



February
2015

In this issue

- 4 Learning from Venezuelan Mennonites
- 5 Partnership news
- 6 Visit to Hmong in Thailand
- 7 New Testament Challenge

Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word
—Matthew 13



Standing: Abraham Rodriguez, David Boshart, Omar Rodriguez, Erwin Mirabal, Don Kempf, Aura Abreu, Holly Blosser Yoder, Carlos Velasquez, Linda Shelly, Zarai Gonzalia. Kneeling: Oscar Herrera, Carlos Avila, Euclides Bauza, Maria Elena Rodriguez.

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path.... Other seeds fell on rocky ground.... Other seeds fell among thorns.... Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

— Matthew 13:3-9

Venezuelan church leaders spread “healthy infection”

by Holly Blosser Yoder, West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa
Outreach & Service Committee and Ecuador Partnership

“Infecting the churches of Venezuela with a *sana doctrina*” (literally, ‘healthy doctrine’ in English) --This metaphor of the gospel of Jesus as a healthy infection is how an ecumenical group of church leaders led by Mennonite Erwin Mirabal describe their educational mission.

In several locations throughout Venezuela, a network of Mennonites and others are sharing the Anabaptist theology that has strengthened their understanding of the gospel.

Mirabal, a businessman and church leader, and his wife Haydee have devoted much time and effort to ministry in Venezuela. Mirabal was first introduced to Anabaptist theology as a young man in the 1980s when he attended a class taught by John Driver, a former Mennonite Mission Network worker and author. At first, Mirabal said, he didn’t understand much. But he kept the materials, pon-

dered what he had heard, and continued to study and learn.

Bible study transforms lives

In recent years, he and an ecumenical group of leaders on Isla Margarita, the Venezuelan island where he and his family live, have offered educational workshops and seminary classes with help from the Colombia Mennonite Biblical Seminary. On the mainland, a network of Christians who were similarly nurtured by Mennonite missions have helped to expand the reach of the seminary classes. In 2014, 72 committed students participated in the seminary classes in Venezuela.

Seminary student Marielis Barrios said, “God has given Erwin a gift to teach in a way that helps all of us, that we can understand God’s word much better, to help us to be more involved with the

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

people around us. Through the word, the Lord heals us, in our spiritual lives and at the level of identity.”

A Christology class “permitted me to see who Jesus Christ is and how to convey him to other people,” said Marianela Verde, a transit official. As a project for the class, Verde painted a picture to illustrate Jesus’ call to serve, which now hangs in the seminary’s Isla Margarita office (see photo on page 3).

The students were responding to questions from a partnership delegation representing Central Plains Mennonite Conference, the Colombian Mennonite Church (IMCOL) and Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) during a visit in November. Students described why they prize the seminary classes; recent subjects have included classes on Christology and Church History. The mission partners visited Isla Margarita as well as several other locations to learn about the ways brothers and sisters in Venezuela are ministering, “infecting” those around them with healthy biblical teaching on the way of Jesus.

Linda Shelly, MMN’s director for Latin America, remarked on the dedication of the Venezuelan church leaders who have volunteered their time and energy.

“In addition to developing Mennonite churches, they see the importance of, as they say, ‘infecting’ other churches with a *‘sana doctrina’* or healthy doctrine,” she said. By offering these classes also to independent churches, they strengthen the churches and believers. Independent churches generally are outside accountability structures, so people can be vulnerable to erroneous Bible teaching, or even abuse.

Going to the Word for direction

Maria Elena Rodriguez, a business woman who now serves as a church leader on Isla Margarita, said, “When I began to take these courses, I realized that I had had a lot of twisted formation... I told God that I felt like I was lacking something. I had looked for it in pastors.” Now she and the reflection group she leads search for direction from scripture, resulting in changed lives and relationships. As an example, she told of a participant who came to see that she was mistreating a sister. “Understanding this and realizing that she could change was something that made her very joyful,” she said.

