



Scattered Seeds

November
2019

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

— Colossians 3:16

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FORMATION RESOURCES

Becoming a librarian (of sorts)

by Amanda Bleichy

Conference Minister for Christian Formation



I remember back to my first days as a pastor, looking around my new office with satisfaction at my growing library. My shelves were filled with books from seminary and second-hand books that kindly retired pastors insisted I would need someday. Back then I was (hilariously) optimistic about my ability to read them all. But besides wanting to *know* all the things written in these books, my library was also a symbol to myself and the congregation that, young and inexperienced as I was, I was willing to learn. Those books were a security blanket in my fledgling pastoral journey.

Over time, I've become more realistic about the amount of reading that I will actually get done and more selective in the requirements for my professional library. I no longer need a library to communicate my ability and authority for ministry, but my enthusiasm for collecting (too many) good books has not waned.

It is fortuitous, then, that part of my role as the

Christian Formation Minister in Central Plains is to oversee the Formation Resource Library and to work with congregations to recommend relevant resources for their children, youth, and adult programs. As both a congregational pastor and now a conference minister, I find that much of *my* ministerial calling has been to resource people for their ministries. In my calling and desire to resource others, I've found that my history of collecting comes in handy. I am passionate about finding, promoting, and sharing good, sound, biblical, timely Anabaptist resources with individuals and congregations.

This issue of *Scattered Seeds* highlights some of the resources available to CPMC congregations. In it, we have reviews for books that are available from our Formation Resource or Shalom Readers Libraries, descriptions of some of the available resource collections, and some of the results of a poll of CPMC congregations about transformational adult study books. I invite you to explore CPMC's rich resources for Christian formation!

FORMATION RESOURCES

Book review: *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*

Book by E. Randolph Richards & Brandon J. O'Brien

Review by Grant Nebel, Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, Iowa



An ongoing challenge for many generations has been how we interpret scripture. The differences in interpretation have led to numerous denominations, various congregations within denominations and lively debates within congregations. To add to our attempt to interpret scripture we have many translations, paraphrases and online resources that can be helpful or divisive.

I have read several books on the subject of interpretation of scripture that have been helpful and thought-provoking, one of which is *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*. The author states, “In whatever place and whatever age people read the Bible, we instinctively draw from our own cultural context to make sense of what we’re reading.”

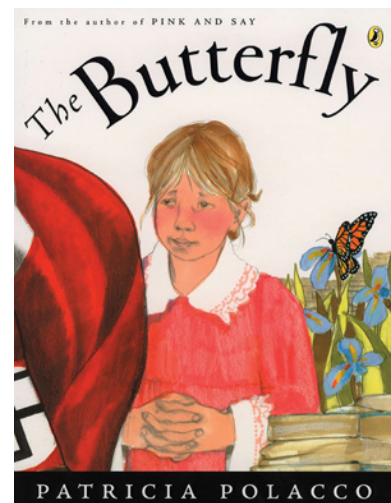
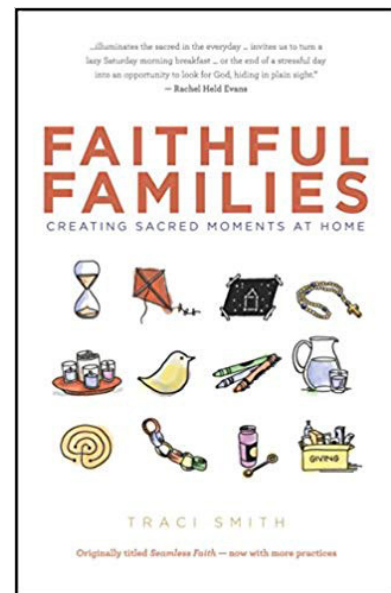
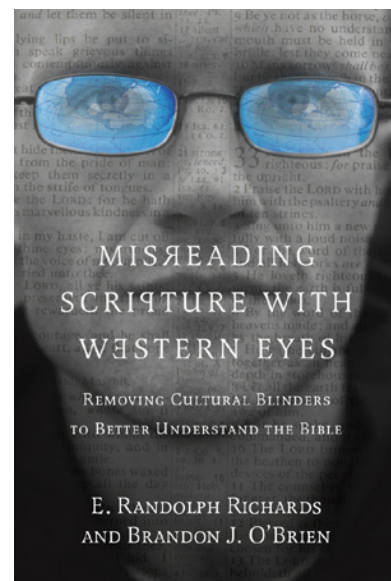
Richards and O'Brien use the analogy of an iceberg to describe our understanding of scripture. The iceberg above the surface is what we see most clearly, they call it our “code of conduct.” Questions like: “What were the moral instructions or biblical understandings given to you in childhood on such topics as alcohol, movie theatres or conflicts?” and “How has your training influenced your interpretation of scripture?” help us to find and understand our own “code of conduct.”

