

Workbook
Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Annual Meeting 2023

Table of Contents

p. 1	Table of Contents
p. 2	Schedule of Events
p. 3	Agenda for Delegate Sessions
p. 4-5	Moderator's report
p. 6-8	Ministry Staff Report
p. 9-10	Pastoral Leadership Committee Report
p. 10-11	Congregational & Pastoral Transitions & Credentialing
p. 12	Outreach & Service Committee Report
p. 13-14	Hispanic Ministries Coordinator
p. 15	Ecuador Partnership
p. 16	Peace & Justice Task Group
p. 17	Christian Formation Committee Report
p. 20	Bios for the Slate of Affirmation
p. 21	Ballot of Election/Affirmation
p. 22-23	Partner in Mission - Agape Peace Center – Ted Lewis
p. 23-24	Partner in Mission – Galilean Fellows - Philip Friesen
p. 25-38	Minutes of the 2022 CPMC Annual Meeting
p. 38	Summary of Conference Board Actions 2022-2023

Schedule of Events for 2023 Annual Meeting
Holthus Convention Center
3130 Holen Ave., York, NE

Thursday, June 15

- 5:00 pm – Registration begins – The Lobby
- 7:00 pm – Opening Worship – Ballroom A
- 8:00 pm – Social – The Lobby
- 8:15 pm – Youth gathering & Orientation – Backstage

Friday, June 16 –

- 8:00 am – Registration continues – The Lobby
- 8:00 am – Children’s Activities begin – First Methodist Church of York, 309 E. 7th St.
- 8:30 am – Worship – Ballroom A
- 9:30 am – Break - The Lobby
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #1 – Ballroom B/C/D/E
- noon – Lunch - Ballroom B/C/D/E
- 1:30 pm – Delegate Session #2 – Ballroom B/C/D/E
- 3:30 pm – Break - The Lobby
- 4:00 pm – Workshops – Classrooms TBA
- 5:15 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal – Ballroom B/C/D/E
- 7:30 pm – Evening activities – TBA

Saturday, June 17 –

- 8:00 am – Children’s Activities begin - First Methodist Church of York, 309 E. 7th St.
- 8:30 am – Worship – Ballroom A
- 9:30 am – Break - The Lobby
- 10:00 am – Delegate Session #3 – Ballroom B/C/D/E
- noon – Lunch – Ballroom B/C/D/E
- 1:30 pm – Workshops – Classrooms TBA
- 2:30 pm – Break - The Lobby
- 3:00 pm – Delegate Session #4 - Ballroom B/C/D/E
- 5:15 pm – Children’s Activities end
- 6:00 pm – Evening meal – Served at Henderson Mennonite Heritage Park with free admission to the museum buildings. Bring a lawn chair/blanket to sit on.

Sunday, June 18 –

- 9:30 am – Closing Worship – Bethesda Mennonite Church, 930 – 16th St., Henderson, NE

Offerings will be received at each Worship Service

Agenda
Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Annual Meeting
June 15–18, 2023
Holthus Event Center, York, NE

Friday, June 16

10:00 am - Delegate Session 1

- Welcome/Prayer
- Review of Minutes and Board Action
- Executive Conference Minister's report
- Table group Introductions
- Moderators report
- Dwell with Scripture
- Delegate Work: Where do we go from here?
 - Engaging with the Resolution for Repentance and Reconciliation

1:30 pm - Delegate Session 2

- Phil Friesen - celebrating Galilean Fellows and conference partnership
- Introduction of the Financial Blueprint
- Introduction of the Slate
- Delegate Work: Intro Leader's Table
 - Dwell with Scripture

Saturday June 17

10:00 am - Delegate Session 3

- Peace Mug Presentation
- Celebrate new pastors and leaders
- Delegate Work: Leaders Table

3:30 pm - Delegate Session 4

- Discussion and vote on Blueprint
- Vote on Slate
- Affirmation of Officers and Committees
- Delegate Work: Leader's Table
 - Dwell with Scripture
- Closing of the 2023 Delegate Session

I have my very own 173 piece set of Lego bricks that is made into a fire engine. It was given to me one Christmas by my children, a set that I could build and never take apart. When my kids were little and they would get a set of Lego bricks, I loved building the structure, following the directions, but then afterwards it would frustrate me that it all ended up in the "Lego tub" in pieces. How could I know what it was supposed to be? Which piece went with what? And such a mess! But I was told the fun of Lego was digging through the mess to find just the piece needed at the right time. That tub looked like a mess to me; however, that was where the creativity, the imagination happened.

Perhaps a messy Lego tub is a good analogy for our Conference. Maybe that's what we think about Central Plains Conference -- we look at all the parts and pieces and wonder where the directions are and how we move forward from here?

Do we trust God to work? Of course, we do. But do we? So often I say I trust God but then I also have the outcome in mind. My Lego fire engine came with directions so I knew exactly what it would be after assembly. But my kids' Lego tub offers wide open possibilities. Through the directions of Bible study and prayer, do I trust God in the mess?

Where do we, as Central Plains Conference, go from here? How do we trust God and put the pieces together to live as people worthy of the call we received from God (Eph 4:1.) Maybe the key is to step into the mess and say "God, do your work".

I like the analogy that Central Plains Mennonite Conference is like a tub of Lego bricks. It might look like a mess now; however, there is the potential to build something beautiful. Instead of being paralyzed by the mess, let's imagine its potential. Instead of thinking it should be the way it was or the way we think it should be, let's trust God's Spirit to lead. Instead of the way it has always been, imagine with God what *could* be. My fire engine has only been a fire engine, which is kind of sad, because maybe it could be so much more.

To some the Conference looks a mess, like a tub full of Lego bricks. But it is in the mess that we rely on God; it's in the mess we must trust God.

Where do we go from here? I am energized by the possibilities that the ministry staff and the Conference board have set forth. Will you join me in being okay with the mess -
- passionate about Christ and trusting God to work in this conference?

I look forward to meeting together and starting the process of 'Where do we go from here?'

Pam Gerig Unruh -Moderator, CPMC

Ministry Staff Report to Annual Meeting, 2023

“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 year has been another year of transition for the CPMC ministry staff. At the end of February Amanda moved from $\frac{3}{4}$ time to $\frac{1}{4}$ time, continuing her role as communications director for the conference but leaving the role of Conference Minister for Faith Formation. As she noted in her resignation letter, it is becoming clear that the structure of conference is going to need to change, and she wanted to give the conference the freedom to do that without having to worry about how it would affect people’s employment. We have not chosen to fill this role at this point since it is unclear what the conference is going to look like or need moving forward.

Amanda had been raising the question of the role of the Conference Minister for Faith Formation. With the ready availability of resources on the internet, churches have become self-sufficient in finding the formation resources they want, so having someone who serves to compile lists of available resources is no longer as important as it once was. This past year Amanda began a cohort of pastors who are thinking about how they could be doing formation differently in their churches. This was an interesting and important experiment as it was a good attempt to help pastors resource one another and to make space for people to dream and imagine different ways of helping people grow deeper in their faith. She will continue this cohort group until summer and then we will need to re-evaluate whether to continue. Amanda has also been working with Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) for the conference, a role she plans to continue. The first cohorts have completed the learning piece attached to the IDI and this has raised the question of what is next. We don’t just want to do book studies, so finding resources that help us continue the work of intercultural development and anti-racism are important, but they are also difficult to find. We are very grateful for all that Amanda has given (and continues to give) to the conference and we wish her the best in her new role as co-director of Crooked Creek Christian Camp.

A good bit of Susan’s time as Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership is spent in both informal and focused conversations with pastors and other leaders credentialed by Central Plains. The focused conversations, often in the form of annual accountability visits, are a time to reflect on spiritual and emotional health, growth in ministry and nurturing of one’s call, and for pastors, their relationships with congregational leaders and the conference. Pastors who aren’t credentialed are encouraged to participate in accountability visits; it is required for those whose credentials are held by the conference. This group includes pastors, along with chaplains, educators, and therapists.