Romano Troncone, who hosts seminary classes in the industrial city of Valencia, said that the people who have been coming to the classes taught by Mirabal “are impressed, because they have never gone so deep into the Word before.”

continued on page 3



Top left to right: Seminary sign on Romano Troncone in Valencia; Valencia seminary students (Back: Alexis Ulacio, Romano Troncone, Gladys Machado, Jesús Risales, Bruchis de Risales, Adeli Rivero, Tony Sirit, Andrés Huaman. Front: Desire Bastidas, Aaron Toncone); Bottom: Children at La Galera where the church has a children’s ministry.

continued from page 2

Footwashing service is a highlight

A highlight of the partnership delegation's visit to Venezuela was the joint communion and footwashing service among the different churches and study groups on Isla Margarita, where they asked representatives of the mission partnership to serve communion and also to demonstrate a footwashing service, something most had never done before. Oscar Herrera, chairman of the IMCOL mission committee, taught the group a song about unity. Central Plains Executive Conference Minister David Boshart gave a message on the meaning of Jesus washing feet, and then Zarai Gonzalía, administrator of the Colombia Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and MMN's Linda Shelly demonstrated. Two circles were formed, one for men and another for women. Children stood behind their parents to watch as participants continued around the circle, each one washing the feet of the next, until everyone in the circle had participated. There were long hugs all around.

Before visiting Venezuela, the partnership delegation met in Ecuador. The current churches and ministries in Ecuador have grown out of the partnership of Central Plains, the Colombian Mennonite Church (IMCOL) and Mennonite Mission Network.

Recently, IMCOL has invited Central Plains and Mission Network to partner with them in Venezuela. Central Plains delegates at the 2014 Annual Meeting in Mount Pleasant responded with enthusiasm. Writing in a recent Mission Network publication celebrating the partnership, Executive Conference Minister David Boshart wrote, "This past summer, Central Plains members expressed overwhelming support for expanding our connections to the Anabaptist community emerging in Venezuela." The partnership delegation spent November 20-25 with the Venezuelans, learning to know them and gaining a better understanding of their context and vision for ministry.

Members of the delegation from Central Plains were Boshart, Ecuador Partnership Coordinator Don Kempf and Outreach & Service Committee member Holly Blosser Yoder; from IMCOL, Missions Committee Chair Oscar Herrera, Missions Committee member Peter Stucky (in Ecuador) and Executive Administrator for the Colombia Mennonite Biblical Seminary Zarai Gonzala (in Venezuela); and Director for Latin America Linda Shelly from Mission Network. Brady Peters of Mission Network was also part of the group visiting Ecuador.

Top to bottom: Erwin Mirabel and Alex Pena at El Shadday Church in Maracay; Members of the partnership delegation: Linda Shelly, Brady Peters, David Boshart, Don Kempf, Holly Blosser Yoder, Peter Stucky, Oscar Herrera; Marialida Barrios receiving certificate from David Boshart; Marianela Verde; Painting by Marianela in Christology course illustrating servant leadership.



Imagine what it would be like if...

Reflections on what we can learn from the Venezuelan churches

by Don Kempf, Salem Mennonite Church, Shickley, Nebraska
Ecuador Partnership Coordinator



As Holly Blosser Yoder, David Boshart and I observed and dialogued with our brothers and sisters in Venezuela, I was reminded of the Parable of the Sower where Jesus likened the gospel to seeds scattered everywhere, without regard to whether they landed in soil where they would thrive. Through the seminary courses, people there are embracing a new understanding of who Jesus is (“a healthy doctrine”), and that this is good news in a context of increasing violence, political polarization, and disappointment in government policies that have resulted in a failing economy.

One of the recurring themes we heard was that they have a completely new understanding of who Jesus is after taking the Christology course. My perception is that the Christology course explores in depth what it means to know the person of Jesus when he lived on earth.

Another theme was their discovery that in following Jesus, they become aware that they want their lives to be a testimony of good news to the poor and the oppressed. They are becoming the answer to the violence, political polarization, and other failures that surround them.

We also observed that the people in Venezuela felt that they had received a gift from us through our 500 plus years of Anabaptist history. They embrace this as a treasure of great

value. They are inspired by it and claim it as their own.

