**Church Planting Commission**

**Marv Zehr, Chair**

**Introduction**

The Church Planting Commission provides leadership and resources for church planting initiates and fosters relationships with emerging Anabaptist/Mennonite groups. The commission helps emerging groups and their leaders connect with the congregations, resources, staff and structures of Western District Conference. Commission members are: Marv Zehr (Chair), Violeta Ajquejay Suastgui, Karen Mascho, Tonya Ramer Wenger, Caleb Yoder, John Garland. The Commission works closely with Associate Conference Minister Byron Pellecer.

**Current Church Plants**

**Camino Nuevo**, Dallas, Texas, pastored by Antonio Caceros.  Unfortunately, pastor Caceros needed to resign recently due to health concerns.  Following further discernment, the Camino Nuevo Support Group determined to close the church plant on June 5, 2019, with gratitude for pastor Caceros' leadership since the church plant began in 2015, and for the support that was provided by partner congregations Luz del Evangelio, Comunidad de Esperanza, and Monte Horeb in Dallas, and Southern Hills in Topeka, KS.

**Aposento Alto, Wichita**, KS, pastored by Jamie Cazares. Jamie served for ten years as the founding pastor of Casa Betania in Newton, KS prior to becoming pastor of Aposento Alto.

**Palabra Viva, Liberal, KS** was certified as a church plant by the commission at the meeting on August 28. They have recently purchased a building in Liberal enabling them to develop more community connections. This church plant is an outgrowth of Iglesia Camino de Santidad also in Liberal.

**Camino de Santidad** is moving from being a church plant to becoming a full member of the conference during the upcoming assembly.

**The Commission** held a Church Planting Retreat in Dallas, TX July 13-15 with the theme: “Missional Communities of Peace.” The retreat included members of the commission and current and potential church planters. It is anticipated that another similar retreat will be held this fall or sometime next spring. We feel it is important that members of the commission remain in close contact with our church planters and their congregations.

The commission encourages established congregations to become involved in supporting new church plants in the district. We have identified two kinds of relationships. The first is a Sister Church relationship, a relationship of mission among two or more congregations to build intercultural and missional bridges. Congregations share information, visits and prayer support. The Sister Church relationship does not necessarily involve regular financial support of the emerging congregation.

The other relationship is a Partner Church Relationship. This relationship seeks to cross ethnic and geographic lines and to provide emotional, financial and prayer support to emerging congregations. This partnership is for three years and may be renewed indefinitely in three year increments. It includes regular sharing news stories, visits and pictures of each church in the partnership. The established church in the partnership makes a financial covenant to resource the new church development projects of WDC with a combined monthly contribution.

We are grateful that Doug and Raylene Penner, members of the Southern Hills Church in Topeka, KS have volunteered to coordinate both the Sister and Partner Church relationships. Congregations interested in establishing such a relationship with an emerging congregation are encouraged to contact either the Penners or Byron Pellecer, Associate Conference Minister.

During the past year the commission has been developing Church Planting Guidelines for our work. These guidelines include identifying potential church planting locations, identifying and calling church planters, possible models for church plants, equipping and sending church planters, and providing prayer and financial support for new congregations. The commission seeks to make an amount of $30,000 available to each church plant over a period of three years. As part of this support we seek to engage congregations throughout the district to become sister or partner congregations with these new congregations. It is our goal that within a 3-5 year period of time the new congregation will be prepared to become a member of the conference. During this time we work with the Ministerial Leadership Commission to prepare for the credentialing of the pastor and with the Executive Board to prepare the congregation for membership in the conference.

One of the struggles our church plants frequently face is the issue of immigration. In some of our congregations 50% or more of their participants are undocumented. This brings a high level of stress, instability and mobility to the congregation.

We continue to find much joy in our ministry of planting churches within our conference. We seek the prayers of the conference and congregations as we seek to be faithful to the mission to which God has called us.