Central Plains Conference and MC USA require all credentialed persons in active ministry to complete Healthy Boundaries ethical training every 3-5 years. So, in October, Susan arranged for former Central Plains conference minister Ed Kauffman to be with us for a week. During this time, Susan and Ed traveled to three regions of our conference, where Ed led one-day Healthy Boundaries sessions for 38 pastors and other credentialed leaders.

Walking with congregations in pastoral searches brings Susan both joy and frustration. While some congregations have been searching for more than a year with little progress, others have had frequent inquiries from multiple candidates. With fewer than 15 candidates sometimes on the monthly list from MC USA, we are becoming more reliant on word of mouth, shoulder-tapping, and the formation of lay leadership teams. If you know of someone who may be a good pastor for one of our congregations, please let Susan know. Please pray that along with guiding pastors and congregations to one another, the Holy Spirit might inspire us all to consider creative new models for pastoral leadership.

Susan facilitates monthly Zoom gatherings for two groups. The Conflict Management Support Team helps congregations address conflicts and harms in healthy, biblically-informed ways. The team has been invited to assist several congregations this year. Their expertise includes people trained in enhancing communication skills for transforming conflict along with facilitation work for requested interventions. The First-Time Pastors Cohort, which has been gathering monthly by Zoom for about 18 months now, offers a venue for new pastors to learn from one another and ask questions that arise from doing the tasks of ministry.

During the winter and early spring, Susan worked with the Pastoral Leadership Committee to plan the Annual Leaders Retreat (ALR), which was held April 30 to May 2 at St. Benedict Center near Schuyler, Neb. PLC members Karen Martens Zimmerly and Corey Miller planned worship, and Amanda Bleichty led participants in reflecting on their personal spiritual formation as preparation for imagining God's direction for the future. Next year's ALR is scheduled for April 19-21 at St. Benedict. For as long as there has been Central Plains (and even before), the ALR has been the primary opportunity for pastors across our conference to get to know one another. However, since Covid attendance has been down. There are various reasons for this. Bi-vocational pastors often have to work, pastors with young families have a harder time getting away, there is a cost to attend, and significant travel time to Nebraska. Susan invites your feedback about the current ALR and your ideas about how you'd like to see relationships among pastors formed as we look to the future.

Nathan continues to work at tending relationships, particularly with our mission partners in Ecuador and Venezuela, as well as connecting with the broader Mennonite church. It is exciting to see our partners asking for help with Anabaptist theological formation and their desire for master's level Anabaptist theological education. The challenge is in discerning how best to provide that education and how to partner with existing organizations to give them what they need. Nathan continues to work at a Doctor of Theology in Ministry and it has been amazing how the things he is learning have informed his work with the conference. A direct result of this is the new experiment we are trying around the Leaders Table, a way to bring leaders together to talk about the challenges we as churches and church leaders are facing and how God might be calling us to learn to listen and follow in the situations in which we find ourselves. Nathan

continues to think about the question, “Where do we go from here?” because he firmly believes that God is at work in our churches and in the communities around our churches, the question is how we get involved in what God is doing.

In the fall of this year, we held three regional gatherings to give a broader cross section of leaders from across our conference a taste of the work we did together at our annual meeting last year. It was good to be with many folks from across the conference studying the Bible together and inviting people to recognize how their background, upbringing, experiences and culture change the way in which they see the world and how they read the Bible. We found this to be a great way to connect with people from across the conference and deeply enjoyed the interactions we had in these gatherings. It showed us again the broad diversity of cultures, experiences, and theological understandings that exist across our conference which is both a great gift and a challenge as we seek to work together.

Lastly, we acknowledge that our decision as a denomination to pass the repentance and transformation resolution last May has created tension within our conference. Some congregations are excited about the resolution and want us to fully live into it, calling on reluctant congregations to get on board. Others see this resolution as a sign of unfaithfulness and want the conference to put out a statement objecting to the resolution. In talking with pastors we hear that many churches are split, with people on both ends of a spectrum on human sexuality and many others trying to find some sort of middle ground. The question we are asking is how much grace are we willing to give each other? If we believe that Jesus is the center of our faith, the community is the center of our life and reconciliation is the center of our work, can we trust that the Holy Spirit will work out our differences? Can we give each other the space to respond to the people that Jesus puts in our path, even if we might not agree with the way in which different churches engage in that work? Do we want to be in relationship with people who hold differing beliefs?

Our prayer for CPMC. May we run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith!

Nathan Luitjens
Executive Conference Minister

Pastoral Leadership Committee
2023 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 – Corey Miller, Kim Becker, Ramiro Hernandez, Karen Martens Zimmerly, David Nichel, and Sid Burkey (serving as chair). It has been a privilege and joy to work together over the past year along with Susan Janzen.

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 anticipating activities that PLC has been planning and looks forward to implementing. For example, we are considering a Fall pastors' gathering this year. Stay tuned.

We are so thankful that we could resume our Annual Leaders Retreat, held at Saint Benedict's Center on April 30th - May 2nd. Our speaker and facilitator, Amanda Bleichty, served as CPMC Minister for Christian Formation from 2019 through February, 2023, and now serves as co-director of Crooked Creek Christian Camp, and continues as editor of Scattered Seeds and the Sower. Amanda guided a thoughtful exploration of the theme "Where Do We Go From Here?" Reconnecting for worship, reflection on the meaning of calling, and having fun together has been a rich blessing. A special thanks goes out to Corey and Karen from PLC for their parts in planning worship. Building relationships was lifegiving for people. Planning ahead to accommodate a tight schedule at St. Benedict's Center, we have confirmation for next year's retreat, on April 19-21, 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 Mennontie 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.

Our gracious God knows what kind of leadership CPMC congregations will need in the future. Please pray for PLC as we anticipate serving our pastors so they, in turn, can ably equip our congregations for works of service!

Pastor Transitions and Credentialing

May 2022 – April 2023

Credentials Granted

Ordination

John David Kenney, Pastor at West Union Mennonite Church, Parnell, IA on Sept. 18, 2022
Fernando Ramos, Pastor at Casa de Oración Emanuel, Davenport, IA on Oct. 30, 2022
Jacob Guckenberger, Pastor at Christ Community Church, Des Moines, IA on Nov. 6, 2022
Randall Koehler, Pastor at Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD on Feb. 5, 2023
Chelsea Vaught, Pastor at Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE on Apr. 16, 2023

License Toward Ordination

Laurel Swartzendruber, Chaplain, at Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA on June 26, 2022
Pratoomporn Harder, Pastor at Lao Christian Fellowship, Mountain Lake, MN on Aug. 14, 2022
Jill Hofer, Pastor at House Church of Freeman, Freeman, SD on Oct. 23, 2022
Suzette Shreffler, Co-Pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, MT on Nov. 13, 2022

Pastor Transitions — Endings

Resignation

Chris Becker, Co-Pastor at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Lauderdale, MN, effective May 1, 2022
Rachelle Luitjens, Pastor at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church, Wayland, IA, effective July 3, 2022
Taric Leichty, Youth Pastor at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE, effective Nov. 15, 2022
Matt Troyer-Miller, Pastor at Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, NE, effective Apr. 30, 2023

Retirement

Barb Tieszen retired from ministry as a Chaplain, Yankton, SD, May 1, 2022
Willis Busenitz retired as Pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, MT, Aug. 31, 2022

Death

Marvin Penner, retired Pastor, Williston, ND, died Mar. 5, 2022
Robert Hartzler, retired Pastor and Northern District Conference Minister, Wayland, IA, died July 24, 2022

Pastor Transitions — Beginnings

Installation

Scott & Suzette Shreffler, Co-Pastors at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, MT, Nov. 13, 2022

Interim Pastor Assignments

Current Interim Pastors

Thom Bower began as Transitional Pastor at Faith Mennonite, Minneapolis, MN on Aug. 1, 2020, and
will end June 26, 2023

Kent McDougal began as Interim Pastor at Sugar Creek Mennonite, Wayland, IA in Aug. 2022

Gene Miller began as Interim Pastor at Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD on Jan. 8, 2023

Jack Scandrett began as Interim Pastor at Bethel Mennonite, Mountain Lake, MN on Feb. 1, 2023

