



August
2014

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Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word
—Matthew 13



Left: A variety show skit; right, Jewel Gingerich Longenecker. Photos by Stan Harder

Joyfully following Jesus: Formed by God's Word

Annual Meeting provides a rich feast of teaching and fellowship

by Holly Blosser Yoder

"And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them."

—Nehemiah 8:12

Members of Central Plains Mennonite Conference met June 19-22 on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa for worship, delegate sessions, workshops, and fellowship at our 14th Annual Meeting. Many families attended, as organizers reported that more children were registered than at any previous annual meeting.

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker spoke on the theme "Joyfully Following Jesus: Formed by God's Word." This topic is of special meaning to Longenecker as she studied "scripture as formative in the life of the church" for her doctoral degree. She is associate dean for leadership education at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

During the Saturday session, titled "Called to Teach so that All Might Feast," she shared what she learned through studying six pastors who engage in Bible teaching as a regular part of their pastoral leadership, "creating communities of engagement around scripture."

Among her findings: the pastors she studied challenge people and views on both ends of the liberal/conservative spectrum as well as those in the middle; they use different methods and techniques but have in common strong personally formative experiences with the Bible and a view of biblical study as transformational; they view themselves as "Servants of the Word" and love teaching the Bible. In their educational approaches, they lay the groundwork by preparing and expecting participants to prepare; they use a learner-oriented teaching approach; and they provide guidance for sessions to stay focused.

Longenecker's presentations on "Starving for Your Word," "Called to Teach so that All Might Feast," and "Formed to Teach: Formed to Lead" provided relevant perspective to the delegate agenda, in particular the introduction of a new congregational study on communal biblical discernment developed by a

continued on page 2

conference task group and now available for use by congregations. Led by Conference Minister for Christian Formation Shana Peachey Boshart, delegates practiced biblical discernment in table groups as part of the introduction to the study.

Workshops on Friday and Saturday included such topics as Social Media, New Developments in the Ecuador Partnership, Child Protection Policies, and an exercise called “Loss of Turtle Island,” in which participants symbolically represented Native Americans through over 500 years of history. Workshops, together with fellowship/meal times and a Saturday night variety show, offered opportunities to learn to know more about the conference and one another.

Friday evening, Max Villatoro shared his immigration story, testifying to God’s peace and guidance in his life. Several other pastors and participants shared a testimony of where they see God at work in their communities. This was a rich time of witness, listening and bonding together.

In the concluding worship service Sunday morning, Longenecker challenged the gathering with the question, “Do people really take the time to read the Bible anymore?” The sermon began powerfully with an evocation of the scene in Nehemiah in which the newly rediscovered books of the law—the first five books of the Bible—are read to a thrilled assembly. When listeners “understood the Word of God and were filled with conviction,” Longenecker emphasized, “God was pleased; He called it a Holy Day.”

Longenecker told the gathering that formation “to teach and lead communities to engage the Bible is not an accident” and is the responsibility of all. She described the Bible as one story, a story of God’s love, woven through all 66 books; through creation, the people of Israel, Christ’s coming, and the church; in which people have value apart from their achievement or possessions. It notably contrasts with other popular stories that tell us that having the right things makes us worthwhile.

Sugar Creek Mennonite Church near Wayland hosted the worship service on Sunday, where participants were led in communion by the pastors of the southeast Iowa cluster.

Photos by Stan Harder



Clockwise from top left: Workshop attendees participate in the “Loss of Turtle Island” simulation; Patricia Uruena and Cesar Moya; Todd Jones leads worship; Voices join together in worship.



God's word is the pathway that leads us in the way of Jesus with joy

by David Boshart, Executive Conference Minister



It's all about joyfully following Jesus! This year we had a very special gathering at our Annual Meeting. We gathered to focus on things that go all the way to the bottom of what it means to be the church. In doing so we heard the call to renew our commitments to those things that make us people of faith.

