

Table of Contents
Online Workbook for CPMC Annual Meeting Workbook 2022

Table of Contents		1
Schedule of Events for 2022 Annual Meeting		2
Agenda for Delegate Sessions		3
I.	Our Conference at Work	
	Moderator’s Report	4-5
	Ministry Staff Report	6-7
	Pastoral Leadership Committee	8-9
	Congregational & Pastoral Transitions & Credentialing	10
	Outreach & Service Committee	11
	Hispanic Ministries Coordinator	12-13
	Ecuador Partnership	14
	Peace & Justice Task Group	15
	Christian Formation Committee	16
	Shalom Readers	17-18
	Discernment Committee – Ballot of election/Affirmation	19-20
	Bios of first-time candidates	21
	Partner in Ministry – Agape Peace Center	22-23
II.	Administering the Work of Our Conference	See separate entry on website
	Minutes of the Delegate Sessions – June 19, 2021	
	Summary of Conference Council Actions 2021-2022	
III.	A Covenant of Spiritual Practices for Central Plains Mennonite Conference	See separate entry on website
IV.	Our Conference Body	Only available in print version
V.	Financing the Work of Our Conference	See separate entry on website

Tentative SCHEDULE OF EVENTS FOR 2022 Annual Meeting

Freeman Academy campus
748 S. Main St., Freeman, SD

Thursday, June 16

- 5:00 pm – Registration begins – The Link
- 7:00 pm – Opening Worship – Pioneer Hall
- 8:00 pm – Social – The Link
- 8:15 pm – Youth gathering & Orientation – Band room

Friday, June 17 –

- 8:00 am – Registration continues – The Link
- 8:00 am – Children’s Activities begin - rooms in Administration Building TBA
- 8:30 am – Worship – Pioneer Hall
- 9:30 am – Break - The Link
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #1 – Sterling Hall
- noon – Lunch - Dining Hall
- 1:30 pm – Delegate Session #2 – Sterling Hall
- 3:30 pm – Break - The Link
- 4:00 pm – Workshops – locations TBA
- 5:00 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal – Dining Hall
- 7:30 pm – Evening activities – Hymn sing on the lawn

Saturday, June 18 –

- 8:00 am – Children’s Activities begin - Rooms TBA
- 8:30 am – Worship – Pioneer Hall
- 9:30 am – Break - The Link
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #3 – Sterling Hall
- noon – Lunch – Dining Hall
- 1:30 pm – Workshops - locations TBA (Eisenbeis Farm Tour begins at 1:15 pm)
- 3:00 pm – Break - The Link
- 3:30 pm – Delegate Session #4 - Sterling Hall
- 5:00 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal - Dining Hall (*Church Road Bandits* will perform at the Prairie Rose Amphitheatre following the evening meal.)

Sunday, June 19 –

- 9:30 am – Closing Worship – Salem-Zion Mennonite Church (27844 - 443rd Ave.)

Offerings will be received at each Worship Service

Agenda

Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Annual Meeting
June 16-19, 2022
Freeman Academy Campus, Freeman, SD

Friday, June 17

10:00 am - *Delegate Session I*

- Welcome
- Review of Minutes and Board Actions
- Executive Conference Minister's Report
- Moderator's Report
- Tablegroup Introductions
- Introduction of the Financial Blueprint
- Introduction of the Slate

1:30 pm - *Delegate Session II*

- Delegate Work: Re-establishing our Connections

Saturday, June 18

10:00 am - *Delegate Session III*

- Delegate Work: Envisioning our Shared Commitments

3:30 pm - *Delegate Session IV*

- Celebrating new pastors & leaders
- Peace Mug Presentation
- Highlighting of Peace Videos
- Presenting the results of the Visioning session Feedback
 - Table Discussion
 - Large Group Feedback
 - Affirmation & Commitment to Action
- Vote on Slate
- Vote on Blueprint
- Affirmation of Officers and Committees
- Closing of the 2022 Delegate Sessions

*"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another." -
Romans 12:5, NRSV*

Greetings to you in the name of Christ, wherever you may be - including if you're reading this about 5 minutes before the first delegate session on Friday, June 17, at Freeman Academy. :) I'm writing to you from my home in Saint Paul, MN, as I have done for the last few years.

It's a difficult task to open a letter such as this - to a body of delegates, pastors, leaders, and friends who are eager to gather together again. Yet, as we prepare to Come to the Table, many of us are experiencing a sense of dis-ease or anxiety around what the future holds for our body. I won't waste your time pretending I know what the future holds, but I thought I would begin by sharing with you what I'm bringing to the table in Freeman.

The past year has seen a lot of change in our family - job transitions, a kiddo who somehow became a toddler, and we all got Covid together. The past few weeks and months have seen an uptick of violence in our neighborhood - it's concerning and troubling, and distracting from our other responsibilities, and we feel it is calling us to strengthen our connections with our neighbors to work for change.

Our congregation has been back to meeting together now, and it's been wonderful. Like many, we found that virtual connection only goes so far - and we've grown (albeit a little) over the time as well, which is encouraging. We have families expecting babies and folks retiring this year - there is much to celebrate, and it's also a lot for a small community to support one another.

