



Scattered Seeds

September
2023



Symbols of Central Plains Mennonite Conference

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

— Acts 2:42

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Listening well at Annual Meeting

by Amanda Bleichy, Director of Communications

When Doug Stoltzfus grabbed the microphone to report on his time at Annual Meeting, the first thing he said to East Union Mennonite Church was, "I've always been opinionated, and I've always been right." Knowing Doug well, the congregation laughed, but Doug wasn't finished. His pronouncement was a kind of confession—that for most of his life, having opinions and being right had been a badge of honor. A badge that Doug isn't so sure he wants to wear anymore. He's been learning that relationships are more important than being right.

Doug has been on a transformative journey with God for the last 5-10 years, and in the midst of that journey, COVID became an unexpected blessing. Always before, he'd said, "I'll read the Bible when I have time." During COVID, Doug had time. Since 2020 Doug has read the Bible

cover-to-cover 6 or 7 times, and is continually captivated with Jesus. The new "softer" Doug, has been shaped and formed by Jesus' command to love God and love neighbor and by Jesus' quiet assertion to the woman caught in adultery, "If no one else has condemned you, then I won't either. Go and sin no more."

"If no one else has condemned you, then I won't either. Go and sin no more."

Even with all this transformation, Doug got "caught" in the carefully set trap of the very first group discussion at Annual Meeting. Delegates and guests were told to talk together in pairs about a Bible passage, then they were invited to share what their partner had said with the table group. Doug didn't have anything to report to the group and had to admit that he hadn't really been listening, he had been busy formulating his own thoughts while his partner talked. Doug learned a powerful lesson about what actual

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listening entails, and made a commitment to listen better throughout Annual Meeting and beyond.

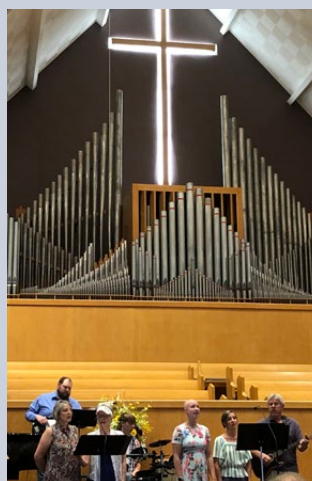
Doug left the delegate sessions each evening exhausted. He reported that Annual Meeting was an important place to be, but he wouldn't say it was "fun." He observed that things were put together well and in a way that led the delegates and guests to the place where they could talk well around tables. They formed relationships around the tables that helped to transcend opinions. He grew to understand the ways in which the various voices around his table and around the delegate hall illustrate the Kingdom of God. Annual Meeting is a place to find commonality and connection and discernment among congregations in very different places but with many of the same issues. "We need the interaction between bigger churches and smaller churches and diverse ethnic groups, etc. There is more to be heard than what we hear each Sunday morning in our own congregation," said Doug. "We can and need to worship with people who are different."

