



# Scattered Seeds

April  
2017

## Friends, let us love one another

Sharing gifts of ministry and hospitality

by Holly Blosser Yoder

West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

— Romans 12:10

Christ Community is an urban church in Iowa’s capital city, Des Moines. Formed in 1990, its members come from many church backgrounds. They meet in Temple B’nai Jeshurun, an elaborately adorned synagogue which they share with a Jewish Reform congregation. In worship, Christ Community follows the classical practices of Christian liturgy with a strong emphasis on sacraments. They share the eucharist each week.

West Union is a country church in rural Iowa county. The congregation meets in a simple frame building, 100 years old, painted white, and rimmed by tall evergreens. Among its members are descendants of the same people who worshipped in its sanctuary 100 years ago. The congregation relishes its four-part hymn singing, likes a good sermon, and has communion four times a year.

While different, both are congregations of Central Plains Conference and Mennonite Church USA. How do people coming from different congregations, practicing different styles of worship and divided by distance, love and serve one another?

In the summer of 2016, Martha Yoder, a long-time member and recently retired associate pastor at West Union, received a phone call from Conference Minister Dave Boshart. Christ Community’s minister and preacher, Kent McDougal, was taking a medical leave. Would she fill in?

Martha had travel plans for later that fall and was unsure if she should accept. But she was intrigued by Christ Community’s history, which was one of study and discernment that had led them to membership in the conference. Marcia Yoder Schrock, another recently retired pastor, agreed to preach during the month of October when Martha would be traveling. To go to this church that “had studied and come to believe that they were Anabaptist,” Martha said, “was compelling to me.” She added, “The few people

I had met from the church were delightful, and I thought this would be a good group to get to know.”

Martha drove the two hour distance weekly. As she offered her gifts in ministry, she found she was also blessed. She adapted readily to the more liturgical practices of Christ Community’s worship service and enjoyed worshipping with a congregation that had communion every Sunday. As a participant in

the Christian education hour, she valued the in-depth Bible study of Ephesians which was led by an elder, and was inspired by the congregation’s commitment to refugee support and other efforts. “It reminded me that deep theological study and attention to social justice are so very compatible,” Martha observed.

Sometimes she drove up on Saturday and stayed with Kent and Julie McDougal overnight, learning to know them through their hospitality. “I feel like I’ve made new friends,” she said.

**“It reminded me that deep theological study and attention to social justice are so very compatible.”**

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"We would talk on Saturday evenings and share a meal," said Kent McDougal, who said the congregation was appreciative of both Martha and Marcia for the perspectives they brought to the congregation, as well as their flexibility. "They adapted well to work with our congregation, given some of the practices and habits we have," he noted.

Drawing on Martha's background in visual arts, the McDougals organized an evening with a small group of interested members to discuss the use of visual arts in worship. "We talked about what questions you ask of scripture when you think visually," Martha recalled, and observed, "They have a very interesting canvas," referring to the temple's sanctuary.

McDougal attended services as a worshipper during his leave of absence and returned to active ministry at Christmas. Martha and Marcia's service to the congregation permitted him time to rest. He continues his recovery, making what he describes as "steady progress" in dealing with the chronic pain that had prompted the request for ministerial assistance. McDougal said that Christ Community has capable lay leaders who had stepped in previously during a sabbatical; however, other responsibilities made it difficult for them to do so this time.

The New Testament is full of encouragement to Jesus' followers to love one another. Jesus' "New Commandment" (John 13:34-35), the admonition to "honor one another" (Romans 12:10), and the call to "love one another" and thereby "know God" (John 4:8) are powerful messages--even commands. How do people coming from different communities, practicing different styles of worship and divided by distance, love and serve one another? Perhaps they do so by taking up the opportunities that are presented: turning to one another for assistance, offering gifts of ministry when called upon, giving and receiving hospitality, making new friends, and recognizing Christ in one another.

