



Scattered Seeds

February
2020

"We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope."

— *Thess. 1:2-3*

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Reflections as an Interim Leader

by Marcia Yoder-Schrock

As of January 31, Marcia Yoder-Schrock and Firman Gingerich have ended their six-month terms as Interim Co-Executive Conference Ministers of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Here are some of their reflections on their time in Central Plains leadership.



Serving in an administrative role for the last six months gives me a different perspective, yet confirms my sense of who we are—47 Mennonite congregations scattered across the prairies who live in covenant with each other to be Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

It is within our diverse country and city congregations that our faith in Jesus the Christ is being anchored and is growing. It is in these local congregations that people meet regularly for worship—singing, confessing, praying, and preaching. It is here that we study the scriptures together and share hospitality. It is in these congregations that we learn a new way of life—following after Jesus and being empowered by the Spirit. It is in local congregations that we enjoy fellowship and make every effort to work through our differences. It is in these congregations where our witness of faith in Jesus the Christ is on the

cutting edge, where God's mission intersects with our lives—at home, in our neighborhoods, workplaces and world.

As the Apostle Paul gives thanks for the young congregation in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1: 2-3, so too, I am grateful for the congregations of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. The life and witness of each congregation is enhanced, intensified and increased when we join together to hear testimony, support, and even "*provoke (spur) one another to love and good deeds*" (Hebrews 10:24). In these conference connections and fellowship the Spirit is present, energizing us for God's mission wherever the Spirit prompts. **This is work we can do together** that would not be possible separately. Here is some of what I've seen.

*We always thank God because...we remember **your work that comes from faith...***

When congregations are seeking pastoral leadership, the Conference Minister for

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Ministerial Leadership, Susan Janzen, assists with pastoral searches. When a congregation calls a pastor the Pastoral Leadership Committee interviews and credentials them; chaplains also receive their credentials from conference. Susan offers advice for pastoral evaluations, sabbaticals and support for pastors and congregations working together. She also gives counsel in case of an ethical lapse.

As congregational leaders and teachers provide spiritual nurture for children, youth and adults, they can look to Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister for Christian Formation. She offers guidance finding spiritual resources in person or online. On February 12 congregations and families with elementary-aged children are invited to a reading party webinar with picture books selected from the Shalom Reader's Library.

Great reviews of meaningful books for reading or study were recommended by adults and children from various Central Plains congregations in the November 2019 Scattered Seeds.

*"We always thank God because...we remember **your effort** that comes **from love**..."*

Every one to two years, congregational members from Central Plains are invited to participate in a service and learning trip to Ecuador, working together with the Ecuadorian Mennonite congregations, Columbian Mennonite Church and Mennonite Mission Network in a shared mission of aiding refugees and peacemaking groups. The trip this year, from March 4-14, celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Ecuador Partnership.

Entire congregations, small groups and pastors are encouraged to get together locally February 11, 18, and 25 for a webinar led by Dick Boyd called, "Musings of a Recovering Racist." Outreach and Service Committee offers this relevant topic for our conference in light of demographic changes in our society, overt racism showing its face across our country, and the conference's commitment to working cross-culturally.

Whether the Spirit is prompting us toward God's mission in international places such as SE Asia, to build bridges between congregations or to practice peace in our homes and communities, it is a beautiful thing when congregations support God's mission with generous giving. Year end giving in 2019 was definitely a "Hallelujah" moment.

*We always thank God because. . . we remember your **perseverance** that comes from **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ..."*

Conference work takes steady persistence of faithful committee chairs and members to organize and lead purposeful meetings. Since June 2019 it requires another level of perseverance for the search committee discerning the call of an Executive Conference Minister.

What a joy to hear how church planters are persevering in teaching emerging congregations what it means to be faithful followers of Christ in an Anabaptist Mennonite perspective. Or in a leader beginning a restorative Bible study group for un-churched people who are open to what the Bible holds.

Even as the church is changing, a new generation of leaders will cast a vision for the future of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Thanks be to God! There will be both opportunities and challenges for faithful practices-praying, working together and growing based on "*hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*."

Reflections on my time in Central Plains leadership

by Firman Gingerich



1 Thessalonians 2:2-3 says, “We remember your work that comes from faith, your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope.”

Indeed, this verse could well describe my experience as an interim member of the Executive Conference Ministry Staff for Central Plains Mennonite Conference. The past six months have been very stimulating for my personal faith and my leadership journey.