Can we, as members of Central Plains Mennonite Conference, spend more time in discerning the scriptures for ourselves with a Christocentric interpretation of the Bible? This past year, our congregation read through the whole Bible together. We began with excitement, thinking that this would be really inspiring. But many of us found the Old Testament to be very confusing and depressing with all of its violence, laws, and punishments, which seemed to be rather arbitrary at times. We found out that having a good understanding of Jesus is necessary to help us understand the rest of the scriptures.

We have also been affected by polarization, both politically and socially. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we are good news to the poor and the oppressed. Does our rhetoric, and do our priorities in life, look like good news to others? Can we prioritize following Jesus as a way to unify us instead of being divided by opinions on issues?

Many of us have ambivalent feelings about evangelism or at least about the way it is done in popular culture. We tend to think in terms of attracting people into the doors of our churches, and then little by little, introducing them to discipleship, hoping that they will not be turned away by it. We also are often ambivalent about our Anabaptist history and faith, thinking that it may be a deterrent to evangelism. Mike Breen says, “If you make disciples, you always get the church; but if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.” Are we making a church or are we making disciples?

Imagine what it would be like if all of our congregations offered basic seminary (Bible study) courses from an Anabaptist perspective to anyone in the congregation, community, or surrounding churches who would be interested. There would be no pressure to join a church. The Holy Spirit and the teachings of Jesus are what would give hope for change in people. In this way, the whole gospel is scattered around like seeds for all to see. Our “healthy doctrine” might begin to “infect” many more people.



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, Lerace Graber, Susan Janzen, Nathan Luitjens, Sherilyn Ortman.
Thanks to Peg Burkley, Mary Lou Farmer and Verna Zook for proofreading.
E-mail: scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org. Telephone: 319-936-5905.
For the April issue, please send stories, news and photos by **March 6, 2015** 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



An area conference of

Mennonite Church USA

To read more articles and learn more about what the Partnership is doing in Ecuador visit Mennonite Mission's website:
www.mennonitemission.net/OurWork/Locations/Pages/Ecuador.aspx

Partnership News

Growth and change in Ecuador, joining the vision in Venezuela

*by Holly Blosser Yoder, West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa
Outreach & Service Committee and Ecuador Partnership*

Building relationships, encouraging church workers, and preparing for future ministry, a delegation from Central Plains Mennonite Conference travelled to Ecuador in November to attend partnership meetings with representatives from the Colombian Mennonite Church (IMCOL) and Mennonite Mission Network, as well as local church leaders.

It was a joyful time of renewing relationships, as well as witnessing growth and change in the Ecuadorian churches and their ministries. Since the last partnership meetings in 2013:



- The Ecuador churches have gained official recognition as ICAME (the Anabaptist Mennonite Christian Churches of Ecuador), an important step since the organization can now own property and obtain documents for workers from other countries. César Moya and Patricia Urueña continued in an administrative coordinating role with ICAME through 2014. Now Patricia Miranda and **María Helena López** serve in this role.

- Pastor **Luis Tapia** from Chile now serves as pastor of the Quito Mennonite Church, replacing founding pastors César and Patricia. His wife, **Jennifer Rey**, is one of the refugee program coordinators.

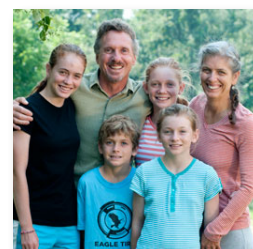


- The church's refugee program, a ministry begun in 2002, has seen growth and expansion, with MCC now providing significant support in the form of personnel and funds. Coordinator since 2010, **David Shenk** trained Jennifer Rey, David Sulewski and Tribrine Da Fonseca to take over this work and plans to return to the US with his wife, **Eliana Tejedor** and son, **Kaleth**, in July, 2015.



- **Caleb Yoder**, a worker from Central Plains congregation West Union (Parnell, Iowa), coordinates PROPAZ, a program that prepares Ecuadorians and Colombians to give leadership to Anabaptist churches. He also serves as a pastoral co-coordinator of a church plant in Calderón, together with María Helena López, a worker from Colombia.

