



Scattered Seeds

June
2018

"I pray that you may comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

— Ephesians
3:18-19, abridged



Shana with youth delegates at Annual Meeting 2007

Reflections on 20 years of conference ministry

What I'm learning about the church

by Shana Peachey Boshart

Conference Minister for Christian Formation



Someone has said that change is the only constant in life, and change is happening for me soon. On August 1, I will leave Central Plains and begin as denominational minister for faith formation for Mennonite Church USA.

I've been serving the congregations of this conference since—well—since before Central Plains even started! In 1998, I was hired by the Iowa-Nebraska Conference as conference youth minister. Two years later, that conference joined with the Northern District Conference and five churches of the Central District Conference to become Central Plains Mennonite Conference. At that point, I increased my time to three-quarters and began to serve as youth minister for this new

conference.

Ever since, my role has evolved according to the needs of our churches and my growth as a leader. In 2010, I began to provide counsel and resources to leaders of children's and adult ministries in addition to youth ministry leaders with the new title of "conference minister for Christian formation." That's also when I started editing our newsletters and website.

This summer, I will complete twenty years in this role, and this seems like a good time to wrap it up and let someone else grow into the role of formation minister. I have loved working with the congregations and leaders in Central Plains, and I have learned a lot.

In Central Plains Mennonite Conference, **our mission is to create settings for our**

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congregations and partners to grow in holistic witness to God's reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship and promoting lifelong discipleship.

Here are some things I've learned in this role about...

Holistic Witness. A clear and succinct way to describe what we believe about God and ourselves is to say that "what God is doing in the world is reconciling people to God, each other and creation." (Ephesians 1:7-10) We believe that our work is not to take on God's job of reconciliation, but to bear witness that God is doing the reconciling.

There is a great difference between thinking it is our job *to do the reconciling* rather than seeing our job as *bearing witness to what God is doing* to reconcile all things to God. For one thing, when we take it on ourselves, we quickly lose our joy because the job is too big for us and we get discouraged at our many failures. We become negative, judging everyone else who is not trying hard enough or not doing the "right" things.

On the other hand, when we recognize that God is the one who initiates and empowers reconciliation, we have joy in giving witness to God's work wherever we see it and joy in participating in it wherever we can. As editor of *Scattered Seeds*, I have tried to tell the stories of the many places in our conference where our members and congregations are bearing witness to God's reconciling work and joyfully participating in it.

Developing Leadership. I have learned that the best leaders are those who humbly serve, putting the interests of the church ahead of their own. I have often said that we have an exceptional cohort of pastors in Central Plains who are humble in spirit and would never think of their jobs in terms of climbing the ladder of success.

Recently, I've also discovered another critical leadership trait. Everyone has influence, whether large or small. The critical leadership trait is the ability to figure out where you have influence *and take responsibility for it*. This is critical because when we do not take responsibility for the influence we have, we communicate that we do not mean for others to take us seriously, we squander the influence we have for good, and we open the door to using our influence in unintended, harmful ways.

Leaders who take themselves seriously and take responsibility for the influence they have are not only worthy of our respect, they are also effective.

Encouraging Fellowship. Fellowship is not just at the heart of the gospel, it IS the gospel. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself and made us ambassadors of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:19-20) John puts it this way, "This

is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." (1 John 3:11)

It has been heartbreaking to see instances of broken fellowship in the church over the past two decades. On the other hand, fellowship in Central Plains remains fairly strong. I believe that this is largely due to the fact that as an integrated conference, a choice for unity and fellowship is our reason for existing. Fellowship is at the very center of our identity; we would not exist had we not chosen in 1999 to be one body. I am grateful for this, because it has helped us to live out the very reason the church exists: to make one body out of many to the praise and glory of God.

Promoting Lifelong Discipleship. Now we come to my job description: to equip congregations to form lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

I define both discipleship and Christian formation as a lifelong journey of transformation into the likeness of Jesus. This is what we signed up for at our baptism: to make it our life goal to become like Jesus and obey his teaching. "Christian practices" are those things that we do because Jesus taught us to do them or because we have found that they shape us into the likeness of Jesus.

