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2013

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# Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word  
—Matthew 13



## Growing and healing: A story of reconciliation

by Gordon Krause, Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota

Our story of reconciliation is a story still in process. As is often the case when conflict occurs, our conflict was rooted in historical dynamics in the congregation and triggered by events, processes, and personality differences. It was difficult to identify what the real issues were, and the question was often asked, "What is the conflict?" We observed and experienced the symptoms of conflict, but we were not sure how to handle it.

Our symptoms included polarization within the congregation along theological, polity, and age differences. There was considerable misinformation and gossip within the church and in the community about what was happening at Bethel. There was mistrust and anxiety directed to the leadership, and those in leadership were anxious about what was happening in our congregation. Instead of voicing concerns directly to the individuals involved, people would confide in those with whom they would get a sympathetic ear.

After much discussion and discernment and leading of the Holy Spirit, the Spiritual Board and the Church Council decided to contact Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC). They have had over 25 years experience with mediating conflicts, focusing especially on congregational conflict. Following an initial teleconference call with

LMPC, our Spiritual Board and Church Council invited Richard Blackburn, the director of LMPC, to come to our congregation in December, 2010, to explain the mediation process. When the congregation voted on whether to hire Blackburn and enter a process to address the conflict, the members were evenly divided. As moderator, I cast the deciding vote in favor of having LMPC come.

The mediation process began in January 2011 and had four phases. The first phase was gathering information in which the historical patterns, past divisive issues, personality differences, etc., were examined. The second phase consisted of two weekend seminars, one called "Healthy Congregations" that taught us about the Family Systems perspective of conflict in a congregational context and one called "Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation," which taught a biblical perspective of conflict.

In the third phase, the healing phase, participants were encouraged to name their hurts and resentments from the past and present in a safe setting. We confessed our behaviors and attitudes which contributed to the conflict, we sought forgiveness from each other and extended forgiveness to one another. This phase, along with the fourth phase, the problem-solving phase, were probably

*continued on page 2*

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*

— Matthew 18:20



*continued from page 1*

the two most significant parts of the mediation process. In the problem-solving phase, we worked toward consensus on strategies and proposals for resolving issues and moving forward, taking ownership of the proposals and goals on which we agreed.

Several factors challenged our congregation. The decision-making process itself and how it was handled became an issue. The high cost of hiring LMPC challenged us and raised anxiety. However, our Spiritual Board chair at that time asked, "Can we afford NOT to do this?" Most of those who participated in the process easily recognized the value for the congregation and for themselves as well. We were able to pay most of our expenses through contributions and pledges. (LMPC is very flexible with Mennonite congregations in allowing time to pay expenses.) The mediation process itself also became an issue, with some people choosing not to participate in the mediation or not to attend worship services for a time.

However, we grew and learned much as we went through mediation. Mediation is not having an outside arbitrator come in and tell us what to do. It is working together to identify and resolve issues and feelings until reconciliation is achieved.

We learned that conflict in itself is not sinful or bad, but how we handle it determines if it is positive or negative. Conflict handled well can move us forward; conflict handled poorly can be destructive. Those who participated in the mediation process discovered skills to deal with conflict and gained added capacity for working at relationships. We had testimony of people using their skills not only in the congregation but in their homes and work places.

We were encouraged to stay connected with all parties and to seek and create opportunities to relate to each other. We were constantly reminded to look at ourselves: what were our behaviors and attitudes that contributed to the problem. We were reminded that we are a family, the family of God, and we needed to see each other in terms of "we, us, and ours" rather than "they, them, and theirs."

We learned that it is not necessarily the events themselves that caused conflict, but the perceptions, values, and emotional reactions to the events that trigger conflict. We learned to affirm each other—even those with whom we disagreed—and through confession and forgiveness, to move on.

The challenge still remains as to how the strategies and proposals, and especially the learning, can be fleshed out in our congregation. While some tension and anxiety still remain, we have laid a good foundation, and with the Holy Spirit's leading, we are committed to build on that foundation and move forward.



Top to Bottom: Children will be the beneficiaries of parents and other adults learning to handle conflict positively; Proposals for eight areas of church life were developed in small groups; A time for refreshments and fellowship helped people share thoughts and stay connected.

# Finding our way through conflict to reconciliation

by Tim Detweiler, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership



I grew up in a family of eight children and, needless to say, we had our share of conflict. “Just kiss and make up” was our parents’ approach to sibling conflict. Yuk! Consequently, some of us found it easier to “just give in” for the sake of peace. Others learned to “just bury our feelings.” Still others chose a “win at all cost”

approach. Sound familiar? These approaches to conflict are often hurtful. Given our Anabaptist/Mennonite peace theology, conflict is often viewed as a bad thing to be avoided if at all possible. There is a better way.

