



# Scattered Seeds

June  
2019

“See, I am doing  
a new thing!

Now it springs  
up; do you not  
perceive it?

I am making  
a way in the  
wilderness

and streams in  
the wasteland.”

— Isaiah 43:19

## In this issue

2 Moving with  
discernment

3 Places of meeting

6 Women's retreats

7 Responding to local  
needs



Farewell Sunday at First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota

## Changing Patterns

### Beginning a new chapter

by E. Elaine Kauffman

*Retired pastor, First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota*



Numbers were dwindling. Emotional and physical resources were waning. The maintenance and up-keep needs of an aging building became overwhelming. Energy efficiency was low. In a way, you could say, our building pushed us into making the decision to sell it and move out, a choice that turned out well in spite of our fears.

Group cohesion was good: seen in little gaggles of conversation that hung around after the morning service, gatherings for “Supper at Six” two Wednesday evenings per month, and a strong sense of group identity. In spite of suggestions that we could disband as a church or join another congregation *en masse*, neither of those options seemed to be preferred.

Conversations with at least two other church groups that might be interested in acquiring the property ended in nothing. Finally, the decision was made to list the property with a realtor. It was a heart-stopper for some long-time members to

see that “for sale” sign on the lawn; even knowing it was practical did not make it easy.

Leadership was proactive about keeping everyone informed as plans went forward. No one was eager to see the building used for apartments or commerce, but that might have to happen. However, the offers seemed low. Then, in a surprising week, everything seemed to happen at once. On a November Tuesday at the annual meeting, the trustees were authorized to go ahead with any offer they deemed reasonable. Sunday night the congregational chair called to say, “We have an offer... and they want to take possession at the end of the year.”

Quick work went into listing removable objects and letting members indicate what they would like to keep; everything else would go “as is” to the Hispanic Pentecostal group buying the building. One of the best feelings was that the building would continue to be used for its original purpose, a place of worship and praise to God. Major adaptations were in order. Office space

*continued on page 2*





*continued from page 1*

and a room for our library books were arranged with our sister congregation, Bethel Mennonite Church. Among the possibilities considered, we discerned that we did not want to meet at a different time of day, nor to use a separate space in another church's building at the same time they would be meeting. The chapel space of the local nursing home, normally unused on Sunday mornings, became the option we decided to try. Cupboard space to keep songbooks was an added generous gift on their part.

The space was a good fit for our size. We like to sing and we could actually hear each other better than before. I loved being able to hear the voices of the children mingled with adults as they learned to join in the Lord's Prayer. In addition, the half a dozen members living in the nursing home or the assisted living facility next door could now walk to church without worrying about the weather or

transportation. We also welcomed other residents on days when they were unable to attend their own services.

People pitched in as they were able: setting up chairs, restacking them, picking up hymnals. The gaggles of conversation continue as strong as ever. A hanging box of file folders is a practical substitute for mailboxes. Meetings can be held in the facility or member's homes or in the Bethel church. Bethel also offered their space for funerals. Potlucks and other events that center around the kitchen have been a challenge, but creative solutions, such as holding potlucks in the café of our local MCC store, have worked well.

The changing of our patterns has, on the whole, been good for our congregation. Moving out of our building was not the end of our story, but rather the beginning of a new life-giving chapter.

## Changing Patterns

# Moving with discernment

*by Thomas Kessler, Congregational Chair and*

*Kris Pond-Burtis, Relocation Exploration Committee Chair*

*Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa*



In 1994, Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, a small congregation of about a dozen families, purchased a church building (c1915) near downtown Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Within a decade, the congregation revisited the issue of building ownership. Although some of the supporters of the original purchase were no longer part of the congregation, discussion resulted in a renewed commitment to ownership.

Over the years the building mortgage was paid off and space was rented to another congregation and a private pre-school. The latter rental agreement remained in effect. Over time, changing demographics resulted in fewer members with the skills to maintain the building, and periodic repair costs prevented building a long-term

*continued on page 4*





## Changing Patterns

# Places of meeting: identity, mission and movement

by David Boshart

Executive Conference Minister



In recent weeks, the news carried live coverage of the fire that destroyed the 850-year old Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Within two days, contributions to rebuild the church topped 1 billion Euros. Clearly this building means a great deal to a lot of people.