And, I'm wrapping up my service as moderator for this body. It's an odd feeling to prepare for my first in-person Annual Meeting as a member of Central Plains Mennonite Conference in this way - I'm so excited to be together with everyone! And, I admit that I am both anxious and incredibly hopeful for the broader church - and both are born from the differences present among us.

I am tired.

Yet, I'll come. I'm bringing all of me with me. And I hope you will too.

I hope you'll come to the table as yourself, representing your family, neighborhood, and community as we gather for worship, connection, visioning and yes, some business. I hope we bring our full selves, and that we see one another as their full selves. We are siblings and parents and children and workers and

employers and neighbors and farmers and friends - and hopefully we're people who play and laugh and eat, because we plan to do a lot of that at the table, too.

When we come as ourselves, bringing all of our disparate parts - *we who are many, are one body in Christ*.

In last year's letter I shared about my fear for the long-term consequences of the physical, social, emotional, and political "distancing" we've experienced over the last few years. To be honest, outside of the church - this past year hasn't felt like much of an improvement. What does it mean for us to be *individually members of one another* when we feel so distanced?

I feel strongly that the church is called to engage in the reconciling work that is God's healing and hope, flowing through us, into a world desperately in need. This year I hope you come to the table at Annual Meeting as we discern together how our conference can engage in that reconciling work.

Before closing, it's important to remember and celebrate the ways in which we continue to see growth and energy flowing through the many parts of our conference. While the reports to follow will detail these, I hope you can celebrate with me some highlights from the last year:

Our staff has finally been able to get out to congregations and meet with pastors all across conference. It's been quite a busy year with lots of miles as they work to get back on the road again, but it feels good. Please continue to keep them in your prayers!

Once again we are able to celebrate the close of a fiscal year in a great financial standing thanks to the overwhelming financial generosity of individuals and congregations. This is especially to be celebrated during what have been uncertain financial times for many.

We continue to call new pastors to leadership in congregations - with our cohort of new pastors having steadily grown throughout the year.

As the blueprint will highlight in detail, we have dispersed this year over \$54,000 across the conference to financially support new ministries and provide relief to families and communities impacted by COVID-19.

We again have a slate of nominees willing and ready to serve on committees and the board. We're grateful for their leadership and service.

I continue to hold onto hope that *we who are many, as one body in Christ*, will continue to commit to the faithful work of witnessing across the street, with one another, and around the world. May we continue to pursue a hope-filled witness to a world desperately in need.

See you at the table,

John N. Murray - Moderator, Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Ministry Staff Report to Annual Meeting, 2022

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” – Hebrews 12:1-3

This has been a year of transition, not transition in terms of staff, rather in terms of the slow transition as we moved from COVID-19 being a pandemic to being more of an endemic disease. One of the things we noticed was that we have a whole lot of relationships to tend to, since we have been unable to be as deeply connected with our pastors and churches as we would have liked. We also have been missing many of the touchpoints, places and times where we gather as the conference to work, eat and visit with one another. Having been unable to gather in person for our conference annual meeting, council of committee meeting or annual leaders retreat since 2019 we look forward to doing these things again and connecting with many of you. We have also begun to travel more to meet with pastors and congregations face-to-face. The ability to be connected in virtual spaces was extremely important during the pandemic, but we are enjoying the opportunities to be back with congregations in person.

Amanda has continued her work as the Conference Minister for Faith Formation. She was involved again this year in working alongside the Christian Formation Committee as they put on another series of winter webinars to engage with folks from the conference around the theme of Christian formation. She has also continued to work at helping conference staff and leadership become more interculturally competent. She continues to do more Intercultural Development Inventory assessments, with conference committee members and a small group of pastors while also leading cohorts, along with Nathan, to help people become more interculturally competent. Amanda also continues to work at conference communications through Scattered Seeds, the Sower and also beginning to work at revamping our conference website. In the next year Amanda is looking forward to refocusing her work to deal less with Christian formation as Christian education (Sunday School) and instead to work with pastors and other church leaders to think about how we can make everything we do as a church formational and other ways that we can make space in our lives and church communities to experience and be changed by Jesus.

Susan’s work as the Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership has continued to evolve this year. With the slow re-opening of life during this pandemic she has endeavored to spend more time with pastors, caring for them and giving them opportunities to get together and be with one another. Many pastors had to learn many new things over the course of the past two years and the work of being a pastor was made much more difficult. On top of the feelings of isolation pastors have also had to contend with the polarities of our culture and the way in which those polarities have entered into our churches. Susan, together with the Pastoral Leadership Committee (PLC), planned a two day gathering in the fall of 2021 to hear from Scott Peterson, one of the pastors from Trinity Mennonite Church in Phoenix as he shared some of what he has learned about engaging with government and the polarities we find in our culture and churches. Susan was the staff representative for the Faith, Life and Procedures task group that the conference board convened to help congregations prepare for the Mennonite Church USA special delegate session in May. Finally, she was excited to work with the PLC to plan and execute the first Annual Leaders Retreat since spring of 2019. Pastors, other ordained persons

and spouses gathered in Schuyler at the Benedictine Retreat Center to engage with Mark Sundby from LeaderWise around the topic of clergy loneliness and resilience. Susan has also continued to work at meeting with pastors for accountability visits and since she is trying to do those in person they will continue into the fall.

