



August  
2013

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diverse, bold, and heroic

# Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word  
—Matthew 13



Photo by Stan Harder

## Grim history, cultural curiosity, & emerging hope

### Annual Meeting in Ashland, Montana, brings clash of images and growing insight

by Jane Yoder-Short, West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa

This year's conference was filled with clashing sensations – beautiful Montana rolling hills marked with poverty-stricken towns, fragrant sage mingled with battle scars, Cheyenne songs next to hymns, native wisdom bumping against Euro-centric understandings. Grim history, cultural curiosity, and emerging hope followed me around Montana.

Terry LeBlanc's messages proved to be a stimulating backdrop to the clang of cultural complexities. LeBlanc is Mi'kmaq/Acadian, from Listuguj First Nation. He is director of NAITS, North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, and the lens through which he developed the biblical message was fresh, challenging and at times bewildering.

When LeBlanc became Christian he gave up his culture. He burned his Beatles albums and cut his hair. The message was to talk, walk, and look like the missionaries.

Tension between faith and culture is not new. LeBlanc reviewed the conflict between the Jewish culture and Gentile converts in Acts 15. How Jewish did the Gentiles need to become? It was

decided not to place unnecessary burdens on the converts.

Walking into White River Cheyenne Mennonite church one sees the familiar poster from Mennonite Central Committee, "Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other." I was okay with that import. Then I saw the old organ and was reminded of LeBlanc's words about making people unnecessarily like us. Pastor Willis Busenitz explained that when he was bemoaning the out-of-place organ, a wise person reminded him that the early missionaries were products of their time and so are we. What unnecessary baggage are we still loading on others?

An afternoon tour took us to the Little Bighorn Battlefield where Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors defeated Custer. The bloodshed was the culmination of cultural misunderstandings, broken government promises and misguided greed. Guilt invaded my space. My culture got it wrong.

We can't go back in history and undo the wrongs but it is important that we look back and see from where we have come. LeBlanc retold how remembering history was a Hebrew idea. People

*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

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were to remember who brought them out of the land of Egypt. When we look back we see a mix of faithfulness and infidelity; we gain an understanding of who we are.

God creates a new world with people from every tribe and nation. Other cultures help us see what we are missing. Other cultures help us see how our ethnicity may be muting the voice of Jesus. Montana opened a crack into the Cheyenne culture, opened a crack into seeing my culture in new ways. Back home I unpacked with my dirty laundry the smell of sage and the aroma of three nuggets of inspiration.

Nugget one: Land is sacred. Keshia Littlebear reminded me we are all called to take care of the land. How was I caring for the land taken from tribal people? As I came home to my garden and picked my fresh peas her words continue to haunt me. What does it say when we frack to feed our energy habit? What does it say when we farm every inch of land? What does it say when we see land as a commodity instead of a resource to be tenderly cared for?

Nugget two: Science isn't the answer. We can't wait for science to solve everything. LeBlanc told how he had picked up a 1997 Field and Stream, just in case he could learn something about hunting and fishing from Whites. He read an article about the collapse of the cod and salmon fish populations. The article said if we don't do something there will be no fish. It was reprinted from 1913 and no one has done anything. We keep assuming that if we mess up today, science will fix it tomorrow.

Nugget three: Dancing and drums are Mennonite. The rumors that there was dancing at conference are correct. At the close of the powwow there was a friendship dance. Two circles of people rhythmically walked around shaking hands and greeting each other. Sometimes we need to be shaken out of our ruts, shaken out of the illusion of our sinless superiority. All cultures need to be shaken up a bit.

As God's people we are a hybrid culture. God's Spirit and our neighbors give us eyes to see our history and our culture in new ways. What a blessing to be part of a multi-cultural family!



