



Scattered Seeds

August
2022

“... [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him... They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’”

— Luke 24:30-32

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Photo by Carol Eisenbeis

COME TO THE TABLE: ANNUAL MEETING 2022 REVIEW

A letter to our delegates and congregations

by your Conference Ministers

We give thanks for all the delegates and guests who “[came] to the table” as the CPMC delegate body for our Annual Meeting in Freeman, SD, from June 16-19, 2022. We asked a lot of our delegates, and they were more than up to the task. Rather than listening to business and reports, most of the weekend’s delegate sessions were spent in discussion and Bible study around tables.

As our delegates and guests gave time and energy to discussions about the past, present and future of CPMC, the spirit in the room was amazing. It was so good to be together! It was clear that we have missed one another and the connections that we make when we can be present in the same space for worship, fellowship, communion, and discernment.

The weekend, and each day, began with worship. We (the Conference Ministers) were the input speakers and we preached table fellowship scriptures from Luke that, along with help from the Freeman area worship team and daily Communion, helped to set the stage for delegate discernment around tables.

On Friday morning we spent time thinking about stories and perspectives we each bring to the table, and how those things affect the way we talk about the church. Friday afternoon we talked about our experiences in the church, spending time reflecting on what we value about our congregation and our congregation’s connection to other churches and to the conference. On Saturday morning we worked at determining

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what things are important to us, and reflected on how our differences can be difficult, but how those same differences can also give us energy for transformation as we grow to become more like Jesus. On Saturday afternoon we asked delegates what they would be taking home from this meeting. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, with many delegates noting the feelings of connection and cohesion they felt in the delegate body.

We spent a significant amount of our delegate time in Bible study as we engaged questions about who was around the table with Jesus, what motivated them, and how Jesus responded. In our final Bible study, we explored the transformation that takes place when we make space for Jesus and allow him to be at work in people's lives.

We solicited feedback from each delegate session during the weekend, and our out-going moderator, John Murray, summarized some of the things we heard.

-First, there was clear affirmation that just as in our past and present, our future together should remain centered on Jesus.

-There was also a clear theme of finding ways to increase our connection across conference. Over the next year, our work will focus on maintaining the connections we have and building new ones through various initiatives and projects. We heard:

*Numerous calls for a framework of partner/sister congregational relationships. Amanda will be working to facilitate those relationships in the coming weeks and months.

*A clear desire for finding places for shared service. Working together increases our connections.

*Visits from Conference staff/representatives continue to be important.

*A desire for updated ways of communicating. The board has committed to a communications audit to determine next steps.

In addition to reviewing our formal communications, it's also clear that improving our communication will require work on both ends. Setting up better patterns for communication will mean that we will ask congregations to be in dialogue with us, helping us to share information, requesting needed resources, and offering ideas about how staff/committees can best serve congregations.

There is much more information in the responses we received from delegates and it will take us some time to work through it all and engage with it. There are some differences among us that are inviting us into long-term discernment together as we seek to understand who Jesus is calling us to be and the way Jesus is inviting us to follow. Our work is not done.

