



2517 N. Main • PO Box 306  
North Newton, Kansas 67117  
Tel: 316-283-6300 • Fax: 316-283-0620  
E-mail: [wdc@mennowdc.org](mailto:wdc@mennowdc.org) • web: [www.mennowdc.org](http://www.mennowdc.org)

# **WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE REPORTS**

To the One Hundred and Twenty Fourth  
Annual Session of the  
Western District Conference  
of  
Mennonite Church USA

October 30-31, 2015  
Bethel College  
North Newton, Kansas

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Staff</u>	
Conference Minister .....	1
Associate Conference Minister .....	3
Interim Director of Conference Resource Library .....	4
Conference Treasurer.....	5
Youth Ministry Network Team Leader .....	5
 <u>Executive Board, Commissions, Committees, and Task Forces</u>	
Executive Board .....	5
Gifts Discernment Committee .....	7
Discernment Task Force .....	8
Church Planting Commission .....	9
Ministerial Leadership Commission .....	10
Resource Commission .....	11
End Death Penalty Task Force.....	12
Historical Committee .....	12
Low German Task Force .....	13
*Safe Sanctuaries Task Force .....	36
Tournament Task Force .....	13
Worship & Music Task Force .....	13
Stewardship Commission .....	14
Staff Relations Committee.....	14
Trustee Task Force .....	15
 <u>Institutions/Organizations with relationships/partnerships to WDC</u>	
Camp Mennoscah .....	15
Mennonite Agri-Urban .....	16
Mennonite Central Committee Central States .....	17
Mennonite Disaster Service .....	19
Prairie View .....	20
Western District Women in Mission .....	21
 <u>Mennonite agency reports:</u>	
Mennonite Church USA .....	22
Mennonite Mission Network .....	23
Mennonite Education Agency .....	24
Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).....	26
Bethel College .....	28
Bluffton University .....	29
Goshen College.....	30
Hesston College .....	31
Everence .....	32
MennoMedia.....	34
Mennonite Health Services Alliance .....	35

*\*Report received after completion of the Report Book. Normally it will be placed with the other Resource Commission Task Force reports.)*

## **Conference Minister**

**Clarence Rempel**

(Service ending June 30, 2015)

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the fellowship of churches named Western District Conference as Conference Minister for the past six years. I began as a half-time Associate on May 1, 2009. “What energized me about this assignment is that the church is the very center of God’s redeeming, reconciling, and restoring work in the world. It is we the church who are the living presence of Christ’s saving and healing global mission.”\*

“God raised [Jesus] from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe....At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence” (Ephesians 1:20-23 The Message). It is you and your congregation who are the hands and feet and mind and heart of our resurrected Jesus Christ in the world – seeking the lost, lifting up the oppressed, healing the sick, releasing the imprisoned.\*

### **Reflections on Six Years as Conference Minister**

1. “For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end” (Psalm 48:14). I was particularly aware of God’s guidance in my work with Search Committees and with Pastors seeking a congregation. I made calls at the prompting of the Spirit and I received calls in answer to prayer all in “just-in-time” delivery that left me with goose bumps of gratitude. It happened often.
2. I have participated in 27 pastor farewells, 39 pastor installations, 19 pastor licensings, and 19 pastor ordinations.
3. I am delighted with the pastors recruited and called during these six years. We have gifted, skilled, heart-for-the-kingdom-of-God pastors, and I am grateful. I can think of at least three pastors who gave me a firm “not interested” to begin with and are now among our fruitful pastors in WDC.
4. I have been an advocate for church planting. In 2011 we planned a church planting catalyst event for Oklahoma City with Wilbert R. Shenk and Conrad Kanagy. Out of the forty that participated one was called to become a church planter and others became a part of a Church Planting Task Force. In 2014 the delegate body took it one more step and created a Church Planting Commission. Instead of the Conference planting churches, the new paradigm is “churches planting churches” with the Conference providing resourcing and networking.
5. God gifted us with two already functioning new churches – Iglesia Camino de Santidad in Liberal, KS (50-70 in worship) and Chin Emmanuel Church in Houston, TX (125-150 in worship). Camino de Santidad had a wonderful farewell Mexican dinner for me on April 26, and I had the opportunity to preach at Chin Emmanuel on May 3. In conventional wisdom, we need to plant two new churches per year for the long term stability of Western District Conference. Our motivation, however, is not survival. Jesus’ final instruction was to make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them and teaching them to follow Jesus’ instructions.
6. I am grateful for the many who have helped Western District Conference in navigating the human sexuality conundrum. My work has been to encourage open and clear communication, patience and forbearance. “Why do you judge your brother or sister? ...We will all give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another...Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification...Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 14:1-15:13). I am grateful for the work of the Human Sexuality Discernment Task Force, the Discernment Task Force, the Executive Board, and the Ministerial Leadership Commission who have carried the load in the course of the past six years.

