



Scattered Seeds

Fall
2025

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

— 1 Cor. 3:6-7



25 Years of Central Plains

ANNUAL MEETING 2025

A festive feeling was in the air Friday night during Annual Meeting when we celebrated the 25th birthday of Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

Central Plains was incorporated in 2000 after several years of conversation, prayer, and relationship-building among members of the Iowa-Nebraska Conference of the Mennonite Church and Northern District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church, along with several Central District General Conference congregations in Iowa.

These conferences were anticipating the merger of the two denominations that would later become Mennonite Church USA, and had the foresight to begin getting to know each other as spiritual and geographic kin through joint gatherings, youth activities, and conference sessions.

Twenty-five years later, as we gathered around the tables for the celebration, the fruits of those early efforts were all around us as delegates and guests mingled to share stories, reminisce, and eat birthday cake.

Along with recognizing the many people who have served the conference over the years in various elected and appointed roles, the evening honored those who have served as conference ministers and in staff positions over these 25 years. Two long-time staff members — **Monica Friesen Clem**, who has been the Office Manager for the entire lifespan of Central Plains, and **Ted Widmer**, who has been the financial officer since 2003 — received a standing ovation for their commitment to Central Plains!

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Highlighting the celebration were memories and reflections shared by several former conference ministers:

Shana Peachey Boshart, who served as Conference Youth Minister from 2001 to 2010 and then as Conference Minister for Christian Formation and Scattered Seeds Editor from 2010 through August 2018.

Ed Kauffman, who served as Executive Conference Minister from 2001 to 2010.

David Boshart, who served as Executive Conference Minister from 2010 through July 2019.

Amanda Bleichy, who served as Conference Minister for Christian Formation from 2019 through 2023, and continues as Communications Director and Editor of Scattered Seeds and The Sower.

Marcia Yoder-Schrock, who served as Interim Executive Conference Minister alongside **Firman Gingerich** from August 2019 through January 2020.

Sharon Kennel, who served as West Regional Minister from 2001 to 2010, was not present but sent greetings to the gathered body.

We also remembered with fondness and gratitude three persons who served Central Plains in ministry roles who are no longer living but remain in our hearts:

Robert Hartzler, former Northern District Conference Minister who served as Conference Coordinator in 2001 and 2002;

Sharon Wyse Miller, who served as Missions Minister in 2001 and 2002; and **Tim Detweiler**, who served as East Regional Minister from 2001 to 2010, and then as Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership from 2010 through June 2019.

The celebration was planned and emceed by Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership Susan Janzen, with assistance from Executive Conference Minister Nathan Luitjens and Hispanic Ministries Coordinator Ramiro Hernandez.

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Staff — 2001-2025

Purple — ministry staff; Green — all others

2001-2002	Robert Hartzler	Conference Coordinator	Freeman, SD	NDC CM prior to CPMC
2001-2002	Duane Miller	Financial Officer	Burlington, IA	
2001-2002	Beth Shank	Office Manager	Kalona, IA	IA-NE secretary prior to CPMC
2001-2003	Jane Yoder-Short	Newsletter Editor	Kalona, IA	
2001-present	Monica Friesen Clem	Office Manager	Freeman, SD	NDC secretary from Aug. 1, 1999
2003-2009	Myrna Joy Wenger	Newsletter Editor	Wayland, IA	
2003-present	Ted Widmer	Financial Officer	Mt. Pleasant, IA	
2010-2012	Maki (Mark) Van Steenwyk	Community Network Developer	Minneapolis, MN	
2010-2018	Shana Peachey Boshart	Scattered Seeds Editor	Wellman, IA	
2010-present	Ramiro Hernandez	Hispanic Ministries Coordinator	Washington, IA	
2019-present	Amanda Bleichy	Scattered Seeds Editor	Mt. Pleasant, IA	
2023-present	Amanda Bleichy	Communications Director	Mt. Pleasant, IA	
2001-2002	Sharon Wyse Miller	Missions Minister	Burlington, IA	
2001-2010	Ed Kauffman	Executive CM	Sioux Falls, SD	
2001-2010	Tim Detweiler	East Regional Minister	Washington, IA	
2001-2010	Sharon Kennel	West Regional Minister	Strang, NE	
2001-2010	Shana Peachey Boshart	Conference Youth Minister	Parnell, IA	
2010-Aug. 31, 2018	Shana Peachey Boshart	CM for Christian Formation	Wellman, IA	
2010-June 30, 2019	Tim Detweiler	CM for Ministerial Leadership	Washington, IA	
2010-July 31, 2019	David Boshart	Executive CM	Wellman, IA	
2019-2020	Marcia Yoder-Schrock	Interim Executive CM	Iowa City, IA	
2019-2020	Firman Gingerich	Interim CM for Staff Development	Tiffin, IA	
2019-2023	Amanda Bleichy	CM for Christian Formation	Mt. Pleasant, IA	
2019-present	Susan Janzen	CM for Ministerial Leadership	Tiffin, IA	
2020-present	Nathan Luitjens	Executive CM	Olds, IA	