We presented the next three-year plan for Central Plains. The delegates strongly affirmed the statement in the plan that is intended to orient our hearts. *"We seek to foster a conference culture of biblically-grounded, Christ-centered communities, sharing God's love as we joyfully follow Jesus."* In his prayer for all believers, we see at the bottom of everything, the great hope of Jesus for all who follow him is that our following would lead us to joy, *complete joy!* (John 17:13). If our following Jesus doesn't lead us to joy – which is not the same as being happy all the time – then we are doing it wrong.

Being formed by God's word is the pathway that leads us in the way of Jesus with joy. I believe that our speaker, Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, was sent to us for "such a time as this." Jewel said that when we do serious Bible study together, things change and they get better. Her call to be formed by God's word can save us when it feels like we are starving to death in the world. Being formed by God's word is the only hope we have for joyfully following Jesus. She said, "When we think

about living and dying and that we only get one chance at life, what ultimately guides us? The Bible offers us a story to live by, the story of God's love and of God's hopes and dreams for the world. This story gives us faith in a world where many walk in fear."

Jewel asserted, "I would say that when we can no longer speak to each other from the Bible, we cease to share a common Christian identity, we lose our shared foundation, our shared theological core, and our conversations go in circles." Being formed by God's word makes it possible for us to meet each other and remain joyfully united as we follow Jesus even when we face divisive issues.

The true community of faith needs pastors who understand that their primary work is to equip and empower disciples to do serious Bible study. This work deserves the focused attention of every pastor. It is written into our *Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*: "The minister's life is therefore a life of study, prayer, contemplation, and action in and on the word of God, God's creation, the lives of people, and the events of life in the world." Jewel asked, "Congregations, did you know this?" Her research showed that when pastors lead their congregations in serious Bible study, the Bible study itself becomes a means of offering pastoral care at the point of their members' needs. And, Bible study changes things.

Converging with the challenging call we received from Jewel, we were able to deliver a resource that can help guide our congregations in the process of studying the Bible to help us walk in faith rather than fear. *Seeking God's Will Together* is an excellent guide in helping congregations develop their capacity for communal biblical discernment. Congregations that will do a thorough study of this resource will have the skills necessary to apply what they've learned to face the challenging issues of living in a complex world where it isn't always clear what is most influential in our formation as followers of Jesus.

As we are formed by God's word and we find ourselves joyfully following Jesus, the witness that springs from our life together becomes a beacon of hope that will help those who have yet to know God's love to find new pathways to Jesus. May it be so in all our congregations! Amen!



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Thanksgiving, celebration and looking toward the future

Delegate sessions at Annual Meeting 2014

by Susan Janzen, pastor, Cedar Falls Mennonite Church

Thanksgiving, celebration, and looking toward the future marked the delegate sessions at this year's Annual Meeting.

The main features of Friday morning were a report about the ministry of Central Plains Mennonite Conference through its three committees (Christian Formation, Pastoral Leadership, and Outreach & Service) and Conference Board, along with an introduction to a new "Strategic Plan" that will guide the ministries of Central Plains Conference over the coming three years. A feature of this plan is an intentional "heart orientation," which seeks "to foster a conference culture of biblically-grounded, Christ-centered communities, sharing God's love as we joyfully follow Jesus."

Friday morning was also the opportunity to offer gratitude for the ministry of Cesar Moya & Patricia Uruena, who are returning to Colombia after serving 14 years in Ecuador. Their original mission was to minister to indigenous evangelical churches. In the course of their time in Ecuador, they became involved in ministry to refugees, taught biblical theology, developed a 12-book curriculum for training pastoral leadership, and helped plant four Mennonite congregations. Additionally, in honor of their commitment to nonviolent social and political ethics, Cesar and Patricia were awarded the 2014 peace mug.

Also on Friday morning, two staff members were recognized for their years of service. Monica Clem has served as office manager for 15 years and Ted Widmer has been the financial officer for 10 years.