7. Mennonite Church USA is in the midst of ongoing ethical, theological, and relational realignments, and so are we. I am saddened that it was on my watch that ten churches withdrew from Western District Conference beginning with First Mennonite Church, Pretty Prairie, and ending with First Mennonite Church, Clinton, OK (awaiting final notice). The WDC leavings were triggered by the perception that WDC was not upholding the biblical description of marriage as one man and one woman committed in lifelong union.
8. I believe that for the foreseeable future WDC has the capacity to support three full- time ministerial staff. We have reduced staffing by 1.50 FTE during my time. We eliminated the half-time Associate Conference Minister, Conference Youth Pastor, Oklahoma Associate Conference Minister, and reduced the Business Manager by quarter time.
9. Creative innovation has been a part of new staffing arrangements by which we have provided nearly the same level of services to our churches with less staff.
  - a. We created a new paradigm of staffing in support of youth pastors and youth ministry called the Youth Ministry Network, a shared program with South Central Conference. Dwight Regier serves as the Youth Ministry Network Director at 10% of full time. He coordinates monthly youth pastor resourcing lunches and meets in one-on-one mentoring with pastors with a youth ministry portfolio.
  - b. We have a volunteer, John Good, who serves as the manager and Mr. Fix It for 2500 Place. This was part of the Business Manager's job description.
  - c. Laurie Oswald Robinson has served as writer for our newsletter, some in exchange for office space for a period of time.
  - d. We have used Schowalter Grants to provide coaching for new pastors and for churches engaged in visioning or dealing with crisis.
10. We upgraded our communications systems in order to sync up with digital/print developments. We developed a new website that increasingly has become the place to go for WDC information. Marlene Bogard opened a Facebook page that Nancy Funk now updates weekly. We redesigned our newsletter as a glossy bi-monthly publication, The Garden. SPROUTS is our weekly Tuesday communication with churches and pastors. SEEDS is our Wednesday release of something new and good happening in our churches. All the staff creatively participated in brainstorming and implementing these changes.
11. We released Camp Mennoscah to become its own 501(c)3 entity. We blessed them with \$617,000 in improvements capped off with an additional \$250,000 swimming pool drive that completed our Vision 2012 Capital Campaign. We continued support with a decreasing annual subsidy beginning at \$10,000. We continue to carry communications for the camp in SPROUTS and The Garden. Camp seems to be thriving with increased enrollments, a significant addition of staff, and capital and program improvements. They have assembled a board with expertise and are far more nimble in making decisions and moving ahead. Campers and congregations barely noticed the change. It was a huge change internally in WDC organization and ministry identity.
12. In my interview for Executive Conference Minister, I named three essential tasks that shape the ministry of the area conference. This is different from what the national body does and what the congregation does. The core tasks are:
  - Sustaining transformational pastors
  - Resourcing healthy, missional churches
  - Networking Anabaptist church planting partnerships
 I commend this paradigm to the Conference for its future work. It could serve as a framework for reimagining staffing for WDC.
13. I am grateful for the exceptional staff I inherited. A special thanks to the behind-the-scenes work of Phyllis Regier and Nancy Funk who will provide a bridge of stability in all the staff transitions. I am



grateful for all the Board, Commission, Committee and Task Force members with whom I worked. A special thank you goes to the three Moderators during my tenure – Doug Penner, Diana Schunn and Richard Gehring.

14. I completed a farewell tour of Oklahoma and Western Kansas – one thousand miles with seven churches, April 24-27. I completed a Texas farewell trip – 1,850 miles with the Hispanic Pastors Retreat and two churches, May 2 – May 5. I met with four Pastor Peer Groups and fourteen pastors in March - April. These were leaving goals I wrote out during my retreat at the beginning of February 2015.
15. My ongoing prayer for Western District Conference has come from Philippians 1:9-11. “May our love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.”