In our covenant of spiritual practices, we have covenanted to specific practices "through which we submit ourselves completely to the purposes of God who longs to transform us into the likeness of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit."

God's purposes are important here. God is the main actor in history, bringing about specific purposes which we can understand. God's purpose from the beginning was to bless all the families of the earth. (Genesis 12:3) In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God opened a way for everyone to be reconciled to God, each other and creation. In this way, everyone is intended to receive the blessing of individual and communal well-being.

As we become more and more like Jesus, we become more and more able to live out God's vision of reconciliation and well-being for everyone. The practices of prayer, fasting and reading the Bible make us available to learn from Jesus. Practices like forgiveness, communion, foot-washing, and communal discernment shape us into a loving community that is both a sign of and an invitation to the reign of God.

I suppose that if I were to try to say everything I've learned about promoting lifelong discipleship, it would take a whole book, but this is what it all boils down to for me: becoming more like Jesus. It's about that simple.

As I leave this role, my wish and blessing for you is this: may you come to know ever more clearly how great is the love that God has for you. May you know Christ and become like him. And may God be glorified in the church, now and always.

New! Short videos with tips for teaching adult bible study

Open the Book: Practical tips for leading Bible study

The title of each video is a phrase from Nehemiah 8, when Ezra read the Book of the Law to the Israelites as they returned from exile.

Don't Mourn or Weep: Goals and problems

focuses on the goal of Bible study and the role of the leader and covers common problems we encounter in leading groups.

Listen Closely: Facilitating good discussion

focuses on the skills for leading a Bible study—managing the time, asking questions, and keeping the group on track.

A Unified Purpose: Preparing to lead

gives guidance on how to prepare by doing some background study, developing your theme, and writing discussion questions.



The presenter is Keith Slater, who led our Fall 2017 Bible Study webinars. Keith is a Sunday School teacher and member at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa. He has worked for SIL International as well as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, where he led Bible discussions for Christians and others. More recently, he has taught biblical interpretation and Bible study principles to Sunday School classes.

We will prayerfully study the Bible together

We have covenanted together as a conference to specific Christian practices, including Bible study with each other, with our neighbors and those we don't yet know. These videos are designed to equip Bible study leaders in our congregations.

Keith has summarized the tips we learned together in the Bible study webinars and made them available for you to watch any time it suits you! Find them at www.centralplainsmc.org/bible-study-videos.

YOUTH ESCAPE 2018

THE BIENNIAL RETREAT FOR CENTRAL PLAINS YOUTH



CHOOSE JOY

JULY 20-22, 2018

AT HIDDEN ACRES CHRISTIAN CENTER

SPEAKER: JOSH LUNDBERG & FRIENDS

MUSIC: JOHN N. MURRAY & BAND

Habits of prayer, fasting and scripture reading

by Ramiro Hernandez

Hispanic Ministries Coordinator



It has been said that old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. So, is it possible to break old habits and start new ones? Well, I leave that to the experts to figure out, but I do understand that habits can become needs in people's lives if repeated often enough.

Habits are repeated patterns which become etched in us, such as life's daily routines, like brushing your teeth, the way you put on your shoes, or getting dressed for work. We do these things without thinking about them.

As I began thinking about our busy lives, I suddenly realized that yes, we do pray; and yes, we read the scripture, and some of us do fast. For some, these disciplines are important. However, the more I thought about this, the more I became aware that many of us practice prayer, fasting, and scripture reading *only as time permits* us to dwell on these disciplines. Perhaps because we are aware that all this will happen at church on Sunday, we rely on church to fulfill those needs.

As I reflected on these disciplines, I thought that as a congregation we might need a challenge to act on them.

As a congregation, we developed what we call the

7 – 30 – 30 – F. We are hoping this will become a need in people's lives. We started last year in the hopes that if we practiced those disciplines in our lives, that those disciplines would then become more than habits, that they would become a need in our spirit. I felt that if they became a need, then if you did not pray, fast (at least once or twice a week) and read Scripture, we would sense that something would be missing in that part of the day.