Nathan has also been busy with the work of tending relationships, engaging with as many churches as possible and visiting with our international partners in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador. It has been exciting to see the ways in which God is working in our international partners, especially in the midst of some incredibly difficult circumstances. It has also been amazing to see the ways God continues to be at work in and through the congregations of Central Plains, also in the midst of difficult circumstances. Nathan continues to think about how we as congregations can best connect with our communities to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He took a coaching course this past year to be better prepared to help congregations think through who they are, what gifts they bring and how those gifts can benefit their communities. The staff believes that our congregations understand themselves and their communities better than we do, and so we want to partner with them in the work of the church in the world.

Staff have been working at getting to many of the congregations to hear what is happening and to engage congregations in imaginative work. This was complicated by the continuing effects of the pandemic and the challenges this made for scheduling. We plan to continue this work through the next year and hope to have visit all the churches in the conference by summer of 2023. The visits we have already made have revealed a great deal to us, showing us the many ways that our congregations are engaged in their communities and the challenges that churches and the conference are facing. One of the things we have noted is that we as Mennonites and Anabaptists have a “branding” problem. Although we have a theology and understanding of the world and our place in the world that is well suited to the societal changes that are happening around us, the many people who are disillusioned with the broader church and want something different don’t have any idea how to find us. We also need to think through what evangelism looks like and how we share the incredible good news of Jesus with a world that desperately needs it in a way that they will receive it.

In our many discussions as staff we have been thinking about what is it that brings us together and what is foundational for us. We have been drawn to Palmer Becker’s three foundations of Anabaptism: Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our life and reconciliation is the center of our work. There are many challenges facing us, and finding our way forward is not going to be easy, but the writer of Hebrews reminds us that if we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus we will be able to let go of the things that are entangling us and keeping us back and move forward into what God wants for us. This is not something we can do alone, we need one another to do it, in our congregations and as congregations in our conference. To this end we look forward to connecting with many of you as we gather in Freeman, SD this year for our annual meeting. We look forward to working together on strengthening our relationships so that we then can engage in the ongoing work of discerning who God is calling us to be and how God is calling us to live in our present time.

Pastoral Leadership Committee

2022 Annual Report

Prepared by Sid Burkey

The Pastoral Leadership Committee (PLC) is charged with developing and maintaining high quality pastoral leadership for Central Plains Mennonite Conference congregations. We work closely with the Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, assisting her and a network of volunteers in offering counsel to search committees who are calling pastoral leadership, providing encouragement and support for pastors and congregational leaders, and offering ongoing personal and professional development. PLC also supports the training of elders, deacons and other lay leaders. Among the tasks of PLC are planning the Annual Leaders Retreat for pastors, chaplains and spouses; granting scholarships for leadership development; and overseeing the credentialing process for leaders within Central Plains Conference.

The PLC is made up of six elected members (one member is currently on the slate for approval) – Corey Miller, Kim Becker, Ramiro Hernandez, Karen Martens Zimmerly and Sid Burkey (serving as interim chair). It has been a privilege and joy to work together over the past year along with Susan Janzen. We are keeping Martha Yoder in our prayers during her health challenges, and are deeply grateful for her tireless and selfless service to our pastors and congregations as board chair. Martha has needed to resign for health reasons, and we miss her gentle wisdom.

Part of Susan's many responsibilities relating to PLC's work include leadership development training, the credentialing of new pastors, and assisting congregations with pastoral evaluations and pastor searches. She is the staff person who meets monthly with the conflict management team, responding to pastoral misconduct charges, offering guidance on questions of polity and theological variance, relating to pastor clusters, annual accountability visits with congregational pastors and the organization of the Annual Leaders Retreat. We are grateful for Susan's presence and the life and energy that she brings, particularly within the areas of pastoral resourcing and leadership development.

We continue with normally scheduled credentialing interviews via ZOOM, and are resuming many of the activities that PLC has been planning and looks forward to implementing. For example, we are planning to hold Healthy Boundaries Workshops this year. They do remain a priority. Dates for those trainings will be forthcoming.

We are so thankful that we could resume our Annual Leaders Retreat, held at Saint Benedict's Center on May 1st -3rd. Our speaker, Mark Sundby, was well received as he shared insights and research on overcoming clergy loneliness and renewing their spirits. Reconnecting after 2 years has been a highlight and a rich blessing, and building relationships was lifegiving for people. To plan ahead to accommodate a tight schedule at St. Benedict's Center, plans have been confirmed for next year's retreat, on April 30 - May 2, 2023, and on April 19-21 of 2024.

