



August 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



CPAL members joined a local May Day protest in support of local immigrant workers in the community in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Supporting Immigrants in Detention by Alaina Dobkowski

Five years ago CDC welcomed Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (Mich.) to the conference. Due to COVID, we received our cup of blessings in the mail. This was a cup filled with little scrolls of blessings written by CDC congregations for us. Our community sat in a circle one Sunday and read every single one out loud. We felt the hospitality and welcome with deep gratitude.

Since that time, we have been recipients of the Emerging Faith Communities grant which has allowed our community to call me as their pastor and find some stability in our meeting location and space. As the only Mennonite congregation in our city, we have asked ourselves, what does it mean for us to be a peace church in this community, specifically? What work is ours to do? Many of us had been learning from Mennonite Action and have participated in actions locally. But it became clear to

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us that we needed to engage and partner with more folks. Through relationships, one on one meetings, and getting involved in community efforts that already exist, we took stock of what was happening locally and where we might fit in.

Then, with guidance and training from Mennonite Action, we invited folks who were concerned about the rise of authoritarianism, violence against vulnerable neighbors both locally and globally, and Christian nationalism to a Zoom call. A small group of folks showed up and Christians for Peace & Liberation (CPAL) was born, just over a year ago. Since that day we have grown to a coalition of over 100 people from more than a dozen faith communities. We meet monthly for a potluck, hosting local organizers as speakers with invitations for getting involved in a variety of efforts happening in our community. We are a community growing in faith and courage who are also connecting with others who are interested in taking action.

This past January we decided to focus our 2026 efforts on immigration. This has included advocacy, learning from our

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Rapid Response network, and more. It also has led us to become involved with a ministry that visits our immigrant neighbors who have been detained at the North Lake Detention Center. At 1,800 beds it is the largest detention center in the Midwest. In March two of us went to visit a man, G, from Nicaragua. All we knew was that he had been detained for six months and had not had a visitor. We got to know him and his story. We learned that he had been the main support for his parents back home and that his mom had a health issue that needed attention. With his detention he was no longer able to send money back home and he was consumed with worry. We were so grateful to be able to apply to CDC's Rise Up, Take Courage Fund for a \$500 grant that we could send to his mom.

Not only did this grant (most importantly) help his mom get the treatment she needed; it also helped our ministry build trust. We have gotten to know G and his family. Now we've been able to raise enough funds for G's legal fees and we are praying for an upcoming court hearing that he may be granted release. We invite you to pray with us.

In July G communicated that many people needed funds on their commissary accounts and gave us a list of 20 men who had been detained for longer than six months. We were able to raise \$2,500 to deposit in the commissary accounts.

Through the ministry we connected with initially and G's efforts, we have visited many detainees. Christians for Peace and Liberation has now raised over \$17,000 for mutual aid, legal fees, and commissary support. Honestly, we don't know how long this money will last or how much more will come in, but right now we are grateful we can say "yes" when we are met with a need.

We also gain confidence and courage in knowing that we're not alone. Not only have we built a network of folks doing this work across the state of Michigan and

beyond, we also know that our CDC network is here to support this work too. We know you support us, and we are so thankful that the blessings we received five years ago weren't just nice words on little scrolls. They have turned into our lived experience as we have been blessed in countless ways as members of the Central District Conference.

Below: Buttons made by intergenerational CPAL members to share at their May Day March. Photo: Alaina Dobkowski.



Safe Churches Corner

Each month we will feature stories from CDC congregations who have done good work in improving their safe church policy.

Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. has developed a careful, comprehensive Safe Church policy. It opens by outlining children's rights and includes practical safeguards—record-retention and diapering policies, recommended child-to-adult ratios, and a requirement that all food allergies be posted near the snack area. It also contains one of the most powerful lines I've seen in a church policy: "Grace and mercy are extended in the context of repentance, accountability and justice." Congratulations to this church's staff and board for doing the preventative work of good policy writing!

For more information, help or support with your church's safe church policies, contact the Central District Conference's Safe Church Coordinator, Kristin Sancken at kristin@mcusacdc.org.