From the beginning, places to meet the living God have mattered in the identity and witness of the church. God's idea about the place of meeting was first a tabernacle, a moveable space to accompany people as nomads on the way to the Promised Land. As the people of God became settled in the land, King David imagined a permanent place of meeting – a house of cedar where God could live. God contested the notion that it would even be desirable to God to be confined to a house made by human hands. Eventually, a temple was built. The temple was destroyed, the temple was rebuilt, only to fall again. The Temple Mount remains a contested place of meeting to this day.

Mennonites have had their own challenges with understanding the role of the place of meeting. We have tried to be careful to remember that “the church” is people who gather to meet the living God, not a building. It was not an accident that *What is this place?* is the first hymn in the blue hymnal. It is a profound statement about what we mean by our places of meeting. The relative modesty of our meeting places with generous space for fellowship and study further reinforce the notion that the nature of the church is located in peoplehood.

**From the beginning, places to meet the living God have mattered in the identity and witness of the church.**

Even so, place *matters* when it comes to meeting with God. For new churches, the acquisition of a building is a symbol of legitimacy as a church. In some cases, the maintenance of a pristine building can overshadow the ministry of spiritual formation and witness in the world. Churches that have experienced losses of members

due to demographic shifts or declining spiritual vitality find themselves straining under the burden of building maintenance and encroaching decay.

How shall we think about our places of meeting? It is clear that there will not be one answer for every context. All places of meeting are local and therefore unique. Permanence where places of meeting are concerned is not aligned with the theology of the early church that believed that our citizenship is in heaven and we are pilgrims by vocation, people on the way.

This is not to say that churches should divest of facility. But here we have two stories of churches that have done careful discernment about their places of meeting. First Mennonite (MN) and Cedar Falls Mennonite Churches have made bold moves to sell their buildings. Having done so, they are finding new opportunities to renew and reframe the ministry, identity and witness of their churches. Other churches, such as Bethesda Mennonite, have adapted the worship space to be a more intimate, authentic expression of their community as it is today. Still other churches, like Kalona Mennonite, have renewed Christian education spaces to reflect the value of their commitment to the children who are formed in the faith in that place of meeting. Nine of our churches gather in the meeting places of other congregations. The continual reminder of their own “guest” status fosters a spirit of hospitality to those who are seeking a spiritual home where they can meet the living God. Christ Community Church gathers in a synagogue. Recent experiences of shootings at synagogues in other parts of the country have meant that this congregation thinks about what happens if one's place of meeting is a target for violence. Still other congregations are very much in the process of discerning whether it is best to move into home settings.

Clearly the question is not buildings or no buildings. The question is, who are we as God's people and how does our space of meeting reflect and support our commitments, our values and our hopes as the people of God in this place where we live and move and have our being?

*continued from page 2*

maintenance fund to cover future needs.

By 2016, it was clear that necessary repairs and improvements, including making the building more physically accessible, would require more than \$160,000, not counting future maintenance costs.

In Fall 2016, the discernment process intensified with a strong commitment to involve as many congregational voices as possible. Six congregational meetings focused around these questions: How do we live out our church mission? Who are we as a church? What concerns and/or excites you about this conversation? What issues are important to consider during this discussion? What does a/this building mean for the life of our church? What role(s) does a/this building play as we live out our mission?

We sought congregational input through large group discussions (sometimes using a “talking stick”); table discussions at potluck lunches; written questionnaires; a straw poll asking individuals to rank priorities, values, and possible actions identified in prior discussions; and inviting individuals to speak confidentially with the elders, church chair, or pastor about concerns they preferred not to make public. Throughout the process we provided printed summaries of meeting discussions. Our goal was inclusive, open, and transparent communication.

Just before Advent we concluded a congregational meeting by lining up in a “Keep or Sell” continuum, which revealed that we had reached a widely-shared preference to sell our building. We knew that further time-consuming discernment was needed regarding what our path would look like following the sale, but we were ready for the congregational chair, pastor, and elders to devise our next steps.

In the spring of 2017, we formed a “Relocation Exploration” committee that was charged with (1) studying the information gathered from the congregational

discussions, (2) investigating local space options, (3) keeping the elders and pastor apprised of the committee’s efforts and seeking any input or counsel needed, (4) preparing a recommendation for our congregation, and (5) keeping the congregation apprised of the work of the committee in an open, transparent process. Committee members toured three local church buildings, meeting with church leaders who were open to considering sharing physical space with another congregation. Ultimately, the committee recommended renting space from First Presbyterian Church—just two blocks from the building that we were selling.

