



December
2013

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Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word

—Matthew 13



Guiding children toward Jesus

by the Dove's Nest staff

Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

— Luke 18:6

Children. They amaze us, enlighten us, and bring joy and fulfillment to our lives. Beaming faces on Sunday mornings greet teachers at Sunday School tables and circle eagerly around the pastor or another adult during the children's story. We're surrounded by them. As a community, we are responsible for all of them – for their safety, their growth, their shelter, their health. As Christians, we have a higher mandate to guide these children toward Jesus.

In 2009, Dr. Jeanette Harder's adult Sunday School class at First Mennonite Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, began a discussion about child abuse and neglect. How should the church respond to abuse inside and outside of the church building? Was the church part of the problem or part of the solution? Did child abuse and neglect actually occur in Mennonite families or churches?

For Jeanette, a professor of social work at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the answers to these questions and others were part of her research focus. There is a right way and a wrong way for the church to respond. The church can be part of the problem and part of the solution. And yes, unfortunately, abuse and neglect does occur

in Mennonite families and churches. Jeanette has been asked to assist many Mennonite congregations struggling with how to handle occurrences of abuse in their midst.

"The most common thing I heard during those difficult moments was, 'We never dreamed something like this could happen here,'" says Jeanette. "Helping congregations break through the denial that abuse and neglect does exist in the church and can even occur inside the church itself has become one of the key areas of focus for Dove's Nest."

Jeanette is one of the founders and the current board president of Dove's Nest (www.DovesNest.net), a nonprofit organization that began during the Mennonite Church USA Convention in 2009. Dove's Nest's mission is to equip and empower faith communities to keep children and youth safe in their homes, churches, and communities.

"Dove's Nest is committed to seeing every congregation have an actively implemented child and youth protection policy," says Jeanette. "We provide a checklist churches can use to develop a policy, as well as many sample policies from Mennonite churches across the country. We also offer training sessions, especially at regional events, and are work-

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

ing to develop online training opportunities as well.”

At the 2013 Convention, Dove’s Nest led three seminars and was instrumental in authoring a resolution, Protecting and Nurturing our Children and Youth. The resolution, which passed unanimously, explained the scope of the problem of abuse and neglect (20% of women and 6% of men in Mennonite Church USA congregations report having experienced abuse as a child or teen). It reminds the church of Christ’s mandate to protect and care for children. “It suggests that every congregation have a protection policy that includes a process for reporting suspected abuse,” says Jeanette.

Recently, Dove’s Nest was able to hire their first staff member, Jon Stanton. Jon, also a member of First Mennonite in Lincoln, has helped to guide Dove’s Nest through a year of rapid growth.

“My heart has always been with the local church,” says Jon. “Growing up as a pastor’s kid in mostly small, rural congregations helps me understand the difficulty congregations have with the idea of conducting background checks on Sun-

day School teachers and other youth leaders. I tell them things are different now, and we know more. Thirty years ago, none of us wore seat belts either. The church won’t be as effective in their community if it lives in the past.”

In fact, Jon says, most parents who are new to a congregation or new to the faith will want to see a child safety policy before allowing their children to participate in congregational activities.

“It could be one of the key reasons they choose to become part of your church,” Jon says. “Parents want to know that the church takes their children’s safety seriously.”

“I’m encouraged that interest in child and youth protection has increased since the resolution passed because there is still much to do to keep children and youth safe in our faith communities,” says Jeanette. “It is encouraging to see churches taking child and youth protection seriously. We at Dove’s Nest are here to help congregations to implement their policies in a meaningful, sustainable way.”

