



# Scattered Seeds

February/March  
2023

“For I was hungry  
and you gave  
me something to  
eat, I was thirsty  
and you gave  
me something  
to drink, I was a  
stranger and you  
invited me in, I  
needed clothes  
and you clothed  
me, I was sick  
and you looked  
after me, I was in  
prison and you  
came to visit me.”

— Matt. 25:35-36

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## PHOTO ESSAY

### The best thing we’ve ever done

by Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister of Christian Formation, Central Plains Mennonite Conference

*“This is the best thing our church has ever done.”*

I was visiting First Mennonite in Lincoln on a Thursday in late fall when at least four different people pulled me aside to share this message. I was there to photograph and experience the weekly labor of love that First Mennonite took on over a year-ago when it became a Foodnet distribution site. Starting around 9:00 am each Thursday (with some pickups happening the night before), folks from First Mennonite begin to gather food from various pick-up sites like WholeFoods and a local donut shop before they meet at the church to sort and display all that they have collected. Thursday evenings, the doors open at 4:30 for local families to come in, take a number and wait for their turn to “shop” the laden tables.

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Foodnet is a Lincoln, Nebraska initiative that started in 1985 with the motto, “Tummy fill, not land fill.” The organization matches up donors (the website features a partial list of donors that includes more than 80 businesses in the Lincoln area) and distribution sites. First Mennonite is one of 18 Foodnet distribution sites around the city, and every day of the week, there are at least two sites in operation. Each site is run a bit differently, based on their space, volunteers and demographics, but in each place, the twin goals of keeping food out of the landfill and keeping those who are hungry, fed, are at the center.



Pages 1 & 2, Early in the day, members of First Mennonite of Lincoln collect food and set up the “store” in the fellowship hall and a classroom for Foodnet distribution later in the day. They have fun together as they work.







The day I was there, the dessert table (my job) was especially weighty, while they had less produce and bread to distribute than normal. Around the table during our morning break, people reminisced about other times of scarcity and plenty, including the time they had 23 boxes of bananas to distribute. No one knows ahead of time what will be collected each Thursday, and it's clear that when there isn't enough of something to go around, it weighs heavily on the volunteers, who have learned to know and care about the folks who come to pick up food each week. They notice when someone is missing, they can name who is most annoying, and they each have special favorites, such as the man who often brings homemade egg rolls for the volunteers. In addition to providing a service, and meeting the very real needs of hunger in their community, Foodnet is also a place for social activity, both for the volunteers and for those who come to collect food. Some who used to wait in line for food found community among the First Mennonite volunteers, and now help out during the day. A few even started attending worship on Sundays.

From start to finish, the First Mennonite folks all seem to know their jobs. In the morning, the volunteer crew skews older, filled out mostly with retired people, while the afternoon crew picks up a few younger folks to help with distribution and to carry boxes to cars. The work goes fast and the air rings with the good-natured teasing and laughter of a congregation who has found purpose and meaning in serving their community, together.



*Community members "shop" the Foodnet distribution by choosing portions of breads and beverages, fruit and vegetables, prepared foods, canned goods, and desserts.*



# Kid Link, helping the neighborhood to thrive

*by Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister of Christian Formation, Central Plains Mennonite Conference*

In Sioux Falls, SD, the opportunity to serve their immediate community fell into the laps of members of Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church (SMMC) during the Pandemic. SMMC was asked to partner with Kid Link, by hosting children and family programming in their church building one evening a week during the fall-spring of 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Kid Link is a program of Sioux Falls Thrive, a city-wide organization that brings together volunteers and programs across the city into a more systematic approach to the needs of Sioux Falls neighborhoods. Through research, Thrive concluded that one of the communities that needed the most support was located around the Laura B Anderson Elementary School, across the road from SMMC. In the summer of 2020, Kid Link was started on the playground of the school to address some of the needs and wants of the parents and children in the neighborhood, and when fall weather meant that the program needed to move indoors, SMMC kept the program afloat by donating an indoor space to meet.

When the program began, children met in the sanctuary of SMMC for games and activities, reading and other academic help. They met in the church building for two years until the local school district decided to join the initiative and began providing the programming (with volunteers) in the school building. The initiative is expanding and in the next few years each school in the district will begin to host a Kid Link evening each week.

Along with the children and family programming, each week a hot meal is provided by volunteers in the Nightwatch food truck, and a food give-away takes place in the SMMC fellowship hall. While many from SMMC help out with these various programs from time to time, three women in the church have been involved very regularly. From the beginning, Cheryl Lehman has helped with the children's programming, even using Shalom Readers books with the kids when they met in the church. The first year, 10 children earned free books! Bethany Yoder is most often involved in helping to serve food from the Nightwatch food truck, and Sherri Donaldson has found energy taking over the food give-away each week.

