



October  
2014

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# Scattered Seeds

Children of the Kingdom Sowing the Word  
—Matthew 13



Edie Hochstetler, Kathy Leichty, Carolyn Hochstetler and Erin Ramer prepare the summer's first free lunch in Wellman, Iowa. Story on page 4.

## Crossing borders, partnerships amplify witness

by Holly Blosser Yoder

*"I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ."*

— Phileman 1:6

"There are no more borders. It's open," said Martha Hernandez, reflecting on the benefit of partnership in mission.

Hernandez is not speaking of borders that divide nations, but rather of relational borders--barriers of difference and isolation that separate congregations and people.

For her, those barriers began to come down in 2011 when Iglesia Centro Cristiano--the congregation that she pastors in Washington, Iowa--formed a ministry partnership with several other congregations in Central Plains Mennonite Conference that brings together developing congregations and established congregations. The partnership model is one of mutuality, "an approach of accompaniment in ministry rather than engineering ministry," according to Executive Conference Minister David Boshart, who added, "The witness becomes amplified as we partner together."

"In accompaniment, we are not consulting out of our expertise," he further elaborated, "rather, we are walking together, seeing what wisdom emerges, being formed in Christ as we engage in mission."

The conference has learned much about this approach to ministry through its 14-year partnership with Mission Network and IMCOL (the Colombian Mennonite Church) for ministry in Ecuador. Each partner contributes from its resources, which may include personnel, finances, or understanding of the mission context. "When we start partnering with others in ministry, it becomes something shared," said Boshart.

The Centro Cristiano partnership began in August 2011, when the developing congregation along with seven other congregations in Iowa and Nebraska made a covenant of mutual support for ministry among the Hispanic population in Washington, Iowa. The covenant states as its aim "that this partnership will develop into a robust relationship that will foster growth and renew the missional imagination of all parties involved."

*continued on page 2*

## An intimate fellowship

Representatives of the partnering churches meet about every three months. In addition, members from one of the partnering churches, Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church (Kalona, Iowa), conduct Sunday School for the Centro Cristiano children every week.

Meetings have a regular but informal routine. “When the partners meet, everybody shares about what is going on in their church life, and I share about what’s going on in our church life,” explained Hernandez. The partners pray for one another and share a meal together.

For Hernandez, the prayer support is a powerful expression of shared purpose. “I know that I have brothers and sisters, and that they pray for us.”

Over the years, an intimate fellowship has grown. Greg Yoder, who represents East Union Mennonite Church in the partnership and chairs the meetings, said, “As we get to know one another, it’s something we look forward to.” He added, “I’ve enjoyed the relationships with the various partners. It’s a positive thing for everyone involved.”

“I feel very comfortable with this group,” said Hernandez. “If they don’t understand something, they ask. If I don’t understand something, I ask.”

“It has been a learning experience for me,” said Yoder, who has a background as a Spanish teacher but no prior experience with church planting. “You may have a grand plan for how it’s going to go, but my plan or your plan doesn’t always jibe with God’s plan.”

In the case of Iglesia Centro Cristiano, where the church has seen significant turnover as members moved away to other cities, Yoder has found a new metaphor for growth in ministry. “People move on and continue in God’s way. It’s spreading out like a vine rather than a vertical plant.”

Hernandez echoed these thoughts. “The most important thing is not to have 100 members. The most important thing is, if people stay or leave, that they have Jesus in their hearts.” In meeting the challenges of ministry, Hernandez says of the partnership, “Their support in prayer means a lot to me.”

For Yoder, the experience has been inspiring, which he conveys to his congregation. “We have a wonderful opportunity to see how others are led to the Lord through this ministry.”

### “It doesn’t just depend on us”

In addition to the Iglesia Centro Cristiano partnership, the conference has facilitated two other covenanted partnerships with developing congregations, one with Shalom (Eau Claire, Wisconsin) and another with Torre Fuerte (Iowa City, Iowa), involving a total of fifteen existing or established congregations from around the conference. Some other churches have similar relationships. Indications are that more would like to become involved. At the 2014 annual meeting,

Outreach & Service Committee Chair Roger Farmer shared several stories of partnership and surveyed attendees for their interest in such a relationship. (See page 3.) The response was positive.

Boshart sees benefits to existing congregations in terms of revitalization, as partners see evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work and come to understand that “it doesn’t just depend on us.”

“We have a tendency to, at one extreme, abdicate responsibility and experience futility, and on the other extreme, to think that, if anything good is going to happen around here, WE have to do it,” an attitude which has been dubbed ‘functional atheism.’ Shared ministry challenges this form of unbelief, even as it breaks down barriers of inequality and distrust among brothers and sisters. “Things happen that we never would have imagined!”

