



February
2013

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Montana!

Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word
—Matthew 13



Photo credit: Abbie Miller

What do these two churches have in common? **Quite a lot, actually!**

by S. Roy Kaufman, Salem-Zion Correspondent

What does a very traditional rural Mennonite congregation of German background from South Dakota have in common with a young, growing urban congregation of Hmong Mennonites in St. Paul?

Well, quite a lot, as it turns out! We are of course both gatherings of Christian believers, called to follow Jesus and to be an alternative community of faith in the midst of a dominant, idolatrous and exploitative culture.

But more than that, like the ancient Israelites before them, the rural South Dakota and urban Hmong congregations share a long and deep agrarian heritage of care for the land. Visit a farmer's market in the Twin Cities area and you will see stand after stand of Hmong produce spilling out of the stalls. Rural German Mennonite

congregations likewise have a long history of living on the land, sometimes in the most inhospitable ecological contexts.

Another commonality, and again like the ancient Israelites, the traditional German and urban Hmong congregations share a long history of living as an immigrant people. Just as German Mennonites trace their ancestry back to Switzerland or the Netherlands, Hmong Mennonites trace their ancestry back to their homeland in China. Both German and Hmong Mennonites have a history of pilgrimage in many places before meeting here in North America.

The Hmong Mennonite Church in St. Paul invited folks from Salem-Zion Mennonite Church in rural Freeman to come to their New Year's Day/Thanksgiving celebration on November 25. A

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They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.

—Acts 2:42

How MDS got tangled in a fence rebuild

Bethesda men make a service trip to Montana

by Larry Swartzendruber, Bethesda Mennonite Church



Photos by Jay Dee Janzen

Can you imagine the situation of a cattle farmer who has had 90 percent of his land ravaged by fire? His cattle have been placed on a neighbor's land. Miles and miles of fence are down, and hundreds of posts need to be replaced. And the cattle should be brought back before winter.

Nick Golder, a cattleman in his early 80s, lives just five miles north of the Cheyenne Indian Reservation. The Golder Ranch is located about eight miles north of Lame Deer, Montana. Mr. Golder is an active lay minister in his church and a member of the Northern Cheyenne Ministerial Association. He and Willis Busenitz, pastor of the White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, have been friends for over 20 years and work together in the ministerial alliance.

Willis inquired of Nick how he was getting along. He replied that he had no one to help with rebuilding fence. Willis said he could help him with that and called Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS).

The ranch buildings had been spared from the fire but stacked hay bales were destroyed. The cattle were moved ahead of the fire and temporarily placed on the Indian reservation, but Golder wanted them back on his land for winter feeding. About 50 miles of fence needed mending. The neighbors were working on their boundaries, but Golder needed to do his half.

Three groups of MDS workers have responded. The first week a group of a dozen from Kansas responded; the second week, a crew of five men from Missouri. The third week saw four men from Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, Nebraska, digging holes, pounding posts, splicing and stretching wire and clipping it to new posts.

Most of the wood posts were burned, many consumed at ground level and most weakened. Most of this fence was over 50 years old, and many steel posts had already been added to replace or reinforce older wood posts. Gate posts, corner posts and brace posts were wooden and most of these needed to be replaced. We didn't really build fence as much as mend it. A "helper" could hold wire or untangle it so the others could work on planting posts and driving the steel ones. For the most part the ground was sandy and holes were easy to dig. After the wire was stretched again, it needed to be clipped to the steel posts.

There is still much work to be done. To help out, contact Al Kroeker, Director of MDS Region III by email: region3@mds.mennonite.net or by phone: 620-690-3707.

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van-load of Salem-Zioners made the journey to St. Paul and enjoyed a day of worship and eating and fellowship with our Hmong brothers and sisters in Christ. The Hmong folks sang Christian songs in their language and were clothed in traditional Hmong garb.

Next summer, the Hmong church will be invited to visit Salem-Zion and the farms of the Freeman community. These are the latest examples of an extensive relationship between the Salem-Zion and Hmong congregations reaching back more than a dozen years, the result of persistent efforts by David Janssen, Salem-Zion member and former member of the Central Plains Outreach and Service Committee.

Who knows, perhaps our commonalities will lead us to have a rural Hmong congregation in the Freeman community! Perhaps South Dakota Mennonites could help these recent immigrants to become landed here in America while they teach us about local food production.