Finally, the Pastoral Leadership Committee is responsible to allocate funds from the Hochstetler Scholarship fund. Eligible programs for funds include Instituto Biblico Anabautista (IBA) and Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (SeBAH), programs of Mennonite Education Agency. Other programs include AMBS, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, and the CALL program of Hesston College. Pastors, or potential pastors and missionaries are encouraged to apply for funds to help cover the cost of these programs.

PLC looks forward to serving our pastors as they, in turn, serve and equip our congregations for works of service!

Pastor Transitions and Credentialing

May 2021 – April 2022

Credentials Granted

Ordinations

Kelsey Guckenberger, Co-Pastor at Christ Community Church, Des Moines, IA on June 27, 2021

Michael Swartzendruber, Pastor at Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA on Oct. 31, 2021

Libby Conley, Chaplain, at First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, IA on Nov. 14, 2021

Recognitions of Prior Ordination

Steve Griffin, Pastor at Bellwood Mennonite, Milford, NE on Jan. 2, 2022

Pastor Transitions — Endings

Resignations

Galen Kauffman, Pastor at Bethel Mennonite, Mountain Lake, MN, effective May 31, 2021

Beth Peachey Miller, Pastor at Pleasant View Mennonite, Mount Pleasant, IA, effective Nov. 21, 2021

Retirements

Donna Stucky retired from ministry as a Chaplain, November 2021

Pastor Transitions — Beginnings

David Heusinkveld was installed as Pastor at Wellman Mennonite, Wellman, IA on Dec. 12, 2021

Josh Wenger was installed as Pastor at Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite, Wayland, IA on Jan. 9, 2022

Interim Pastor Assignments

Current Interim Pastors

Thom Bower began as Transitional Pastor at Faith Mennonite, Minneapolis, MN, on Aug. 1, 2020

Gene Miller began as Interim Pastor at Bethel Mennonite, Mountain Lake, MN, on June 27, 2021

Jack Scandrett began as Transitional Pastor at Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD on Jan. 2, 2022

Pam Gerig Unruh began as Interim Pastor at Zion Mennonite, Donnellson IA, on Feb. 3, 2021

Assignments Completed

David Erdman ended as Interim Pastor at Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD on Aug. 15, 2021

David Heusinkveld ended as Interim Pastor at Eicher Emmanuel Mennonite, Wayland, IA on Nov. 21, 2021

Congregations Seeking Pastoral Leadership

Active & Upcoming Searches

Bethel Mennonite, Mountain Lake, MN – Pastor

Faith Mennonite, Minneapolis, MN – Pastor

Kalona Mennonite, Kalona, IA – Pastor

Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD – Pastor

White River Cheyenne Mennonite, Busby, MT – Bi-Vocational Pastor

Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA – Pastor

Discerning Future Leadership

First, Mountain Lake, MN

Sermon on the Mount, Sioux Falls, SD

Shalom, Eau Claire, WI

Outreach & Service Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2022

In Central Plains we aim to “grow in holistic witness to God’s reconciling mission in the world.” Toward that end Outreach & Service Committee (OSC) is “to assist and encourage member congregations in all areas of Christian outreach, including, but not limited to evangelism, church planting, peacemaking, justice advocacy and service activities.” This committee is aided by additional task groups, including the Peace & Justice task group (chaired by Jane Yoder-Short) and the Ecuador Partnership task group (led by Holly Blosser-Yoder). Their specific annual reports follow this one. The Church Planting Strategy Team was on a hiatus in the past year and its next steps will be reviewed this year.

For the task of equipping CPMC members in witness to “the love of God as revealed in Jesus,” the Outreach and Service Committee is designated eight at-large members. In 2021-22 there were six persons serving: Tara Stahl (Belwood MC, Milford, NE), Tamara Zechin (Sugar Creek MC, Wayland, IA), Elisabeth Harder Schrock (First MC, Mt Lake, MN), Rhonda Brubacher, (First MC, Lincoln NE), Shirley Ries (Freeman, SD) and Nick Detweiler-Stoddard, chair (Washington MC, Washington IA). We are supported by Conference staff, Nathan Luitjens and Ramiro Hernandez.

With fewer opportunities for in-person gatherings, workshops and initiatives, the challenges of pandemic distance (and the general congregational fatigue, tensions and church leader weariness) contributed to this being another lower-activity year for OSC. We are thankful, though, for the persistent work of our related task groups during this period, especially the Peace & Justice task group.

After two years online Outreach & Service Committee are eager to facilitating some in-person learning opportunities. We are emphasizing immersive learning and practice opportunities. Some of these may include a potential Civil Rights Tour, a reintroduction of Congregational Exchanges, and guided practice in sharing faith, testimony and witness. In addition to leading such initiatives on behalf of conference congregations, OSC is also considering ways it may help congregations themselves take further steps on the missional ideas sparked during the *Imagimenos* staff visits.

Submitted by committee chair, Nick Detweiler-Stoddard

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Report May 2022

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Matthew 24:42, KJV

Our salvation is limited to the days we live, until our death or upon Christ's return. Life is short, and through it, we have made decisions that will affect our eternity by the choices we have already made or making.

