

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider



Election season is over, giving season has begun. Instead of receiving political fliers, our mailboxes are now filled with advertisements, catalogues and year-end funding appeals. While some end up in junk mail or recycling, they also present opportunity to consider how our financial practices relate to our values and priorities. How do our purchases and gifts reflect that we are disciples of Jesus?

Recently I joined WDC's Stewardship Commission and teams from several WDC congregations at a seminar on Cultivating Generous Congregations sponsored by Everence. We reflected on what has shaped our relationship with money, current giving trends, ways to align congregations' stewardship practices with missional priorities, and to approach giving and fundraising as spiritual practices at the heart of discipleship and congregational health. One resource that was noted is [A Spirituality of Fundraising](#) by Henri J. M. Nouwen, which the WDC Stewardship Commission is reading as a devotional guide this year. As you and your congregation discern end-of-the year giving and next year's budgets, I invite you to consider these words from Nouwen:

Fundraising is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. It is a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission... Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission. Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging. When we seek to raise funds we are not saying, "Please, could you help us out because lately it's been hard." Rather, we are declaring, "We have a vision that is amazing and exciting. We are inviting you to invest yourself through the resources that God has giving you – your energy, your prayers and your money – in this work to which God has called us."

Nouwen notes that fundraising is also a call to conversion – both for those who seek funds and those who have funds:

...Whether we are asking for money or giving money we are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration. ...In fundraising as ministry, we are inviting people into a new way of relating to their resources... Fundraising from the point of view of the gospel says to people: "I will take your money and invest it in this vision only if it is good for your spiritual journey, only if it is good for your spiritual health. ...If fundraising as ministry invites those with money to a new relationship with their wealth, it also calls us to be converted in relation to our needs. ...When those with money and those who need money share a mission, we see a central sign of new life in the Spirit of Christ. We belong together in our work because Jesus has brought us together, and our fruitfulness depends on staying connected with him. ...Therefore those who need money and those who can give money meet on the common ground of God's love. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8)

Coming Events

Dec 24-Jan 1, 2019
WDC Office & Resource
Library closed

**MERRY CHRISTMAS &
HAPPY NEW YEAR!**



July 26-27, 2019
WDC Annual Assembly
Bethel College
North Newton KS

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
December 2018, January & February 2019

love Jesus, love God, love people, share Jesus, love God, love people, share Jesus, love

Year of Evangelism

By Brad Roth

“Can I be baptized here?” a newcomer asked on visiting Beatrice (NE) Mennonite Church (BMC) for the first time. Her question was an act of wondering as she imagined herself becoming part of this faith community. Pastor Tim Amor has been leading BMC in a process of asking questions and developing a culture of outreach, and Western District's Year of Evangelism has been fuel for the fire. It's a chance to break out of old ruts and try something new.

Pastor Tim is not alone. After inspiring talks by Heidi Rolland Unruh and Marvin Lorenzana at the Year of Evangelism launch at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, KS in January, congregations and leaders have sought to jump start a culture of evangelism and mission. The first question many leaders have faced is one of definitions: What does evangelism—spreading the good news about Jesus—sound like in an Anabaptist register? And how can we practice evangelism in our distinct contexts in a way that's authentic to who we are?

“At Rainbow you won't hear the word 'evangelism' too often,” writes Pastor Ruth Harder of Rainbow

Mennonite in Kansas City. “Many of us are trying to recover from evangelism-gone-wrong-experiences where we felt emotionally manipulated and/or damned/shamed.” And yet, Harder says, “I want to be someone who invites people to enter a conversation, a way of life that is true and beautiful.” Pastor Terry Rediger in Turpin, OK, writes that evangelism in his congregation's context is more of a “show people love than a tell about God's love.” Turpin Mennonite supports the local food bank and provides Christmas food baskets and Christmas gifts for folk on the margins in their community. At Hoffnungsau Mennonite in rural Inman, KS, Pastor Lynn Schlosser describes her congregation's thinking on attractional evangelism. “How do we use our place, our space, and create there a body of believers that will attract the people who are living in the country right around our church?” asks Schlosser. To that end, the rural congregation cast an invitation to folks in the multiple communities Hoffnungsau connects with and



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

Western District Conference

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hosted a series of outdoor movie nights and cookouts. They intentionally avoided showing “churchy” movies, choosing instead *The Greatest Showman* and *Inside Out*. Schlosser describes these efforts as part of a broader movement in her congregation to grow more comfortable in sharing “Christ’s hopeful view of the world.”

Francis of Assisi famously (didn’t) say, “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Within Western District, many of us have adopted this misquoted slogan for our own and then gone on to forget the “use words” part. We get mission, but when it comes to evangelism we aren’t so sure—in part because we don’t know how to faithfully and fruitfully enter into a conversation about the hope we have in Jesus. What do you say? Pastor Willmar Harder of Buhler Mennonite (KS) speaks of moving people forward by “nudges” to reclaim a more comfortable and daring capacity for evangelism. “Evangelism isn’t just ordaining someone to go hand out pamphlets somewhere and hope someone comes to Christ,” says Harder. It’s about taking stock of your circles of relationships and engaging people in conversations about the good news of Jesus. “For me it’s cattle,” says Harder. Raising cattle allows him to connect naturally with local cow-culture families. “We eat together. We help each other out. We even burn pastures together.” And that life together is a door into deeper conversations about struggles and relationships—and Jesus.



