



Scattered Seeds

March
2016

A morning spent in scripture

by Lois Janzen Preheim
Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.

—Psalm 91:1-2



Do you sometimes long for a deeper encounter with God? Do you wish for an experience of the scriptures coming alive for you? These things happened when about twenty people gathered at Salem Mennonite Church in rural Freeman, South Dakota, on a gray January 30 morning. Led by three Central Plains women, participants began the Lenten season with an exploration of three scripture texts. As they arrived, the participants were surprised to find the fellowship hall smelling of cinnamon rolls. At their tables, they discovered that people had come from a variety of area churches.

Barb Tieszen, a member of Central Plains Christian Formation Committee and one of the planners, welcomed the group and laid out the plan for the morning: forty five minutes with each text using three different approaches to devotional study.

Dawn Stahl began the morning with a consideration of Psalm 91:1-2, using the "Dwelling in the Word" method: listening to the text in three different translations, listening for key words, sharing one's perception with a partner and then with the whole table. Dawn then went around the whole circle, asking for reflections. Since the passage was only two verses, I had wondered when we planned this whether there would be too much repetition. To my surprise, there were no repetitions.

By the time we had completed the circle of insight, the two verses had acquired a luminous quality. *Shelter, fortress, and refuge*, the Psalmist's metaphors for God, communicate safety in a dangerous world, while the phrases "*shadow of the*

"By the time we had completed the circle, the verses had acquired a luminous quality."

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Almighty” and *“Most High”* suggest God’s grandeur, power, and at the same time an uncontrollable quality that is still trustworthy. The verses spoke of living with, abiding with and trusting this God. These verses became then both an invitation and a challenge for both the morning and this Lenten season.

Barb Tieszen’s session, using Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, took a more individual approach, using “*Lectio Divina*”. Since the passage was longer and more difficult, Barb gave participants 30 minutes to sit with the text alone. In this time, participants were to look for what words or phrases kept drawing their attention.

Since we had just come from reflection on God as a refuge and a source of safety, this passage’s beginning with a warning of coming danger and devastation and the prophet’s plea to “rend our hearts and not our garments” really stood out. While the prophet clearly believes in God’s steadfast love and mercy, it appears that these qualities of God, to be fully operational, need the open hearts of the whole community. As this passage made many references to city, to sanctuaries and to assemblies, the whole community’s need to seek God was in view here. When the group came back together, many of the responses added texture to one’s individual reflection.

As leader of the third session, I began my consideration of Luke 13:31-35 not with the text but with the personal memory of hearing Colombian refugees in Ecuador talk about receiving threats that eventually led to leaving everything and starting over in Ecuador. In this passage, Jesus receives a face-to-face threat to his life but he responds very calmly. In order to understand the source of Jesus’ peace in the face of danger, we first role played the giving and receiving of threats at our tables.

After reading the text, we again acted out the Pharisees giving Jesus a warning but which he takes as a threat. We also acted out the word “fox.” Acting out the text helped us to consider Jesus’ own confidence in God and the contrast between Herod’s enmity of Jesus and Jesus’ love for

his people and for the city of Jerusalem. In this session, the whole group participated in the discussion.

Throughout the course of the morning, we moved back and forth between private and group reflection. Participants expressed appreciation for a time that provided the practice of three different devotional approaches. Cheryl Lehmann of Sermon on the Mount Church in Sioux Falls sent an e-mail afterward saying that she needs “new ways of interacting with Scripture because doing the same thing all the time makes Scripture lose its special quality.” She expressed appreciation for the additional resources we had included in the packets that each participant received.

As one of the resource leaders, I appreciated the opportunity to keep going over these three texts from October through January. I began to see recurrent themes in these lectionary texts. All three alluded to a sense of external danger but turned to God for a sense of safety. Joel and Jesus both offered warnings along with their invitations to repent, to seek God, and to bless each other.

Jesus’ warning that our houses will be left desolate unless we learn to recognize who is coming in God’s name feels like a timely warning in a world of insecurity. As a result of this devotional study, I felt ready to be more intentional in my devotional life for the season of Lent. Both Dawn and Barb brought books on spiritual formation to my attention that I did not know before, so I went away greatly enriched from working on this project with them. These books were listed in a bibliography included in the participants’ packets.

If you would like to lead this same retreat, or one like it, find a leader’s guide and participant handouts at www.centralplainsmc.org/word-and-spirit. Contact Shana Peachey Boshart for help planning and promoting a half-day retreat of scripture and prayer in your community.

The Christian Formation Committee thanks Lois Janzen Preheim, Dawn Stahl and Barb Tieszen for creating this day-long retreat and making it available to others.