However, as short as life may seem, we strive and work at making the right choices so that we might have eternal life; thus, we continue to be involved in the ministry we serve to fulfill God's purpose as ministers of the gospel.

To be sure, it's been a heartening year! With Covid, Ukraine's war, fires on the west coast and in the southwest, violence, and racism, words that go together, or so it seems, baby food out of stock, prices soaring in food and gasoline, the threat of a nuclear holocaust, etc., etc. As pessimistic as this may sound, we nevertheless continue to work together as the body of Christ.

I enjoy visiting pastors and their congregations, and going out for coffee and enjoying their company has been a significant time for me. Also of interest to me is meeting with pastors at our cluster meetings, where we feel free to express our thoughts and ideas. We gather to read and study the Bible; it's also where information about conference events or our local church events is shared. I might add that prayer is a significant part of our meetings as we pray for one another and our congregations; we encourage trust with one another, then after our meetings come to an end, we go out for a bite to eat and or share a meal.

IBA (Anabaptist Bible Institute). Currently, I am working with two groups, one from Iglesia el Balsamo and the other from Jesus el Buen Pastor, with seven students. We are nearing completion, so we are graduating those students next year. As for me, IBA requires a continuing education course. A four-week class on Anabaptist Theology.

Nathan, Susan, and I often meet throughout the year, and our conversations will generally relate to conference conversations.

This year I had the privilege to invite our Conference Ministers, Nathan Lutgens and Susan Janzen, to our Hispanic cluster. They share information pertinent to our conversations as a cluster. Usually, they make clear those conversations where we have questions.

Other areas of my work include CLC and PLC.

- Ramiro Hernandez
Hispanic Ministries Coordinator

Ecuador Partnership

With limited opportunities for international travel due to the ongoing pandemic, partners met via zoom for updates and consultation before arranging an in-person visit to Colombia and the Venezuelan border in March for training and encouragement with Venezuelan church leaders. Executive Conference Minister Nathan Luitjens offered the following report of the March visit:

March 21-28 As part of the ongoing relationship between CPMC, MMN and IMCOL Nathan Luitjens travelled to Colombia to meet with leaders from the Anabaptist congregations in Venezuela. On March 22 he travelled to Cucuta to take part in a series of meetings with church leaders from Venezuela, Linda Shelly from MMN, Paul Stuckey, Alix Lozano, Juvenal Pacheco and Carlos Moreno from IMCOL and Bekah York, a MMN worker who lives in Bogota. They met with leaders from five churches from various parts of Venezuela. Tuesday afternoon we began with a two and a half day healthy boundaries training that was led by Paul Stuckey and Alix Lozano. They have adapted materials from the FaithTrust Institute for use in the Latin American context and the folks from Venezuela were really engaged in the learnings from these two days. Friday was spent working with the folks from Venezuela as they began to think about a structural framework for the relationship between the various congregations. Erwin Mirabell, who died during the COVID pandemic was well respected by all and really embodied the relationships between these congregations in his person. Euclides Bauza was the vice president of this fraternal organization and he was affirmed as the president as they seek to work out what a healthy and meaningful structure for the relationship between these congregations could look like. Much of the time in between sessions was spent engaging with the leaders from Venezuela, hearing their stories about the challenges they are facing and how God is inviting them to be at work in their communities. It was a deeply meaningful time. Saturday we returned to Bogota and spent a couple of days engaging with some of the leaders from IMCOL, going to church and tending to the relationships with our partners from Colombia.

Another trip for partnership meetings was set for May 18-23 in Quito. The Merienda Menonita podcast by Ecuador Partnership Coordinator Peter Wigginton and Jonathan Minchala about living out the Christian calling in Latin America, a response to flooding in Quito, and a community gardening project were among the activities of ICAME, the Mennonite Conference based in Quito. Because of the pandemic, the Ross Richer family adapted their focus of two-way mission with Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian rainforest to a North American context, forging deeper relationships with Indigenous people here. They used the longer-than-usual time away from Ecuador to do language study and learn more about the injustices experience by Native Americans. Quoted in November 2021 article for Mission Network, Jerrell Ross Richer said of the shift in location and focus, "That experience signified a big pivot for us and became a silver lining to the pandemic, as it turned our attention to Indigenous people in North America," and added, "In learning more about these groups, we are identifying some similarities with their challenges, including land issues."

Report for Peace and Justice Task Group – 2021-2022

Peace Videos

After spending time trying to collect peace stories, we decided to take a new path and collect peace videos. We wanted this to be a cross-generational experience. With the help of a new ministries grant we started *Cross-Generation Peace Talks Video Collection*. All middle school, high school, and college undergraduate students were welcome to produce a video where they interview someone who had a peace, service, or kindness story to tell. Each video producer received \$100. We had a total of eight entries - Josiah Beachy, Lydia Beachy, Micah Leichty, Collin Miller, Liam Ortman, Millie Severino, Norah Yoder, and Susanna Yoder.

We will continue to look at different ways to collect and tell stories.

Peace Mug Nominations

It is always hard to decide who will receive the peace mug. This year's award went to Joseph Walks Along, Jr. from Lame Deer, Montana.

