



Scattered Seeds

Summer
2024

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—God's good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:2



Photo by Karen Martens Zimmerly

Pilgrims on the way

by Kathy Harder, Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN

On March 4-11, 2024, 11 Central Plains members boarded a van in Atlanta, Georgia. We were participating in the Just Peace Pilgrimage, which was partially underwritten by Central Plains. Arloa Bontrager and Joanie Miller from Mennonite Mission Network led us and made all the arrangements. We followed a path from Atlanta, Georgia to Montgomery, Alabama and then on to Meridian, Philadelphia, and Jackson, Mississippi.

A pilgrimage is more than a tour of sites, although we did follow a trail of historical landmarks. It is more than going to museums and memorials, although we did that too. The experiences we had on this pilgrimage addressed so many places where “the way things are” is not “the way things should be.” We were each deeply affected by this pilgrimage. We came home realizing that what we do or neglect to do makes a real difference in people's lives.

Our path led us to Anton Flores and Casa Alternativa in Atlanta, where they welcome asylum seekers, immigrants, and the issues they face. A woman who is an asylum-seeker from Venezuela cooked an amazing evening meal for us and Eastern Mennonite University students who were working at Casa Alternativa on spring break. Anton took us downtown where we saw the long lines of people waiting for appointments at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building and the detention center where “caught” persons are jailed while awaiting deportation.

The tour took us to Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice was heard, and to the
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Martin Luther King Museum and burial park.

In Montgomery, we experienced the Lynching Memorial and the Legacy Museum, both created by the Equal Justice Initiative. The Legacy Museum took us through history from the beginning of the human slave trade and followed the path through slavery in America to Jim Crow racism. We saw how the “separate but equal” laws and other systems contributed to ways that states “got around” civil rights. These include present-day mass incarceration and racial profiling. We could see plainly that slavery never really went away, but continues to reappear in new forms.

We had a tour of Montgomery, Alabama with Jake Williams and saw where Rosa Parks started the 13-month-long bus boycott, where slave auctions had been held, and we drove along the path of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march. Jake had walked 12 miles of the march when he was 12 years old. We walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, a day in which police used billy clubs and tear gas to turn the people back from the 54-mile march to demand voting rights from the Governor in Montgomery. The march started with 6,000 people, and by the time they had walked 5 days, it had grown to 25,000.

We ate at Black and immigrant-owned restaurants, and stayed one night at Pine Lake Fellowship Camp, a Mennonite camp that started as and continues to be, a way for Choctaw, Black, and white children to develop friendships and learn together. It was a beautiful, peaceful place to ponder all we had experienced.

In Meridian, Mississippi we learned about efforts to revitalize the community and about the Freedom Summer events. Gerald Hudson described to us how he had felt threatened just the day before while visiting the grave site of James Chaney, one of the three murdered Freedom Workers in 1964.

We visited with James A. Young, the Black mayor of Philadelphia, just down the road from Meridian, who impressed us all with his vow to govern with integrity and

honesty. He has been re-elected three times. His friend, Leroy Clemens, told us stories of living through the time of the Freedom Summer murders, and about the after-effects on the community and continued community healing.

Our last stop was Jackson, Mississippi. Pastor Hugh Hollowell showed us the landmarks of civil rights activities that occurred there and talked about ongoing issues of racism. We learned about the many ways white flight has caused urban blight.

That evening we were treated to a meal from Choctaw members of Nanih Waiya Indian Mennonite Church, cooked in their traditional ways. After the meal, they surprised us with a giveaway of beautiful beadwork and told us the story of how their church was bombed—and rebuilt—three times in the 1960s.

During these seven days, it was sobering to learn that greed could cause so much harm. In addition to learning about the horrors of racism and violence, we also learned about the many heroes who stand out in the history of making Civil Rights changes. We were encouraged to see that those who help “heroes” can also make a big difference. We saw resilience and persistence and the strength that comes when people support each other and stand together. I came home with a completely different perspective on what activism and protest mean and I am inspired to participate for the good of others.

We are thankful to Central Plains and the Outreach and Service Committee for the opportunity to go on this pilgrimage and highly recommend that others take the opportunities that arise for other pilgrimages, such as the *Christ at the Borders Pilgrimage* and *Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples Pilgrimage*.

We are thankful also to Mennonite Mission Network for organizing these trips, and to the many people who hosted us and shared their experiences.

We saw resilience and persistence and the strength that comes when people support each other and stand together.

