



# Scattered Seeds

Winter  
2024



For where two  
or three are  
gathered in my  
name, I am there  
among them.

— Matthew 18-20

## Creating space for community in Busby

by Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership



In November 2022, Scott and Suzette Shreffler returned to Busby, Montana, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation to pastor the White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church. Willis and Nadine Busenitz, who had pastored and led the congregation for 52 years, were retiring and the church called Scott and Suzette to come as their next pastors.

Scott and Suzette came into a church that was facing a massive disruption. Not only were they experiencing the change from a pastoral family who had been part of the church and the community for more than five decades, but the community was still reeling from COVID. Ministries of the church — like Sunday school and summer camp — had been put on hold, and there were people who had not returned to in-person worship services. And as in many other places, while people longed for things to “return to normal,” it became

apparent to Scott and Suzette that was not going to happen.

In the spring of 2023, Scott and Suzette took part in the first Leaders’ Table that CPMC hosted. Scott said he resonated with the conversations “around the table,” particularly regarding local engagement. He noted that “on the reservation the relational aspects of community went way down after COVID.” He went on to say “that people aren’t in touch with each other. Even in the church people don’t talk to each other outside of church.”

He added that people want community, they want opportunities to be with each other and get to know each

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other, but there are few places in the Busby community to do that. The town does not have a community center, it doesn't have a coffee shop or even a gas station where people can run into each other. The only place where people might run into someone else from the community is in the post office, but that doesn't lend itself to hanging out. For Scott, the realization was that while he was noticing this disconnect within the community, he also needed to be honest about his personal feelings of disconnection from the Busby community.

For Suzette, the Leaders' Table made space to begin to think about the ministries of the church. This led to a time of re-considering all the ministries of the church, thinking about which ministries continue to be meaningful and which ones no longer have the same impact. Suzette noted that these ministries weren't bad or wrong, they just no longer met the needs they once did. She talked about "helping the congregation to see that it's okay to do something a little bit different. It's okay to be uncomfortable," she said, "because I believe you need to be uncomfortable in order to grow."

As a follow up to the Leaders' Table, Scott and Suzette joined the first CPMC Companions' Table, which offers mutual support and encouragement for "little experiments" designed to help navigate the challenges of ministry. They started men's and women's groups, family game nights, Dwelling in the Word (scripture study), Kettle Is On (a morning gathering for coffee and conversation), and GriefShare workshops. Suzette also leads parenting classes for the tribe.

These initiatives have strengthened connections among congregation and community members, and they have helped connect Scott and Suzette to their community. Relationships among people within the church have begun to strengthen, as have connections between the church and the surrounding community. As a result, Scott and Suzette have also felt more connected to their community.

Though each person comes with unique needs, Suzette and Scott try to create a welcoming environment for everyone. They are heartened when they see families having fun and worshiping together, individuals healing from the loss of a loved one, church members gaining deeper knowledge of scripture, and people whose relationship with Jesus is growing. Through that spiritual growth came baptism for five new Christians in August of this year.

Even in the midst of massive disruption, by asking the right questions they have been able to see where God is working within their congregation and community. As the Spirit has led them each day over the past two years, they have seen spiritual growth in all areas of ministry in Busby.





## Coming full circle

by Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister



What do you do when you have been pastors in a community for more than 50 years? How do you disengage from a church in a healthy way while not abandoning the roots that you have put down? What does it look like to continue to be involved in the broader work of ministry among the Northern Cheyenne while not living in the community, and not crossing boundaries with respect to the new pastors?

For Willis and Nadine Busenitz this was the challenge that was facing them in the fall of 2022 as they wound down their ministry at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana. They had poured their hearts and souls into the lives of people in and around the Busby community and now they were moving out of the house and the church they had called home for more than 50 years.

