



August  
2012

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# Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word

—Matthew 13



Left to right: Ervin Stutzman greets worshipers; Henderson welcomes Central Plains; Kate Friesen and Monica Clem at the registration table. Annual Meeting photos by Stan Harder.

## Worship at Central Plains Annual Meeting 2012

### Ervin Stutzman encourages us to cross barriers, surrender all, forgive sin

by Holly Blosser Yoder

“Guided by the Spirit: To Let the World Know” was the theme of this year’s Central Plains Annual Meeting held in Henderson, Nebraska, with Mennonite Church USA Executive Director Ervin Stutzman as the featured speaker. The Nebraska churches led in music, which included a bluegrass-style praise band, a men’s gospel trio and hymns from Hymnal: A Worship Book, variously sung a cappella or accompanied by flute and piano.

Having missed the chance to mark the ten-year anniversary last year, conference leaders celebrated 11 years of Central Plains conference with meditation and song. During the opening worship on Thursday night, Executive Conference

Minister David Boshart offered a meditation on “God’s Leading: Past, Present & Future” in which he encouraged listeners to recognize and identify the work of the Holy Spirit in their congregations and conference.

Following Boshart’s message, Nebraska pastors told of “ways we’ve experienced God’s leading.” Recalling the early days of conference fellowship, a quartet sang a Central Plains version of Gershwin’s “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off,” a humorous look at cultural and culinary differences among the former General Conference and “Old” Mennonite churches that came together as Central Plains Mennonite Conference in 2001.

*continued on page 2*

*The glory that  
you have given  
me I have given  
them, so that  
they may be one,  
as we are one...  
so that the world  
may know that  
you have sent me  
and have loved  
them even as you  
have loved me.*

—John 17:22-23





Above: Annual Meeting opens with worship. Right: Symbols of Central Plains are the peace pipe, basin and towel, pitcher and Ecuadoran poncho.

Friday morning, Stutzman picked up on the culinary theme in his sermon from John 14:22-31. Highlighting barrier-crossing stories from the New Testament such as Peter and Cornelius, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and the call from Macedonia to “come over and help us,” Stutzman emphasized that the Holy Spirit bridges barriers in ways that “could never have happened just by human knowledge and wisdom.”

He described a vision of a future Central Plains in which a “multiple choice” banquet offers veronike and tacos, rice and beans and curry, where the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’ followers to “reach beyond the constrictions of culture” to carry out the vision articulated in the Mennonite Church’s vision statement to “grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope will flow through us to the world,” a refrain he would repeat throughout the weekend to conclude his sermons.

On Saturday, Stutzman used as a metaphor for entering the Kingdom of God the process of going through airport security. We surrender our belongings—shoes, cell phones, keys and anything else in our pockets. When we get to the other side, after having been thoroughly searched, we re-encounter our previously surrendered items. In the Kingdom of God, these items are God’s, to be used for God’s purposes.

We pick them up again, but for God’s purposes, no longer sources of worry or possessiveness to us. We are reassured by Jesus’ words from scripture to seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be provided. Rather than owners, we are stewards. In the Kingdom, Stutzman said, “We give ourselves to God to live under God’s rule and reign.”

Stutzman described ways Christians become confused about God’s reign: by identifying the Kingdom of God with the power of the State; by confusing the gospel with the optimism of social progress; and by identifying the advance of

the gospel with the agenda of a political party, which he said is becoming a “besetting sin” in Mennonite Church USA. At the conclusion of the service, many worshippers went forward to receive anointing with oil as a blessing of healing and power to live out their citizenship in Christ’s kingdom.

Sunday morning worship was in the sanctuary of the 1,100-member Bethesda Mennonite Church. A choir composed of members from various congregations, accompanied by pipe organ and brass, called the congregation to worship with an arrangement of “Come Christians join to sing.” Stutzman’s message was titled “Sent for the Forgiveness of Sins.” Although crime and disease are concepts society is more comfortable talking about, Stutzman emphasized the importance of recognizing sin.

