



# Scattered Seeds

November  
2023



*Fall colors of Crooked Creek Christian Camp*

“For where two  
or three are  
gathered in my  
name, there I am  
among them.”

— Matthew 18:20

## A conversation with Alan Roxburgh, consultant for CPMC’s Leaders Table groups

*Interviewed by Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister*

*Alan Roxburgh is a former pastor and one of the early prophetic voices in the Missional Church Movement (along with Lois Barrett, Mennonite theologian from Kansas). Alan has written and taught extensively about the challenges facing the church as we find ourselves pressed by the changes taking place in the culture around us. Over the course of the last year Alan has been consulting with CPMC in the formation of Leaders Tables, places where pastors and other church leaders gather to begin a conversation about what it means to lead in the challenging spaces of our time. Nathan recently interviewed Alan to get a sense of how he is experiencing the Leaders Table gatherings within CPMC.*

**Nathan:** *As you meet with CPMC’s Leaders Tables, what are you noticing?*

**Alan:** Leaders Tables are really an opportunity for pastors (and leaders) to come together to address the question, “What’s happening more broadly in the church and the culture, and what do we do about it?” What I’m noticing is that almost all of your leaders are very aware that huge shifts have, and are, taking place, and they’re affecting both themselves as leaders and their people. And they are working and wrestling with how to faithfully engage this changed context, with themselves and with their people.

**Nathan:** *You have connections across the church. In what ways do you see similarities with what is happening in CPMC and in what ways do you see differences?*

*continued on page 2*

### In this issue

**1-3** Conversation  
with Alan Roxburgh

**3-4** Learning at the  
Leaders Table

**4-5** Think, act, lead

**6** Let me listen to your  
story

**Alan:** What's the same is that practically every church system and organization is confronting the fact of decline, of loss, of realizing that the role and the place that they've had in American society is changing dramatically. And they're not sure what that means. They are all the same in terms of finding themselves in a place that they never expected, whether congregations or clergy or denominational leaders, and to a large extent, really not knowing what to do about that.

As Mennonites, you are far more locally based out of a tradition of belonging and accountability than most other denominations. And that's a very strong and positive thing. You know, 20 years ago, you may have been accused of being these groups who are keeping to themselves or something. But today, the power of being rooted in community and belonging, I know, it's breaking apart for you guys as well, but there's still enough of it there. And there's enough story there; there is a base in a tradition and that's a real strength. I find that as I listen to your pastors, your leaders, that they are more in tune with who they are and what's going on in their context. And they're local.

**Nathan:** *What is something you have appreciated about working with CPMC leaders?*

**Alan:** I think, and I mean this as a compliment, not as a criticism, they're not looking to the conference for answers. They're certainly looking for spaces of, what I would call, companionship and belonging, and places to talk together and are deeply appreciative of it. I was aware that when for example, you/we offered them Companions Table conversation, there was very little hesitation, people were ready to embrace that. Because that place of conversation and reflection and dialogue, they see that as something pretty important, and they want to do it. Whereas with many other groups, it's not quite that clear, or evident of them being together.

**Nathan:** *What is your hope for where Leaders Table begins to take the church?*

**Alan:** I got one of these Facebook posts about the four characteristics of a missional church. I'm not going to talk about the first two, but the second two characteristics were visionary and innovative. What that is illustrative of is how the churches remain captive to methodologies that are brought in from the outside. Any organization can do visioning, any organization can do innovating and all of that. But what's absent in all of this is any sense of, "In the unraveling that's going on, how do we listen to what God is doing amongst us and in front of us?" And that's

not the same as doing visioning and doing innovating. I want, in these Leaders Tables, to invite pastors to get that picture that we don't have to be always looking for and slaves of, and thinking we've got to get the right method. But it's how you form a people who are asking, "What is it that God's doing in front of us now to be joined with God?" So that's what I want to see happening, I want to see that kind of movement take place in congregations with their pastors. And that for me starts to get at what I really mean by missional. The second part is that in engaging their congregations, very often pastors feel like they're doing it by themselves. And when you're in a place you've never been before, doing it by yourself is the dumbest thing on the face of the earth. We need one another. So, what I want to do through the Companions table, is begin to give them a taste of what it means to be co-journeymen, co-workers with one another, not just in a generic way, but in the ways in which they are learning to address how to lead and form communities in their own contexts. It's giving back to Mennonites, what they claim they always had from the very beginning; that is a people together discerning God and engaged in their communities.