Experience learning.

Learning through experiences has been a topic P & J continues to discuss.

A game-time arranged by Rachel Geissinger will be the workshop sponsored by the Peace and Justice Task Group.

We also continue to think about other ways of experience-based learning - such as a bus tour.

Table resources.

We are again giving a book away at our resource table. We are happy to offer a chance to win Sarah Augustine's book "This Land is not Empty"

Along with the book, we will have a variety of resources available.

Immigration Training

We continue to consider immigration training. We would be interested in hearing what congregations would like to learn and in what form.

Environmental Concerns

What would be helpful for our churches? If you have done something in your congregation related to creation care, please let one of us know.

Members: Margie Caraballo, Rachel Geissinger, Tom Kessler, Nathan Ramer, Jane Yoder-Short (chair), Nick Detweiler-Stoddard (Chair of Outreach and Service), Nathan Luitjens (Staff)

Contact The Peace and Justice Task Group via email: wilmajane17@gmail.com

Christian Formation Committee 2021-2022 Report

This past year, the Christian Formation Committee headed into another year of uncertainty. Starting the year, not knowing where Covid was going, we decided to lean into webinars again this year. We scheduled 13 webinars on three topics called “Season of Stories: a winter webinar series.”

- Making Space: An online space for makers to gather to find community, create, explore and share stories about God’s gift of creativity
- Anabaptist Stories for All ages: An inter-generational story and activity time focusing on Anabaptist values and practices
- Meditations on Word and Art: An adaptation of Lectio Divina where we focused on an artist’s portrayal of a Bible story and let the Holy Spirit speak to us through that artist’s work.

While participation in these webinars was meager in numbers, the interaction and insight gained were inspirational.

As I finish my term of leadership of this committee, I offer these thoughts.

The Christian Formation Committee was chartered to resource formation leaders in our churches. We have found that mandate is limiting for several reasons. First, the times are changing, and ‘resourcing’ isn’t what it used to be. Churches aren’t looking for conference to hand them curriculum when wide varieties of resources are available online. While Amanda does consult with churches and makes recommendations, the committee is not in a position to generate new formation resources. Additionally, I don’t think churches need more resources as much as they need more examples of how to do formation in different and effective ways. I hoped that CFC could provide experiences that are not being offered in local congregations. That is why we have been providing webinars to demonstrate new ways of thinking about formation for both adults and children. Perhaps as we continue to provide these experiences they will inspire new practices in local congregations as well.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference 2022 Annual Meeting Report



helping children and adults choose the Jesus-way of PEACE!

www.centralplainsmc.org/shalom-readers.html

Books have the power to transport their readers to circumstances beyond their own. Their storylines can provoke empathy, inspire questions, and stimulate dialogue. Mix all of that with the influence of Scripture and a supportive church family, and you have a recipe to make a significant impact for good.

That recipe for good has been in place here among our Central Plains Mennonite Conference congregations in the form of “Shalom Readers,” an avenue for children to learn about peaceful responses to a variety of challenging situations. This is important because the seeds we plant with children today will impact the ways in which they will interact in the world and serve as Christ’s ambassadors both now and as adults.

Everything you need to know about this program can be found at CentralPlainsMC.org. While the “Shalom Readers” page is housed in the “Formation Leaders” section of the conference website, all of the resources there can be used by families, Sunday School classes, Bible School classes, community outreach groups, and anyone interested.

Here’s how it works for children:

- 1) Children from pre-school age through eighth grade are encouraged to experience stories from our extensive collection of “Shalom” titles. A link to the annotated lists of these books can be found on the “Shalom Readers” webpage.
- 2) Books may be read aloud to individual children or to groups of children. Or, the books may be read independently by children.
- 3) Children keep track of the books they’ve read and respond to two of the books with a creative project of their choice.
- 4) Once seven books have been read and two projects completed, a request can be submitted to receive a brand-new book of choice from the “Shalom Readers” list. Requested books are purchased and provided FREE of charge due to funding set aside for this purpose.

More recently, Amanda Bleichty, Central Plains Conference Minister for Christian Formation, designed an opportunity to also engage adults in a variation of “Shalom Readers.” The program is currently in motion with a list of 52 books identified for this purpose. Additionally, adults have the option of reading up to three books from the children’s list to children or groups of children. After reading a total

of seven books and engaging deeply with at least three of the seven, a request can be made for a free book to be sent to the church library or to a person specified by the reader.

The secular setting featured in many of the books provides an effective bridge for addressing important and highly relevant topics beyond the walls of the church. The messages of these books lend themselves to meaningful follow-up discussions that underscore important elements of our Christian faith and promote responses that reflect peace, love, and justice. The “Shalom” books also serve as an excellent basis for reading comprehension lessons and can function as mentor texts for writing exercises. Even the most basic, seemingly simplistic picture books among the collection should not be overlooked by older readers as they focus on thought-provoking concepts capable of inspiring deep discussions for a broad age range.