“When we lose a sense of sin, we lose a sense of God’s grace,” he said. Referencing John 20, where believers are given the authority to forgive each other’s sins, Stutzman said, “People need to hear us say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’” Stutzman explored Paul’s understanding of the concept that “all have sinned,” highlighting shifts in the apostle’s self-awareness that reflect a growing sense of humility as faith and love for God deepened, bringing release from sin.

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.



# God as the subject of an active verb

by David Boshart, Executive Conference Minister



"If the Spirit had moved any more in our meetings this week-end I don't think I could have stood it!" was how one delegate on Saturday evening summed up our Annual Meeting.

In his Friday morning sermon, Ervin Stutzman pointed out our tendency in the Mennonite Church to talk about what *we* are doing rather than what God is doing. He cited Lois Barrett's research in which she interviewed people in congregations asking them what God is doing in their context. There were hardly any responses to this question where God was the subject of an active verb. We have a hard time naming what God or the Holy Spirit or the risen Jesus is doing in our midst.

Maybe we have been exposed to people in our past who made claims about "what the Lord has told them" without the confirmation of communal discernment or a mature grasp of the biblical story. But surely we can find confirmation that God is alive and active in our midst. And surely we, together, have a grasp of the biblical story. Why not claim that God is alive and active in our churches and name *how* God is at work in our midst.

The Spirit of Jesus was moving in our midst at Annual Meeting in a profound way. God spoke to us through Ervin Stutzman's sermons. Our hearts were moved to remember that at our baptism we have surrendered all of our possessions to be used for the purposes of God's reign. On Sunday, we encountered our sin, and our tendency to do everything but confess it. Unless we deal with our sin we cannot know the healing power of God's grace.

Shana Peachey Boshart will be on sabbatical September 1 through November 30. Erin Ramer will edit the next issue of the Scattered Seeds that will come out in November. Contact her at [scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org) or 319-646-3358. See below for the submission deadline.



The newsletter of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is published six times a year at Kalona, Iowa. Editor: Shana Peachey Boshart. Copy Editor: Erin Ramer. Editorial Council: David Boshart, Tim Detweiler, Roger Farmer, Blaine Friesen, Susan Janzen, Sherilyn Ortman. Thanks to Sherilyn, Stacey Waltnier and Verna Zook for proofreading. E-mail: [scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org). Telephone: 319-936-5905.

For the fall issue, please send stories, news and photos by **Monday, October 8** to the address above.

Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to [office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org).

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In our litany of release for St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship, we acknowledged the pain of not being able to resolve our differences and offered lament for the brokenness this creates in the Body of Christ.

But the Spirit of God was reminding us that God's final word is reconciliation as we proclaimed this eternal truth, "There is one body and one Spirit – just as we were called to one hope when we were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

God's Spirit reminded us, through Pat Barron's message at the mission banquet, that undoing racism and intercultural transformation is not the result of our straining or the effectiveness of our programs. It is about a change of heart when God's love overcomes the limitations of our ability to love.

We saw God at work in our conference as we celebrated the births of three new Hispanic congregations and as we celebrated the achievement of eight students who are completing the first level of the Instituto Biblico Anabautista.

And something new happened at conference. Something I could never have predicted. Something God did.

For several months I had been talking to individuals and congregations about the need for the growing Ashland congregation in Montana to expand their building. Everyone was interested, but nothing was committed.

After learning that Doug and Lori Bishop were unable to come to Annual Meeting do to the fires that were threatening their church building and home, I called Doug, pastor at Ashland Christian Fellowship, on Thursday to check on how they were faring with the fires. Though they needed to break ground soon, I had to tell Doug, I was sorry, but I was unable to find the help they needed for their building project.

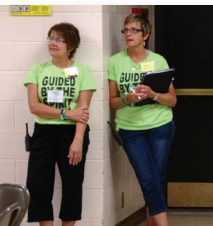
In our opening prayers on Thursday night, we lifted up the Ashland, Lame Deer and Busby communities. On Friday, I briefly shared several stories that Doug has passed on to me about what God is doing in Ashland. I simply asked, "Who will help them?"

