



# Scattered Seeds

August  
2017



Left: Emberlynn Nolt, Tim Springer, Courtney Nolt, Alyssa Nolt, Jareya Harder, Daniel Harder. Right: Meghan Good.

## Annual Meeting 2017

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...for God is love.

— 1 John 4:7-8

## The theme “A Covenant People: Responding to God’s Love” prompts stories of how we are living out our covenant

by Susan Janzen, pastor

Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa



Baptismal waters from across Central Plains Mennonite Conference were poured together into a font at the opening worship for Annual Meeting, June 15-18 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

At the closing worship, these same waters, now mingled, were dispersed back to congregations as a reminder of our common commitment to Christ through baptism.

The theme for the weekend was “A Covenant People: Responding to God’s Love,” and much of the conversation at Annual Meeting centered on how we are living out the covenant we entered with one another a year ago. Hosted by Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, a spirit of peace and a sense of unity hovered over the gathering held in the appropriately-named Spirit of Peace United Church of Christ.

The presence of the Spirit was evident throughout the event, from a meeting on Thursday afternoon for pastors to review revised

sexual misconduct policies, to deep sharing about spiritual practices around delegate tables, to inspiring worship and preaching, a wide-ranging slate of workshops, the presence of exuberant children and youth, and many opportunities for hospitality and fellowship.

**“The presence of the Spirit was evident throughout ...”**

Attendees worshiped together five times, beginning and ending the gathering with communion. Christopher Montgomery, pastor at Sermon on the Mount, led worship, and on three occasions, Meghan Good, teaching pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona, preached.

Two of the worship services were contemplative in nature, with readings, prayers, singing, and scriptural reflection. Saturday evening vespers included an invitation to anointing and prayer for healing.

In her first sermon, Meghan Good commended Mennonites for taking Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount seriously, but lamented that the weight of impossible expectations can leave us flailing in a whirlpool of guilt and judgment.

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"If we suspect that deep down we're not good enough, we're pretty sure our neighbors aren't good enough either," she noted, adding that we can take comfort in a God who does not do math, but rather offers us an unconditional covenant through Jesus' blood.

The second time she spoke, Good invited participants to help illustrate Jesus' parables about sheep and shepherds in Luke 15 and John 10 by coming forward to form a "flock." As she reflected on the vulnerability of sheep that wander from the flock, as well as the vulnerability of a flock without a shepherd, she sent people back to their seats until there were just a few people standing. How fortunate we are, she exclaimed, to have a God who is not going home without the lost sheep! God expects the same tenacity from us, she added, suggesting that we're called to be a "herd of shepherds."

In her final sermon on Sunday morning, Good reminded the gathered body that we are not only followers of Christ, but that through our baptism we are, in fact, "Christians," which literally means "little Christs." Like Peter and John who healed a man lame from birth in Acts 3, we ought to expect the unexpected as we carry on in his name. Christian faith is not passive, she exhorted; it is active and requires our participation. That's the power of Pentecost, she concluded, because the same Spirit that was in Jesus is now living in us.

Delegates heard reports on the ministries of our conference, as well as of Mennonite Church USA and related organizations. As part of his report on God's work through Central Plains, David Boshart noted that four congregations chose to leave the conference this year. In summarizing staff evaluations, assistant moderator Sid Burkey offered "fruitful, rich gratitude" to the ministry staff for "sharing servant lives."

Luis Tapia, pastor of Quito Mennonite Church in Ecuador, brought a message from our Latin American brothers and sisters, and Rod Hollinger-Janzen related how the conflict in Congo is affecting Mennonite congregations there. In response, delegates affirmed a letter to the churches in Congo promising fervent prayer and material support from the people of Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

In some lighter moments, attendees donned party hats, burst confetti "poppers" and munched on monster cookies baked by our ministry staff to celebrate the abundance of God's provision. We met our 2016-17 spending plan with enough income to cover expenses rather than retain the \$20,000 deficit expected when the plan was adopted last year. Not only that, enough money was raised to replace the conference's 2005 Honda Accord with a 2014 Toyota Camry.