\*Excerpts from my commissioning on July 11, 2010.

**Associate Conference Minister  
Howard Garver (Jan-Aug 2015)**

It is an odd sensation as I write this report to the Assembly, realizing that I began my role after the last gathering in 2014 and will conclude before the delegates assemble in 2015! As I began my work with the Conference, I did not expect that my time would be so brief. It now appears (as best I can discern) that my role was to bridge from the retirement of Gilberto Flores to the transition to new Conference staff, in effect an “unintentional interim”.

It has been my privilege to work with other Conference Staff and gotten to know quite a few across the Conference in the various roles I have had. In such a short time, I have grown to appreciate the deep commitment to the Conference, the work of the local church and a desire for unity. During the shifts in leadership that mark this year, these are the qualities that give me hope as I think of WDC’s future.

**Texas Congregations**

There are currently 12 established congregations in Texas, extending from Dallas to the north, to San Antonio in the south and Houston in the east. What I have enjoyed most as I have gotten to know these churches and their leaders is the diversity of culture and vision. What they have in common is a warmth found in community and devotion to making an impact in their communities, closely held Anabaptist values.

I want to recognize the service of several pastoral leaders who transitioned over the past year. Antonio Caceres concluded his service at Monte Horeb earlier this year as did Rachel Epp Miller at San Antonio this spring. These congregations, respectively, deeply appreciated the spirit with which both Antonio and Rachel served among them.

The Houston Mennonite Church is now in the midst of its long-anticipated campus development project. Not too far away, Chin Emmanuel is actively looking to purchase its first permanent facility. These are exciting chapters in these congregational stories and a specific way those in the Conference can pray for them.

**Church Planting Commission**

I want to recognize the devotion of the members of this Commission. Marvin Zehr chairs a very capable and passionate team of Violeta Ajquejay, Nita Nikkel, Virgil Penner and Lee Suderman (in addition to Lici Roth, who served until recently). As a new commission much of the focus has been on providing support to the existing church planting projects and lay the foundation for church planting in the future. This team committed to monthly meetings for a 6-month period – which reflects their level of commitment.

Aposento Alto has developed as a community-based, network of 'house church' groups in the north Wichita area. Byron and Hilda Pellecer are energetic and passionate about the work. Camino de Santidad (Liberal, KS) is at the point of being recognized as an established church, under the capable leadership of Moises and Teresa Romero. A personal highlight from the past few months was celebrating with them the baptism of 12 people! Grace (Gladewater, TX) has had a very positive impact on its community and seen evidence of changed lives. Karen and Steve Mascho are unsure of their future plans and the future of the project. Please join the Commission in praying for these church planters and the groups they lead!

### **Hispanic Ministries**

I am grateful for the work of Sandra Martinez as she relates to the Spanish-speaking congregations as well as represents WDC on the IMH (Iglesia Mennonita Hispana) General Board. We have jointly hosted a retreat and several fellowship meetings. I am pleased to report a great spirit of fellowship and cooperation among the 9 congregations/church plants.

### **Western District Conference Resource Library Jeanette Roberts, Interim Library Director**

The Conference Resource Library is an important center for Anabaptist Christian resourcing for all ages. In 2014, we added 311 new resources, over half of them in Biblical studies and Christian living. These additional books and DVD's provide significant and timely resources to address pertinent topics throughout the year.

**Most Popular:** Bible studies (print and DVD) as well as peace and justice resources remain in demand; other growing areas include small group resources (print and DVD); Christian formation and devotional life; children's literature, particularly for children's stories during worship services; biographies; and youth ministry.

**Book a Box!** Do you want to expand your library budget without additional money? Many congregations are finding that long-term loans of resources are a great way to offer more in their own church libraries. We can tailor a Box of Books to fit the needs of your congregation. We are happy to select 25 resources and send them to you for a two-month (negotiable) loan. Are you doing a series on a particular book of the Bible or on a particular issue? A box can be tailored for a specific need as well. All you have to do is ask!

**Do DVD's –** We have over 500 available for personal or small group viewing and study. To see the list, go to [mennowdc.org/library/catalog/](http://mennowdc.org/library/catalog/) Click Visual, then Materials by Type, then DVD.

**Surf the Web:** Our library catalog provides an overview of our 12,000 resources. If you have a library card, you can reserve, renew or make your own book lists online.