Next they examine the part of the iceberg that is just below the surface. As Westerners we value individualism; our business is between “me and Jesus.” But the authors ask questions like: Where does community enter into our biblical understanding or our congregational conduct? How do we determine right or wrong, honor or shame? Do our understandings apply just to us, or are they universal? The question then moves from our understanding of culture to the culture of the first and second testaments. What cultural norms or assumptions were they living under?

The biggest mass of an iceberg is deep below the surface. Our western sciences have taught us that the earth is round, the sun is the center of our solar system and there are many solar systems out there. We are governed by our understanding of how the world works. Do our rules about the universe override our relationships? The authors discuss the many misunderstandings between western and ancient cultures.

Although the book is about biblical interpretation, the authors clearly state that their primary goal is to help us learn to read ourselves. It's when we know who we are that we can begin to understand and appreciate the cultural differences between our time and the time of our scriptures. When we understand ourselves, we can understand the scriptures better.

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes is available in the CPMC Formation Resource Library.



FORMATION RESOURCES

Book review: *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*

Book by Traci Smith

Review by Heidi Gingerich Detweiler, East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa



Traci Smith, in her book *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home* describes simple, thoughtful practices for incorporating faith into the daily rhythms of life. Smith encourages families to joyfully explore how our homes can be sacred spaces. She invites us to welcome moments of wonder, connection, and worship as we complete ordinary tasks.

This book is arranged in three sections, including fifty activities to shape family traditions, ceremonies, and spiritual practices. Each section includes suggested age ranges and potential modifications for families with children at different developmental stages, thus creating a user-friendly resource that can be drawn from for years. Additionally, Smith has included a supplemental guide for grandparents and pastors and a special guide to expand the practices to different contexts. As a parent of young children, I appreciate the way in which the activities create pathways to introduce deep theological concepts using ordinary language.

Having begun putting some of the ideas into practice, it is a joy to observe my three-year-old son start his day by placing a sticker on a poster next to his bed, smile, and say, “Thank you God for another day!” At the end of the day, we now recite a blessing as part of our bedtime routine. I love watching him take the initiative to pass on a blessing to his younger brother. Our whole family is benefiting from the intentionality and mindfulness these activities prompt.

Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home is available in the CPMC Formation Resources Library.



FORMATION RESOURCES

Book review: *The Butterfly*

Book by Patricia Polacco

Review by Eden and Simon Willems, First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, Iowa



Eden: There is a town that has Nazi soldiers in it. There is a little girl, Monique, whose mom hides Jewish people in their basement to keep them safe from the Nazi soldiers. Monique discovers the girl, Sevrine, in the basement and they start to play together. Their neighbor saw the family that was hiding so they had to help them leave and find another place to hide. After Monique and her mom helped them escape they were in their garden and saw lots of butterflies, so they knew Sevrine and her family were safe.

The best part of the story was when Sevrine and her family were finally safe from the Nazi soldiers.

Simon: The best part of the story was when Monique and her mom were separated at the train station after helping Sevrine and her family escape. Monique was responsible enough to ride the train home by herself, where she found her mom.