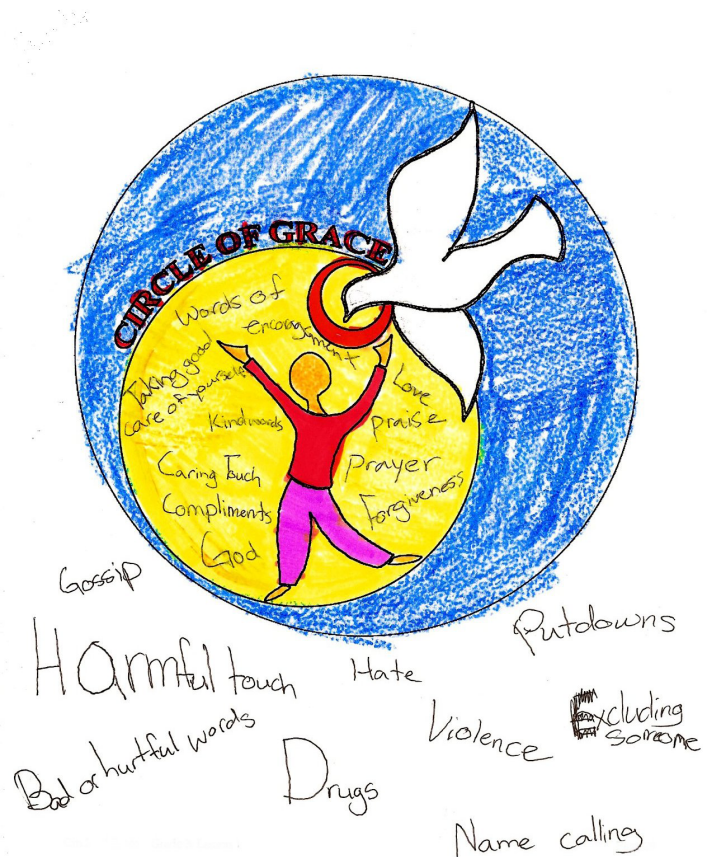
Educate children and youth with *Circle of Grace*

Circle of Grace is a Christian curriculum that helps to form and educate children and youth about the value of positive relationships with God and others. Children and youth learn how to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries. Lessons demonstrate how to recognize when boundaries are about to be violated and how to take action if they feel unsafe or threatened.

Circle of Grace is a supplement to your congregation’s regular Sunday School curriculum. Each grade level has one to four age-appropriate lessons per year. The formative years of preschool through third grade have three lessons each year. During transition years (puberty/adolescence), there are four lessons. Other grade levels have only one lesson per year.

First Mennonite Church Lincoln picks one month per year as *Circle of Grace* month. The theme of child and youth protection permeates the church’s activities during that month. While the children are learning from *Circle of Grace*, adult Sunday School classes talk about prevention of child abuse and neglect. Pastor David Orr preaches on topics related to the church’s responsibility to care for children and be a safe place.

Dove’s Nest can provide the curriculum **free of charge** to every Mennonite Church USA congregation. Currently, nearly 400 congregations are using *Circle of Grace*. If your congregation does not have its free copy, visit www.DovesNest.net/mcusa to request a copy or call 402-577-0866. It is available in both English and Spanish. —Dove’s Nest



A sign of the Kingdom of God

by Shana Peachey Boshart, Conference Minister for Christian Formation



At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven." --Matthew 18:1-6, 10

"Children are of great importance. Jesus saw them as examples of how to receive the reign of God. Children are to be loved, disciplined, taught, and respected in the home and in the church."
--Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995

Children are naturally open to mystery, wonder and story. So we share with them the stories of a loving, mysterious and wonderful God who loves them and wants to bless them. It is a special privilege to nurture faith in children.

It bears mentioning that a safe, secure environment is necessary for sharing faith with children. As adults, we take responsibility for creating and maintaining safe places for children to grow in faith. When abuse occurs in the very place that ought to be safe, the very place that ought to honor the holy in a child, immeasurable damage is the result.

On the other hand, I can think of no better sign of the Kingdom of God than beloved children thriving in a family of faith where they are safe, valued and respected.

With this in mind, the First Mennonite Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, submitted a *Resolution on Protecting and Nurturing our Children and Youth* to the Mennonite Church USA delegate assembly at Phoenix last July. The delegates passed this resolution, and now the Central Plains Christian Formation Committee (CFC) is prepared to help congregations implement it.

From the resolution

We know that Christ welcomed children and blessed and healed them. We also know that Jesus declared stern consequences for harming those who are vulnerable. God calls us to protect our children and youth and to nurture them so they will know they are deeply loved by God and invited to also follow Christ with joy and faithfulness.

As we seek to "...grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world," we desire to act with love and integrity in all our relationships and avoid the exploitation of vulnerable people or the misuse of positions of power within the church or family.

We, therefore, resolve...to promote the protection of children and youth from all forms of abuse and neglect and to advocate for their safety.