In an unexpected moment, the Spirit of God moved, people began to surrender their possessions to the work of God, and God found \$40,150 in an hour for what is needed to continue God's work in Ashland.

Can you imagine how much fun it was to call Doug on Saturday afternoon and tell him what God did at Annual Meeting this year? What is God going to do next?

# Delegate sessions blend worship and work

by Holly Blosser Yoder



Max Villatoro and Martha Hernandez (top) and Steve and Judy Harder (middle) express the desire of their congregations to join Central Plains. Hosts Carol Janzen and Barb Voth (bottom) pause for a moment to listen to the delegate session. Below: Will and Sherilyn Ortman and children keep the gathering youthful; Joe Walks Along Jr. and Willis Busenitz extend the invitation to meet on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Montana in 2013; Marcia Yoder-Schrock and Ramiro Hernandez receive anointing in the Friday worship service.

Work and worship blended seamlessly at Central Plains Annual Meeting in Henderson, Nebraska, as leaders and members of the delegate body attuned conference business and reporting to the theme of Holy Spirit guidance.

Contributing to the worshipful atmosphere were congregational stories bearing witness to God's presence through times of struggle and rebuilding; litanies—one to release a departing congregation and another as a covenant with three new ones; and hymns selected by song-leader Sharon Kennel on a moment's notice and sung by the delegate body in a spirit of corporate prayer.

## Plans and priorities

In staff reports, Executive Conference Minister David Boshart highlighted the aligning of Central Plains' priorities with Mennonite Church USA's Purposeful Plan. He noted that Central Plains' mission statement and priorities for ministry were approved "before we knew that there would be a Purposeful Plan" for the denomination. *Our Purposeful Plan*, a missional vision and plan, was developed by Ervin Stutzman and first shared publicly at the biennial convention in Pittsburgh 2011. Stutzman highlighted sections of the plan in a later session.

## One church departs; three join

Bringing closure to a relationship that has been in question since the conference's beginnings, Moderator Blaine Friesen read a letter from Lisa Pierce on behalf of Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship asking that the congregation's membership in Central Plains be discontinued. Pierce said that Central District Conference on June 22 voted to welcome the fellowship following their application for membership in 2011.

Friesen commented, "Today we want to acknowledge the pain that we have that we were unable to resolve our differences and . . . offer release and wish them God's grace and peace." Delegates read a "Litany of Departure," giving voice to varied feelings of pain, sadness, weariness or relief. The hymn "Healer of our Every Ill," led by Kennel, concluded the session.

On Saturday afternoon, Conference received into membership three new congregations: Torre Fuerte, Iowa City, Iowa; Centro Cristiano, Washington, Iowa; and Iglesia Evangelica Agape in Mt. Lake, Minnesota.

In a ceremony that followed, Hispanic Ministries Coordinator Ramiro Hernandez recognized eight members of both new and long-time Spanish-speaking congregations for their achievements in Instituto Biblico Anabautista (IBA), an Anabaptist theological education program with certificate and diploma levels.

"Some will be pastors and some will plant churches," Hernandez said in his remarks. Dressed in graduation robes, participants afterwards formed a receiving line to accept congratulations.





# holy spirit guidance

In addition to planned agenda, business meetings contained two notable surprises. The first was an announcement regarding a newly adopted statement on marriage by Faith Mennonite Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The second was an unexpected outpouring of funds for a building expansion project at Ashland Mennonite Church in Montana.

Faith Mennonite Church acknowledges that, after undergoing a congregational discernment process, the congregation is at variance with Article 19 of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and denominational statements on human sexuality. Reading from a letter from Faith during the Saturday morning delegate session, David Boshart noted that Faith's policy opens the possibility that the pastor would, in the future, marry same-sex couples.

Evoking baptismal vows to "give and receive counsel," he called for delegates to talk with members of Faith and the conference board during breaks. Four regional meetings are planned for next fall to give and receive counsel. Boshart said that each congregation will be invited to send three people to the meetings, which will be "carefully designed to help us speak to one another." He said a group would then summarize the counsel offered.