Boshart encourages people and congregations interested in ministry to “talk to each other.”

He describes missional engagement as “reading the Bible with the world in view and dreaming about what the world looks like when God’s kingdom comes, and God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.”

“When thinking about engaging our communities, ask, ‘Where are the people who are thinking the same thoughts,’ and engage with them,” he advised.

“It is not the task of Christians to solve every problem but to bear witness to the hope of redemption,” Boshart added, quoting Alan and Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja in *A Culture of Peace: God’s Vision for the Church*.

“Congregations discern in their local contexts the needs of the community and how they might partner with others to bear witness in a way that brings hope. It’s not primarily about ‘meeting a need’ or ‘fixing a problem’ although those might be an outcome of the partnership. God builds the Kingdom. We bear witness to that kingdom.”

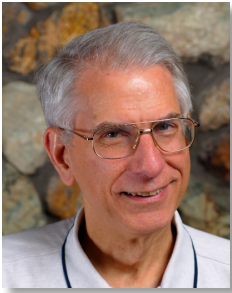
Conference can provide partners with help in articulating a covenant of understanding in which each identifies gifts that they bring, and needs that can be met through the relationship. Boshart believes that, regardless of a congregation’s size and resources, partnership will benefit their ministry.

“In partnership, the whole process becomes less burdensome and more joyful. Partnership energizes the whole.”



# Finding new paths to Jesus: Partnering in mission

by Roger Farmer, Chair, Outreach & Service Committee



During the final delegate session at Central Plains conference in June, the Outreach and Service Committee led an hour-long discussion on the theme of “Finding New Paths to Jesus: Partnering in Mission” with an emphasis on how congregations can work together to help people find their path to faith in Jesus.

As a part of the discussion, we invited three persons to describe partnerships where congregations work together in mission. Don Kempf, Shickley, Nebraska, described an invitation to partnership from interested Anabaptist congregations in Venezuela. Adam Nussbaum, pastor of Shalom MC, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, described the support that his congregation receives from a partnership of established congregations. Finally, Erin Ramer, Wellman, Iowa, described a summer lunch program that her congregation provides in partnership with another local congregation. Following these three presentations, we asked each person present to respond with their comments, both around the discussion tables where they were seated and also on written response forms.

Over 100 people returned the written response forms. As might be expected, almost everybody was positive about everything. Many comments reported enthusiasm for the three partnerships as presented and expressed interest in being involved. The discussion also stimulated new ideas that participants hoped to develop in the future. Some responses mentioned similar projects that congregations were already doing. Response form comments included the following:

- We can't always set our own agenda, but must listen and respond to the Holy Spirit.
- I have been to Ecuador on three work projects with family members and all have been life-changing experiences.
- [Mission projects] are like Paul's dream of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come help us.” (Acts 16:9)

- It has been a blessing to have financial assistance and fellowship with other congregations, although it is a challenge to continue and expand relationships when there is too much geographical distance.

- There is more poverty in our own neighborhoods than we realize.
- We need to find more ways for congregations to tell stories of how they are reaching into their communities with the gospel.
- We are good at sharing everything except the gospel.
- How can we reach the children who play every day in the park across the street from our church?

- These stories are amazing, exciting, and inspiring.

In summary, there was much enthusiasm about mission activities in general as well as lots of involvement and interest in most congregations. But this very enthusiasm raises other questions. If many congregations are involved in a variety of mission activities, then why are most congregations not growing? What else needs to be done to transform our congregations into vibrant, attractive outposts of the kingdom of God?

We hope to address questions like these in the coming months. Currently, the Outreach and Service Committee is planning to present a video conference featuring David Boshart on how congregations can more effectively find their mission. These video conferences will enable the members of our congregations to meet across the miles to think together about how we can be pathfinders for those who are seeking Jesus. We are tentatively calling this series of teleconferences “Tuesdays with Dave” and we hope to have representatives from every congregation involved in this teleconference. Dave will address questions of effective outreach, including questions such as “How do you talk to people about Jesus?” and “What do you do if a new person shows up at church?” and “What happens when someone new begins attending your congregation and stays?”

These teleconferences are currently planned for Tuesday evenings in February 2015, and we are looking for persons from across the conference who might be willing to help coordinate this event in your area. We anticipate needing both local hosts and technology coordinators. If you have interest in helping in either of these two areas in your local area on Tuesday evenings during February, 2015, please contact Roger Farmer at [rfarmer@iowatelecom.net](mailto:rfarmer@iowatelecom.net) and let me know of your interest.