The Central Plains “Shalom Readers” program would not be possible without the time, effort, and expertise invested by Marlinda Beachy, Joan Friesen, and Ellen Miller. They are responsible for selecting book titles for the “Shalom” collection, making book purchases, and mailing books to those who’ve earned them. Their contact information can be found on the “Reader Record Form” section of the “Shalom” webpage.

As the result of participation with Shalom Readers, the Christian Formation Committee of Central Plains Mennonite Conference was pleased to provide a total of 38 free books to participants from five congregations in 2021:

- Bethesda Mennonite, Henderson, Nebraska
- Cedar Falls Mennonite, Cedar Falls, Iowa
- First Mennonite, Iowa City, Iowa
- First Mennonite, Lincoln, Nebraska
- Hutterthal Mennonite, Freeman, South Dakota

We encourage churches to stock their own library with “Shalom Readers” books. Churches also have the option of checking out books that are part of our Central Plains Conference collection. Plan to explore the “Shalom” collection on display with books available for check-out to churches during our annual meeting sessions. Arrangements can also be made for book loans at other times of the year by contacting Monica Clem at office@centralplainsmc.org.

Respectfully submitted by Carol J. Eisenbeis
Shalom Representative for the Central Plains Christian Formation Committee

Ballot of Election/Affirmation
Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Annual Meeting 2022

The following slate has been developed through the work of the Discernment Committee and is recommended by Conference Board. Additional nominations may be made when this ballot is presented at the Annual Meeting provided such nominees meet the requirements of the CPMC Bylaws for serving in the position for which they are nominated. Please contact potential nominees prior to the election to assure that they will serve if elected. As a matter of courtesy, the Moderator should be given prior notice of the intent to make a nomination from the floor.

Conference Moderator Elect (Becomes Moderator at 2024 Annual Meeting) vote for 1

_____ Michelle Hofer - House Church of Freeman, Freeman, SD
 _____ (write in) _____

Conference Board Secretary (3-year term) vote for 1

_____ (2025) Shirley Kempf - 1st term - Salem Mennonite Church, Shickley, NE
 _____ (2025) (write in) _____

Conference Board Member-at-Large (2-year term) vote for 2

_____ (2024) Anita Breckbill - 2nd term - First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, NE
 _____ (2024) Ramont Harder Schrock - 1st term - First Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake,
 MN
 _____ (2024) (write in) _____

Discernment Committee (2-year term) vote for 2

_____ (2024) Will Swartzendruber - 1st term - Salem Mennonite Church, Shickley, NE
 _____ (2024) (candidate needed)
 _____ (2024) (write in) _____

Christian Formation Committee - chair (3-year term) vote for 1

_____ (2025) Dylan Keller - 2nd term - Zion Mennonite Church, IA
 _____ (2025) (write in) _____

Christian Formation Committee (3-year term) vote for 3

_____ (2025) Carol Janzen - 2nd term - Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE
 _____ (2025) (candidate needed)
 _____ (2025) (candidate needed)
 _____ (2025) (write in) _____

Outreach and Service Committee (3-year term) vote for 2

_____ (2025) (candidate needed)
 _____ (2025) (candidate needed)
 _____ (2025) (write in) _____

Pastoral Leadership Committee - chair (3-year term)

vote for 1

_____ (2025) Sid Burkey - 1st term - Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE

_____ (2025) (write in) _____

Pastoral Leadership Committee (3-year term)

vote for 2

_____ (2025) Ramiro Hernandez - 2nd term - Iglesia Menonita Jesus El Buen Pastor,
Muscatine, IA

_____ (2025) Dave Nickel - 1st term - First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, NE

_____ (2025) (write in) _____

Bio's for new nominees

For Assistant Moderator - Michelle L. Hofer

Michelle L Hofer is from Freeman, South Dakota. She and her husband Colin have two teenage daughters and attend House Church of Freeman. Michelle sees her calling as a visual artist to help others find healing, wholeness and connection with God. She recognizes the difficult conversations and questions we continue to navigate. This stirs a desire to explore ways to increase our capacity for listening, empathy and leaning in towards each other. As someone who engages imagination in her daily work, Michelle is enthused by the conference's pursuit of fresh collaborative possibilities with the Spirit and one another in serving the God who makes all things new.

For Board Secretary - Shirley Kempf

Shirley Kempf, from Shickley Nebraska, was raised in eastern Illinois. She met her husband, Donald, while attending Hesston College in Kansas. After their marriage, they served 2 years with MCC in northeast Brazil before returning to Don's family farm near Shickley. Since then, she has been an active member of the Salem Mennonite Church, involved for many years with music, youth and adult worship bands, and Mennonite Women, as well as other activities. She worked for the US Postal Service and the Shickley School system. She and her husband raised three sons and now also have 5 grandchildren. She enjoys music, gardening, nature, and traveling. By serving as the secretary for Central Plains Mennonite Conference, she hopes to be of service in spreading God's healing and hope throughout the world.