While some of the challenges were logistical: sorting, packing and moving to a home in Billings –where their daughter and other family members live– others involved practical questions. Where do they worship when there is no Mennonite church in the community they have moved to, particularly since they want to continue to worship with the Cheyenne people? And how do they continue to support the Everything Beautiful Thrift Store, an important ministry on the reservation in Lame Deer where they had invested a lot of time and energy over the last 10+ years?

What has emerged is a new rhythm of life. On Sunday mornings, Willis and Nadine travel from Billings to Lame Deer to attend church at the Lame Deer Mennonite Church. For Willis this feels like things are coming full circle. He began his pastoral ministry at the church in Lame Deer, working as the assistant pastor alongside Joe Walksalong Sr. Now, he and Nadine have returned and are supporting Joe Walksalong Jr. as he leads the congregation there. The opportunity to be present with the folks in Lame Deer has kept them connected to the Mennonite church and with the Cheyenne people without stepping on the toes of the Shrefflers who are serving as the pastors in Busby.

After church they often retire to an apartment on the lower level of the thrift store where they stay through Tuesday afternoon. This allows them to continue to serve with and help the thrift store thrive. On Tuesday afternoon they head back to Billings where they spend the rest of the week and are able to be present for events with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

While this lifestyle has some challenges, including the 100+ mile drive from Billings to Lame Deer which can be particularly challenging during the winter months, it has given Willis and Nadine the opportunity to remain deeply connected to the place and people they have related with for 60 years. When folks talk about retirement to Willis, he laughs and suggests, “you never retire from a people and a place that you love.”

## Happenings around Central Plains

If interesting things are happening in your neck of the woods, snap some pictures and send in a caption! We'd love to hear about what is happening in all the corners of our conference! Send photos and captions to Amanda ([amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org)).

### Suzette Shreffler ordination

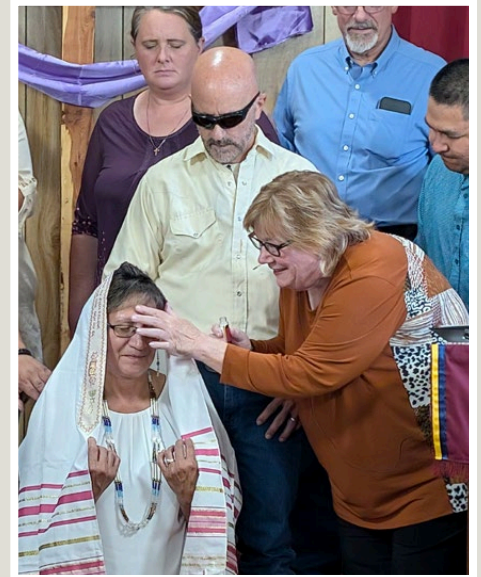
Suzette Shreffler was ordained for Christian ministry on Sunday, September 22, at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana, with Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, officiating.

Suzette grew up in Muddy Cluster, a hamlet between Lame Deer and Busby. In 1987 she left on a Greyhound bus to Seattle, Washington, saying that she "would not return home until she could help her people on the Northern Cheyenne reservation." Some years later, God called Suzette to be back home with her people to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

She was licensed for specific ministry in April 2014 for her work as manager of the Everything Beautiful Thrift Store in Lame Deer, a ministry of the Northern Cheyenne Ministerial Association. She held that position until 2018, when she and her husband Scott felt God calling them to move on from Busby, not knowing for sure where they would land. But they knew God had a plan.

Five months later, while in Pennsylvania, Suzette was called to serve as a local missionary with Central Pennsylvania Youth Ministries. When Scott and Suzette returned to Busby as co-pastors at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in November 2022, she was licensed toward ordination.

The first Northern Cheyenne woman to be ordained by Central Plains Mennonite Conference, Suzette joins Susan Hart, a Southern Cheyenne from Oklahoma, as the only ordained Cheyenne women in Mennonite Church USA. -Susan Janzen



### Women's Retreat at Swan Lake

Swan Lake Christian Camp near Viborg, South Dakota was the setting for Central Plains Women's Retreat on September 14-15. Pastor Jill Hofer shared on the theme "Formation of Healing & Hope." Forty women gathered for worship, fellowship, a variety of activities, relaxing in the camp's beauty, and a sunset hayrack ride!



