



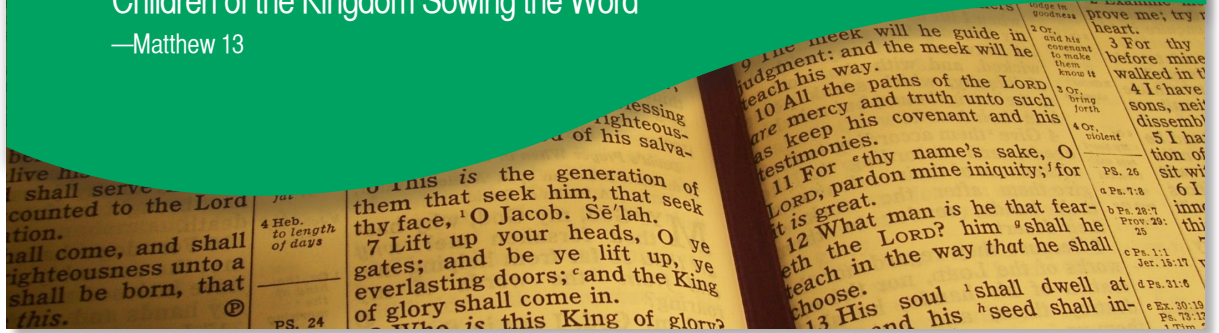
April
2013

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Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word
—Matthew 13



Lower Deer Creek offers many ways to interact with the Bible

by Don Patterson, Pastor at Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church

At Pittsburg 2011 when the Purposeful Plan of Mennonite Church USA was unveiled, Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church leaders got excited about one of the “outcomes and goals”: “To increase our capacity as a community of faith to use the scriptures as a faithful guide for daily living.”

Since then, Lower Deer Creek (LDC) has journeyed toward becoming more engaged in the Bible. For many years, a sizeable part of the congregation has read the Bible through as an annual pilgrimage, using helps that were originally available from Herald Press.

In January of 2012, the congregation invited the community to a “Walk Thru The Old Testament,” a teaching method that uses 77 statements and actions to tell the stories of the Old Testament chronologically. This method aids in remembering the geography, people, and especially how God worked throughout the Testament. This event was attended by 110 people.

In January of this year, LDC hosted a “Walk Thru the New Testament” as well as the “Kids in the Book” program for Kindergarten through 5th graders. This event was held at Iowa Mennonite School to better accommodate the 93 adults and 24 children that attended.

The week after “Walk Thru” 2012, our men gathered in a retreat at Crooked Creek Christian Camp and discussed forming small groups. The group decided to meet in groups of no more than seven for Bible memorization and mutual accountability. They meet at many different times during the week to accommodate schedules.

Presently, about eight groups meet weekly for an hour and begin their time with memorized scripture, followed by sharing and prayer. In addition, there are at least five women’s Bible Studies and several mixed small study groups meeting each week.

On February 26 and 27, 2012, we invited Marion Bontrager to present his mini-course on biblical literature, a course that he has taught with Michelle Hershberger for many years and which has become a hallmark course for many students at Hesston College. For many of us, hearing Marion’s presentation just after the Walk Thru series helped us better understand how Mennonites read the Bible with Christ as the center of our interpretation.

Beginning the first of December, Pastor Steve invited the congregation to read 24 days of Luke, reading a chapter each day until Christmas. It was interesting to see how God used the timing of the Sunday readings to coincide with the sermon

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

—Hebrews 4:12

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themes each week.

The congregation continues this Bible emphasis by using the 12 Scripture Project promoted by Mennonite Church USA. After several weeks of announcements, the congregation met together during the Sunday School hour on January 13 to hear about how we were going to proceed.

Everyone was asked to write down the scripture verses that have helped them become more like Jesus. They could submit 3-5 scriptures each. The Sunday School classes were given a seven-foot-long newsprint banner labeled “Genesis to Revelation.” They were given time in the class to share why their chosen scriptures had influenced their lives, which produced powerful testimonies.

