



Scattered Seeds

August
2021

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.”

— Luke 10:5-6

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ANNUAL MEETING 2021: REFLECTIONS ON WORSHIP

Looking Forward: Discernment, Curiosity, and Imagination

by Randall D. Koehler, pastor, Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD

Almost 15 years ago my older brother, still studying to get his secondary education degree in English, shared with me his ideas for better engaging high school students with English literature. Once he got his first high school English position, he would require a conversational book report for each student in his classes. He would provide a list of texts based on the particular course content, and each student would select one for his or her report. By the end of the semester, he or she would have to sit with my brother and have a conversation about the text. I asked him how he was going to grade such an activity, as the conversation and insights that he gained from each student would be quite subjective. He replied that with quality questions and proper cues, he would know pretty easily if the student had actually read the book carefully and attempted to understand its content. After listening to David Fitch's exploration of creating space for God's reconciling work by being present

to each other, asking questions stemming from genuine curiosity, and listening closely to not only what the person is saying but what the Spirit is also stirring in us, I thought of this conversation with my brother.

We have too easily sometimes engaged in our present contexts' antagonisms and conflicts without first preparing ourselves to ask good questions and listen deeply. At what point have we spent so much time speaking or preaching that we missed the opportunity to listen quietly, ask genuinely, and engage thoughtfully? We enter the communities around us as agents of Jesus' way of peace, as active and curious listeners, holding the stories of our church members as well as those in the community who have not yet joined or are part of a different faith community. In Randy Woodley's book, *God's Shalom and the Community of Creation*, he calls the church to listen deeply to everyone as a way of honoring

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people's dignity and allowing their story to shape and change us. People have walked these paths ahead of us and experienced some of our present circumstances, so how can we intentionally tap into the wisdom not only of our historical theological tradition but also people, inside and outside of the tradition, who have attempted to embody the key themes of anabaptism? By allowing space for stories, we aid in our ability to discern a wiser path forward and imagine the obstacles that may come and the creative solutions to facing those obstacles.

We have opportunities in front of us to create space and imagine together as we journey beyond COVID. We can use the new hymnal as a way to invite people to notice those songs that are most meaningful to them in this new collection and to mourn those historically special songs that were not included. We can use our first gatherings in person as ways to create space by not jumping back into church as it was, but by taking our time, getting to know each other anew as physical beings again, where for a time we have been two-dimensional forms on a screen. We can create space together to hear the stories of struggle and joy from our many months of separation, and we can now empathize and comfort each other in embodied ways. Some of us may need to create space by allowing difficult conversations, in which apologies are spoken for hurtful words said under COVID anxiety. Maybe we need the space for extending and receiving forgiveness for the ways that time was not taken to reach out to everyone in the community during our time apart.

In our rural church, we have been meeting in person with masks for many months, but we still celebrated those first few Sundays without masks in early June by including more music and voices as well as celebrating with a meal and VBS children's celebration. What better way to walk into the freedom of a post-COVID experience than by following our children forward in singing and relating again?

In this season, how are we as congregations and leaders in Central Plains making space for rest and rejuvenation in light of the digital exhaustion and constant creativity that has driven our online worship? Maybe creating space means shaping worship some Sundays without sermons and allowing the sermon space to be filled with stories and celebrations of who we are together in one place. As we breathe deeply and think about the next stage of being church, are we taking time to listen deeply and ask authentically, to discern creatively and imagine adventurously, to pray intensely and watch closely, thereby creating space in the process?

ANNUAL MEETING 2021: DELEGATE SESSIONS

In Brief

by Amanda Bleichty, Conference Minister for Christian Formation

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual Meeting 2021 seemed to fly by! While we look forward to meeting together in person in South Dakota next year, we have learned in 2020 and 2021 that we can still accomplish a lot by spending time together virtually! Here's just a taste of what we did together during our delegate session this year.