The Ashland story that prompted spontaneous fundraising unfolded gradually over the course of three days. Delegates learned Thursday night that fires in Montana had interfered with delegate travel and were now threatening Ashland Mennonite Church on the border of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. Pastors Doug and Lori Bishop had turned back, en route to conference, after learning that their church and home were at risk. Prayers and updates were offered throughout the weekend.

During the Saturday morning delegate session, David Boshart presented a congregational story from Ashland, which Doug Bishop had intended to present himself. He told of rapid growth during the past year and the challenge of inadequate space for the congregation in its present facilities. When the delegate body returned to business after a break, Boshart announced that an anonymous donor had offered \$15,000 in matching funds.

Pledges collected during the final session Saturday afternoon more than doubled the matching funds. Announcing the total at the close of business, Boshart said, "Today, God found \$40,150 among us."

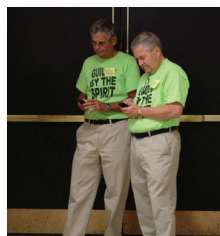
Conference members will have a unique opportunity to visit brothers and sisters at Ashland next year, as Annual Meeting 2013 will be held in Montana. Delegates responded with resounding applause to an invitation from Joe Walks Along Jr. on behalf of the Northern Cheyenne Mennonite churches.

## Other good things

During open-mike time concluding the final session, delegates in a continuous flow shared in response to the moderator's invitation to "share good things happening in Central Plains." Several shared of successful or anticipated pastoral transitions, and their appreciation for conference support.

Sarah Lynne Anderson of Missio Dei, a Minneapolis congregation with a hospitality ministry, related that members of Washington (IA) Mennonite taught Missio Dei members how to can food. Anderson noted that Missio Dei was a relatively new member of Central Plains and said, "Thank you for letting us become part of your family."

Hernandez, a member of Centro Cristiano, recalled feeling "alone" when attending Annual Meeting some years ago. Reflecting the warm feeling of the meetings, he commented, "I feel like this is a whole different conference."



Above, top to bottom: Apple preishka served at the mission banquet; Jeff Miller, Peg Burkey and Eldon Miller; Mark Van Steenwyk; Ron Pauls and Norm Yoder. Below, left to right: scriptures that have shaped us; Mary Litwiller; IBA graduates.





## Youth delegates dive into Annual Meeting

### Leaders Credentialed

**Max and Gloria Villatoro** were each licensed toward ordination on May 6 at Iglesia Torre Fuerte, Iowa City.

**Karen Dalke** was ordained June 3 at Des Moines Mennonite Church.

### Developing Leaders

**Ben Breckbill** of First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, Nebraska, is participating in the Ministry Inquiry Program this summer at Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana. Ben is the son of David and Anita Breckbill.

### Pastor Transitions

**Jeff Miller** was installed as interim associate pastor at Kalona Mennonite Church on May 20, 2012.

**J. John J. Miller**, 93, former pastor at East Union Mennonite Church, died on Monday, July 2, 2012. He is survived by his wife, Mabel, and five children. Funeral services were held at East Union on Sunday, July 8.

J. John was a long time pastor and conference leader in the former Iowa-Nebraska Conference, serving in various roles including conference secretary and president of the Leadership Board. In the latter role, he served as a mediator for churches in conflict. In 1948, John and Mabel were part of a group who reopened the small rural Pleasant Valley church. He was ordained to the ministry in 1953 and as a bishop in 1969. He served East Union for 31 years, retiring in 1984.



Clockwise from top:

- William Janssen taking it all in
- there's time for fun too
- Clara Koerner and Christina Hofer capture the moment
- the quiet part of Telephone Pictionary
- Arianne King prays for our new churches
- youth participate in worship



*Theme: Singing God's song in a foreign land*

## Shellenberger to speak at Fall women's retreat

by Barb Voth

Central Plains Mennonite Women invite you to their annual retreat at Swan Lake Christian Camp near Viborg, South Dakota. Bring a friend and enjoy a weekend of inspiration, relaxation, interest sessions, and fellowship in a retreat setting.

