



Scattered Seeds

May/June
2022

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples..."

— John 13:34-35

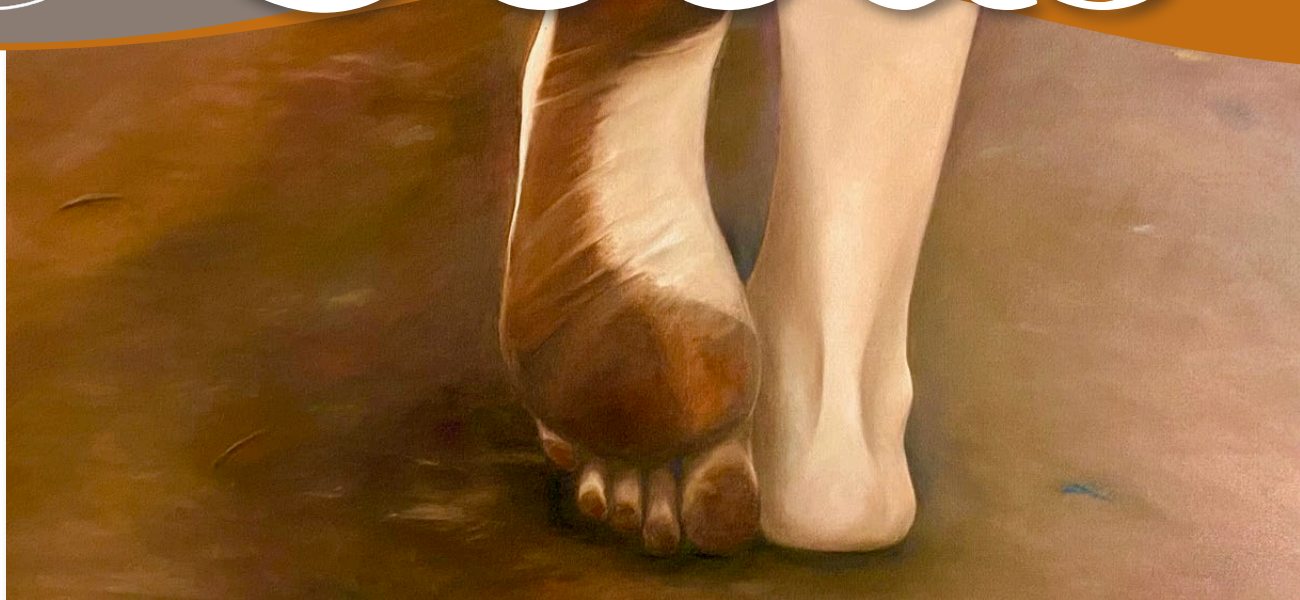
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Communion: A meal that tells on us

by Seth Miller, Pastor for Preaching and Congregational Life, Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE

I've always been someone who likes to collect. As a child, it was baseball cards and rocks — the appreciation of a good skipping stone is greatly lacking in our current cultural context. But over the last 15 years or so, I've developed a bit of a collection that has drawn raised eyebrows more than once. I love to collect cookbooks. Not the new, mass printed, gimmicky ones with smiling celebrities or name brands on the cover. No. The cookbooks that I search for are birthed around a small table in the corner of a musty church basement. I've made a habit of combing over the bookshelves in thrift stores and boxes at garage sales, searching for the stained and tattered pages of a once loved collection of recipes. Why?

Because those old community cookbooks are more than recipes. They are a collection of communal stories and family histories. The best ones have scribbled notes all over the pages, whispering secrets that aren't often shared

beyond the confines of close friends. Its in these books, we get a brief picture of the way people lived together in a specific time and place. They signal what is important and shifts in community values. Phrases like "quick and easy," "no mess" and "no fuss" start to creep into our vernacular. In many ways, these cookbooks tell on us.

We certainly don't mean for them to. We want them to preserve our best communal selves. But if you hold a church cookbook up against the directory, it will likely tell you a story. Who was on the planning committee that chose the recipes? What family names appear again and again and again? What families are only mentioned a few times? How do we describe foods that come from cultures that are not our own? Who contributed those? Who and what is missing altogether? Some cookbooks included all submitted recipes. If there were five recipes for meatloaf, all five were included. Others appear more curated, and only

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one makes the cut. What was the process for selection? In the writing, what story is the community trying to preserve? What are we wanting to say about ourselves? What do we want to pass on to future generations?