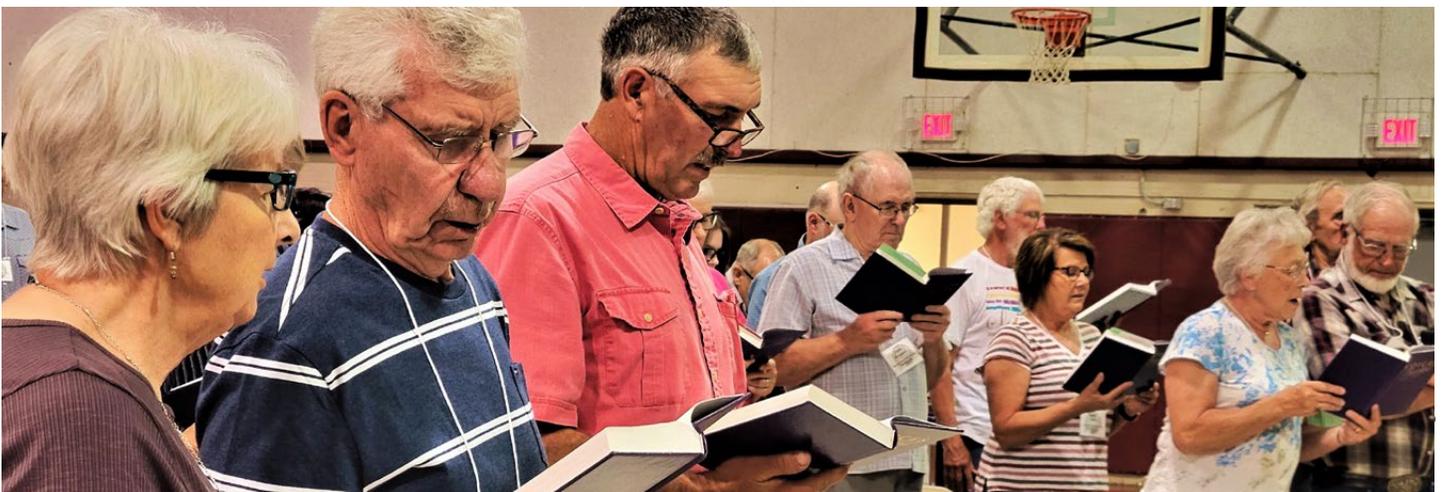
Nor is our work just beginning. We give thanks for the ongoing discernment of our congregations and delegates, and for the ways in which God is present and working in our congregations and in our conference. We are grateful for all those who "[came] to the table," and we are looking forward to new opportunities to partner with our 46 member congregations over the next year and beyond.

Thanks for a great Annual Meeting!

Conference Ministers, Nathan Luitjens, Susan Janzen,
Amanda Bleichy

Photos by Amanda Bleichy and Carol Eisenbeis







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Student peace videos

In 2021-22, a New Ministries Grant was given to the Peace and Justice Task Group to award money to those motivated students who filmed an interview with someone of a different generation who has worked for peace.

You can find these videos on the Central Plains Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7tT0DDUia0EJ0eUtiPoqFQ>

We hope that as you use them in worship or faith formation spaces, they will inspire others to interview (and to BE) peacemakers!

Celebrations!

During Annual meeting, we celebrated Willis and Nadine Busentiz's retirement after 50 years of ministry in the White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana. We give thanks for their faithful ministry!

The peace mug was awarded to Joe Walks-Along Jr. for a life of peacemaking on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Joe is the pastor of Lame Deer Mennonite Church. Joe was nominated by Willis Busentiz.

We also celebrated our ability to fellowship together in-person after two years of online-only Annual Meetings! We celebrated with an ice cream social and a bluegrass concert!

CPMC imaginative art sale

As part of an initiative to increase our imaginative capacity, artists from across the conference were invited to create imaginative art based on scripture to be showcased in a series of thematic Scattered Seeds. At our Annual Meeting in June, we held a silent auction for these works of art. Half of the proceeds of this auction will go to the artists who so generously donated their time, talents and imaginations to the conference, and half will go to a CPMC mission project. This year, the project we've chosen will be "supporting our Partners in Venezuela."

The auction raised \$1,980, so \$990 will go to "Supporting our Partners in Venezuela," and \$990 will be split between our artists.

A big thank you to our artists for contributing to our conference in this way, and to those who bid on and purchased art, for supporting our artists and our partners in Venezuela.

If you'd like to be or nominate a CPMC featured artist, contact Amanda Bleichy (amandableichy@centralplainsmc.org)

Sister congregations in CPMC

We heard a lot of affirmation for starting a "sister congregation" program. Amanda Bleichy is working on this initiative. If you would like your congregation to participate in this conference-wide initiative, please urge your congregational leaders to fill out the three question survey that was sent to them this month! If you have questions or ideas about this project, please contact Amanda Bleichy (amandableichy@centralplainsmc.org) for more information.





CPMC quiz

Youth Delegates gathered on Friday evening to get to know each other and learn more about conference. One of the ways that they learned about CPMC is through a quiz—how do you know CPMC?