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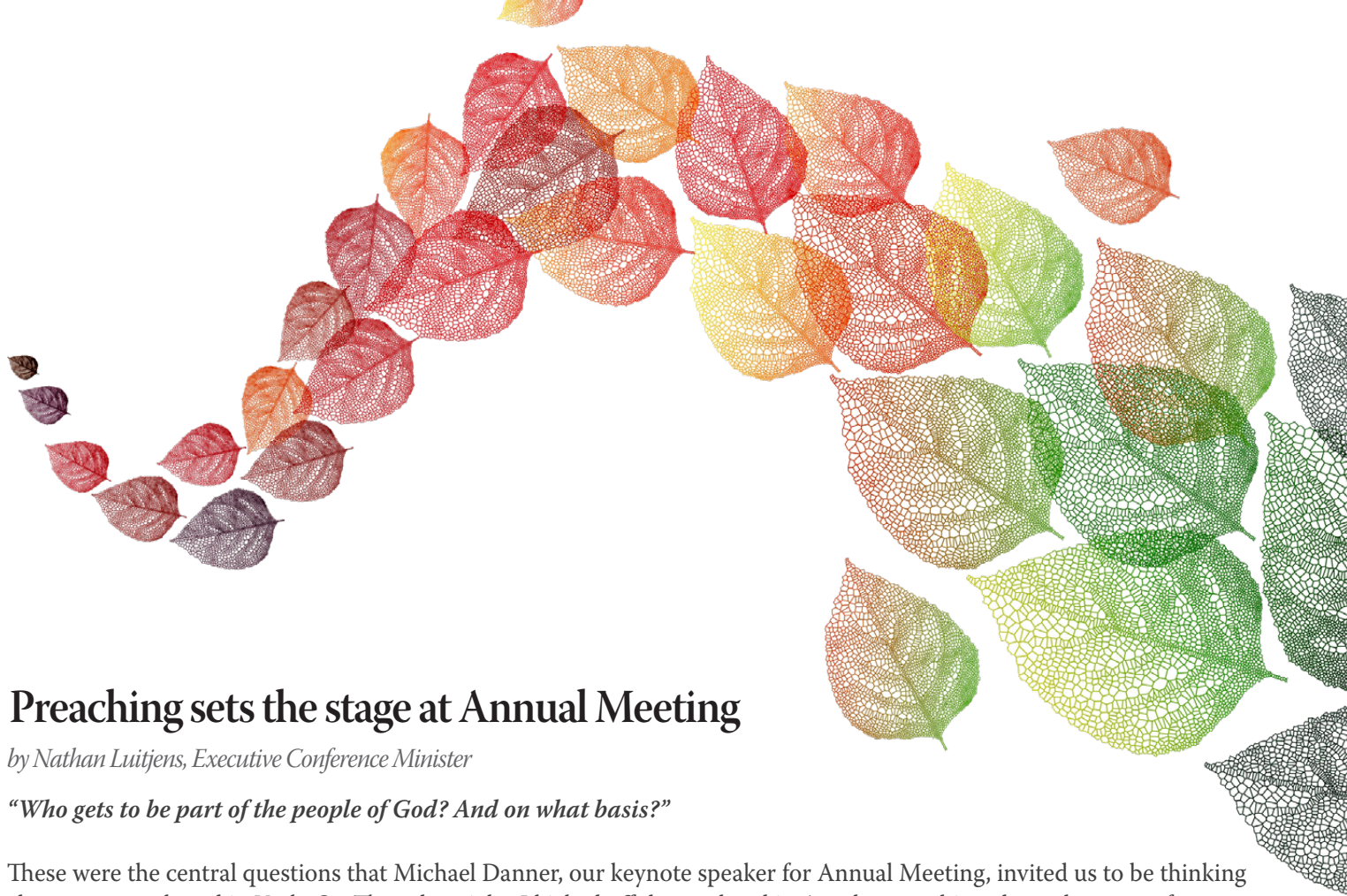
Before being a delegate, Doug wasn't sure what to expect. He had some "opinions" on what seemed like an oversized bureaucracy of CPMC and MC USA. He read the Scattered Seeds, heard the sharing from people who attended Annual Meeting, occasionally heard from Conference Ministers when they preached at his church, but he wondered if there was enough value in the conference to justify the cost. He wondered what the point was of continuing to fund the organization that seemed to be asking for money a little too often.

After Annual Meeting, Doug understands the value of Central Plains. Having experienced Annual Meeting for himself, he understands the value of gathering the diverse body of CPMC into one place to tell stories, to discern, to form relationships. Doug understands the value of a conference of congregations with various experiences who can learn from and encourage one another.

Annual Meeting came at the right time in Doug's transformative journey. Doug "felt privileged" to join this group that cares for each other and enjoys being together. He was amazed that when he arrived he fit in, not because he knew anyone, but just by virtue of being there and participating around the tables. On the way home, Doug told his pastor that he'd sure like to be able to go again. Look for Doug at CPMC Annual Meeting 2024. He'll be there with his opinions in check and his listening ears on, because, for Doug, being in relationship is more important than being right.



Top to bottom: Delegates in discussion, a table group, worship team, Doug Stoltzfus.



Preaching sets the stage at Annual Meeting

by Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister

“Who gets to be part of the people of God? And on what basis?”

