



July 2026

Connector

Central District Conference

A conference of Mennonite Church USA

Knowing Christ's Love...
Answering God's Call

Stories and News from
Around the Conference



Participants sing during Friday afternoon worship at Martin Chapel at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

CDC Annual Meeting at EMU

by Sarah Werner

The conference held its annual meeting Jun 25-27 at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Before COVID it was the practice of the conference to have regional groups of congregations host the annual meeting. Last year we were hosted by congregations in Ohio, and this year we were hosted by our southern congregations in Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida on the beautiful EMU campus, nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. There were 130 people registered including 10 children and two youth delegates, Asher Yoder from Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio and Grace Hostetler from Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (N.C.).

The conference started with a pre-conference seminar led by Karla Minter and John Glick entitled, "Body Wisdom—Rise Up! Take Courage!" Karla and John gave some background on body movement practices, specifically those used by the group called Interplay. We were invited into a

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practice of *lectio divina* with both words and movement. To start with, we listened to a reading of the story of the Hebrew midwives from Exodus, and after a period of silent reflection on a word or phrase that stood out, we were invited to trade slow movements with a partner that reflected the word or phrase that we chose from the passage. It was a wonderful meditative process that helped us center our bodies and also respond to Scripture in a unique way.

The opening worship service on Thursday evening was led by members of Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va. and Americus Mennonite Fellowship (Ga.). Rev. Dr. Shannon Dycus, the president of EMU, gave the sermon entitled, "Is It Lawful or Is It Good?" on the Luke 6 passage about healing on the Sabbath. She urged us to rise up and take courage in doing what is right, even in the midst of adversity. Worship was followed by an enjoyable ice cream social in the foyer of the chapel, where friends from afar had a chance to catch up with one another over a tasty dessert.

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Left: Karla Minter and John Glick demonstrate embodied *lectio divina* movement during the pre-conference workshop. **Below:** Rev. Dr. Shannon Dycus shares a message at the Thursday evening worship service at Martin Chapel. **Below right:** Ben Kreider tells a story during Children's Time at the Friday afternoon worship service.

Friday morning Board President Joel Miller of Columbus Mennonite Church (Ohio) opened the delegate session with the state of the conference address. He recounted some of the history of CDC and his family's experience having an annual talk where they discussed important events in their lives with one another. He noted that our annual meeting is similar to this, in that we at CDC are a chosen family of adult siblings. This meeting is our annual family reunion. Each time a congregation joins us, we are challenged and changed by their presence, and so are always growing and learning.



Pastor Josh Richardson of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship (Mo.) shared a congregational story on how they used their Rise Up! Take Courage! mutual aid grant funds to support newly-arrived asylum-seeking families from Venezuela living in their community. They used the grant funds to pay for the families to obtain work permits, which cost around \$650 and which local organizations do not cover. The work permits have been life-changing, allowed them to find work and financial stability, all of it because of the work of CDC.

The majority of the Friday morning delegate session was taken up with a dis-

ussion of Article 19 of the *Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective*. The discussion was part of an ongoing effort by the conference to reexamine our relationship with this particular doctrine, since it has been a point of concern for congregations interested in joining our conference from outside the Anabaptist tradition (see the April *Connector* for more information). It was a lively gathering, with delegates discussing a series of questions at our tables related to how relationships ought to be supported and how a broader definition of family might benefit those in congregations in the conference.



Participants shared a desire for CDC to have a positive statement about how we understand the covenant relationship between two people and the valuing of many different types of family beyond the traditional nuclear family. Several groups expressed a concern that marriages in the Bible rarely fit this modern cultural stereotype, and that one of the primary themes in the Gospels is the idea of chosen family. Covenant relationships between two people are important, but they occur within the family of God.

"Beloved community seems to be broader than the care for biological family," one group reported. Additionally, there are many different types of families that include adopted children or adopted parents, blended families, and intergenerational families. All of these depend on different types of caring relationships.