Top from left to right: Delegate table groups; Speaker Terry LeBlanc drumming and singing a traditional Mi'kmaq song; Willis Busenitz and Keisha Littlebear lead the children's time in Sunday morning's worship. Bottom from left to right: Shana Peachey Boshart and Keisha Littlebear talk with the youth and young adult delegates; Elizabeth Troyer-Miller and a Cheyenne dancer participate in the powwow; Joe Walks Along Jr, along with the pastors of the Northern Cheyenne Mennonite churches, welcomes everyone to the Annual Meeting. More photos of Annual Meeting can be found at [www.centralplainsmc.org](http://www.centralplainsmc.org). Photos by Stan Harder

# “Looking Back” on Annual Meeting

by David Boshart, Executive Conference Minister



If you attended Annual Meeting in Montana this summer, I have no doubt that you spent the weeks since looking back and reflecting on the rich experience we shared there. The end of one Annual Meeting means it's the start of a new year in our conference. Looking ahead, we wonder how we can grow in holistic witness to the reign of God in our complex world.

This year, Annual Meeting was a wonderful opportunity to get out of our usual patterns for a time of listening, observing, and learning. It was an opportunity to reflect on the nature of culture and damage done and community and hope. Jane Yoder Short says it well in her opening article, “We can't go back in history and undo the wrongs but it is important that we look back and see where we have come from....When we look back we see a mix of faithfulness and infidelity; we gain an understanding of who we are.”

I've been reflecting on how the word “prophetic” is being tossed about these days. It's a word often used as shorthand for an activist word or progressive thinking. In rereading some of the biblical prophets, one finds how much more often the prophetic voice is actually a call back. For example, we hear Jeremiah saying, “Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” (Jeremiah 6:16).

It's true that we can also find the voice among the prophets that speaks of the day that is coming, when sin and injustice will be judged and things will be set right. But I thought of Jeremiah as I was listening to our speaker, Terry LeBlanc, at Annual Meeting in June. He said, “So if you fix the landmarks in your mind

clearly the way they will appear to you when you turn and take the trail home, you'll never get lost. So spend twice as much time looking where you've come from as you do where you are going.”

Rather than a tool of denial or an attempt to keep things the same, looking back helps us gain our bearings. When we understand both our past faithfulness and infidelities, our honesty will help us to bear witness to the way of Jesus in a way that invites the other to come to Jesus by following him rather than following us.

In our one time spent in delegate discernment at tables, we asked the question, “*What do you believe are the most pressing matters of faith and life where the church needs to do spiritual/biblical discernment in order to have an effective witness in the world?*” That

exercise produced some interesting feedback. Much of the feedback was reaching to identify the landmarks on our trail. One issue was raised in the form of a question, “How do we discern what is culture and what is Gospel?” or another, “How is the church a contrast society as we live in the world?” or another, “Who are we as Mennonites, our identity?” and another, “How is a Christian household different in the ethical values it embodies? Our faith should make us different.”

LeBlanc's messages\* reminded me of the work of missiologist Andrew Walls who believes that Christian witness is really about managing a tension between two principles, the pilgrim principle and the indigenization principle. He writes, “the Gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is at home with the Gospel,” but, “the Gospel will also put us out of step with society.”\*\* It is by living in this tension that the church discerns the path to faithful life and witness as we live in the world.

To do that work means looking back, not in some self-preserving way to keep things always as they are. No, it is looking back and asking for the ancient way. Learning from our faithfulness and infidelities. We look back to learn the biblical story from multiple cultural perspectives. Then we can consider the ancient way. A way that goes back to our Creator God and God's hope for all things to be set right, where “steadfast love and faithfulness meet each other and righteousness and peace kiss” (Psalm 85:10).

I'm not done looking back to discover what we can learn from our time with our Cheyenne brothers and sisters.

**Rather than a tool of denial or an attempt to keep things the same, looking back helps us gain our bearings.**



## Scattered Seeds

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, Lerace Graber, Susan Janzen, Sherilyn Ortman.  
Thanks to Peg Burkey and Verna Zook for proofreading.  
E-mail: [scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org). Telephone: 319-936-5905.  
For the October issue, please send stories, news and photos by **September 9, 2013** to the address above.  
Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to [office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org).