**Nathan:** *At the heart of the Leaders Table (and Companions Table) are spiritual practices. Can you talk a little about why practices are important and what practices are embedded in these conversations?*

**Alan:** When we turn to methods, we are fundamentally saying to our own people, "We need resources from the outside, we're not equipped enough, we're not ready, we're not smart enough." This is very opposite of what is in the Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament. God is present amongst God's people. And it's amongst God's people, that we hear the Spirit and the directions in which to go. And so, what we practiced, at least the last 100 years or so, is the borrowing of methods, from anywhere and everywhere, from outside. And then we need to bring in people who can teach it, who can train people how to do this, and how to do that. But every single time we do that, what we are building into our people in our congregations is that when it comes to church, you need experts, you need professionals. Whereas through the history of the church, and you as Mennonite people should know this better than anybody else, is that what shapes enlivened, hopeful, Christian life, are practices, and practices are habits of life.

Christians have, over the years developed a variety of practices. One is the daily office. Each day, we listen to Scripture, we pray, we bring ourselves before God at the beginning of the day. Or the practice of worship is a similar

practice. And so, what we're doing in Leaders Table and Companions Table is almost, in a sense, reintroducing these practices. And the practices are directed toward putting our attention upon God, not just in a spiritual devotional way, but turning our attention each day to the question, "What's God doing here among us?" That never gets asked anymore in our communities. The Leaders Table and the Companions Table become built in places where we practice with one another, dwelling in the Word and dwelling with each other. So, the practice of dwelling is one of them. The other practice that's really critical, that we build into this, is the practice of discerning. Discerning is how a community begins to ask again the question, "In our stories, in the rhythms of our life, in our connections with our neighbors, where might we be seeing God at work?" It's a communal process and is always connected to the question, "What do we see God doing here? And how do we then join it?" Without that action built in, we're really not doing discernment. Those are the core practices, so instead of saying, "Let me spend six months and train you how to do innovation" I want to say, "Let's begin to learn again, how to listen, how to indwell stories, how to reconnect with basic Christian practices."

**Nathan:** *Finally, what is your hope for the future of the church?*

**Alan:** One of the most important texts in the New Testament is Ephesians, that doxological opening. And, you know, "Thanks be to God," ... then you get to verses 10 and 11. And it says, "Because he who, from the beginning, ... that everything, the whole of the cosmos, the whole of creation, is going to be brought back together and made one in Christ." We live in a broken universe. And in that broken universe, we live, as Augustine once said, with this deep, deep, deep sense of what's gone wrong. ... So that's the world we live in. It manifests itself in a million different ways. There's not a lot of hope in that. But what's going on in Ephesians is pretty different. The question has now been made clear in Jesus that God is in the process of remaking and healing the whole of creation. So that's the hope that we all live in. And that's the hope, and hope is not a wishful thinking, it's the anticipatory way of life that we have.

## Learning at the Leaders Table

*by Steve Griffin, Pastor of Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE*

*"We learn absolutely nothing unless we stop and reflect on what we have done." ~ Alan Roxburgh*

Alan shared the above sentiments at a recent online Companions Table meeting. (The Companions Table is the continuation of the initial Leaders Table.) Consequently, I am grateful for this opportunity to stop and reflect on—and share with you—what I experienced during the Leaders Table.

First, after briefly exchanging hellos, Alan would pray and then instruct us to recall and encourage others with where and how we experienced God—in highs, lows, and the seemingly mundane—since our previous gathering. It was a bit like a communal *examen*, if you will.

Next, we read scripture together. The passage was read aloud twice and as we followed along, we would take note of where the words gave us pause...where we felt our attention drawn...where questions arose, or impressions emerged. Then, we would join a friend or two in a "break out" room to share our thoughts regarding the Spirit's inner voice prompted by scripture.

These breakout sessions were about hearing and being heard. Our focus was to intently listen to what our dialogue partners were saying. There were no "wrong" or "right" statements, simply honest observations for further contemplation. Without exception these effortless conversations were all-too-soon ended as we were unceremoniously snatched back into the general meeting room (what I refer to as "Zoom-Rapture").

Back in the plenary session, we would share with everyone the insights we heard from our friends—not what we *said*, but what we *heard*. What a valuable exercise!