In another light moment, the Listening Committee "complained" about how few people had talked with them, leaving them to end their report with a call for everyone to go out and "be the gospel."

The sessions ended with parting words from out-going moderator Margie Mejia Caraballo and an invitation to gather next June in Nebraska.

### Our Covenant Practices

Worship God together • Pray, fast, give generously • Study the Bible together • Accept and offer hospitality • Study the Bible with neighbors and strangers • Make peace with everyone



Top to bottom: Josias Hansen pours baptismal water into the community pitcher. Willis Busenitz, Aiden Risingsun, Gensyn and Joedes Emerson; Moderator Margie Mejia Caraballo; Conference members sing during worship.

Find many more great Annual Meeting photos at [www.centralplainsmc.org!](http://www.centralplainsmc.org!)



## Stories told at tables reflect our deep desire to be close to God

by Lois Janzen Preheim

Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota



In recent years, our conference has used a table-talk format to organize delegate time together. Using open-ended questions and a talking piece, delegates often share stories. For me, these conversations and stories stay with me much longer than what we do in the business meetings or the worship sessions.

This year the table-talk questions were designed for staff and delegates hearing how congregations are putting the covenant agreed to last year into practice. Tables were to begin with a story about when we experienced God's unqualified love, when we submitted to God's purpose, when we were transformed, or knew the power of the Holy Spirit moving in our lives.

Two of us at my table had had powerful experiences of the Holy Spirit's presence after a season of study of the Spirit's work in the Bible and then a time of sustained prayer. Our parallel experiences happened on two different continents—Africa and South America. Both occasions of study and prayer led to results that the people praying could not have produced on their own.

Later, as the table groups came to the mike to disclose bits of their table discussions, it became clear that other groups also experienced the same sorts of recognition of God's presence, prodding of the Holy Spirit, and inspiration from memories of God's past activity that my table had.

How and why are these stories so powerfully restorative? I don't know, but they are. I always go away refreshed and strengthened, happy to know that my congregation is not the only place where God is present and

operating. I go away appreciating other people's faith and experience.

While all the congregations in our conference have their own personalities and routines, they each also have things happening that produce a much larger and most interesting whole.

Shawn Nolt, pastor of Salem Mennonite in Shickley, Nebraska, told how studying the Bible prayerfully and specifically using the covenant study guide had built additional closeness and trust among those participating.

Andrea Nussbaum told how Washington (Iowa) Mennonite spent a series of Sunday morning worship services focusing on a variety of prayer practices. Many appreciated the intentional use of quiet, reflective time during worship.

Nick Detweiler-Stoddard shared how a few folks at Salem Mennonite near Freeman, South Dakota, gather for prayer once a month. People attending found it initially uncomfortable to pray out loud together but with persistence and consistent focus, this is getting easier. He said the group also is trying fasting but this is proving to be harder.

All three speakers agreed that using the six practices as a way to plan and look at congregational life has proved helpful.

I thought all the sharing at the microphones throughout the conference reflected a deep desire to be closer to God, to experience God's power addressing the many needs of our country and our world, and to be deeply honest in practicing our faith in our communities. I heard several calls for unity and peace among us as well as a desire for peace in the world.



Left to right: Suzanne Nolt ponders how to pop a popper with one hand when table groups celebrated God's abundant provision with party hats, poppers and monster cookies; Clara Koerner shares from her table discussions; Sid Burkey was installed as our new moderator.



Left to right: Terry Shue of Mennonite Church USA staff leads a prayer for David Boshart as he prepares to become moderator of Mennonite Church USA (a volunteer role). Luis Tapia, recently pastor of Quito Mennonite Church in Ecuador, preaches on the story in Acts of the boy falling from the window while Linda Shelly of MMN translates.

## Annual Meeting 2017

# Inspired preaching and a call to prayer

by Holly Blosser Yoder

West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa



Visitors and stories from Ecuador, Venezuela and Congo connected delegates with international brothers and sisters during delegate sessions at Annual Meeting 2017.