Conflict is actually natural and common to all human relationships, and yes, even within the church. Within all conflict there is the **danger** of hurtful actions, which result in broken relationships. That is why we tend to avoid conflict. Conflict can also provide **opportunity** for reconciling and forgiving actions, which lead to reconciliation, greater understanding and increased intimacy.

## Conflict is actually opportunity to discover the reconciling presence of Christ among us.

The Conflict Management Support Team (CMST) was formed to help congregations, pastors and conference leaders within Central Plains to manage conflict in ways that lead toward reconciliation and forgiveness. Our purpose is to instruct, model and lead constructive methods of conflict management that are consistent with our Mennonite/Anabaptist faith.

**Discipleship for Holistic Witness** is one of our conference priorities, calling us to grow in Christ-likeness. As Anabaptist

Mennonites, peacemaking and reconciliation are core values. So why are there so many stories of harmful actions within the church resulting in broken relationships? I believe it is because we have tended to avoid conflict instead of managing conflict as Jesus taught us to do.

Jesus offers the church a model for managing conflict in Matthew 18:15-20. Jesus talks about conflict as opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness. Conflict is actually opportunity to discover the reconciling presence of Christ among us when persons who disagree come together to resolve differences. “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt. 18:20)

Conflict is often viewed as confusing, overwhelming and hurtful. Unhealthy practices for managing conflict combined with poor patterns of communication contribute to the hurt and confusion. Too often, conflict in the church leaves people feeling broken, divided and mistreated.

We believe there is a better way as followers of Jesus. Our goal is not to eliminate conflict but rather to help churches and pastors practice Jesus’ model for managing conflict as found in Matthew 18.

**Leadership for Holistic Witness** is another one of our conference priorities. All members of the CMST are trained in conflict management skills through the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. In the coming months and years, we will be offering workshops throughout our conference to educate, train and equip pastors, congregational leaders, and other interested persons in the skills of healthy conflict management. In addition, Conflict Management Support Team members will be available to offer assistance for managing conflict in our congregations.

We want pastors and congregational leaders to learn and practice healthy conflict transformation skills within the congregation. Equipping leaders with the skills for managing interpersonal and group conflict, promoting a healthy understanding of conflict, and learning how to speak truth in love are important practices in this process.

With reconciliation as our goal for managing conflict, relationships are restored, community life is strengthened and our Christian witness in the community has greater integrity. This leads to our third conference priority of **Fellowship as Holistic Witness**.

I hope you take advantage of the benefits the Conflict Management Support Team offers by attending our workshops and inviting the team to help your congregation.



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## The mediator's perspective

# “Compassion for everyone takes me by surprise”

*by Lois Janzen Preheim*

Entering a conflict situation is generally scary for me so I'm choosy about what conflicts I go to! But once I've met people and have heard the issues, I'm absolutely fascinated. The conflict usually exists for very good reasons. Sometimes, people start out with very different goals or assumptions. Positions in the family or community are shaping persons' interests. Feelings are involved. Often, earlier history is contributing to feelings and positions. In church conflicts, attachment to a certain outcome is hard to give up since it often feels like one's very eternal life and Biblical understanding is at stake.

As with a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle, I begin to sort out the conflict, laying out the pieces on the table. Then, I like the creativity of watching a more complete picture emerge that often has the solution right there as we move pieces around. My analytical and sorting-out self loves finding order and understanding, looking for the keys that open up space for a shift in perspective, a change in feeling, or a willingness to change a starting premise. It is very satisfying to me to watch how even small shifts in understanding or feeling can lead to reconciliation. Sometimes, it is enough for people to hear themselves say something out loud that they didn't know they thought or felt.

The place of a mediator is a good place to be. Since I didn't start the fire, I can attend to the people and the situation in a calm way. It is this spirit of calmness that is helpful. Richard Blackburn calls it “the non-anxious presence.” I like preparing myself to be peaceful so that I can fully attend. In my own house, I'm way too self-involved. When I am mediating, however, I love finding that calm, still place where compassion for everybody involved takes me by surprise. For me, this calm presence mirrors God's own peace and seems God-given.

## Learn new skills for living out God's reconciling love

*by Elizabeth Troyer-Miller*

Would you like to learn how we can live together in God's spirit of reconciliation even when we are in conflict? Would you like to learn more about yourself, about conflict, and about our call as disciples to live out and witness to God's reconciling love?