Why I have hope for the church:

Reasons why we can assume the best about each other

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

- Ephesians 4:15

by David Boshart, Executive Conference Minister



When I began my work as a conference minister, our congregations told the ministry staff that they did not feel as connected to their sister congregations as they wanted to be, not only across the conference but even within more localized regions of the conference. Because of the geography of our conference, it is easy

for us to assume that we are not very closely connected. Perhaps it is due to our culture's penchant to assess the church in negative terms, but we too can tend to think less than the best about what's going on in other churches.

Last fall, the congregations of our conference were asked to send three people "full of wisdom and the Spirit" to a time of giving and receiving counsel regarding the policy on marriage adopted by Faith Mennonite. The Conference Board has appointed a task group of people to analyze and summarize the feedback from these meetings in a report due in late spring.

While we do not yet know the meaning of the counsel that has been offered, as someone who attended all four meetings, I want to share a few observations that give me hope for the church and reasons why we can assume the best about each other. First, I was impressed at the very high level of participation. My guess is that this was, in part, because of the regional locations of the meetings. Second, I was deeply moved by what happens when congregations discern carefully the people they trust to be in the room when difficult issues are on the table. Participants in the

regional meetings embodied extraordinary wisdom, spiritual maturity, interpersonal sensitivity and open communication. It was an experience of watching brothers and sisters "speak the truth in love" to one another.

It is premature to talk about outcomes. But having looked carefully at the feedback myself, I can offer several general observations. Participants in these meetings expressed a strong call to loving and patient forbearance in times of disagreement. Participants called our churches to be grounded in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and sensitivity to the Spirit's leading in times of disagreement. The meetings showed that we have high expectations for healthy and ongoing communication when we face issues of disagreement. The participants in the regional meetings recognize the challenges of coming to clear resolution in such times.

Our members expressed strong affirmation for the regional meeting process as a way of doing discernment on matters of faith and life.

This was a rare opportunity for our members to talk to one another at the table about agreements and disagreements on issues of sin and faithfulness. It is apparent that we take sin seriously. It is also apparent that we are slow to pass judgment on one another because we recognize that we are all sinners. This is surely a hopeful sign for the church going forward. We also saw that we take the Bible seriously and care deeply that the Bible is interpreted faithfully. But we also raise some important questions about what it means to interpret the scriptures faithfully. Taking the Bible seriously does not necessarily result in competent interpretation, and that is one reason we need more practice in doing biblical discernment together.

What gives me most hope for the church going forward is that participants expressed that an unqualified commitment to Christ-centered witness is what we value most as a people. Commitment to that mission provides the only reliable foundation for the discernment of sin and faithfulness.

At each of our regional meetings, someone came to me and said, "You're not going to be able to come up with an answer on this that will make everyone happy." I don't think so either. But I do believe there is a faithful response for this time and place and that the Spirit is leading us to it. It may not satisfy everyone, and it may not be a decision for all time. But the Spirit is leading us. Jesus is at the center of our common life, and he is faithful. Of this I have no doubt.



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Regional meetings offer chance to give and receive counsel

Responding to a congregation at variance

A summary report by conference staff

In early 2012, Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, did a study of marriage with the goal of formulating a policy on marriage for their congregation. Conference leaders met together with Faith Mennonite leaders several times in which conference leaders represented the position of the church and discussed the ramifications of Faith adopting a variant position.

In February 2012, Faith Mennonite adopted a set of marriage guidelines that in the future would allow their pastor to participate in same-sex commitment ceremonies. Both the congregation and the conference leaders understand that with the adoption of this policy, Faith Mennonite is at variance with the Mennonite Church's teaching position as articulated in Article 19 of the 1995 Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective.

Response: Regional meetings for discernment

In response, conference leaders shared information about Faith Mennonite's marriage policy with the delegates at the 2012 Annual Meeting and announced that they had designed a process to receive the counsel of Central Plains congregations. They proposed four regional meetings for the purpose of offering counsel to one another, to Faith Mennonite Church, to the Pastoral Leadership Committee (PLC), and to the Conference Board. The meetings were not to be about changing the position of the church regarding same-sex marriage; rather, how to respond when one congregation takes a position that is different from the position of the broader church.

