



Scattered Seeds

November
2021

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, “The Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

— Luke 10:8-9



IMAGINEMOS

Imagination and mission

by Nathan Luitjens, Central Plains Mennonite Conference Executive Conference Minister

I have struggled to write an article about imagination and mission, not because I don't believe that it takes imagination to engage with God's mission in the world, but because I couldn't figure out a way to write imaginatively about it. We know that God continues to be creatively at work on our world inviting people to come and be part of God's Kingdom. Peter reminds us that God has a grand vision for humanity, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).” Also, in the book of Revelation we get a glimpse of God's intended people, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb” (Revelation 7:9a). God's vision for God's people is huge and it is all-encompassing.

At the same time I know the statistics we hear from church planters: 60-70% of the people who don't attend church are not interested in coming to Sunday worship. That means that there are still 30-40% of people who are not attending church but would be open to it if someone would invite them, so church as it is currently structured still matters and can and should play a significant role. But what about that 60-70%? How can we help them to hear the good news of Jesus? How will our churches change if we make it our goal to reach them?

Luke 10:1-11 is an intriguing story about Jesus and how he went about engaging in the mission that God had given him. In this passage, Jesus sends out 72 of his followers in groups of two into all the towns and villages in the area. For years I assumed that when Jesus looked out at the fields and saw they were ripe for harvest he was simply using that as a metaphor for a spiritual harvest.

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But recently, I read a scholar who suggested that Jesus was also thinking of the literal harvest. How interesting if Jesus wasn't just sending his followers out as missionaries, but as part of a migrant labor force that would work the fields of each community in which they found themselves in. This does seem to make sense, given Jesus' somewhat odd instructions to his followers as they leave to engage in this work. But this isn't the most important take away; rather, I believe there are three other lessons about God's mission and how we engage in it that we can glean from this scripture story.

First, Jesus tells them to "go." This is vital to the mission of God. We are tasked with taking the message of Jesus into all the different towns and villages of our world, rather than expecting that people will somehow come to us.

Second, rather than going into places as itinerant preachers or evangelists who have a message to share, Jesus instructs his followers to be present with the people in these communities. As migrant farm laborers, Jesus' followers would be expected to work alongside others in the fields, eat with others from the community, and stay in homes as the farm laborers did. These places of working, eating and staying were where people shared life, talking about their stories, sharing joys and challenges.

IMAGINEMOS

"Go Harvest" based on Luke 10:1-11

*by Gay Widmer, Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, IA
25 1/2" x 30 1/2", plaster and acrylic on wood*

While reading this scripture I pulled out the things that were the most distinct to me. I feel that we are called to go out into the world and spread the love of God with others. In this artwork the "go" is represented by the large red arrow pointing to the center of our mission. In the upper right corner you see a city filled with houses. We are called to go to people all over the world: in cities, towns and the countryside. In the bottom half of the painting is a large field with two people representing the harvest of our mission. The people in the center represent healing and baptizing.

The upper left corner is filled with rocks, representing the shoreline, and a fishing net. The fishing net had two meanings for me. Fishing is another form of harvest and a representation of a career. The other meaning behind the fishing net is that God calls us to leave our nets and follow. We must lay down our careers and focus on God's Kingdom.

Third, it is in these spaces of sharing life together that Jesus instructs his followers to witness to the Kingdom of God, bringing God's healing to the pain they find there.

When we engage in the work of being present, we will come across the places of pain, brokenness, and sin where God's grace, justice, love and healing are needed. We don't just stand outside people's lives, shouting at them to come and get fixed, rather we walk with our neighbors, getting involved in the messy-ness of life, coming to experience deep pain together, so that space is made for God's healing to reach the deepest parts of life.

Jesus saw what was going on in the world around him and used it as a creative opportunity for his followers to engage with many communities, bearing witness to the Kingdom of God. What are the ways in which we, as followers of Jesus today, can go (often without ever leaving our homes or communities) and bear witness to Jesus? What does it mean for us to "share life" with others today? How do we bring God's healing and hope to a world that desperately needs it?



IMAGINEMOS

“Get your feet dirty” based on Luke 10:1-11

*by Kim Becker, pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, St. Paul, MN
2'x3', oil on canvas*

I was very privileged to be asked to create an art piece based on the scripture passage of Luke 10:1-11 for Central Plains Mennonite Conference. I love to paint but have rarely taken time to do so in the six years I've been pastoring, so this was a very welcome project for me. As I read through the Luke passage, taking time to consider what was being said, I allowed my imagination to consider any images that came to mind. I was struck by the simple image of dirty feet.

The idea of being sent out on a journey with no wallet, no bag, and no sandals seems very foolish to me; however, I see great meaning in this. Travelers are immediately placed in a state of vulnerability. They must rely on the hospitality of strangers. They must walk slowly and carefully to avoid injury. This careful stepping is both practical and metaphorical in nature in that it causes you to consider where you are walking and what your surroundings are at all times. It keeps you in the present moment.