### Powerful Preaching by a Partner

Representing the Ecuador Partnership, Pastor Luis Tapia, as well as Peter Wigginton and Delicia Bravo and their two children, participated in the conference meetings.

Tapia has served three years in Quito and plans to study at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, this fall. As part of the Saturday afternoon delegate session, Tapia preached from Acts, exploring the story of the youth who, sitting in a window during a long night of preaching, fell from an upper story to the ground.

“A tragedy which also makes us laugh,” Tapia said, as translated by Mennonite Mission Network’s (MMN) Latin American Director, Linda Shelly. “We’ve all been there, trying to stay awake until the preacher is finished,” he explained.

“Does the Christian message really produce sleepiness and death?” Tapia asked, noting that “we have been witnesses to the loss of youth in the church,” and asking, “Is the message to them just boring and out of date?” Tapia said that Paul’s response demonstrates that the message is not just talk. He goes down, stretches himself over the youth, and pronounces good news to all.

Later, Conference Minister for Outreach and Service, David Boshart, thanked Tapia for his message and

described the sermon as “a taste of the inspired preaching that the Mennonite Church in Quito has had under Luis’s leadership.”

### Hardships and Hope in Venezuela

Boshart also reported on the ministry in Venezuela, which is an outgrowth of the conference’s partnership with Colombia and MMN for ministry in Ecuador. With reference to the current political and economic challenges faced by Venezuelans, Boshart described the ministry in Venezuela as the outgrowth of seeds that were planted years ago, went fallow, and have now taken root “for such a time as this.” Precarious governance, political protests, riots, and food shortages are regular features of life for Venezuelan brothers and sisters at this time.

“We are getting an opportunity to participate in a movement that is bringing hope in the midst of this crisis,” said Boshart.

### Letter to Congolese Brothers and Sisters

Delegates approved a letter to Mennonite Church of Congo leader Pastor Komuesa Kalunga Adolphe, offering prayers and pledging to ask “our congregations to be in fervent prayer for you, our Mennonite brothers and sisters in Congo; and to respond to your material needs through contributions” to Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and Mennonite Central Committee. “Please know that you are held in our hearts and in our prayers. We stand with you in your struggle for peace,” the letter stated.



## Children show God's love in creative ways

by Amanda Montgomery

Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Children at Annual Meeting explored the theme, "God's Unqualified Love for Us," in age-appropriate ways through story, crafts, study, games, and service. On Friday, each age group read *Plant A Kiss* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal about a little girl who plants a kiss in the ground. Her love grew and she shared it with everyone she knew. Upon returning to her plant, she discovered that her love had grown exponentially. We used this book to illustrate how just as God continually shows love for us, we can show our love to everyone and everything.

The older kids took turns making heart shaped salt-dough creations (hard ornaments) as donations for LifeScape residents. We delivered these hearts to the residents on Saturday and helped them paint, decorate cards, and add ribbons as Father's Day gifts.

The children who are residents at LifeScape have severe developmental delays, many of whom are confined to wheelchairs and/or are nonverbal. For most of our children, this was their first encounter with differently-abled people. The children did an amazing job moving past their own insecurities to spend time with those who are often seen as outcasts in our society.

From LifeScape, we picnicked at a park before learning about endangered species at Outdoor Campus. The children learned about an endangered species that originates from the Plains – the black footed ferret. We played an informational game, watched a video, and made a craft. As we learned about the effects of our actions on the ecosystem, we saw how we can care for the environment and the animals within.

From the volunteers to the children who attended this year's Annual Meeting, God's love was shown in the helping hands, willing spirits, and shouting and laughing. It truly was an amazing time!



## Welcome signs customized for Central Plains

The Peace and Justice Task Group of Central Plains invites you to add a new welcome sign to your yard. Many welcome signs have popped up in our communities that declare, "No matter where you are from, we're glad you're our neighbor."