I have a new understanding of what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3 on the subject of nurturing faith, “I planted, Apollos watered and God gave growth.” I entered this journey with you after much seed development and growth were underway, and those things will continue far beyond my departure. Said in my own way, I saw lots of planting, watering and signs of growth and yes, even struggle, in these months of serving among you.

I witnessed healthy and high expectations from folks who frequently reached out for counsel and support. Clearly previous CPMC leaders have helped nurture the idea that congregations and pastors both need the relationships and resources of others to help them problem-solve and strengthen their ministries. Our Central Plains mission statement calls us to, “create settings for our congregations and pastors to grow in holistic witness to God’s reconciling mission.”

I noticed that within 30 minutes of Susan Janzen’s first day in the office as Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, she started getting phone calls from leaders to share, test ideas and explore creative ministry responses. When Amanda Bleichty returned to her role as Conference Minister for Christian Formation following her maternity leave, I noticed a burst of energy in the office, as well as within our network of congregations, as she stepped into a number of preaching and congregational resourcing events. It’s been a great joy to see Susan and Amanda traveling into so many different congregations to share their leadership gifts and understandings.

When I attended the annual Conference of Committees meeting in Freeman, South Dakota in September, I was blessed to see so many examples of focused leadership

in the groups that serve us. Participating in our various ministry and leadership committees, I witnessed our common vision *to help each other grow in holistic witness* at work. These various committees are helping to lead us as we offer God’s reconciling love in the communities where we live and serve. I came away from this gathering thrilled and overjoyed for the creative and dedicated planning that undergirds our lives and witness together as a conference of congregations.

Our church and world are very different today than they were 36 years ago when I began ministry. As a lay leader and then seminary student, I was trained for a different time and different kind of leadership than is required today. The church I was trained to serve was a much more program oriented church living in a culture that often shared its values. Our church today is much more decentralized. Polarization patterns in the culture have followed us into our congregations. Changing church attendance patterns and trends toward finding churches that meet the needs of individuals and families have affected our Sunday morning expectations.

Older fellows like me can get weak-kneed thinking about the future of the church, but I think we are in the midst of a valuable time of sorting priorities and creating a church that is an outpost of God’s kingdom now and into the future. I think Jesus’ invitation and call to be about making disciples is at the center of what the church needs to be. I think with sadness of the time we spent in past generations enamored with the church as a settled group, the time we failed in our disciple making. I see younger leaders who are well poised to help us hear Jesus call the church and all of us as individuals to “Come and follow me.” I have hope as I see leaders today who are more adept at helping local congregations find ways to represent who Jesus is to them and to their local community.

I thank you for this opportunity to walk among you for this part of the journey. It’s been a particular gift to have partnered with a number of conference leaders as well as our staff: Amanda Bleichty, Susan Janzen and Marcia Yoder Schrock. I give thanks for the signs that I have witnessed that the congregations of Central Plains Mennonite Conference are leaning into the hope that God is calling us to witness and share now and in the future.



In the meantime: CPMC transition plans

by Shawn Nolt, Central Plains Mennonite Conference Moderator

The CPMC Conference Board and Staff are grateful for Marcia Yoder-Schrock and Firman Gingerich as they have served in Interim Executive Conference Minister (ECM) roles over the last six months of transition time. They have given generously of their time, wisdom and hope for the church. Their ECM roles end on January 31.

While the ECM Search Committee is diligently working toward interviews of candidates by the end of January, it is clear that plans need to be in place for the next phase of CPMC operations without an ECM.

With input from the Conference staff, board members and outgoing interim ECMs, the Conference Board has made the following plan, which will necessitate some board members and staff taking on additional roles in the coming months that would normally be a part of the ECM's work.

Moderator Shawn Nolt will help to spot and sort priorities in monthly staff meetings and (when chosen) help an incoming ECM with the transition.

Assistant Moderator John Murray will check in with Susan Janzen and Amanda Bleichty weekly via Zoom, helping to think through current (and future) complexities, acting as a liaison between the board and staff, and helping to manage the various individuals delegated to attend to specific tasks.

Treasurer Kent Blossom and Financial Officer Ted Widmer will develop a proposed Financial Blueprint for the coming fiscal year, meet with the Stewardship Task Group, and draft a fiscal year-end fund appeal.

Pastoral Leadership Committee will help share the pastoral support load and support Susan in her work.

Conference Minister of Christian Formation, Amanda Bleichty will move to full time for several months (March-June) to take on planning responsibilities for Annual Meeting.