Graphic Design by Erin Ramer.  
Printed by Kalona Graphics in USA

An area conference of



[www.centralplainsmc.org](http://www.centralplainsmc.org)

\*Two of LeBlanc's messages can be accessed on our website at: <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/annual-meeting-2013.html>

\*\*Walls, Andrew. (1996). *The missionary movement in Christian history*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. p. 7.



## Learning Tour to Little Bighorn Battlefield

by Susan Janzen,  
Pastor, Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa

On June 25, 1876, General Long Hair of the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry engaged Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho fighters near the Greasy Grass ridge in what is today southeastern Montana. By the time the battle ended the next day, more than 260 soldiers and dozens of warriors lay dead.

If you've never heard of this general or this particular battle site, perhaps it's because most history books are written from the perspective of the dominant culture. The general known as "Long Hair" to Native Americans was George Armstrong Custer, and the fight near the Greasy Grass ridge has gone down in legend as the Battle of the Little Bighorn or even Custer's Last Stand.

A visit to the historic battlefield near Crow Agency, Montana culminated one of the tours during Annual Meeting. Because our gathering was just days before the anniversary of the battle, the crowds at the National Monument included re-enactors in military dress who were preparing to re-create the battle.

I have been to the battlefield before, and it is always a somber reality to walk the paths and see the markers where both soldiers and warriors fell. And it's sobering to realize that although the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho won this battle, it was the beginning of the end of the war to preserve their way of life. In less than a year, circumstances would force their leaders to surrender.

Storm clouds threatening to pour down rain shortened our exploration of the battlefield, and we hurried to the memorial to Native people killed in the battle. What strikes me about this memorial is that it is a symbol of reconciliation. Not all Native people fought against the Army; some fought with the U.S. troops against other Native peoples who were historic enemies. The memorial acknowledges this reality and brings former enemies together.

As a Christian pacifist, I mourn the lives lost in this and other battles, and I reflect on the futility of using violent engagement to try to achieve peace. As an American whose own forbearers were that same year obtaining title to the Kansas farm where I grew up, I also reflect on the role the coming of my people played in the zeal of the U.S. government to confine Native Americans to the reservations.

Before our visit to Little Bighorn, Conrad Fisher, a Northern Cheyenne tribal historian, met the tour group at the White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby to talk with us about the engagement from the Native perspective. His insights were good preparation, as were Willis Busenitz's comments as tour guide on the bus trip.



Top: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument; Philip Whiteman Jr. at the Deer Medicine Rocks; Thursday evening Worship; Youth delegates.  
Photos by Stan Harder and Erin Ramer



# Learning Tour to Deer Medicine Rocks

by Lois Janzen Preheim,  
Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota

To visit the site of the Deer Medicine Rocks, two school busses full of conference participants drove a winding dirt road on a private ranch. Our tour guide, Phillip Whiteman Jr., led the group in a pickup truck and stopped four times to pray on the way to the site. The busses lumbered over a creek, over prairie grass and sage up a long upsweeping bench of land below some tree covered bluffs. We stopped before a formation of very large boulders standing off by themselves, the Deer Medicine Rocks.

During the winter of 1876, the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux Indians were under threat and pressure to come into reservations. Sitting Bull, a chief and holy man, came to this place to pray to the Creator for help and clarity in the deepening conflict between the tribes and the U.S. government soldiers.

As he prayed, Sitting Bull saw a vision on the Deer Medicine Rocks. On one side was a deep, blue streak left by lightning. Below the streak was a medicine man petroglyph. On another boulder soldiers were drawn falling down. Sit-

ting Bull interpreted this vision to mean that the people were under the Creator's protection and that the soldiers would be defeated. That is what happened the following June at the Battle of Little Bighorn. The rocks are a holy place that mark a place where God spoke to Indian people and assured them of their survival.

Philip Whiteman Jr. spoke to the group and explained traditional Cheyenne spirituality, saying that all of creation is inter-connected. He said that he is sometimes criticized for offering traditional teachings when talking with Christians. He agreed to do this talk at the Medicine Rocks because the Creator wants us to talk with one another and act out of the possibilities given in the resurrection.