Interim Completed

Tim Detweiler served as Interim Pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite, Busby, MT
Sept. 18–Nov. 12, 2022

Gene Miller ended as Interim Pastor at Bethel Mennonite, Mountain Lake, MN on Dec. 31, 2022

Jack Scandrett ended as Transitional Pastor at Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD on Dec. 31, 2022

Pam Gerig Unruh ended as Interim Pastor at Zion Mennonite, Donnellson IA on Feb. 1, 2023

Congregations Seeking Pastoral Leadership

Congregations in Active Searches

Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN – Solo Pastor

Faith Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, MN – Solo Pastor

Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD – Lead Pastor

Zion Mennonite Church, Donnellson, IA – Solo Pastor

Congregational Search Coming Soon

Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, NE – Solo Pastor

Outreach & Service Committee (OSC) Annual Report 2023

This past year the Outreach & Service Committee got to meet together in-person (twice) for the first time in over two years. We met during both the summer Annual Meeting in SD and the fall Council of Committees in IA! In recent years our initiatives often took the form of Zoom webinars, but with the glut of online learning options in the past two years, we shifted our focus to preparing for some in-person learning and practice opportunities: We continued to gather details for offering CPMC participants a Civil Rights Learning Tours led by Mennonite Mission Network (MMN). We encourage participation in the Companion Congregation partnerships introduced at the 2022 Annual Meeting. We also prepared a handful of workshops for the 2023 Annual Meeting in NE, including one on sharing faith and one reporting from the recent visits with the Ecuador Partnership.

As a regional Conference 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.”

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 2022-23 there were again six persons serving and two positions remained open: Allison Krehbiel (Zion MC, Donnellson, IA), Tamara Zechin (Sugar Creek MC, Wayland, IA), Rhonda Brubacher (First MC, Lincoln NE), Shirley Ries (Salem MC, Freeman, SD), Tara Stahl (Bellwood MC, Milford, NE) and Nick Detweiler-Stoddard, (Washington MC, Washington IA). We are supported by Conference staff, Nathan Luitjens and Ramiro Hernandez. 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, who has come to the end of her term). They also have reports included below. The Outreach & Service Committee is grateful for the persistent work of our task groups during this period.

Submitted by outgoing committee chair, Nick Detweiler-Stoddard

Central Plains Mennonite Conference

2023

Report Ramiro Hernandez

What is faith?

Faith is trust, assurance, and confidence in God. Without trust, assurance and confidence in Gods ability and power there is no faith! God is faithful to his promises.

Hebrews 11:1

Although what follows is not part of my report, I thought I might share with you what has transpired in our lives since December to this day.

Life is constantly shifting and changing causing us to take another look at how we might be able to cope with new situations.

I am sure that many of us have faced needles events or situations that have shaken our lives for a moment would it be not for our faith in God.

For us the year had gone by without any sudden changes or concerns. Then at the end of December life began to change for us. We were informed by the doctors that my wife had cancer. However, I have seen God at work in my wife as she has struggled with pancreatic cancer. It has been hard for her much more than for me as I make needed changes helping her cope with her cancer.

I trust God for her healing! I praise His name and give him thanks for His many blessings! Soon she will be healed, and it will all be a memory of a struggle we were unprepared to deal with. Knowing then He walked alongside of us comforting us! I am thankful for His presence through it all. Praise His Name!

As for my work.

- I continue to meet with Nathan in which I inform him of events or situations that arise within our Hispanic community. There have been some issues that have risen but that are not of big concerns. Just grateful that we were able to work with those situations bringing peace.

- I continue to meet with Susan, who I inform her of situations that I need clarifications and require her expertise. She has been very helpful as she has provided me with insights that were helpful for me and those who needed or required resolutions to their situation.
- I continue to work with PLC.
- Our cluster meetings are vibrant in that we meet to share a portion of scripture in which we all participate lead by the hosting pastor. As we take turns hosting one another and so the hosting pastor will provide coffee and donuts and at times he will provide a meal. For our prayer time we share congregational or personal concerns to which we pray for.
- I make myself available as pastors might want to meet with me for prayer and concerns or just to meet and have fellowship.

Hispanic churches in clusters are: Each Pastor Hosts pastoral cluster in their congregation every month.

- El Balsamo has chosen to be left out from all activities within the conference that's why you will not see their name appear in the circle above.
- IBA "Anabaptist Bible Institute" We will be graduating 6 persons from IBA. To which I am excited to see this year. Hopefully, there will be other students who might interested in studying in IBA for the coming year!
- Participated on an IBA 2-day retreat for tutors in Newton Kansas. Our teacher was Michel Hershberger. The class title for that event was "Biblical Literature". We explored the story and basic themes of the Old and New Testaments in their historical contexts.
- I also attended the Kansas City meeting in which we met to further conversations

God bless you all! God is Good!

Ecuador Partnership Report

Nathan Luitjens and Joel Beachy represented CPMC at Encuentro Andino, a regional gathering held outside Quito February 18-21 of this year. The gathering, a time of worship and fellowship, was for people from the Anabaptist churches in Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. A previous gathering, held May 18-23, 2022, was attended by Nathan Luitjens and Holly Blosser Yoder. It brought together Mennonites from three conferences in Ecuador and, in addition to building unity within Ecuador, served as a practice run for the regional gathering. Reporting on the May 2022 event was published in the August 2022 Scattered Seeds.

Mission Network and CPMC's ministry partners in Ecuador facilitated training in mediation and conflict transformation to address economic and social realities in Ecuador. As described in a Mission Network article at <https://www.mennonitemission.net/news/4834/workshops-in-Ecuador> Julián Guamán of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (ICME, Ecuador Mennonite Christian Church), Mauricio Chenlo of Mission Network, and Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas, a lay leader working within the Mennonite Church of Colombia and the Colombian Council of Evangelical Churches, provided historical perspectives, biblical grounding, and practical experience for the workshop. Chenlo and Ecuador Partnership Co-coordinator Peter Wigginton organized the workshops at the invitation of long-time Mission Network Partner FEINE, the Council of Indigenous Evangelical Nations and Organizations of Ecuador.

Quito Mennonite Church has invited Pastor Sergio and Mabel Flores from Buenos Aires, who had been serving in a transitional pastoral role at the church throughout 2022, to continue pastoring the church through 2023. A special project LA 312 Ecuador Pastoral Support, has been created to receive donations towards their support at <https://www.mennonitemission.net/donate>.

The Ross Richer family, who had been unable to return to their work in rainforest region of Ecuador since before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, made their first journey back this winter for an in-person visit with friends they have known and worked with in ministry since 2015. They had maintained contact through emails and WhatsApp messages in the interim. Sierra Ross Richer, Jane and Jerrell's oldest daughter and a writer, contributed a reflection to the Climate Pollinator series published by the Anabaptist Climate Collaborative during Lent 2023. The reflection challenges us to grow in our capacity to practice mutual interdependence through learning from and caring for one another, the model on which the Ross Richer's Two Way Mission Partnership in Ecuador is based. See:

<https://sustainableclimatesolutions.org/climate-pollinator-series/>

--Holly Blosser Yoder

Report for Peace and Justice Task Group – 2022-2023

Peace Mug Nominations

We decided to switch it up a little this year and ask for a young Emerging Peace Leader. We ask for nominations of people in their teens or twenties.

As always it was a difficult decision. Each nominee brought a different aspect of peacemaking. We decided to go with one male and one female. Aiden Yoder and Sydney Bontrager were selected.

Aiden, from Iowa (West Union Mennonite) had been active in the Mennonite Church and political issues such as gun control. He is studying at EMU. Sydney Bontrager is from Nebraska (Bellwood Mennonite church) and studying at Hesston. She raised awareness for the plight of people in Myanmar.

Table resources

We are again giving a book away at our resource table. We are happy to offer a chance to win J. Nelson Kraybill's book "Stuck Together, the Hope of Christian Witness in a Polarized World." This seems like a pertinent choice for our current culture. 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

This year we are offering a workshop on *Solar Panels and Your Church*. Churches can now apply for solar grants. How do churches move toward installing panels? Where do we start? We hope this workshop will provide some possible steps forward.

