



Scattered Seeds

Winter
2026



And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

— Luke 24:27

We will prayerfully study the Bible together

The opening lines of our Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC) Covenant of Spiritual Practices read “By covenanting together to six specific Christian practices and to a process of discernment around disagreements, we hope to invigorate our discipleship, fellowship and witness as a conference.” The Covenant is a gift that we give one another, so that we know and trust that, even in our differing contexts, each of us is engaged in the work of Spiritual Practices and discernment-seeking God’s will and work in our place and time.

The third practice in our covenant says:

We will prayerfully study the Bible together weekly in our congregations and whenever the conference gathers, guided by qualified teachers for the purpose of increasing our competence in reading, interpreting and applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective to our everyday lives and to the critical issues of faith we face in the world.

For many congregations in CPMC, these powerful words describe a way of church life in which the study of Scripture is central. In this issue, we’ll hear from just a few congregations who have found ways to make the corporate study of scripture central to their work and worship. You’ll hear from Elisabeth Harder-Schrock, whose congregation, First Mennonite Church of Mountain Lake, MN, has been using the Anabaptist Prayer Book for nearly 10 years, Steve Griffen, whose congregation, Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE, has been centering youth group around a study of the scriptures, and Scott and Suzette Shreffler, from White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, MT, who have been using “Dwelling in the Word” with a small group for two years.

Be inspired by these congregations and their study of the scriptures—and let me know if you have practices of ongoing scripture study in your congregation! We’d love to highlight more experiences in a future publication. ~Amanda Bleichty, Director of Communications, CPMC

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Bellwood Mennonite Church

By Steve Griffin, Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, NE

I sit silently encircled by fourteen teenagers—the only thing that remains of the pizza and wings is the scent. The solitary sound is a baritone voice, “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

Gage, a high school senior, is reading from Matthew 11.

A moment of silence ensues and then another voice—a tenor. Cooper is an old soul in the 7th Grade. He’s rereading the same passage Gage has just finished. “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!” he concludes.

Fourteen pairs of eyes rest on me. “What questions do you have? Any comments? Where do you think the Holy Spirit made you pause and think?” I ask.

The next 40 minutes are intense and go by so very, very quickly. The lively discussion is completely serious and utterly joyful.

Why is John the Baptist doubting? What makes him the greatest prophet? How could we be even greater than John the Baptist? I’m not sure I’m in the kingdom of heaven. What does the kingdom of heaven mean?

The Holy Spirit is bringing scripture to life! Young imaginations are being formed by the words, works, and ways of Jesus. They have ears to hear and they want to understand. Surely this is fellowship in one of its purest forms!

And now a different group gathers...a silent circle of five: The elders of Bellwood and me.

What a privilege to dwell in scripture with these women and men! We quiet our minds and bodies with two minutes of silence. Then we perform the very same practices described above and we enjoy the same fruit of experience: The Holy Spirit brings scripture to life.

Beginning Elder’s meetings in this manner helps us to be Jesus-centered. It fosters or forges mutual love and peaceful respect. It trains us to truly listen to the Spirit and to each other. As we prayerfully and with the Holy Spirit contemplate scripture together, we are being formed. The ripple effects of this formation, I believe, are being sensed congregation wide.

In addition to the aforementioned groups, one of Bellwood’s adult Sunday School classes practices dwelling in scripture. Each week a different person brings a passage for consideration. It’s wonderful to witness folks approach scripture in community!

I close with repeating John the Baptist’s question: “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

We believe Jesus is the Christ. We don’t need to look anywhere else. Dwelling together in scripture keeps our focus where it needs to be...on Jesus.



White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church

By Scott and Suzette Shreffler, White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church, Busby, MT

Dwelling in the Word aligns with our Anabaptist roots of interpreting scripture in community. Two years ago, a small group of six individuals at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana, started Dwelling in the Word together, not knowing what to expect. We started dwelling on different biblical texts. After eight months, the dwelling community decided to begin dwelling in the book of Acts rather than jumping from one biblical text to another.

What started as six individuals soon became a small community of hope. As we read through the book of Acts, we noticed many themes, but one stood out: when the believers were of one mind and heart, the Holy Spirit moved. We decided that night to end all Dwelling in the Word with a time of prayer, but it did not stop there. We committed to lift these prayer requests up in unity of one mind and heart all week long. The Holy Spirit showed up, and we have seen numerous prayers answered.