More transition is coming in 2015 with new workers arriving, including **Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer** who relate with indigenous pastors and church leaders, the community that first invited Mennonites to Ecuador 25 years ago. **Delicia Bravo and Peter Wigginton**, who will arrive in May, will base their work in Quito as partnership coordinators, while also serving in the church ministries. In the meantime, David Shenk is serving as coordinator of the partnership in Ecuador.



Hmong mission trip to Thailand

Leader Transitions

Rachelle Luitjens began as pastor of mission and faith formation at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church in Wayland, Iowa, on December 1, 2014.

Jeff Miller completed his time as interim associate pastor at Kalona Mennonite Church on December 7, 2014.

Eric Deckert resigned as pastor of Salem-Zion Mennonite Church in Freeman, South Dakota, effective December 28, 2014.

Leader Credentialed

Andrea Wall was ordained to pastoral ministry at Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska, on January 11, 2015.

Contact information

Moderators:

Nathan Luitjens: 319-256-6061
moderator@centralplainsmc.org

Margie Caraballo: 309-786-1748
assistantmoderator@centralplainsmc.org

Office:

P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029

Monica Clem, Office Manager: 605-925-4463
office@centralplainsmc.org

Hispanic Ministries Coordinator:

Ramiro Hernandez 319-621-3725
rmherns@yahoo.com

Conference Ministers:

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

David Boshart: 319-936-5904
davidboshart@centralplainsmc.org

Tim Detweiler: 319-458-0224
timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org

Shana Peachey Boshart: 319-936-5905
shanaboshart@centralplainsmc.org

Editor's Note: In late December, Bee Her and Mee Xiong, a couple from Hmong Mennonite Church in St. Paul, traveled to Thailand to visit Hmong Christians and deliver needed items and gifts. They were accompanied on the trip by the president of the Hmong churches in the United States, Jonah Yang, and his wife Memee Yang. The conference board awarded a New Ministries Grant to support this trip and help buy items such as Bibles, hymnals, dishes, blankets and health kits. The Hmong people do not have their own country, they live in Laos and Thailand. This trip was an important pilgrimage for the two couples because they were returning to see Hmong Christians who are still experiencing oppression and persecution.

by Bee Her, Hmong Mennonite Church of St. Paul

The purpose of this trip was to bring relief and observe the Hmong people in Thailand and Laos. There were numerous times I have had the idea of going overseas and helping out my fellow Hmong brothers and sisters. The question is how do I manage such a huge task and fulfill the mission? Turn to God, have faith in him, and it will happen. I'm blessed and thankful for this opportunity. This trip opened my eyes to see what God has given to me. I need to help and share with others who are less fortunate. We managed to bring important things that were needed for the villages.

After observing how the Hmong people in Thailand worship and pray in their Sunday service, I realized that they have so much faith in God spiritually. Physically, they have nothing to offer or show, but the emotions and the expressions on their faces show how much faith they have in God. Tears would flow down from their eyes as each of them prayed. The prayers would get louder and louder and the words "Amen" and "Hallelujah" would echo through each of them.

I have not experienced this kind of event in the United States. We as Hmong Americans have taken luxury items and wealth as our key to happiness and forgot what it means to be Christians. We go to church whenever we feel like it and pray only when we have to. This trip and mission has put my faith at another level. The call that I have to help my people in Thailand and Laos truly comes from God's love. I would like to thank God for the strength that guided me through this mission. And lastly, thank you so much for all the generous support from Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Salem-Zion Mennonite Church and Emmanuel Mennonite Church.



Top left to right: Hmong Bibles; Bee Her and Mee Xiong; Bottom: Backpacks for children in Laos.

Nebraska Women's Retreat

Body, Soul and Sanity

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? ...therefore, honor God with your body" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). As Christians, and as temples of the Holy Spirit, we are called to care for our bodies. Caring for our physical bodies has a deep effect on the rest of our lives. In what ways do you care for your body, your soul and your mind? Come to the Nebraska Women's Retreat to experience a little body care as we share together practical ideas for caring for all areas of our lives.