## I was in prison...

### Two Central Plains churches partner in prison ministry

by Lewis Miller

*pastor, Beemer Mennonite Church, Beemer, Nebraska*

It's Sunday night in Omaha, Nebraska. An unlikely assortment of vehicles and people are arriving at Underwood Hills Presbyterian Church for an evening of worship and fellowship sponsored by Crossroads Connection, an ecumenical ministry assisting current and former prison inmates. A highlight of this ministry is the weekly worship service followed by a meal and fellowship. Several years ago, Pat Barron of Northside Christian Family Center in Omaha contacted Pastor Lewis Miller of Beemer Mennonite Church about partnering in this ministry. Two to three times annually, about a dozen people from Beemer and Northside provide leadership for the worship service and food for the meal afterwards. Phyllis Campbell, Don Kauffman, and Pat, along with friends and extended family arrive bringing delicious food from Big Mama's Kitchen, Pat's legendary North Omaha restaurant. Fried chicken or veggie lasagna, side dishes, along with pies and other desserts from Beemer are served to about 75 participants as stories were shared around the tables.

The worship service always includes ample testimony, prayer, music, a short message and a service of communion. The support, encouragement, and accountability bring healing and hope for many who feel disoriented and vulnerable as they navigate the brokenness of incarceration or the transition to everyday life. And these two congregations, who sometimes feel isolated and insulated, are forming rich bonds of love. The shared gifts flow much deeper than food and worship. As brothers and sisters work and walk side by side, God continues to bring new energy and renewed relationships through ministry together. Lives and witness become more entwined, and the taste of true community nourishes the souls.



Top: Laying on of hands at Beemer Mennonite.  
Bottom: Phyllis and Pat prepare to serve dinner.



## See how they love one another

by David Boshart  
Executive Conference Minister



***“The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” (I John 4:21).***

I was in Sunday School in one of our congregations last Sunday. The teacher did an excellent job. The scripture focus was I John 4:7-19. The teacher pointed out that the word “love” is used 22 times in these 12 verses. He noted that I Corinthians 13 - often referred to as the “Love Chapter” - uses the word “love” only 9 times in 13 verses. Our teacher asked, “Which of these passages is the real love chapter?” First John says that we know God’s love because it was shown to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Having received this love, we are able to share this love with one another.

More than any other trait in the early church, the expression of agape love set the Christian community apart from secular society. In the late 2nd or early 3rd century, Tertullian wrote that the people in Roman society would look at the Christian community and exclaim, “See how they love one another!”

Nearly a century earlier, Clement of Alexandria described the person who knows the love of God: “He impoverishes himself out of love, so that he is certain he may never overlook a brother in need, especially if he knows he can bear poverty better than his brother. He likewise considers the pain of another as his own pain.”

As I travel in our conference and the national church, a familiar question is posed, “What do we get from our membership in the conference or denomination?” What is the value of being a part of this larger body? It’s a valid question. As a conference minister, one of my highest priorities is to find ways that we can support and strengthen the life and mission of the local congregation. We provide support in pastoral search processes, congregation evaluation, conflict mediation, support for discipleship ministries of the church, big picture visioning, and resources for witness. It’s easy, in our consumerist society, to think of our affiliations, first and foremost, in terms of the “return on investment.” We think of the area conference and the

denominational structures as venders of goods and services. The value of the relationship is found in the “business” we transact. It’s easy for me as conference leader to fall into that pattern of thinking as well.

The thing that this transactional thinking tends to miss is the value of demonstrating the love we’ve received from God through Jesus with Christian brothers and sisters across a vast geography. We are first of all a conference of congregations because we love each other. We seek to assist each other and encourage each other to grow in our faith in Jesus. Everything we do as a conference is intended to serve this most basic goal.

In this issue of *Scattered Seeds* we share examples of how our congregations express love for one another. You will read about the congregations that have partnered together to encourage one of our newest Anabaptist communities, Shalom Mennonite Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. You have read of experienced preachers who provided pulpit support for Christ Community Church during a season of need. You have read about Beemer Mennonite Church and Northside Christian Family Center who partner together to express the love of Jesus to prisoners. There is a common theme in all these stories. In coming together for common purpose the love of Jesus flows not only from the giver to the receiver. The love of Jesus flows in every direction so that all are enriched in this love and come to know God’s love more fully.

The love of God we have come to know in Jesus is so big. It cannot be contained by a single human heart. It is not intended to be hoarded within the walls of a single congregation. The love of God we have come to know in Jesus is to be freely shared in every way possible. When that love is given away, as the old song says, we “end up having more.” Whatever shape the work of our conference takes, my prayer is that it will always serve the basic purpose of showing more of the love of Jesus in more ways and more places. My prayer is that when our neighbors see the churches that make up Central Plains Mennonite Conference, they will exclaim, “See how they love one another!”