For Board Member-t-Large - Ramont Harder Schrock

Ramont Harder Schrock farms near Mountain Lake, MN, where he is a member of First Mennonite Church. Ramont graduated from Goshen College (IN), and has served with Mennonite Central Committee in Bangladesh, India, and Bolivia. He is married to Elisabeth; their children are Jonathan (12) and Anna (10). Ramont values the fellowship that comes with being part of CPMC, and looks forward to participating in the leadership of CPMC and its role in supporting the work of local congregations throughout the conference.

For Discernment Committee member - Will Swartzendruber

I'm Will Swartzendruber from Shickley, Nebraska where I am a member of Salem Mennonite Church. I have been a farmer in Shickley for the last 31 years. Previously I was a science teacher in Nigeria and Pennsylvania. Presently, I also serve as the Central Plains representative on the MCC Central States Board. My hope and vision for serving on the discernment committee of Central Plains Conference is that our committee will work at being inclusive of people of color and all genders in the list of names we put forward for conference positions.

For Pastoral Leadership Committee - Dave Nickel

Dave Nickel is married to Laura, and they have two school-age children: Sofiya and Jude. He enjoys woodworking and supporting all Minnesota sports teams. He pastors at First Mennonite in Lincoln, and is excited about the possibility of humbly walking alongside new and experienced pastoral leaders.

Agapé Peace Center (Duluth, MN) Report for Central Plains Mennonite Conference

With God's help, the work of the center has continued amid the fluctuating restrictions of our pandemic times. New opportunities have arisen more spontaneously, and I've tried to be responsive to the growing needs of peace education as shaped by biblical wisdom.

Central to the work has been the **Restorative Church Project** <https://restorativechurch.org/> Activities included zoom-based **Faith & Justice** meetings with Calvin University Peacemakers, a student-led college group eager to learn about healing and resolution work in a faith-based context. I (Ted Lewis) also provided a couple **Servanthood Communication** workshops via zoom for church groups, emphasizing skills for polarizing conversations. (See feedback comments below.) This workshop can be provided for any CPMC church when requested.

A half-day **Restorative Church Gathering** is being planned for July 11, 2022, in Chicago's Southside in partnership with a number of black clergy leaders. This will follow the biennial national conference for restorative justice. A team of 7 planners are now meeting monthly for this event, and they are already wanting to repeat this gathering annually to help area churches integrate communal and missional expressions of peace and justice.

The "**Strength to Love**" local men's group did not meet during the pandemic, but vigiled together at Duluth's CJM lynching memorial, where later I gave a speech during the commemoration: "[A Restorative Justice Dream for Duluth: Where Truth and Trust Meet.](#)" This led to a connection with a blind black woman who advocates for community-based capacities to assist police in responses to 911 calls. The previous RJ monthly support group continued over zoom with two other lead facilitators, and starting this February the **Restorative Stories** group, led by a team of five, began meeting in-person at Duluth's Damiano Center which serves transient populations.

As Covid-19 keeps people apart, groups have not met at the **G. W. Carlson Peace Library**, including the intended Restorative Bible Study group, but I have met with single people for book studies, supportive conversation, and prayer. This includes a local hospital chaplain, and two artists with interests in the writings of Jacques Ellul. Supporting the program manager at the Steve O'Neil Apartments for women in transition led to several circle processes with her staff that I led with another female chaplain. Over **200 books** were given away out of the center.

Work as a volunteer chairperson for the **Conflict Management Support Team** for **Central Plains Mennonite Conference** has continued. With another facilitator, I assisted a resolution process to help leadership teams in a CPMC church work through a conflict. Partnership with Margie Mejia has led to the development of a forthcoming workshop for Spanish CPMC churches: "*Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Building Bridges of Trust in Times of Conflict and Division.*"

We live in difficult times. Many of us feel wearied from the continual flurry of information that defines the news media. Isolation is commonplace. But the hunger for human connection and

peacemaking practices is still growing. People know deep down how important it is to have a faith shared with others. With God's help, as Marva Dawn put it, the church can be "reborn in weakness."

Please pray with me that new opportunities will arise in 2022 for the right people to be served, and that I, in partnership with co-leaders, will be "instruments of peace" in the hands of God. I always seek a Silas or Priscilla before taking on a new venture!

Might your church want to consider adding the Agape Peace Center to its **annual giving budget**? Most of the work I do is a labor of love, but donations definitely allow make the work sustainable. (Donations can be routed through the main CPMC office.)

Peace and strength, Ted Lewis tedlewis76@gmail.com 715-205-5945

Feedback from some who took the *Servanthood Communication* class:

- "The class offered Bible-based teaching on how to communicate in interactions of difference or conflict. I found it to be very valuable."
- "The concept that 'bridges are built in the heart zone, not the head zone'... That had never occurred to me."
- "This class offered many practical tips I can use to communicate with people in a more servanthood way."
- "Our breakout groups were great... discussing controversial topics respectfully."
- "Ted brought to life a new and deeper understanding of Biblical stories like Hagar and the Jerusalem Council, aspects that I have glossed over in the past."
- "I found it very valuable, although I have a lot more practice to do to capture more of the benefits. I'm already trying to be more aware of how I communicate and to start applying these principles."