Before leading the group in a walk around the rocks to look closer at the lightning streak and the drawings, Phillip led us in a prayer, first bending down to sprinkle himself with a bit of dust. Hearing him pray, with the great silent speech of the rocks before us, was a holy moment.

## Reflections from the youth

by Shana Peachey Boshart, Conference Minister for Christian Formation

Fifteen high school students participated in Annual Meeting. I asked some of them to reflect on their experience there.

I loved being able to see the devotion the Cheyenne people had to Christianity and being able to include their own traditions to their modern day faith. That has always amazed me about the Natives. I greatly appreciated and was spiritually moved by their intellectual depth of both worlds that are changing around them and how accepting they are to new people along with their willingness to help anybody. They were very easy going and are simply beautiful people. —Alden Hartzler, Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa

I loved being able to learn about the culture. One thing that really interested me is how in-tune with nature they are. I feel God's presence very strongly when I'm in His creation, so I can totally relate to how they praise God in that way. I also love their opinion on time and how they look at the past to see how they got to be where they are now instead of trying to understand the unknown future. —Clara Koerner, Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota

I was challenged to ask myself how many of our Christian traditions are actually meant to honor God and how many are just part of our culture. I was also challenged to look at the fact that people worship God in many different ways and the way other cultures worship him is no less important or spiritual than the way our culture traditionally worships him. —Noah Yoder, Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota



Top: Noah Yoder and John Blosser Yoder; Clara and Todd Koerner participate in the powwow. Photos by Stan Harder

## Leaders Credentialed

**Nate Larson**, associate pastor at Mercy Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, was licensed toward ordination on Sunday, May 12, 2013.

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## Engaging the Mystery Introducing Advent 2013

Engage the Mystery! Advent worship planners, you have a special opportunity to learn about the Advent 2013 Leader materials from those who wrote them! Plan now to attend *Engaging the Mystery: Introducing Advent 2013* at Manson Mennonite Church, Manson, Iowa, on Saturday, September 7, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The cost of \$25 per person includes lunch.

The Fall 2013 issue of Leader magazine will include worship resources for Advent 2013, written by members of our own sister congregations in Freeman, South Dakota. The writers are pastor Todd Jones and artist Michelle Hofer from Hutterthal, musician Sherilyn Ortman and retired pastor Roy Kaufman from Salem-Zion, and retired pastor, mediator and chaplain Lois Janzen Preheim from Salem.

There will be breakouts that demonstrate the visuals, the dramas, sermons and music/children's stories. The day will begin and end practicing the worship elements, demonstrating the supplementary materials, and taking questions.

Ask your church office for a registration brochure or go to [goo.gl/yZXOo](http://goo.gl/yZXOo). Questions? Call Shana Peachey Boshart at 319-936-5905.

## VBS inspires partnership: Templo Alabanza and Bethesda

*by Margaret Hiebner, Bethesda Mennonite Church*

This year Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) at Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska, became a partnership with a sister congregation of Central Plains. The first two days of DVBS, June 3 and 4, were important in this beginning. Seven people from Templo Alabanza in Moline, Illinois, came to experience DVBS with our young people. What a privilege it was to host and get acquainted with our new friends!

Our DVBS offerings were designated to help Templo Alabanza equip several Sunday School rooms with furnishings and supplies. Our hope is to continue this partnership into the future.

Some of the children did special projects like selling cookies at the local farmer's market to raise part of the money. Our offerings came to \$2,866.45! Thank you, Pastors Alberto and Aurora, Susanna, Felix, and Danielle, Sara, and Jasmine for making our DVBS experience a memorable one.

## Diverse group of church planters inspired to “Be bold!”

by David Boshart, Conference Minister for Outreach & Service

The annual gathering of Central Plains church planters may not be the largest gathering in our conference, but it is certainly the most ethnically diverse. The 34 who gathered in Clear Lake, Iowa, May 3 and 4, included Latin American, Hmong, Congolese and Cameroonian cultures. Though Clear Lake had received almost a foot of snow the night before (on May 3!), everyone arrived safely and so did the Holy Spirit.