On February 3, each class chose 12 verses to share with the congregation. This produced 78 verses. The top 36 were presented to the congregation on February 10 to discern the congregation’s top 12. This process ended very clearly with each of the 12 getting at least 42 votes and the top verse, Mark 12:30-31, receiving 73.

On March 3, the congregation unveiled their twelve by focusing the entire service on them. Using reading, testimony and singing, the 12 Scriptures (printed on 16x20-inch sheets) were revealed to the congregation throughout the service. These scripture posters will become part of the décor of the sanctuary.

It is our hope that we continue to increase our capacity as a community of faith to use the scriptures as a faithful guide for daily living.



Top: Marion Bontrager teaching Biblical Literature at Lower Deer Creek.
Bottom: Pastors Steve Nelson and Don Patterson unveil Lower Deer Creek’s top 12 scripture texts in the worship service on March 3.

Central Plains churches focus on the Bible

As Don Patterson says on page 1, *Our Purposeful Plan* states that Mennonite Church USA intends to increase our capacity to use the scriptures. In this issue of *Scattered Seeds*, we report on what Central Plains congregations are doing to achieve this goal. Each congregation was invited to share what they are doing to engage their members in the scriptures. In particular, we asked congregations who are participating in the 12 Scriptures Project to tell us about that.

The 12 Scriptures Project is an initiative of Mennonite Church USA leaders that gives congregations one specific method of engaging the scriptures. The story from West Union (page 4) describes how it works. A detailed outline of the process is available at www.mennoniteusa.org. On our own web site, we feature the Top 12 lists and creative ideas of Central Plains congregations.

On pages 4 and 5, we share with you stories from our congregations. What is your congregation doing to get into the Word? When your congregation does the 12 Scriptures Project, be sure to send us your results so we can share them at www.centralplainsmc.org.

—Shana Peachey Boshart, Editor



Tammy Miller created art from the sticky notes used in the 12 Scriptures Project at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Nebraska. Each sticky note shows a hand-written scripture reference and the name of the person who contributed it.

Scripture forms us

by Tim Detweiler, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership



In this issue of *Scattered Seeds* we highlight scripture as the primary resource of the church. Article 4 of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* reads:

“We acknowledge the scripture as the authoritative source and standard for preaching and teaching about faith and life, for distinguishing truth from error, for discerning between good and

evil, and for guiding prayer and worship. Other claims on our understanding of Christian faith and life, such as tradition, culture, experience, reason, and political powers, need to be tested and corrected by the light of Holy Scripture” (p. 21).

As Anabaptist Mennonites, we “accept the Bible as the Word of God written” (p. 21). Given our high view of scripture, it is important to examine from time to time how scripture is used in the congregation. I find seven key words in Article 4 that help us do that.

“We commit ourselves to persist and delight in reading, studying, and meditating on the scriptures” (p. 22). These three words have guided our personal use of scripture. They are also important for our corporate use of scripture.

Reading scripture as a gathered congregation is important (Nehemiah 8; Colossians 4:16; Luke 4: 16-20, etc.). Scripture comes alive when the reader has given prior thought and practice to how it should be read and presented through pronunciation, tone of voice, emphasis, and good oral presentation. How do you instruct and equip readers to give prior consideration for how scripture should be read or presented?

Studying the Bible well goes beyond the sharing of personal opinions. It involves time for listening, digging into the text and research. What training and tools do you give Sunday school teachers, small group Bible study leaders, and others who teach Bible in the congregation for practicing good Bible study?

Meditating on scripture is an important spiritual discipline. As we listen, the Holy Spirit brings a word, phrase or thought to our minds. Meditating together on scripture can be an important spiritual practice in our time-pressured world. Have you sat in silence as a congregation to meditate on a particular scripture text?

“We participate in the church’s task of interpreting the Bible and of discerning what God is saying in our time by examining all things in the light of scripture” (p. 22).