After a series of conversations with representatives from First Presbyterian, we signed a 3-year rental agreement that began mid-July 2018. It provides for shared use of the kitchen and dining room; office facilities for our pastor; Sunday School rooms; shared nursery services; and exclusive use of a large multi-purpose room that we renovated prior to relocating in late August. “Our” space accommodates worship, fellowship, library, and adult Sunday School functions. (The sale of our former building was finalized in October.)

We have received an extraordinarily hospitable welcome from our hosts, with whom we have shared Sunday potlucks, a Christmas Eve service, an Ash Wednesday service, and a series of Lenten meals and programs. To our deep joy, we have learned that another local congregation was inspired by our experience with First Presbyterian to adopt a similar model by inviting another congregation to share their church building.

Having “come home to a place we’ve never been before,” we eagerly look forward to the next chapter in the life of our congregation.

Left: Original Cedar Falls Mennonite Church building; Right: First Presbyterian & Cedar Falls Mennonite Church shared building





# Iowa youth groups explore conscientious objection

by Gretta Rempel,

First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, Iowa



Who is your hero? I thought about it as the sharing made its way around the circle of Mennonite youth. Maybe my great grandparents who made their way to the midwest and started a new life, or Marie Curie, because she is a pioneer in science.

My peers answered with George Washington, Menno Simons, Sojourner Truth, teachers, coaches, parents, and grandparents. Society often glorifies veterans, but why didn't anyone name one as their hero? As the discussion grew, more questions followed. What does it mean to be a peacemaker or a peace church? What does scripture say about being a peacemaker? And finally, what is a conscientious objector?

Karla Stoltzfus Detweiler, Pastor of Christian Formation at First Mennonite Church (FMC), led our gathering with these questions. Our high school youth group in Iowa City, which included youth from FMC and Torre Fuerte Iglesia Menonita, joined the youth group from West Union Mennonite Church in Parnell, Iowa to focus on our answers to these challenging questions in a three-part discussion.

During our first session, Karla focused on living a peace-oriented life and the function of a peace church. We looked at familiar Bible passages that focused on peace and were encouraged to see them with new eyes by diving into the context more deeply. Next we discussed how those passages apply to our lives. Finally, we brainstormed ways that we can promote peace in the earth/world, in our community, church, school and family, and also inner peace. It was impressive to see the many ways that even our small group can and does promote peace. Imagine what a difference we can all make when we work together. Karla summed up the message of the evening with "Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our lives, reconciliation is the center of our work."

This idea of peace threading through our whole

life carried through into the second session, where we began talking more specifically about what it means to be a conscientious objector (CO). Both of our churches invited men to share their personal experiences of being a CO during World War 2 and the Vietnam War. Our guests were Wilbur Litwiller, Darvin Yoder, Galen Yoder, and Wilbur Yoder from West Union and Joe Krabill and Wilford Yoder from FMC. Several shared influential stories from their youth that sparked a peace mindset beyond what they learned while attending a Mennonite church or school, leading them to claiming CO status. As the sharing continued, another component that many panelists touched on was how they pursued service as a result of being a CO. Many of the men continued to serve after fulfilling their required alternative service term and still live a life of intentional peacebuilding and servanthood.

Our final session focused on building our own CO file. How will we show that we are peacemakers if there would be a draft and we would be faced with the possibility of serving in the military? The Central Plains Mennonite Conference website includes resources for youth leaders that our sponsors consulted. Our sponsors encouraged us to think about papers that we've written, bulletins from our peace churches, letters from mentors or teachers, even letters that we've written and sent to ourselves that would outline our character and views on peace. All of these are ways we can show that we are conscientious objectors because of our faith.

Having this three-part MYF discussion about being a CO helped me understand what I believe. Hearing stories of those who experienced a draft themselves and explanations of why claiming the status of CO made a difference in their lives solidified in me my nonviolence and peace mindset. I am grateful to be part of a Peace Church and loving community that encourages me to have heroes like Marie Curie and my grandparents who spent most of their life volunteering for MCC.



The youth group from First Mennonite Church and Iglesia Torre Fuerte, Iowa City, Iowa.



## Leaders credentialed

**Donna Stucky** was ordained on May 5, 2019 at Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, MN. Donna is a chaplain in the Twin Cities area.