Central District Conference Delegates Reach Consensus on “Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine” Resolution

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

During my ten years as conference minister, no resolutions have been presented for discernment at our CDC Annual Meeting...until this year. Yes, we always affirm the spending plan and the slate of committee members. We attend seminars and hear stories which inform and shape our mission. But resolutions which invite our congregations and members/attenders to discuss, discern, and take action on an issue of conference-wide concern is something which hasn't happened for over ten years. The Spirit was moving among us on the Saturday morning of Annual Meeting in Harrisonburg, VA as we discerned a resolution entitled [“Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine.”](#) Lima Mennonite Church (Ohio) submitted the resolution. Central District board member, Lydia Brenneman, is a member of Lima Mennonite. Lydia was born into a Palestinian Christian family in Bethlehem, Palestine. In November 2025, Lydia was present at the conference in Bethlehem where representatives of various Christian faith traditions and 23 countries created the document and study guide, *Kairos Palestine II - A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide* document ([Kairos II](#)). Lydia was moved by the conference and knew she needed to do more when she returned home to Ohio. This was the impetus for her congregation to create the CDC Resolution: “Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine.” Lydia presented the resolution to delegates and participants.

Our collective concern and outrage at the violence experienced by Palestinians, Israelis, and others in the region isn't new to Mennonites. In 2017, MC USA delegates strongly affirmed the [“Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine”](#) Resolution. The resolution brought to our 2026 Annual Meeting by Lima Mennonite Church referenced this

previous resolution as well as the Kairos II document.

The purpose of resolutions in Central District Conference serves four primary functions:

- To provide information and education about issues facing the church
- To build consensus across the conference to work toward common understandings and build unity. Resolutions are not considered binding on members and congregations unless identified as having that intent from the beginning. The “Seeking Peace” resolution was not presented as binding on congregations or individual members of CDC.
- To provide conference understanding, while acknowledging dissenting voices
- To provide a foundation for member advocacy to government.

I strongly encourage congregations, Sunday School classes, small groups, or study groups to study, reflect, and discern this [resolution](#) and the supporting documents provided. Our delegates and non-delegates engaged in healthy, rich, and meaningful discernment on the resolution and passed it unanimously.

Friends, Rise up! Take courage! May our voices and our actions bear witness to God's shalom.

*

Awaken to Wonder: Pilgrimage to the Isle of Iona

June 4-13, 2027

This 9-day pilgrimage begins and ends in Glasgow, with 7 full days on Iona. We hope to hold the cost to \$4000 per person (final fee determined January 2027). Join us as we step onto ancient paths, listen to the rhythm of prayer and tide and rediscover wonder together.

Email Cathy (robby1118@gmail.com) and Jane (janemark76@gmail.com) with any questions or to apply.

Life and Death: Preparing Today for Tomorrow

Rev. Cynthaea Millsaps, an ordained pastor with the Indiana-Michigan Conference, is touring the Midwest to help churches and community groups have one of life's most important—but often avoided—conversations. Too often, decisions surrounding death are left to grieving loved ones who have little knowledge of the burial process or the options available to them. The funeral industry often sees death as a business. We should see it as an amazing part of our precious time here on earth. When we are prepared, as much as possible, death loses its sting. She is able to offer presentations on topics such as death and dying, the cost of death, and burial practices and environmental stewardship. You can contact her at 574-368-9314 or cynetha.millsaps@cityofelkhartin.gov.



Joy Metzler (right) and Shane Claiborne (left) will be the keynote speakers at the Waging Peace Militarism Summit.

Waging Peace: A Militarism Summit

Nov. 6-7, 2026, at Forest Hills Mennonite Church in Leola, Penn.

The summit is hosted by Mennonite Church USA in partnership with Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Central Committee. Rooted in Anabaptist faith values, the two-day gathering seeks to bring together Christians to explore faithful responses to war, political polarization, nationalism and violence.

Best-selling author and lifelong peace advocate Shane Claiborne will deliver the opening keynote address, "Ain't Gonna Study War No More."

Militarism, the belief that military power is the primary means of achieving security and resolving conflict, increasingly shapes public life, public discourse and cultural values in the United States. The nation's annual military budget is the larger than any other nation, while ongoing conflicts around the world continue to raise urgent moral and humanitarian questions.

Within many churches, geopolitical conflicts and nationalism have become increasingly entwined with religious identity. As a historic peace church, MC USA affirms Jesus' call to love our neighbors, seek justice and practice nonviolence. In a 2022 denominational survey, more than three-quarters of MC USA members identified peacemaking as one of their core personal faith commitments.

Author Shane Claiborne and conscientious objector and peace advocate Joy Metzler will be the keynote speakers for the event.

Participants will choose from seminars exploring topics such as conscientious objection, nonviolent action and organizing, the intersection of militarism and climate justice, Christian responses to radicalization, and youth-focused peacebuilding. The cost is \$75 for adults and \$50 for young adults ages 19-25. High school youth may attend free when accompanied by a youth sponsor or pastor.