Photo caption, above: Members of the group: from L to R: Jareya Harder, Aloa Bontrager, Maryann Harder, Carol Detweiler, Susan Janzen, Kathy Harder, Karen Zimmerly, Adam Harder Nussbaum, Joyce Bucklin, David Bucklin, Becky Widmer, Jon Widmer. Not pictured: Joani Miller. Photo by Joani Miller

Reflections on the pilgrimage

by Jon and Becky Widmer, Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, IA

We learned so much as we explored museums and memorials and heard the stories of people who made a huge impact on the Civil Rights Movement. At times, it felt a little overwhelming to hear about the injustice, cruelty and violence that has taken place over the years. There were also times where we saw hope and reconciliation. When we toured Philadelphia, Mississippi, where the Freedom Summer murders took place, our tour guide, Leroy Clemens, shared with us his first-hand experiences of life in this small town in which he grew up. The pride he has for his hometown was very evident. He introduced us to James A. Young, the mayor of Philadelphia. He was the first Black mayor to be elected into this office. He ran against a white incumbent and has been re-elected three times. We were impressed with the ways the mayor tries to lead the community with fairness, honesty and integrity.

Leroy also told us about a coalition group that he has been a part of for many years. This group has brought many changes to the community. As he was describing this group, we realized that what he was describing was a “Peace Circle” that originated with the Native Americans. It is a circle where everyone can participate, but only one person can talk at a time, as they pass around a symbolic peace object. It has been very effective with people working on decision-making and reconciliation. Leroy stated that the group brought a wide variety of people into the circle and remarkable relationships have been developed. Leroy emphasized that healing and acceptance can take place only when relationships are developed and we get to know each other. Participating in these circles has helped the community learn and empathize as they listen to each other and learn with humble hearts.

We learned about people that made a big impact on the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Medger Evers, etc. We were also reminded that there were many “unknown” people that made a big difference in our history. There were many people in the background that supported the Civil Rights Movement. It is the actions or inactions of ordinary people that keep justice or injustice going. We often asked ourselves, “What are we doing to bring fairness, justice or change to the lives of those around us?” We need to learn from our history. Mark Twain once said, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

Despair, anger, courage and hope

by Kathy Harder, Bethel Mennonite Church, Mountain Lake, MN

In museums, photos of the struggle for Civil Rights made the events more real to me. Hearing stories from guides that had lived and participated in those events allowed us to see the despair, anger, courage, and also the hope as people came together to show their determination to be counted as equals. Those who worked for justice knew that they would face severe persecution. The joy we saw in the immigrants that had gotten a new start, the marchers that were registered to vote, and the Choctaw people who had forgiven the bombers of their church and moved on really moved me, showing me that coming alongside is just as important as leading the charge. *Where can we lead the charge or come alongside today?*

Maryann Harder takes in the Lynching Memorial in Montgomery, AL which includes 837 brown steel monuments inscribed with names of 4400 people lynched in counties across America during the Jim Crow Era. Photo by Arloa Bontrager



A pilgrimage of food and hospitality

by Karen Martens Zimmerly, Pastor, First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, IA

“Pilgrims set out not so much to assist strangers but to eat with them. They journey in the wisdom about transformation held in the Rwandan proverb, ‘If you cannot hear the mouth eating, you cannot hear the mouth crying.’”

–*Reconciling All Things* by Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, 2008

These words are in the opening pages of the Mennonite Mission Network reflection guide given to each of us on this pilgrimage. We ate well and here is a buffet of what we sampled, along with some reflections:

*Our first group meal was flavorful Nepali Indian cuisine where there were options for how much heat we wanted! We visited the restaurant in a small, weathered multi-cultural retail strip mall in the vibrant city of Clarkston, Georgia; a good fit for displaced persons coming from more than 50 nations because of accessible housing options and public transportation. *Where is diversity celebrated and thriving in my community?*

*At the Atlanta Mennonite Church, we experienced a Venezuelan meal joyfully prepared by a young woman who is an asylum seeker. Her journey to the United States was arduous and is still difficult. She has big dreams and through the hospitality of Casa Alternativa, an intentional community of asylum seekers and established residents, she is able to share the gifts of her homeland through cooking. *How do I/we as a church welcome the gifts of vulnerable individuals in our community?*

*A number of times we ate generous portions of soul food at local Black-owned restaurants. Soul food originated during slavery when enslaved people were given only leftovers and the undesirable parts of animals (such as ham hocks, hog jowls, pig’s feet, ears, skin and intestines) which white plantation slave owners did not eat. With resourcefulness and struggle, soul food became a means of creative resistance and joyful community in the face of injustice and oppression. *How can food and hospitality create joyful resistance to face the injustices of my community?*

*We learned that in cities like Montgomery, freeway interchanges are often placed in poor neighborhoods, creating displacements of local businesses that result in even greater poverty for already-challenged communities. Yet the Yaadbak International Eatery, a Jamaican and international food take-out service was a hive of people coming and going as we waited outside for our order on broken sidewalks in this rundown neighborhood. And the food was amazing! *Am I willing to look beyond the veneer of poverty and discover and support businesses in the vulnerable places of my community?*