This year we:

*Heard three GREAT sermons and a bonus workshop that challenged us to think deeply about the contexts in which we live and work and the ways in which we can engage in our communities. On Friday night we heard from our Executive Conference Minister, Nathan Luitjens, and on Saturday and Sunday mornings we heard from professor, church planter, pastor and author, David Fitch. You can find videos of these three sermons on our website (centralplainsmc.org/annual-meeting-2021).

*Studied the Scripture around virtual tables, discovering what Luke 10:1-11 might mean for us today.

*Mourned the release of Manson Mennonite Church, Manson, Iowa and Julesburg Mennonite Church, Julesburg, Colorado from membership in our conference (at their request).

*Voted to add the House Church of Freeman, South Dakota, to membership in our conference and welcomed them with a liturgy.

*Worked at the business of our conference including passing the spending blueprint and discernment slate. (Please consider filling out the Discerning Future Leaders form linked on our website homepage to help guide next year's creation of the slate.)

*Discerned together around virtual tables about the Strategic Plan (perhaps more aptly called a short-term "guiding document") and the recurring Faith, Life and Procedures Task Group. You can find copies of both of these documents on our Annual Meeting webpage.

*Had the opportunity to attend one of three excellent workshops, "Ministry among the Hmong" with Jonah Yang, "Sorting out truth now and in our history: Crazy news and political nonsense" with Marcus Miller, and "CALLED? Yes,

but how?" with Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg.

In addition to the work we did together in our shortened Annual Meeting this year, there are many other important things happening around CPMC. Some of these include:

*Mennonite Women's Retreat, September 18-19, 2021, Swan Lake Christian Camp.

*The Conflict Management Support Team provides valuable resources to congregations within CPMC and invites your participation. Find out more on our website, or by contacting Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, Susan Janzen.

*Shalom Readers is available to adults and children who wish to read and engage with thought-provoking books about peace-making, kindness, and intercultural understanding. Prizes are available upon completion of the program. You can find the latest Shalom Readers books for adults and children on our website.

*The Peace and Justice Task Group invites students to participate in a new program called "Cross-Generation Peace Talks: Video Collection." Contact your pastor or Jane Yoder Short (wilmajane17@gmail.com) for more information.

*On October 22-23, pastors are invited to gather in Omaha for "Following Christ in a Partisan World" with Scott Peterson. More details to come.

*If you are interested in keeping up-to-date on happenings around CPMC, subscribe to our monthly online newsletter, *The Sower*, or the Spanish-language version, *El Sembrador*. In them, you can find more information about what is happening in CPMC, links to interesting articles, the latest Adult Shalom Readers books and more! Subscribe on our website under "CPMC at Work" -> "publications" -> "The Sower."

Your Conference Ministers look forward to seeing you in person as we try to visit each Central Plains congregation in the next year, and at Annual Meeting 2022 on June 16-19 in Freeman, South Dakota!





While we have discovered that we can do a lot when we meet together virtually, it's also good to remember the fellowship and fun that we've had in years past and to look forward to the next time we can gather in person.

ROCK ISLAND '11 • HENDERSON '12 • MONTANA '13 • MT. PLEASANT '14 • TWIN CITIES '15
DES MOINES '16 • SOUX FALLS '17 • LINCOLN '18 • KALONA '19 • VIRTUAL '20 & '21



Snapshots from 2011-2019
Photos by Stan Harder

ANNUAL MEETING 2021

Attending Annual Meeting From Afar

by Kate Widmer, Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, currently serving in Montbéliard/Bethoncourt in Eastern France through Mennonite Mission Network.

“Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give him glorious praise. All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.”
Psalms 66:1-2,4 NRSV

It was wonderful to worship with Central Plains Conference at Annual Meeting 2021! Having not seen the majority of you in the past two years, I’m grateful for the technology that allowed us to gather together safely, from near and far, and live out the Psalm I quoted above. I was intrigued by David Fitch’s message as I, too, have been feeling a fresh wind coming through to revitalize how we define what “Church” is. Perhaps this fresh wind is the movement of the Holy Spirit?