Every registrant will receive a free copy of "The Peace Position: Stories and Witness for Today's Peacemakers," a new resource developed by MennoMedia, in partnership with MC USA and Mennonite Mission Network.

For more information and to register, visit: <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/militarism-summit/>.

Doug's Mug: A Second Cup of Courage

by Doug Luginbill



In my October 2025 Doug's Mug I quoted Brené Brown who said, "Ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line." And I reflected, "I like Brown's distinction that courage is more about vulnerability than about heroism. But I confess that making one-

self vulnerable, risking ridicule, being a minority voice in a majority echo-chamber, is not easy."

At our June 25-27, 2026, CDC Annual Meeting, I saw many signs of ordinary courage. I was so proud of those who became vulnerable, sharing deeply about their beliefs, experiences, and longings. Two examples of courage from Annual Meeting include our conversation on Article 19 of the Confession of Faith regarding "Family, Singleness, and Marriage" and the discernment of the "Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine" resolution.

For my entire ministry career, the Mennonite Church has had a spicy, and sometimes fiery, conversation about human sexuality. (Paula and I served with Mennonite Voluntary Service [MVS] from 1985-1987.) In 1986 our MVS regional director resigned right after the Saskatoon '86 Tri-Annual General Conference Convention. It was at this convention that the General Conference adopted a Resolution on Human Sexuality which defined "homosexual, extramarital, and premarital sexual activity as sin." I deeply admired and respected our regional MVS director's faith, leadership, and character. Lynn had become a supportive mentor as I was growing into my Mennonite leadership identity. When she shared publicly at the Saskatoon convention that she was queer, she knew her leadership role in the church was likely to end. I can hardly imagine the courage it took to claim her identity, challenge the

church, and sacrifice her vocation. Lynn's courage remains with me whenever conversations about human sexuality and faith come up.

I confess, I was a bit anxious on Friday morning of our CDC Annual Meeting when we took up the conversation of our understanding of Article 19 of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. Article 19 is entitled "Family, Singleness, and Marriage." It reflects the sentiment of the 1985 Saskatoon resolution, defining marriage as "between one man and one woman for life." After Gerald Mast provided an excellent historical framing of Mennonite Confessions of Faith, our 21 tables of participants engaged in 45 minutes of deep and meaningful conversation. I know that many shared vulnerably and courageously from their experiences and beliefs with their tablemates. (See an article on the discussion in the July 2026 CDC Connector.) We were truly living into our theme, Rise up! Take courage! We are a stronger, closer, riskier, and braver conference because of this honest sharing.

Another example of courage took place on Saturday morning of Annual Meeting when we engaged in discernment about the resolution, "Response to Ongoing Suffering in Palestine." This was the first resolution brought for delegate discernment since I began as conference minister in 2016. Again, deep sharing took place around tables. When it was time for open discussion, several amendments were offered. Some received support. Some didn't. It was a beautiful example of faithful engagement, debate, and community discernment. In the end, the resolution was unanimously affirmed. I was reminded that we don't need to be anxious about engaging in difficult conversations when we know we are in a safe, well-guided space.

As one who grew up with an aversion to conflict and with few examples of healthy disagreement and debate throughout my childhood and youth, I am so grateful for

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our community of faithful disciples of Jesus who are modeling a courageous way through challenging issues of justice and peacemaking.

My hope and prayer is that each of our congregations and members can drink deeply from Christ’s cup of courage, speak honestly and vulnerably from our hearts, listen compassionately to one another, and faithfully discern God’s path through whatever spicy (or fiery) situation in which we find ourselves.

Save the Date!

Our next Annual Meeting will be at
Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.)
June 24-26, 2027.

Installation



Randall Koehler was installed as pastor at Keller Park Church in South Bend, Ind. on Sunday, July 12.
Photo credit: Paula Luginbill

**End of Year Financial report
June 30, 2026**

Income	
2025/2026 income to date	\$ 362,089.15
2025/2026 plan	\$ 361,015.00
Difference between income and plan.	\$ 1,074.15
Expenses	
2025/2026 expenses to date	\$ 368,050.85
2025/2026 spending plan	\$ 371,096.71
Under-expenditure against plan	\$ -3,045.86
Difference between income and expenses . .	\$ -5,961.70

In the past fiscal year, we exceed expectations regarding giving/income by a small amount. This is often the case and are thankful for the faithfulness of our congregations and its members. Expenses did not exceed our projection but were greater than income by a small amount. Travel costs have increased as the footprint of our Conference has grown. This has been taken into consideration with the spending plan for the new fiscal year.

Report provided by Steve Jolley, conference treasurer

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