Interpreting, discerning and examining are essential for Christian formation, Christian ethics, and practicing discipleship in the world. The central message of the Bible is clear and understandable for knowing God, for salvation, for faith and for discipleship. Reading the Bible also requires **interpreting** what God is saying to us through the text for our day. Interpreting the Bible belongs to the church.

Interpreting scripture calls for **discernment** as the faith community takes time for study and listening to each other and especially to what the Holy Spirit is saying through the text. This process involves **examining** our methods, our motives, our context and the biblical context.

Our strong view of scripture calls us to do our best work in interpreting, discerning and examining the scriptures together as a faith community. We do this work in harmony with the teachings, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church.

“Insights and understandings which we bring to the interpretation of the scripture are to be tested in the faith community” (p. 22).

Testing our insights and understandings are essential. This is hard work and requires humility on our part as well as trust in the Spirit’s working through the church. We bring our interpretation of scripture to be tested in the faith community to which we belong.

How is scripture being used in your congregation in light of these seven words? May they encourage us to engage scripture together in meaningful ways and with integrity as we listen to God’s Word that guides our ministry and shapes our living.



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Thanks to Verna Zook for proofreading.
E-mail: scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org. Telephone: 319-936-5905.

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West Union's 12 Scriptures Project

From the very beginning the 12 Scriptures Project caught the attention of the pastors and elders at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa. The congregation was excited when we proposed doing this church-wide exercise. We are in the first steps of the process but the questions people are asking suggest that work with these scriptures could take many forms and go on for quite some time.

This has been our process so far:

- The elders invited each household to choose twelve texts.
- The congregation gathered for a service during the Sunday School hour and sat as family units to write their chosen references on post it notes.
- As the congregation sang songs about the Bible, tables were dismissed to post their scriptures in order around the fellowship hall.
- The elders have now gathered those many references and collated them.

Next steps will be:

- Elders will determine the top 24 scriptures by the number of times they are offered.
- Sunday School classes and small groups will look at the top 24 scriptures and choose their top 12.
- The elders will look at the top 12 texts coming from these groups and pick the final 12.
- Pastors Corey and Martha will preach on the top 12 texts beginning in April.

That is the end of the formal planning, but it is already apparent that other ideas are cropping up. Might we do a devotional book for the congregation that includes all the scriptures offered? Will there be texts that stand out as particularly appropriate for intergenerational memorization?

We don't know where this will go but we are very excited about how God's word will be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path at West Union and beyond. —*Martha Yoder, Associate Pastor*

First, Iowa City: Daily texts, praying scriptures, Bible gifts

During Advent we offered a devotional guide to all households in which people of various ages from the congregation wrote personal stories or reflections, one for each day of Advent, and each was accompanied by a coordinating biblical passage for further reflection.

We have just distributed bookmarks on which the daily Bible readings for Lent are printed as well as a prayer for the season. Also during this season of Lent, we have Wednesday evening soup suppers followed by contemplative services in which we practice Lectio Divina (prayerful reading of scripture).

In May we will distribute Bibles to our first and eighth graders, and we will give our high school seniors study Bibles. —*Mag Richer Smith, Pastor*

East Union: 12 Scriptures, preach through the Bible

At East Union Mennonite (Kalona, Iowa), I've been preaching through the Bible a book at a time for the past year and a half, one book per Sunday except during Advent and Lent. Children in Primary and Junior assembly are being challenged to memorize the order of the books of the Bible. Some people in the congregation are making more of an effort to read through the Bible.

We completed the 12 Scriptures Project last fall. Once the texts were collected from the congregation, we spent two Sundays meeting in the fellowship hall during the Sunday School hour to reflect on and discuss the 12 texts. Verna Zook, who coordinated the project, posted the passages on the walls and led the discussions. People appreciated the face-to-face guided conversation around tables. —*Jay Miiller, Pastor*

Rochester memorizes together

The past few years, Rochester (Minnesota) Mennonite Church attendees have been memorizing scriptures selected by our church council. They announce a passage for memorization with a date when it will be recited together during a worship service. We have most recently learned John 15:12-16, "I call you friends."

