



# Scattered Seeds

Spring  
2024



Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

— John 14:5-6a

## ANNUAL MEETING 2024

### How can we know the way?

by Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister

At our Annual Meeting in York, Nebraska last year, we took up the question, “Where do we go from here?” We explored this question in light of a number of societal shifts in the last few years. The COVID pandemic simply sped up changes that were already taking place. In addition to larger trends in society, there have also been changes in our conference and our denomination that continue to raise this question for us.

We might wonder, will congregations continue to function as they have been, or will the church begin to adopt new models of church based on what the Holy Spirit is doing in and around them? How will the structures (conferences and denominations) that we have created to support these congregations need to change?

When people ask me what the future of the church will look like, I have to answer honestly and say, “I don’t know.” I have no doubt that the Church of Jesus Christ is going to survive and even thrive in the years to come. I just don’t know what form that thriving will take. Our challenge today is that the way forward for the church is not clear.

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# You're Invited!

Central Plains Mennonite Conference  
Annual Meeting 2024

**“How can we know the way?”**

Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA  
June 20-23, 2024

with Keynote Speaker

**Michele Hershberger**



**Keynote speaker:**  
**Michele Hershberger**  
Hesston College, KS

Each year delegates and guests (non-delegate members of CPMC and representatives from the wider church and church agencies) gather to worship, report, vote, discern, and fellowship together. YOU are invited to attend Central Plains Mennonite Conference's Annual Meeting—to listen and to share your voice as the conference discerns together how to best follow Jesus in our changing world.

In addition to delegate and worship sessions, this year at Annual Meeting you'll have the opportunity to experience the Crowded Closet Thrift Shop in Iowa City, attend workshops on Friday and Saturday on a variety of relevant topics, and fellowship in the great outdoors at Crooked Creek Christian Camp.

Visit our website for more information or to register. Early-bird registration goes through May 31. Registration closes on June 10.

[www.centralplainsmc.org](http://www.centralplainsmc.org)

# SCHEDULE

## Thursday, June 20

- 1:00 pm – Crowded Closet MCC Thrift Store, Iowa City, tour/shop/volunteer opportunity
- 5:00 pm – Registration - Sugar Creek Mennonite Church
- 7:00 pm – Opening Worship
- 8:00 pm – Ice Cream Social – Sponsored by Everence
- 8:15 pm – Youth gathering & Orientation

## Friday, June 21

- 8:30 am – Worship - Sugar Creek Mennonite Church
- 9:30 am – Break
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #1
- noon – Lunch
- 1:30 pm – Delegate Session #2
- 3:30 pm – Break
- 4:00 pm – Workshops
- 5:15 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal
- 7:30 pm – Evening activities

## Saturday, June 22

- 8:30 am – Worship - Sugar Creek Mennonite Church
- 9:30 am – Break
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #3
- noon – Lunch
- 1:30 pm – Delegate Session #4
- 3:30 pm – Break
- 4:00 pm – Workshops
- 5:15 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal – Crooked creek Christian Camp, Washington, IA

## Sunday, June 23

- 9:30 am – Closing Worship – Sugar Creek Mennonite Church



Join CPMC volunteers at the **Crowded Closet MCC Thrift Shop** in Iowa City before Annual Meeting officially begins. Learn about Crowded Closet, shop the racks or volunteer for a few hours!



Saturday evening we will experience nature and relaxed fellowship at **Crooked Creek Christian Camp** in nearby Washington, Iowa.

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Over the course of the last year, leaders from across the conference have taken part in a series of conversations called “Leaders Table.” In these conversations we have been addressing four questions:

1. Where is the church today and how did we get here?
2. What does the Bible have to say about times when God’s people found themselves in places they didn’t expect to be and how does God show up in those spaces?
3. What spiritual disciplines do we need to cultivate in order to recognize the way that God is at work in us and in the world around us?
4. What type of leaders do we need to become if we are going to lead people in this uncharted territory in which we find ourselves?