Through Bible study, discussion and an art project, delegates in their table groups wrestled with the question, “What does it mean to cultivate covenant communities of hope?” Groups noted that the primary agent, the one who is actually bringing the growth to people’s lives, is God. Our job is to make space for God’s work to be noticed and engage with what God is doing. Some groups pushed against the idea of cultivation since many in agriculture now recognize that too much cultivation leads to the loss of important topsoil, forcing us to rely on chemical inputs to make crops grow. This too is an important corrective since we can think that we can become too focused on what we “need to do” and miss, or even destroy, the work that God is doing in people’s lives.

Groups noted the challenge of being part of a community. Delegates noted that a covenant community is different from the communities we find in the world around us. Those communities are generally formed around shared interests and with people who are similar to us. God is the one who welcomes people into the church and calls us to be community to one another, and sometimes we can find this difficult since God chooses to call together many different kinds of people. Community in this setting takes work and calls us to serve and love each other in spite of the differences we have.

Finally, delegates wrestled with the idea of hope. In Romans 5:3-5 Paul notes an interesting progression: suffering --> perseverance --> character --> hope. Do we have to suffer to become places of hope? What does that even look like? How do we as the church embody the hope we have in Jesus for a world that often looks hopeless? These are difficult questions, but these are the kind of questions we need to wrestle with if our congregations and conference are going to embody the Good News of Jesus for the world. In the midst of everything that is happening around us we are called to be faithful so that the way of Jesus may be seen in us, and reflected to the world.
-Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister





ANNUAL MEETING 2025

The youth group from Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska worked and played all the way to Annual Meeting (where they worked and played some more). From a day at Adventureland to volunteering at Crooked Creek Christian Camp and Crowded Closet, to finally bringing Vacation Bible School to the children's programming at Annual Meeting, the youth group (and their sponsors) kept busy. We thank them for their work around our conference and at Annual Meeting.

Youth: VaNessa Vap, Hallie Tessman, Amanda Goertzen, Madalyn Janzen, Mary Dente, Kinsley Friesen, Katrina Epp, Sam Friesen, Braden Janzen, Jonathan Friesen, Andrew Friesen, Jace Friesen, Maddox Regier, Waylon Tessman, Thane Wetjen, Darren Friesen

Sponsors: Andrea Wall, Kara Janzen, Hillary Lee, Kevin Friesen
VBS helpers: Bryan and Connie Bechtel



Welcoming Congregations

As part of Annual Meeting, two congregations were welcomed into Central Plains Mennonite Conference. We welcome Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church from Harper, Kansas and Whitestone Mennonite Church from Hesston, Kansas. In this issue we'll learn more about Whitestone Mennonite Church. You can look for a feature on Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church in our next issue.