We have developed signs that include the languages of our conference. These bigger 24"x 24" signs include the welcome in not only the Spanish, English and Arabic, but also Cheyenne and Hmong.

If 25 people want the signs, the price will then go down from \$32 to \$23 each. We are half-way there! These are one-sided signs and include a wire stand. If you would like a sign, email Jane Yoder-Short at [wilmajane17@gmail.com](mailto:wilmajane17@gmail.com) or call her at 319-683-2547.

We will try to use the Mennonite connection delivery system to get signs to you. Please contact Jane by August 31.



## Transitions

**Pam Gerig Unruh** began as interim pastor at Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, Iowa in November 2016.

**S. Roy Kaufman and Lois Janzen Preheim** are providing interim leadership at First Mennonite in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, as of March 2017.

Update: **Ben Waddington** remains the pastor at Ashland Christian Fellowship in Ashland, Montana

**Pulaski Mennonite Church**, Pulaski, Iowa, voted to leave Central Plains and Mennonite Church USA effective August 1.

## Seminary Graduates

**Corben Boshart** of Wellman, Iowa, earned a Master of Arts: Theological Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. As of mid-July, he was candidating for a pastoral position in Ohio. He is a member of West Union Mennonite Church and the son David and Shana Boshart.

**Ben Woodward Breckbill** of Belfast, Northern Ireland, earned a Master of Divinity degree at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He has accepted a position as associate pastor at Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, Kansas. He is a member of First Mennonite Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, and is the son of Anita and the late David Breckbill.

**Kate Friesen** of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, earned a Master of Divinity degree from Sioux Falls Seminary. She is a member of Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD, and is the daughter of Monica Clem.

**Kelsey McDougal Guckenberger** of Eugene, Oregon, earned a Master of Divinity from Duke University Divinity School. She is pursuing a pastoral position. She is the daughter of Kent and Julie McDougal of Christ Community Church in Des Moines.

**Caley Ortman** of Freeman, South Dakota, earned a Master of Divinity degree at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He has accepted a position as director of youth and outreach at First Mennonite Church in Reedley, California. A member of Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, his parents are Stan and Gwen Ortman.

## Annual Meeting 2017

### The church at work inter-generationally—to the glory of God

*by Nathan Ramer, pastor*

*Wellman Mennonite Church, Wellman, Iowa*



Half-a-dozen teenagers and young adults are spread out across the church lawn, tossing a Frisbee amongst themselves in random sequence. One young man jumps as the disc sails over his outstretched fingers. They share an inside joke and laugh as he goes to fetch it.

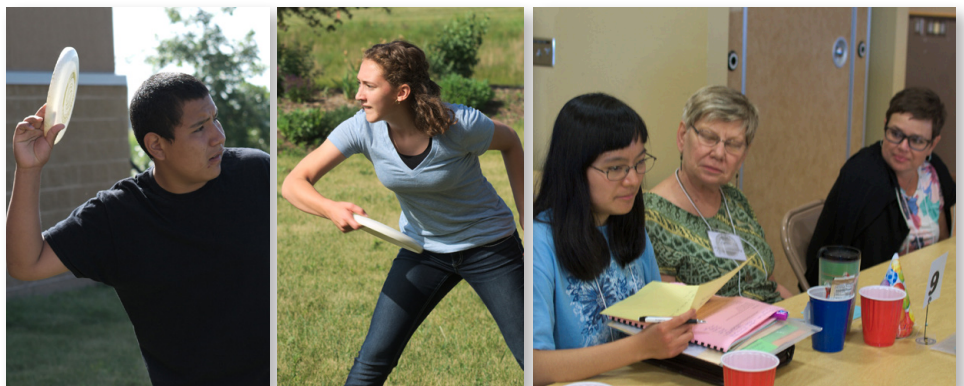
This may appear to be a typical summer depiction of young people at leisure, but these particular men and women are not on vacation; they are merely on break. Those in the Frisbee circle, along with more of their peers, are serving their home congregations and Central Plains Mennonite Conference by participating in Annual Meeting as “youth delegates.”

