

WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE E-MEMO

December 20, 2011

*A weekly communication for:
WDC Churches and Pastors*

WDC Executive Board, Commission, Committee and Task Force members

*Any content may be used in bulletins and newsletters and
forwarded to congregational leaders and members.*

WDC E-Memo is also available at: www.mennowdc.org (Conference Life / Publications)

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MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The next issue of WDC E-Memo will be sent on January 3, 2012.

Christmas Blahs

by Olivia Bartel, Director, Camp Mennoscah

I sit here wishing I were outside sledding, wishing there was snow and a hill to go sledding on. (There may be snow by the time you read this, but I doubt there will be a hill.) I feel somewhat empty of Christmas spirit.

I am in disbelief this Christmas season with how things are so not going the way I expected. I'm exhausted with the effort of trying to fit new traditions into an out-dated mold. I am irritable and cross because I haven't been able to do many of those things that make Christmas feel like Christmas.

During these past weeks, my thoughts have gone to Mary. There must have been incredible turmoil and upheaval in her life in the months before (and years after) Jesus was born. I imagine judging stares and whispers in Mary's community, the struggle to maintain faith after the original joy of receiving God's Word, the frustration with a ridiculous census, and the tediousness of travel to Bethlehem. I imagine things were not going the way Mary expected and that every day meant new adjustments. I also know from scripture there was great joy and amazement. I know that Mary had an immense faith in God, whatever the outcome.

This year Camp Mennoscah has gone through a season of transition. Some things have gone as expected, some have not. We have a new swimming pool and a new maintenance coordinator. We will become our own non-profit organization shortly. We're going to be working on our septic system and we're adding a new rental facility (the Bluestem house). There has been great joy and mind-crushing frustration. We have relied on you, our constituents, for support and encouragement and will continue to rely on you for these next months and years to come. We have faith in the future of Camp Mennoscah.

I find respite in seeing friends and family long not seen. I find peace in familiar stories and songs. I find joy in caring and doing for others and I anticipate newness in the coming of Christ. I pray for you the faith of Mary this season, and that you find the joy of Christmas whether everything or nothing goes as planned.

Merry Christmas, amen.

Clarence's Clarion Call - Simplistic Gospel

by Clarence Rempel, WDC Conference Minister

“To win this game we have to get the ball inside. Drive the lane, take it to the basket.” Simplifying the game of basketball for the moment at hand can be helpful, but most of us know the game is much more complex with both offense and defense needing to be played well.

“The key to raising healthy children is giving them age-appropriate chores that contribute to the well-being of the whole family.” If only it were that simple!

The tendency to simplify has also impacted us in the spiritual realm and to our detriment. We have this inclination to simplify the gospel, the good news of God's global redeeming, reconciling, restoring work in the world.

One common version of the simplified gospel focuses on receiving forgiveness for one's sins and being prepared to meet the Lord. “Jesus was born to be your Savior and die for your sins. Believe in Jesus, and you will be ready for heaven.”

Another common version of the simplified gospel focuses on Jesus as our example for how God wants us to live here on earth. Imitate Jesus and be fulfilled.

There is a measure of gospel or good news in each of these salvation paradigms, but by themselves they are so minimalist that they can easily become distortions of the truth. One is too heavenly to be of earthly consequence; the other too earthly to be of eternal significance. The first focuses on Jesus' death as the saving event and overlooks the example of Jesus' life; the other focuses on Jesus' life and minimizes the salvific significance of Jesus' death. And both tend to miss the full redemptive

significance of Jesus' resurrection. Read the gospel sermons of Acts and be surprised by the proclamation of salvation by resurrection.

The good news of Jesus begins with multiple assertions by angels, elders, and prophets that Jesus is the fulfillment of all priestly instructions and all prophetic visions of the Old Testament. Jesus is the righteous, peacemaking Messiah King ushering in the fullness of God's rule on earth as it is in heaven.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our life example, we are saved:

From sin-generated brokenness to life-restoring healing,
From rule-keeping exclusion to grace-filled inclusion,
From the violent self-protection for innovative peacemaking,
From fear-filled hoarding for a life of serving others.

When we receive Jesus Christ in his sacrificial death, we are saved:

From being outside the people of God to being included in the family of God,
From being guilty and shamed before God to being forgiven and honored as God's ambassador,
From the fear of death and the powers of evil to faith in God's protection and provision.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our resurrected Lord, we are saved:

From sexual addictions for sexual chastity and marital fidelity,
From consumerist addictions for giving and sharing,
From mindless pollution to conscientious creation care.

We want to claim all of Jesus and experience all of Jesus' gift of salvation. We want to proclaim and live all of the good news. We want to follow hard after Jesus—the Jesus who lived, died, and rose again for our salvation and for the restoration of creation and culture. Jesus is Lord of all.