1. What does CPMC stand for?
 - a. Collective Pie Makers and Cooks
 - b. Central Peace Makers Club
 - c. Central Plains Mennonite Conference
 - d. Cookies, Pie, Muffins and Cake
2. How many congregations are in CPMC?
 - a. 18
 - b. 29
 - c. 46
 - d. 52
3. Which 7 states make up CPMC?
4. T/F We gather for Annual meeting every 2 years.
5. The approximate combined age of the three conference ministers is:
 - a. 145
 - b. 210
 - c. 100
 - d. 160
6. The point of Annual Meeting is to:
 - a. Do the business of the conference.
 - b. Fellowship with people from other congregations.
 - c. Get inspired by stories of what other people and churches are doing.
 - d. Have meaningful experiences together.
7. (Youth) Delegate responsibilities include:
 - a. Reporting back to their congregations.
 - b. Getting Amanda coffee whenever she needs it.
 - c. Poking table-mates if they fall asleep.
 - d. Participating in conversation around the table.

Answer Key

1.c. 2.c. 3. Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin. 4.F. We gather every year for Annual Meeting. 5.a. 6.All answers are correct. 7.a+d (but also b+c).



From the coast and from the mountains: Three Mennonite Conferences in Ecuador celebrate fellowship

by Holly Blosser Yoder, West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa

Three Mennonite conferences in Ecuador gathered for a retreat outside Quito May 20-22. Through educational games, worship, meals, and prayer together, the approximately 90 participants—mostly from Quito, Riobamba, and cities along the coast—reflected on the themes of unity from Ephesians 4:3-6.

Representatives of the three conferences—IEME (Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Ecuador), ICME (Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador), and ICAME (Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador)—have had few previous opportunities to meet together for mutual support and fellowship. Separated by geography, history and culture, the three groups nevertheless blended together in fellowship.

Describing the dynamics of the event, Alexandra Meneses of Quito Mennonite Church reflected, “All of us were included in a community space of learning and communion, wanting to discover more of the ties that unite us, of the challenges to achieve this much-desired unity, of the steps we have taken and of those that are still before us, of our strengths and weaknesses as Anabaptist churches, and of our diversity as mestizo, indigenous, coastal, sierra, Quichua- and Spanish-speaking churches.” Meneses serves as co-coordinator of the ICAME Project for People who are Refugees and in Human Mobility.

Diego Noe Pusay Villarroel of Iglesia Columna de Verdad (ICME) highlighted “times of praising God together—including in the Quichua language—sermons, activities and workshops focused on Anabaptist unity and identity.” He noted the “very short time” in which the group “managed to break down any barriers that existed.”

As part of exploring the theme, workshop leaders led a series of games demonstrating the power of cooperation, and then reviewed Mennonite World Conference’s (MWC) seven shared convictions. Reflecting on the implications for his church, Pusay Villarroel remarked, “The shared convictions described by the Mennonite World Conference...open the doors for us to identify ourselves with something much bigger than what we can imagine in our small cities hidden in the Andes.”

Meals together in the center’s dining hall and a “cultural night” for sharing of talents on Saturday evening complemented the schedule of workshops, prayer and Bible study. Ramon Guevarra, pastor of Iglesia Columna de Verdad, served as emcee for the cultural night. Afterwards he commented, “It was a blessing to be able to laugh and to share with everybody. The opportunity to get to know each other and to interact, we should never go without that. It gave me the opportunity to get to know more Mennonite brothers and sisters.”

Ivonne Mendoza Mora of Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Jesús el Buen Pastor (IEME) in Guayaquil said, “I cannot help but be amazed to see how much love

Leaders credentialed

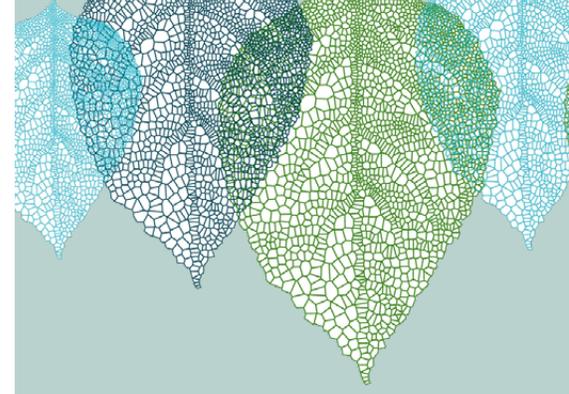
Laurel Swartzendruber was licensed toward ordination on June 26 at Wayland Mennonite Church, IA, for her ministry as a Hospice Chaplain.