When we are willing to sit in community, hear the voices of all brothers and sisters, the sky is the limit. We come together as one mind and heart and ask the Holy Spirit to dwell with us in this community of hope, where all members have a voice. We have seen prayers answered, spiritual growth happen, and a deeper understanding of what it means to dwell in scripture as a community of believers.

First Mennonite Church

By Elisabeth Harder Schrock, First Mennonite Church of Mountain Lake, MN

*God of grace and glory,
you fling the stars into the heavens..
Deepen our trust in the mystery of your power shining through Christ Jesus,
that we may live your love for the world.*

Words have great power to facilitate our experience of the Divine. Words – like the prayer above – can help make our worship holy, and can help us to embody our worship in the rest of life. Words, especially too many of them, also can get in the way of our experience of the Divine. Sometimes we just need to pipe down so that we can listen to, and perhaps even hear, God. Sometimes our needs are too raw to be spoken aloud, but still need tending to.

For almost ten years now, our congregation has turned to *Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book* (Herald Press 2007) to help shape our words and our silences for corporate worship. When our last pastor, E. Elaine Kauffman, transitioned to half-time preaching in 2016, she set up and helped lead our first worship services structured around the prayer book. She recalls that “it was probably a couple of months before all the group became comfortable (assuming they did) with the amount of silence and listening the service includes, but it really didn’t seem like all that long until it was a recognizable pattern, and people knew what to expect, how to participate, and did.”

This volume was prepared by professors at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, who wanted to tap into the time-honored practice of Christian daily, patterned prayer: praising, listening, and responding. In their view, a specifically Anabaptist prayer book further reflects the conviction that we need the body of Christ. “Constancy in prayer—like all faithful living—typically relies on the help and support of other believers,” notes the preface. And “even when you pray alone, you know that your prayers join the prayers of many others.”

The prayer book has a morning and evening service for each day of the week. Each week’s content is thematically linked around the Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes, Parables, or Signs and Wonders. A subsequent volume of *Take our Moments* provides services for Advent through Pentecost.

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Around the same time that we began using the prayer book for some of our worship services, we sold our church building and began meeting in the much smaller chapel of our local nursing home. This space, in which we set up chairs to face each other in several semi-circles, has been ideal for the litanies, responsive prayers, spoken and silent reflections on the scripture texts, and especially the singing (including requests) that comprise each prayer service.

Currently we have an Anabaptist Prayer Service one or two Sundays a month (with regular guest preachers the other Sundays). We've adapted the format a bit over time; for example, lighting our peace lamp was already a regular part of our worship services and continues to be. Our Scripture texts are taken from the lectionary. During Advent and Lent, we integrate the Leader resources into the prayer service format. And even when we do have more "traditional" services with a sermon, our worship service is loosely structured around the prayer service format.

Our own teenagers have grown up in this tradition of worship and prayer, for which we are profoundly grateful. From a very young age, they have recited the Lord's Prayer together with our congregation. They have been steeped in scripture and forms of prayer foundational to their ancestors' faith. But more importantly, they and we are being formed into disciples through words and prayerful silence that bears living testimony to a God whose justice shines like the sun...

Indeed,

*fill our hearts with the spirit of the Beatitudes,
that we may live this day in simplicity, mercy, and joy.*



Try it!

Dwelling in the Word is a simple form of Bible study in which we listen closely to a specific passage and notice what is catching our attention today. While some forms of Bible study focus on what exactly the text means or even debating individual words, in Dwelling in the Word, we listen for how the Holy Spirit is speaking into the community who are currently gathered to hear from God. As we Dwell in the Word together, we practice opening ourselves up and cultivating spaces for God to speak in and to our communities of faith.

In this practice, the leader's role is primarily to facilitate the conversation, helping to make space for all voices to be heard. The leader will also want to have some prior familiarity with the text, so that he or she can lend wisdom and guidance to the conversation, particularly when what someone has heard is not within the general understanding of the text.

Try it out! Use the guidelines below to Dwell in the Word in Sunday School, at a board or committee meeting, or in a Bible study gathering.

As we prepare for next year's Annual Meeting and contemplate God's dream for the world (the reconciliation of all things), consider using 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 as you practice Dwelling in the Word.