Everything Beautiful Thrift Store dedication

by Willis Busenitz, pastor, White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, Montana

In 1987 the Northern Cheyenne Ministerial Association was formed, today it includes six denominations and 12 churches. After being involved in different activities in the community (Good Friday Cross Walk, combined worship services, special prayer gatherings, etc.) for 20+ years, many of us sensed the need for a dignified way of distributing good used clothes and household items. We chose a board of ministers and community members, incorporated and received 501(c)(3) status. We hired a part-time manager (Suzette Cain Shreffler) from within the organization and opened the doors. The Everything Beautiful Thrift Store in Lame Deer, Montana, was opened in May, 2012 in a vacant school building which was offered to us rent free. The motto we chose was **“Reflecting God’s love for all, in Christ Jesus, we seek to serve our people’s needs, protecting each one’s dignity.”**

It didn’t take long to realize that the space in the building was inadequate, plus the poorly constructed building was very expensive to heat and cool. In 2013 we decided to start the process of finding land and raising funds for a new, much larger building. Six lots were purchased, and the board made pledges to begin fundraising, eventually donating over \$70,000. During June 2013, the Northern Cheyenne Mennonite Churches hosted the CPMC Annual Meeting in Montana and after Suzette shared her testimony and dreams for the new thrift store the group gave a generous love offering of over \$4,000. This was deeply appreciated. In 2015, the board met with Mennonite architect, LeRoy Troyer, who volunteered his time to draw up plans for the building. In March 2016, with \$100,000 in hand, the board decided to begin by putting in the walk-in basement. Terry Schultz and Ron Ratzlaff donated their time and equipment and had the basement dug within three weeks. Soon, volunteers arrived from SOOP to put a floor on top of the basement. The first group included Don and Cheryl Fish from Cedar Falls, IA. During the spring/summer of 2017, more SOOP volunteers, Larry Swartzendruber, Tim Detweiler and Tim’s brothers’-in-law helped hang drywall in the basement apartment.

The next three and a half years were filled with sharing the vision and need for the thrift store, applying for grants, hosting volunteers and moving forward, sometimes faster and sometimes slower. That time included many miracles. After approximately \$750,000 in grants and \$150,000 in individual donations, plus many in-kind donations, the building has become a reality. Last spring, Dan Bontrager, Marty Roth, Dennis Reis and Jerry and Judy Kroeker came and worked alongside local people to hang, tape, and texture drywall. During the summer months we received three surprising grants totaling \$350,000 which allowed us to hire contractors and finish building by mid-November.

We had a dedication celebration on Sunday, November 17, 2019. During my opening remarks at the celebration, I read Psalm 115:1, *“To you alone, to you alone, O Lord, and not us, must glory be given, because of your constant love and faithfulness.”* We then began the process of moving from the old building to the new store. We had a soft opening on Tuesday, December 17, 2019. We are planning a “grand opening” later in January. Throughout this winter and spring we plan to focus on finishing out the basement, installing a lift and finishing the back parking lot.

We are deeply grateful for all of the prayers, many financial and in-kind donations and words of support that Central Plains Mennonite Conference churches and individuals have shared in this project.

Artist Melinda Turnbull stands with the painting she created as a celebratory gift from CPMC to the Everything Beautiful Thrift Store. The painting features the CPMC logo superimposed over views of a nearby lake with words from Philipians 4:8.





In memory of Chris Paul McDougal

by Tim Detweiler, Washington Mennonite Church

A “Celebration of Resurrection” service was held for Chris Paul McDougal on December 18, 2019 at Christ Community Church in Des Moines, IA. Chris died unexpectedly on Thursday evening, December 12, 2019.

Persons who attended Annual Meeting 2016 in Des Moines, IA would have known Chris as the local coordinator for this event. Chris was licensed for ministry by Central Plains Mennonite Conference for his role as the Administrator of Christ Community Church, a position he held for 10 years.

Ask people in the congregation and they will tell you that Chris “kept us on task.” Pastor Kelsey Guckenberger, Chris’ niece, said that you “always knew Chris loved you, even when he was nagging you to get things done.”



Chris was a devoted servant of Jesus Christ. I experienced Chris as one who lived out his faith in Christ. He lived into Jesus’ teaching to love God with his whole being and to love others as himself. Stranded one day in Des Moines because of car trouble, all I had to do was call Chris, who dropped what he was doing and came to my rescue. Chris had a way of reaching out to people, especially those who were going through difficult times. On the night he died, he was working on behalf of the church to help someone get the heat turned back on in their apartment. There are countless stories of how Chris reached out to people in caring and loving ways.