**Story Hour:** Preschool story hours are offered in fall, winter and spring. Ages 3-8 are included for the summer story hour program. This outreach highlights our exceptional children's department with many titles that reinforce our faith.

**There's an App for That:** Remember – an APP for your smart phone (Apple or Android) or tablet is available for the Conference Resource Library Catalog.

- 1) Go to the App Store (iDevices) or go to the Play Store (Android) and search for the 'Atrium on the go' application.
- 2) Download the App and add this information in appropriate spaces:  
Server: [mennowdc.booksys.net](http://mennowdc.booksys.net)  
Port: 80 (this can also be left blank as it defaults to 80)  
Library: crl

**Suggestions:** We welcome ideas about resource topics that would help achieve our mission!

I look forward to visiting with you and assisting you with your resourcing needs. Stop in at 2517 N. Main Street, North Newton, KS. If you are at a distance, you can call or email me! 316-283-6300 / [crilib@mennowdc.org](mailto:crilib@mennowdc.org)

### **Conference Treasurer**

**Phyllis Regier**

This report will be posted online after the annual audit is completed. See <http://mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/>.

### **WDC/SCC Youth Ministry**

**Dwight Regier, Network Team Leader**

The current model for conference youth ministry for Western District and South Central Conferences is now completing its third year. This model has two main components:

1. Network Team Leader
  - a. Meet individually with youth pastors for consultation, resourcing, pastoral care, and prayer
  - b. Lead monthly lunches for youth pastors for sharing, input, and discussion
  - c. Seek vision and coordinate with the WDC/SCC Youth Ministry Committee
2. WDC/SCC Youth Ministry Committee
  - a. Lead the planning of two high school and one junior high conference-wide events each year
  - b. Support smaller events envisioned and planned by youth pastors within the conferences

As Network Team Leader, I have the privilege of hearing where God is at work in the ministry of our youth pastors. I get to be in on conversations about discerning God's vision for their youth and youth groups. I am continually challenged and encouraged by the commitment and dedication of these leaders: their love of God; their commitment to Jesus Christ and his church; their compassion for youth and their desire to see these youth become dedicated followers of Jesus. I am also privileged to meet with the youth pastors as a group for lunch on a monthly basis. I love the way that the ideas and energy grow and grow when you get that many youth pastors together.

The WDC/SCC Youth Ministry Committee is made up of youth pastors and others who volunteer to help conference-wide events happen (Isaac Landis (Whitestone), chair; Hope Greiser Graber (Alexanderwohl), Peter Wintermote (FMC Newton), and Clayton Gladish (Hesston Mennonite)). This past year the committee led the Know Jesus event in January and coordinated with Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp for Snow Camps in February and March for senior high youth.

Please keep our conference youth in your prayers as they seek to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And pray too for the folks who are walking with these youth and helping them see the signs of God's Kingdom along the way.

### **Western District Conference Executive Board**

**Wendy Funk Schrag, Board Secretary**

The WDC Executive Board meets six times a year. At each meeting, the Board reviews financial reports, reports from WDC Commissions and Committees, staff and conference minister reports. The Executive Board also makes recommendations to the Gifts Discernment Committee for nominations and appointments to the Board, Commissions and Committees. The Executive Committee meets six times a year prior to each Executive Board meeting. Additional highlights of the year's meetings are as follows:

#### September 2014:

- Reviewed Annual Assembly which was held in Waxahachie, TX and decided to delay Annual Assembly in 2015 until the fall in order to have enough time to process the Rainbow Mennonite Church resolution and any major decisions at MC USA in Kansas City in July 2015.

- Jim Schrag provided a summary of the WDC survey and work of the Discernment Task Force. While there is significant polarization (50/40%) in the question about marriage being a covenant between one man and one woman for life, there is strong support (80%) for congregational and conference decision making with a desire to be part of the larger denomination.
- The board spent time planning for the Fall Reference Council. Themes emerged as follows: to provide results of the survey; education and history of current church documents and conversations on the topics of polity and controversial issues, such as sexuality; to identify ways to move forward as a conference and fellowship of churches; and to prepare delegates on key issues related to MC USA Convention and WDC Annual Assembly.
- Clarence provided an update on the search for a new Associate Conference Minister. Clarence will not be serving another term past June 30, 2015. Plans will be made to appoint a search committee for Conference Minister.