Find, print and keep these new study helps

by Shana Peachey Boshart

Conference Minister for Christian Formation



You don't have to wait for a retreat to get started on new practices of prayer and Bible study! On our website you can find convenient, downloadable one- to two-page documents that can be printed, folded and kept in your Bible or journal. You can use them in your personal Bible study and prayer or with a small group like a Sunday School class, Bible study, or discipleship group.

The Christian Formation Committee has been considering how to give our conference members help in the covenant practices to nurture lifelong discipleship. What we've come up with is a set of easy-to-use, downloadable resources under the name Word & Spirit. This is to help you recognize them by their logo and find them easily. We call them "Word & Spirit" resources because of our strongly-held common belief that the Spirit is active and present in

our study of the Word, enabling us to interpret it for our context.

The Word & Spirit materials will be developed over time to provide resources for all the spiritual practices in the covenant of spiritual practices our conference is considering. The first resources, available now, focus on Bible study and prayer. You will recognize some of these from the discernment study, *Seeking God's Will Together*. They include Bible study methods such as the Swedish method and the "Five R's." You will also find methods that seamlessly combine Bible study and prayer like Lectio Divina and Dwelling in the Word. And, there are practices that focus on different ways to pray.

Look for Word & Spirit downloadables at www.centralplainsmc.org/word-and-spirit.

Lifelong discipleship

I often meet people who are ready for something new in their spiritual journey. I am always glad when that happens because our goal as disciples of Jesus is to be constantly growing into his likeness! Our conference mission statement says that we help people grow in holistic witness to God's reconciling mission in the world by *promoting lifelong discipleship*.

I'm starting to hear more church leaders saying that we need more resources for *adult* spiritual formation. Sometimes we seem to believe that adults have "arrived" at maturity and need no further Christian education. But we all know that things can happen in an adult's life to challenge or shake faith; things that send us searching for answers and needing to grow in understanding and maturity.

Simply put, we spend the majority of our lives as adults, so there must be adequate attention given to nurturing the faith of adults. In addition, the majority of those who model and teach the faith to children, youth and new believers are in their adult years. In faith formation, those who are nurturing their own spiritual growth are in the best position to teach and model faith to others. They embody a living and growing relationship with Christ.

Finally, the most influential people in our churches are adults, and we hope that these persons of influence will be grounded in Christ and growing in Christ-likeness for the good of the whole church.

Find Word & Spirit materials at www.centralplainsmc.org/word-and-spirit and keep growing in lifelong discipleship!

Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches workshop “Skills to help the church we love”

by Lon Marshall

Conflict Management Support Team



No one likes conflict. Especially in these tumultuous times. We would rather avoid conflict. “That’s the last thing we need,” we say. What we want is more peace, more calm, more harmony. But what if I told you that conflict is an opportunity? An opportunity to grow your immunity to disunity. An opportunity to develop deep roots in your community that can withstand the

winds of change.

This is the path a group of nearly 40 individuals started down in Freeman, South Dakota, at Salem-Zion Mennonite Church on a cold weekend, January 15 and 16. Seven churches were represented as our own Conflict Management Support Team (CMST) engaged them in a workshop entitled *Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches*.

This group of hardy souls came to work and learn on a precious Friday night and Saturday. They practiced listening, suspending judgment, and effective communication skills. They learned about the strength of “bounded churches” compared to “divided churches” and studied helpful systemic processes that help develop these healthy churches.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone was enlivened and empowered by the workshop. As the weekend went on, hope became contagious. All agreed that the time was well spent. Many articulated that this was time spent gaining skills to help the church we love stand against the polarization so prevalent in our days. There will be disagreements, but we can be prepared to handle those times with wisdom and compassion, safeguarding our unity throughout.

This is why these workshops and resources are important and why you might consider contacting us to plan a Conflict Transformation Skills Workshop in your area or for your church. You can contact Tim Detweiler (timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org) or Elizabeth Troyer-Miller (melizabethm24@gmail.com) for more information.



Top to bottom: Tim Detweiler speaks about “Bounded vs. Bonded” churches; A group skit shows examples of personality styles; Elizabeth Troyer-Miller shares about the elements of communication: words, tone, and nonverbals to help prep participants to work on communication skills.

Study sparks conversation at Bellwood

During the winter quarter, the Bellwood Mennonite Church in Milford, Nebraska, studied the Central Plains conference discernment study, *Seeking God’s Will Together*. The adult Sunday School classes all met together in the fellowship hall every other Sunday to view the online videos. Immediately following the videos, the participants were dismissed to their respective classes where they discussed the topic of that day’s video. On alternate Sundays, each class met in their own classroom to study and discuss the materials.