Staying Safe

We discussed what makes us feel safe. How do gun laws affect us? We are open to hearing ideas on how churches can respond.

We want to hear your ideas. What would be helpful for peace and justice to grow in your congregations? Let us know. Contact The Peace and Justice Task Group via email: wilmajane17@gmail.com

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

Christian Formation Committee
2023 Annual Report
Prepared by Dylan C. Keller, Chair

The purpose of the Christian Formation Committee (CFC) is to assist the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference to grow continually in Christ-likeness in order to embody a holistic witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We do this by promoting Christian formation resources and equipping formation leaders. We started this year by experiencing a change in leadership with Stan Harder finishing his term as chair and myself being affirmed as the new chair at the 2022 Annual Meeting. I have been a member of this committee since 2018 and have seen the transformative work grow beyond the traditional understanding of our purpose.

My current and former committee members have disrupted the thinking that formative leadership is not limited to Sunday School teachers and youth group leaders. We recognize that formation can be applied to all aspects of worship, Sunday School, and even your daily routine. There are no limits to experiencing formation, especially one where Jesus is at the center of that formation. CFC in the past few years have been active in inviting our member congregations to join us in expanding our definition of formative leaders through engaging workshops, weekly webinar series, and highlighting formative resources and literature through our Shalom Readers program.

Throughout all these efforts, as a committee, we often discern how we are failing to reach those who need our services. Do we need to develop new techniques to reach the current generation? How do we seek formation outside the 1-2 hours we attend services on Sunday mornings? Are we over resourcing when we just need to do something? That was our charge from the November Council of Committees meeting in Kalona, IA. Fjaera Harder took hold of that charge and held two “Anabaptist 500 Bible Studies” in the Twin Cities, which brought in multiple churches and engaging conversations.

This is one example of how CFC is look to adapt and bring formative practices outside the church and into our communities. We are looking to be active in our practices and limit our time and efforts on resourcing. We believe this focus targets all generations with the same outcome: “to grow continually in Christ-likeness in order to embody a holistic witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

We also ended the year with another transition: Amanda Bleichty’s resigned as the Conference Minister for Christian Formation to become the Co-Executive Director of CCCC. We cannot thank Amanda enough for providing our committee the guidance, structure, and encouragement we needed to shift the work of CFC to a broader community within our conference. Our year did not produce the same out of programs and resources as we have come accustomed too, but it provided us the opportunities to work within our own communities. We look forward to engaging and hearing from you on not only where do we go from here, but how.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference 2023 Annual Meeting Report



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

www.centralplainsmc.org/shalom-readers

Reading the way to shalom

Central Plains
Conference encourages
children's engagement
with books

Carol J. Eisenbeis | For Anabaptist

World

October 24, 2022



Unique to Central Plains Mennonite Conference is the opportunity for children and adults to engage in reading activities that promote peaceful responses and also be gifted with free books as part of the experience.

It was in 1990 that the Peace and Social Concerns Committee - of what was then the Northern District Conference - had the foresight to implement a "Shalom Readers Club." The Mennonite Church, after all, is a peace church, and this endeavor would be a way to equip children for peaceful responses in times of conflict.

Now, more than 30 years later, some changes have taken place. "Club" has been dropped from the title, our conference has merged to form Central Plains Conference, the program is overseen by the Christian Formation Committee, and a "Shalom Readers" format for adults has been put into motion by Amanda Bleichty. What has not changed, however, is the need to actively work for peace in a world where conflict rages.

This past fall, we had the privilege of showcasing "Shalom Readers" in a feature article for *Anabaptist World*. Find it at AnabaptistWorld.com.

Without the time, effort, and expertise invested by Marlinda Beachy, Joan Friesen, and Ellen Miller, "Shalom Readers" would not be in existence. 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 at the address listed above.

As the result Shalom Readers involvement in 2022, participants from the following churches were awarded with free books:

- Bethesda | Henderson, Nebraska
- Cedar Falls | Cedar Falls, Iowa
- First Mennonite | Iowa City, Iowa
- Hutterthal | Freeman, South Dakota
- Sermon on the Mount | Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The way that “Shalom Readers” is implemented varies somewhat from church to church. In some churches an adult reads the books aloud to a group of children; the adult keeps records of the books read, facilitates a follow-up activity, and then submits the documentation and book orders. In some churches, the reading and projects are completed by individual families.

“Shalom Readers” provides a wonderful avenue for outreach. Because the majority of the books feature positive responses to conflict without religious overtones, they can be easily incorporated into public school and community settings, as well. In Sioux Falls, Cheryl Lehmann requested books from the public library that arrived via book mobile for use in an after-school program. What a great way to share the message of peace beyond the walls of the church building!

Annotated lists of “Shalom” book titles for both children and adults can be found on the Central Plains website. (Hint: This list can be a great reference if you’re looking for some gift ideas!) Many of the books are readily available in public libraries, as well. We also encourage churches to stock their own library with “Shalom Readers” books or check out sets of children’s books from the “Shalom” collection housed in the Central Plains office in Freeman; arrangements can be made by contacting Monica Clem at office@centralplainsmc.org.

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

Bios for the Slate of Affirmation 2023

For Christian Formation Committee - Laurel Roth
Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, NE

Laurel Roth is a member of Wood River Mennonite Church where he has served as an elder and teaches Sunday School and Summer Bible School (5th Grade). He is currently serving as a trustee in the church. Previously he attended Bethesda Mennonite Church (Henderson, NE) for twenty plus years. He is a retired teacher and school administrator having taught high school mathematics at Giltner Public School for 23 years and eleven years as Principal at Wood River Elementary School. Currently he works as a Property Manager for Excel Development Group in Grand Island, NE, managing and maintaining 146 affordable housing units for tenants in a 55+ community. He and his wife Deb have three adult children and six grandchildren.

Ballot of Election/Affirmation
Central Plains Mennonite Conference
Annual Meeting 2023

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 Board Treasurer (3-year term) vote for 1
_____ (2026) Norm Yoder – 2nd term – Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, NE
_____ (write in) _____

Conference Board Member-at-Large (2-year term) vote for 2
_____ (2025) John Tyson – 2nd term – Des Moines Mennonite Church, Des Moines, IA
_____ (2025) Gregg Waltner – 2nd term – Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD
_____ (2025) (write in) _____

Discernment Committee (2-year term) vote for 2
_____ (2025) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2025) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2025) (write in) _____

Christian Formation Committee (3-year term) vote for 3
_____ (2026) Laurel Roth – 1st term – Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, NE
_____ (2026) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2026) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2026) (write in) _____

Outreach and Service Committee – chair (3-year term) vote for 1
_____ (2026) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2026) (write in) _____

Outreach and Service Committee (3-year term) vote for 2
_____ (2026) Tara Stahl – 2nd term – Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE
_____ (2026) *(candidate needed)*
_____ (2026) (write in) _____

Pastoral Leadership Committee (3-year term) vote for 1
_____ (2026) Karen Martens Zimmerly – 2nd term – First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, IA
_____ (2026) (write in) _____

May 1, 2023

Dear Friends of the **Agapé Peace Center** in Duluth, MN,

As our society and churches alike experience new stresses and strains, the Agapé Peace Center continues to be present to many people in its mission of spreading peace education and restorative practices.

A highlight last July was a full-day [Restorative Church gathering](#) at McCormick Seminary in Chicago's Southside: ***"Helping Church Communities Walk the Peacemaking Talk Both Outwardly and Inwardly."*** About 50 people attended who learned about the balance between missional expressions of peacemaking and internal congregational expressions of peacemaking. The team of six local clergy leaders who helped to plan the event all participated in presenting and speaking on panels.

Another new commitment this past year involved partnership with the Bethany Community Church network of Seattle where a team has initiated both learning and resolution frameworks for strengthening **racial reconciliation** in their church communities. I have been asked to help train a group of people as facilitators who can lead community building circles as well as healing/resolution conferences for two-party situations.