Some suggestions:

- Talk often about God's love and care for children. Be clear that the church also cares for children and does not support any abuse or violence.
- Implement a child-protection policy that includes the process for reporting of suspected abuse or neglect to authorities.
- Prepare children for positive relationships by using a faith-based curriculum like *Circle of Grace* (see page 2).
- Provide parenting classes, support groups, and friendship for parents.
- Be familiar with resources in the larger community and partner with them. Invite child protection agencies to provide training and information.

When your congregation is working on implementing this resolution, please feel free to call upon the conference minister for Christian formation, Shana Peachey Boshart, for assistance. In the coming months, the Christian Formation Committee will provide resources and training for congregational leaders, including resources on the conference web site, www.centralplainsmc.org. The CFC also commends the resources and expertise of Dove's Nest, presented on pages 4 and 5.

May the children and youth among us be safe, blessed and joyful. Amen.



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, Lerace Graber, Susan Janzen, Nathan Luitjens, Sherilyn Ortman.

Thanks to Peg Burkey and Verna Zook for proofreading.

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For the February issue, please send stories, news and photos by **January 6, 2014** to the address above.

Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to office@centralplainsmc.org.

Graphic Design by Erin Ramer.

Printed by Kalona Graphics in USA

www.centralplainsmc.org





Learning from each other: How one church does it

When a congregation is developing and implementing a child and youth protection policy it is helpful to see how other churches have done it already.

“It took time and effort,” says David Orr, pastor at First Mennonite Church Lincoln, “but it’s gratifying to know the congregation takes child protection seriously. It’s so much easier to be proactive and address these concerns in the absence of a specific problem or crisis.”

First Mennonite has a Child Protection Committee whose members are appointed by the congregation. The committee is responsible for implementing the church’s written policy. First Mennonite’s policy focused initially on three areas that nearly any congregation should be able to adopt:

- Windows or open doors in every classroom or area where children and youth gather.
- Offering training for adults on topics related to preventing child abuse and neglect.
- A person must be part of the congregation for at least six months before working with the children or youth.

“It is great to see people being routinely aware of child protection,” says Orr. “Our trustees consult with the Child Protection team on facility changes and individuals mention situations they think might raise concerns.”

Another important part of First Mennonite’s policy spells out how the church can safely include offenders, while ensuring the children and youth are safe. Shortly after the policy’s adoption, the church welcomed an offender and has continued to allow him to be part of the faith community within the policy’s parameters.

“Our policy focuses on education and collaboration as well,” says Pastor Orr. “A congregation who knows how to identify the signs of abuse, knows how to respond, and is aware of organizations in the community that can help is more empowered to combat abuse and neglect. We also encourage our members to pay attention in all the areas they encounter children – not just the church.”

For a sample policy and other help, contact Dove’s Nest Program Coordinator Jon Stanton at jon@dovesnest.net or 402-577-0866. —*Dove’s Nest*

Practical help for your congregation

Are children safe at your church? What precautions have you taken to ensure they won’t be abused? Do you know how to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect?

Let the Children Come, written by Jeanette Harder, PhD, and published by Herald Press, answers these questions and many more. From a biblical perspective, the book helps congregations learn about child abuse and neglect and the church’s role in keeping children safe in the church and the community in which they serve.

“Members of our faith communities need to be reminded of their role in protecting children, strengthening families, and ending child abuse and neglect,” says Dr. Harder. “The book is an excellent resource for adult Sunday School classes or small groups. Each chapter contains discussion questions opening the opportunity for dialogue and feedback.”

Every Mennonite Church USA congregation received a free copy of the book from Dove’s Nest in 2011. It is also available to order at www.DovesNest.net/letthechildren-come.

Speaking of websites...have you visited the Dove’s Nest website? If you haven’t, what will you find there?

- General information about child abuse and neglect, signs that abuse may be occurring, and what to do if you suspect a child is being abused
- A checklist for developing a child/youth protection policy, and sample policies from many other Mennonite Church USA congregations across the U.S.
- Information and FAQs about the *Circle of Grace* safe environment curriculum
- Dozens of links to resources including denominational statements, worship resources, books, speakers and trainers, and more!

Visit today. www.DovesNest.net.

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.