Simon and Eden reviewed *The Butterfly* as part of the Shalom Readers program of CPMC. *The Butterfly* is available from the Shalom Readers Library in Freeman, SD

FORMATION RESOURCES

Book review: *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*

Book by Sylvia C. Keesmaat, and Brian J. Walsh

Review by Lon Marshall, West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, Iowa



We often think of the biblical book Romans as a type of theological treatise. We imagine the Apostle Paul systematically laying out a justification by faith, or a “Roman Road” toward how to be saved by faith. At one point in my Christian journey, I carried a New Testament with me. It had verses from Romans highlighted, starting early in the book with hand-written notes leading from one verse to the next, each building on a description of how to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior of one’s life.

But what if Romans is not a theological treatise? What if Romans is a letter to the Church in Rome? What if it is written specifically to particular people, living at the heart of Empire? What if the message is about justice and calling these people out of idolatrous lives, out of Empire, toward the family of God, toward unification with people of all nations, backgrounds, statuses, and privileges?

Keesmaat and Walsh are a husband and wife team of theologian and biblical scholar. They have done some of their own “coming out of empire” as a result of their faith, study and communal lifestyle. They make some brave claims as they write and challenge readers to rethink some of our long-held assumptions.

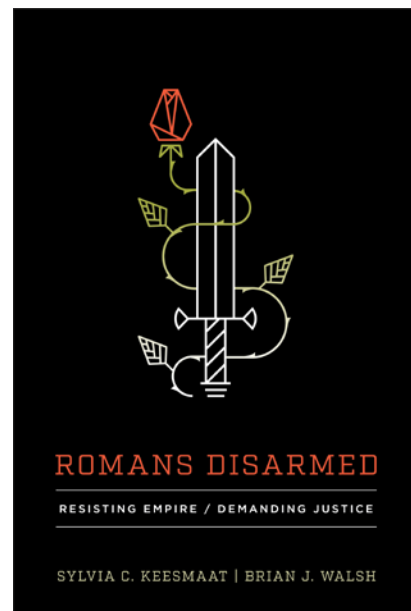
One assumption they challenge is the wording in many of our common translations of the Bible. For example, they argue that the word “righteousness” is better translated “justice.” Their understanding, after much study and research, is that Romans is a book about the injustice of Empire and the justice of God.

The very title of the book, *Romans Disarmed*, is a double entendre on the way in which the letter to the Romans both disarms the violence of the first century Roman Empire (and our realities today) and the way in which Romans needs to be disarmed itself, after centuries of being used theologically as an instrument of oppression and exclusion.

Several lively and creative writing styles are used, all of which keep the reader engaged and interested in an already intriguing topic.

I highly recommend *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*.

Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice is available in the CPMC Formation Resources Library.



Who's reading what?

A GLANCE AT WHAT ADULT BOOKS OR CURRICULUM CHURCHES AROUND OUR CONFERENCE ARE USING.

The Missio Dei: Growing the Church in the Rural Neighborhood content was good because it was relevant to our context. It helped people feel some solidarity in a shared experience.

-East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, IA

I'd recommend *Overplayed: A Parent's Guide to Sanity in the World of Youth Sports* by David King and Margot Starbuck. Parents said this helped them to see playing sports in a new way and to set better priorities. I'd also recommend *Sacred Pauses* by April Yamisaki, *Fledge* by Brenda Yoder, and *Love Does* by Bob Goff.

-Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA

Your New Money Mindset: Create a Healthy Relationship with Money by Brad Hewitt and James Moline helps us see how we see our views on sharing of our time, spiritual gifts and resources. This is a very good study for all ages in our consumerism-driven world.

-First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, NE

We Make the Road by Walking by Brian McLaren is a 52-week course on discipleship and walking with Jesus. You can do one or two sections at a time. I would consider this one very transformational. *Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* really helped us to understand what happens to people when they are marginalized and oppressed by a dominant culture. I think we became more sensitized to the plight of minorities.

-Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN

The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today by Meghan Larissa Good was very good. Many people attended who don't always come to Sunday School and we had good discussions. We felt like it was simple yet made the Scriptures come alive.

-Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, Cedar Falls, IA

Resources available for Central Plains Congregations

Formation Resource Library:

The Formation Resource Library is a collection of curriculum, books, videos and other resources for Central Plains congregations to borrow. The emphasis is on youth and children's ministry, curriculum with a distinctly Mennonite perspective, and resources for adult Bible study, prayer and discernment. Members of Central Plains congregations may borrow from the library for just the cost of return postage. To see a list of available resources, go to centralplainsmc.org/formation-resource-library. To request or suggest resources from or for the library, email Amanda Bleichy at amandableichy@centralplainsmc.org.

