

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. Isaiah 61:11

The Sower

a newsletter for Central Plains Mennonite Conference leaders and pastors

December 14, 2011

Growing in holistic witness to God's reconciling mission in the world through fellowship, discipleship and leadership.

Please forward this newsletter to (or print it for) these congregational leaders:

Pastors, Elders or Deacons, Central Plains Delegates, Church Moderator, Treasurer, Christian Education Chair, Worship Committee

For Your Prayers (weekly bulletin announcements)

Here are weekly prayer requests for each week between now and the next issue of *The Sower*. Please share them with your congregation by whichever method works best, whether it be in your bulletin, in the pastoral prayer or some other way. We welcome your suggestions on how to share these prayer requests. *Thank you!*

For Sunday, December 18

Pray for Mercy Church, Sioux Falls, SD. Pastor Shel Boese writes, "We have run out of space for small groups and need to look at adding on in the near future. Pray for wisdom, clarity, and stewardship of all God has given us. Pray for our new associate pastors, Nate and Brittny Larson, working with youth, growth groups and other ministries."

For Sunday, December 25

Pray for Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE. Pastor Dave Miller says, "We would appreciate prayers in trusting God in finding a youth pastor to minister among us. There is a lot of energy and a good spirit at Bellwood. Good things are happening."

For Sunday, January 1

Cedar Falls Mennonite Church is a small congregation in one of the most diverse communities in Iowa. Pray for the congregation and Pastor Susan Janzen as they discern how best to meet the challenges they face in doing God's work. Also, please pray that the congregation might stay on track to pay off the mortgage on their church building several years early, which will free up resources to be used in other ways.

For Sunday, January 8

Pray for William and Luz Marina Valencia, leaders from the Mennonite Church of Columbia who will be arriving in Riobamba, Ecuador, on January 14 to pastor the Mennonite Church at Riobamba. To read their story, see <http://tiny.cc/qmg4i>. Pray for safe travel and a smooth transition.

Finances

November was a very positive month for Central Plains! Income for the month was the second highest of this fiscal year totaling \$57,473.50. Expenses were a bit lower than normal at \$31,640.05. As a result of this surplus of \$25,813.45, we were able to significantly decrease the fiscal year deficit which has now decreased to \$31,440.84. Thank you! —*Stewardship Task Group*

Staff News

December is a quiet month for conference staff as congregations observe Advent and Christmas. On December 12, Dave and Tim were at Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, NE, for a celebration marking Pastor James Lapp's 50 years in ministry. Dave and Shana will spend December 26-30 with Shana's family in Hesston, Kansas. Tim and his wife, Carol, look forward to having their children and their spouses come home for Christmas.

2012 Congregational Leaders Workshop

Pastors, elders and deacons, put this date on your calendar! On **Saturday, February 25, 2012**, plan to attend **"The Paradox of Power: Biblical Foundations of Authority,"** a workshop with **J. Nelson Kraybill** at Manson Mennonite Church, **Manson, Iowa**.

"There is an urgent need and opportunity for biblical, pastoral, and teaching authority to be strengthened in the Mennonite Church," this is the conclusion drawn by researchers who studied Mennonite pastors in North America.

Participants in the workshop will study the biblical foundations of authority for congregational leadership and learn how to become more effective leadership teams for their congregations. (The date has been changed from March 3 to accommodate our speaker.)

Conference leaders and others who are interested in the Bible study are most welcome, with the understanding that there will also be practical training for leadership groups. More details at <http://tiny.cc/u3rde>.

Family Devotions for Advent...

Parents, you can bring faith into focus during the holidays by observing Advent at home. Find a free devotional guide online at www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/Home. *Surprised by Awesome Deeds* has daily Bible readings, prayers and activities for every week from now through January 8.