Hmong youth retreat

by Mai Yang, Hmong Mennonite Church of St. Paul

The weekend of November 8-10, the Hmong Mennonite Church of St. Paul hosted our very first youth and young adult retreat. We were joined by youth from the Hmong Mennonite church of Hickory, North Carolina and Hmong Mennonite Church of Denver, Colorado. The retreat, held at YMCA Camp Ihduhapi in Loretto, Minnesota, consisted of workshops, worship services and activities. The three different workshops were: *Leadership* by Shana Peachey Boshart, *Anabaptist History & Perspectives* by David Boshart and *Asian-American Cross-Cultural Training* by Jonah Yang. Jonah is the president of the Hmong Mennonite Church Mission, the fellowship of Hmong Mennonites in the United States and Canada.

Many times we come to church and just sit, listen to the pastor preach and then go home. Some think that as long as we hear the pastor talk about God and the Bible that is good enough, while others may seek further and wonder, "Since I go to a Mennonite church, what does 'Mennonite' mean?" or "How does one view things from an Anabaptist Mennonite perspective?"

During the Anabaptist workshop, Dave taught an overview of Mennonite history and how the church came to be. We learned that our core values are "Jesus is the center of our faith, Community is the center of our life, and Reconciliation is the center of our work". We realized that we can practice this every day, even when we are not at church on Sunday.

In order to grow, churches need strong leadership. Leadership is more than telling people what to do or not to do. Leadership is about leading from the heart where Christ dwells. With the five practices of leadership that Shana taught during the session, the youth have a better idea of how to be a leader and what to expect from a leader.

In the cross-culture workshop by Jonah, many of the youth realized how lucky we are. We do not have to wake up early to cook then work on the farm all day until night--the same thing every day. When our parents disagree with what we do, we have to remember that the lives that they had in Laos and Thailand were way different from ours.

The workshop helped the youth to come to a better understanding of what it means to be part of a Mennonite church community. We also learned what leadership skills are needed, how to be a leader and what is needed as a leader. And, it is good to remember who we are and the culture we come from.



Top to bottom: From left to right, Josh and Johnny Yang, Bee Her, Jonah Yang, Shana and David Boshart and Bao Thao; Group photo; David and Shana Boshart with Seng Vang and Mai Yang

New study is growing from Annual Meeting table time

Leaders Credentialed

Scott Shreffler was licensed toward ordination at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, Montana, on Sunday, October 13, 2013.

Leader Transitions

Jay Müller, pastor at East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa, announced his resignation effective December 31, 2013.

Mathew Swora, pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, announced his resignation effective December 15, 2013.

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At our 2013 Annual Meeting, we posed this question to our delegates: “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?” The written responses from the table groups can be summed up in the statement “We are concerned about how the faithful church discerns the way of Jesus as we engage the culture in which we find ourselves.”

At Conference Board meeting in September, the board decided to appoint a task group to develop a study document for congregations with a study guide for 4-6 sessions. This document would provide specific steps for biblical discernment in an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective for congregations to learn from and practice applying to specific issues of our time.

The goal is to have this study ready for congregations to use by January. We would like ten congregations that would be willing to use it and give feedback on it by May 31. (The study can be provided in other languages as needed.) Congregations willing to pilot this study between January and May, should contact Shana Peachey Boshart. (See contact information at left.)

Amanda Beachy, pastor at Washington (IA); Nathan Ramer, pastor at Wellman (IA); Nick Detweiler Stoddard, pastor at Salem (SD); and Matt-Troyer Miller, pastor at Wood River (NE) have agreed to serve on the task group. Shana Peachey Boshart will represent the ministry staff on the team.

Find a summary of the table group responses and the proposal for the task group on the “For Delegates” page under the “CPMC at Work” tab.



Congregations share worship, mission and laughter

by Nathan Ramer, pastor, Wellman Mennonite Church, Wellman, Iowa

West Union Mennonite and Wellman Mennonite were blessed to spend a morning together in worship on October 13. The Southeast Iowa pastor cluster has been emphasizing unity and sharing resources so when West Union booked actor and comedian Ted Swartz to bring the Sunday message, it was natural to welcome others to be included on the special morning. Wellman Mennonite leaped at the opportunity and decided to shuttle their entire congregation the six miles out to the countryside for the combined service. Besides the reverent laughter shared at Ted's gifted approach to scripture, the group also enjoyed robust singing and had a potluck fellowship meal together.