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The discussion also included a question about what key features we feel are important in creating a positive sexual ethic that can be used in congregations. Respect, equality, mutual care, and consent were all commonly listed qualities. One group noted that our Anabaptist commitments to nonviolence should inform all aspects of life, including covenanted relationships. There was also a shared desire for couples to consider how they are thriving together and how they in turn can also be in service to God and help the world to thrive.

The Friday afternoon worship service was led by Raleigh Mennonite Church (N.C.) and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (N.C.) and featured Pastor César Moya of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Gainesville, Florida. César centered his message on the resurrection appearance stories in John 20, in a sermon titled “Hope in Times of Uncertainty.” He told the story of a recently-arrived migrant to Florida named Laura and her 5-year-old autistic daughter, who were facing tremendous fear and isolation because of their precarious situation. César compared her circumstances to that of the disciples after the death of Jesus, who were hiding in fear, worried about what might happen next. In the midst of this fear, Jesus enters and urges them to go out and preach the good news to others. In the same way, Laura has found community with members of a local Mennonite church who support her and her daughter.



After a soaking rainstorm during worship, we reconvened for a brief Friday afternoon delegate session to affirm the membership of Knoxville Mennonite Church as the newest congregation to

join the conference. Alaina Dobkowski of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (Mich.) also shared a congregational story of how they used mutual aid funds received from the conference to assist the families of detained immigrants in their community.



Above: Singers from Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va. lead the group in singing “We Rise” during worship. **Below left:** César Moya preaches at the Friday afternoon worship service.

We then dismissed to our workshop sessions on a wonderful array of topics, including a town’s response to ICE, solidarity with Palestinian siblings, safe church policies, sex education, confessional Bible study, confronting shame, ecotheology for death and dying, and anti-racist solidarity. There was also a field trip to the Jubilee Climate Farm a few miles away from EMU, where participants learned about restorative agroforestry, which is the growing of edible plants and trees together in a way that builds up the quality of the soil for long-term sustainable food production.

Saturday morning began with worship and the celebration of communion, led by members of Atlanta Mennonite Church (Ga.) and Knoxville Mennonite Church (Tenn.). We heard from Daryl Byler, director of the DC Bar Foundation, who preached on two texts: the story of three men surviving a fiery furnace in Daniel 3 and the Dr. Seuss book, *Yertle the Turtle* with a sermon titled,

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“Reclaiming Our Power to Burp.” He discussed the historical and contemporary relevance of resisting unjust authority, or “burping” as happens in *Yertle the Turtle*. He noted that our current political climate calls us to nonviolent resistance in order to protect our most vulnerable neighbors.



Above: Doug Luginbill and Emma Hartman lead the communion service at Saturday morning worship. **Below right:** Delegates during the Friday morning session in the campus commons.

At the closing delegate session we discussed and voted on the Resolution, [“Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine.”](#) Lydia Brenneman of Lima Mennonite Church (Ohio) gave an introduction to the resolution and circulated an updated version with several changes. After ten minutes of discussion at our tables, delegates brought several suggested language changes to the floor for a vote. It was a time of thoughtful collective discernment, and after 30 minutes of discussion, the vote to approve the resolution passed unanimously. Look for more information about the resolution and next steps for congregations in the August issue of the *Connector*.

After the resolution discussion, the Missional Church committee recounted the story of how the mutual aid fund started last fall after members of the committee brought concerns about how to address the acute needs of vulnerable neighbors in their congregations and communities. The

Ministerial committee honored those who were licensed and ordained in this year, and offered memorials to pastors who have died in the past year. We ended with a spirited round of singing as everyone prepared for the journey back home.

Ron Gingerich of Eighth St. Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. led us in a series of centering moments throughout the delegate sessions, encouraging us to pause and make space to reflect using words that begin with the Hebrew letter *shin*. He began with the Hebrew word *shabbat*, from which we derive Sabbath, and which literally means “stop.” He noted that stopping is at the core of our faith since God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. In stopping to rest we reflect the image of God. Other words were: *shuv* (to repent, literally to turn around), *shema* (hear, listen, obey), *shamar* (to guard or protect), and *shalom* (peace).



