

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider



WDC Annual Assembly feels a bit like Easter to me.

Annual Assembly is the big event of WDC's year! It is when the WDC "congregation" gathers to celebrate God's faithfulness and hear God's word, share in prayer and discernment together, and be blessed and sent out to join God's work in the world, connected to the wider body of Christ as we return home to local communities. Assembly is also a bit like a reunion over Easter dinner with friends and family! This year's Assembly festival at Luz del Evangelio, and the gift of Assembly polo-shirts from Hispanic congregations in WDC were beautiful expressions of these relationships, hospitality, gratitude and fellowship.

I also recognize that not all members of WDC are able to attend Assembly. Those who gather do so on behalf of others, mindful of the whole conference. I was moved by a sense of that greater community at the roll-call on Saturday morning, when delegates and members each stood as their congregation was named. The roll-call honored each congregation of WDC, and also revealed in a poignant way which congregations were not represented. We acknowledge that there are barriers that prevent some from participating. We miss those who are not present when we gather for Assembly, because we value each member of WDC. Each congregation's story is important, and an important part of WDC's story.

Throughout this 125th anniversary year, WDC will continue to collect congregational stories to post on the WDC website. I encourage you to read those stories, and to send in your congregation's story if it is not yet included. Together, our stories are part of God's "big story" – the salvation narrative of creation, covenant and new life in Christ. Yes, we are Easter people - alive in Christ, and called to share the good news! "As we, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, let us continue to live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as we were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6-7, paraphrased).

Special thanks to the Assembly Planning Team (Wayne Albrecht, Katherine and Peter Goerzen, Heidi Regier Kreider, Sandra Montes-Martinez, Byron Pellecer—coordinator and Bill Zuercher) and the 125th Anniversary Planning Team: (Violeta Ajquejay, Norma Duerksen—convener, David Haurly, Raylene Hinz-Penner, Gordon Houser, and Brian Stucky).

Summer Reading Fun at the Resource Library

- 10 children at Summer Story Hour explored the Wonderful World of Books.
- Summer Reading Program—12 children and 8 adults participated this year.
- Next summer, look for more opportunities to learn and grow in your faith!

*Remember, we mail books to any individual or church in WDC.
Contact us today! crlib@mennowdc.org or 316-283-6300*

Coming Events

October 10
Healthy Boundaries
Training 101
Shalom Mennonite Church,
Newton, KS

October 28
WDC Reference Council (for
Executive Board,
Commissions and Gifts
Discernment Committee)
WDC Office, North Newton,
KS

WDC Garden

*Stories from Western District Conference
September/October/November 2017*



Annual Assembly Highlights

WDC Annual Assembly took place August 4-6, 2017, at the Doubletree Hotel in Arlington, TX, celebrating WDC's 125th anniversary with the theme "Rooted and Built Up in Christ" from Colossians 2:6-7.



As participants arrived for registration, they were offered a polo-shirt with the assembly logo printed



on it, as a gift from Hispanic congregations in WDC! Assembly began with Friday night dinner. Meals during the weekend were times for fellowship and special gatherings including a pastors' dinner, and a women's lunch (see *Holy Ground* on p. 3).

Friday night worship started with music by Pastor Miguel Norales and others from the Garifuna church plant, Iglesia Menonita Fuente de Restauración. A readers' theater* written by Raylene Hinz-Penner presented by Norma Duerksen, Jorge Guitierrez, Caleb Yoder and Karen Andres, highlighted WDC history, along with a large timeline of WDC history made by Norma and displayed at the back of the meeting room. Colossians 2:1-7 was read by former conference minister Marvin Zehr. Conference minister Heidi Regier Kreider preached on "Rooted in Christ, Digging for Treasure," followed by response time to consider: Through whom have we received Christ? What do we treasure about our congregation and WDC? Participants wrote their

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

Western District Conference

PO Box 306, 2517 N Main, North Newton, KS 67117



316-283-6300

wdc@mennowdc.org

www.mennowdc.org

reflections on paper leaves and placed them on branches to create a colorful tree, as they also brought offerings forward. (All offerings during the weekend were for Church Planting in WDC.) The service concluded with Communion, and a litany of celebration read by former conference ministers Dorothy Nickel Friesen and Marco Guete.



On Saturday morning, delegates gathered around tables for the annual business session led by moderator Anita Kehr and moderator-elect Ray Reimer. Following table introductions and getting acquainted, a roll-call featured slides with the name, location, meeting place and pastors of each WDC congregation, as members of each congregation stood, providing a glimpse of who we are as WDC.

Workshops on Saturday afternoon offered learning opportunities on a variety of topics: Cultural transition, the MC USA Future Church Summit, church history, genealogy, financial stewardship, faith formation, church planting, immigration, interfaith relationships, and the art of the St. John's Bible.



Iglesia Luz del Evangelio hosted a festival Saturday evening, complete with a delicious meal sponsored by the WDC Hispanic Dallas churches, children's games, time for fellowship and a piñata celebrating WDC's birthday!