When a child turns 13, he or she is presented with a Bible accompanied by signed notes listing Scripture passages that have special meaning for the writer.

Presently Pastor David is leading the Adult Sunday School class in a study of the Gospel of Mark. He leads the discussion based upon three questions: 1) What does the passage say? 2) What is meant by what is said? 3) What does it mean for me?

—*Lois Kennel*

Wellman: Bible buddies

From February through April, Wellman (Iowa) Mennonite Church challenges members to increase their reading of scriptures by finding a Bible Buddy. There are three challenges to choose from. A "Chapter Challenge" in which buddies read a specific number of chapters per day. A "Commit to Memory" in which Bible buddies memorize a certain number of scriptures. Or, "Time to Grow" in which buddies decide how much time each day they will spend reading the Bible.

Bible Buddies are encouraged to meet every week or two to hold each other accountable, discuss their insights and questions, share any struggles, and talk about how God is speaking to them. —*Nathan Ramer, Pastor*

Manson: Studying connections between the Bible stories

In our Sunday morning worship at Manson (Iowa) Mennonite, we have been walking through the book of Hosea. We have been connecting with God's perspective in our relationship in Hosea. In our adult Sunday School we have been using a study called The Story. We are learning how to connect all of the "lower stories" of Scripture with the "upper story" of God's redemptive plan. We started in Genesis and right now we have made it up to the divided kingdom. One Sunday night a month we have an intergenerational evening gathering called Pray N Play. Part of the evening plan includes someone sharing the story of God in their life. Often part of their story includes Scripture that has been meaningful or impacting in their life. —*Aaron Carlson, Pastor*

Mountain Lake churches study the Bible together

Something two churches do together, which encourages engagement with the Bible is the Winter Bible Study Series held annually in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. First Mennonite Church and Bethel Mennonite Church have been teaming up for the past 28 years to bring Anabaptist scholars to teach. This year, David B. Miller, Associate Professor of Missional Leadership at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, spoke on the theme "From Ephesus to Mountain Lake (and beyond)."

David's presentations encouraged us to understand the context of the Roman Empire in which Ephesians was written and the subversive nature of the claims Paul presents: that God (not the Pax Romana) unites all things; that the cross becomes an instrument of reconciliation (not of fear and torture); that the Spirit (not political dominance) is the source of power. —*Elaine Kauffman, Pastor, First Mennonite*

Central Plains comes up with a baker's dozen

At Annual Meeting in Henderson, Nebraska, last summer, participants posted their top scripture texts on a Bible timeline. Office Manager Monica Clem recorded each text and noted how frequently each text was mentioned. These are the texts that appeared the most. There are 13 because the last three all received the same number of votes.

1. Matt 5-7 The Sermon on the Mount
2. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world..."
3. The death & resurrection of Jesus from the Gospels
4. Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd..."
5. Micah 6:8 "do justice, love kindness, walk humbly"
6. Matthew 22: 37-39 Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind
7. I Corinthians 13 The Love Chapter
8. Proverbs 3:3-6 "...in all your ways acknowledge him..."
9. Exodus 20 The Ten Commandments
10. Philippians 2:1-11 "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus"
11. Joshua 24:15 "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"
12. Jeremiah 29:11 "I know the plans I have for you"
13. Ephesians 2:1-10 "...for by grace you have been saved by faith..."

Annual Meeting 2013

Introducing our speaker: Terry LeBlanc



Terry LeBlanc is Mi'kmaq/Acadian, from Listuguj First Nation and Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada. He and his wife Bev are in their 38th year of marriage. Together, they have three adult children. Terry has served in full-time Native ministry since 1979, and has been ordained since 1983.

Terry serves as Executive Director with My People International, a holistic, training-focused ministry program with and for Native North Americans. Previously, he was Aboriginal Programs Manager with World Vision Canada.