*Members of the Nanih Waiya Indian Mennonite Church traveled two hours into Jackson, Mississippi and spent the entire day outdoors preparing a meal for us on the grounds of Open Door Mennonite Church. With full tummies we moved to the sanctuary where we got to know one another a bit more through small group conversations and laughter. They sang for us and one woman brought enough beadwork for each of us to take home a trinket or piece of jewelry! *How do we create spaces for conversation and community so that diverse people can get to know each other and share their gifts?*



Reflections

by Carol Detweiler, Washington Mennonite Church,
Washington, IA

I am thankful that I could participate in the Civil Rights Pilgrimage. The pilgrimage raised my awareness of the painful history of the Black and Native American peoples and the difficulties that persons seeking asylum are facing. Our guides shared stories that are not in our history books.

I was extremely saddened and angered by the stories at the Lynching Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. Just a few examples: Calvin Mike voted. A white mob attacked and burned his home, lynching his elderly mother and his two young daughters. Roscoe Parker was lynched because another Black person to be lynched could not be found. Picnics and gatherings were planned as persons watched lynchings. Calvin Kimblern was lynched by a mob of at least 3,000 people.

We visited one of the slave auction sites in Montgomery. Trains would bring slaves from the east to be auctioned. Sadly, it reminded me of a livestock auction.

We heard the horrific murder story of Freedom Workers, James Cheney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner and how they were murdered for investigating the burning of the United Methodist Church and the beating of its members in Meridian, Mississippi. The leader of the Ku Klux Klan that murdered them was a pastor. He had no remorse since they were not "good Christian boys."

I appreciated hearing a few stories of hope. The Black mayor, James A. Young of Philadelphia, shared how he is working at bringing together Black and white persons on the city council to make good decisions for the city. Also, Choctaw Native Americans from the Nanih Waiya Indian Mennonite Church, near Philadelphia, Mississippi, shared how they wanted to work at healing and forgiveness after three bombings of their church. The church was rebuilt each time. The people held onto the belief that love and hope are stronger than violence.

Questions that I need to ask myself: *Who needs me to walk with them in the face of injustice and pain? Where do I need to take action instead of inaction? Where can I join where God is at work?*

Photo, far left: Members of the group learned to make chai at Refuge Coffee in Clarkston, Georgia. Photo by Joani Miller

Photo, left: Choctaw members of the Nanih Waiya Indian Mennonite Church prepare food in traditional ways. Photo by Kathy Harder

Photo, above right: Group members talk to a member of the Nanih Waiya Indian Mennonite Church. Photo by Joani Miller

Photo, right: In 1964, three civil rights workers were murdered after investigating the burning of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church building where this marker stands. Photo by Jareya Harder

Edmund Pettus Bridge

by Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership

One of the most moving experiences of the pilgrimage for me was walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama (*see photo on page 1*). On March 7, 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and other civil rights advocates walked across the bridge and were confronted by law enforcement officers. They were beaten severely, tear gassed, and chased back across the bridge. All because they dared to declare that everyone should have the right to vote. Two days later, many of these same people crossed the bridge again, this time kneeling and praying in front of the line of officers. Two weeks later, they crossed the bridge again as they began the Freedom March to Montgomery. We walked across the bridge on March 7, 2024, the 59th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. As we walked, I recalled the photos I've seen of that day and reflected on the sacrifices so many people made to stand up for something that they believed in. And it made me wonder: *In the face of injustice, what am I willing to lay on the line?*





Compassionate care to Laos

by Jonah Yang, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Lauderdale, MN

I want to thank God and my local church members at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in the Twin Cities, and many others, for supporting me in bringing a Compassionate Care Seminar to Southeast Asia. Being a Hmong man can be difficult because of many responsibilities including those to extended families. The older generation has taught their children that to be respected, they must be tough. They are taught that in marriage, men should place their values and authority over women. Women are taught to be loyal to their husbands. A woman's task in marriage is to work hard not to bring shame to the family name.

In Asia, I am often asked, "What is love between a married couple?" My simple answer is that love is not about intimacy, having children, food to eat, or a house to live in. Instead, love is about understanding, respecting, appreciating and honoring each other. The first Compassionate Care Seminar in Laos was held for two and a half days in the Spring of 2023. We had 68 participants, and they came from six different provinces: Xiengkhoung, Luang, Prabang, Bolikhamsai, Vientiane, and Xaisomboun. This seminar opened their eyes to understand what love is. It is not about closing doors on relationships; it is about integrity, value and understanding each other's point of view.