1. Have two different people read the same Scripture text aloud. Take time between the readings and after the second reading to meditate on what you have just heard. As the texts are being read, invite people to listen for where they were stopped or "caught" in the reading.
2. As a group, begin to share what caught your attention. This can happen in a large group, or in smaller groups of two to three. Each person should have around 2 minutes to share what stopped them and why. *If you do this in small groups, have partners report to the larger group what caught the other's attention. This important step promotes careful listening!* Have the leader or a recorder jot down on a large paper or whiteboard the various ways and places where members of the group were stopped.
3. Have the leader help group members discern any emerging patterns from what was shared. What primary themes did the group hear? These themes are the beginning of what the Holy Spirit is saying to those gathered.
4. Finally, take the themes which the group has identified and begin to think about what they mean in the lives of those gathered and in the broader community and world. We should trust that, in speaking to us, God is inviting us deeper into God's vision for the world.

Welcoming congregations

As part of Annual Meeting 2025, two congregations, Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church from Harper, KS and Whitestone Mennonite Church from Hesston, KS were warmly welcomed into Central Plains Mennonite Conference. In this issue, we'll learn more about Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church. A previous issue featured Whitestone Mennonite Church.

Brief history of Pleasant Valley Mennonite

A group of Amish Mennonites and Swiss Mennonites began gathering in Harper County in 1888. They began meeting together in the Pleasant Valley School which was located three miles east of Harper. In 1898 the congregation had grown and the decision was made to build a church structure across the road to the east of the Pleasant Valley School. In 1915 the church had outgrown the structure and made the decision to build a larger building at the same location. During this process there was a lot of discussion about building the church closer to Harper as a part of their outreach. The decision was made to stay at the present location and proceed with building a newer larger structure.

In 1932 the congregation decided to start Vacation Bible School and it was done at the school and church building. In 1952 with the anticipation of a new pastor coming with a larger family, the church purchased a six-acre tract of land on the east edge of Harper located right on Hwy 160. During this period the church constructed a church parsonage on the property for the new minister and family. Total cost for the land and the new parsonage was \$11,000.00. In the early 1960's the church continued to grow and began to process moving the church to town. There was much discussion but after period of time the decision was made to construct a new church structure on land already purchased and directly east of the new parsonage. On July 19, 1964 a dedication service was held dedicating new structure for the Lord's ministry.

In order to help pay for costs associated with the construction, the church began a Pancake Day serving pancakes and sausage to the community to help fund the structure. This continued for several years helping with the funding. One year the church decided to stop the Pancake Day event and did not proceed with it. There was much outcry from the community as they wanted it to continue on an annual basis. After the one year off, the Pancake Day has continued every year since occurring at the end of January and held in the Harper County Fair Barn. Proceeds from Pancake Day are then used to help those in need from the community. Pleasant Valley continues to this day to be mission focused on reaching the community of Harper and surrounding areas with the good news of Jesus Christ.





Leaders credentialed

Karla Stoltzfus Detweiler, commissioned for ministry as a hospital chaplain at Washington Mennonite Church on Nov. 16, 2025.

Shuji Moriichi, ordination in the United Church of Christ recognized by Central Plains at First Mennonite Church, Iowa City, on Dec. 21, 2025.

Council of Committees

By Nathan Luitjens, Executive Conference Minister

Each year, we gather our board and committee members together to meet around tables, to study Scripture, to fellowship and to have the opportunity to do committee work face-to-face. If you think it sounds like a small annual meeting, well it kind of is. Council of Committees is a chance for the board, staff and committee members to talk about where we have come from and where we are going. As always when CPMC gathers together, we study the Bible. This year we got our first taste of the Scripture texts that will guide our delegate conversations at the next Annual Meeting.

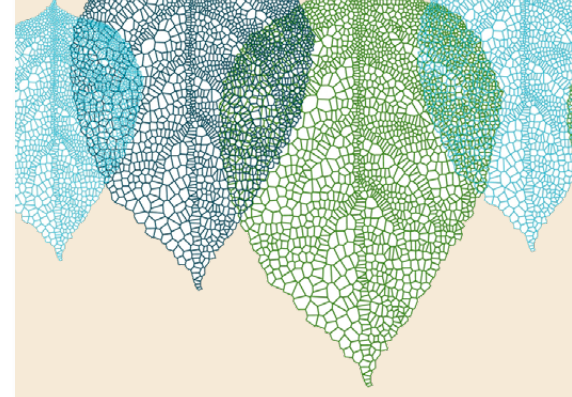
During the year, many of our committee meetings happen over Zoom. We all appreciate the way in which Zoom allows us to gather folks from across our conference in a cost-effective way and allows us to get work done without all the time it takes to drive to a central location. At Council of Committees, however, we get to work and fellowship face-to-face, sharing side conversations, learning to know one another deeper over meals and snacks.