# Central Plains covenant partnership: a love story

by Paul Kaldjian and Meg Nord,

*Shalom Mennonite Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

This past fall, Shalom Mennonite congregation in Eau Claire – the only Central Plains congregation in Wisconsin and the only MC USA church between Madison and the Twin Cities – gave thanks for a decade of presence, service, and relationships. Like new restaurants, new churches can struggle to take root and thrive. Unlike restaurants, we have a covenant relationship.

Shalom began as an offshoot of Emmanuel Mennonite in Minneapolis with two families who had been commuting 90 miles each way to church. For six unfaltering years, Dan Winings was our volunteer pastor for bi-monthly services. For six years, the conference and Emmanuel supported, visited, and prayed for us. The local Jewish congregation graciously allowed us to use their temple for our worship services. Our community grew to five core households, even as numerous others passed through on their life journeys.

By 2012, we felt we could support a quarter-time pastor. We prayed. Tim Detweiler and David Boshart of the conference worked faithfully on our behalf. And also prayed. A sole candidate expressed interest – Adam Nussbaum, a young, fresh graduate of AMBS willing to follow God's direction. But it quickly became apparent that, to lead and nurture even a small church in the vision that we had for our community, we would need at least a half-time pastor. More prayer. And a covenant vision.

With Tim's, David's, and Central Plains Conference's advocacy, coordination, and encouragement, our small, outlying congregation covenanted with four congregations – Salem-Zion Mennonite in Freeman, South Dakota; Bethel Mennonite in Mountain Lake, Minnesota; Faith Mennonite and Emmanuel Mennonite in Minneapolis, Minnesota – who committed to help us practically and spiritually. Beyond simple financial support, this covenantal relationship has wrought unanticipated goodness.

The commitment of our four covenant partner churches to our well-being is a constant reminder that we are not alone, but members of a mutually supportive faith community. The committed representatives of our four covenant churches are part of our Shalom family. We meet to worship, eat, and fellowship in Eau Claire every 3 months. We share our congregation's struggles and joys. We support each other in discipleship, in trusting counsel, listening, and service. We also see each other at events such as Schmeckfest, MCC auctions, youth gatherings, summer conferences, when Adam preaches in their congregations,

and when we find other times to visit each other's communities. Our covenant has bound us across geographical, cultural, and social boundaries in sincere care and prayer for one another.

In summer 2016, we moved into a new church building that gives us a more permanent and visible presence in the Eau Claire network of faith communities. We hold weekly worship and prayer services. We are now ten core households.

Give thanks with us for the love, support, and community we have received from our sister congregations, the conference, and all who have supported us on our journey. We welcome you to our community. Please stop by.



Top: Members of Shalom Mennonite Church on retreat.

Bottom: Shalom and Salem-Zion members and youth prepare a meal to be served at The Community Table in Eau Claire.



Left to right: Joshua Shirsch, Seth Kurtz, Petra Showalter (Journey International volunteers), Dwight Mueller (MMN), Suzette Shreffler, Lewis Miller, Anita Breckbill, Lynne Walksalong, Hannah Breckbill, Galen Kauffman, Joetta Schlabach

## Ecuador encounter: refugees, rivers, and the rainforest

*By Joetta Schlabach,  
pastor, Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Seven persons from Central Plains Mennonite Conference and a Mennonite Mission Network staff person spent January 7-19 on a Learning & Fellowship trip in Ecuador. We awakened the first morning to bright sunshine and the song of birds. Later that morning we walked to the nearby Quito Mennonite Church and joined in their spirited worship. We participated by sharing songs and greetings. Over lunch we visited with the leadership team of the Quito church, along with MMN personnel Peter Wigginton, Delicia Bravo Aguilar and daughter Aliyah. The leaders shared their stories of faith and of finding fellowship and growing into leadership in the Mennonite Church.