Last year at Annual Meeting, delegates were asked to respond to the question, "How does the faithful church discern the way of Jesus as we engage the culture in which we find

ourselves?" As the ministry staff reflected on what they heard, the need for a tool to assist congregations in doing good discernment around important issues came to the forefront.

Over the past year, a task group of four young pastors, along with Shana Peachey Boshart, created *Seeking God's Will Together: A congregational study on communal biblical discernment*, which was introduced to this year's delegate body on Friday afternoon. This tool seeks to empower congregations to practice good discernment in a thoroughly Anabaptist way. The discernment guide includes six sessions, each of which is divided into two parts: Teaching and Practice. Each unit begins and ends with worship rituals and singing.

On Saturday morning, representatives of Mennonite Church USA, including Executive Director Ervin Stutzman, and related agencies offered greetings. The slate of officers was approved, as was the spending blueprint for the coming year.

Saturday afternoon, Central Plains joyfully welcomed its newest member congregation, Iglesia El Balsamo, which is located in Muscatine, Iowa. Pastor Alejandro Huesca and congregation members of all ages were present as a witness to the healing power of the gospel. In a spontaneous gesture of welcome, the entire delegate body rose to greet the congregation with handshakes and hugs.

Delegates wrapped up business with discernment around mission and witness, and with the installation of officers and committee members who will serve in the coming year. An invitation to next year's Annual Meeting in the Twin Cities was extended by delegates from congregations in southeastern Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Photo by Stan Harder



Page 4: Dave Boshart and Tim Detweiler welcome the members of Iglesia El Balsamo into Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

Clockwise from top left: Julie and Hazel Birky; Ecuador Partnership Team; Villatoro Family; Delegate session; A prayer of blessing for Iglesia El Balsamo; Ramiro Hernandez, Alex Huesca and Philip Friesen; Grant Nebel prepares the delegate tables; Nathan Luitjens, moderator.

Photos by Stan Harder and Ramiro Hernandez. See more photos at www.centralplainsmc.org.



Fall Women's Retreat

Growing in God - What's working for you?

All Central Plains women are invited to the 2014 Fall Women's Retreat at Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota, on Saturday and Sunday, September 20-21. The theme is "Growing in God – What's Working for You?" with Shana Peachey Boshart as the featured speaker.

The sessions will explore how women nurture faith in our churches at three stages of life: children, young women/mothers and empty nest/older women. There will be special interest sessions and singing as well as time to renew friendships and make new friends. The weekend begins at 9:30 am on Saturday and ends with the noon meal on Sunday. Check the poster in your church for details about the schedule and cost. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend!

Leader transitions

Arthur Roth retired as pastor at Julesburg Mennonite Church in Julesburg, Colorado, effective May 4, 2014. Pastor Art served for 52 years as pastor at Julesburg Mennonite.

David Orr resigned as pastor of First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, Nebraska, effective May 31, 2014.

Nathaniel Larson resigned as associate pastor at Mercy Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota effective May 31, 2014.

Doug Bishop, pastor at Ashland Christian Fellowship, Ashland, Montana, announced his resignation effective June 30, 2014.

Sonya Stauffer Kurtz ended her time as interim pastor at East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa, on June 30, 2014.

Firman Gingerich began as transitional pastor at East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa, on July 1, 2014.

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.

Central Plains church-to-church relationships

Templo Alabanza and Bethesda

Last summer, Templo Alabanza in Moline, Illinois, and Bethesda Mennonite in Henderson, Nebraska, established a sister church relationship. Templo Alabanza Pastor Alberto Parchmont and his wife Aurora took the church's youth to Nebraska to assist with summer Bible school at Bethesda. The Bethesda Vacation Bible School offering was designated for the Christian Education department at Templo Alabanza. The offering was used to renovate Sunday school rooms with paint, new flooring, window air conditioning units, and ceiling fans.

This past May, eleven youth and four sponsors from Henderson visited Templo Alabanza for a Sunday morning service. Templo Alabanza served a wonderful noon meal and everyone enjoyed getting to know each other over the meal.

