



Scattered Seeds

April
2018

“...I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...”

— Revelation 7:9



Quito Mennonite Church dedicates their new building.

Ecuador Partnership

A new home for the Anabaptist Mennonite church in Ecuador

by David Boshart

Executive Conference Minister



During the past 24 years of partnership, Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Mission Network and the Colombian Mennonite Church have witnessed the birth of a new Mennonite Conference in Ecuador, Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME).

On January 27, members of ICAME, along with representatives of the partnership, gathered to dedicate a building that will serve as the ministry center for the conference. Members of ICAME are excited that the property is very close to where they have been meeting. They are also very pleased that the building is a good financial investment because it is close to a new subway

station. It has ample space for ICAME offices and ministries, as well as worship space for the Quito congregation. In addition, a third-floor apartment will provide some ongoing rental income.

Long-time Ecuadoran leader Alba Silva said at the dedication, “This building will be God’s house for all the people who wish to come. Its purpose is to proclaim the Kingdom of God through justice and peace. It has been a dream of all of us for many years to have a home of our own. It will help us to continue transforming lives through the Word. The building is a huge blessing.”

“This building will be God’s house for all the people who wish to come.”

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Quito Mennonite Church celebrates the dedication of their new building.

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Before purchasing the property, the church was forced to move multiple times as owners changed plans. ICAME and the partnership believe that owning space for the conference, central church and ministries will contribute significantly to their growth and development. Grants from Mennonite Mission Network and Central Plains Mennonite Conference, combined with a no-interest loan offered by a Central Plains family, made it possible for ICAME members to purchase the building with a manageable mortgage that will not place stress on current ministries.

A sister in the church, Doris Espinoza, shared at the dedication, “It is a blessing from God to have a house of our own to meet together in community. We won’t need to worry any more about not having a place to meet, or not knowing how many more years we can rent where we are.”

At the dedication, Mennonite Mission Network representative Linda Shelly said, “We recognize this building as an important tool, while we continue to emphasize that

the church is the people”.

In a letter of affirmation read at the dedication, Central Plains Executive Conference Minister David Boshart wrote, “We have seen the careful, prayerful discernment that has led you to the purchase of this building. As you dedicate this building to God’s purposes, we are ‘confident that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.’” (Philippians 1:6)

Founding pastors César Moya and Patricia Urueña returned from Colombia for the dedication. César preached the primary sermon during the worship service. In his conclusion he said, “A meeting place, rather than only being a beautiful structure and a place where multiple activities are carried out, should be a place where Christ is testified, his teachings are followed and the ethics practiced are coherent with the way of the cross. May this new headquarters of the church in Ecuador keep alive Jesus’ spirit that welcomes all.”

Ecuador Partnership Work Trip: February 2018



Twelve volunteers from Iowa and Nebraska traveled to Quito, Ecuador, on February 23, 2018, to work on the recently purchased Quito Mennonite Church. Projects included painting the exterior of the three story building, some interior painting, remodeling a bathroom, cleaning the inside and outside of the windows, venting a water heater, beginning construction of a roof over the side patio and other small projects. Along with working on the church, the group visited the Equator, Historic Central Quito, the Artisan Market and enjoyed a supper at an indigenous Mennonite church in southern Quito.

Many new friendships were made with members of the Quito Mennonite Church, refugees from Colombia and Venezuela, Mennonite Mission Network volunteers serving in Quito, and among the members of the Central Plains work team. The work team returned March 5, grateful for having had the opportunity to serve and blessed by the experiences and the people they met. We thank God for His presence with us as we traveled and worked. -Doyle Roth

Left: What a difference twelve volunteers, 22 gallons of paint and one week can make. Right: Dave Stutzman, Leo Rudolphi and Ron Troyer paint the front of the second story.