Sharing the good news of Jesus out of life shared together rose to the top as the main evangelistic approach

adopted by Western District congregations. Sandra Montes Martinez, pastor of the Monte Horeb congregation in Dallas, TX, describes their practice of being “church outside the walls.” “Sometimes it feels like I have two congregations, one that meets in church on Sunday morning, and another that meets in homes,” says Montes Martinez. Every three weeks, a group of around 25 women plus children meet in a home to talk about life and Jesus. They share their struggles, help each other, study the Bible, and pray for one another. Pastor Sandra speaks of ministering to the whole person. “The word (of

God) is having its impact, and not just in the pulpit,” she says. Using a Mustard Seed grant offered through the Year of Evangelism, her congregation purchased a diagnostic machine to test blood sugar levels. With the guidance of a member who is a newly minted doctor specializing in preventative medicine, the congregation has deployed the machine to test for diabetes and open conversations about healthy diet and lifestyle. “The church is to do more than just preach from the pulpit and say ‘God bless you,’” says Montes Martinez. The church has to go where the needs are. “I think that’s what Jesus did,” she says.

Also in Dallas, Pastor Juan Limones’ Luz del Evangelio congregation spends most Saturday mornings preparing breakfast burritos and coffee to feed some 200-300 homeless folks downtown. They’ve experienced God’s miraculous provision in having enough burritos for everyone who is hungry. The congregation also celebrates a fall Harvest Sunday where they invite neighbors and newcomers to join them in giving thanks to God., and the congregation is planning a



s p r i n g neighborhood carnival with b o u n c y h o u s e s , m u s i c , p r e a c h i n g , prayer, and food. Limones is currently leading a process to equip families to host Bible study fellowships in their own homes. The idea is that people can invite friends and neighbors—folks who might not be ready to set foot in church—to join them for coffee and a Bible study. It’s a new idea for the congregation, and one that was not immediately embraced by all. And yet, the congregation is moving forward to give it a try. “We have to do something different, and if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t matter, because what we’re doing now isn’t working anyway,” says Limones. “The worst thing is stagnation and conformity.” Limones goes on to say: “Jesus is calling us to do something. He did his part, and he has left to us the responsibility of continuing His work.”

Brad Roth is the pastor of the West Zin Mennonite Church in Moundridge, KS and author of God’s Country: Faith, Hope, and the Future of the Rural Church (Herald Press). He blogs at DoxologyProject.com.

Count the Ways

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways... “ These words from a famous love poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning come to mind as I think about Western District Conference in this season of giving and gratitude! Let me count some of the ways – and reasons - to love WDC:

1. As a network of congregations, WDC strengthens our faith and witness as we connect with one another in fellowship, learning, spiritual growth and mission. Encourage your congregation to reach out to other WDC congregations through shared projects, a sister-church relationship, addressing a common challenge, or visiting for worship. And as you look ahead to next year, plan to attend WDC annual assembly, July 26-27, 2019, at Bethel College in North Newton, KS.

2. WDC provides resourcing and support for congregations and their leaders, such as training for congregational safety guidelines and prevention of sexual abuse, guidance during pastoral transitions or reviews, coaching for church planters, pastor peer groups and mentors, seminary scholarships and ministers’ continuing education grants, congregational resourcing events, grants to support mission initiatives, adaptive leadership training, and more. Contact WDC to let us know what kind of assistance would be most helpful to your congregation.

3. WDC has a fabulous resource library! Check out materials for your Sunday school, children’s story, youth group, book club, sermon preparation or personal study. For more information see <http://mennowdc.org/library/>

4. WDC is enriched by a diversity of leadership gifts and voices, with congregations from Houston to Beatrice, from Turpin to Kansas City. Nominate someone from your congregation or another church to serve on a WDC board, commission or committee, or volunteer your time and skills for a WDC ministry or special event.

5. WDC values a holistic approach to ministry that embraces both evangelism and justice, witness and worship, faith formation and prophetic peacemaking, Anabaptist history and ethnic diversity. Consider what strengths your congregation has to share, and also where God is calling you to change and grow towards greater vitality.

6. WDC is a key link to our denomination, Mennonite Church USA, and has institutional relationships with a variety of other Mennonite-related organiza-

tions. See <http://mennowdc.org/institutional-relationships/>. Support and be involved in these organizations as partners in our witness as Anabaptist/Mennonite followers of Jesus in today’s world.

7. God has blessed WDC with numerous resources to support our mission. Give thanks for congregations and individuals who generously offer their time, prayers, skills, wisdom and financial gifts as we empower congregations to **Witness** and invite others to faith in Jesus Christ, **Dwell** in just and loving relationships and **Connect** to God’s work in the world.
—Heidi Regier Kreider

Join the ministry of WDC through your financial gift. Contributions may be made online at <http://mennowdc.org>, or sent to WDC at PO Box 306, North Newton, KS 67117. Thank you for your generosity!

82 years of Growth

The Western District Conference Resource Library started in 1936 with three bookshelves and mostly German-language materials. We now have over 12,500 books, DVDs, and



other materials (have you seen the Bible board games?) available for checkout in two locations. You can borrow resources in English or from our growing Spanish collection from our main library in North Newton, KS or Spanish-language materials geared toward church leadership from the Dallas (Texas) branch. We have also recently cataloged our first Chin-language book.

In those early days, the Education Committee of WDC envisioned a “mail-order library” allowing everyone in the conference access to materials. Our mission is still the same—we are here to serve **everyone** in the conference. Anyone who attends a WDC congregation can get a library card and borrow materials—not just pastors, leaders, or Sunday school teachers. And, like the early days, we mail books to individuals and to congregations. The library is here to serve **you**—every person in WDC. We exist as a resource to help you grow in faith. Visit our online catalog, email, or call the library to take advantage of this great resource. www.mennowdc.org/library crib@mennowdc.org or 316-283-6300.

—Jennie Wintermote, Library Director