

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Reger Kreider



Electronic communication is useful and necessary in our time, and helps WDC connect across our wide geography. We send *Sprouts*, a weekly newsletter, by e-mail to all congregations, pastors and other subscribers. Video-conferencing allows groups of people from different locations to work together. Through Facebook and the WDC website we share news, photos, announcements, electronic giving options, library catalogue, and many other resources. WDC staff also use a variety of social media to connect with others, navigate travels, share and access resources, and stay in touch with the wider church and world.

As with all technology, the benefits of electronic communication are accompanied by liabilities. With this in mind, WDC staff are exploring guidelines to help us use social media in constructive ways that are consistent with Christian values and WDC's mission, and maintain healthy professional and personal boundaries. Here are some ideas we are considering:

- Be selective in choosing the form of social media that best matches the intended purpose and audience. For work purposes, use only media that will leave a record of the communication (not ephemeral messaging apps).
- Consider how a statement on social media will impact WDC and clarify when a personal opinion does not necessarily represent WDC, recognizing that social media blurs the lines between professional and personal communication.
- Assume that what is posted on social media is public. Think carefully before posting.
- In the interest of authenticity and transparency, identify yourself. Social media posts should not be anonymous.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality. Do not publish personal information about others without their permission, or – in the case of children and youth - the permission of parents or guardians.
- Use respectful language when expressing different viewpoints on social media. Nurture healthy dialogue and relationships; consider face-to-face conversation when possible.
- Comply with copyright laws when posting information that is not in the public domain.
- Never use social media for illegal or immoral purposes.

There are many other concerns related to electronic communication, but I hope this short list will encourage you to consider your own practices - as an individual, family, church leader, or congregation. How is your use of electronic media shaped by faith-based priorities and purposes? Check out books on these topics from the WDC Resource Library, including: *Before You Hit Send: Preventing Headache and Heartache* by Emerson Eggerichs; *Managing Your Family's High-Tech Habit: From Video Games to the Dark Side of the Web* by Arnie Cole, et al; and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* by Sherry Turkle.

As WDC focuses on a Year of Evangelism, let us remember that our online behavior is a significant way that others observe how a follower of Jesus acts and speaks. Are we embodying and communicating good news?

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

Coming Events

March 18-19
Faith, Hope & the Mission of Rural and Small Town Churches (Year of Evangelism event)
Beatrice, NE

July 27-28
WDC Annual Assembly
Tabor Mennonite Church,
Newton, KS & Eden
Mennonite Church,
Moundridge, KS

July 29
WDC Annual Assembly
Sunday worship option
Alexanderwohl Mennonite
Church, Goessel, KS

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
March/April/May 2018



Building up the Church

Welcome people of all ages ... hospitality for the community... accessibility for persons with disabilities... discipling youth... energy efficiency... opportunities for peace and justice work. These are among the reasons a number of WDC congregations are planning or currently doing building or renovation projects on their facilities. WDC invited them to share about their projects and how this expresses a vision to connect with the community:



this will make the facility more welcoming for persons using walkers and wheelchairs, and families with infants and toddlers. Another way the church reaches out is to provide a meal for school teachers during fall and spring parent-teacher conferences at the Turpin School.

Tabor Mennonite Church (Newton, KS) plans to add a ground-level fellowship hall (see drawing at top of page) with kitchen and restrooms, as well as a new elevator to the lower level where the former fellowship hall was, which will be renovated to provide space for junior and senior high youth rooms. Pastor Phil Schmidt expressed the hope that the project will express the congregational vision to offer hospitality, healing and hope in the name of Christ, as it creates a more hospitable place for fellowship, learning, and worship for people of all ages and abilities. Tabor Mennonite Church hosts Wednesday evening ministries, Bible School, a food pantry, serves at New Hope Shelter for homeless persons, and at the annual Mennonite Central Committee Relief Sale.

Western District Conference

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Peace Mennonite Church (Lawrence, KS) is adding new worship space, kitchen and bathroom to their existing building, with plans to convert former space into offices, classrooms, library and meeting room. Additional space will allow the congregation to offer greater hospitality and include more people. "We believe God is calling us to grow for the sake of more faithfully sharing the peace of Christ with each other and with our community," said pastor Joanna Harader. Peace Mennonite Church hosts the neighborhood association at their facility; they cook food and serve once a month for a local soup kitchen, and are active with a local inter-faith justice organization.

Houston (TX) Mennonite Church is doing a total campus re-design including constructing a new facility. Pastor Marty Troyer wrote, "Our Anabaptist ministry and witness in Houston are more relevant – and crucial – than ever. More people are seeking us out, drawn by Jesus' message of peace and intrigued by his gospel of radical justice for all." The congregation partners with United We Dream to address needs of undocumented persons, and hosts SURJ (Showing Up For Racial Justice) events, Peace Camp, two different worshiping congregations, and the Houston Peace and Justice Center. These relationships and partnerships coincide with the opportunity to move into a larger and more modern space.