*continued on page 4*



*continued from page 3*

Having fellowshiped in prayer and Bible study, we were then ready to grapple with challenges and opportunities in our various ministry contexts.

Some of the questions:

- How does a leader and his/her people move from a program/structure focus to one of relationship?
- How do we as leaders get our congregations to start to navigate their lives in tune with the Spirit?
- Can we learn to let things die to allow new things to be born?

These are not easy questions, and we offered no easy answers. We attended. We dwelled. We discerned.

And herein lies what was and remains the most valuable to me: The attentive, nonjudgmental presence of fellow travelers. The Leaders Table *was*, and the Companions Table *is*, a much appreciated fellowship. I am convinced that what our churches, conference, and denomination need is not more programs or polity but deeper relationships.

Thus, I encourage pastors and churches to experiment with similar Tables and see what the Spirit may do. Perhaps you will discover, in the words of William Butler Yeats, “There are no strangers here; only friends you haven’t yet met.”

## Think, act, lead ... like Jesus in the face of conflict

*by Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership*

A desire to learn how to do this brought 20 pastors and conference leaders together Sept. 28-30 in Council Bluffs, Iowa, for WayFinder training, a ministry of The Colossian Forum (TCF). TCF is a non-profit organization that helps Christians productively engage conflict in their lives and communities. President Michael Gulker is a Mennonite pastor who previously served at Christ Community Church in Des Moines. Grounded in scripture and prayer, TCF trainers Jess Shults and John Sparks led the group through a process that reimagines conflict as an opportunity for discipleship and witness, rather than as something to be avoided out of fear or threat. It is a challenge to ponder conflict as a gift that God uses to help people flourish and draw closer to God and one another — and to lead from that mindset. Our tendency is to see conflict as an obstacle we need to get past. Throughout our time together, Jess and John helped us understand conflict as a normal and expected part of congregational life that if handled well, can actually build trust and relationships.

Jesus shows us how to do this in Matt. 22:34-40, when an expert in the law asks him which is the greatest commandment in the Law of Moses. Jesus replies, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and adds, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Everything else follows from this. We can know that we’re leading in the direction of

this North Star when we experience an increase in the fruits of the Spirit and a decrease in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5).

Striving to follow the way of Jesus in times of conflict requires us to engage one another with a spirit of self-giving love and attentiveness to what God is doing in and through the relationship. WayFinder calls this Covenantal Communication, which “stems from God’s covenantal promises to always pursue us” and recognizes that “covenantal relationships are not simply about satisfying our own needs but are an invitation to serve one another and serve God’s world together” (*WayFinder Guidebook*, p. 19).

Covenantal Communication is hopeful, humble, generous, courageous, and forbearing. It is lived out in five practices that transform conflict: Go Toward: Pursue Others with Generosity, Go Godward: Affirm Unity in Christ, Get Curious: Listen with Humility, Go Deep: Uncover Fears and Loves, and Get Right: Repair Missteps. Much of our time was spent learning more about these practices by putting them into practice through role play, case studies, reflective journaling, and small and large group discussions.

Participants went home with practical tools for transforming conflict in their own congregations and a keen interest in sharing what they learned about following in the way of Jesus with others.

## Wayfinder Training Testimonials:

Pam Gerig Unruh: *The training filled me with renewed energy and hope. I left thinking that there are parts of this process that could be put into place right away.*

Nick Stoddard: *While this training focused on best practices of communication amidst conflict, I found it to be valuable reminders for my everyday pastoral care as well! For instance, three of the 5Gs of Communication were “Go Toward,” “Get Curious,” and “Go Deep.” “Go Towards” calls me to actively pursue others for connection and care. I had an embarrassing realization that, while some folks I avoid because they are difficult, there are others I don’t prioritize because I simply feel less interested in them. I’d lost some sense of curiosity about the people around me! I was reminded of my calling to value, honor and pursue all the members of my congregation. This pushes me to “Get Curious” and “Go Deep.” As I increase my pursuit and valuation of others, my care for them can grow as I cultivate curiosity about each person and show deepened interest in them, asking genuine questions about their life stories, digging into what hurts, what gives them joy, and what they care deeply about!*