Mission in our time: We accompany one another

by David Boshart

In a recent issue of *Missio Dei*, Mennonite Mission Network executive Paula Killough attributes her profound belief in Christian mission to a careful study of Galatians 1:11-12: “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin, for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Having once believed that mission was mainly a tool of colonialism, Paula’s perspective was transformed. Those who have received the gospel—wherever they live—have an opportunity to share a priceless gift with those who have not yet received it.

But the full benefit of intercultural mission is realized when we move beyond sharing the gospel from one to another and we begin to *accompany one another in living out the gospel*. This has been the blessing of our partnership in Ecuador which has led to the invitation to accompany a new Mennonite witness in Venezuela. It’s the same blessing we have known in longstanding connections in the Congo.

As we *accompany* one another intercultural-ly, we learn how the gospel is at home in every culture and how the gospel challenges and confronts every culture. And then, “the wisdom of God in its rich variety” is revealed not just within each culture and across cultures, but even “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 3:10)

I am continually amazed at how much we gain from *intercultural fellowship*. While there is a sharing of finances, the money is only a symbol of a life we share that makes more of God’s wisdom known. We learn so much in this fellowship.

As I reflect on the recent trip to Venezuela and the dedication of the new ministry center in Ecuador, I think of four powerful things this accompaniment across cultures offers us.

We learn about the source of joy. Our brothers and sisters in Venezuela were once a part of a thriving economy with a promising national vision to be a world power. For those who once knew plenty, every day is now a struggle to provide the most basic needs. While it takes enormous energy to keep households going, these disciples of Jesus teach us that there is joy in following Jesus and living in

the community that makes his body. There is joy in sharing so that no one has need. There is joy in service even when it isn’t certain from where one’s daily bread—or daily *arepa*—will come.

We learn about the beauty of love. The economy of Venezuela has devastated family structure. In one of the congregations, the pastor and his wife are the only intact family in the church. Family is defined by whatever collection of people can cooperate to ensure that basic needs are met for the most vulnerable. The testimony of a newly-baptized member in Caracas said, “This church came to the plaza to share soup. I felt the love of family.” One church leader said, “Here we don’t fight. We have strong conversations, but no one wants to dominate the others. We want to be one family.”

We learn about the power of God. There is simply no other way to explain how a small community of five churches with so few resources can accomplish so much except that the power of God is at work among them. How else can we explain that five churches are able to reach nearly 4000 students, teachers, and administrators with the message of the gospel of peace, and the faculty beg them to come back and do more? How else can we explain in this economy that the church has found a way to produce food that people can afford and at the same time create profit to support the church’s other ministries?

We are challenged to reflect on the capacity of our faith. As people with many resources and the ability to make many of our problems go away, *what do we do by faith?* As people who are not consumed with meeting our most basic needs, what commitments might we make to show God’s love in our own communities? Can we expect that our witness will accomplish “far more than all we can ask or imagine” because we trust in God?

As we accompany our brothers and sisters in Ecuador and Venezuela, we are surely receiving far more than we are giving. Our visitation provides them an opportunity to let their light shine and, upon seeing their good works, we—with them and the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places—give glory to our God in heaven.

“As people with many resources and the ability to make many of our problems go away, what do we do by faith?”

Venezuela Partnerships

Life in the apocalypse

by David Boshart

Revelation is ominous in the pictures it paints, “Two pounds of wheat for a day’s wages, and six pounds of barley for a day’s wages...” (Rev. 6:6) This reminds me of life in Venezuela in 2018. With a 4500% inflation rate last year, Venezuela’s economy is in free fall.

Five years ago, the Colombian Mennonite Church invited Central Plains Mennonite Conference to expand our partnership in Ecuador. They were responding to requests for theological education to ignite an emerging Anabaptist Mennonite network in Venezuela. During the years that we have accompanied this fledgling movement, we have observed the demise of Venezuela’s economy. But we also have front row seats to observing the power of God when everything else is failing.