Some persons previously understood love as having children, providing shelter, and doing heavy chores. While discussing Genesis 2:18-25 and Galatians 3:28, their eyes were opened and hearts were softened to understand and see God's love. They began to understand that humanity was created in God's image, in which there is no longer male or female, enslaved or free, but everyone is the same in the love of Christ. The men confessed to their wives that they have often misinterpreted what love is about, and they apologized to each other.

At the end of the session, we performed vows to re-establish relationships. One man apologized to his wife for the bad things he had done, including cheating on her and advising her to have an affair. His wife was suicidal, but was saved by her four little children and God. This man turned his life back to God and devoted himself to loving her and trying to understand, respect, and honor his wife.

Three men commented that this Compassionate Care is a place for the couple to come and talk about their guilt, confess and ask for forgiveness. Another man said it is like a mediation session for them to understand, agree and set goals to improve their marriage.

One woman shared that Compassionate Care is like a clinic in which she came seeking a diagnosis and a cure. Another woman shared that it is like a treatment center for her to come to learn how to prevent conditions that will eat her slowly from the inside out. Yet another woman said it is like a burning furnace where she can dump her pain and restart her marriage fresh.

This seminar changed many lives. Men and women spoke positively about how they will love their spouses or families differently, such as respect, honor and welcoming women's opinions and decision-making.

Holy listening

by Ruth Johnston, MA, BCC, Spiritual Director

“Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality...” -Henri Nouwen

Attentive listening is rare in our world.

Care-full listening is one of the most important things we can do for each other. It is the only way to know and understand another person, and for many of us, speaking our truth and sharing our experiences is how we begin to make sense of our own lives, to figure out what we believe and to discern next actions.

In our relationship with God, too, listening is sometimes neglected. We often pray with words, but do not know how to sit in stillness allowing ourselves to “waste” time with God. We rarely allow ourselves to unhook from technology, let go of distractions, and open our hearts in faith to what may come.

Spiritual direction (sometimes called spiritual companionship) is a ministry of listening, prayer, pastoral care, and discernment.

The practice of spiritual direction has a history that is centuries long, coming first out of the Catholic tradition. Still, today a number of folks (including Mennonites) are being drawn toward, educated, and trained to provide spiritual direction. There are a number of organizations that provide training, and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary offers a Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction. There is also a Mennonite organization to support and provide ongoing education called Mennonite Spiritual Direction Network (MSDN). This organization has a list of Mennonite spiritual directors and how to connect with them. The much-larger Spiritual Directors International organization also has a directory of available directors around the country and world. (links below)

Spiritual directors hold a place of safety and confidentiality. They have a practice of listening for the movements of God in their own lives and a love of co-discerning the Spirit in others' lives.

Within the relationship, you and your director will meet (in person or virtually), usually at monthly visits. There is generally a fee unless a director is employed by a church or organization. Consider whether the support of spiritual direction would be of benefit to you.

For further questions, feel free to email me at: rjohnston453@gmail.com

Link to MSDN: <https://mennosdn.org/>

Link to Spiritual Directors International: <https://www.sdicompanions.org/>

The logo for 'Scattered Seeds' features the word 'Scattered' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font above the word 'Seeds' in a larger, bold, blue, serif font. The 'S' in 'Seeds' is particularly large and stylized.

Scattered Seeds Summer 2024

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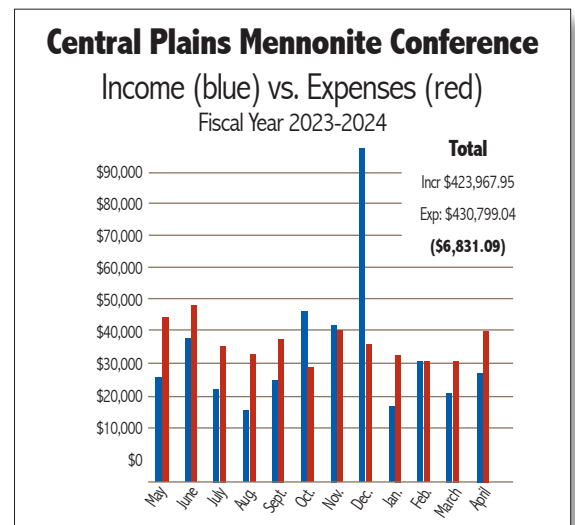
FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '23-'24 ended the year with a small negative balance. Total Income for the fiscal year was \$423,967.95 while expenses were \$430,799.04. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$6,831.09 for our '23-'24 budget. While we are disappointed that we didn't end the year with a positive balance, we are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

— *Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fall Facilitation Training, November 8-9, 2024, Des Moines, IA



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