This is our 7 – 30 – 30 – F challenge:

7 days

30 minutes of prayer

30 minutes of scripture reading

Fast once or twice a week

I challenged our congregation and explained that there are seven days in a week, and that in those seven, we could pray for 30 minutes, and read scripture for 30 minutes, then throughout the week they could fast one day a week or perhaps three times a week as they felt comfortable with it.

This has been our challenge for almost a year. I check in with them from time to time and see how they are doing with this challenge. My hope is that they accept this challenge so that it becomes a habit or a need in their lives.

Congregational Challenge

- Fasting separates us from the world
- Prayer draws us nearer to God
- Reading of scripture is our guide to our faith for our lives

7 day challenge

- 30 minutes of prayer
- 30 minutes of scripture reading
- Fast once or twice a week



Bible journaling proves a fun way for students to engage scripture

by Jan Friesen, junior youth sponsor

Bethesda Menmonite Church

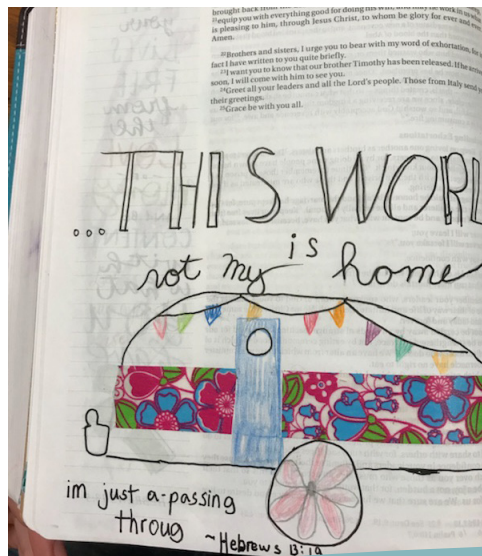
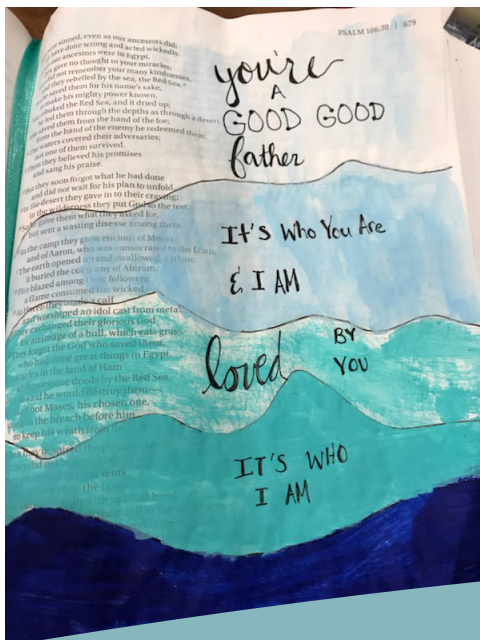
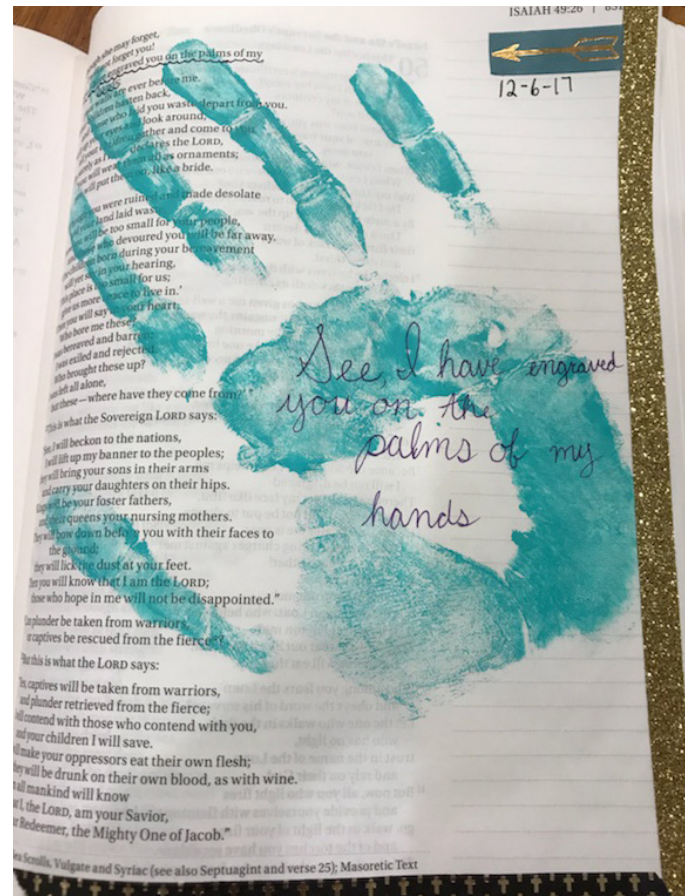