At each worship service and several of the delegate sessions, we sang “We Rise” together, a song by Batya Levine. The first verse reads:

We rise - humbly hearted
Rise - won't be divided
Rise - with spirit to guide us
Rise!

It felt like a fitting anthem for our work together in these times of great division as we worked together to discuss several important issues and also enjoyed warm fellowship with our fellow siblings in the chosen family that is Central District.

AMBS Graduates for 2026

On May 2, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. celebrated the graduation of 26 students, four of whom have connections to CDC: Andrea Cramer, Christian Berambaye Nawai, Janeen Bertsche Johnson, and James Rissler.



Andrea Cramer of South Bend, Ind., graduated with a Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies with an emphasis on Theology and Peace Studies. Andrea plans to continue serving as Executive Director of Neighbor to Neighbor, a friendship-based network for refugees and immigrants in South Bend. Her home congregation is Keller Park Church in South Bend, Ind.

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Christian Berambaye Nawai of N'Djamena, Chad, graduated with a Master of Arts in Theology and Peace Studies. He is currently working as a Weekend Supervisor at Bashor Children's Home in Goshen, Ind. He is also launching a global online peacebuilding network — "Djémelom (Peacemaker): Peace Built on Wisdom" — dedicated to conflict transformation and the restoration of human bonds (Follow Djémelom on [Facebook](#) or subscribe via [YouTube](#)). While at AMBS, he attended Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind. and Living Faith Elkhart, a nondenominational church also in Elkhart, Ind.



Janeen Bertsche Johnson of Goshen, Ind., graduated with a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership (DMin). She is one of the first two graduates to complete the distance-friendly program, which AMBS launched in January 2023. Her professional doctoral

dissertation, "Healing after the Shame of Difficult Ministry Endings," focused on how Mennonite pastors found healing from shame through distancing, spiritual grounding, processing and releasing pain, affirmation of ministry gifts and identity, understanding the shame event, and experiences of transformation. Janeen plans to continue serving as Campus Pastor, Admissions Counselor, Alumni Director and Core Adjunct Faculty at AMBS. She is a member of Eighth Street Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

James Rissler of Macon, Georgia, graduated with a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership (DMin). He is one of the first two graduates to complete the distance-friendly program, which AMBS launched in January 2023. His professional doctoral dissertation, "How Faith-Adjacent People Experience Spirituality in Wild Church," focused on the spirituality of people attending Atlanta (Georgia) Mennonite Church's Wild Church experiment who identify as spiritual but not religious. James plans to continue serving as Pastor of Atlanta Mennonite Church.



All photos except Andrea Cramer are credited to Jason Bryant/AMBS.

Ordinations and Installation



Ben Kreider was ordained as pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (N.C.) on Sunday, May 17. He is pictured here with Conference Minister Doug Luginbill.
Photo: Xaris Martinez



Josh Richardson was ordained as pastor at St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship (Mo.) on Sunday, May 24.
Photo: Paula Luginbill



Trey Ferguson was installed as pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church (N.C.) on Sunday, June 21.
Photo: Doug Luginbill

Financial report May 31, 2026

Income	
2025/2026 income to date	\$ 324,621.46
2025/2026 plan	\$ 330,930.42
Difference between income and plan.	\$ -6,308.96
Expenses	
2025/2026 expenses to date	\$ 315,993.48
2025/2026 spending plan	\$ 340,173.82
Under-expenditure against plan	\$ 24,180.34
Difference between income and expenses	\$ 8,627.98

We are in our last month of the current fiscal year and are once again in a strong financial position.

While income has been slightly lower than anticipated, expenses have been lower than the spending plan. Thank you for your contributions to the ministry of CDC.

Report provided by Steve Jolley, conference treasurer

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