The writer of Hebrews said it well in Hebrews 10:24 when he said, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...encouraging one another...and all the more as we see the Day drawing near.” We hope that both the delegate session at conference and our upcoming teleconference will do just that.



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## A fellowship of faith, worship, outreach and love

by Tim Krabill, First Mennonite Church, Iowa City

Two years ago, First Mennonite Church of Iowa City entered into a partnership with five other area Mennonite congregations, including Iglesia Torre Fuerte, for mutual support and growth in relationship with this new church for whom we had been providing space for worship and fellowship. The partnership also includes Cedar Falls Mennonite, Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite, Sugar Creek Mennonite, and Wayland Mennonite.

Representatives meet four times a year to report on happenings in our congregational lives, to hear from pastors Max and Gloria Villatoro about the life of Torre Fuerte, and to pray for one another. Although there is some distance in driving, the Holy Spirit draws us near in sharing our hopes and dreams, our concerns and sorrows, and in exchanging ideas and experiences.

We celebrate joys and face difficulties together, always knowing that in these things the Holy Spirit is present as our comforter, vision, and guide. Many members have had opportunities to work and worship with Torre Fuerte in visiting one another's congregations, in helping to teach children's Sunday School, and in outreach ministries.

Max and Gloria have a particular calling to work with immigrant members of the community, which has opened a door for us to join together in this ministry. We do not know the future for Torre Fuerte, or for any of our congregations. We do know the love of God and that wherever God's love and spirit guide us, whatever fortunes or misfortunes the world around us may bring, we have gained a new fellowship of faith, of worship, of outreach in our communities, and of love for God and one another, all by the work of the Holy Spirit among us.



Torre Fuerte partnership meeting. Left to right: Tamara Gill from Wayland Mennonite; Tim Krabill from First Mennonite, Iowa City; Tamara's Guest; Connie Freyenberger from Sugar Creek; Gloria and Max Villatoro, Torre Fuerte; and Dave Schooley, Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite Church.

## A mother's hospitality inspires summer lunch ministry

by Jane-Yoder Short, West Union Mennonite Church

Like pieces of a mystery puzzle, the parts start fitting together. It started with a simple story of kids enjoying summer fun with their neighbors. Ben and Nicole Miller found themselves living in a temporary home in Wellman, Iowa. Their three children soon found town living supplied them with playmates.

In the first week, their new friends—whose houses were empty during the daytime—started enjoying lunch with the Millers. It was great for them to be in a home with a parent, friends and lunch. Even the rules and the chores seemed like fresh activities.

Word spread about the somewhat unusual lunches in the Miller household. Carolyn Hochstetler became the next piece of the puzzle. Carolyn remembered hearing about life at the Miller's house, but it took on new meaning as she read *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion* by Sara Miles. Miles was raised an atheist until one morning for no reason she wandered into a church. She ate a piece of bread and took a sip of wine and was radically transformed. She turned the communion bread into tons of groceries and nearly a dozen food pantries in San Francisco.

Carolyn says, "More than a few times, the Millers' experience in Wellman interrupted my reading." One morning Carolyn said aloud, "Help me remember to call Nicole today and hear this story for myself." A few hours later as Carolyn was leaving the local grocery store she met Nicole. There in the store, the story unfolded.

The next piece was for more people to hear. The hearing snowballed. There was a meeting that included anyone interested from Wellman Mennonite and West Union Mennonite. The puzzle was beginning to take the shape of a summer lunch ministry for Wellman kids. The at-risk coordinator for the local school sent invitations to families she knew who would benefit from summer lunches. Cookie bakers, bread makers and sandwich creators volunteered. Financial support fell into place. Somehow it all came together. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday lunches were available at Wellman Mennonite.

Looking back, it seems like a mystery just unfolded before us. Pieces of a puzzle came together. Since this summer I have found myself looking for mysteries that are unfolding. What is God's Spirit piecing together right before our slow eyes?