This process was guided by the following underlying assumptions and commitments:

- We understand that biblical and spiritual discernment is the permanent vocation of the church.
- All counsel gathered and shared will be done in face-to-face settings.
- We all understand that Faith Mennonite Church has adopted a policy that is at variance with Article 19 of the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective.
- Given that we live in a covenant of conferences that make up Mennonite Church USA, we understand that according to the current membership guidelines of Mennonite Church USA, should a credentialed leader participate in a same-sex covenantal ceremony, the Pastoral Leadership Committee will review the leader's credentials.
- We understand that giving and receiving counsel has the same goal as evangelism and the discipling process: bringing people into closer relationship with God through Christ.

The regional meeting participants

Last fall, half-day regional meetings were held in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Each congregation, within their own process of discernment, identified three people "full of wisdom and the Spirit" to participate in the regional meeting. Persons "full of wisdom and the Spirit" were defined as people who are "spiritually wise, highly trusted by their congregation, capable of deep listening and understanding, and capable of representing the content of a meeting with fairness." These persons were to be chosen from among the congregation's delegates to conference, pastors, other identified leaders, or members of the congregation who possess special wisdom and/or capacity for spiritual discernment.

"The meetings were not to be about changing the position of the church regarding same-sex marriage; rather, how to respond when one congregation takes a position that is different from the position of the broader church."

The regional meeting process

Each regional meeting followed the same process. Participants gathered on a Saturday morning, starting with worship and prayer. They were seated at round tables of six to eight people, facilitated by a designated leader. Members of Faith Mennonite Church shared the story of how the congregation came to adopt its position on marriage. Then, a conference leader gave an overview of historical background and issues related to Mennonite faith and polity.

After a brief orientation to table group process, the table group leader led the table in a guided dialogue in which participants shared their hopes and fears. Next, participants shared a passage or story from scripture that shapes their “understanding on giving and receiving council within the body of Christ when congregations differ on matters of faith, such as same sex orientation and committed same sex relationships.”

Next, the table spent time in prayerful silence and reflection, concluding with the Lord’s Prayer. Participants were invited to share what they had heard in the table conversation.

Finally, each participant was invited to offer their counsel based on their sense of the Holy Spirit’s leading and the table group discussion. They divided their counsel into these categories: counsel to one another (i.e., to sister congregations), to Faith Mennonite Church, to Pastoral Leadership Committee and to the Conference Board. All their counsel was recorded and collected.

Summarizing the counsel

After all the regional meetings had taken place, a task group appointed by the conference board met on January 19 to study the collected feedback and begin to develop a response from conference leaders. This response will be communicated to members of conference in early spring. Members of the task group are Blaine Friesen, moderator; Nathan Luitjens, assistant moderator; Sherilyn Ortman, conference board; Seth McCoy, conference board; and Susan Janzen, PLC chair. Conference ministers Tim Detweiler and David Boshart also met with the task group.

Photo credit: Jeremy Waltner

Recommended Resources on Congregational Discernment

Discerning God’s Will Together: Biblical Interpretation in the Free Church Tradition by Ervin R. Stutzman, Cascadia Publishing House, coming in May 2013.

This book invites congregations to learn communal forms of biblical interpretation through which to implement practices of discernment offering guidance amid today’s challenging ethical and theological riddles. – from the publisher

Pursuing God’s Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups by Ruth Haley Barton, IVP Books, 2012.

In these pages you will discover personal and group practices that will lead you into a new way of experiencing community and listening to God together. – from the publisher

Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church by Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, Alban Institute, 2012.

Bible study, research, and fieldwork merge in this book of practical principles for decision making by spiritual discernment. The step-by-step approach is interactive, spiritual, and rooted in faith practices and community. – from the publisher

Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God’s Way Forward in Decision Making by Lon Fendall, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop, Barclay Press, 2007.

To discern is to hear and understand God’s voice as articulated by the Holy Spirit, resident within us. Discernment is a necessary precondition for faithfulness to God’s leadings. – book excerpts

Three two-page papers entitled **Biblical/communal Discernment: What is it? and Biblical/communal Discernment: What are the necessary components? and Biblical/communal Discernment: Practicing discernment together.** Available in PDF form at www.centralplainsmc.org.

These papers would be a great place to start for congregational leadership groups who want to practice good biblical and communal discernment. They are short enough to be useful in many settings and give practical steps for discernment.