The minimum wage in Venezuela is 740,000 Bolivares (Bs) per month (about \$2.50 US). During our visit, the regulated price of two pounds of rice was around 40,000 Bs, while in other stores it cost 255,000 Bs. To get the regulated price, people need to get an ID card indicating which day they can make purchases. People with these cards get in line the day before to sign up, and then return the next day to make purchases. Often only a few of the items they need are available, in very limited quantities.

Now, there is a shortage of cash and people stand in day-long lines to withdraw the maximum 10,000 Bs, not even enough to purchase a daily ration of food. Pastor Euclides Bauza shared that a change of oil in his motorcycle takes two months of his salary as school principal. People sort garbage in the street and children beg for food outside restaurants as the few who can afford to eat inside carry out their leftovers.

In the face of these dire circumstances, the five Mennonite congregations on Isla Margarita and the mainland offer a shining testimony to many who are struggling to find hope for each day. The Mennonite Churches in Venezuela share three ministries in common.

Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Venezuela (SBMV) is a tool for evangelism as well as a program to train leaders. Classes often include people who are interested in learning, but who haven’t made a commitment to God yet.

In a meeting with students from multiple churches who participate in the seminary classes, Director Euclides Bauza said, “We aren’t asking anyone to change how they worship, but we are drawing together because we believe in one God.” The students expressed a lot of appreciation for Euclides’ teaching, saying the classes from the Anabaptist perspective had “opened their eyes to see in a new way.”

Cooperative Games for Peace is a long-term project that the Mennonite Churches initiated in the public schools. The games address themes of love, respect, empathy, esteem for self and others, solidarity, communication, awareness against bullying, conflict resolution, active nonviolence, peaceful resistance and love of God.

In October and November, church leaders organized a campaign teaching the games in schools in the three zones where the churches are located (Isla Margarita, Yaracuy and Caracas). The cooperative games ministry engaged a total of 3,932 students, teachers and administrators in 14 schools. Teachers and school directors often ask why they do this. In response, the game leaders share about their faith and give a copy of the booklet, *What is an Anabaptist Christian?*

Corn grinders are an effort to help respond to the economic crisis and food shortages. Colombian Mennonites donated four manual corn grinders and Central Plains contributions paid the duty fees. These are simple manual grinders, yet the corn flour which is typically used for making *arepas* is scarce and expensive. (An *arepa* is a cross between a corn tortilla and mush.) Corn sold in kernels is much less expensive than corn flour.

In Caracas they are able to sell a kilo of corn dough





ready for *arepas* and still make a 47% profit. The profit is divided three ways among the two brothers who do the work and the church. They also donate nine of every 100 bags to the church for community meals and for their outreach ministry with homeless people. They prepared 932 packages of corn dough from November through January. Of this, 56% is sold within the church, and 44% is sold to others.

In some of the other communities where corn is more expensive, the churches make the grinder available for a small fee to people who buy, cook and grind their own corn. Church members are considering ways to expand the corn grinder project.

Beyond these ministries, the churches focus on meeting the needs of children in their neighborhoods, many of whom live in very difficult family situations. One congregation offers hair salon services one day a month. Shampoo is expensive and scarce. Children can have their hair washed, combed, cut, dried and even straightened with loving hands. Hygiene is only one goal. Self-esteem is another.

Inirida Alfonzo de Perez, one of the women helping said, “I don’t have anything, but I have the willingness to go out and serve. I don’t have gold or silver, but what I have is faith.”

Another congregation has begun learning how to grow food on the church property and at members’ homes so they can feed themselves and share food with their neighbors.

While extreme economic challenges facing the church are real, the Mennonites in Venezuela live dependent on the power of God. One member said of the church, “The Sermon on the Mount is our foundation,” noting that, “if this isn’t in our lives, we can’t share the Gospel.”

These are members of the great multitude (Rev. 7:10) who know suffering and great loss, yet they are bound together in love and peace, proclaiming, “Salvation belongs to our God.”