The videos sparked some interesting conversations in our classes, and emphasized the importance of studying God’s Word in depth as a community of believers. We have been reminded that the Bible points to Jesus as our ultimate source of authority, and therefore we should turn to Him for guidance whenever we are faced with a decision. Learning the steps for studying Scripture passages together and applying what the Holy Spirit is teaching us as we discern where God is leading us is a challenging but worthy goal. —Peg Burkey, Bellwood Minister of Education

Invitation to visit our Ecuador partners

Have you been inspired by stories from our partner churches in Ecuador? Would you like to have a first-hand opportunity to meet Ecuadoran and Colombian brothers and sisters in faith and learn about the joys and challenges of bearing witness to God's kingdom in Ecuador?

A "Learning and Fellowship Tour" has been organized for this purpose from June 3 through 15, 2016. Like past trips led by Donald and Shirley Kempf, eight persons from Central Plains will travel with two persons from the Colombian Mennonite Church. New to this trip will be a week-long stay in the rainforest where we will get acquainted with indigenous life. Mennonite Missions Network (MMN) workers Jerrell and Jane Ross Richer will be our hosts during that portion of the trip.

During the final extended weekend, we will visit with congregations in Quito and learn about the refugee program that is supported by Mennonite Central Committee. MMN workers Peter Wigginton and Delicia Bravo Aguilar will be our hosts in Quito.

Tour information and an application form are on the Central Plains website, www.centralplainsmc.org. The application deadline is March 31. Questions can be directed to Joetta Schlabach, jschlabach@faithmennonite.org or 651-290-2185. Some travel scholarships are available through the partnership.

Debra Hirsch to speak at Annual Leaders Retreat

by Tim Detweiler

Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership

"Missional Discipleship: Following Jesus into the Hard Places" is the theme of this year's Annual Leaders Retreat at the St. Benedict Retreat Center in Schuyler, Nebraska, on April 22-24, 2016. Debra Hirsch will be our resource person.

Debra is a speaker, church leader, and writer. She has led churches in both Australia and Los Angeles. She is one of the founders of Forge Mission Training Network and a current member of the Forge America national team. She co-authored (with husband Alan Hirsch) *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship*. Her new book, *Redeeming Sex*, reflects something of her own journey and attempts to bring new conversations around sexuality into the context of the church. A trained counselor, Deb has been involved in social work and community development. She and her husband live in community with others in Los Angeles.

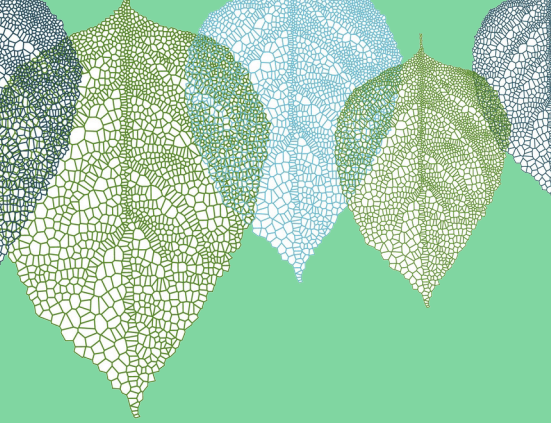
Debra's focus for this year's Annual Leaders Retreat will be to help us reflect on what it means to embrace a missional form of discipleship. As followers of Jesus, what does it mean for us to be missionaries following Jesus into the hard places in our world and culture? Debra brings energy, passion and experience for engaging this theme of "missional discipleship."

This year's Annual Leaders Retreat will be a great opportunity for pastors, chaplains and spouses to come together to renew and build collegiality with other leaders in our conference; to worship together; to be resourced for missional discipleship; and to find space for relaxation and self-care.

Go to <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/annual-leaders-retreat.html> to find information about the Annual Leaders Retreat and to register online. Contact Tim Detweiler at timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org or call 319-458-0224 with any questions.



Debra Hirsch



Transitions

Marcia Yoder-Schrock announced her retirement and resigned as pastor at Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, Iowa, effective January 31, 2016.

Bethel Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa, voted to leave Mennonite Church USA and Central Plains effective August 29, 2015.

First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, had the last worship service in their historic building December 27, 2015. They have sold the building to another church and continue to meet for Sunday morning worship services.

Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa, voted to leave Mennonite Church USA and Central Plains effective April 1, 2016.

Leaders Credentialed

Ry Siggelkow was installed and licensed toward ordination on February 7, 2016, as pastor of proclamation, witness and formation at Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis.



Philadelphia pastor Leonard Dow to speak at Annual Meeting

by Nathan Luitjens

*Pastor, Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa
Annual Meeting Task Group*



At Central Plains Annual Meeting next June 15-18, our speaker will be Leonard Dow. When you hear Leonard tell the story about his path to pastoral ministry and the story of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, the church where he pastors, there are numerous points along the journey that seem almost unbelievable. In Leonard's own life, he was a banker and member of Oxford Circle who along with his wife had decided to leave the church. On the Sunday they were going to talk to the pastor about that, the pastor announced his resignation. Leonard was then invited to be a part of the transitional leadership team, and out of that experience he was called to pastor the church.