Transitions

Donna Stucky, St. Paul, MN, retired from chaplaincy in November 2021.

Barbara Tieszen, Yankton, SD, retired from chaplaincy in April 2022.

Rachelle Luitjens resigned as pastor at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA on July 3, 2022.



the Lord pours out for us, his children, through each reflection, the times of intercession and worship, and even in the times of relaxation.” Together with Guevarra and Alexandra Meneses, Mendoza Mora was one of three speakers, representing each of the three conferences, who brought the message at the final worship and communion service Sunday morning.

Participants spent some of their time together brainstorming ways the three conferences might cooperate in the future. “The 2016 earthquake and also the pandemic have been occasions in which the conferences have related and supported each other in the past,” according to Linda Shelly of Mennonite Mission Network.

Helping to provide a relational link among the three groups is Peter Wigginton who, together with his wife Delicia Bravo, serve as coordinators for the Ecuador Partnership, which is composed of Mennonite Mission Network, Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia (IMCOL), and CPMC. Recognizing the value of relationships, Mission Network encourages broad participation in national and regional events. “This was a wonderful opportunity for the church conferences, as well as the partnership, to get to know each other better,” Shelly commented.

Nathan Luitjens, Conference Minister for Central Plains Mennonite Conference, along with Holly Blosser Yoder of West Union Mennonite Church (Parnell, Iowa), participated as delegates from CPMC. Reflecting on the retreat, Luitjens said, “The thing that struck me was how much worshipping together, eating together, and beginning to think about ways we can cooperate—what might some of that look like—was a healthy way and a hopeful way of thinking about their relationship. It’s not that they’re going to agree on everything but they can find ways to be together.”

Note: Participant quotes have been translated from Spanish.

Scattered Seeds

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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '22-'23 ends the first two months with a negative balance. Total income for May was \$31,600.80 and for June was \$27,333.62. Expenses for May were \$32,959.77 and for June were \$42,815.35. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$16,840.70 after two months for our '22-'23 budget. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— Stewardship Task Group

UPCOMING EVENTS

Spanish language pastor/elder/deacon regional meeting, September 17, Quad Cities, *tentative*

Pastor/elder/deacon regional meeting, September 24, Nebraska, *tentative*

Healthy Boundaries training for pastors, October 11, 9:00-4:30, Emmanuel MC, Lauderdale, MN

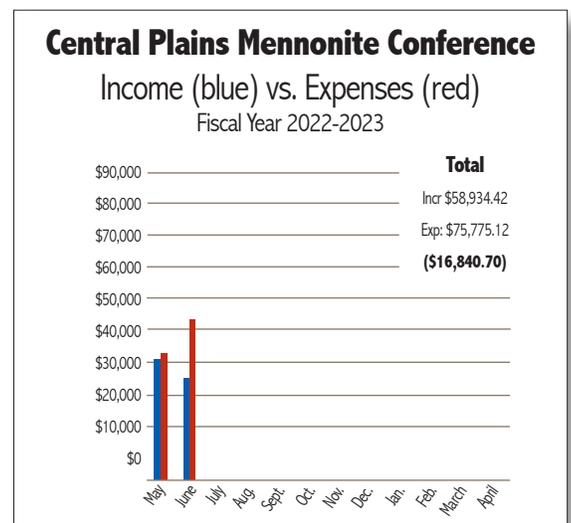
Healthy Boundaries training for pastors, October 13, 9:00-4:30, Bellwood MC, Milford, NE

Healthy Boundaries training for pastors, October 15, 9:00-4:30, East Union MC, Kalona, IA

Pastor/elder/deacon regional meeting, October 22, Mt. Lake, MN, *tentative*

Council of Committees, November 11-12, East Union MC, Kalona, IA

Pastor/elder/deacon regional meeting, November 19, Iowa, *tentative*



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