As we navigated the busy streets of Quito, we learned about the Mennonite Refugee program, supported by the Ecuador Partnership and Mennonite Central Committee. We witnessed the able leadership of the co-directors, Daniela Sanchez and Jennifer Rey, and of all who work with the project to provide aid and accompaniment to refugee families. Two afternoons we divided into small groups to visit with refugee families, most of whom were from Colombia. “Spending time with refugee families and hearing their stories—seeing and hearing of their raw struggles for the basics of life that we so often take for granted—left my heart and emotions tender to the brokenness of our world,” said Lewis Miller from Beemer, Nebraska.

Thursday morning, we boarded a bus before dawn and began a 13 hour trip to a remote indigenous village in the Amazon rainforest of eastern Ecuador. When the road ended at the Aguarico River, we boarded a large canoe and spent the final three hours entranced by the river scenery. At nightfall we arrived in Závalo, entering a world like none we had ever experienced. There we spent three days learning about the marvels—and the fragility—of the rainforest. We saw birds, butterflies, piranhas, and monkeys, and met the soft-spoken, earth-keeping Cofán people. Dwight Mueller of North Newton, Kansas, was left with an “appreciation of the [community’s] efforts to protect this treasure as they live in tune with nature and respect for God’s creation.” Suzette Shreffler [felt] the Holy Spirit during a walk in the rainforest and [enjoyed] singing Cheyenne hymns to praise His beautiful creation. She experienced this as, “His grace and love for me.”

Bringing the experience back home is as important as the journey. “My spiritual director has helped me understand that the trip significantly nourished my soul. When I speak of it I become animated and enthusiastic,” reports Galen Kauffman from Mountain Lake, Minnesota. “Such a trip gives me a sense that we are not in the world alone,” said Anita Breckbill of Lincoln, Nebraska. “God cares about all the world’s peoples.” Anita’s daughter, Hannah Breckbill, of Decorah, Iowa, “was inspired to think about how the survival of the Cofán people and the rainforest (and thus our planet) are intertwined. I want to move forward, practicing ways of intertwining my life with that of the earth around me.”





A covenant people:

## Responding to God's love

*By Nathan Luitjens,*

*Annual Meeting Task Group Chair*

*pastor, Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa*



It is sometimes hard to believe on a chilly morning in March, but spring is close at hand which also means we aren't far from the Central Plains Annual Meeting. In three months we will gather in Sioux Falls, South Dakota from June 15-18 at the Spirit of Peace United Church of Christ. This will, as always, be a wonderful time of worship, fellowship, learning, and yes, even some work. I have come to value these gatherings as a wonderful time to renew friendships, meet new people and interact with all of the many incredible people who make up our conference in all of its diversity.

The committee has been hard at work thinking about the direction to take our annual meetings for the next few years. Our themes for the next three years will reflect the work we have been doing on re-imagining our common life in Central Plains Mennonite Conference. To that end, over the next three years we will focus on what it means for us to be a covenant people. This year our theme will be, "A Covenant People: Responding to God's Love." We have been invited into a covenant with God and with others, a covenant that originates in God's unqualified love for us.

This year we have invited Meghan Good, the teaching pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona, to help us begin this journey by thinking through how we as a covenant people respond to the love that God offers. Meghan is a gifted speaker and writer and many of us participated in her webinar series on teaching the Bible last fall. Meghan is also a blogger and you can check out some of what she has written on her website: [mudpiegod.com](http://mudpiegod.com).

I am personally very excited about the Central Plains Annual Meeting this year and I hope to see many of you there.

## Transitions

**Corey Miller**, installed as pastor at Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD on February 12, 2017.

**Elaine Kauffman** retired as pastor at First Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake, MN effective February 28, 2017.