**Pornchai (Xeng) Thosaengsiri** was ordained on May 5, 2019 at Saint Paul Hmong Mennonite Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

## Transitions

**Eugene Miller** completed his term as Interim Pastor at Christ Community Church, Des Moines, Iowa, on May 26, 2019.

# Nebraska Mennonite women's retreat

*by Peg Burkey, Bellwood Mennonite Church*

It was a cold, snowy weekend when the Nebraska Mennonite women met for their annual retreat at The Leadership Center in Aurora on March 1st and 2nd. Despite the cold, the fellowship was toasty warm, the laughter ran deep, and the inspiration was wise and strong. The retreat was planned and hosted this year by the women from Bellwood Mennonite Church in Milford.

We were grateful for the insights and wisdom of Kate Friesen from Sioux Falls, our guest speaker for the retreat. Kate's theme for her four messages was "What God Wants Women to Know". A few of her sub-themes were: "You are Enough," "You are Valued," "You are More than a Label," "You are Loved," and "You are Needed". For Joy Steckly from Bellwood, a highlight was the message, "God doesn't need us to do stuff for Him, yet He has chosen to accomplish His work in us and through us. [God] will give us the tools we need, when we need them. True growth happens when we realize we can't do it on our own." Another high point was Kate's vivid monologues portraying different women in the Bible. Those characters really came alive for everyone in the group!

The music for the weekend was led by a worship team from Bellwood, with special guest, Deb Brunkow, joining the team. The times of singing drew us into God's presence, and helped us focus our thoughts on the theme for each worship session. The last time of worship on Saturday closed with Communion and sharing testimonies. Char Roth from Bellwood said, "I was encouraged by our inspirational speaker and the music! It's always good to see and renew friendships with our sisters from the other Nebraska Mennonite churches."

Fellowship and building relationships with women from other churches is a key value of the retreat. There were opportunities for this during our shared meal and snack times, free time on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, a water aerobics session in the pool and a workshop on "Feeding our Bodies to Serve the Lord."

As the women said their good-byes, they were already anticipating next year's retreat, to be hosted by East Fairview Mennonite Church.

## Sister Care Seminar held in Iowa City

*by Martha Corpus Hernandez, pastor, Iglesia Menonita Centro Cristiano*

On March 16, 2019 I met with the sisters of the Iglesia Menonita Torre Fuerte from Iowa City, Iowa. Around 13 women attended the Sister Care Seminar from 8 am to 5 pm. We were especially pleased to have Cyneatha Millsaps, Executive Director of Mennonite Women USA, with us. Her role for the day was to evaluate the seminar.

Before leading this Sister Care Seminar, I attended two Sister Care training seminars held in Portland Mennonite Church in Portland, Oregon and Drift Creek Camp near Lincoln City, Oregon. Both were led by Rhoda Keener and Carolyn Heggen. Rhoda and Carolyn are the authors of the Sister Care materials. I am grateful for Pastor Gloria Villatoro and the Torre Fuerte congregation, and especially for the women who shared their stories. The sharing was impactful and had many of us in awe as we heard the stories of what had taken place in each others lives. Leaving the seminar, I reflected on how moving it had been for the women present that day.

My hope is to bring Sister Care to the rest of our Central Plains Hispanic Mennonite congregations.



# Freeman Network for Justice and Peace responds to local needs

by Gloria Graber, Salem-Zion Mennonite Church

In February, I attended a meeting like no other meeting I've ever experienced. It was four hours long and full of strangers and in a town where I'd never been. It took place in a bar and grill in a South Dakota town 90 miles from Freeman.

The subject of this meeting is what brought me, my husband Gary, and another couple to this unlikely place. As the Freeman Network for Justice and Peace (FNJP) chair, I had been alerted to the dire needs that this community was beginning to experience. Fleeing the violence of gangs and threats of death in their own countries, and at the invitation of family members already living in South Dakota, immigrants have been making their way with only the clothes on their backs to this small rural community.

The strangers we met in this meeting were a motley group. Retired South Dakota State University professors, nurses, a banker, Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic, Mennonite and non-denominational. The owner of the bar where we met had relocated to this area 10 months earlier and everyday she sees people come in the door, hungry and looking for food. In her compassion, she tries to help them, giving them food and answering their questions. It's overwhelming work.