"We are excited to have formed a partnership of sharing, caring and working together with our sister church in Henderson, Nebraska," said associate pastor Margie Caraballo of Templo Alabanza. "We look forward to planning further activities together."





A church home for Mayo Clinic patients

by Lois Kennel

If you or a family member are coming to Mayo Clinic, Rochester Mennonite Church would like to support and care for you there. The congregation offers you both pastoral support and general information about the hospitals and clinics, the city, lodging, transportation, etc. You are also welcome to worship with Rochester Mennonite. The church meets in the chapel of Christ United Methodist Church, located at 5th Avenue and 4th Street SW. The chapel is in the northeast corner of the building, and can most easily be accessed from 4th Street SW. Contact Galen Penner, at 507-281-3405 or galenpenner4@gmail.com.

STAR training to be offered in St. Paul this fall

by Donna Minter, STAR

It's time to strengthen your capacity to address trauma, break cycles of violence, and build resilience for the benefit of your congregation and the greater community. The STAR Training, Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience, will be offered in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in the fall. STAR has a 12-year national and international reputation of success of training professionals, paraprofessionals, and lay volunteers to be trauma-informed and resilience-oriented. Registration is now open for two 4.5 day trainings:

- Mon-Fri, September 8-12, 2014 www.starmnpeace2.eventbrite.com
- Fri-Sun October 3-5 & Sat-Sun Oct 18-19, 2014 www.starmnpeace3.eventbrite.com

STAR integrates concepts from neurobiology, restorative justice, nonviolent conflict transformation, and broadly defined spirituality that can lead to healing, resilience resourcing, and the potential for personal, family, and collective reconciliation.

Early tuition is \$698. Scholarship assistance is available to ensure economic diversity. Professional CEs are also available for social workers, psychologists, LMFT, LPCC, LPC, LADC, nurses and educators. For more information, please contact Donna Minter at 612-377-4660 or STAR.Mpls@gmail.com.

STAR is a program of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA.

WDC Library

Wouldn't it be cool if...

...youth and adult Sunday School teachers had dozens of free studies to choose from?

...your children could enjoy quality picture books that align with Christian values?

...teachers and choir directors could order DVD curricula and sheet music at no cost?

...you could borrow instead of buy devotionals, Christian books, and unique cookbooks?

Well, guess what?

YOU CAN! Just surf on over to <http://mennowdc.booksys.net>, the online catalog of Western District Conference Library. You can also call Marlene Bogard, Library Director and have a "real-time" chat about what might be most useful for your particular area. We are here to serve you! 316-283-6300 / crlib@mennowdc.org —*Marlene Bogard, Library Director*

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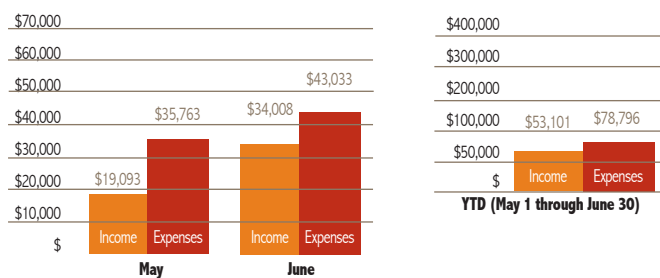
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Growing in
holistic witness
to God's
reconciling mission
in the world through
fellowship,
discipleship
and leadership

Central Plains budget struggled through the first two months of the new fiscal year. As you can see from the graphs, income for the months of May and June was less than the expenses incurred. As a result, we are facing a \$25,694.50 deficit. We are thankful for your continued support of Central Plains, where we see God at work in many different ways.

—Stewardship Task Group

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



UPCOMING EVENTS

Conference Board meets August 22-23 in Freeman, South Dakota.

Women's Retreat will be September 20-21 at Swan Lake Christian Camp, Viborg, South Dakota.

Conference Board and Committees meet November 14-15 at Crooked Creek Christian Camp.

An area conference of



Mennonite
Church
USA