These were the central questions that Michael Danner, our keynote speaker for Annual Meeting, invited us to be thinking about as we gathered in York. On Thursday night, I kicked off the weekend in Acts by preaching about the story of Pentecost and the surprising work of the Holy Spirit who, from the beginning, seemed to be working to change the early church’s perception of what God was doing. In Pentecost we find a bunch of people who were in a place they had never been before and never expected to be, and the Holy Spirit showed up and invited the early followers of Jesus to be a part of what God was already doing.

In subsequent worship experiences, Michael took us into the stories of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8 and Peter and Cornelius from Acts 10. In both of these stories, God surprised leaders of the early church with the way the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of individuals and communities who had previously been excluded from the people of God. Philip and Peter were confronted and had to adjust their way of seeing the world to conform to what God was doing around them. In this pair of stories, God made it evident that through Jesus, anyone can be a part of God’s people. Michael closed the weekend by engaging with the story of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Here people argued for standards that would help them to discern who could and could not be considered a Jew and therefore a part of the people of God. Instead of upholding these standards, the council finally decided that if God had made space for others to become part of God’s people through Jesus, then it wasn’t up to the church to limit access. Rather, they needed to work out how to live together in community with all of the people that God brought together.

Since our time in York, I’ve been thinking about Michael’s key questions. I’m reminded of the Bible studies on Ephesians from an MC USA MennoCon several years ago, when the speaker kept making the statement, “The church is a mess. Thanks be to God.” His point, similar to Michael’s, is that God is the one who gets to decide who is a part of the community of God, not us. All who profess, “Jesus is Lord,” are part of God’s people. We don’t get to choose. We may find some people “too conservative” or “too liberal,” we may even profoundly disagree with people’s deeply held theological positions, but that doesn’t make them any less a part of the people of God. The challenge isn’t in figuring out who is in and who is out, the challenge is in figuring out how to live together well. What does it look like to faithfully follow Jesus in all of the messy-ness that is created when God brings people together? As a conference we are a diverse group of diverse congregations. May we all be challenged by Michael’s question to work at what it means to live faithfully in the midst of that diversity.



Peace Mug Recipients 2023

by Jane Yoder Short, for the Peace and Justice Task Group

Each year the Peace and Justice Task Group combs through the nominations for the Annual Peace Mug Award. This year the task group decided to have congregations think about emerging peacemakers. We limited nominations to people in their teens and twenties. It was inspiring to see up-and-coming peacemakers. This year two nominations were selected to receive the mug – Sydney Bontrager, a member of Bellwood Mennonite, Milford, Nebraska, and Aiden Yoder, a member of West Union Mennonite, Parnell, Iowa.

Sydney, a student at Hesston College, was credited for raising awareness of the plight of the people of Myanmar. Bellwood responded with monetary donations. The church connected with an orphanage that provided food and schooling for children who literally lived in the city dump.

Sydney also introduced Bellwood to Ro Lian, an Anabaptist pastor from Indianapolis. He needed help as he sought to remain in the US. Being sent back to Myanmar would have likely been a death sentence. Bellwood was able to help him.

Aiden is starting his junior year at Eastern Mennonite University with a double major in History and Political Science. Aiden is known for advocating for peaceful justice in multiple ways. He has spoken to his political representatives.

In the past, Aiden has been a delegate to MC USA. One of the people who nominated him shared that he has read and understands the Mennonite bylaws and is seen as a voice for the underserved in his congregation. Aiden has spoken out by writing for Mary Swander's "Emerging Voices," which is part of the Iowa Writers Collaborative. He has written about his experience being a delegate to an earlier Mennonite conference and his dreams of a more diverse, fruitful community. Aiden also wrote about his experiences weeding newly planted olive trees in Palestine that were replacing ones that had been destroyed. The simple act of planting trees becomes an act of resistance against the powers trying to destroy Palestinian farms.

As a conference and as congregations, let's keep learning from the voices of emerging peacemakers.