Our fourth annual gathering for church planters was historic. For the first time the gathering included participants who came, not because they were church planters, but because they were interested in knowing more about church planting and wanting to support those who are starting new churches.

Chet Miller-Eshleman, a successful church planter from Dover, Ohio, was our speaker. After serving with Mennonite Central Committee in Colombia, Chet and his family received a call to start a church in Dover. In 2007, Chet and his wife began inviting people into their home, and the church has grown to include more than 130 people. In a little over five years, LifeBridge Church has already planted a daughter congregation and has started a Sunday evening service in a local gym that may become a third congregation.

The theme for the gathering was, “Taking the Next Step...Wherever You Are.” In three sessions, Chet addressed 1) Sharing your faith; 2) Different leadership needs for different stages in your church’s development; and 3) What to do when church growth has plateaued.

In one session, Chet inspired participants by reflecting on his own spiritual discipline. “I am not bold...but after spending two hours with the Father in the morning, I am bold and can talk to anyone. Be bold. Talk to people, have a substantial conversation. Ask them, ‘Is there any way I can pray for you? Can I have your phone number and, if it’s OK, I’d like to call you in a week and see how this is going...’”

In Chet’s experience, “God speaks. God speaks...You’ve got to hear from God and often God doesn’t speak until you are just done! And then God says, ‘I will build my church, it’s not you...’” Chet identified many practical ways to develop no-cost entry points for welcoming people to a new church.

Participants also gathered in times of significant worship. Susan Janzen led the opening worship by having participants (including the children) work in groups to create a vehicle that would drive or fly out of recycled materials. Focusing on Nehemiah’s struggle to rebuild the temple, Susan reflected on the challenges of pursuing God’s vision for his people.

One of the most powerful moments in our worship time was sharing the Lord’s Prayer together in English, Spanish, Hmong, and French. The gathering ended with a moving service of worship that included an anointing service and blessing for the heroic work that these leaders do.

Watch the Central Plains website and publications for the opportunity to join us next year for this special event!



## Women’s Retreat

### Power Made Perfect: How’s a Woman to Live?

by Esther Jane Buller,  
Central Plains Mennonite Women

Central Plains Mennonite Women invites all Central Plains women to attend a retreat September 21 and 22, 2013, at Swan Lake Christian Camp near Viborg, South Dakota.

Elisabeth Harder Schrock and Charlotte Loewen will speak on the theme, “Power Made Perfect: How’s a Woman to Live?”

One year ago, Elisabeth and her husband completed a four-year term in Bolivia with Mennonite Central Committee. They worked with Old Colony Mennonites and indigenous Bolivian communities on potable water projects. Elisabeth also compiled and edited a monthly magazine, *Menno Bote*, for the German-speaking Mennonites in Bolivia.

Charlotte is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, who has her own mental health private practice. She is a graduate from McPherson College and has a master’s degree in social work from Kansas University. She is presently studying for a master’s degree in theology from Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana.

The cost of the retreat is \$75 for the full weekend. Please pre-register by September 14 by contacting Esther Jane Buller at [hebuller@gmail.com](mailto:hebuller@gmail.com) or 507-427-3064.

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.

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The financial reports are on summer vacation and will return in the next issue. —*Stewardship Task Group*

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



Ashland Christian Fellowship, Ashland,  
Montana Photo by Stan Harder

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Ecuador Partnership Task Group** meets August 23 in Omaha, Nebraska.

**Outreach & Service Committee** meets August 24 in Omaha, Nebraska.

**Engaging the Mystery: Introducing Advent 2013** September 7 at  
Manson Mennonite Church, Manson, Iowa.

**Women's Retreat** will take place September 21 & 22 at Swan Lake Christian Camp,  
Viborg, South Dakota.

**Christian Formation Committee** meets September 24 & 25 in central Iowa.

**Conference Board and Committees** meet November 15 & 16 at  
Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota.

**Youth Escape 2014** will take place the weekend of August 1-3, 2014, in central Iowa.

An area conference of



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USA**