I have been discovering with my junior high girls' midweek class that illustrating Bible verses with a "journal" edition of the Bible creates a deeper relationship with scripture. The girls like it so much, that we have also had a journaling party in addition to our Wednesday night gathering. They even got together in their free time to have fun journaling. As one of my students expressed, "When we journal in our Bible, we go deeper in understanding the scripture."

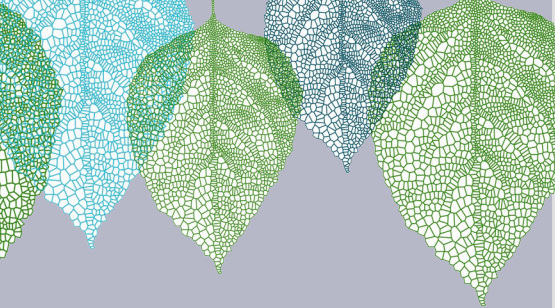
I've seen that God can speak to us as we think about a verse and decide how to best illustrate it. We first underline the verse we are studying, then search for images that portray the meaning to us. It is easy to find ideas by typing the verse into Google search and clicking on "Images," or checking it out on Pinterest. We draw, trace, color or even paint with materials that don't bleed through the pages.

I gave the students special journaling Bibles that are designed with wide columns. We illustrate in the blank columns or extend the image across the page. I encourage the girls to illustrate in a way that they can still read the words.

Bible journaling has been a spiritual time of worship for me. Through the process of creating, God speaks to my heart. Best of all, it's been exciting to see how the girls engage with scripture and have fun while they are doing it!



There are a variety of journaling Bibles. We use the Beautiful Word Bible, which has 500 illustrations in addition to blank spaces where you can create your own artwork. Colored pencils work great as well as gel pens and Micron pens. We try out any pens at the back of the Bible to ensure they don't bleed through. Google for these supplies or check them out on Amazon, Christianbook.com, or your local Christian bookstore. —Jan Friesen



Central Plains Hispanic Women's Conference

by Martha Corpus Hernandez

pastor, Iglesia Menonita Centro Cristiana, Washington, Iowa



Central Plains Hispanic Women's Conference has been meeting for the past three years. It is a regular gathering of the women from the Hispanic Mennonite churches in Central Plains. Norma Arangury, Fatima Muniz and Martha Hernandez have been involved in giving leadership. Pastor Martha Hernandez has been active in providing leadership in the reorganization of the Hispanic Women's Conference, and together these women have worked very hard to gather all the Hispanic congregations to participate.

We praise God for his work in us. God has been good to us. He has led the way and has been involved every step of the way. Even though it has not been easy getting reorganized, we are beginning to see God's work in us leading us through this time and are beginning to see the results of our work.

Hispanic Women's Conference has a retreat once a year, usually at Crooked Creek Christian Camp. We also meet twice a year in different Hispanic churches to worship, get together to pray three times a year, and finish off the year with a Christmas banquet.

On April 28, 2018, we met at Iglesia El Balsamo in Muscatine. The speaker for this event was Angela Santos, a member of El Balsamo. We are excited to report that there were 57 women at this event. There were also ten teenage girls and ten kids who came with their mothers. It was good to hear the teenage girls at the event talk about being willing to attend other Hispanic Women's Conference events.