Executive Board Statement

by John Tyson, pastor, Des Moines Mennonite Church

During the final delegate session at the CPMC annual meeting in York, Nebraska on June 16 – 19, the executive board released the following statement to the delegates: “We recognize that there is diversity among congregations in how they choose to respond to human sexuality. Rather than ignore this reality or sever relationships, the executive board senses a greater desire for unity among the delegates and hopes that we will remain connected in shared ministry as followers of Jesus. Conference leadership is committed to walking and working with congregations as they discern whether to remain in relationship with one another despite fundamental disagreements regarding issues of theology, biblical interpretation, and practice. Toward this end, we affirm the Covenant of Spiritual Practices (2016) as our primary framework for discerning together. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us forward.”

The executive board released the statement to delegates after meeting on Saturday afternoon to process what was being shared around delegate tables and during open microphone time at the gathering. In the first delegate session, Nathan Luitjens, CPMC Executive Conference Minister, provided a framework of three potential directions for “Where do we go from here?” as a conference: 1) Continue with the status quo; 2) Take a vote and see which churches want to remain affiliated with Central Plains Conference and who doesn’t; or 3) Commit ourselves to a time of deep discernment and seek the leading of the Holy Spirit for how we might remain connected in shared ministry. During the course of the annual meeting, the members of the executive board perceived that the delegate body was coalescing around option three and released the statement in support of that direction.

Despite deep uncertainty about the future of the church in our changing world, the spirit of annual meeting reflected a conference that continues to enjoy gathering together to worship, work, and cultivate relationships in the way of Jesus. On this note, a major aspect of the executive board’s discussion was

increased hope that we may want to prioritize relationship over full agreement as we chart a path forward. Can we remain friends and partners in shared ministry while not seeing eye to eye on everything? Discerning this possibility, while led by resources like the Covenant of Spiritual Practices, is the work before us. May the Holy Spirit guide us on our way.

Our Covenant of Spiritual Practices calls on congregations to practice discernment together and with other congregations about what it means to faithfully follow Jesus in our time. Conference Ministry Staff remain committed to walking with congregations and leaders as we engage in discernment. Here are some of the resources we have available for congregations and congregational leaders:

1. In 2014, Conference produced a resource entitled ***Seeking God’s Will Together: A Congregational Study on Biblical Discernment***. This continues to be a relevant and helpful resource for helping congregations engage with each other and the Bible.
2. Listed on our website are a number of papers, books and studies about congregational discernment. You can find them at <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/christian-discernment.html>
3. Conference Ministry Staff are willing to work with congregations in discernment in whatever ways are most beneficial. This could involve facilitating cross-congregational discernment relationships, more equipping workshops for leaders, or consulting with leaders on how best to practice discernment in their context.



Upcoming Opportunities

September 28-30, 2023, Finding Our Way Pastors Event, Council Bluffs, IA
Central Plains Mennonite Conference is excited to invite pastors to a seminar entitled *"Finding Our Way: Learning to Lead Like Jesus in the Midst of Conflict."* This event will equip pastors to invite people into and walk with them through hard conversations.

Due to a generous grant from the Central Plains Mennonite Conference Board, registration will only be \$100/person (plus lodging). Register on our website, <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/finding-our-way.html>

November 3-10, 2023, CPMC Civil Rights Pilgrimage

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.

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.

Cost of participation in the pilgrimage is \$800 + airfare per person. Find more information on our website, <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/cpmc-civil-rights-pilgrimage-2023.html>

November 17-18, 2023, Facilitation Training with Ted Lewis

Sponsored by the Conflict Management Support Team of CPMC

"Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Foundations for Facilitating Harms, Conflicts and Divisive Issues in Church Communities"

Church communities are increasingly being challenged by polarizing issues. Meanwhile, new stresses and strains are causing micro-harms and conflicts between church members, resulting in atmospheres of avoidance and mistrust. Can the Matthew 18 framework of bringing two or perhaps three (or more) together apply to such tensions that are found in our churches? Through the lens of restorative practices and biblical narratives, this introductory training provides practical skills and frameworks for addressing basic conflicts and harms between two people or two parties in church settings. The power of people telling their own stories and being heard well by others is vital, but this can often require others who serve as facilitators. If you find yourself prompted to hold facilitated spaces in your church for hard but healing conversations, this training will provide a good foundation with experiential learning in both conference and circle dialogue models. Ultimately, good facilitation is all about helping people move from a defensive head-zone to an open heart-zone where they can connect with each other more empathetically and rebuild some trust.