[A new book in the Resource Library, *The King Jesus Gospel* by Scot McKnight, works with similar themes.]

Prayer Requests

Jan 1 - Pray for Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman, Kansas, as they bid farewell to Pastor Alden Dyck, who is retiring. Pray for Pastor Alden and Joan in new opportunities for ministries. Pray for God's guidance for the Search Committee.

Jan 8 – Pray for Goessel Mennonite Church, as they bid farewell to Pastor Mike Hiebert. Pray for the Search Committee as they seek a new pastor for the church.

Jan 15 – Pray for God's presence and wisdom for the Executive Board of Western District Conference as they meet for retreat and goal setting on Saturday, January 21.

Jan 22 – Pray for Marlene Bogard and the committee responsible for planning our annual assembly in Oklahoma City, July 6-8, as they develop a theme and invite leadership.

Jan 29 – Pray for the revitalizing of our congregations through the Missional Church Seminar being planned by the Moundridge Mennonite Churches for Western District Conference on February 11.

Coming Events

Dec. 23 through Jan. 2, 2012 - WDC Office and Conference Resource Library closed for Christmas and New Year break

Jan. 7 - Out of the Pew (youth), Journey at Yoder, Haven, KS

Jan. 21 - Lent Planner, First Mennonite Church, Newton, KS

Feb. 11-12 - Missional Church Seminar, Moundridge, KS

Feb. 16-18 - Damascus Road Anti Racism Analysis Training, Shalom Mennonite Church

Mar. 22 - New Pastor Orientation, WDC Office

Mar. 23 - Prevention of Clergy Misconduct Training, Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS

Apr. 26 - Summer Worship Planner, Newton, KS area

July 6-8 - WDC Annual Assembly, Oklahoma City, OK

Parish Paper

The January issue of Parish Paper, entitled "How to Perfect Your Leadership Triangle" can be viewed at: <http://mennowdc.org/resources/publications/parish-paper/>

WDC Announcements

1. Save the date! Our WDC Annual Assembly will be held July 6-8, 2012 at the Magnuson Hotel & Meridian Convention Center in Oklahoma City, OK.
2. It's time to think about summer! Camp Mennoscah still has a few weekends and many weekdays that are available for groups and families. Ask about our new rental facility--Bluestem! It's just the right size for a smaller group. Contact Camp Mennoscah with any reservation questions at campmno@mennowdc.org or [620-297-3290](tel:620-297-3290). We can't wait to see you!
3. Bluestem needs you! Our Camp Mennoscah Bluestem house is just about ready for use, but we are still searching for various household items. There is a wish list at www.mennowdc.org in the Camp section. Questions? Just give us a call at [620-297-3290](tel:620-297-3290). We'll work with you to find ways to get in-kind donations to Camp Mennoscah.
4. WDC encourages churches to gather and send copies of bulletins and newsletters from the past year to the Mennonite Library and Archives, 300 E 27th, North Newton KS 67117. These documents are valuable historical records of WDC churches. Put this task on your "to-do list" at the end of each year!
5. Attention new WDC pastors: Put March 22 on your calendars to attend a New Pastor Orientation at the WDC office. Learn about WDC history, vision, tasks and operation. More info to come in the new year!

Kansas Announcements

1. Iglesia Casa Betania is planning on cooking and baking for the Christmas Holidays as a Fund Raiser to keep on spreading the Good News to the Newton Community. We've been witnesses of people coming to know the Lord as their personal Savior, others reconciling, and better yet planting the Seed of the Word in their hearts even though they do not come to our church. It is important to plant the Seed but, what it important is that God makes the seed grow just what the Apotle Paul stated to the Corinthians in his first letter. (1 Corinthians 3:7) To place your order, please call Jaime at [\(316\) 644-5800](tel:3166445800).

Tamales (chicken only): \$12 a dozen

Pies (cherry or apple): \$7 each

Place to pick up: 510 S.E Second (Corner of Walnut and Second, Newton)

Date: Saturday, Dec. 24, between 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m.

MC USA Announcements

Attached are the prayer requests from the member schools of Mennonite Schools Council, and the colleges, universities, seminaries and educational programs of Mennonite Church USA for January. MEA also posts these prayer requests on its website. The prayer request for the day is displayed on our home page and the document is available at www.MennoniteEducation.org/PRAYERS. We encourage you to share Prayers for Faith and Learning with others. The document is set up so it can be a bulletin insert or distributed in church mail boxes. Some churches choose specific prayer requests to include in their weekly bulletins. Congregations or individuals who are interested in a free subscription to Prayers for Faith and Learning (or other MEA publications) may subscribe online at www.MennoniteEducation.org/Subscribe. Thank you for the many ways you support Mennonite education!

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