I have all of this on my mind, because in Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends two of the disciples ahead to prepare a meal. It wasn't just any meal; it was the most important traditional meal. One that would have its own section in a treasured community cookbook simply titled "Passover." It was a celebration driven by memory — one deep, powerful memory: the memory of slavery and deliverance in Egypt. They practiced the memory in everything they said and did. They recited it in what they ate and what they sang. It's the sort of thing that tells you who you are and what sort of world you live in. It's the sort of thing that shapes the kind of hope you have.

Jesus gathers his disciples around a table to share THE traditional meal. Along the way, these disciples have demonstrated their lack of faithfulness, their lack of understanding, their selfishness, their ambition, their pride, their willingness to discard those who are outside their vision for Jesus' reign. And Jesus welcomes them — all of them. Knowing their mixed motives and dishonest intentions and broken relationships, he welcomes them to his table. And he bends down, and he washes their feet. And he offers them communion with him.

Every year, like countless others, our congregation gathers in the evening on Maundy Thursday to share in communion. And every year, we tell some version of this story. We practice the memory through what we say and what we do. We recite it in what we eat and what we sing. And our recipes tell on us. Who is involved in the planning? Whose voices are heard again and again and again? Who is asked to serve? What in our worship is borrowed from cultures or traditions not our own? How are they presented? Who and what is missing altogether? Do we prioritize values like "quick and easy" and "no fuss" as we attempt to share THE meal?

In a world where most of us are trying to figure out how to simply be together in shared space again, the stakes feel high. The divisions among many communities feel deeper and more entrenched than they have at any point in my lifetime. Sometimes I wonder, as Mennonites, if we are more comfortable with the notion of loving the stranger than we are loving the person whom we know all too well. And we're supposed to be preparing to share in communion. But maybe that's the point.

The word "Maundy" itself refers to the command that Jesus gave to his disciples in John 13:34-35: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (NRSV). Maybe that's partly what communion is intended to be—the recipe for a meal that tells on us.

We gather with people we like and those of whom we're skeptical, and we listen and watch as Jesus sets the table. And he tells us that we're supposed to behave in the same way, welcoming, loving and serving even those who we're sure aren't trustworthy — do this in remembrance of me. It's a good thing that it's Jesus' table and not ours. Because in this act of obedience, Jesus takes our mixed motives, our dishonest intentions and broken relationships and somehow makes them into something different. The practice of sharing in communion is a window through which we begin to see ourselves and those around us in the light of Jesus' radical grace and love. It's the sort of thing that tells you who you are and what sort of world you live in. It's the sort of thing that shapes the kind of hope you have. Yes, it's a meal that has the potential to tell on us. But it also can speak as a witness.

**This article was originally published on the Menno Snapshots blog of MC USA. <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/communion-a-meal-that-tells-on-us/>*

In the gospels, spending time with Jesus often means spending time together around a dinner table. These past two years, we haven't been able to eat nearly enough dinners together. This year our CPMC Annual Meeting theme is "Come to the table!" We will celebrate that we are finally able to gather in-person again and sit around tables with one another and with Jesus!

Conference Ministers and the Freeman area worship team will open some of Jesus' table fellowship scriptures for us during worship and we'll take communion together. We'll imagine, dream, and discern together what it means to be part of CPMC's table during delegate sessions. And, of course, we'll eat, sharing life with one another! After several years that have been challenging in so many ways, you are invited to join with others from across our conference, to meet Jesus at the table. Come and eat!

You don't have to be a delegate to attend, all are invited. For more information and to register, see our website, centralplainsmc.org/annual-meeting-2022.

Imaginative scripture art for sale at Central Plains Annual Meeting

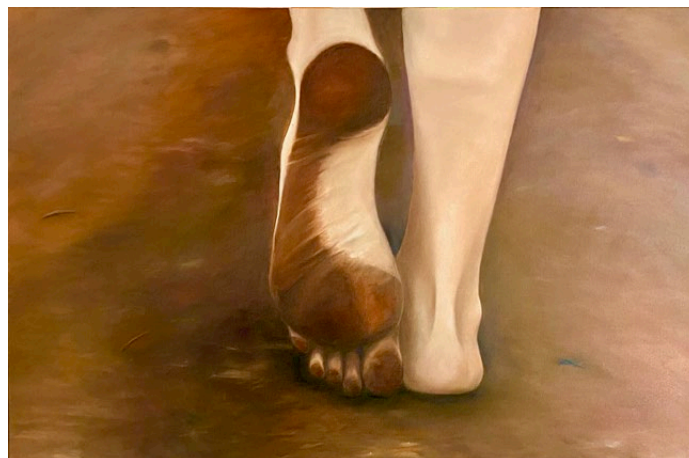
As part of an initiative to increase our imaginative capacity, artists from across the conference have been invited to create imaginative art based on scripture to be showcased in a series of thematic Scattered Seeds. At our Annual Meeting in June, we will hold a silent auction for these artworks. Half 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." Proceeds from the auction will help to fund community meals and meals for children, as well as provide pastoral support in an extremely difficult economic environment.