Oxford Circle Mennonite Church has also undergone a significant shift. With Leonard as the pastor, the church began to change and to seek to connect with their neighborhood. This led to the creation of the Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association and the purchase of a former medical clinic building for the use of the church and to rent to other organizations. (The story of the purchase of the building is another seemingly miraculous story.) Today this congregation is a diverse, multi-cultural group of Christians who continue to try to embody the way of Jesus in the Oxford Circle community of Philadelphia.

During my sabbatical in the fall of 2014, I had the opportunity to spend a week at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church. The more I interacted with folks there, the more I was struck by the sheer audacity of the undertaking, and the way in which they have seen God move in their midst. I was also struck by the commitment of the members of the congregation to move into the neighborhood and their desire to seek to engage their neighbors and to embody the way of Jesus in that community.

Leonard is a gifted leader and powerful speaker who continually calls Oxford Circle and the broader church to engage their communities. I look forward to him joining us at our Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual meeting and having him challenge us to engage with Jesus and our communities.

Subscription to WDC Library ends April 30

For the past several years, Central Plains has paid a subscription to the Western District Conference (WDC) Resource Library that has given all our congregations and individual members access to the library. With the departure of a few congregations, the conference budget needs to be reduced, and the subscription to the WDC Resource Library will be discontinued as of April 30.

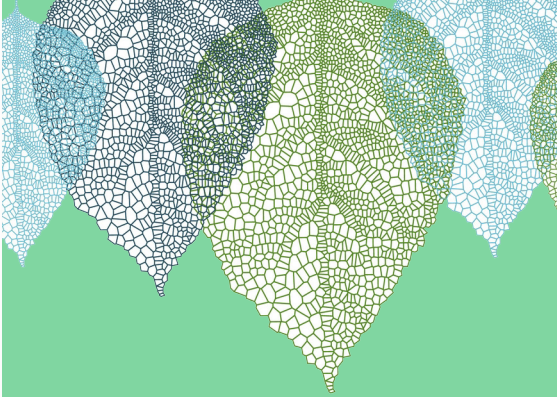
Individual congregations can subscribe, however, and continue with the Box of Books program as well as individual library cards for their members. A yearly membership for a congregation costs \$1 per year per regular attender with a \$100 per year minimum. Individuals may subscribe on their own for \$25/year. These prices are negotiable for those who want to subscribe but cannot afford the rate.

Central Plains also has a resource library that Central Plains churches and individuals can use. It is smaller than the WDC Library, and it focuses mainly on curriculum for children, youth and adults. Find a list of everything in the Central Plains Formation Resource Library at www.centralplainsmc.org/resource-library.

**You can still
check out books
from the Central
Plains formation
resource library.**

Shalom Readers clarification

Recently the WDC Library has received calls from Central Plains churches asking about Shalom Readers. Shalom Readers is administered by the Central Plains Christian Formation Committee, not the WDC Library. Find details about Shalom Readers, a reading program for children, at www.centralplainsmc.org/shalom-readers or contact Shana Peachey Boshart at 319-936-5905 or shanaboshart@centralplainsmc.org.



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July 15-17, 2016 at Hidden Acres Christian Center, Dayton, Iowa

**INSIDE OUT
YOUTH ESCAPE 2016**

Speaker, Michele Hershberger

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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.

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Uphill climb

In December, we had one of our largest monthly deposits ever: \$72,288.82. Thank you so much to all who contributed to our year-end fundraiser! January receipts, however, were the lowest in four years, and we have an uphill climb to end the fiscal year in the black by April 30. As you can see from the graph, as of the end of January, we had a deficit of \$17,386.60 for the fiscal year. We are thankful for your continued support of your conference; God is at work among us in so many ways! Please help lower this deficit in the coming months. —*Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

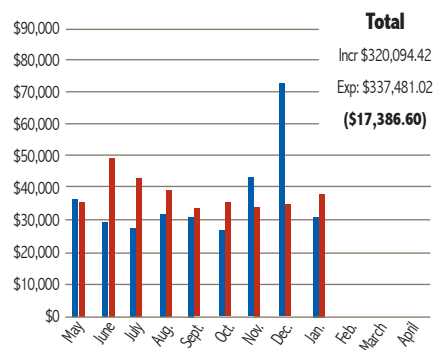
Annual Leaders Retreat will take place April 22-24, 2016, in Schuyler, Nebraska.

Central Plains Annual Meeting 2016 will take place June 16-19, 2016, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Youth Escape 2016 will take place July 15-17, 2016, in Dayton, Iowa.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)
Fiscal Year 2015/2016



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