Shalom Readers

Shalom Readers is a reading program for children ages 4-14 to explore books that reflect core Christian values of peace and justice from an Anabaptist perspective. In Shalom Readers, children read seven books from the Shalom Readers list then respond creatively to two books. Children are then rewarded with a book of their choice from the Shalom Readers list. Find out all about the Shalom Readers program at centralplainsmc.org/shalom-readers.

Central Plains Website

Our Central Plains website contains a wealth of knowledge and available resources for congregational, mission, or formation leaders. You can find relevant information by clicking on the tabs at the top of the webpage and by browsing the dropdown Resources tab. See centralplainsmc.org.

Anabaptist Faith Formation

The Anabaptist Faith Formation website contains formation resources for all ages, curated through an Anabaptist lens. It is maintained by Shana Peachy Boshart, Denominational Minister for Faith Formation. Browse anabaptistfaithformation.org to find relevant resources for baptism instruction, youth and adult curriculum, Bible study, child protection, and covenant practices.

Looking for Stories

Where have you seen or experienced reconciliation? Will you tell your story?

The Peace and Justice Task Group continues to collect a wide variety of peace stories. Please share them.

Send your stories to Jane Yoder-Short at wilmajane17@gmail.com.

Let's keep learning from each other's stories.



Learning journey to Asia

by Jonah Yang, church planter at Hmong United Mennonite Church in St. Paul, MN

In June of 2018, I went to Vietnam for a short trip to help upgrade a water reservoir in a village. While I was there, several people asked me about Anabaptism. Because time was limited, I could not share much, but I used the Mennonite Confession of Faith and Palmer Becker's understanding of Anabaptism to teach them.

When I returned to AMBS I began to develop a course for Asia about Anabaptism that I could share with CPMC, the AMBS Church Leadership Center, Mennonite Mission Network and my local congregation. When the project received support from each of these agencies, David Miller, a professor at AMBS and I went to Thailand to teach the course.

In Thailand, we heard stories from the students about families who went through severe persecution. One student shared that his father was in prison for weeks without food. Another shared that he was arrested in his home because he was a Christian. Yet another shared that his father would disown him if he continued to study Anabaptism. These students had great faith. Some even had to borrow money in order to attend our class.

Each of the students had only three sets of clothing for the whole month. My wife and I prepared bed sheets and other clothes for their use. When I arrived at the village, the only beds available were given to David and me. The rest of the students slept on the floor for the whole month. Even though they had no good place to sleep, they were thankful for the opportunity to come and learn about God. They were truly seeking the Kingdom of God first. In the class, students learned about church history and God's shalom. Teaching on reconciliation opened their hearts to the importance of forgiveness.

During our time with these students, we shared our stories about God's calling and how we will use our gifts to accomplish God's work. When we visited a local farm to help plant rice, we discovered that our students had shared our teachings with their communities; they were living witnesses to God's work. Some students traveled far and wide to share the Good News, and the student whose father threatened to disown him for attending class had reconciled with him.

I give thanks to God Almighty for giving me the strength, knowledge, ability and opportunity to undertake this project and to persevere and complete it satisfactorily. Without God's blessings, we could not have done this. Undertaking this teaching project has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible to do without the support and guidance that I received from many people. Thank you!

Transitions

Gordon Scoville ended his transitional ministry at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE at the end of August.

Gene Miller began serving as a bridge pastor at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE on September 1, 2019.

Steve and Brenda Bachman have begun as pastors at Manson Mennonite Church, Manson, IA.

Adam Harder Nussbaum was installed at Third Way Church in St. Paul, MN on October 13.

Scott Roser was installed as interim at Cedar Falls Mennonite Church in Cedar Falls, IA on October 13.

Leaders credentialed

Ngun Lian (Daniel) Bawi was licensed toward ordination on August 11, 2019 at Omaha Chin Christian Church, Omaha, NE.