Austin (TX) Mennonite Church is renovating their main restrooms to be accessible for people with disabilities. Pastor Lee Lever noted the congregation's desire to be a welcoming church for all people, including current members as well as visitors from the community. The area of Austin in which the church facility is located includes a number of group homes serving persons with disabilities.

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church (Goessel, KS) plans to add a commercial elevator off of the ground-level front entrance of their historic building, to allow accessibility to the sanctuary on the main level, and lower-level fellowship hall. Pastor Caleb Yoder noted that they see this as a tangible message of welcome to

all who visit and gather as the body of Christ. The project will also replace the front doors with an airlock for improved energy efficiency. An earlier renovation six years ago repaired a failing foundation and created a new multi-use space called the "Foundation Room," used for a children's midweek ministry involving many community children. They have also renovated a shelter house for youth ministry and community gatherings, and are adding a kiosk in the cemetery to welcome all who come to pay respect to loved ones.



How did these congregations decide to undertake building projects? They were motivated by both vision/mission and needs/limitations. Then came congregational surveys to gather feedback and ideas, deliberation among leadership groups, appointing task groups to guide the process, reviewing proposals and construction estimates, considering financial resources and fundraising capacity, and finally congregational decisions. In all cases, the process took several – or many - years. Some congregations faced setbacks, and needed more information, additional congregational discussion or alternative proposals. But this patience and persistence paid off, as plans were improved and greater congregational support emerged. As Peace Mennonite Church pastor Joanna Harader said, "We came to a congregational meeting... expecting to contend with a wide range of opinions about which direction the church should go. The Holy Spirit moved among us in a powerful way at that meeting and we discovered that we had a consensus to begin a capital campaign and embark on a building project. The congregation moved forward from that point with great energy and enthusiasm and we have seen God's faithfulness throughout our process."

Thanks be to God for vision to listen and learn, hope and wait, plan and implement projects that further the mission of the church. May God's purposes be realized as these facilities are filled and used by people of all kinds for years to come!



Year of Evangelism

By Peter Goerzen, Planning Team Member

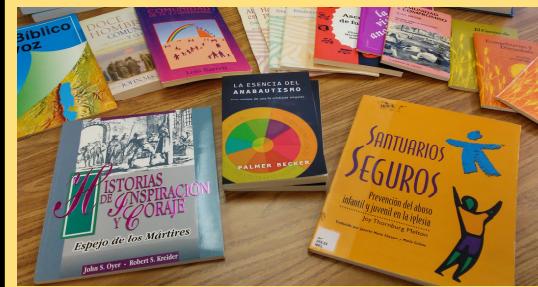
"Evangelism" comes from the New Testament Greek term *euangelizomai*, which refers to the announcement of good

news. The term is used to describe Jesus' announcement of the inbreaking reign of God. This was especially good news for the marginalized and vulnerable, and even those of status, who were ready to embrace a new life in the community of Jesus' followers. This message came to be known as the "good news of peace." What might it look like for us as Anabaptist-Mennonites to join Jesus in sharing this good news of peace among our neighbors today?

136 registrants from 24 Western District congregations assembled for the Year of Evangelism Kick-Off event, January 19-20, at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, KS. Heidi Rolland Unruh, in her keynote address, called participants to be "both-and" evangelists, to "do" and to "tell" and, especially, to "dwell," as we "link our lives with others" to form authentic relationships.

Resources for Everyone: New Texas Library "Branch"

By Jennie Wintermote, Resource Library Director, with Sandra Montes-Martinez, Administrative Assistant (Texas)



With an increasing number of Spanish-speaking WDC congregations (mostly) located in Texas, many with bi-vocational pastors and church planters, we recognize that accessing the books, DVDs, curriculum, and other resources in the Conference Resource Library (located in North Newton, KS) can be a significant challenge. In order to meet this need, in March, a Texas branch of the Resource Library will open to serve Spanish-speaking leaders. Located at Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb in Dallas, the library collection will focus on resources for pastors, church planters, and other leaders. Materials will include curriculum, books, and more. WDC Administrative Assistant (Texas-based), Sandra Montes-Martinez will facilitate check-in/check-out and bring resources to leader's trainings and gatherings of Hispanic churches for individuals to borrow. The Texas Branch will be open for business following the March 9-10 Hispanic Pastors' Retreat in Texas. The current Spanish/bilingual collection will be maintained in North Newton for local Spanish-speaking congregations, and as always, all materials from the North Newton location are available to anyone in WDC via mail. We praise God for this new project and this new way the Conference Resource Library can fulfill WDC's core tasks of sustaining transformational pastors and church planters as well as resourcing healthy, missional churches.