These have been great conversations and out of them some of our leaders have begun experiments addressing some of the challenges they are facing in their contexts.

As the Annual Meeting Task Group met to plan our gathering for 2024 the question that bubbled up was, “If we don’t know exactly where the Spirit is taking us, how can we know the way?” This question brought to mind the story in John 14 in which Thomas asks this very same question of Jesus.

In this story, we join Jesus and the disciples as Jesus has just finished washing his followers’ feet. He tells them that one of their own will soon betray him, that he is going away and they can’t follow, and finally, he suggests that even Peter will soon deny and abandon him. Jesus’ disciples had given up everything to follow him only to have him tell them that they can’t go with him. They are confused. Jesus leans into the confusion, telling them that they know the way to the place where he is going. Thomas asks the question that they (we) are all thinking, “If we don’t know where you are going, how can we know the way?” Jesus’ answer is both brilliant and confusing when he says, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

The way forward is embodied in the person of Jesus. As Mennonites who are committed to walking in the way of Jesus, this might make sense. But it is also a challenge. What does it even mean? We’ll explore this scriptural question and answer during our Annual Meeting by doing a deep dive into the book of John, both in worship and in Bible study in our delegate sessions.

We’ll be led by Biblical scholar, author, educator, Hesston College professor and communicator Michele Hershberger. Those who have had the opportunity to hear Michele preach or teach will remember her as someone who is deeply committed to telling the story of Jesus well. She is open, honest, vulnerable and imaginative as she seeks to bring the stories of Jesus to life for a 21st century audience.

In a recent conversation with Michele, she expressed enthusiasm about the choice to use the Gospel of John as the primary text for our Annual Meeting. She is intrigued by a number of the stories in John and wonders about their connections to the larger text and to our lives. She wonders about John 3 and its connection to the Old Testament story of the snakes. Is there a connection to our own need to confront the thing that is killing us? Or John 9 and the story of the man who was born blind. Jesus healed the man, even though it was the Sabbath. What does that mean for those of us who are seeking to follow him? The story of the feeding of the 5,000 in John is interesting because there is a little boy in that story who shares his lunch and Jesus takes the little that is offered and turns it into something abundant. What if we tie that together with the amazing “I am” statements in John, particularly when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life?” We can begin to get a picture of this amazing God who came to demonstrate that in God’s economy there is always more than enough. In John, Jesus is upending the world of the Jews. Michele noted that we need to remember when Jesus talks about being “born again,” he is talking to someone who is already part of the people of God and inviting him to experience the massive shift that comes when we follow Jesus.

We are living in a time of upheaval and disorientation for the church, but it is also a time of incredible opportunity. During our conversation Michele expressed appreciation that CPMC is working at and recognizing the need for change. She went on to say, “If Jesus wants to take the church to a brand-new level, something that you and I don’t know what it is, then we have to embrace the chaos that is now. You have to admit that the current system is failing, which is scary to say, but until you do, you’re relying on the old system and you can’t let the new thing be birthed.” I don’t know exactly where Jesus wants to take us, but I do know that the way forward will be found in the person of Jesus who is already at work in our midst. As we gather this year we will continue to discern what it means for our congregations and our conference to follow Jesus. May we all be in prayer as we prepare for our Annual Meeting, that we will be brave and that the way of Jesus will become more clear during our time together.



## It's a Myth

by Steve Griffin, Pastor of Bellwood Mennonite Church

Years ago, I read a book that challenged nearly every lofty ideal of American mythology I had imbibed since early childhood. My angry protestations, indelibly inscribed in its margins, display my then-offended sensibilities.

I could shelve the book, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* by Greg Boyd, but not its questions and claims:

Did Jesus say we should try to acquire the power of Caesar?

Did Jesus work to pass laws against the sinners he hung out with?

America has never looked remotely like Jesus.

A significant segment of American evangelicalism is guilty of nationalistic idolatry.

The book was written in 2006, and things have gotten worse since then. The downward spiral is evident in the rise of so-called “Christian nationalism” or, as I call it, “Americanity.”