Annual Meeting 2013 June 20-23 in Ashland, Montana

"Buckle up for a scenic ride to Montana and come and join us for Annual Meeting. Bring your casual summer clothes for warm days and your light jackets for cool evenings. Come expecting to fellowship, learn, grow and be stretched. We look forward to having you here!" - Willis Busenitz, pastor of White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church.

We will gather for Annual Meeting 2013 on the beautiful campus of St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, Montana. If you are wondering where Ashland is, find the interactive map on our web site. Click on "CPMC at Work" then "Events" for the Annual Meeting 2013 page. The map shows the locations of the three Mennonite churches, St. Labre Indian School, and towns nearby with hotels. You'll also find links to Montana and South Dakota tourism sites, as well as a link to photos of St. Labre Indian School. The lodging at St. Labre is very nice, as you can see in the photos.

Mark your calendars now for June 20-23, 2013, in Ashland, Montana!

Leaders Credentialed

Jeff Miller was licensed toward ordination at Kalona (Iowa) Mennonite, on December 2, 2012.

Tamara Gill was licensed toward ordination at Wayland (Iowa) Mennonite, on December 30, 2012.

Leader Transitions

Sherm Kauffman began as interim lead pastor at Bethesda Mennonite, Henderson, Nebraska, on November 4, 2012.

Rosie Epp resigned as pastor of Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, effective February 15, 2013. She and husband **Ray Reimer** will co-pastor Zion Mennonite Church in Elbing, Kansas.

The White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana, has invited **Scott Shreffler** from Lewistown, Pennsylvania, to come to Busby for one year to assist pastor Willis Busenitz and the congregation in ministry. Scott's responsibilities will be to participate in church activities, build relationships with people and to explore new possibilities for ministry in the community.

Nebraska youth "lock-in" deeper friendships

by Scott & Jenny Eichelberger, youth sponsors

Youth from **Salem Mennonite Church**, Shickley, Nebraska, invited the youth from **Wood River (Nebraska) Mennonite Church** to a lock-in on Nov. 17. Seventeen youth and eight sponsors participated in the evening of fun. The event began with snacks, of course, and then a time of sharing by Mike and Diane Row. They shared about the importance of choosing good friends and how God blesses us with Christian friends. It was great to hear about their own personal experiences of friendships and how our friends influence our choices.

The evening then continued with a "Minute To Win It" competition, a church scavenger hunt, and other group games. It was fun to connect and form friendships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Mercy Church featured for Election Day communion

by Pastor Shel Boese

In November, **Mercy Church**, Sioux Falls, was one of two South Dakota churches that officially participated in electiondaycommunion.org. People joined us from several other churches including Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church. The regional newspaper, *The Argus Leader*, did a nice Life section write-up interviewing us and Calvary Episcopal Cathedral about the event. We were able to give testimony to the classic Anabaptist view of state-church separation which resists the idol of civil religion that so dominated the election discourse.

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.

Youth Service trip report

Sugar Creek Mennonite: DOOR Chicago

By Shirlyn Graber

From July 1-6, 2012--now on record as one of the hottest and most humid weeks in Chicago history--17 youth and four sponsors from the Sugar Creek Mennonite Church in Wayland, Iowa, served with DOOR Chicago, a service opportunity whose acronym means "Discovering Opportunities Through Outreach and Reflection". Other DOOR sites are Atlanta, Hollywood, San Antonio, Miami, and Denver where DOOR was founded by Mennonites and Presbyterians.

Throughout the 2011-12 school year, sponsors Randy and Shirlyn Graber and Randy and Jan Shelman became familiar with the area and program which helped them prepare the youth mentally, physically, and spiritually for this extremely challenging and certainly life-changing week. The covenant vision, prepared by our youth group council, read: "Come with an open heart and be open to new opinions and ways of doing things so others may see the face of God in us."

Our home base for the week was The First Church of the Brethren in the East Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago. We were given room and board in that inner city facility, along with two other Presbyterian youth groups from Kentucky. Each day began and ended with devotional reflections given by the sponsors and college-age staffers who also accompanied us to our service projects in the many varied and mostly ethnic neighborhoods of this great American city.