Active in Native Canadian affairs for many years, Terry has served the Native community in a variety of training and facilitative capacities. He has lectured at various colleges, seminaries and universities across Canada and the United States. He is one of the founders and current Chair of North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies (NAITS), a new approach to biblical and theological reflection, writing and education for Native North Americans.

An accomplished writer, Terry also serves as managing editor for the Journal of NAITS and as a contributing editor to Cultural Encounters, a US journal exploring issues in culture and faith. Terry is also adjunct faculty with Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto and Asbury Seminary in Kentucky where he is completing his PhD in Intercultural Studies.

Registration packets for Annual Meeting will arrive at your church soon. Find everything you need to know about Annual Meeting at www.centralplainsmc.org.

Leaders Credentialed

Martha Hernandez was ordained at Iglesia Centro Cristiana Menonita, Washington, Iowa, on February 24, 2013.

Leader Transitions

Taric Leichty was installed as associate pastor for youth at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Nebraska, on March 3, 2013. Taric grew up at Bethel Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa.

Everence distributes \$27,000 through Central Plains churches

Everence distributed \$27,000 in Sharing Fund matching grants in 2012 through 22 churches in Central Plains Mennonite Conference. The Sharing Fund provides money to match what local congregations have donated to help people with basic needs.

The Sharing Fund is an example of how Everence works together with local congregations to help people in need, said Jeff Swartzentruber, Regional Director for Everence in Iowa and Illinois.

"Our mission is to help people integrate their finances with their faith and values, consistent with an understanding of stewardship that emphasizes caring for 'the least of these,' as Jesus put it in Matthew 25," said Swartzentruber.

—Everence

Turn your life upside down at Crooked Creek Christian Camp

"The Upside Down Kingdom" is the 2013 summer theme at Crooked Creek Christian Camp. It is based on Matthew 6:10: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," where we learn to serve others and love our enemies. Camps are offered for children age 5 through high school juniors. Join us as we explore how to live in God's kingdom while here on earth. Register online at crookedcreekcamp.org.

—Mary Lou Farmer, Director

God Among Us at Swan Lake Christian Camp

Everyone at Swan Lake Christian Camp is gearing up for a wonderful summer of learning and growing in God. "God Among Us" is the theme for the summer, which is based on Matthew 18:20 and Matthew 28: 20b. Through Bible studies, campfires, devotions and other activities at camp, campers will come to understand that God is not confined to any one place or time, but rather is with us and among us and in us wherever we are. See www.myslcc.com for the 2013 summer schedule.

—Jerry Kroeker, Director

To receive this newsletter in Spanish, call Shana Peachey Boshart at 319-936-5905. Para recibir este boletín en español, llame a Shana Peachey Boshart al 319-936-5905.

Second hand, not second rate

Churches join to disperse donations with dignity on Cheyenne reservation in Montana

by Kelli Yoder, *Mennonite World Review*

In the 46 years Willis Busenitz has lived on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeast Montana, he has seen many truckloads of donations emptied — including one shipment left outside a locked building for weeks after being picked through and rained on.

“I just remember going by there and thinking, that doesn’t bring dignity to our people,” said Busenitz, pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby.

“We live in an economically depressed area. And so our people, they often feel like, ‘Well, that’s all we’re worth, we’re just second best.’ ”

No adequate storage existed for donations.

“So it became a burden,” Busenitz said. “It was difficult to know how to handle.”

Now, thanks to a group of local ministers Busenitz helped found, the reservation has its own thrift store where donations are sorted for quality and neatly displayed at affordable prices.

Working together

From 1950 to 1980 many denominations planted mission churches on the reservation. For many years, Busenitz said, instead of working together, the churches were actually driving the reservation’s 8,000 residents apart over differences. In the 1980s, Busenitz teamed up with a Lutheran minister and a Catholic priest to form the Northern Cheyenne Ministers Association, hoping to work toward positive change together.

In 2009, the thrift store became the group’s focus. The dozen or so churches involved found a building to rent, collected donations and filed for 501(c)3 status, so that in May of this year the Everything Beautiful thrift store opened its doors. The name is written on the sign in English as well as Cheyenne: E’mapeva’e Netaa’o Hovea’.