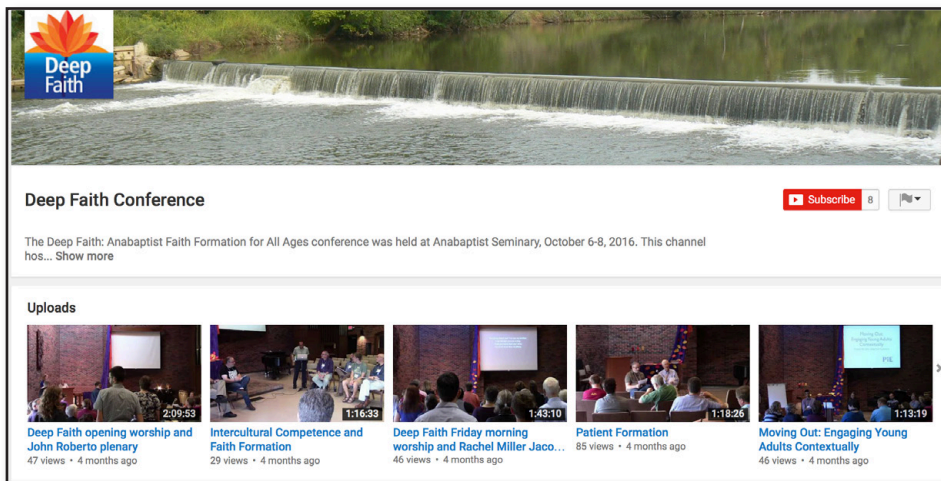
## Leaders Credentialed

**Michael Jinteh**, Licensed toward Ordination, March 12, 2017 at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, MN for his work as chaplain.



## Anabaptist Faith Formation resources

Find video highlights of the Deep Faith Conference workshops here:  
[www.youtube.com/channel/UCyMzI8k2M2iWAKuY7HP7dYQ](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyMzI8k2M2iWAKuY7HP7dYQ)



On the Anabaptist Faith Formation Network website is curriculum for teaching conscientious objection to youth: [www.anabaptistfaithformation.org/co-resources.html](http://www.anabaptistfaithformation.org/co-resources.html)

### Youth and Conscientious Objection

As a historic peace church, Mennonites have a long tradition of conscientious objection to military service. Before World War II, leaders of peace churches secured legal exemption from military service for anyone who "by reason of religious training and belief is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form."

Here are resources for churches to help their youth think through their beliefs on military service and help them prepare for the possibility of a draft.

Think in terms of leading a study on conscientious objection every year, alternating between *Ben's Story* and *Decide for Peace*. Don't worry about repeating this material with the same students; two years is a long time in a teen's life.

**For the Leaders**

**For the Youth**

On the Central Plains Mennonite Conference website are the video and discussion guides for the *Tuesdays with Dave* events. These can be useful for Sunday School, Bible Study or during a small group discussion time. [www.centralplainsmc.org/tuesdays-with-dave-2017.html#/news/](http://www.centralplainsmc.org/tuesdays-with-dave-2017.html#/news/)

### Tuesdays with Dave - 2017

This year's theme for Tuesdays with Dave was **Witness to a Better Place**. This series focused on how the life and witness of our churches can be infused with grace, joy and peace in a world seeking hope. These instructional videos are intended to stimulate conversation within your congregation and "open up" the questions about how our congregations can be effective in witness.

**Session 1: Witness in Exile: Longing for a better place (February 28)** [Video](#) [Discussion Guide](#)

How can the life and message of the church address people's longing for a better place? How can the church become a place where questions and doubts are welcomed and people are released to engage their neighbors in a ministry of

Find material for Sunday School, youth group, small group or Bible Study at [www.anabaptistfaithformation.org](http://www.anabaptistfaithformation.org). Hover over "Youth" then click on "Curriculum" or hover over "Adults" and click on "Curriculum."

# Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds April 2017

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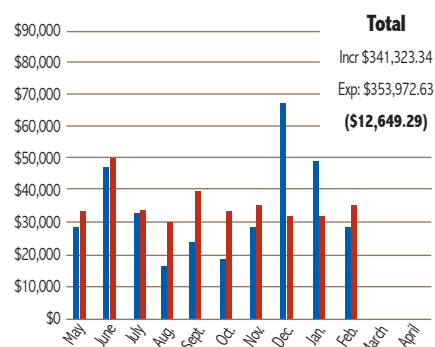
## FINANCES

The Central Plains budget experienced another strong January with a slight setback in February. There are two months until the end of the fiscal year and we continue to hope to end in the black. Income through February came in at \$341,323.34. Expenses are slightly lower than our expectations at \$353,972.63. As a result, an overall deficit for the fiscal year is \$12,649.29. We are thankful for the continued support of our conference and continue to see God's work in many different ways. Help us meet our budget and end the year in the black! — *Stewardship Task Group*

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2016/2017



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Central Plains Annual Meeting 2017** will take place June 15-18, 2017, in South Dakota.

**Mennonite Church USA Convention & Delegate Assembly** will take place  
July 4-8, 2017 in Orlando, Florida.



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