If you would like to purchase original art from a CPMC artist, we invite you to attend Annual Meeting, or submit your maximum bid on our website, centralplainsmc.org/annual-meeting-art-2022. We encourage your generosity!



Top to bottom, left to right:
Eat — Peter's Vision, Acts 10
by Michelle L. Hofer, 8" x 10", mixed media on paper, 2021

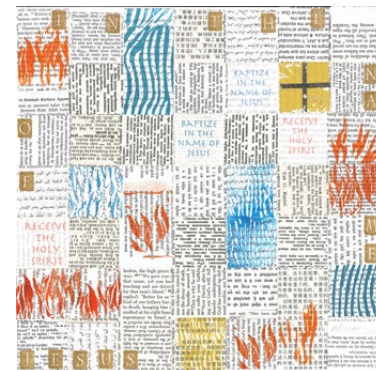
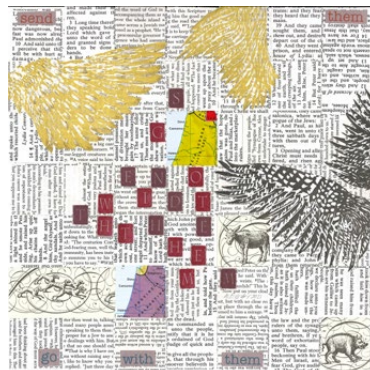
"Go Harvest", Luke 10:1-11
by Gay Widmer, Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, IA, 25 1/2" x 30 1/2", plaster and acrylic on wood, 2021



Orb of Humanity, Matthew 20
by Stan Harder, 6 inch orb, carved walnut, pedestal of spalted maple, 2021

The Last Shall Be First, Matthew 20
by Melinda Turnbull, framed 20" x 20", colored pencil, ink and gold leaf on vellum, 2021

"Get your feet dirty" based on Luke 10:1-11
by Kim Becker, pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, St. Paul, MN, 2' x 3', oil on canvas, 2021



Didactics for Acts 10 triptych
by Martha Yoder, Triptych. Each piece is 11" x 11", woven paper, collage, and printed text

Conference Ministers continuing education will benefit CPMC congregations

“How can we best support the congregations and pastors of Central Plains Mennonite Conference in their mission to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities?” This question is central to the work and vision of CPMC’s conference ministry staff. We recognize that every community is different and that each congregation will have to discern for themselves how best to share the Good News. In order to be better partners with our congregations as they do this work in their communities, your conference ministers have each been engaged in strategic continuing education.

Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister, is taking a coaching course through Vibrant Faith. As a coach, he envisions partnering with pastors and congregations to ask questions and provide insights that will help them discern how God is calling them to engage with their communities. Coaching recognizes the wisdom and knowledge that are present in each congregation. The coach provides a bird’s-eye view, good questions, and thought-provoking conversation that can help to spark a congregation’s creativity as they think through who they are and who God might be calling them to be.

Nathan has also begun a Doctor of Theology in Ministry degree through Northern Seminary in Chicago. This is a doctorate in contextual theology, and Nathan is particularly interested in it because of the central question that guides the ministry staff’s work. Again, “How can we best support the congregations and pastors of Central Plains Mennonite Conference in their mission to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities?” The society around the church in North America has changed, and how the church engages with that society is necessarily undergoing change as well. Many of us are not equipped for the conversations that we need to have as we discern the way forward for our congregations, conferences, and even the denomination. Nathan is in this program so that he can learn how better to lead and to partner with pastors and congregations at the conference level as we have these challenging conversations and discern God’s way forward.

Susan Janzen, Conference Minister of Ministerial Leadership, has been part of an international cohort piloting a leadership training course designed by the Movement Leaders Collective (MLC). This three month online course is built from the six elements in Alan Hirsch’s book, *The Forgotten Ways*: Jesus is Lord, discipleship, missional-incarnational impulse, APEST culture, liminality and communitas, and organic systems. Together, members of the cohort are exploring the future of pastoral leadership and transformational change within the church. They want to create a ministry environment in which relational, collaborative, and trust-based friendships can foster radical innovation and partnership.