The store aims to maintain the dignity of each customer. Through it, the churches have demonstrated they can get along.

“We’ve learned to love each other,” Busenitz said.

Overwhelmed

Suzette Cain, a Cheyenne woman who attends Circle of Life Lutheran Church, is the store’s manager. It’s a big job.

“At one point I was just overwhelmed being the only employee,” she said. “I was almost in tears. I would walk into the donation room and then turn around and walk back out.”

Things changed in June when the Red Cross set up an emergency shelter on the reservation for people evacuated from their homes because of forest fires. Cain knew the store could be helpful. A recent shipment included hygiene kits, towels and handmade quilts, which they handed out to those in need.

“I said, ‘Lord, forgive me for even questioning your plan.’ He already knew what was going to happen,” Cain said. “So now when the donations come in — and they come in every day — I just smile and say, ‘thank you.’ ”

Reprinted with permission.

What might a Year of the Bible look like?

by Marlene Bogard, WDC Resource Library Director

A Year of the Bible could be...

- An opportunity to engage with the Scriptures for one year.
- A way to nurture your Christian faith, growth and development.
- More than reading through the Bible, although you may want to do just that!
- Immersing yourself in new faith practices as part of a congregation, small group or individually.
- For all ages, all abilities!
- Filled with possibilities!

One of the best resources for engaging with the scripture is this website: www.yearofthebiblenetwork.org, a ministry of the Western District Conference (WDC) of Mennonite Church USA. The Year of the Bible Network refers to materials primarily from an Anabaptist perspective. Check the site regularly as new resources will be added almost weekly. Another opportunity to connect with others is to join the Facebook group: Year of the Bible Network for an ongoing conversation about what works in different contexts.

Plan to attend the Year of the Bible Launch, on August 1-2 in North Newton, Kansas. Connect with leaders and pastors in your congregation and make your plan to attend. Central Plains Mennonite Conference — you are invited!

Questions? Contact me at the WDC Resource Library for hundreds of wonderful books and DVD’s about engaging God’s word. 316-283-6300 / crlib@men-nowdc.org

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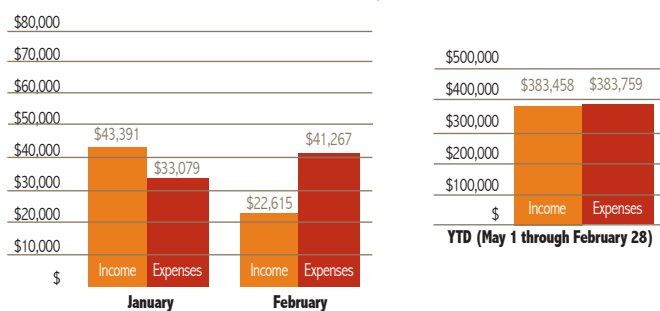
Growing in
holistic witness
to God's
reconciling mission
in the world through
fellowship,
discipleship
and leadership

The graphs illustrate a financial snapshot of Central Plains Mennonite Conference through February 28, 2013. As shown, a strong January increased the overall surplus to \$18,348.21. However, a slow February gave back this surplus and created a slight overall deficit of \$300.81. With less than a month remaining in the conference fiscal year ending on April 30, we ask for your prayers and your contributions for a strong close to the fiscal year. We are also very thankful for your continued support. —*Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conference Board meets Saturday, April 13, in Mountain Lake, Minnesota.
Pastoral Leadership Committee meets Friday, April 14, in Schuyler, Nebraska.
Annual Leaders Retreat Sunday through Tuesday, April 14-16, at Schuyler, Nebraska.
Central Plains Church Planters Gathering, May 3-4, in Clear Lake, Iowa.
Central Plains Annual Meeting, June 20-23, in Ashland, Montana.
Mennonite Church USA Convention July 1-6, in Phoenix, Arizona.
Youth Escape 2014, August 1-3, 2014.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



An area conference of



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