What are youth delegates? They are a lot like regular congregational delegates, only... younger. Every congregation in Central Plains is invited to send one. Each youth delegate is paired with an experienced mentor to help orient them to the delegate process and encourage participation. They are given the needed time to come into their own voice and they have their own “hang out” room to decompress in after a long day of meetings.

Otherwise, they function in much the same way and carry the same responsibilities as all the other delegates. The major distinction might be that while adults grab coffee and fellowship inside between sessions, the youth delegates are more likely to grab the disc and fellowship outside.

As the delegate body is called back to order, the Frisbee is dropped and the youth return to their assigned tables. As the days of Annual Meeting unfold, they share their opinions in round-table discussion. They ask challenging questions. They vote on conference matters such as the budget and filling leadership positions. They interact with conference ministers and share their observations. They worship “in spirit and in truth” as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ’s body.

This is the Church, doing its work inter-generationally to the glory of God: older and younger, wisdom and enthusiasm, prayers and perspectives, experience and freshness all passing back and forth around the circle in free exchange. Like a game of Frisbee?



Left to right: Aiden Risingsun, Alyssa Nolt, Lily Kauffman, Barb Tieszen, Paula Martin.



## Help for Sunday School and Bible study leaders

This fall, we will again offer—free of charge—three webinars to train teachers in how to lead a Bible study. Two of our covenant practices involve studying the Bible together, so we want to equip our members to facilitate Bible studies.



Our presenter will be Keith Slater, a Sunday School teacher and member at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa. Keith is experienced in teaching Bible study methods and how to interpret the Bible. He has worked for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and SIL International. With his wife, Kate, and children, Jesse and Elizabeth, he lived in China from 2000 to 2014.

The series will be called, **Open the Book: Practical tips for leading Bible study**. Session titles are based on Nehemiah 8 when Ezra read the Book of the Law to the Israelites as they returned from exile. The sessions will be offered on three Tuesdays: September 26, October 24 and November 28.

Session 1, *Don't Mourn or Weep: Goals and problems*, will focus on the goal of Bible study and the role of the leader. It will also cover common problems we encounter in leading groups.

Session 2, *Listen Closely: Facilitating good discussion*, will cover the things you do to lead a discussion well.

Session 3, *A Unified Purpose: Preparing to lead*, will give guidance on how to prepare by doing some background study, develop your theme, and write discussion questions.

More information will be sent to churches via bulletin announcements and inserts. Sign up and find more details at [www.centralplainsmc.org/bible-study-webinars-2017](http://www.centralplainsmc.org/bible-study-webinars-2017).

Faith formation resources for all ages



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

Suggestions for Sunday School curriculum for children, youth and adults  
Ideas for faith talk at home • prayer practices • podcasts • online devos

# Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds August 2017

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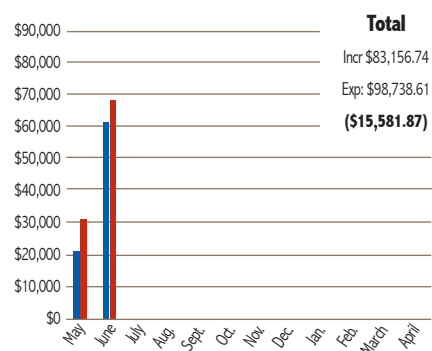
The Central Plains budget couldn't quite meet expenses in May and June, the first two months of the new fiscal year. Income through June came in at \$83,156.74. Expenses came in higher at \$98,738.61, but this is primarily caused by Annual Meeting expenses which is a normal trend for the month of June. As a result, we start the fiscal year with a deficit of \$15,581.87. We are thankful for the continued support, the energy experienced at Annual Meeting and your contributions into the work of Central Plains!

— Stewardship Task Group

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2017/2018



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Conference Board and Committees** will meet together September 15-16 in South Dakota.

**Fall Women's Retreat** will take place September 16-17 at Swan Lake Christian Camp in South Dakota.

**Bible study webinars** will take place on September 26, October 24 and November 28.



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