We, the body of Christ, represent God to those who don’t yet know God. What we say, how we say it, what we do, and how we do it are important and communicate amongst ourselves and to others the nature and concerns of God. Let me give an example through my French congregation’s church building.

The original building was constructed in 1891, but in the last decade or so, the space had become too small to house the growing congregation. Recently, the church finished an expansion that more than triples the footprint of their worship space. What had been the chapel is now a multi-functional space (fellowship hall, bookstore, offices) but they preserved its exterior. While the new portion is definitely a modern design, it carries over many elements from its predecessor. The color scheme comes directly from the stones and mortar of the 1891 chapel.

This visual space represents to me the congregation’s attitude toward mixing traditional and modern aspects of faith and community. It remembers, respects, and learns from the generations that have preceded the current body, but it also adapts to serve the body for what it is today and what we hope, pray, and believe it will become. The congregation embraces diverse forms of music and worship styles.

It encourages its youth and newer members to develop their talents and share them, while encouraging multigenerational mentorships and small groups. It utilizes modern technology to make community worship and meetings more accessible across distance and ability.

In Central Plains our covenant practices are to worship God; practice prayer, fasting, and generous giving; prayerfully study the Bible together; accept and offer hospitality; study the Bible with neighbors and strangers; and practice peacemaking. These amazing life giving practices for a faith lived out in community represent the character of God to the world.

These should always be at the crux of what makes Church. But in this time when the world is questioning if we really want to “go back to normal,” we have the perfect opportunity to analyze how we are living our covenant practices and creatively incorporating more ways to do so. God declares repeatedly in the Bible that the Good News is for everyone, every people and every culture. There is no single way of living faithfully God’s Good News, so let’s follow the movement of the Spirit and embrace the diversity between cultures, generations, and technologies.

Cross-Generation Peace Talks

VIDEO COLLECTION



ATTENTION STUDENTS!!

Do you know someone who has been in service?

Do you know someone who has had their Jesus-centered peace position questioned?

Does your grandparent have memories of serving in PAX, TAP, 1-W, VS or some other service?

Do you know someone who has remembered when a church conflict was solved in a healthy way?

What acts of kindness have you heard stories about?

Any peace story will do.

GET READY TO INTERVIEW SOMEONE!!

WE WANT INTERVIEWS FROM ANY STUDENT:

- Middle School
- High School
- College Undergraduate

**EVERYONE ENTERING
RECEIVES AT LEAST \$100**

With roots in Central Plains Mennonite Conference, submit a **5-15 minute video interview**. Submissions needed by **March 1, 2022**.

Submit entries (.mov or .mp4) to wilmajane17@gmail.com

Sponsored by Central Plains Peace & Justice Task Group

Scattered Seeds

Scattered Seeds August 2021

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E-mail: scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org. Telephone: 319-325-4522.
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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

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

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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for the 2021-2022 year through July continues to operate with a deficit. Total income through July is \$78,883.66 while expenses for the same period came in at \$105,085.31. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$23,201.65 for our '21-'22 budget. Expenses are tracking as expected at 24% while income is at 18.6%. We anticipate that income will catch up as we move into the second quarter of our fiscal year. We continue to be thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. Thank you.

— Stewardship Task Group

UPCOMING EVENTS

Pastors Event, "Following Christ in a Partisan World" with Scott Peterson,

October 22-23, Omaha, NE

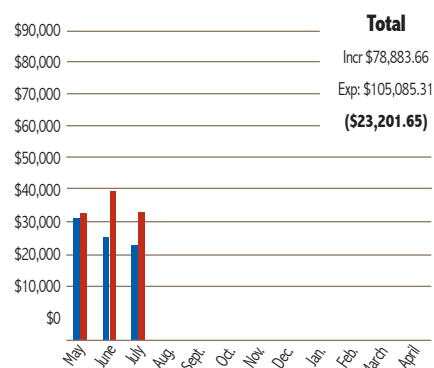
Council of Committees, date TBD, East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, IA

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

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2020-2021



An area conference of
**Mennonite
Church
USA**

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