During our worship time, we recognized Gloria Villatoro for her service as our Hispanic women's coordinator for our area, and for working with the Hispanic Women's Conference at a national level. We recognized her diligent work as a pastor and mother for the last three years since her husband Max was taken by ICE.

We also prayed for Cecilia Huesca whose husband was also taken by ICE six months ago. Since then, several of the Hispanic churches have either been involved economically or through prayers. Please help us pray for those that have been taken by ICE, leaving families without a father figure and in other cases abandoned children.

We continue to work with our Hispanic Women's Conference. Keep us in your prayers. Shalom!

Leaders credentialed

Seth Miller was ordained on March 18, 2018, at Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska.

Amanda Bleichty was ordained on April 8, 2018, at Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, Iowa.

Taric Leichty was ordained on April 15, 2018, at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Nebraska.

Chris and Kimberly Becker were ordained on May 13, 2018, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Minneapolis.

Transitions

Pamela Gerig Unruh ended her interim pastor role at Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, Iowa, March 25, 2018.

David Heusinkveld was installed as interim pastor at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa, April 15, 2018.

Ry Siggelkow is transitioning from part-time to full-time pastor at Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis.

Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa, plans to celebrate their 150th Anniversary on Sunday, July 1, 2018.



Reflections on Annual Leaders Retreat

by Christine Maust Beachy, pastor's spouse
East Union Mennonite Church



On a Friday afternoon in April, we arrived at the monastery's beautiful retreat center tucked into a quiet hill overlooking Schuyler, Nebraska. Conference leaders traveled from sprawling cities in Minnesota, villages in the Iowa countryside, and wide-open places in Colorado and Montana. The weekend was part rest and part repurposing for the pastors, chaplains and other credentialed leaders and their spouses who gathered from across Central Plains Conference. The rhythm of worship, session input, and fellowship with attendees was a welcome respite.

Bryan Moyer Suderman led sessions to explore scripture and how we share scripture with others. Bryan is an itinerant singer/songwriter and Bible teacher from Kitchener, Ontario, and founder of Small Tall Ministries. He was invited to help us explore spiritual practice #5 in our Covenant of Spiritual Practices: "We will study the Bible with neighbors and strangers, inviting them to become disciples of Jesus."

Weaving together scripture, story, and song, Moyer Suderman shared his insights with those gathered, and drew out reflections from others. His songs have infectious power to share the gospel. Back home, I smile as my boys sing along to his scripture songs in the car. Moyer Suderman's teachings leave me with new affection for scripture.

Our four worship times focused on Luke 24 as Jesus the stranger opened up the scriptures with the two Jesus followers on the road to Emmaus. We were encouraged to return home with "wide-open eyes," expecting Jesus to be present with us as we read and study the Bible with neighbors and strangers.

Please encourage your pastor and spouse to attend the Annual Leaders Retreat. Our deepened relationships with one another strengthen our churches' ministries. In our friendships and sharing, we are reminded of what called us to a life of following Christ.



Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds June 2018

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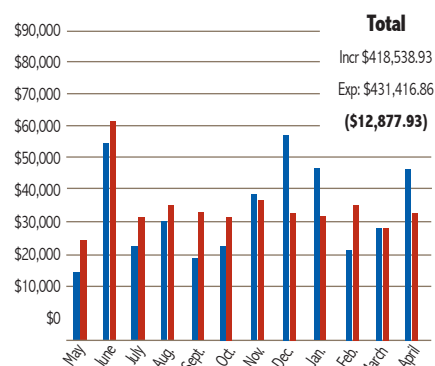
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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget experienced a strong finish with very generous donations, but it came up a bit short and unable to erase the deficit we carried for much of the fiscal year. Income through April and the end of our fiscal year came in at \$418,538.93. Expenses came in at \$431,416.86. As a result, our fiscal year deficit came to \$12,877.93. We are thankful for your continued support, and we invite you to consider Central Plains in your prayers and contributions as we look to start the new fiscal year on the right track. We do thank you! — *Stewardship Task Group*

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)
Fiscal Year 2017/2018



UPCOMING EVENTS

Central Plains Annual Meeting will take place June 21-24, 2018, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Youth Escape 2018 will take place July 20-22, 2018 in central Iowa.



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