The Conflict Management Support Team has just the thing for you! In the future, they will be offering workshops in various places in our conference, starting with these two:

### **Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation**

November 8 & 9, 2013, at Wood River, Nebraska.

### **Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches**

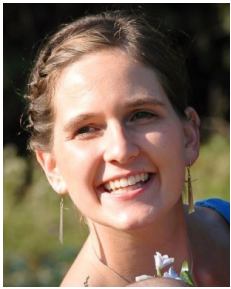
February 8, 2014, in southeast Iowa.

These workshops will provide you with a greater self-awareness as to how you handle conflict, and help you to become better at handling conflict in the church. They will help promote your personal growth as a disciple of Christ by encouraging thoughtful integration of Christian faith with practical skills for managing conflict.

These principles will influence your life beyond the church as well. You will be able to take the knowledge you gain into your family and your work. You may even find yourself to be more confident in managing conflict throughout your life.

If your congregation is interested in hosting their own workshop, contact a member of the conflict management team to learn more. Watch Central Plains publications for more details about these upcoming workshops.

# Introducing the Conflict Management Support Team



**Elizabeth Troyer-Miller** works for Central Mediation Center in Kearney and as a trainer for the Nebraska Mediation Association. Elizabeth earned a B.A. in Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies from Goshen College in 2006, and an M.S. in Negotiation and Dispute Resolution from Creighton University in 2011. She is a member of Wood River Mennonite Church in Wood River, Nebraska.

“Working with conflicts within the church allows me to integrate my faith and my work. Our shared belief in the power of the resurrection provides us, as Christians, the opportunity to allow God to work in our conflicts and to not just get a resolution, but to seek and to find reconciliation.”



**Gordon Krause** has a degree in psychology and has been a pastor and counselor. He is a member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

“When I prayed and thought about Tim’s request to serve on the Conflict Management Support Team, it became clear to me that God was calling me to this ministry. My experience as church moderator when my congregation went through our mediation gave me additional insight into the mediation process. I believe mediation is an important part of our Anabaptist peace witness because it is a ministry of healing, reconciliation, and hope.”



**Lon Marshall** is a licensed marriage and family therapist. He works in private practice and is the founder and owner of Cornerstone Brief Therapy in the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City corridor. He has worked in critical incident debriefing, conflict resolution, counseling and therapy in many contexts for 25 years. He attends West Union Mennonite Church in Parnell, Iowa.

“Being new to Anabaptism and Mennonite Church USA in particular, I began to see my work as a marriage and family therapist as peacemaking. When the announcement was made in Scattered Seeds that a conflict resolution team would be developed, I thought this was a perfect way for me to use my gifts for the conference. I’m looking forward to being part of this called group of peacemakers.”



**Lois Janzen Preheim** was director and mediator for Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (now Restore) in Sioux Falls for 17 years. During that time, Lois took mediation training from Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, with Victim Offender Mediation Association, and the University of Minnesota. Lois also has pastoral and teaching experience. She attends Salem Mennonite Church near Freeman, South Dakota.

Lois shares what draws her to this work in the story on page 4.



**Tim Detweiler** is Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership for Central Plains. He has a Master of Divinity degree from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Tim has received training in conflict mediation through the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. He has 28 years of experience as a pastor.

“I have witnessed harmful/hurtful outcomes as well as transformation/healing outcomes from conflict in the church. It matters how the church works through conflict. A style that leads to transformation, reconciliation and healing is a strong witness to the presence and power of Jesus in our midst. This is what gives me hope in working with this team.”

## Leaders Credentialed

**Taric Leichty**, Associate Pastor of Youth, Bellwood Mennonite, Milford, Nebraska, was licensed toward ordination on July 21, 2013.

**Adam Nussbaum**, pastor at Shalom Mennonite, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, was licensed toward ordination on August 18, 2013.

## Leader Transitions

**Larry Evers**, pastor at Eicher Emmanuel, Wayland, Iowa, retired June 30, 2013.

**David Brunner**, pastor at Rochester Mennonite in Rochester, Minnesota, retired June 30, 2013.

**Sherm Kauffman** at Bethesda Mennonite, Henderson, Nebraska, ended his interim on September 30, 2013.

**Dave Schooley** and **Joe Telgren**, interim pastor team at Pleasant View Mennonite in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, ended their term on September 1, 2013.

**Robert Hartzler** began as interim pastor at Eicher Emmanuel, Wayland, Iowa, July 1, 2013.

**Galen Penner** began as pastor at Rochester Mennonite, Rochester, Minnesota, August 1, 2013.

**Robert Engbrecht** was installed as pastor of senior ministries at Salem Mennonite, Freeman, South Dakota on September 1, 2013.