Terry Zimmerly: *The training provided opportunity to get together with some wonderful people and strengthen relationships with colleagues in the wider church as we together seek to lead faithfully during a really challenging time in our society and in our congregations. One takeaway from the training is that it is a spiritual best practice to actually ‘mine’ for trouble, dissatisfaction, and difference in our church communities in order to hear God speaking to us more fully. Taking time to ‘mine’ in Elder’s and Leadership Council meetings, staff meetings, and other settings is preemptive and helps move towards needed changes before situations spiral into unhealthy places. The spiritual practice of ‘mining’ provides a hope-filled lens through which to see problems as opportunities for God to transform us as individuals and church communities so we may more fully work with God in the world.*



## Our North Star and Test for Success

Jesus showed us how to live in his reply to a question from an expert in the Law about which is the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Everything, he said, hangs on these two commandments (Matt. 22:34-40).

Love of God and Love of Neighbor: this is our North Star, our guiding principle. How do we know we’re orienting to the North Star? When we increase in the fruits of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control — and loosen the grip of the fruits of the flesh — sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy (see Gal. 5).

Both where we end up **and** how we get there should be oriented to the North Star.

---

## Our time together was grounded in prayer.

Each time we gathered, we began by **Praying in Three Phases**, a practice that provides space for voicing praise, lament, and hope. Praying in Three Phases asks: How have you been moved to gratitude or praise? How have you been moved to confess or lament? How have you been moved to ask God to act?

The **Prayer of Examen** reflectively invites people to recall events from the day and take note of their responses and feelings. St. Ignatius recommended praying The Examen every evening to look with gratitude on what God was doing on that day.

**Palms Down, Palms Up** involves emptying oneself to receive from God. In a spirit of prayer, place palms down to let go of concerns as you name them aloud. Then, place palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from God. Spend some time sitting in stillness, enjoying God’s presence, and resting in the knowledge that God knows you and loves you.

---

**WayFinder** is a program of The Colossian Forum, a non-profit committed to helping equip Christians to transform conflict into opportunities for spiritual growth. To learn more about leading like Jesus in the midst of conflict, check out WayFinder resources at [colossianforum.org](http://colossianforum.org).



# Let me listen to your story

by Tamara Zechin

In 1964, Gerald Freyenberger (member of Sugar Creek Mennonite, Wayland, Iowa) received a call from Mennonite Central Committee. The tensions caused by hatred and racism were increasing in the south. Church buildings charred; young lives cut short; so many people left with only ashes and memories of what prejudices had violently taken away. Gerald rode on a train to Mississippi where he spent one month rebuilding two churches. Fear was prevalent, even the white northerner was afraid whenever law enforcement entered a restaurant. While he was treated well, others' painful realities were evident as the service team stood by the dam where local boys had been shot and buried in the swamp. The impact of the stories that he heard on this trip remained in his heart for decades.

When Gerald saw that Mennonite Mission Network was offering a Civil Rights Pilgrimage in March 2020, he knew that he had to return to these churches and communities that he had helped to rebuild. While he immediately witnessed more cooperation and less fear upon his return, he also noticed that many of these communities still struggled with the poverty and injustices that segregation had left behind. For example, many of the prominent businesses in Jackson had taken their wealth elsewhere, leaving behind water and street problems that an impoverished, mostly black community could not fix. As Gerald listened to the stories of these current struggles, he realized, "We think things have changed, but they still haven't changed completely." In Macon, they visited a Civil War cemetery where people are buried based on the color of their skin. In fact, the white people would have preferred not having black people at all, but they needed the funding that was available if the burial plots were open to all people. This example shows the overall lesson that impacted Gerald the most, "things are still segregated to a certain extent." A huge smile comes to Gerald's face as he remembers gazing at the bricks that he had placed at Mount Zion United Methodist Church almost sixty years ago. While he enthusiastically talks about many churches, museums and historical sites on the tour, the stories that various speakers shared are what left the biggest impression on his heart.

Gerald hopes that others from Central Plains Mennonite Conference will go on the upcoming Civil Rights Pilgrimage in March 2024. He guarantees that participants will have their eyes opened through the stories that they hear. He explains, "People will pay to go on a cruise, but you will get more out of this trip and you will eat just as good." While Gerald served these communities by laying new blocks and bricks at burnt churches, he also shared God's love. He is glad that more peace has prevailed in these places, but he admits that this trip also revealed how much more work we still need to do to overcome racial prejudices. To build bridges instead of divides, we must listen to the stories.