Amanda Bleichy, Conference Minister of Christian Formation, became certified as a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) in 2021. As a part of the conference’s anti-racism work, Amanda has been administering the IDI to conference leaders and inviting them to join an Intercultural Development Cohort. Cohorts meet every other month to follow a plan designed to increase intercultural competency. Much of the work so far has been in self-awareness, inviting cohort members to reflect on their own culture, values, and beliefs. The work of intercultural communication is relevant for everyone, focusing not only on communication across ethnicities, but also across all the diversities we find in our conference: socio-economic, political, theological, contextual, heritage, gender, etc.

Amanda will also be taking a coaching intensive that will help to guide her work as she engages with congregations about faith formation for all ages. She is especially interested in developing coaching cohorts that will examine faith formation beyond dedicated “Christian Education” and curriculum. Faith formation happens in all of congregational life, and Amanda is hoping that training in coaching will help her to ask good questions that will help us to evaluate and refine our ways of doing faith formation in congregations.

Holding hope for the other: The gift of spiritual direction

by Jill Hofer, The House Church of Freeman, Freeman, SD

As we journey through our lives, we may often find ourselves wondering, “Where is God?” or “Why is God so silent?” Perhaps we find ourselves feeling less hopeful or a bit lost or alone. The gift of Spiritual Direction is the act of coming alongside an individual, examining life and experiences, noticing where God has been and is currently moving. **Spiritual Direction is active listening that holds hope for the other.**

It might be tempting to equate Spiritual Direction to “therapy” or “therapy light.” Spiritual Direction and Therapy are two very different methods of care. Therapy, or counseling, is a process that can provide benefits such as understanding and changing behaviors, working on responses and emotions, growing in self-confidence, coping with depression, etc., all which lead to better mental health. Spiritual Directors typically do not offer this kind of assistance; rather, they companion alongside the directee to increase awareness of God and spiritual growth. Often, directees find a new openness in their relationship to God and in their spirituality, exploring new ways of enjoying and knowing God. While the word “Direction” can seem misleading, as though the director will tell the directee all the ways in which the directee is “doing faith” wrong, it is in fact the exact opposite! Directors encourage and guide, offering insights into new ways of approaching faith and faith growth, building on the faith the directee already is living.

During a typical monthly session, time is spent listening and responding to the spiritual needs of the directee, encouraging spiritual growth through practice, raising awareness of the movement of God, and providing spiritual friendship and wisdom. This is not a place where the directee is judged on their level of spirituality but rather, they are assisted in living out their spirituality to its fullest capacity.

Spiritual Direction can happen either in a one-on-one relationship between director and directee or as group direction, where several directees meet simultaneously with a single director who facilitates the gathering and sharing. Spiritual Direction can take place in person, on the phone or via Zoom; there is even an email or letter writing option. Spiritual Direction is as varied as the number of Directors available.

Spiritual Directors of Central Plains Mennonite Conference: If you are interested in listing your name and contact information on a CPMC-wide data base, please submit that information, along with any other details about your Spiritual Direction practice (where you are located, types of Spiritual Direction offered, your SD philosophy, credentials, etc.) that you would like potential directees to know, to Jill Hofer, jhofer272@gmail.com. This compiled list will be made available to CPMC members in the near future.





The Medicine Quilt—Inspired by a true story

by Jenelle Ortman, Salem Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD

“Grown men can learn from very little children for the hearts of little children are pure. Therefore, the Great Spirit may show to them many things which older people miss.” -- Black Elk

The above quote is taken from a forward page of the children’s book, *The Medicine Quilt, Inspired by a True Story*. Margaret Doom, the author, has written a story of hope and light for “those born of that land” and “those who came to it”, referring to Native Americans and the others who now call the land home. The illustrator, LaShawn Medicine Horn, gives the book color and life that appeals to children.