The myth of a Christian nation emerges from an equally mythical “Christian nationalism.”

Why “mythical”? Let’s start with my definition of nationalism: Devotion to a heroic narrative of one’s country and its role in the world.

Nationalism is zeal for a story, not for a nation.

In this way, nationalism is very different from patriotism.

Patriotism is love and pride for one’s country, warts and all.

Nationalism is allegiance to an unblemished narrative about one’s country. No warts at all.

Thus, the “Christian nationalist” badgers school boards not over history but the narrative of history.

(This is one meaning of “myth”: a story that explains the way things are.)

Because “Christian nationalism” is loyalty to a narrative, not a nation, some “Christian nationalists” cavalierly call for civil war. They fantasize about destroying the actual country in which they live to create a fairytale kingdom that resides in their minds. The enemies of “Christian nationalists” are their fellow citizens who don’t subscribe to their story.

It’s this despising of perceived enemies and devotion to false narratives that lead me to put scare quotes around “Christian nationalism.”

Don’t get me wrong. Nationalism is real. Christian nationalism is a myth. I no more believe in “Christian nationalism” than “Christian Nazism” or “Christian Marxism.”

“Christian nationalists” don’t love their country too much. They love it too little.

The Jesus way is the way of love, especially for one’s enemies. I say especially because Jesus said love for one’s family and friends is perfectly natural and in no sense meritorious (Matthew 5:46). Therefore, Jesus’ followers are called to love their country. Truly, deeply love it.

Yet the Jesus way is also the way of the Kingdom of God above all other kingdoms. This is antithetical to the “Christian nationalist” mantra of America first. (“America first” is not a reference to the actual country but to the nationalist’s fanciful version of it.) Jesus isn’t American, and his kingdom is not the United States of America.

I can think of no greater antithesis to the myth of “Christian nationalism” than the truth of Jesus’ teachings.

*Article reprinted from Anabaptist World by permission of the author.*



# Sister Care Seminar to Laos

by Memee Yang

Possibilities are limited for Hmong women, who traditionally live under the supervision of their husbands. For those who are Christian and believe in God, life is less difficult. After I married my husband, we understood that God created both male and female in God's image. We believe that the husband is to oversee his wife, but this does not mean that he is in control; instead he should support and love her.

As I traveled among Hmong women in Southeast Asia, the question, "What is the point of living if my husband does not understand me?" came up again and again. In the spring of 2023, I did a three-day Sister Care seminar in Xiengkhouang, Laos. Around 38 women from three different provinces attended. These women shared their stories about what had been difficult in their marriage. Going through the seminar manual and exercises helped women learn how to forgive and how to protect themselves from harm. Before, many women felt no one could love them and there was no future for them in their families. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well helped to strengthen their faith and understand that they are each God's beloved daughter.

Some of the women tell me that Sister Care is like a river that runs through a dry creek so that dead trees can have a chance to grow again. One lady shared that Sister Care is like a fountain where thirsty people can go and draw water. Another says Sister Care is a clinical facility where women can go to heal their wounds.

This seminar changed many lives. Women shared about positive changes in the ways that they will love themselves. They will show themselves respect and honor as God's beloved child.

Thank you so much to my local church, Emmanuel Mennonite Church in the Twin Cities, and many of you for supporting me in bringing this seminar to the Hmong women in Southeast Asia.

## Transitions

**Gene Miller** ended as interim pastor at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD, on Dec. 31, 2023, and began as interim pastor at Wood River (Neb.) Mennonite Church, on Jan. 7, 2024.