That day we heard the stories of several immigrants who were struggling to make a place for themselves in the community and to provide for their families. In response, we, along with our new friends, took those requests home to our church communities and began collecting donations of food, money and household items. We've made several trips back and forth, ferrying donations and volunteers for various projects. We've formed relationships and expanded our understanding; we've learned a lot.

At our meeting that day, we discovered an unexpected group of people committed to heeding the call found in Leviticus 19:33-34: *"When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself..."* We met as strangers, but left as friends...common, ordinary people trying to follow the example of Jesus.

FNJP and several Freeman Mennonite Churches are participating in the work of the kingdom of God in South Dakota by heeding a call that looms large in our backyard; a call to form relationships and to care for these immigrants who were created and deeply loved by God.



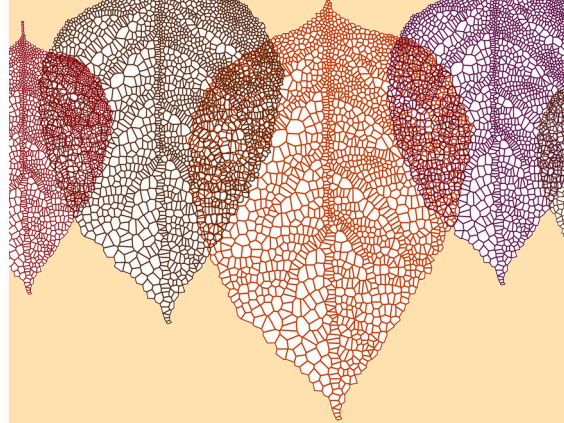
Gloria Villatoro and Martha Corpus Hernandez participate in the Sister Care seminar.

## Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds June 2019

The newsletter of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is published five times a year at Kalona, Iowa. Editor: Amanda Bleichty. Copy Editor: Erin Ramer. Thanks to Peg Burkey, Mary Lou Farmer, and Verna Zook for proofreading.  
E-mail: [scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org). Telephone: 319-325-4522.  
For the June issue, please send stories, news and photos by **August 5, 2019** to the address above. Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to [office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org).

Graphic Design by Erin Ramer. Printed by Kalona Graphics in USA



## Contact information

### Moderator

Sid Burkey 402-761-2093  
[sid@burkeyfarms.com](mailto:sid@burkeyfarms.com)

### Assistant Moderator

Shawn Nolt 402-364-3493  
[slnolt7@gmail.com](mailto:slnolt7@gmail.com)

### Office

P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029

Monica Clem, Office Manager  
605-929-3325  
[office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org)

### Hispanic Ministries Coordinator

Ramiro Hernandez 319-621-3725  
[rmherns@yahoo.com](mailto:rmherns@yahoo.com)

### Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

Amanda Bleichty 319-325-4522  
[amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org)

David Boshart 319-936-5904  
[davidboshart@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:davidboshart@centralplainsmc.org)

Tim Detweiler 319-458-0224  
[timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:timdetweiler@centralplainsmc.org)

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  
P.O. Box 101  
Freeman, SD 57029

change service requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Freeman, S.D.  
Permit No. 12

## FINANCES

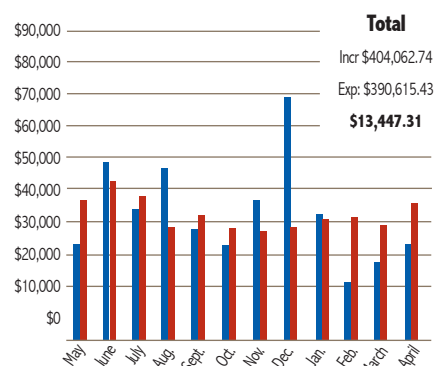
The Central Plains budget ends the year in the **BLACK!** We are extremely grateful for the generosity that exists within our conference and we cannot thank you enough for your continued support. Income for March and April came in at a slower pace than our expenses. However, our healthy surplus leading into these months helped us end the fiscal year up \$13,447.31. This reverses last year's unfortunate deficit we took on at the end of the fiscal year. We are appreciative of all your support. Thank you again.

— *Stewardship Task Group*

### Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2018/2019



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Central Plains Annual Meeting** will take place June 20-23, 2019, in Kalona, Iowa.  
**MennoCon '19** will take place July 2-6, 2019, in Kansas City, Missouri.



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