The Sunday morning featured worship and music led by Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Katherine Goerzen and Annette Albrecht. Hildalejandra Pellecer read scripture, and the sermon was offered by John



Garland, Pastor at San Antonio Mennonite Church, again reflecting on Colossians 2:1-7. John told about SAMC's experience last year hosting hundreds of people released from detention, and then a traffic accident that he and his wife suffered soon after. As he recovered, he was reminded that his life and ministry belong to God. John encouraged the church to focus on how much God loves us, and on making disciples who overflow with love for the world – a fitting message as we were sent forth from Assembly!

*For more information, see <http://mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/>. Posted there are several items related to Assembly including:

- Text of Readers' Theater for WDC Celebration of 125 Years - available for congregational use
- Executive Board statement opposing Texas law SB4
- For more Assembly photos, see Western District Conference (Mennonite Church USA)'s Facebook page!

2017 WDC delegate business highlights:

- ♦ Table conversation: What do you hope to let go of or carry forward from church history? What do you think WDC will look like in the future?
- ♦ Approved 2018 budget; nominees for Board, commission and committee appointments; and a minor bylaw amendment.
- ♦ Approved request from Kingman (KS) Mennonite Church to withdraw from Western District Conference, to join South Central Conference.
- ♦ Heard reports from conference minister, commissions and two of WDC's institutional relationships: Mennonite Church USA and Camp Mennoscah.
- ♦ Received statement from WDC Executive Board opposing Texas law Senate Bill 4, related to immigration concerns.
- ♦ During an open mic time, delegates offered a variety of comments, affirmations and questions.
- ♦ Approved resolution of thanks for staff, congregations and volunteers who made Assembly possible.
- ♦ Announcement that Reference Council for Executive Board and Commissions will be October 28; and the next WDC Annual Assembly will be July 27-28, 2018, in central Kansas (location to be announced).



When the speaker for the WDC women's luncheon at the Annual Assembly on August 5 walked to the podium with a mask covering her face, I wondered who this mysterious woman was. Her translator stood beside her while she shared about a childhood of sexual abuse that carried over into an abusive marriage. Troubled relationships with a son and daughter only multiplied her feelings of failure and low self-esteem. However, she continued to go to church and act as if all were well. She thought her mask would protect her from her painful life experiences and keep her secrets hidden.

But God saw beyond that mask and looked into her heart. God's love broke into her life freeing her of her secrets. Relationships with her children mended, and she now accepts them and loves them for whom they have become. While she talked she removed her mask, revealing a lovely woman with a strong faith. Because

Holy Ground

By Elizabeth Raid

she found God's love she is now in a happy marriage, is a pastor and church leader.

She ended by saying God had put it on her heart to pray with us because there could be others in the room wearing masks, women who were holding onto secrets that kept them from experiencing God's love. While she prayed I could sense the Spirit moving through the room.

Tears flowed freely when our speaker embraced one of the hotel's wait staff and prayed with her. I looked at my table mate and saw her eyes glistening too. "Holy ground," I whispered. She nodded.

Both of the wait staff responded to God's call on their lives that day. Each heard that call in her own language—Spanish and English. Our speaker's story gave them courage to take off their masks. God's love language broke through all the barriers. More tears, hugs and prayers continued as they exchanged contact information and the women returned to work.

Yes, we were indeed on "holy ground."

WDC Step Up participants reflect on their experiences

"Step Up", a program launched at the Mennonite Church USA convention in Orlando in July, encouraged youth to engage in the discussions and work of the delegates and the larger Mennonite Church. Hear below from WDC's three Step Up participants:

Erick Martinez (Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb, Dallas, TX) - My time at the Orlando convention was extremely enjoyable. I learned a lot. My points were taken into consideration and not just dismissed due to my age. Weeks after Orlando, I realized how important the event was because it seems like everyone still speaks on the topics that were discussed and those who were not there were interested in hearing what had happened during the sessions. This opened my eyes and made me realize that this gathering is exactly what the church needs, which is communication between everyone. If we allow everyone to speak their mind, then we can all work together to reach a common ground. I truly enjoyed the opportunity of being a part of the conversation and giving my views to people who were willing to listen.

Andrew Moore (Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, KS) - My experience was extremely beneficial. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to connect with other people throughout my time in the delegate sessions. This allowed me to gain a better sense of what Mennonite Church

represents to other people and other congregations. It also gave me a greater appreciation for how diverse the different congregations already are. The second main benefit was as an education about MC USA in general. I learned about the current organizational structure of the denomination. I am now more knowledgeable about the process that runs our denomination and the people in charge of it. This gave me a greater appreciation of how open the delegate sessions were and how dissenting opinions were both spoken and treated with respect.

Magdalena Wenger (First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, KS) - One of the things I most valued was the information. Usually the youth convention and the delegates are kept very separate. I really enjoyed being in the loop. As a Step Up veteran, I know much more about how MC USA functions than your average youth. It gives me a good base to build off of if I want to be more involved in the future. I was most excited about the delegate sessions, because I wanted to see more about how the church worked. It was amazing that this big group of people with so many different lives, views and home congregations could come together and make decisions. I valued that I could be a part of that body. The Bible says that we are the body of Christ, but it is hard to feel connected... at the delegate session and the Future Church Summit, I felt that we were one body, which was cool. The Future Church Summit was a lot of fun. The people at my table had a lot of interesting answers to the questions. I liked discussing with them. I enjoyed the people at my table and our discussions. I enjoyed learning about them and being treated like an adult.