The Nebraska Women's Retreat will be held March 7 and 8 at the Leadership Center in Aurora, Nebraska. The speaker for the weekend will be Stacey Waltner of Freeman, South Dakota. Registration forms have been distributed to Nebraska churches. If you are interested in participating in this event (even if you live outside of Nebraska) or have any questions, you can contact Elizabeth Troyer-Miller at 574-304-6548 or melizabethm24@gmail.com. Come and enjoy a weekend of relaxation and rejuvenation with your sisters in Christ! —*Elizabeth Troyer-Miller, Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, Nebraska*

KMC New Testament Challenge

Reading the New Testament together

During eight weeks in January and February, Kalona Mennonite Church is embarking on the "KMC New Testament Challenge." The KMC New Testament challenge is a community Bible experience in which we will read the entire New Testament in the NIV version as a group in eight weeks. However, there is a twist. This community Bible experience is based on a program by Biblica and uses their book, *The Books of the Bible: New Testament*. This book is the NIV version of the New Testament, but the chapters and verses are removed. There are no helps or footnotes and it is presented in a single column format. Also, the sequence of the books is rearranged. It starts with Luke and Acts, because these two books are a single work that encompasses the whole New Testament. Also, the letters of the New Testament are put in the probable order that they were written. The result of these changes is that the Bible now reads and flows like it was originally written. It is rather amazing how those simple changes make such a big difference. For those who do not read, Biblica has made audio files for both adults and kids. The adult version is the text of the NIV; the kids' version is simplified while staying true to the text.

The other special part of the KMC New Testament challenge is that everyone is covering the same material at the same time. Plus, several Sunday school classes and small groups are doing book-club style discussions to share with each other what God is revealing to them as they read through the New Testament in community.

God promises in Isaiah 55:11, "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." We are relying on this promise. We believe that good things will come from Kalona Mennonite coming together as a community and reading God's precious word together. Praise be to God! His glory will be seen! —*Dawn Wyse, Kalona Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa*



WDC Library

Library director resigns

Marlene Bogard, director of the Western District Conference Library, is leaving her role with WDC. She writes, "I have loved my job for almost 25 years, but it is time for a transition. I have accepted the position of Executive Director of Mennonite Women USA and have resigned my position at WDC effective Feb. 28. This new job will enable Mike and I to move to Oregon to be closer to our family."

Marlene and I have had a wonderful working relationship and I will miss her. Western District Conference will hire a new library director, and we expect to continue to partner with the WDC Library.

Remember, members of Central Plains conference may check out materials from the WDC Library any time. Search the catalog at mennowdc.org to find materials you can use, then contact the library to check them out and have them mailed to you. Email crlib@mennowdc.org or call 316-283-6300. —*Shana Peachey Boshart, Conference Minister for Christian Formation*

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 Mennonite Conference
P.O. Box 101
Freeman, SD 57029

change service requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Freeman, S.D.
Permit No. 12

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

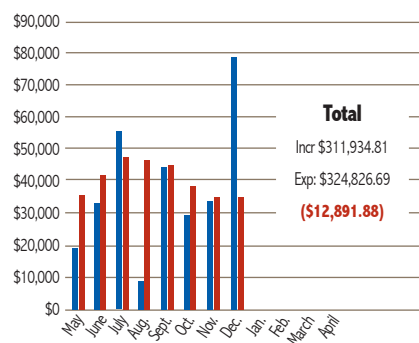
The Central Plains budget experienced a huge turn-a-round in December after four consecutive months of income not meeting expenses. Income in November and December totaled \$112,658.59, while expenses came in at \$71,634.04. As a result, the budget deficit greatly decreased to \$12,891.88 for the fiscal year. We are thankful for the continued support of conference and continue to see God's work in many different ways.

—Stewardship Task Group

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2014/2015



UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Women's Retreat will take place March 7-8, 2015 at the Leadership Center in Aurora, Nebraska.

Sister Care Seminar will take place April 17-18, 2015 in southeast Iowa.

Annual Leaders Retreat will take place April 19-21, 2015, at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR Training)
will take place June 13-17, 2015 in Minneapolis.

Central Plains Annual Meeting will take place
June 18-21, 2015, in the Twin Cities.

An area conference of



Mennonite
Church
USA