

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider



I do not consider myself a historian. In high school and college history classes, I struggled to remember historical dates, names, places and events contained in textbooks and teachers' lectures! At the same time, I believe that history is crucial in shaping our identity. The more we know our history, the better we can understand who we are.

So, during this 125th anniversary year for WDC, I am enjoying reviewing the book *Prairie People: A History of the Western District Conference* by David Haury, talking with former

conference leaders about WDC history and reading congregations' stories posted on our website at <http://mennowdc.org/congregation-history-stories/>. (If you do not see your congregation's story included there yet, encourage your congregational leaders to submit it at <http://mennowdc.org/wdcs-125-year-anniversary-is-in-2017/>). Some themes I observe in WDC history:

From its beginning, WDC has been characterized by **diversity**. It was formed by multiple groups of Mennonite immigrants who left Europe and Russia to escape militarism and make a livelihood where they could freely practice their faith. They brought a variety of different cultural traditions and theological emphases. In the years that followed, WDC's diversity expanded to include more ethnic groups, a wider geography, urban and suburban communities in addition to the early rural congregations, and the new experiences and perspectives of each generation.

Given this diversity, it is not surprising that **conflict** has also been part of WDC's history. These have been internal divisions within congregations, conflicts between congregations, and congregational decisions to leave WDC. We have argued over core beliefs, responses to war, mission priorities, financial resources or buildings. Some divisions have been rooted in family loyalties, leadership and power struggles. Most conflicts have been a complex combination of these factors. Our history bears witness to God's grace and faithfulness in spite of our brokenness and sin.

So, what has brought us together? Early immigrants shared a common concern for **education** that would preserve the Mennonite faith and train church leaders. This was expressed in establishing elementary and preparatory schools, Bethel College, Christian Endeavor programs, Camp Mennoscah, youth retreats, and continuing education for pastors. Perhaps promotion of education is also a reason why WDC has been a leader in the Mennonite church in providing opportunities and affirmation for women in ministry. Today, programs such as IBA (Instituto Bíblico Anabautista) and SeBAH (Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano) continue to provide Anabaptist/Mennonite education in new ways.

Church planting and mission has also been a theme of WDC history. The initial strategy of starting congregations by gathering together "scattered" Mennonites has expanded to include outreach to new believers and engaging in service, justice and peacemaking. Over the years, WDC has sought to respond faithfully to warfare and military conscription, poverty, racism and discrimination, capital punishment, rural decline, and many other concerns. New congregations have been established as each generation discerns how to be the church in the context of a changing world.

During this 125th anniversary year I look forward to hearing more interpretations of WDC's history, as we continue to share stories of the past, consider how that has shaped who we are today, and imagine where God is leading us into the future.

Western District Conference is a regional grouping of Mennonite Church USA congregations located in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Coming Events

August 4-6
WDC Annual Assembly
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel
Arlington, DFW South, TX

October 28
WDC Reference Council
Location TBD

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
June/July/August 2017

Rooted
and
Built Up

in Christ

Colossians 2:6-7

Rooted and Built up in Christ: Assembly 2017

Welcome to Texas where "Big things happen here."

It will be a blessing to have you in Arlington, Texas, during our Annual Assembly and as we gather as pilgrims on a journey of faith and seeking God's presence.

The Assembly focus is *Rooted and Built Up in Christ* (Colossians 2:6-7), also the theme for WDC's 125th anniversary which will be celebrated at Assembly with a readers' theater presentation and a timeline of WDC historical highlights.

"Rooted and Built up" was an invitation to the Colossian community to reflect on their commitment of faith in Christ and as part of their communal life shaped by the very same faith that was initially handed down to them.

Rooted as a tree, sending down strong roots into the soil from the corners of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Built up as house, taking

shape in a gradual construction within a multicultural and diverse setting. In addition, the Pauline text cautions that believing in Christ should be reflected in living.

As we journey together the way of the "Via Christi" and as the gathered Body of Christ, we are invited to worship services, workshops, delegate sessions and fellowship during our Western District Conference Annual Assembly.

This blessed gathering will start on Friday evening with dinner and worship, and it conclude with Sunday morning worship.

On Saturday evening, assembly participants will have opportunity to enjoy a family-friendly festival of food, music and fellowship hosted by Dallas-area congregations at Iglesia Luz del Evangelio, or to visit other area attractions.

Come, worship God and enjoy Christian fellowship!

—Byron Peller
WDC Associate Conference Minister (Texas-Based)

Western District Conference

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WDC Annual Assembly Details

Schedule:

Friday, August 4, 2017

3:30 pm Registration & Check-in

5:30 Welcome Dinner
or
Pastor Appreciation Dinner

7:00 Worship

9:00 Fellowship

Saturday, August 5, 2017

7:00 am Breakfast Buffet

8:30 Delegate Meeting (Worship, introductions, table conversations, reports from conference minister and commissions, board and commission elections, 2017 financial report and approval of 2018 budget, congregation membership transitions, other business)

12:00 pm Lunch / Women's Lunch

1:30 Workshop Session 1 (50 minutes)

2:30 Workshop Session 2 (50 minutes)

3:30 Workshop Session 3 (50 minutes)

5:00 Departure for Mini-Festival
or
Leisure time to visit area attractions

6:00 Mini Festival (includes dinner) at:
Iglesia Luz del Evangelio
1524 Dowdy Ferry Rd, Dallas

Sunday, August 6, 2017

8:00 am Breakfast

9:30 Worship

11:00 Check out

All events (unless otherwise noted) will take place at:
Doubletree Hotel Arlington DFW South
1507 North Watson Rd, Arlington, TX

Speakers:

Heidi Regier Kreider, WDC Conference Minister, will preach on Friday evening.