Locally in Duluth I, with a couple other facilitators, was able to lead the **Restorative Stories** monthly circle in the Damiano Center which serves transient populations. This provided a space for people to share their stories, be heard by others, and learn a bit about restorative justice. Another Duluth-based situation allowed me to be a lead facilitator for two staff teams that serve female residents in a transitional housing complex. After a month of trust-building activities, the full group then had a month of establishing practical solutions to strengthen their collaborative work. After three months of implementation, the group met again in September to celebrate the successes of the process. Finally, I, with two other city leaders, was able to initiate a proposal for police-citizen mediation for addressing complaints against officers.

Due to providing a number of workshops on **restorative practices** at Calvin Univeristy (Grand Rapids, MI) last October, I was asked to participate on a panel in February at the Worship Institute Symposium. With four others, the presentations addressed the topic of [Moving from Dividing Walls of Hostility toward Christian Unity](#). I recommend that you find a quiet hour to enjoy the wisdom from all of the presenters.

Work as a volunteer chair for the **Conflict Management Support Team** for **Central Plains Mennonite Conference** has continued. Additional work through this framework included facilitative supports for a CPMC church in Iowa. Also launched during this last year was the planning for the first training for church members who feel called to provide facilitation services in their own churches. ["Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Foundations for Facilitating Harms, Conflicts and Divisive Issues in Church Communities."](#) Des Moines Mennonite Church is

hosting the first one this May, and the hope is to continue trainings for both new and previous facilitators.

Please pray with me that new opportunities will arise in this next year 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 try to seek out a Silas or Priscilla before taking on a new venture. And if your church would like to help sustain the center with an annual donation, that can be done through the Central Plains main office.

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

Wanted: Someone with WordPress/PayPal web-knowledge to assist with strengthening interactions with Restorative Church subscribers.

Note re: Financial Suppor: if you would like your donation to have a tax benefit, it can be directed through the main office of *Central Plains Mennonite Conference*, designated to New Ministries Fund. Checks can be sent to: CPMF, P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029, with *Agape Peace Center* in the note line.

Closing Verse

(Jacob to Esau)

“For to see your face is like seeing the face of God,
now that you have received me favorably.”

- Genesis 33:10

Annual Report from Philip Friesen, Partner in Ministry with Galilean Fellows

Kim and I will have been married 50 years come December this year. With both of us in relatively good health, it appears there still appears to be a few hills yet to climb and curves to maneuver. So we continue on.

Few, if even any of you, remember my mother, Amanda Dahlenburg Friesen. I want you to know, however, that last September the South Dakota State Poetry Society gave her a posthumous “*Poet of Merit*” award, the first person in history to receive this award. I invite you to visit the SDSPS digital library at South Dakota State University to see some of my mother’s poetry and the story of her life, as the wife of a Mennonite pastor, which I have written. She was well known in her lifetime. Go to [Browse - Digital Library of South Dakota \(DLSD\) \(digitalsd.org\) to see her story](https://digitalsd.org). I can also give or email you a copy of her story. The title page and description is below.

Kim, my wife, finished a 3-year term as interim volunteer director of Connexions International (CXI) on June 1 of this year. During the past 2 years, the ministry grew exponentially. Our ministry to international scholars at the University of Minnesota seemed ready to perish due to Covid when a miracle happened. A Taiwanese student suggested we advertise on Facebook which suddenly put the ministry on steroids. People from around the world want to practice English conversation with native speakers of English. Now while the number of participants does fluctuate, now we have more than 30 volunteers from a number of different states holding weekly conversation classes in English with people around the world, exercising full liberty for Bible discussion and witness to Buddhists, Muslims, and atheists who voluntarily decide to join the program. One Buddhist man with whom I conduct a one-to-one Bible study asked me this week about how he might interest other people in reading the Bible together. Discipling under this arrangement is a challenge, but God has led this far, and we walk by faith that God will reveal “where we go from here.” More than 6 people that we know of have professed faith in Jesus as new believers during this time. This includes outreach into the Muslim world.

For the past 10 years I have served as board chair for The Ministry Office, a service to small experimental and explorative ministries around the world, handling the financial and legal details for such ministries. This year I resigned as chair of this board but continue as a member of this oversight board. God has provided a younger person with more expertise and high digital fluency to take on the leadership.

One of the ministries sponsored by The Ministry Office is Holistic Peace and Development Zimbabwe (HPDZ). Ten years ago a Zimbabwe pastor visiting here, Masango Matimura, requested that I chair a local board to support his ministry dream. Today Pastor Matimura leads a small church in a desperately poor rural village in his country while simultaneously developing better farming practices as model for others to see—a kind of incarnational presence in a very dark—yes, and demon oppressed community. Kim and I visited him in 2018.

My second book, *A Trajectory of Social Change: From a House of Patriarchs to the House of the Father*, was published last year. I continue to write, and our Galilean Fellows group of scholars that I lead continues to meet.

Here is the title page and description of my mother's witness.

A MOTHER'S DOMAIN IN THE HOUSE OF THE FATHER

Vignettes of Trauma and Triumph over
Crippling disease, prison, and psychiatric confinement
A center of pain immersed in a circle of love

The story of a South Dakota Mennonite Pastor Family (1936-2002)

A Free digital copy is
offered by the author as
a memorial in memory
of Amanda by her son,
send email to
Philip E. Friesen
Frie0081@umn.edu

All of Amanda's poems quoted in this monograph are from *Verse from Twisted Fingers, A Memorial Volume*, edited by Phil & Jake Friesen, published in 1983 in Freeman, SD by Pine Hill Press. Many had been previously published in *Pasque Petals*, the South Dakota State poetry magazine.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual Meeting

June 16-19, 2022

Hosted by the Freeman Area Mennonite Churches
Freeman Academy Campus, Freeman South Dakota

I. FRIDAY MORNING DELEGATE SESSION

1. Welcome and Introductions

Moderator John Murray (Third Way Church, St. Paul, MN) opened the meeting. He announced that Covid is still among us, and Lyle Miller tested positive this morning, so his workshops have been cancelled. He then introduced Pam Gerig Unruh, (Zion Mennonite, Wayland, IA) the Assistant Moderator.

Pam welcomed the delegates and guests. She called our attention to an image that she likes to imagine – sitting around a fire. In this context we are sitting around tables, and we would like to see Christ in the middle as the central image.

2. Secretary Report

Marilyn Brockmueller, Executive Committee Secretary (Salem Mennonite, Freeman, SD) highlighted several items from the 2021 Annual Meeting minutes, Year-End Report of Conference Board Meetings 2021-22 (both in the Annual Meeting report booklet) and one action from the Executive Committee. A call for corrections was made. None were voiced.

Tamara Zechin (Sugar Creek Mennonite, Wayland, IA) made the motion to approve the minutes. Nyle Kaufman (East Union Mennonite, Kalona, IA) seconded that. They were approved by a show of hands.

3. Executive Conference Minister's Report

Nathan Luitjens referred the delegates to the written report in the Annual Report booklet and the video report on the CPMC website. He highlighted congregational visitations. The conference ministerial staff is making visits to all member churches as allowed by Covid protocols. They haven't yet been able to visit all the churches but are busy working on that.

The staff and board are considering what structures in the conference will look like in the future. They will look for feedback from the table discussion groups this weekend.

4. Announcements – There are items on the tables to fidget with during our sessions as well as lined paper for note taking. We will primarily use our time in table discussions which will help the staff and board with future planning. The table discussion summaries may be submitted by following the link or using the QR code as shown on the screen; emailed to Monica; or handwritten and submitted to the front table.

5. Table Introductions

The table groups that everyone is assigned to for the whole conference are important sharing and listening groups. Therefore, to become acquainted, the table members were asked to spend time introducing themselves and their community. This was followed by a time of remembering a childhood saying. What value does this saying show? What similarities and differences are seen between the sayings? How do these influence our communication with each other?

6. Moderator's Report

John Murray noted that this was his first in person conference. Since the last pre-Covid conference there are new faces as well as those we have lost. There are people who couldn't come because they were sick, chose not to come or don't feel welcome here.

Even without meeting in person, the congregations have continued to give generously and found new ways of resourcing and connecting. It is good to finally be together in person. The Board has put much effort into administering the work of the conference facing new challenges.