## The “Peaceable Kingdom”

*by Todd A. Jones, Pastor, Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota  
on behalf of the Freeman Network for Justice and Peace*

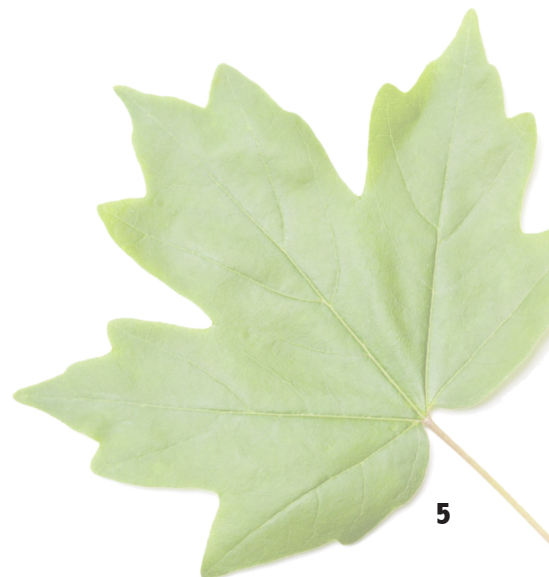
Delegates and guests to the Central Plains 2014 Annual Meeting in June may have noticed among the displays of books, pamphlets, and organizational information two “peaceable kingdom” banners. Commissioned by the Freeman Network for Justice and Peace (FNJP) and designed by Michelle Hofer of Freeman, South Dakota, their appearance at Annual Meeting was the culmination of a vision to share Christ’s peace and His reconciling ministry of justice across our conference. The banners themselves are based on the artistic works of American folk painter Edward Hicks (1780-1849) whose series of “peaceable kingdom” paintings can be seen as a visual commentary on Isaiah 11.

The FNJP has long been asking how we might encourage others to meditate upon and enter into dialogue around issues of justice and peace in our local communities, our nation, and our world. Believing that our faith is relational and that the processes that make for justice and peace are at once creative as well as intellectual, our desire was not to provide “answers,” but to assist in providing the space necessary to ask questions: What is justice and peace? What might justice and peace look like in our unique context? How did Jesus’ ministry both inspire and challenge our understandings of justice and peace? Are we a just and peaceable people? How might we build communities that are just and peaceable?

As we continue to engage those questions ourselves, we invite you to “join” us by hosting the “peaceable kingdom” banners in your congregation, camp, or school for 2-4 weeks. Gather around them, discuss them, use them for periods of silent meditation and/or guided prayer, allow them to be a visual focal point for worship, a time of retreat, or even an important meeting. The hope of the FNJP is that these banners will encourage you to walk with Christ and inspire you to think not only critically, but creatively, in regard to justice and peace.

If you would like to bring these banners to your community or would simply like further information, you may call Todd Jones at 605-925-7186. Please note there is no cost to display the banners. FNJP will work with you to find economical ways to transport the banners to your community. A worship outline as well as a link to a sermon, a frame upon which to hang the banners, and instructions for banner care will also be provided. Spanish translation of these resources will be available soon.

May you be blessed and may the “peaceable kingdom” of Christ resound in you! Shalom.





## Leader Transitions

**Scott Shreffler** was ordained to pastoral ministry and **Suzette Shreffler** was licensed for specific ministry at White River Mennonite Church, Busby, Montana, on July 13.

**Christopher Montgomery** was licensed toward ordination at Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on August 10.

**Alejandro Huesca**, pastor of Iglesia Cristiana El Balsamo in Muscatine, Iowa, was licensed toward ordination on August 24.

**John Yoder-Schrock** was installed as interim pastor at Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, September 7.

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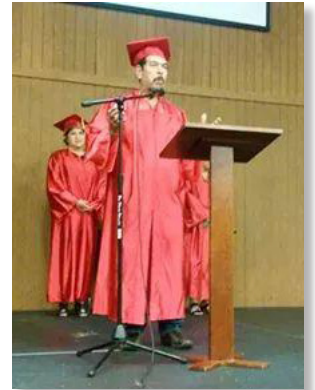
## Moline IBA students celebrate achievements

The annual Instituto Biblico Anabautista (IBA) students retreat held August 29 to September 1, 2014, in Talladega, Alabama, had a beautiful highlight this year. Five students from the IBA center in Moline, Illinois had their graduation ceremony at the gathering. In a special dedicated time, the entire body of attendees celebrated with them in their achievement. Ramiro Hernández was recognized for his work as their tutor, and student Diego Rivera received a special certificate for his outstanding work.

Receiving his award, Diego commented, “Esto no es fácil, pero nos animamos, le echamos ganas y si se pudo; esto es de valientes, no de cobardes.”

“This is not easy, but it took courage, we put an effort and we accomplished it; this is for the brave, not for cowards.”

—Rafael Barahona, Director of Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education, Mennonite Education Agency



Diego Rivera received an award for outstanding work.