*Gerald, second from left.*

## Transitions

**Kent McDougal** ended as Interim Pastor at Sugar Creek, Wayland, IA, September 24, 2023

**Pam Gerig Unruh** began as Interim Pastor at Sugar Creek, Wayland, IA, October 15, 2023.

**Robert Troyer** retired from ministry as a Pastor and Mental Health Counselor, Lincoln, NE, October 31, 2023.

## Deaths

**Don Headrick**, retired Prison Minister, Lancaster, PA, died July 24, 2023.

**Kelly Slagel**, retired Pastor, Wayland, IA, died August 30, 2023.

**Gordon Scoville**, retired Transitional Interim Pastor, Milford, NE, died October 3, 2023.





Central Plains Outreach and Service and  
Mennonite Mission Network present:

## A CIVIL RIGHTS PILGRIMAGE



**March 2-9, 2024**

Join Central Plains Outreach and Service Committee on a Mennonite Mission Network **Just Peace Pilgrimage**.

Mennonite Mission Network will lead CPMC pilgrims in exploring what God is doing to bring about justice and peace in the world and the ways in which we can participate in such movements.



### Learn more about Civil Rights

You will hear first-hand reflections from people who participated in the civil rights movement as well as learn from others who help unpack the significance of the civil rights movement, the lessons we need to learn from it, and the way in which this is an ongoing struggle for justice and equality that this history both tells and invites us to participate in.



### Costs

Due to a generous New Ministries Grant from CPMC, the cost of the pilgrimage has been reduced to \$550 + airfare per person. Further scholarships are available by request.



### For more information

To sign up, see a sample itinerary, learn more, or donate toward cost of others going on the trip, see our website, [centralplainsmc.org/cpmc-civil-rights-pilgrimage](https://centralplainsmc.org/cpmc-civil-rights-pilgrimage).

**\*This trip is limited to 12 participants. Please sign up ASAP.**

**\*The deadline for signing up for this trip is January 5, 2024.**



## Contact information

### Moderator

Pam Gerig Unruh 319-750-3091  
[pgunruh@gmail.com](mailto:pgunruh@gmail.com)

### Assistant Moderator

Michelle Hofer  
[cmhofer@gwtc.net](mailto:cmhofer@gwtc.net)

### 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  
[rmhems@yahoo.com](mailto:rmhems@yahoo.com)

### Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

Nathan Luitjens 319-461-6505,  
[nathanluitjens@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:nathanluitjens@centralplainsmc.org)

Susan Janzen 319-610-1007  
[susanjanzen@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:susanjanzen@centralplainsmc.org)

### Director of Communications

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

# Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds November 2023

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 February issue, please send stories, news and photos by **January 8, 2024** 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

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

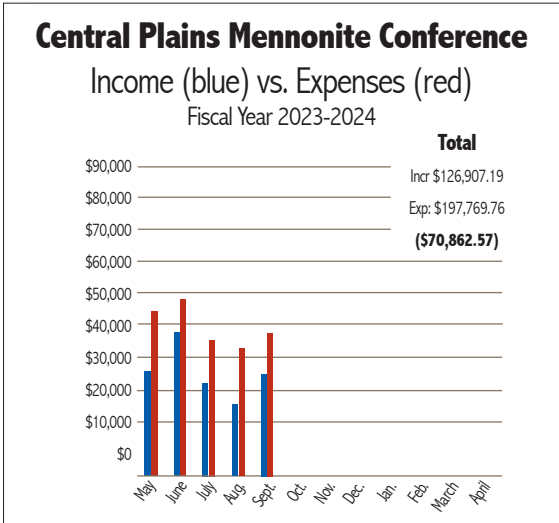
## FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '23-'24 continues the current fiscal year with a significant negative balance. Total Income for the first five months was \$126,907.19, while expenses were \$197,769.76. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$70,862.57 for our '23-'24 budget. While we are concerned about the large deficit at this time, we are grateful for the gifts we have received and trust that future support will help CPMC meet our financial needs for '23-'24. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— Stewardship Task Group

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- CPMC Civil Rights Pilgrimage, March 2-9, 2024
- CPMC Annual Meeting in Iowa with speaker Michelle Hershberger, June 20-23, 2024.



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