Find out more on our website, <http://www.centralplainsmc.org/fall-facilitation-training.html>

Transitions

Kim Becker ended June 26, 2023 as the pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Lauderdale, MN.

Caleb Yoder will begin September 10, 2023 as the pastor of Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, MN.

Art Roth, 92, former pastor of Julesburg Mennonite Church, a former CPMC congregation, died on June 26, 2023. Art served the church for over 50 years. He is survived by his wife, Marjorie, and three daughters.



Timothy R. Detweiler
November 18, 1951 — June 17, 2023
Washington, Iowa

Timothy R. Detweiler, 71, of Washington, IA, passed away on June 17, 2023, at home and surrounded by his family, ending his cancer journey.

Tim was born in Burton, OH, to Rudy and Mahala (Mullet) Detweiler. He enjoyed growing up with his seven siblings in Ohio and Mississippi. He was a graduate of Hesston College, Eastern Mennonite University, and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where he formed lifelong

friendships and embarked on worldwide travels.

Tim was united in marriage to Carol (Bachman) on July 1, 1977. They treasured life together for nearly 46 years, setting a beautiful example of love and service for their children.

Tim found deep meaning in his work as a pastor in Colorado, Iowa, and Montana. He also felt privileged to journey alongside the congregations of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, seeking to follow Jesus' example of love and peace in his ministry.

Tim had a gentle spirit, was a caring listener, and appreciated the retelling of a good story with his hearty laugh. He delighted in maintaining connections with friends, relatives, and church family throughout the years. He enjoyed fishing, woodworking projects, and sharing in laughter and play with his adoring grandchildren. He also held a private pilot license and loved flying.

Tim's memory will be carried on by his wife, Carol, and their children Nathan (Karla Stoltzfus) of Tiskilwa, IL; Erika (Nick Stoddard) of Washington, IA; and Caleb (Heidi Gingerich) of Parnell, IA and grandchildren Isaiah and Mahala Stoltzfus Detweiler; Eli, Jace and Luke Detweiler Stoddard; and Simon, Reid and Ingrid Detweiler and Tim's siblings Barb (Cleo) Miller of Nampa, ID; Mary (George) Dunn of Pandora, OH; Sadie (Don) Buckwalter of Archbold, OH; Martha (Leland) Earnest of Caldwell, ID; Lois (Everett) Earnest of Nampa, ID; Tom (Cheri) Detweiler of Middlefield, OH; and Rudy (Tonia) Detweiler of Delano, MN.

He was preceded in death by his parents, and his step-mother, Anna Detweiler.

**Scattered
Seeds**

Scattered Seeds September 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 and Mary Lou Farmer for proofreading.

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FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '23-'24 continues the new fiscal year with a negative balance. Total Income for the first three months was \$85,781.48 while expenses were \$127,087.43. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$41,305.95 for our '23-'24 budget. 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 Women's Retreat, September 16-17, 2023, at Swan Lake Christian Camp near Viborg, SD

Finding Our Way Pastors Event, September 28-30, 2023, Council Bluffs, IA

CPMC Council of Committees, November 3-4, 2023, Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD

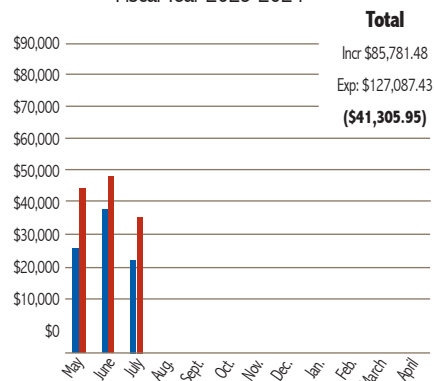
CPMC Civil Rights Pilgrimage, November 3-10, 2023

Facilitation Training with Ted Lewis sponsored by the Conflict Management Support Team of CPMC, November 17-18, 2023

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Income (blue) vs. Expenses (red)

Fiscal Year 2023-2024



An area conference of
 **Mennonite Church USA**

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