In verses 10 and 11 it says, “Whenever you enter a city and the people don't welcome you, go out into the streets and say, “As a complaint against you, we brush off the dust of your city that has collected on our feet.” In light of this, I see dirty feet as a sign of being welcomed and well-received. I also see dirty feet as a sign of obedience and a willingness to go when called.

Sometimes we have to say yes to a call in spite of some of the details of going seeming illogical or irrational (such as taking no wallet, bag or shoes). For this reason I chose to paint dusty, dirty feet and title my painting as an imperative: “Get your feet dirty.”



IMAGINEMOS

Imaginative mission in Ecuador

by Peter Wigginton, Ecuador Partner Coordinator, Quito, Ecuador

Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) and previously Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) has worked with indigenous churches and leaders in Ecuador for more than 30 years. The work started here when local and indigenous Ecuadorian leaders heard about MBM's work with indigenous communities in the Argentinian Chaco. The work has varied over the years with communities here, working on theological education, leadership training, supporting schools, youth and children.

Over the last 18 months the work with the indigenous communities has shifted immensely and many initiatives have stopped completely. The refugee project had shifted to almost exclusively food assistance and is only now slowly returning to pre-pandemic activities. One initiative that began out of acute need during the pandemic has been a church garden project. The garden provides a place for people to gather and connect out-of-doors and it provides healthy food. Other things have continued virtually during the pandemic, including discipleship classes, church services, regional classes and workshops, and work with children in Quito.

Many communities we work with have limited or no access to the internet, so during these times, we have been unable to connect with them regularly. We have worked to connect with as many individuals and leaders from different communities virtually as possible, and we were able to include several leaders from indigenous Mennonite Kichwa congregations in virtual events, classes and workshops over the past 18 months. Before the pandemic, we started a Spanish-language podcast, Merienda Menonita. This has proved an important communication tool in these past months. The podcast is hosted by Jonathan Minchala and me, and it features weekly conversations with Anabaptist leaders and lay people around Latin America about the blessings of Anabaptism from the broader church and testimonies of Jesus in daily life.

Many of the indigenous communities moved back to in-

person meetings over the past six months as the different local governments permitted. Our family spent July and August in the United States, visiting a few congregations (in-person and online) and spending time with family. During this time I was able to take a class at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Now returning to Ecuador, we are pointing to a new type of beginning with Iglesia Cristiana Menonita del Ecuador (ICME), a mostly Kichwa conference of churches. We have started imagining new ways to walk alongside congregations in Ecuador as COVID cases drop and vaccinations increase. We hope to work alongside new children's programs, especially since indigenous communities have been some of the most affected by the lack of access to education during the pandemic. We have also been working with MMN's Sent Network and have created a similar program in Spanish to work with leaders of church plants for revitalization. Several leaders from ICME participated in the online "Enviados" (Sent) program that we did earlier this year and we plan on following up with in-person workshops and classes in the region.

ICME and indigenous churches around Ecuador have suffered many losses of church leaders and members due to COVID-19. We ask for prayers in this process of lament and mourning, and for strength and resilience as new leaders come forward to continue the reconciling mission of Christ in this region.

We also ask for prayers as we continue to discern how best to walk alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ. Over the years we have learned, and are excited to keep learning, together. As non-Ecuadorians and non-indigenous mission workers, we work with Christ as the center of our mission, we work in community towards reconciliation, but we sometimes wonder how this will be manifested in the culture and the realities of our indigenous brothers and sisters. Perhaps more importantly, we wonder how to help the global church listen and reflect on what our brothers and sisters here in Ecuador have to teach us about being Christ-centered, living in community and working with Christ's reconciling mission for congregations, communities and creation.

Game nights at White Chapel

by Cynthia Mullet, White Chapel Mennonite Church, Glendive, MT

When Darren Green started preaching at White Chapel Mennonite Church in Glendive, Montana, he brought with him a love of playing board games. He introduced us to new ones, and suggested we share our fun with the larger community by hosting monthly game and pizza nights.

Invitations to game nights were posted on the church Facebook page and shared on some community discussion pages. Members invited friends. People from outside the church who started coming invited their friends. Often the number of people who didn't regularly attend White Chapel outnumbered regular church attendees.

“At this church no one sits alone.”

After her first game night, one single mother who had come out of an abusive relationship expressed her thanks to the church, saying that night was the first time she'd seen her children laughing and having fun in a long time.

Another night, a relative new-comer came in a bit late. Everyone else had found a seat and was enjoying pizza. The table was full but people started moving together to add another chair. She protested that she could sit at a table by herself, and a non-church member, but regular game night attendee, told her, “At this church no one sits alone.”