Top to Bottom: Erwin Mirabal, Domingo Padilla, Rolando Gómez, Alexander; Roselyn Rodríguez and Arli Rojas washing Silmarys Rodríguez’ hair. Jazmin Tormes watching; Corn in María Elena Rodríguez’ yard; The pot to cook the corn before grinding it; Domingo Padilla with corn.

Page 4: The baptism of Gisela was a humorous and joyful experience, as strong waves repeatedly knocked down and “re-baptized” Gisela and the officiants. Left to right: Erwin Mirabal, Carlos Moreno, Gisela Garban, Euclides Bauza, David Boshart.



Leaders credentialed

Jack Scandrette was installed as transitional pastor at Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota, on January 14, 2018.

Larry Nail was installed and licensed toward ordination as pastor at Julesburg Mennonite Church, Julesburg, Colorado, on January 28, 2018.

Transitions

Marcia Yoder-Schrock ended her role as interim pastor at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa, effective February 28, 2018.

David Miller resigned as pastor of Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Nebraska, effective March 25, 2018.

Scott and Suzette Shreffler have announced their resignation as pastors at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, Montana, effective April 1, 2018. Scott has been assistant pastor and Suzette has been outreach pastor.

Joetta Schlabach has announced her retirement as co-pastor at Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, effective May 31, 2018.

Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa plans to celebrate their 150th Anniversary on Sunday, July 1, 2018.

Annual Meeting 2018 preview

Come to Lincoln, Nebraska, June 21-24, 2018, to worship, learn and fellowship together as sisters and brothers in Central Plains conference!

Rachel Springer Gerber will speak three times on the theme, *A Covenant People: Walking with Jesus*. In her sermons, Rachel will explore a variety of ways to approach faith formation at home, on the road, and in the congregation. You'll find her words to be practical and inspirational, encouraging you and your congregation to journey closer with Jesus.

Prior to July 2017, Rachel was the Mennonite Church USA denominational minister for Christian formation and editor/founder of *The Gathering Place*, an interactive website designed for resourcing, networking, and equipping Anabaptist educational leaders. Rachel is also the author of *Ordinary Miracles: Awakening to the Holy Work of Parenting* (Herald Press), a spiritual memoir written for new parents.



Pastors workshop. A workshop for pastors, led by Central Plains staff on Thursday afternoon will explore how the covenant of spiritual practices intersects with the Journey Forward from Mennonite Church USA.

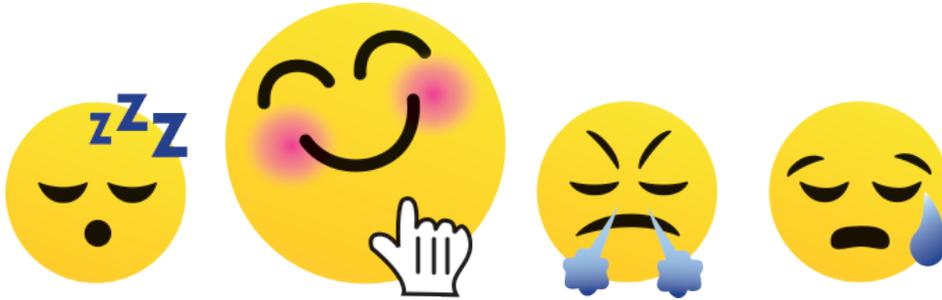
Delegate sessions. In our delegate sessions we will be receiving stories from our member congregations about their experience with the spiritual practices of our covenant. We will also be in discernment about how our conference will participate in the Journey Forward with Mennonite Church USA.

Children's activities. Bring your children! Their theme for the two mornings will be "Babylon: Daniel's Courage in Captivity." Daniel was way more than the guy who survived a den full of hungry lions. Join Daniel—torn from his home and forced into the king's service. Explore exotic sights and smells of a Babylonian bazaar! Kids will find that they're not much different from Daniel and his friends, who kept their faith in a faithless culture. In the afternoons, planners hope to take the children to the zoo and/or the children's museum.