## Instituto Bíblico Anabautista (IBA) graduation

Glory to God for this achievement in our lives, a time of great effort, dedication and discipline. We achieved it thanks to the teachers, Ramiro Hernandez Sr. and Martha C. Hernandez, who always believed in us and motivated us to continue studying for the sake of God. To God be all the glory. IBA class of 2024. *-Jesus y Norma Arangure*



## Washington Mennonite Dessert Theater

After a six year hiatus, Washington Mennonite Church, Washington, Iowa, presented a Dessert Theater featuring skits, choir songs, snacks, and three delectable desserts, serving over 180 guests over three performances. The theme was "Wild Hope."

This is a big undertaking for a small church, but once again through stress, late night rehearsals, teamwork and LOTS of laughter, the church community forged deeper and lasting bonds—and hopefully, spread a message of hope to the community. Proceeds from ticket sales will benefit Crooked Creek Christian Camp and Mennonite Central Committee.

*-Amanda Bleichty*



## 60th anniversary of Templo Alabanza

On October 5 people gathered at Templo Alabanza in Moline, Illinois to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the church. Representatives from all of the Spanish-speaking congregations of CPMC, as well as other Hispanic congregations, CPMC ministry staff and even members of the Bustos family (Mac Bustos was the founding pastor) were present. After a worship service folks gathered in the fellowship hall and later shared a wonderful meal together.





# Voices of Conscience exhibit visits Hillcrest Academy

by Jane Yoder-Short, Peace and Justice Task Group

Have we as Mennonite congregations forgotten our history? Have we forgotten the price of being a Conscientious Objector? What do you know about people brave enough to say no to military conscription?

During World War I people who refused to join the military were mistreated and harassed. Voices of Conscience, an exhibit that helps us remember the witness of these peace-minded people, is now on display at Hillcrest Academy. This remarkable exhibit dramatically shows us the witness of Conscientious Objectors during the First World War from 1914-1918. Visitors experience the cost of witnessing for peace during the “total war”. It raises the question -“What am I willing to die for?”

The exhibit was developed and produced at the Kauffman Museum in North Newton, Kansas. Having the exhibit has started a conversation among community people and students. It raises questions of how we, as congregations and followers of Jesus, are responding to the militaristic culture we live in. As we view the story, we can begin to see parallels to the culture of war and violence in which we live.

Hillcrest students have had opportunities to visit the exhibit, and chapel has included local stories. Marcus Miller, Hillcrest’s history and social studies teacher, used chapel time to tell the stories of Jesse Hartzler, “Happy” Henry Miller, and George S. Miller. Marcus brought to life their struggles.

What would it mean to get a draft notice? Students heard how Henry H. Miller received his draft notice in August 1917, and was ordered to report to the military camp at Fort Dodge, north of Des Moines. Here he was taught to march and drill. Marcus explained, “On the fifth day, the captain gave us a talk. He said, ‘If any of you men have any religion about you, you might just as well shelve that somewhere and get the devil into ourselves cause you’re going to go out there and kill at those Germans.’” Henry said, “My religion just couldn’t be shelved.”

The next day when Henry refused to drill, his officer sent him to work in the kitchen. When his unit was transferred to New Mexico, Henry again refused to drill or to put on the uniform. Eventually, he was court-martialed for not following orders and sentenced to Fort Leavenworth prison. (For more information see MCC Oral History of WWI Conscientious Objectors.)

Henry’s story has us asking whether we ever shelve our religion.

The exhibit continues to create spaces for conversations. In November Ron and Lorene Bender will share about their family’s conscientious objector experience. Small chapel groups are going through the exhibit with a list of follow-up questions.