The childhood saying John grew up with was from his grandmother - "Remember who you are." This can mean many different things from "Stay out of trouble" to "You are God's beloved" to "...and what has brought you here." We remember that 22 years ago CPMC was formed right here in on this campus. Over the years we have changed, but across MCUSA we are known as being a strong conference. There are the natural cycles that happen of "No longer" to "Present" to "Not Yet." "No Longer" is always in our memory and the "Not Yet" is unknown, but it is dangerous if we don't remember all three. We need to commit to a hope filled witness and as we continue toward the "Not Yet." John thanked us for helping create a shared vision together and coming to the table this weekend.

7. Table Group Guided Bible Study

Seven scripture texts were studied: Luke 7:36-50, 14:1-24, 10:38-42, 19:1-10, 5:27-32, 11:37-52, and 22:14-38.

- Questions to ponder were: 1) Who is Jesus eating with? and 2) What do you notice about them?
- List who is at your table in terms of social location, socio-economic, education and political status. What are the similarities and differences between us? What can we learn from the list we created?
- Given our shared identity in Jesus and all the cultural influences on our lives, how does this affect how we come to discussion about church?

Verbal sharing included that Jesus went wherever he was invited, but it was also noted that there were differences in how he was treated. During table fellowship, participants always listened but there could also be friction. However, they weren't afraid to express their views since they felt safe. There is an importance of being a host and a guest. All submitted responses will be viewed by the ministry staff and board.

8. Introduction to Later Business

2022-23 Blueprint – Delegates were asked to please review the proposed Blueprint on page 61 in the Annual Meeting (AM) Report booklet. Questions may be directed to the Stewardship Task Group – Don Kempf, Ted Widmer (CFO), Nathan Luitjens (ECM), or John Murray (Moderator). Kent Blossom was unable to attend and Norm Yoder (Treasurer) could not be present due to illness. The vote will be tomorrow so direct your questions to them prior to that time.

Slate – See pages 24-25 in the AM Report booklet. The slate is not full. Please help discern who could be a nominee where we have open positions. You can give those names to members of the Discernment Committee members that are present this weekend – Pam Gerig Unruh (Asst. Moderator), Peg Burkey, or Marissa Hochstetler Unruh. This vote will also happen tomorrow.

II. FRIDAY AFTERNOON DELEGATE SESSION

1. Opening

John Murray opened this session. He highlighted that there are many resources available on the CPMC website. He then introduced the next table group activity.

2. Table Group Discussion

In this session, the group is to talk about their congregation discussing the following questions:

- Who makes up your congregation?
- What do you value about your congregation?
- What do you/your congregation value about your relationship with the conference?

Verbal sharing included:

Differences: recognize diversity instead of dividing us,
can be due to context,
can be scary

Similarities: can bring us together
can build connections

Differences can be positive by bringing diversity, but negative if there is no change

This weekend is to help bring us together in a cohesive way through similarities but with some tension that brings about diversity.

3. Sharing Our Stories

This was an exercise for pairs from each table and later in the process to share with the entire table, but some tables choose to work as the whole table from the start of this exercise. The questions to wrestle with were:

- What is the story of your relationship to church?
- How has it formed you?
- What has brought you joy?
- What has been difficult?

4. Table Group Guided Bible Study

Nathan Luitjens led this section. Four stories about Jesus were examined (Luke 6:1-11, Luke 13:10-17, John 8:1-11 and Matthew 20:20-28) answering the following questions:

- What is the Law/cultural constrict or norm that is influencing the people coming to Jesus?
- What seems to be important to the people who are coming to see Jesus?

Verbal sharing included: healing, the Law (1st & 7th commandments), power by being close to Jesus.

Next the table groups were to answer the following questions:

- How does Jesus respond to these situations? What does Jesus prioritize? What seems to be important to Jesus?
- What do you notice about what Jesus is doing?
- Where do you see this in the world? Where do we see this in the church?

Verbal sharing included:

Jesus asked questions, asked unconventional questions,
He didn't give in, not pushed around by those in power
Sided against the scapegoat,
Leveled the playing field
Prioritized need over Law
Prioritized people over Law
Prioritized mercy over sacrifice
Had patience for the sinful & vulnerable rather than the
sinful and powerful
Reframed what the Law meant
Responded with grace and invites the person to accept
the grace

Nathan summarized that the relationships were the most meaningful. People were hurt by the strict adherence to the Law.

5. Closing and Prayer

This session was closed in prayer by John Murray and announcements by Nathan Luitjens.

III. SATURDAY MORNING DELEGATE SESSION

1. Opening

Moderator John Murray opened the sessions by highlighting comments from yesterday's submitted input. The delegates appreciate being able to meet together in person – to reconnect and to share within the table groups. However, there are noted differences among us such as: rural vs. urban worldviews, defining the sin problem, policy and leadership structure, the role of politics and influence of culture on theology, the place of inclusive theology in the church, and the Repentance & Transformation resolution in Kansas City. (The latter which happened so recently will not be addressed at this meeting). Table summaries dealing with these difficult issues had three different responses:

- Conference should make a decision on these “issues” to guide us
- Conference should make a decision on these “issues” so the churches can decide to leave or stay
- Glad that conference hasn't made a decision on these “issues” but would like more help in discerning them.

For 22 years we have been trying to deal with this issue and a policy was written for the sake of integrating two denominations into MCUSA. We now see that we cannot build a faithful, Jesus-centered institution on “right” policy.

Forbearance came up frequently in the responses. To some this is seen as “agreeing to disagree.” Others see it as one side “is just going to do it anyway.” This concept assigns permanent labels of “us” and “them.” However, we all (us and them) are to be one in Christ bringing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. We must be aware of how we are causing harm through our language and conduct which in turn also causes harm to us. John mentioned that in talking with Corey Miller, he noted that our world, our culture, and our church suffers from a “grace deficit.”

We believe that a greater majority of us want to follow our core Anabaptist Mennonite convictions of walking in the way of Jesus. We espouse Palmer Becker's distillation of our beliefs as:

- Jesus is the Center of our Faith
- Community is the Center of our Lives
- Reconciliation is the Center of our Work.

We are not here today to resolve this issue. Instead, we are setting up a “container” where we will in the future be able to unify and identify a policy while we honor each other while being a witness for Christ. We need to remember our CPMC Covenant of Spiritual Practices. Yesterday we spent our time importantly laying the foundation for “Who are we?” This morning we will discuss “What is important to us?” These will lay the foundation for our final conversations this afternoon about the future asking, “How do we connect?”

2. Bible Study

This was not originally planned in the agenda, but delegates asked for this. Nathan Luitjens led us in a session on “Transformation” to discern “What happens when people are in the same space as Jesus”? Looking at the following verses Luke 19:1-10, Acts 9:1-19, Acts 2:38-47 and Acts 10, table groups answered the following questions. They then shared their responses with the delegate body.

1) How is space made for Jesus in these stories?

- Through a vision
- Through obedience to the vision
- Through witness of the believers taking that message
- The Holy Spirit at Pentecost opened a channel to God
- Certain structures/practices engaged in, help to make space for Jesus such fellowshiping together, prayer, breaking bread together, etc.
- Jesus himself is offering us space when we request “Jesus be present in this place.”

2) What happens when space is made for Jesus?

- Eyes are opened (scales fell off)
- Economics changed (Zacchaeus)
- Lives were transformed
- We have to “get out of our tree”
- The enemy became a friend and leader (Saul/Paul)
- Jubilee set people free
- Fellowship breaks out
- God is worshipped

3. Table Discussion

“What is important to us” was discussed at each table with the results being handed in to the Moderator for compilation. John Murray listed three questions to talk about in connection with this broader question:

- What are the differences that are the cause of negative tension?
- What are the differences that have the energy (tension) for positive transformation?
- What are the differences that move us towards transformational change in Jesus?

John closed this discussion thanking everyone for all their hard work.

4. CPMC Resources – Pyramid, Staff, Binding documents, etc.

John Murray posed the question “How do we connect?” The conference has many resources, but they are not known/utilized by many of the congregations. There is a communication problem that we need to address to connect resources with the congregations. Nathan Luitjens explained some of the CPMC Resources.