Each Monday and Tuesday food deliveries arrive at the church from Bread Break, a local ministry that picks up

excess food from various restaurants and supermarkets and delivers it to distribution sites across the city. Sherri is there to receive each delivery, and to package and organize the donations so that families and individuals can come on Tuesday evenings to pick up food. She has worked hard at communicating that relationships are at the heart of this program. Economic status doesn't matter, everyone is welcome to the food give-away (and to the recently added Bingo game). Sherri has also added rummage items that are available to anyone and everyone for free. In November, Sherri was awarded the Sioux Empire Volunteer of the Month for her work. The church also received recognition for their willingness to host the Kid Link programming when it was first beginning.

For a small church, partnership with the larger organization Sioux Falls Thrive, and their host of volunteers and system of programs, has been important. "This fell into our laps, all we had to do was say "yes" to it," said Cheryl Lehman. "That's sometimes better than making all these plans and something not working out." Bethany Yoder added, "Someone else is doing the planning and organization and all we have to do is step in and do it, and that makes a big difference to a small congregation."

SMMC feels the effects of this community effort when they gather as well. Beth summed up its effect on the congregation, "I think that having this program so close to our church building has given us a new feeling of hope and life. Before we were just doing what we were doing, to stay afloat, but now this is something we can work towards and put our energy towards."

Because of this program, and the invitation for neighbors to enter the church building (many for the first time), the SMMC building is now home to a new church plant on Sunday evenings, the Riverside Community Church. Their building is also used Sunday afternoons by a Liberian church, New Hope Community Church.



# How is God already at work among us?

*by Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister*

I've long been interested in the missional movement. It's a movement that starts with the theological conviction that God is already at work in the world around us. Our job is not to bring God into our community, but to learn to recognize what God is already doing there. This kind of contextual theology can often feel messy and uncertain. Learning to join with God in what God is already doing in the neighborhood is not an exact science. Finding ways to live in our communities with open ears and open eyes, watching and listening for where God is at work is often difficult, and takes patience and a deep love and knowledge of the people and systems we live amongst. In Acts 16:5-16, we have a "missional" story of Paul and his companions as they seek to do God's work according to their own plans while God has something entirely different in mind for them.

During Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas developed a strategy for sharing the good news. Whenever they entered a town, their first stop was the synagogue where they would preach to all those gathered there. When they were inevitably kicked out of the synagogue, they would take those who were interested, and start a group of Jesus-followers in that community.

Acts 16 takes place during Paul's second missionary journey when all their best laid plans are thwarted. They can't go to Asia and Bithynia, and they eventually find themselves in Troas, unsure of what to do next. Paul and his companions seem to be just bumbling along. But finally, Paul has a vision of a man begging them, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," and he and his companions discern that this means that God is calling them to Macedonia. But after arriving in the city of Philippi, they discover that their old strategy won't work—there isn't a synagogue in which to preach.

In places where there were not enough Jews to form a synagogue, Jewish men still gathered for prayer. As a last resort, Paul and his companions go out into the city on the Sabbath to find one of these places of prayer. Upon arrival,

they are surprised to find no worshipping Jews, and instead, a gathering of Gentile women.

Though undoubtedly disappointed, Paul and his companions sit down with the women and soon find themselves deep in conversation. One of the women is named Lydia, a business owner from Asia who dealt in purple cloth. After conversing with these visitors, she is baptized and invites Paul and his friends to stay with her at her home. It is from this encounter with Gentile women that the church in Philippi is born. Lydia is their leader and this church will be a fervent supporter of Paul and his mission going forward.

What is so interesting to me in this story is that Luke, the author, makes it clear over and over again that God is the primary agent in this story. Paul and his companions main job is just to engage whoever God puts in their path. It is the Spirit who prevents them from going where they want to go, it is a vision that gets them to Macedonia, and it is the Lord who opens Lydia's heart to respond to the message Paul is sharing. God is already at work and it is God who brings Paul and his companions to the place where God needs them to be.

The work of engaging with our communities can feel like this sometimes. We have all sorts of plans and dreams and strategies. We often think we know what our community needs and how we ought to get involved. And sometimes our plans work, and sometimes they don't. But often, if we open our eyes and ears in the midst of our bumbling around, we will find that God is revealing something else to us, something that we could not have planned for. Contextual theology, missional theology, is learning to discern as a faith community, how God is already at work around us, and how we might join in. The stories in this issue from Lincoln and Sioux Falls remind us that sometimes opportunities fall into our laps and we just need to recognize them and say, "yes," to whatever God is already doing. God is at work, can we find it in ourselves to see and step into what God is doing, allowing ourselves to be used by God for God's purposes in our neighborhoods and communities?



## The CPMC traveling table

Playing with the Annual Meeting 2022 theme, “Come to the table,” the initial idea of building a table to symbolize our unity in Christ within Central Plains Mennonite Conference came during a planning committee brainstorming session. Corey Miller, pastor of Salem-Zion Mennonite Church in Freeman, SD and the local host committee chair for Annual Meeting, took the idea and ran with it. When logistical problems thwarted the original idea of building the table on-site during Annual Meeting, Corey worked with local wood-workers to make a new plan.