John Garland, Pastor at San Antonio Mennonite Church, will preach on Sunday morning.

Workshops:

- Managing Cultural Transitions
- Responding after the Future Church Summit
- A People of Two Kingdoms II
- Genealogy, Tracing Your Historical & Spiritual Roots
- WDC History/Congregational Storytelling
- The Upside Down King Curriculum
- Church Planting, the Mission, Ministry & Process
- Jesus, the Immigrant on the Border
- The St. John's Bible and its Art
- Christian, Jewish and Muslim Relationships in our Troubling Times
- Financial Planning for Responsible Stewardship

Things to note:

- **Information and registration** materials will be sent to churches in early June. All information, including online registration will also be available at: <http://mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/#2017annualAssembly>
- **Registration fee** includes Friday dinner, Saturday breakfast, lunch, dinner, and Sunday breakfast \$185—Adult \$53—Child (through 5th grade)
- **Lodging**—make your own reservations at the Doubletree Hotel Arlington DFW South by calling 1-800-HILTONS; ask for the “Mennonite Western District Conference” group rate (\$109 per night). Group rate is available until July 14.
- **Childcare** provided for infants through grade 5
- **Offerings** during the Friday evening and Sunday morning worship services and donations at the Saturday evening festival dinner will go to WDC church planting.
- **Scholarships** for those with financial need—available upon request.

Agri-Urban to Close Doors

By Carol Duerksen



The concept was simple: Urban people bought cattle, and farmers fed them.

Simple, but in the early 1970's when Elbert Koontz began to sell the dream to Western District Conference officers, the responses were mixed. Some thought it might work for a while and then die out. Others weren't sure why the conference should be “in the cattle business.” But the idea had a huge factor going for it: it offered a program for farmers and urban dwellers to join hands and raise funds that would benefit the conference. When the vote came up at the 1971 fall conference of WDC, it passed by a wide margin, and Agri-Urban was born. Later, the committee decided to expand the plan to include Bethel College and the General Conference Mennonite Church. A farmer selling Agri-Urban livestock

could designate them to any of the three institutions; if profits were undesignated, they were split one-half to WDC, and one-fourth each to Bethel and the General Conference (later Mennonite Church USA).

Between 1972 and 2016, \$1,676,845 was distributed to the Agri-Urban beneficiaries. The program expanded beyond beef cattle to include dairy calves and milk, hogs and grain. Several thousand people in Kansas and Nebraska contributed funds, purchased feed certificates, fed livestock, or donated grain. Thousands enjoyed Agri-Urban's annual Day no the Farm, an opportunity for all ages to enjoy interacting with animals and farm-related activities.

The Agri-Urban board has now decided to close its doors. Board president Alan Entz said, “The Board felt that with the way the agricultural landscape has changed over the years, and with fewer farmers feeding cattle for Agri-Urban, it was time to close this organization when we still have a sizable amount of money to distribute.”

Israel Palestine Voices for Peace

By Katie Mitchell-Koch, Member of WDC Israel-Palestine Task Force

April 17-19 was the *Jewish and Palestinian Voices for Peace* Kansas tour, hosted by WDC. Speakers were Laura Tillem, Jewish Voice for Peace, Wichita, and Jonathan Kuttab, a Mennonite Palestinian human rights lawyer. Stops included Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church (Wichita), Bethel College (North Newton) and the Ecumenical Campus Ministry Building (Manhattan).

The tour offered context for the “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” resolution that will be discussed at the Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) Convention in Orlando in July (<http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/delegate-resources/>).

The Manhattan event had broad support from Christians, Muslims and others, including Israelis and Palestinians. Bob Atchison, Manhattan Mennonite Church, reflects, “the type of dialogue we had during the event is exactly what is needed.” Without dialogue, peacemaking efforts cannot move forward. Regardless of the delegate decision regarding the resolution, this work is bearing good fruit!

The Wichita discussion asked how we can be both pro-Jewish and pro-Palestinian. In being Pro-Jewish, one must acknowledge the past suffering of

the Jewish people through anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, and recognize the Christian Church and Western Civilization's culpability and complicity in horrific acts. In being Pro-Palestinian, one must acknowledge America's support of the Palestinian apartheid through weapons sales and direct support (\$38 billion from 2016-26), with the support, either direct or complicit, of the Christian church. Yet in being pro-Jewish, one does not have to support the current military actions of the Jewish state, Israel. Likewise, one does not have to support any violent actions taken by Palestinians.

As Christians, we are called to be a voice for peace. Palestinians have formulated a plan of non-violent direct action, with the aim to bring forth peace, and they are asking for our support. The resolution written by MC USA advocates for justice and building bridges with our local Jewish communities. Incidents of anti-Semitism are up 80% in the U.S. this year. It is important now that we support our Jewish neighbors. This timely resolution affirms our desires for peace and ties with all of God's children.

For a list of resources to learn more about Israel-Palestine, see: <http://mennowdc.org/committees-task-forces/>. If you have questions, concerns, or ideas for future events, contact us at: wdc@mennowdc.org.