Pyramid

Nathan Luitjens outlined his theological understanding of how the church functions with the ministry staff and board in relation to the congregations as seen in an upside-down pyramid.



*** Pastors and Leaders equip us to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ

** Conference supports the pastors and congregations

* Denomination help support the conferences

Ministry Staff

Ramiro Hernandez (Hispanic Ministries Coordinator) helps navigate cultural differences within the Hispanic community.

Susan Janzen (Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership) supports the credentialed leaders and supports churches that don't have credentialed leaders.

Amanda Bleichty (Conference Minister for Christian Formation) helps develop practices to make space so Jesus can be present in our congregations.

Nathan Luitjens (Executive Conference Minister) works with reconciliation as well as does administrative functions

Supporting Documents

CPMC is governed by the Bylaws. Periodically they need to be updated. They are part of the Handbook of Information which comes out each fall. In addition, we have our own Covenant of Spiritual Practices found both in the Workbook as well as the Handbook of Information. These give us a structure to work through issues.

5. Table Discussion

The table groups were asked to discuss the question “How do we connect?” specifically:

- What is important in our congregational connections
- What role can conference play in facilitating our connections
- What role can conference play in fostering transformational change (purpose)?

The answers to these questions were submitted to the Moderator for compilation.

6. Closing and Announcements

- Intergenerational Peace Videos will be available to watch starting at 3:00 in the gym. They will, also, be posted on the CPMC website.
- Silent Art Auction bidding will close at 2:30 with the winning bids announced in the afternoon session. Half of the money will go to the artist and the other half will be distributed to our Partners in Venezuela.

John Murray closed the session and offered a prayer for the noon meal.

IV. SATURDAY AFTERNOON DELEGATE SESSION

John Murray opened this afternoon session noting that we will celebrate but also do more business and discussion.

1. Presentation of Peace Mug

Nick Detweiler Stoddard, (Washington Mennonite, Washington, IA) and chair of the Outreach and Service Committee, noted that the Peace Mug is given annually to someone who exemplifies Jesus’ way of peacemaking. The Peace & Justice Task Group chose Joe Walks Along, Jr. (Lame Deer Mennonite, Lame Deer, MT) as this year’s recipient of the Peace Mug.

Willis Busenitz (White River Cheyenne Mennonite, Busby, MT) introduced us to Pastor Joe. He has known his family for 56 years. Joe and his wife Lynne work together as a team. Joe keeps busy with a full-time job, his family, and the church. He treats all people with respect no matter who they are, has a gentle way of dealing with people, has helped many families through the grief process, leads his small congregation and is a member of the Ministerial Association. Willis mentioned that last year was difficult for Joe when he lost his 20-year-old grandson in a tragic car accident.

Pastor Joe emphasized that God is always present with us in all circumstances. There were many traumatic incidents on the reservation especially in the last 2 years. He believes that we are going to see our loved ones again in heaven. He learned much from his father. He doesn’t want the next generation to be “empty handed” so they must be taught through word and example. He learned through Sunday School, at the dinner table and in church. We must put Jesus in our hearts and have God guide us. He finds peace in prayer. We will receive strength, guidance, and a plan for us. For him a seed was planted, the roots have grown deep and now we need to feed that plant through prayer, trust, and obedience and all will be good. He

mentioned that Willis was at his wedding. He gave thanks for his award which he will cherish for the rest of his life. To end, he and Willis sang a Cheyenne song that translates to “Let’s Praise Jesus.”

2.Introduction of New Pastors

Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership highlighted new pastors and pastors in new positions over the past 3 years since we haven’t met in person since then.

Enrique and Maria Mendoza	Iglesia Torre Fuerte	Iowa City, IA
Steve Griffin	Bellwood Mennonite	Milford, NE
Jacob Guckenberger	Christ Community	Des Moines, IA
John David Kenney	West Union Mennonite	Parnell, IA
Thom Bower (transitional)	Faith Mennonite	Minneapolis, MN
Ben Schlegel	Salem Mennonite	Shickley, NE
Bob Brown	Cedar Falls Mennonite	Cedar Falls, IA
Randall Koehler	Hutterthal Mennonite	Freeman, SD
Chelsea Vaught	Bethesda Mennonite	Henderson, NE
Josh Wenger	Eicher Emmanuel Menn.	Wayland, IA
Adam Harder Nussbaum	Third Way Church	St. Paul, MN
Nick Detweiler Stoddard	Washington Mennonite	Washington, IA
Pam Gerig Unruh (transitional)	Zion Mennonite	Donnellson, IA
Gene Miller (transitional)	Bethel Mennonite	Mt. Lake, MN
David Huesinkveld	Wellman Mennonite	Wellman, IA
Jack Scandrett (transitional)	Salem Mennonite	Freeman, SD

Susan asked that we get to learn to know our new pastors.

3.Intergenerational Peace Video Project

John Murray highlighted the Cross-Generation Peace Talk Video project. The videos submitted can be seen on CPMC’s website and YouTube page. The Peace and Justice Task Group initiated this idea. They received eight videos. There is prize money (\$2200) left so youth (middle school – college undergraduates) can still send in videos. Youth submitting videos will receive \$100 minimum.

4.Fiancial Blueprint Discussion and Vote

Ted Widmer (CFO) followed up on the Blueprint introduction that was given on Friday morning asking that questions be brought to him. He has received two questions since then. 1)Do we pay the Conference Ministers according to the MCUSA guidelines. The answer is yes. 2) The Freeman office is listed as paying rent to Ten Thousand Villages, but it should be Etc. Shoppe. That will be corrected. He asked for any questions from the floor at this time. Dylan Keller (Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA) has heard that some churches may be leaving the conference along with their financial contributions. He was wondering if the implications of that have been discussed. Ted said the board has discussed it. Nathan Luitjens (also a member of the Stewardship Task Group) followed up by saying that CPMC is currently in a strong financial

position. We have about one year to discern how to proceed. Probably some structural changes will need to be made. The Board will be working on that in the coming year. John Murray said that the feedback from this weekend will help clarify where to focus resources in the next year. John also thanked all the congregations for their strong financial generosity in the past few years. There was a call for the motion.

Nyle Kaufman (East Union Mennonite, Kalona, IA) made a motion to accept the Financial Blueprint for FY 2022-23 as printed on pages 61-63 in the Annual Report booklet. There was a second by Randall Koehler (Hutterthal Mennonite, Freeman, SD). It was approved unanimously by a show of hands.

5.Slate discussion and vote

Pam Gerig Unruh, Discernment Committee chair, noted that there are still blanks on the ballot. From the floor a new nominee was announced. For the open post in Mission & Service, Allison Krehbiel (Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA) has agreed to be a nominee. There was a call for the motion.

Pam Gerig Unruh (Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA) made a motion to accept the ballot (printed on pages 24-25) amending it to add Allison Krehbiel for a position on the Mission & Service Committee. There was a second by Kim Becker (Emmanuel Mennonite, St. Paul, MN). It was approved unanimously by a show of hands.

John Murray followed up by saying that the Discernment Committee is made up of the Assistant Moderator plus four elected members. In these past few years, they have been recruiting instead of discerning and they need our help. Please fill out the green sheets on your table “Discerning Future Leaders for Central Plain Mennonite Conference” or submit names on the website.

6.Wrap-Up

Introduction:

John Murray called our attention to all the hard work we did during the table discussions. This is to be a wrap-up session but should be viewed as a beginning with ideas of what is to come. There were over 100 responses so there is a lot to review and summarize. Delegates reported: the time together was appreciated, valued the relationships around the table, being together in person, there were Spirit-filled and Spirit-led conversations, we need to find ways to maintain and sustain these conversations. After reading all the submissions, a summary report will be given to the conference committees with actions for the conference and actions for the delegates to be shared with their congregations.