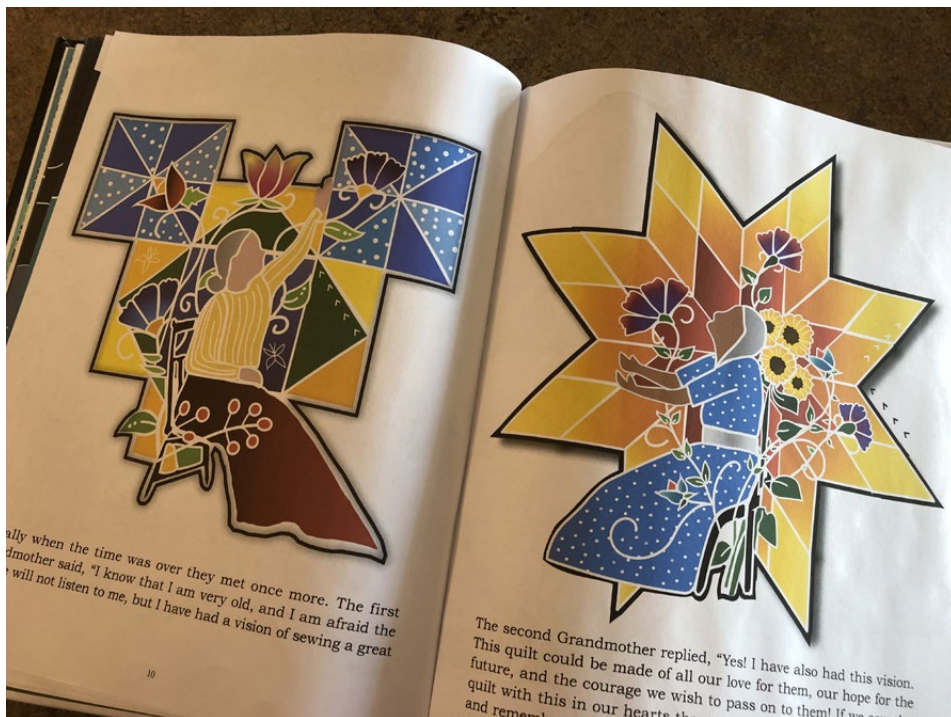
It’s a story of truth, but also appeals to a child’s imagination. There is no peace between the two groups of people, with a reluctance from everyone to even talk about the division. That brings about consternation for all, even the health of the land. A grandmother from those born of the land, and a grandmother from those who came to it, do come together to talk and pray in their individual ways. The idea of a quilt is born, and from that symbol and the questions of children and youth, the next generations learn what it takes to move ahead and gives hope to all of us.

Both of these ethnic groups have a rich quilting culture. The theme of using the making of a quilt was in part inspired by a real happening. Two groups of people, East River Horizons of Wagner, SD, and Freeman (SD) Network for Justice and Peace (FNJP), have been meeting together for several years. A relationship has gradually been developing through fellowship and food shared at the table and taking turns hosting in their respective communities. At one point the suggestion

Transitions

Chris Becker ended as co-pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Lauderdale, MN on April 30. **Kim Becker** moved from co-pastor to solo pastor on May 1.





was made by the Peace and Justice group, made up of those who came to it, to have a quilt made, in appreciation for the growing friendship, and gifted to the Wagner group, made up of people from both groups, as they hosted Freeman. Irene Schrag was the quilter and her craftsmanship and generosity was well-received. Again, in friendship, a quilt from a Wagner quilter, was presented to Freeman. It has found a home in the Freeman Heritage Museum.

The author was also celebrating her adopted grandmother, Margaret Zephier, her wisdom and the many obstacles and experiences she has had to endure. The two Margarets had many conversations about forgiveness and forgiving, which young Margaret expressed on paper at an early age. Those conversations, plus more experiences for the younger Margaret, morphed into the story that is now published. Grandmother Margaret, also talented in quilt making, created the quilt that is now on display in Freeman.

The book can be found on Amazon.com, Target, Walmart, Barnes and Noble or the Freeman Heritage Museum. It is written at about a 3rd grade level and is a great discussion starter for children and adults.

Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds May/June 2022

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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '21-'22 ends the fiscal year with a surplus thanks to strong support from the CPMC constituents. Total income for the year was \$407,143.25 which is 95.9% of the blueprint (budget). Expenses for the year came in at \$404,470.09 which is 95.3% of the blueprint (budget). As a result this leaves us with a positive balance of \$2,673.16 for our '21-'22 budget. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— *Stewardship Task Group*

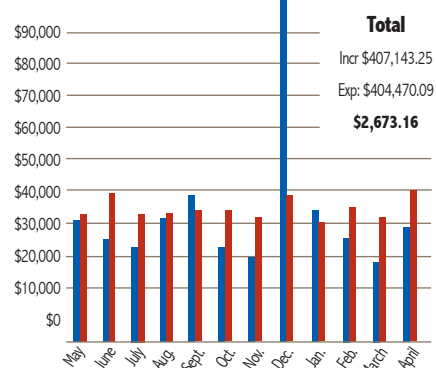
UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Meeting 2022, June 16-19, Freeman, SD

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2021-2022



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