Chris loved music, he loved playing his guitar and he loved leading worship at Christ Community Church. Kelsey said that Chris loved songs like ‘Immanuel’ and ‘Grace be to you all’ by Michael Card, but also classic hymns and more contemporary worship songs. Chris was known to get laughs during worship nights at church by requesting ‘Free Bird.’ “He could play and figure out by ear almost any song you requested and shared his gift of music generously with the church.”

Chris loved and cared for his family. He left a successful career in technology to start a lawn service called “McDougal and Sons” with his two sons, Tanner and Mason. You couldn’t be around Chris very long without knowing his deep love for Tanner and Mason and his family.

I got to know Chris through my former conference ministry work. After our annual visits, we would often go to one of his favorite restaurants for some good food. I’ll never forget the day he introduced me to Smoky D’s. I know that Chris’ death will leave a huge hole in his family, in Christ Community Church and in the hearts of those who knew him. His love for God, love for others and love for life have inspired many.

Thanks, Chris, for inspiring us with your faith and with your life.

Transitions

Kelly Slagel retired as pastor at Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA effective November 30.

Nathan Ramer resigned as pastor at Wellman Mennonite Church, Wellman, IA effective December 31.

Dave Schooley retired as pastor at Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA on January 5.

Chris McDougal, Administrator at Christ Community Church, Des Moines, IA, died on December 12, 2019. Funeral services were held at Christ Community Church on December 18.



Conference ministers gather in Banff

by Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister for Christian Formation

In December, Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, and I (and tiny baby Henry) were privileged to attend the Annual Conference Ministers Gathering (ACMG) in beautiful Banff, Alberta, Canada. We met with denominational leaders and conference ministers from the United States and Canada for retreat, worship and learning. Betty Pries, conflict transformation specialist and the co-founder and CEO of Credence & Co, guided us in table conversations on the topic: "Talkin' About Talking, Conflict and Power."

Betty's sessions delved into themes such as: understanding when and how to act, yet maintain enough distance to see the big picture; transforming polarized thoughts from either/or thinking to both/and thinking; and communicating in ways that recognize first that we are all equally made in the image of God. Betty's input was fabulous and we came out of each session with practical knowledge and skills to use in our work.

In addition to excellent input, ACMG was also a good time of meeting and talking with other conference ministers. It was interesting to note things that we all had in common in our work, and also, things that were different from conference to conference. Susan and I came back with a renewed appreciation for the vision and forward momentum of Central Plains!

Other highlights of our short trip included Henry's first airplane rides and professional meetings, ministry staff bonding between Susan and me, glimpses of the breathtaking Canadian Rockies between meetings, and good flavors as we fellowshiped over meals in the village of Banff.

Annual Leaders Retreat—Save the date!

The Annual Leaders Retreat for pastors, chaplains and their spouses will be held April 24-26 at St. Benedict's Center near Schuyler, Nebraska. Scott Peterson, leadership pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, AZ, will help us find the hope beyond the hate in our political world. The retreat also includes time for personal reflection, fellowship with colleagues, and worship. Hope to see you there!

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To receive this newsletter in Spanish, call Amanda Bleichty at 319-325-4522. Para recibir este boletín en español, llame a Amanda Bleichty al 319-325-4522.

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FINANCES

Big swing in December! The Central Plains budget experienced quite the dramatic shift in the month of December thanks to our incredible constituency, both congregations and individuals through their generous hearts to help us in a positive position to start the new year in 2020. THANK YOU! Income through December was at \$299,898.24, while expenses were at \$265,905.72. This leads to a \$33,992.52 surplus. We are so very thankful for all your support to help ignite our push towards the end of our fiscal year at the end of April. — *Stewardship Task Group*

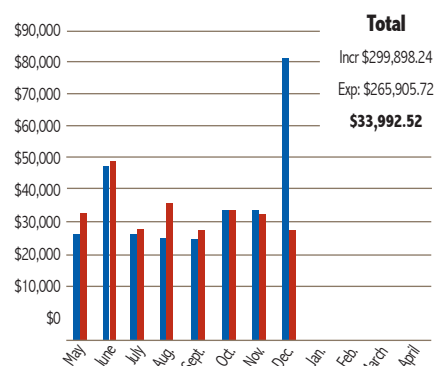
UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Leaders Retreat will take place April 24-26, 2020, in Schuyler, Nebraska

Annual Meeting 2020 will be held June 18-21 in the Twin Cities

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)
Fiscal Year 2019-2020



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