## Hispanic Women's Retreat Women Renewed, Released, Restored



The Hispanic Mennonite Women in Southeast Iowa had a great time together at a retreat held at Crooked Creek Christian Camp August 15 and 16. Deborah Williams brought messages on the theme, *Mujeres Renovadas, Liberadas, Restauradas* (Women Renewed, Released, Restored). Williams, a resident of New York City of Dominican descent, had been a speaker at the Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference in Florida last year. With gifts of prophecy, healing and encouragement, Williams frequently speaks to women about how God wants to use them in the world.

“Shekinah,” a group of young women from Iglesia El Balsamo in Muscatine, Iowa, led the praise and worship. Fifty-three women attended, along with 16 children. On Saturday, the children had their own message, class and activities.

# Central Plains church-to-church relationships

## Milford churches unite for children

by Tara Stahl, Bellwood Mennonite Church



When we talk about outreach, we sometimes forget about our children and the importance of teaching them about Christ at an early age. For the last several years, several churches in Milford, Nebraska, have come together to host a Community Vacation Bible School (VBS) to help kids lay a foundation for Christ. Central Plains congregations Bellwood Mennonite and Milford Mennonite participate in the effort, which is held in the Milford United Methodist Church building.

This year Community VBS trained up “agents for the one true God.” The agents-in-training learned to uncover counterfeit gods, find that the one true God is unique: one God in three persons, collect clues to reveal how to become a child of the one true God, and discover that the one true God is not distant but personal and wanting to be our first love.

We are working on being the church in Milford, and not letting where we congregate on Sundays define the church of Christ. That’s also why we have a community VBS, to let the kids know that no matter what denomination we are, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

Tiffany Reynolds leads a group of children at Milford’s Community VBS.

## DOOR service trip deepens faith

by Tamara Gill, Co-pastor, Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa

From July 12 to 19, nine youth and five adults from the Wayland community traveled to Atlanta together. We went with open minds and hearts to Discover Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection (DOOR).

From the moment that we pulled our three mini vans up to the large Presbyterian Church directly across from the capitol building, we realized that this service adventure would certainly bring us face to face with realities of God’s Kingdom in ways that we had never experienced before.

We were welcomed by an entire group of people who had already set up their cardboard box mats on the sidewalks surrounding the church. After unpacking, we brought out a few gift packages that we had compiled that included drinks, snacks, socks, toothbrushes and toothpaste. We gave out bracelets that used the DOOR acronym with our faith testimony in a phrase, “Depending On Our Redeemer.” We prayed with them and listened to their stories. More profoundly, they prayed for us and sang for us and showed us which scripture passages they were reading. They treated us like friends and even family, not strangers. They showed us the love of God.

Each day we received a new service project assignment. We worked hard and we had fun doing it! But even more important than the tasks that we accomplished, we built friendships with people who were vastly different from us. We realized that loving people as God loves them requires us to change our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and lives.

Now, we trust in God with an even deeper faith.



Mason Barnhart and Jorge Chacon emptied wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of debris into this dumpster. Several other members of the youth group used sledgehammers to demolish some rooms of this warehouse to be renovated into a tool bank.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference  
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Freeman, SD 57029

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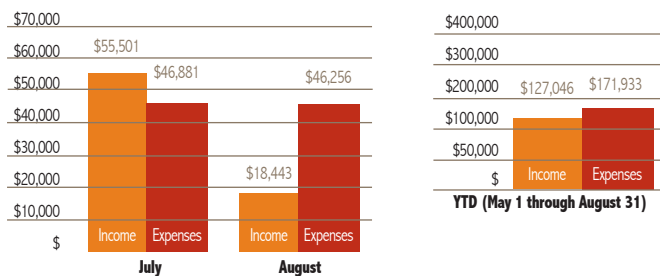
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Growing in  
holistic witness  
to God's  
reconciling mission  
in the world through  
fellowship,  
discipleship  
and leadership

Central Plains budget saw a positive comeback in July followed by another large shortfall in August. As you can see from the graphs, income for the month of July and August came in at \$73,944.61, while expenses came in at \$93,137.65. As a result, the deficit for the fiscal year climbed to \$44,887.54 overall. We look forward to stronger months ahead and invite you to prayer in giving thanks for our blessings thus far and guidance in securing the continued support for the future.

—Stewardship Task Group

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference Income vs. Expenses



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Conference Board and Committees** meet November 14-15, 2014 at Crooked Creek Christian Camp, Washington, IA.

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

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

**Mennonite Church USA Convention and Delegate Assembly**

will be held June 30 to July 5, 2015, in Kansas City.

An area conference of



Mennonite  
Church  
USA