Suzanne Engle Ford was licensed toward ordination on September 15, 2019 at Zion Mennonite Church, Donnellson, IA.



Joining together in faithful action across geographical distance

by Ry O. Siggelkow, pastor, Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, MN

Distance can easily become an obstacle to building and sustaining strong cross-congregational relationships in Central Plains Mennonite Conference. However, our distance does not have to mean that we cannot seek creative ways to join together to risk a common act of love for the sake of the gospel.

Last summer our congregation sensed a calling from the Holy Spirit to deepen our commitment to migrant people by connecting with a family who had been traveling north from Central America with the Migrant Caravan. For the past 15 years or so, Pueblo Sin Fronteras has been supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Latin America, advocating for the human rights and dignity of displaced peoples, providing humanitarian aid, and in recent years leading a Caravan to the US border. In years past, between 400-500 people joined the Caravan. Last year, however, nearly 1,500 people joined, 80% of whom were fleeing violence in Honduras.

Faith Mennonite Church has developed a relationship over the past few years with a local grassroots faith-based organization called Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza ("Peoples of Struggle and Hope"), a predominantly Latino/a organization that, among other things, comes alongside churches to support migrant people in their struggle for freedom. With Pueblos we were able to connect with the Arias family (Nuria and her children, Daniel, Vannia, and Brian) from Honduras, and upon their release, we welcomed them into life in our congregation and our city.

For the first several months of their time in Minnesota, Nuria and I spoke at several congregations throughout the Twin Cities to build relationships and generate support for our ministry. One of the more meaningful connections we made came as a result of an invitation from First Mennonite Church (FMC) in Mountain Lake, MN. Their invitation was a welcome gift, an expression of care and love for us and a recognition of the Spirit's activity in the life of our congregation.

Our time in Mountain Lake that Sunday was a remarkable display of hospitality, as we were given the opportunity to share about our solidarity work with the Caravan and our congregation's deepening relationship to migrant people from Central America during worship and fellowship around a common meal. Members of FMC gifted two beautiful quilts to the Arias family as a symbol of their care and welcome. Later we received a generous gift of support from FMC that has helped to carry forward our ministry in ways that we could not have anticipated. It was an important reminder of the possibilities for common faithful action between our congregations in Central Plains. In this time of fear, discrimination, and border walls, actively discerning and joining together in the Spirit's liberating work in our world can help us forge new bonds of community, rejuvenating and breathing new life into our relationships across geographical distances.

Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds November 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. Telephone: 319-325-4522.
For the January issue, please send stories, news and photos by **December 3, 2019** to the address above. Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to office@centralplainsmc.org.

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

Contact information

Moderator

Shawn Nolt 402-364-3493
slnolt7@gmail.com

Assistant Moderator

John Murray 620-951-0176
John.murray951@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
rmhems@yahoo.com

Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

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

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

Marcia Yoder-Schrock: Interim Executive
Conference Minister 319-371-7333

Firman Gingerich: Interim Conference
Minister for Staff Development
319-855-8379

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 continued through the normal summer slowdown for income in July and August. Income through August is at \$126,157.44, while expenses are at \$144,556.65. This leads to a \$18,399.21 deficit. Have you considered including Central Plains Mennonite Conference in your Charitable Planning and/or Estate Plan? We invite you to do so and are very thankful for all your continued support.

— *Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

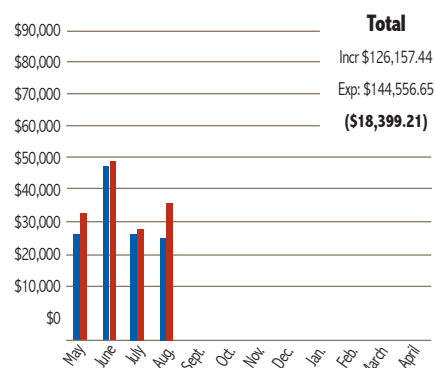
Shine Curriculum webinar #2, will happen on November 21, 2019 at 7:00pm

Annual Leaders Retreat will take place April 24-26, 2020, in Schuyler, Nebraska

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2019-2020



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