Themes seen in the responses include:

- The centrality of Christ. It is good to have that confirmed.
- Finding ways to connect across the conference by 1) creating a framework for sister congregations, 2) finding shared service opportunities, and 3) continuing to send conference staff to all congregations.
- The Board will do a communications audit since there is a disconnect. New ways of communicating need to be explored for news, stories, updates, resources, etc.
- Congregations need to help disseminating information to all their members and back to the conference with their needs

Table Discussion:

To discuss: “What will you take home to your congregations?”

Table responses should be submitted by email or hard copies can be handed in. These responses will accepted through tomorrow.

Open Mic closing comments:

Tamara Zechin (Sugar Creek Mennonite, Wayland, IA) expressed thanks for the opportunity for table talk, thanks to the leadership of the Board and pastoral guidance, thanks for allowing the delegates to have a voice, appreciated the Conflict Management support team and their seminars (how to listen to each other more deeply when there is diversity).

Carol Janzen (Bethesda Mennonite, Henderson, NE) thanked the youth delegates for coming, they are a gift for our conference.

Dylan Keller (Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA) gave thanks for the willingness of conference and leaders to help us going into unknown times. How do we relate that back to our congregations, and when it doesn't necessarily relate to their issues?

Marcus Unruh (Washington Mennonite, Washington, IA is originally from this conference and had been a youth delegate. Since then, he has have lived in other Mennonite conferences (Indiana and Kansas) and now sees how strong and special CPMC is.

Don Kempf (Salem Mennonite, Shickley, NE) noted that he was fearful when Dave, Shana and Tim left plus then Covid hit. Now he is optimistic seeing the good conference leadership.

Aubrey McClanahan (Wayland Mennonite, Wayland, IA) was glad to see youth delegates present. She noted with concern the empty spaces on the ballot. We need to encourage our congregations to submit names.

Adam Harder Nussbaum (Third Way Church, St. Paul, MN) noted that most people that grew up non-Mennonite don't come to annual meetings since they imagine sitting around discussing dry policies. We need to encourage them to come if we keep up this format.

John Murray noted in the responses that some congregations and members don't feel as confident, and they are anxious about conference. It is hoped that we can be church together.

Silent Auction Results:

Six Imaginative Scripture art pieces were submitted. The winning bidders were presented with their art piece. A total of \$1980 was received with \$990 going to our Partners in Venezuela and \$990 going back to the artists.

7. Transitions and Dismissal

John Murray invited Pam Gerig Unruh to take over as the new Moderator.

- She had a prayer of blessing for the new and continuing committee members.
- She reminded us that the Anabaptist church is an important model of work.
- The next annual meeting will be in June, but the dates and venue has not been finalized.
- Thanks were given to the Annual Meeting Task Group, Freeman Academy for the space where we met, the Worship planning team, the Local Host committee, the food service, to Nathan Luitjens and John Murray, the CPMC staff, to Monica Clem (office manager) and to John Murray for his leadership during the past two years of virtual meetings, to all the participants as they worked and studied together, and Thanks be to God!

Called for a motion to adjourn.

Dylan Keller (Zion Mennonite, Donnellson, IA) made a motion to adjourn the 2022 Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual Meeting. Josh Yoder (East Union Mennonite, Kalona, IA) seconded it. It was approved unanimously by a show of hands.

This officially concluded the end of the delegate meetings.

After the meal this evening, the Church Road Bandits will play in Pioneer Hall

Tomorrow morning the Sunday morning worship service will be at Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, rural Freeman at 9:30.

Thank you to all the churches that brought wood for the table. That will be on display tomorrow morning. Wood pieces can still be submitted. The table will be completed in several weeks after which it will travel around to the conference churches.

Draft submitted by Marilyn Brockmueller, Secretary
August 12, 2022

Year-End Reports of Conference Board Meetings 2022-2023

Meeting Dates:

June 17, 2022	Freeman Academy
September 7, 2022	by ZOOM
November 12, 2022	Kalona, Iowa
December 7, 2022	e-mail decision
January 3, 2023	e-mail decision
January 30, 2023	by ZOOM
February 6, 2023	e-mail decision
March 28, 2023	by ZOOM
April 22, 2023	Des Moines, Iowa

June 17, 2022 In person board meeting in Freeman, SD

Discussion:

Introductions made. Board functions reviewed. Finances discussed. Church affiliations reviewed. Talked about conference communications strategies, especially in regards to ethnic churches during covid, and the Kansas City special delegate session. Minutes were read and approved. Council of Committees dates suggested.

Actions:

John Murray moved to distribute \$1,000 each to Venezuela Partnership and Rachel Givens, and Kate Widmer. Shella Franz seconded it and it passed.

September 7, 2022 First Quarter Board Meeting (ZOOM)

Discussion:

Minutes and finance reports reviewed and approved. Communications and conference structure discussed. Reviewed progress of Intercultural Development Inventory and executive conference ministry reports. Talked about who represents CPMC on the Constituent Leaders Council. Dates announced for 2023 in person annual meeting in York NE June 15-18, 2023, and the in person board meeting November 11, 12, 2022 in Kalona IA.

Actions:

None taken. Information only

November 12, 2022 Second Quarter Board Meeting in Kalona, IA

Discussion:

Minutes and finance reports reviewed and approved. Three new ministries grant proposals were discussed and approved. Discussed board's response to decisions made at Kansas City's special delegate session. Letter to be crafted and sent to pastors and churches of CPMC letting them know that discussions are underway.

Actions:

Gregg Waltner moved to grant Ted Lewis's request for \$3000 to facilitate training on conflict resolution in our churches. John Tyson seconded it and it passed.

Norm Yoder moved to grant \$1500-\$1700 to Amanda Bleichity for the 2023-2024 season of Advent planning for The Leader. It was seconded by Gregg Waltner. Passed.

Michelle Hofer moved to grant \$2000 to Scott and Suzette Sheffler to help cover relocation expenses as they move to White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT. It was seconded by Anita Breckbill and it passed.

December 7, 2022 (email decision)

To review a letter prepared as the board's response to special delegate assembly in Kansas City. Approved by email.

January 3, 2023 (email decision)

Reviewed the new ministries proposal to grant \$1000 to Suzette Shreffler to provide grief counseling. Approved.

January 30, 2023 Third Quarter Board Meeting (ZOOM)

Discussion:

Reviewed and approved minutes of the previous meeting and financial reports. Discussed new ministries grant proposal. Discussed minimal responses to the letter sent to pastors and churches in December. Accepted (with regret) Amanda Bleichity's resignation. Brainstormed on ideas to use money from an estate bequest.

Actions:

Moved by Norm Yoder and seconded by Michelle Hofer to formally approve new ministries grant of \$1000 to Suzette Shreffler to assist with grief counseling. Passed.

Moved by Gregg Waltner and seconded by John Tyson to accept the resignation of Amanda Bleichity as ¾ time conference minister. Offering a 10 hour per week position to continue her Intercultural Development work and her conference communications work. Approved.

February 6, 2023 (by email)

Approved by email a draft of the letter to leaders and congregations of CPMC.

March 28, 2023 (ZOOM)

Considered need for more delegates representing CPMC at Mennonite Convention July of 2023. Discussed the Leader Table Proposal and other programs available for pastor and leader support. Reviewed plans for CPMC annual conference in June.

Actions:

None taken. Information only.

April 22, 2023 Fourth Quarter Board Meeting in Des Moines, Iowa

Discussion:

Minutes were reviewed and approved. Financial report and proposed budget blueprint reviewed and approved. The executive conference minister report was discussed. Talked about office space adjustments, communication concerns, and the conclusion of Intercultural Initiative cohorts. Annual meeting agenda and scheduling was discussed. Alan Roxburgh and Michael Danner will be invited as resource persons. Susan's sabbatical plans were presented. Slate of officers for conference will be forthcoming.

Actions:

Gregg moved that \$6,000 be taken from the Merck bequest to hire Alan Roxburgh as a consultant from May 1 through December 31, 2023 to begin Leader's Table Proposal. Seconded by Shirley. Passed.

Norm moved that \$10,000 be taken from the combined bequests of Herman and Bernice Stucky and Irene Schrag to support the work of the volunteer network for conflict management in CPMC. Anita seconded and it passed.

Submitted by:

Shirley Kempf

Executive Committee Secretary