Hillcrest English teacher, Greta Anderson, took her senior rhetoric class, along with a related writing assignment, to view the exhibit. Even the 6th graders had a chance to visit the exhibit.

It’s easy to forget to take time to tell these stories. I still remember the report I heard as a teenager. A man from our community wouldn’t carry a gun for guard duty. He was given a hoe to carry. He was laughed at and mocked as he took his turn at “guard duty” while armed with a hoe.

## Leaders credentialed

**Suzette Shreffler**, co-pastor at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT, was ordained on Sept. 22, 2024

## Retirements

**Bob Engbrecht**, retired from ministry as a pastor, Freeman, SD, June 30, 2024



What stories do you have to tell? Hillcrest welcomes any CO (conscientious objector) stories that have helped shape your faith. If you have a CO account you'd like to share in chapel, contact Corben Boshart at [cweaverboshart@hillcrestravens.org](mailto:cweaverboshart@hillcrestravens.org).

Visit this exhibit and let it prod you to tell your stories.

Visit this exhibit and let it prod you to ask your congregation's youth what they think of conscientious objections.

Visit this exhibit and let it prod you to think about the price of saying no to militarism.

Voices of Conscience will be on display through December. Plan to see it. View it anytime during school hours or call Hillcrest Academy (319-656-2073) to arrange a time to view it.

Thanks to the Peace and Justice Task Group of Central Plains and a New Ministry Grant, Ag Arts of Kalona, Iowa, and the Kalona Mennonite Historical Museum for making this exhibit possible.

More information about the exhibit can be found at <https://kauffmanmuseum.org/exhibitions/travelingexhibits/voices-of-conscience/>.

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Scattered Seeds Winter 2024

The newsletter of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is published five times a year at Kalona, Iowa. Editor: Amanda Bleichty. Copy Editor: Erin Ramer. Thanks to Peg Burkey, Mary Lou Farmer and Verna Zook for proofreading.  
E-mail: [scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org). Telephone: 319-325-4522.  
For the next issue, please send stories, news and photos by **January 15, 2025** to the address above. Please send subscription requests and changes of addresses to [office@centralplainsmc.org](mailto:office@centralplainsmc.org).

Graphic Design by Erin Ramer. Printed by Kalona Graphics in USA



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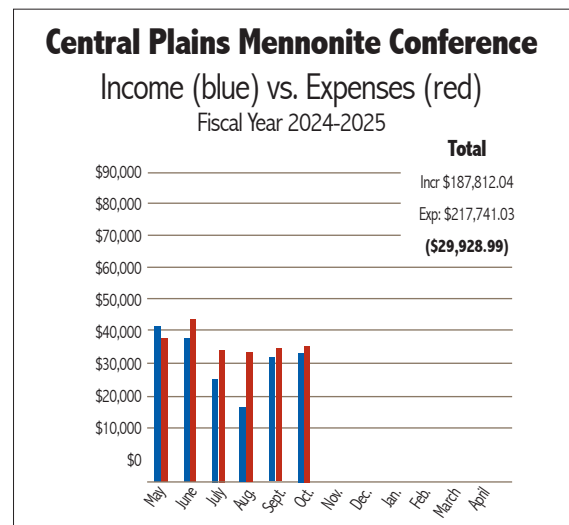
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## FINANCES

The Central Plains budget for '24-'25 currently has a negative balance. Total income through October of the new fiscal year was \$187,812.04, while expenses were \$217,741.03. As a result this leaves us with a negative balance of \$29,928.99 for our '24-'25 budget. We are hopeful that giving will increase as we enter the holiday season. We are extremely thankful for the support of the members of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. — *Stewardship Task Group*



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Prayer School with Brian Zahnd**, February 28-March 1, 2025, Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE.

**Ecuador Partnership Service and Learning Tour**, February 28-March 9, 2025.

**Follow Jesus 2025**, MC USA's biennial national gathering, July 8-12, 2025, Greenville, NC.



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