The speaker for the retreat, Evie Kauffman Shellenberger, grew up in Hesston, Kansas, and married Wally in 1965. Together they did medical work in Nigeria under Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Board of Missions. After more medical training and employment, they, along with a group of other medical colleagues, moved to Southern Indiana to set up a health care system for people in two rural, poor counties, where they worked for 28 years.

Evie and Wally lived in Iran from 2001-2004, invited there by MCC to be part of a student exchange program. Their assignment was to build friendships and relationships with the Iranian Muslims, to be involved in religious dialogue and to be a Christian presence. They have returned to Iran yearly thereafter to lead learning tours. Evie and Wally have spoken extensively about Islam and Iran to North Americans, in an effort to promote peace and understanding between Christians and Muslims.

At the retreat, Evie will use storytelling, guided scripture and song to guide us as people of peace, to see and relate to our neighbors who believe and live differently than we.

Cost for the entire weekend is \$75, Saturday only \$55, and Sunday only \$30. Prices include meals, camp fees, and retreat expenses. Registrations due by **September 10, 2012** to Arlyce Friesen, P.O.Box 488, Henderson, NE 68371; 402-723-4414; myarfriesen@mainstaycomm.net.



## The Golden Rule in action

Arlene Geissinger (left) of Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis and Marilyn Miller (right) of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Minneapolis are shown 48 hours after successful surgery as donor and recipient, respectively, of a kidney. Arlene and Marilyn shared their journey in an April 29, 2012 worship service at Faith centered on "sharing life with another." The scriptures were Psalm 23, 1 John 3:16-24, and John 10:11-18.

"No doubt this is one of the biggest decisions I have made," said Arlene. "Knowing that this was a life-giving process kept me going. It was a way of putting faith into action; of doing for another what I would want someone to do for me."

Marilyn said, "The frequent sentiment of the joy of answered prayer made me believe that many of our friends had their faith renewed and built up because of sharing in our experience. So many bonds of friendship have been strengthened and become more precious."

Both women mentioned notes from Marilyn's granddaughters thanking Arlene for "giving our grandma back her life and health."

—Phil Stoltzfus, FMC Ministry Staff

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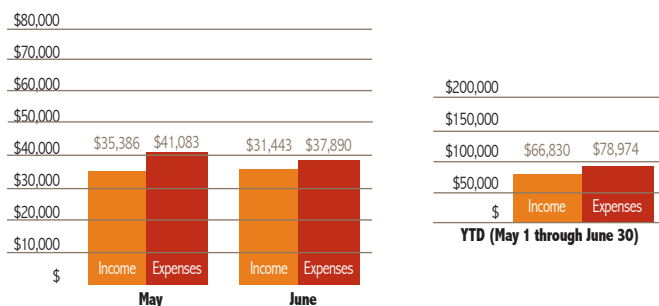
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Growing in  
holistic witness  
to God's  
reconciling mission  
in the world through  
fellowship,  
discipleship  
and leadership

In May, Central Plains started a new fiscal year. Income for May and June totaled \$66,829.51. Expenses came in at \$78,973.56 leaving a net loss for these first two months at \$12,144.05. We thank you for your continued support of conference.

—Stewardship Task Group

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



## FYI: COMING EVENTS

**Christian Formation Committee** meets Monday and Tuesday, August 13 and 14, in Central Iowa.

**Conference Board** meets Friday and Saturday, August 24 and 25 in Freeman, South Dakota

**Pastoral Leadership Committee** meets Saturday, September 15 location to be determined

**Outreach & Service Committee** meets Monday, September 17 in Milford, Nebraska

**Celebration of 100 Years of Mennonite Church in the Congo** Friday, September 21, in Mountain Lake, Minnesota

**Conference Board and Committees** meet Friday and Saturday, November 9 and 10 at Crooked Creek camp

An area conference of



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