This year our new Outreach and Discipleship Committee (formerly Outreach & Service and Christian Formation Committees) worked on finding its niche in our conference structure and coming up with a name to match. This committee is thinking about formational experiences that can help us see Jesus better. Our Pastoral Leadership Committee continued the good work they do in supporting pastors in our conference as they credential new leaders and plan Annual Leader's Retreat for ministering persons and their spouses. The Board continued to look at the future of CPMC, discerning where God is inviting us to follow. We recognize that our structures are changing and will need to change even more as we seek to support our churches in following Jesus in their local contexts.

Come to the Table events:

This year, the Outreach and Discipleship Committee has invited congregations to host “Join us at the Table” events where fellowship can occur within and between congregations. For the fall months, congregations were invited to host pizza parties. Wellman, West Union, and Washington Mennonite Churches came together for an epic pizza party at Geyer’s Oven in rural Parnell, Iowa. The Sunday evening was beautiful, the pizza was delicious and plentiful, and the conversation was lively. Many suggested that this become a yearly tradition. Perhaps you’d like to organize a “Join us at the Table” event in the new year!

If you or your congregation participate in “Join us at the Table” events, please send pictures and a description to Amanda Bleichty for inclusion in upcoming issues of Scattered Seeds.



Contact information

Moderator

Michelle Hofer
cmhofer@gwtc.net

Assistant Moderator

Michael Swartzendruber
319-936-7541
mswartzendruber@gmail.com

Office

P.O. Box 101, Freeman, SD 57029

Monica Clem, Office Manager
605-929-3325
office@centralplainsmc.org

Hispanic Ministries Coordinator

Ramiro Hernandez 319-621-3725
rmherns@yahoo.com

Conference Ministers

P.O. Box 352, Kalona, IA 52247

Nathan Luitjens 319-461-6505,
nathanluitjens@centralplainsmc.org

Susan Janzen 319-610-1007
susanjanzen@centralplainsmc.org

Director of Communications

Amanda Bleichty 319-325-4522
amandableichty@centralplainsmc.org

Scattered Seeds

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E-mail: scatteredseeds@centralplainsmc.org. Telephone: 319-325-4522.

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To receive this newsletter in Spanish, call Amanda Bleichty at 319-325-4522. Para recibir este boletín en español, llame a Amanda Bleichty al 319-325-4522.

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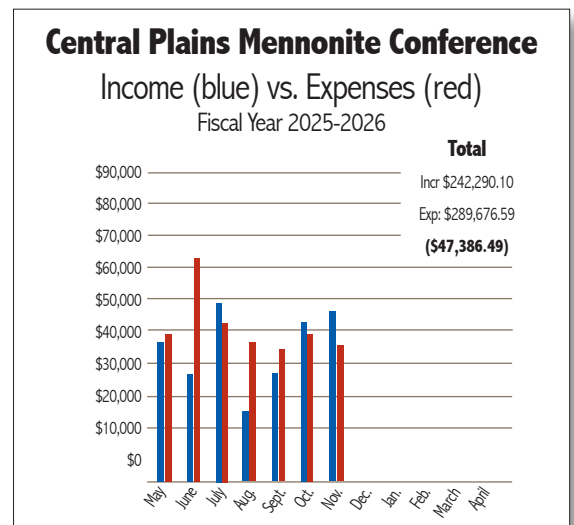
FINANCES

The Central Plains Mennonite Conference financial report for November 2025 is currently in the red. Receipts received year to date are \$242,290.10 while expenses incurred are \$289,676.59. That leaves us with a deficit of \$47,386.49. We are very thankful for the support of the constituents of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference and trust that calendar year-end giving will give us a boost toward balancing our budget.

— *Stewardship Task Group*

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Service and Learning Trip to Riobamba and Quito, Ecuador**, March 13-23, 2026.
- Annual Leaders Retreat** at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, NE, April 17-19, 2026.
- Annual Meeting 2026**, Mountain Lake, MN, June 25-28, 2026.



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