Whitestone Mennonite Church

By Isaac Landis, pastor of Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, KS

Whitestone Mennonite Church began as a small rural church nestled on the prairie a short distance outside of Hesston, KS. In the late 1800's, families with last names such as Weaver, Erb, and Horst made the trek west from Pennsylvania and Maryland to try their hand at farming the untamed Kansas grassland. In 1887, these settlers formed what would be called the Pennsylvania Mennonite Church. In 1964, the "PA Church" moved into the town of Hesston, with a new building and a new name: "Whitestone Mennonite Church." (The name Whitestone comes from Revelation 2:17).

Today, Whitestone is a vibrant congregation with an average Sunday morning attendance of around 180. One of our longstanding ministries has been a Wednesday evening program that includes a meal and faith formation activities for children, youth, and adults. This program has been one of our primary ways of reaching children and families in our community.

Whitestone is a church family that enjoys having fun together. This often involves eating together – whether it is potlucks or making chicken BBQ! It has been said that we are a church of "doers", which means that many of us are involved in ministries within and outside of the church. We are also a church that benefits from having a healthy representation from all age demographics.

Whitestone is excited to join Central Plains Mennonite Conference, as we see reflected in the conference that which has been present in our congregation: a group of people who strive to find unity and common purpose in the midst of diversity. We look forward to the ways we can strengthen and encourage each other.





Leading Music at Follow Jesus '25 in Greensboro

By Randall Koehler, Pastor of Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD

Fifteen months ago, I said yes to being band leader at the Mennonite Church USA biennial gathering in Greensboro, North Carolina. Our denomination and its national gathering have changed in recent years. What was once 7,000 attendees has become 1,600 attendees. I had never led or performed with a crowd bigger than about 400. I had lots of doubts about all of it.

Transitions

Shella Franz was recognized for her completion of AMBS's Journey program at Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN, on June 8, 2025.

Denny Coon ended as interim pastor at Des Moines Mennonite Church, Des Moines, IA, on June 30.

Tim Springer retired from ministry as a pastor, Milford, NE, on July 13, 2025.

Jim Shellenberger was installed as pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN, on July 20, 2025.

Ben Ramirez, Aaron Policky, Aaron Steckly, and D.J. Yoder began serving as a bi-vocational ministry team for Milford Mennonite Church, Milford, NE, in July. D.J. Yoder will be licensed toward ordination on Sept. 28, 2025.

Dan Boshart will begin as pastor at Wood River Mennonite Church, Wood River, NE, on June 7, 2026.

Celebrations

Ramiro Hernandez, Hispanic Ministries Coordinator for CPMC, married Ana Martinez on August 9, 2025.

In those first few months from May to October 2024, I began working my way through the Voices Together hymnal in search of a familiar, but "new," group of songs. I also began asking band members to join me, including Pastor Chelsea Vaught playing keyboard (Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, NE), Samuel Vazquez playing bass guitar (Templo Alabanza in Moline, IL), Lee Ebersole playing electric guitar and vocals (Wellman Mennonite Church in Wellman, IA), Hector Martinez playing drums and cajon (Iglesia Cristiana El Balsamo in Muscatine, IA), Amy Hofer Vetch (Hutterthal Mennonite Church) playing keyboard and vocals, and my spouse, Morgan Koehler (Hutterthal Mennonite Church) offering vocals. In my intent to keep the distance between band members relatively small, we ended up being a Central Plains Mennonite Conference band, thanks to CPMC ministers Nathan and Susan.

Our first worship planning team meeting was in Chicago in October 2024. We solidified the scripture theme (Luke 4:18-19) and the individual themes for each worship service. I began listing possible songs for each service in my notes and brainstorming the ways that styles, words, and ideas might blend together into a cohesive music set. In those October meetings, Pastor Melissa Florer-Bixler suggested a local song called *God of Every Daughter*, which arose from a songwriting workshop at the North Carolina Correctional Institute for Women, in which Sus Long, a NC musician invited incarcerated women to process their faith through song. Rooted in the lived realities of these women, this song acknowledges women's stories in the Bible without trying to fix the violence and trauma of their lives.