Youth group members were given week-long CTA passes which meant that we traveled throughout Chicago solely by way of the el, subway, and bus systems--talk about a learning experience for rural Iowans! We were constantly aware of "seeing the face of God in the city" as we served in our diverse assignments--helping with homeless programs, AIDS shelters, urban gardening, conversing and learning to know city folk, cleaning up city parks, cleaning and painting food pantries, packing food in food depositories, and listening to groups and individuals who are working for change in the city.

The best way to define DOOR Chicago for our group might simply be by mentioning some of the cardboard testimonies shared by each one of us at our July 8 morning worship service at Sugar Creek. Please "listen" as some of us speak:

- Came to Chicago with doubts/left Chicago with hope.
- Once frightened/now enlightened
- Volunteering: unpaid work/Volunteering: paid in new ways
- If not now/when?
- Once...feeling down/Now...I've been found
- Once felt powerless/now INVINCIBLE through the Lord:
- Unfamiliar faces: DANGER! /Unfamiliar faces: no longer a stranger
- From caring/to sharing
- Once judgmental/now open-minded
- When you're down to nothing/God's up to something.
- I like my space/but God wants me to share
- Once existing in my world/now abiding in God's world
- Physical thirst/ now drinking from living waters

Editor's note: This service report was written for the Fall 2012 Scattered Seeds. To see a You Tube video demonstrating cardboard testimonies, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvDDc5RB6FQ.

Check out the WDC Resource Library's sheet music

Are you looking for music for your Easter choir? The Western District Conference Resource Library includes a Music Library, which contains multiple copies of choir anthems for both adult and junior choirs that can be checked out for your church choir.

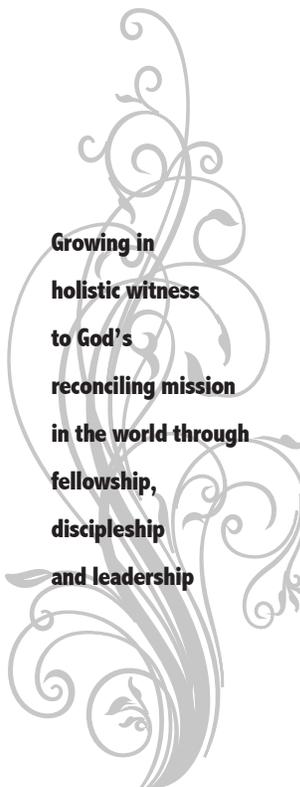
On the Resource Library web site, you will find the selections listed by title, by composer, by season, and by junior choir. Just go to mennowdc.org/library and click on "Music Library" in the drop-down list under "Resource Library."



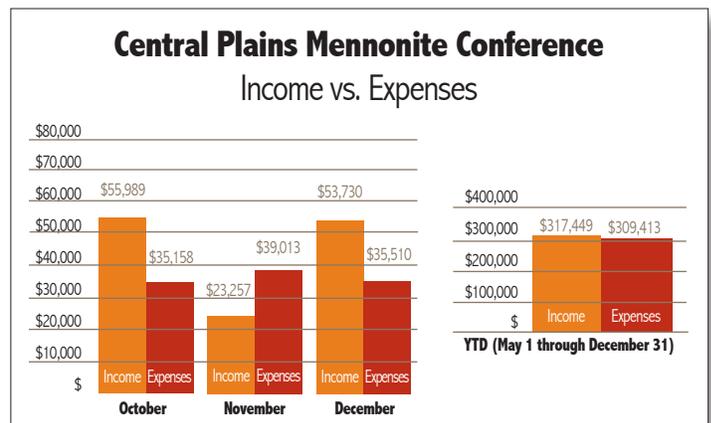
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The graphs illustrate a financial snapshot of Central Plains Mennonite Conference for the last three months of 2012. October and December both provided large monthly surpluses. Despite a low November, overall year-to-date the conference has a surplus of \$8,036. We are all very thankful and blessed for the continued support we have seen in 2012 and look forward to 2013 and the last four months of our conference fiscal year. —*Stewardship Task Group*



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Ecuador Partnership** meetings take place February 14-26 in Ecuador and Colombia.
- Conference Board** meets Saturday, April 13, in Mountain Lake, Minnesota.
- Pastors and Spouses Gathering** Sunday through Tuesday, April 14-16, at Schuyler, Nebraska.
- Central Plains Annual Meeting**, June 20-23, in Ashland, Montana.
- Mennonite Church USA Convention** July 1-6, in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Youth Escape 2014**, August 1-3, 2014.