...and the Rest of the Year

Pastors and worship committees, now is the time to order *Taking Faith Home*, a weekly bulletin insert for families. On one side are daily Bible readings and suggested prayers for the week, on the other side are practical ideas for nurturing faith at home divided in to the four categories: Caring Conversations, Devotions, Service and Rituals & Traditions. The Bible readings follow the Revised Common Lectionary, which is wonderful for churches who follow the RCL, but should not deter those who do not. Either way, families get daily Bible readings that draw from all parts of the Bible over a three-year period. Order at www.vibrantfaith.org.

Priced at just \$50 a year, even if only five families use it, you've gotten them a year-long resource for only \$10 a family! If you don't want to stuff every bulletin, make only enough copies to put in the mailboxes of those who want them. Let's give our families the tools they need to nurture faith at home.

Writers: Gather 'Round curriculum accepting applications

The Gather 'Round curriculum, produced by MennoMedia and Brethren Press, is accepting applications to write for Preschool, Primary, Middle, Multiage, Junior Youth, or Youth age groups for 2013-14. Writers produce well-written, age-appropriate, and engaging material for teacher's guides, student books, and resource packs. All writers will attend an orientation March 19-23, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. See Job Opportunities at www.gatherround.org. Application deadline: January 9, 2012.

From the WDC Library

Marlene's Top Picks for studying about The Gospel and Popular Culture.

My Top Picks this month offer you some options for study, both personal and group. Pastors may find some food for thought as well. No, these specific titles are not about Advent or Christmas. But they are about discerning what kind of people we become as we accept God's gift to us in Jesus and as we attempt to live an incarnational life.

The Gospel According to Twilight. Elaine A. Heath. Includes guide for reflection and discussion, notes and index. Chapters include themes of family, singleness, salvation, power, reconciliation.

The Gospel According to Harry Potter. Connie Neal. Explores the Potter world of magic and mystery and enumerates more than 50 themes that can be seen as glimmers of the Christian gospel.

The Gospel According to the Earth. J. Matthew Sleeth. Retells the Bible's most familiar stories in ways that will stimulate your imagination, soften your heart and challenge you to think more deeply about caring for creation.

The Gospel According to the Beatles. Steve Turner. An in-depth look at the development of the group's philosophy and how it affected their music, lives and audience. Distills the message of love, peace, freedom and transcendence that was at the heart of their gospel.

The Gospel According to Lost. Chris Seay. Explores the elements of faith, life, history, hope, and multiple biblical metaphors as they were depicted in the television show Lost.

Visit on our on-line catalog at mennowdc.org/library/catalog/ or drop me a line at crlib@mennowdc.org

—Marlene Bogard, director / 316-283-6300

AMBS offers discount for online courses

Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary is offering a 50 percent tuition discount to students taking their first online course from AMBS who are not already enrolled in any theological education program. Two online courses are offered from AMBS for spring 2011: Biblical Foundations of Peace and Justice and Turnaround Strategies for Churches. To learn more and register for a course, visit www.ambs.edu/academics/courses.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary offers online courses for audit

For the first time, EMS is offering an **audit option** for online courses. Students taking online courses for credit will have priority until 2 weeks before the class starts. Spring online offerings are: **Interpreting the Biblical Text** with Professor Joni Sancken and **Pastoral Care** with Professor Lonnie Yoder. For course descriptions and other details, visit www.emu.edu/seminary/distance-learning. Contact Lonnie Yoder at yoderld@emu.edu with questions.

Upcoming Events

Young Adult Retreat, Sunday through Tuesday, December 18-20 at Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota

Conference Board and Committees meet Friday and Saturday, March 16 and 17 at Omaha, Nebraska

The Paradox of Power: Biblical Foundations of Authority, Saturday, February 25 at Manson Mennonite Church, Manson, Iowa

Central Plains Annual Meeting, Thursday through Sunday, June 28 – July 1, 2012, at Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE

Youth Escape 2012, Friday through Sunday, August 3-5, 2012, at Hidden Acres Christian Center, Dayton, IA

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The mission of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is to create settings for our congregations and partners to grow in holistic witness to God's reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship and promoting lifelong discipleship.