That sense of community, caring and camaraderie expressed our vision for game night, a time to bring people, young and old, friends and strangers, together to share food, fun and the simple joys of life, to let them know all are loved and valued by God and by the church.

COVID-19 put an end to our regular monthly events and we have only recently started hosting them again. Because case numbers are still relatively high here we have not advertised them widely but are looking forward to a time when we can once more extend this ministry to the broader community.





Challenge your dreams

by Jolene Boshart, First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, NE

I love books. One of my earliest memories is sitting in my father's lap on Saturday nights, with Dad reading to me. (He was a great reader, too). Being born blind, I didn't really have the usual toddler's visual bonding with books, but I loved to touch them, and I loved that special smell you get when you open a book. I especially loved to thumb through Bibles, because of the crispy-sounding pages.

Oh how I wished I could read those printed words myself! In fact, when I went at five years old to a residential school 170 miles away from my family, the only incentive that made it worthwhile was when they told me, "They'll teach you braille, so you can read for yourself." Okay, then!

And they did. I was so proud when I could read to my grandfather, and he could correct my mistakes and enjoy the story, too!

With the advent of braille, my love of reading exploded. Many times when we were in bed, I read to my siblings. I thought we got away with it because we didn't need the light. I found out later that my mother could hear the pages turning! Busted!

Leaders credentialed

Kelsey Guckenberger was ordained for pastoral ministry at Christ Community Church in Des Moines, IA, on June 27.

Michael Swartzendruber was ordained for pastoral ministry at Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA, on October 31.

Libby Conley was ordained for ministry at First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, IA, on November 14.

Transitions

Gene Miller began as interim pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN on June 27.

Robert Erdman ended as interim pastor at Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman SD, on August 15.



Jolene demonstrates how she reads with her braille machine.



Since that time, I've read something every day. So when I heard about Shalom Readers (for adults), I naturally wanted to read those books as well.

Longer ago, I had trouble getting certain books in braille. But in the spring of 2021, I got a machine that would allow me to access the internet via braille, and then download and read the books on the machine itself. And by then, most of the books on the list were available.

What I didn't realize was how much the actual content of the books would impact me on a daily (and probably lifelong) basis.

In books like *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes and Refugee*, I learned from the stories of people who risked their lives to make a better future for themselves. In *His Truth Goes Marching On*, I got to know John Lewis (one of my personal heroes) and learn how he advocated for peace and love in a time when desegregation was only a dream. In *I Am Malala*, I learned just how important it is for individuals to celebrate their rights. And in *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* and *The Rent Collector* (which incidentally became some of my favorite books), I learned about the hidden pockets of prejudice still prevalent today, and the love of books. Now when I watch the news, it isn't just detached stories anymore; it's real people undergoing real-life trauma.

Eventually, I ended up reading two "sets" of Shalom Readers (for adults) and two "sets" of Shalom Readers (for children)—28 books in all. I am so thrilled to share the books I earned with my church's library—and I'll be reading again next year!

Who knows what the next year of Shalom Readers will bring?

You can find more information about Shalom Readers (for adults) and Shalom Readers (for kids) on our website, centralplainsmc.org/shalom-readers. Because of Jolene's above-and-beyond participation (which we are so excited about!), we've capped the number of "rewards" per person for the next year at one--but we still encourage people to read as many Shalom Readers books as they can get their hands on!

Contact information

Moderator

John Murray 620-951-0176
John.murray951@gmail.com

Assistant Moderator

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

Office

P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029

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

Hispanic Ministries Coordinator

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

Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

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

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

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

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Scattered Seeds November 2021

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To receive this newsletter in Spanish, call Amanda Bleichty at 319-325-4522. Para recibir este boletín en español, llame a Amanda Bleichty al 319-325-4522.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference
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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for the '21-'22 year through September continues to operate with a deficit. Total income through September is \$147,939.56 while expenses for the same period came in at \$164,845.92. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$16,906.36 for our '21-'22 budget. We anticipate that income will catch up as we move into the second half of our fiscal year. In September we did have receipts of \$6,458.87 more than expenses which helped to reduce the ongoing deficit. We continue to be thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Thank you.

— Stewardship Task Group

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conference Minister visits to each CPMC congregation, Spring 2022

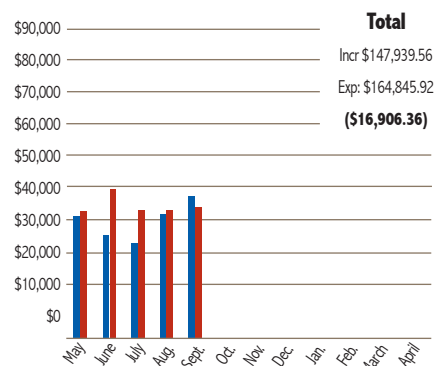
Annual Leaders Retreat, May 1-3, 2022, St. Benedict Center, Schuyler, NE

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.*