During those next five months, I narrowed my list of possible songs. Our next worship planning meeting happened in Greensboro in March 2025. Seeing the event space made me even more anxious. My stage arrangement for the band seemed feasible now, and I left our meetings with a clear sense of how music would work within each service. My nerves soon began to build with each passing day. The band practiced together one time during Memorial Day weekend.

When we all arrived safely in Greensboro on July 6, the anxious voices in my head were at a fever pitch. We were met with challenges every day (needing a plastic barrier for the drum kit, fellow convention volunteers borrowing an instrument, sharing stage time with other worship team members, changing songs because services went long, updating music sheets and arrangements), but it all came together, and we encountered the living God together in worship.

Even as each day felt overwhelming in specific moments, so it felt like we had completed our task too quickly. As a band, we were becoming more of a team with each day. The Holy Spirit inspired and sustained our creative energies as we both led and responded to the audience in worshipping our Creator, the one who has called us in Jesus Christ and empowered us by the Holy Spirit to come together.

Tim Detweiler Scholarship Update

Thank you, Central Plains friends! AMBS thanks everyone who has contributed to the Timothy Detweiler Central Plains Scholarship Fund at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. More than \$700 came in during the Conference sessions, which will bring the total to approximately \$27,000.

This Scholarship will support students at AMBS from Central Plains Conference congregations for decades to come and continue to remember and honor the ministry and life of Tim Detweiler.

If you would like to contribute to the Scholarship Fund send checks to AMBS, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517 (note Detweiler Scholarship in the memo line).



Central Plains Outreach and Service and Mennonite Mission Network present: **CHRIST AT THE BORDER PILGRIMAGE**



November 9-16, 2025

Join Central Plains Outreach and Service Committee on a Mennonite Mission Network **Just Peace Pilgrimage**.

Mennonite Mission Network will lead CPMC pilgrims in exploring what God is doing to bring about justice and peace in the world and the ways in which we can participate in such movements.



Learn more about the US-Mexico border

This one week opportunity allows participants to better understand the realities of migration at the US-Mexico border as they experience how communities of faith are responding to it.



Costs

Due to a generous New Ministries Grant from CPMC, the cost of the pilgrimage has been reduced to \$650 + airfare to Tucson, AZ. Further scholarships are available by request.



For more information

To sign up, see a sample itinerary, or learn more, see our website, <https://www.centralplainsmc.org/border-pilgrimage.html>

***The deadline for signing up for this trip is October 1, 2025.**

Scattered Seeds

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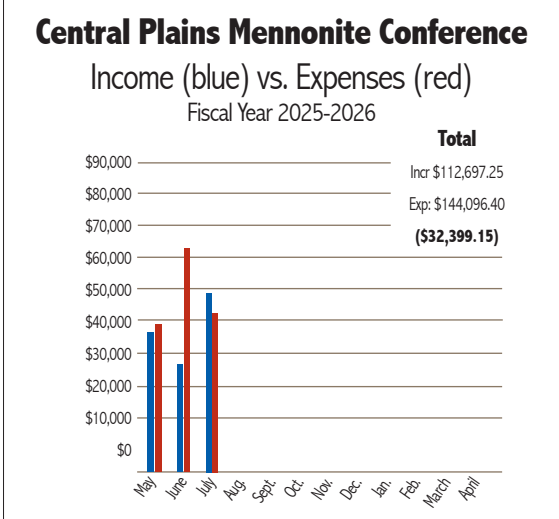
FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '25-'26, after the first three months of the fiscal year, had a total income of \$112,697.25. Total expenses for the three months were \$144,096.40, which left a negative balance of \$32,399.15. We are very thankful for the support of the constituents of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— Stewardship Task Group

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christ at the Border Pilgrimage with Mennonite Mission Network, Sponsored by CPMC,
November 9-16, 2025



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