Workshop for elders, deacons and pastors. On Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m., a special workshop will be open to all pastors, elders and deacons, even if they are not registered for Annual Meeting. Come for the workshop, then stay for the cookout and evening activities. Watch for the opportunity to buy supper tickets.

Saturday evening picnic. We'll kick back and have fun together with a cookout supper, music by Dave Miller and the B Street Band, corn hole tournament and other festive outdoor activities. You won't want to miss the fun!

You get to choose—so Choose Joy!



Youth and sponsors, make plans now to come to Youth Escape 2018! This weekend youth retreat for Central Plains youth in grades 7-12 will be held July 20-22 at Hidden Acres Christian Center near Dayton, Iowa.

Laurel Rudd, a long-time sponsor at Cedar Falls Mennonite, said of Youth Escape 2016: **“It was the most meaningful thing we’ve ever done as a youth group. The kids LOVED it. People came away changed.”**

Our theme this year is “Choose Joy.” A planning team of pastors, youth pastors and youth sponsors chose that theme because we see youth overburdened with anxiety, and we want Youth Escape 2018 to focus on the good news that can free them from that anxiety. Living life with God is a good life, and every day we get to choose this goodness again!

Josh Lundberg will be our speaker. Josh is a co-pastor at Kalona Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa. He will be collaborating with a team of people to bring creative and compelling messages. High school senior Emma Beachy will contribute to the worship planning as well.

The band will be led by John Murray of Minneapolis. John is recruitment coordinator for Mennonite Mission Network and a lay leader at Third Way Church. John will also collaborate with a team of people to plan inspired music for Youth Escape worship.

Why come? Come to connect with Jesus, other Central Plains youth, and the church. The weekend is filled with worship gatherings, breakout sessions, free-time activities, good food, and memorable experiences.

Registration opens April 2. Keep up with all the plans and details on the Youth Escape 2018 page at www.centralplainsmc.org.

“From the first hour after arriving, the youth we took to Youth Escape in 2016 were having a blast. The planners did an excellent job of setting up activities to make everyone feel welcome and included. The camp is a fantastic venue for giving youth plenty to do throughout the day. Youth Escape offers a good mix of programmed time and free time. On our drive home, the youth were very excited to return again!”

- Matthew Hendricks, 2016 sponsor, Faith Mennonite Church

Scattered Seeds

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FINANCES

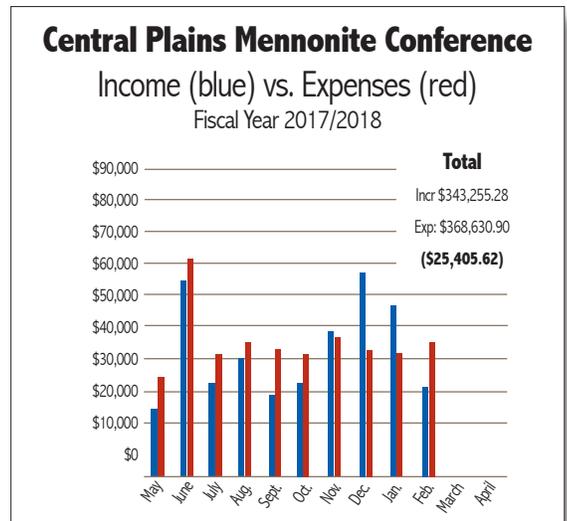
The Central Plains budget experienced a very strong December and January, helping to erase much of the deficit. However, we backtracked in February, leaving some work to do in the last two months of the fiscal year. Income through February totaled \$343,225.28. Expenses totaled \$368,630.90. As a result, we have a fiscal year deficit of \$25,405.62. We invite you to consider Central Plains in your prayers and contributions as we look to decrease this deficit by April 30. We do thank you! — *Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Leaders' Retreat will be April 27-29, 2018, at Saint Benedict Retreat Center in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Central Plains Annual Meeting will take place June 21-24, 2018, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Youth Escape 2018 will take place July 20-22, 2018 in central Iowa.



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