The day concluded with a commissioning service for West Union member Caleb Yoder as he prepared to leave for service in Ecuador. Wellman Mennonite is also joining with West Union in support of Caleb's work in Ecuador. Doing church together like this was something of an experiment for the two congregations. It turned out to be a robust success and the two churches look forward to the possibility of more joint ventures in the future.

Resources for children's faith formation

Question: Is children's faith formation the same as Sunday School? Could it happen in a variety of settings? Are both church and home responsible for this precious opportunity?

Here are some resources you won't want to miss:

- *Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping children using story, ritual and relationship* by Ivy Beckwith, Baker, 2010.
- *Children's Ministry that Fits: Beyond the one-size-fits-all approaches to nurturing children's spirituality* by David Csinos, Wipf and Stock, 2013.
- *Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the spiritual life of your children* by Elizabeth Caldwell, United Church Press, 2000.
- *Imagining Faith with Kids: Unearthing seeds of the gospel in children's stories from Peter Rabbit to Harry Potter* by Mary Keaton, Pauline Books, 2005.

All of these and more are available through the Western District Conference Resource Library. Contact Marlene Bogard to have them delivered to your door! 316-283-6300 / crlib@mennowdc.org / on-line catalog at mennowdc.org.

Would you like to go to Ecuador?

People interested in going on a **Fellowship and Learning Tour to Ecuador** from January 16 to 28, 2014, may contact Don Kempf at donaldkempf@windstream.net or 402-759-1285. This is an excellent opportunity to know our brothers and sisters in Ecuador intimately as you visit them in their homes and communities, and you will be able to observe the amazing things that God is doing through the Ecuador Partnership.

People interested in going on a **Fellowship and Work Team to Ecuador** this winter, may contact Doyle Roth at doyleth@hotmail.com or 402-641-0266 for more information and scheduling. Exact dates will be confirmed as peoples' schedules allow. This is a great opportunity to work alongside brothers and sisters from Central Plains in a different culture and climate and to deepen our relationships with our Ecuadorian friends.

Iowa Mennonite School seeks principal

Iowa Mennonite School is seeking a dynamic, qualified educational leader for the position of Principal/Chief Administrator in rural Kalona, Iowa for the 2014-2015 school year. The successful candidate must have the following:

- Master's Degree or equivalent in educational administration
- Possess a valid Iowa Administrator and Evaluator License
- Serve as Christ-centered spiritual leader
- Demonstrate success working with culturally and academically diverse students
- Effective interpersonal and communication skills

Candidates should complete an application found on the IMS web site at: <http://www.iowamennonite.org/about/job-opening/>. Submit a letter of interest, resume, supporting documentation and three letters of recommendation to pbuckwalter@iowamennonite.org or contact Paula Buckwalter at 319-646-2456.

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

The Central Plains budget took a step back in September but regained some momentum in October. As you can see from the graphs, we experienced a strong shift in income for these two months as September came in at \$24,337.80 and October at \$46,958.63. Expenses held fairly steady which helped lower the overall deficit which now stands at \$18,400.31, as of the end of October. We are grateful for the continued support by congregations and individuals and pray we can continue this momentum through the last two months of the calendar year. —*Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches will be offered February 8, 2014, in southeast Iowa.

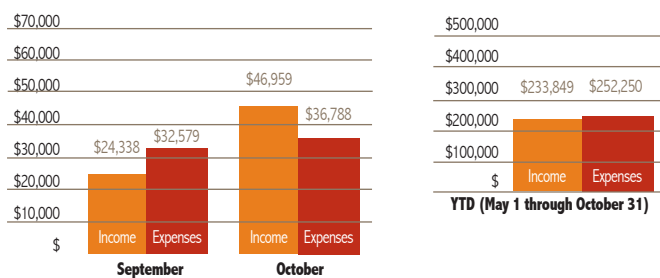
Church Planters Gathering will take place March 11-12.

Annual Leaders Retreat for pastors and spouses will take place April 25-27 at Schuyler, Nebraska.

Central Plains Annual Meeting will take place June 19-22 at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

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

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



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