**Bob Brown** ended as pastor at Cedar Falls (Iowa) Mennonite Church, Jan. 7, 2024.

**Eugene Thieszen** retired from ministry as a pastor, Jan. 23, 2024.

**Spencer Bradford** installed as lead pastor at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD, Feb. 18, 2024.

## Deaths

**Martha Corpus Hernandez**, pastor at Iglesia Menonita Centro Cristiana, Washington, IA, died Mar. 11, 2024.





## Obituary for CPMC Pastor

**Martha Corpus Hernandez**  
December 9, 1957 — March 11, 2024  
Washington, Iowa

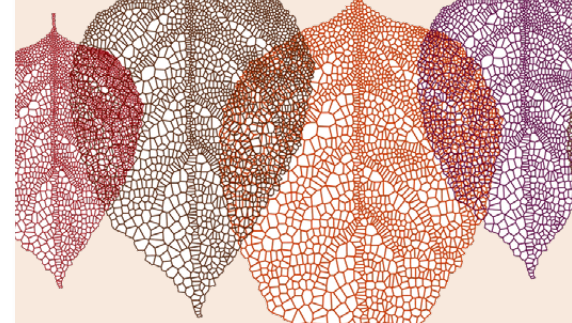
Martha Corpus Hernandez., age 66, of Washington, Iowa, passed away on Monday, March 11, 2024, surrounded by her family. Funeral Services were held Saturday, March 16, 2024.

Martha was born December 9, 1957, in Linares Nuevo Leon, Mexico, the daughter of Dionisio Corpus and Hortensia Munoz. Martha graduated from Goshen College in Indiana. She was united in marriage to Ramiro Hernandez on April 2, 1977, in Chicago, Illinois.

Martha was the Pastor at Iglesia Centro Christiano for several years. She was the facilitator of Bible Classes and Secretary for the Instituta Biblico Anabaptista (Anabaptist Biblical Institute) where she trained church leaders and pastors. Martha served as the coordinator for the Hispanic Women’s Conference and participated on the Board of Directors for the Hispanic Mennonite Church. She spent many hours filling bags with hats, gloves and blankets and distributing them to those in need. She was a servant of God and would help anyone in need. She enjoyed preaching, worshiping and singing. She was a Prayer Warrior. Martha enjoyed cooking and selling her products to buy presents for her grandchildren.

She is survived by her husband, Ramiro of Washington, Iowa; son, Junior E. Hernandez and wife Anna of Fort Madison, Iowa; son, Eli E. Hernandez and wife Melanie of Elkhart, Indiana; daughter, Lisa K. Knuth and husband Tom of Harrisburg, South Dakota; 10 grandchildren and six siblings: Magdalena Orellana, Dionisio Corpus, Laura Vazquez, Ernesto Corpus, Elsa Corpus and Elisa Vazquez.

Martha was preceded in death by her parents.



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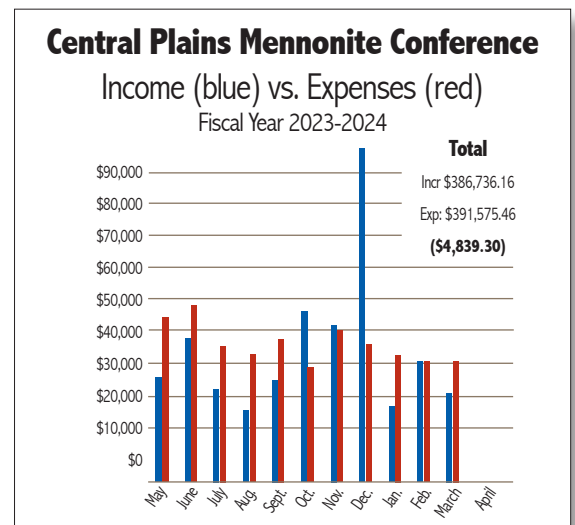
## FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '23-'24 currently has a negative balance with one more month to go in the current fiscal year. However, we feel confident that with the great support of the churches and individuals of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, we will be able to finish the year with a positive balance. Total income for the first eleven months was \$386,736.16 while expenses were \$391,575.46. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$4,839.30 for our '23-'24 budget. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— Stewardship Task Group

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**CPMC Annual Meeting** in Iowa with speaker Michelle Hershberger, June 20-23, 2024.



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