Each congregation in Central Plains was invited to bring a piece of wood of their choice from their respective community, and the final table incorporates close to 30 pieces of wood from across the Conference. On the first night of worship, delegates brought their wood forward in a symbolic (and literal) “come(ing) to the table” together.

Salem-Zion Mennonite Church member Duane Tieszen drew up the blueprint, figured out logistics, built the base for the wood pieces to rest in and created the legs that come off the table when it is transported. Salem Mennonite Church member Craig Miller did the challenging work of planing each of the small pieces of wood so that Duane could format them into the table along with other wood burned blocks that speak of the date and occasion of the table. 81 Signs of Freeman created the sign for the front of the table according to the theme, “Come to the Table.”

We are so thankful for the work of Corey, Duane and Craig. The table looks great!

Now that the table is built, all of the congregations of CPMC are invited to host the table for a week or two, using the table in worship and/or as a base for Communion. A notebook travels with the table so that each congregation can document their time with it. The CPMC congregations in South Dakota started the rotation.

Salem-Zion used the table for communion on World Communion Sunday. The House Church of Freeman used the table as a welcoming piece in two of the homes they meet in. Pastor Jill Hofer wrote, “We observed how the table had been constructed—the top intentionally uneven. We noted how this was similar to the churches of CPMC. The beauty of each piece of wood representing the beauty that each church brings to our conference.” After the table visited Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Randall Koehler, the pastor, wrote, “The table is a beautiful symbol and reminder of who we are as Central Plains Mennonite Conference all together.” At Salem Mennonite Church the table served as the pulpit for a Sunday, and Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church received the table on Christmas day. The following Sunday it held communion elements and they wished each other “Joy in Christ” as they served one another.

Now it’s your turn to host the table! Contact Monica Clem ([office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org)) for assistance in scheduling a time for the table to visit your congregation!

### Leaders credentialed

**Jill Hofer**, licensed toward ordination on October 23, 2022 at the House Church of Freeman, Freeman, SD.

**Ferando Ramos**, ordained on October 30, 2022 at Casa de Oración in Davenport, IA.

**Jacob Guckenberger**, ordained on November 6, 2022 at Christ Community Church in Des Moines, IA

**Suzette Shreffler**, licensed toward ordination on November 13 at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT.

**Randall Koehler**, ordained on February 5, 2023 at Hutterthal Mennonite Church in Freeman, SD

### Transitions

**Tim Detweiler** served September 18-November 12, 2022 as interim pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT.

**Scott and Suzette Shreffler** began November 13, 2022 as co-pastors at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT.

**Gene Miller** ended December 31, 2022 as interim pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake, MN, and began January 8, 2023 as interim at Salem Mennonite Church in Freeman, SD.

**Jack Scandrett** ended December 31, 2022 as interim pastor at Salem Mennonite Church in Freeman, SD and began February 1, 2023 as interim at Bethel Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake, MN.





## Contact information

### Moderator

Pam Gerig Unruh 319-256-7294  
pgunruh@gmail.com

### Assistant Moderator

Michelle Hofer  
cmhofer@gwtc.net

### Office

P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029

Monica Clem, Office Manager  
605-929-3325  
office@centralplainsmc.org

### Hispanic Ministries Coordinator

Ramiro Hernandez 319-621-3725  
rmherns@yahoo.com

### Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

Nathan Luitjens 319-461-6505,  
nathanluitjens@centralplainsmc.org

Amanda Bleichty 319-325-4522  
amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org

Susan Janzen 319-610-1007  
susanjanzen@centralplainsmc.org

# Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds February/March 2023

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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.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference  
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Freeman, SD 57029

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## FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '22-'23 ends the first seven months with a negative balance. Total Income for the seven months was \$265,513.96 while expenses were \$303,238.46. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$37,724.50 for our '22-'23 budget. Year-end giving reduced the deficit by almost one-half of our December deficit. We are hopeful increased giving over the next several months will help us balance the budget. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— Stewardship Task Group

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Annual Leaders Retreat**, April 30-May 2, 2023, St. Benedict Center, Schuyler, NE

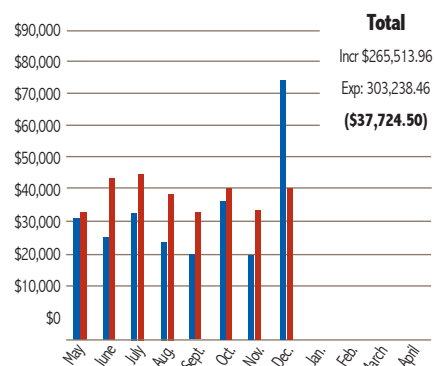
**CPMC Annual Meeting**, June 15-18, 2023, York, NE

**MennoCon23**, July 3-7, 2023, Kansas City, MO

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2022-2023



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