## Engaging the Mystery Introducing Advent 2013

On September 7, 55 people gathered at Manson Mennonite Church in Manson, Iowa, for the workshop presented by the writers of the Advent 2013 worship materials in *Leader* magazine. The writing team was from Central Plains churches in Freeman, South Dakota. Worship planners will find recordings from the workshop at [www.centralplainsmc.org](http://www.centralplainsmc.org).



Top: Participants experienced Advent worship through song, prayer, scripture and visuals.

Left to Right: Sherilyn Ortman conveys enthusiasm for the Advent hymns as she teaches various ways to sing and play them; Michelle Hofer explains how the Advent wreath draws worshippers in to ponder the theme, "Oh, the Mystery of God's Dwelling!"

## Resources for congregations

*Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love* is a short, practical guide for applying Jesus-centered conflict transformation skills in thought, action and life. Find it on the Central Plains website at <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/when-we-disagree.html>.

The Fall 2012 *Leader* magazine, has three feature articles: "Calling for Help: When the church needs a mediator" by Keith Regehr; "Can we Talk? A church learns how to have crucial conversations peacefully, together" by Andre Gingerich Stoner; and "Skilled Intervention: Leading others in significant conversations" by Kristin Zerger. Go to [www.leaderonline.org/Archives/Fall2012/Contents.html](http://www.leaderonline.org/Archives/Fall2012/Contents.html).

*Let's Talk: Communication Skills and Conflict Transformation* by Barry C. Bartel is a curriculum for senior high and adult Christian education classes outlining basic communication and conflict transformation skills. Faith and Life Press, 1999.

*The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* by John Paul Lederach is a clearly articulated statement that offers a hopeful and workable approach, laying out the vision for conflict transformation, as opposed to conflict resolution. Good Books, 2003.

*The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A practical, hands-on guide.* Lisa Schirch and David Campt demonstrate the possibilities of dialogue; teach key dialogue facilitation skills and invite people into a dialogue process. Good Books, 2007.

Lombard Mennonite Peace Center offers excellent mediation skills training as well as workshops on conflict transformation skills for churches. Find a list of seminars and training workshops at [www.lmpeacecenter.org/](http://www.lmpeacecenter.org/).

Online Anabaptist Short Course: *Understanding and Managing Congregational Conflict* offered by Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) from March 26 to May 13, 2014 (with a break April 7-12). This course seeks to equip participants for skillful, transformative leadership that can provide the insight and guidance essential to making situations of conflict opportunities for growth and learning rather than division and alienation. Taught by David B. Miller, D. Min., Associate Professor of Missional Leadership. Find more information at <http://www.ambs.edu/churchleadershipcenter>.



Scattered Seeds October 2013

## Authored by our pastors

*Healing God's Earth: Rural Community in the Context of Urban Civilization*, by **S. Roy Kaufman**, was published by Wipf & Stock August 2, 2013. Roy is retired and lives in Freeman, South Dakota.

*The Unkingdom of God: Embracing the Subversive Power of Repentance*, by **Mark Van Steenwyk**, was published by Intervarsity Press August 5, 2013. Mark is pastor at The Mennonite Worker in Minneapolis.

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Photo by Jeremy Waltner

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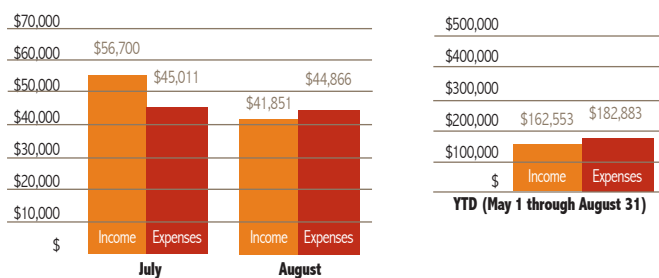
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Growing in  
holistic witness  
to God's  
reconciling mission  
in the world through  
fellowship,  
discipleship  
and leadership

The Central Plains budget took a turn for the better in July but then slowed again slightly in August. Income in both July and August were strong at \$56,700.28 and \$41,851.29 respectively. With this activity in July and August, the overall deficit was lowered by \$8,673.76 to \$20,329.69. We are grateful for the continued support by congregations and individuals and pray we can continue this momentum through the autumn months. —*Stewardship Task Group*

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

**Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation** will be offered November 8 & 9 at Wood River, Nebraska.

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

**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.

An area conference of



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Church  
USA