#### November 2014:

- New Board members were welcomed: Wayne Albrecht, Norma Duerksen, Anita Kehr, and Kristen Swartley.
- The Fall Reference Council meeting held earlier that month was reviewed and ideas were developed for the Spring Reference Council.
- Clarence provided a report from the recent Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) meeting noting there was a sadness and resignation that we are at an impasse and things could dramatically change for MC USA.
- WDC and South Central Conference secured a joint \$50,000 leadership grant.
- The Board approved Clarence's recommendation of Howard Garver as the new Associate Conference Minister.
- Board members were chosen to be appointed to the Conference Minister search committee.

#### January 2015

- Marlene Bogard provided an overview of the Leadership Transformation Grant and discussed how the grant's focus on adaptive leadership can apply to various issues, challenges, and development currently happening in WDC churches.
- Marlene provided an update on the Anabaptist Faith Formation kick-off planned for June. Since Marlene will no longer be with WDC at that time, Katherine Goerzen will be providing leadership to the event.
- The Board expressed appreciation to Gilberto Flores and Marlene Bogard for their years of service with WDC.
- The Board approved a recommendation brought from the Resource Commission to move \$88,450 to an endowment with the Mennonite Foundation and use 5% of the funds on an annual basis, which is approximately \$4,000 yearly.
- Significant time was spent planning for the Spring Reference Council to be held April 11, 2015 at Hope Mennonite Church in Wichita.
- Richard Gehring, moderator, sent a letter on behalf of WDC to MC USA to keep them updated with our WDC process in our year of discernment of the Rainbow Mennonite Church resolution.
- Gilberto presented some ideas for future collaboration and networking with Central American churches.
- The Board approved delegates for MC USA Convention to be held in July in Kansas City.
- Sondra Koontz, chair of the Conference Minister search committee, reported on the committee's work so far. The Board approved some recommended changes to the Conference Minister job description.
- The Board met in executive session to discuss future staffing needs.

#### March 2015

- The Board did some final planning for the Spring Reference Council to be held April 11.
- Approval was provided to Clarence to secure someone to plan Annual Assembly and be provided a stipend.

- A report was provided to the Board from the Conference Minister search committee.
- A resolutions committee for Annual Assembly 2015 was appointed.
- Nineteen scholarships have been approved out of a total of 34 available for the Leadership Transformation grant. Two scholarships are church teams, and the others are all pastors.
- A date was set for Clarence's farewell reception.

#### May 2015

- The Spring Reference Council held April 11 was reviewed.
- The Board discussed their understandings of the resolutions for MC USA Convention. An email was sent following the Board meeting to WDC delegates making them aware of the devotional guide, the preparation webinars, getting contact information from them and the funding assistance available through WDC if requested.
- Heidi Regier Kreider was recommended by the search committee as the new Conference Minister. The Board approved the recommendation after meeting with Heidi.
- Clarence provided a summary report from his tenure as Conference Minister.
- Clarence informed the Board that Howard Garver is considering resigning his position as Associate Conference Minister.
- The Board discussed interim coverage and arrangements for the time between Clarence's ending and Heidi's beginning.
- The Board approved some changes to the Personnel Policy upon recommendation from the Staff Relations Committee.

#### July 2015

- Board members reflected on MC USA Convention held earlier that month.
- Board members planned for Annual Assembly to be held Oct. 30-31 at Bethel College in North Newton.
- The MC USA Convention reflections and ideas for Annual Assembly will be shared with the Discernment Task Force.
- The Board reviewed some changes to the WDC by-laws which will be brought to delegates at the Annual Assembly.
- The memo of understanding was approved for Heidi Regier Kreider.
- Future staffing needs were discussed.

### **Gifts Discernment Committee**

#### **Brian Stucky, Chair**

Beginning in January the Gifts Discernment Committee began preparing for the 2015 Annual Assembly. The Committee again requested pastors and congregational chairpersons from each of our Western District Congregations to provide names of individuals from their congregations for certain positions who they felt would feel a calling to serve on a board or commission of the conference. A number of names were forwarded from which to work and very much facilitated the work of the Committee.

The Gifts Discernment Committee, on behalf of the conference, wishes to thank those, when called, to have their name placed on the ballot for a second term as well as those who have agreed to have their name placed on the ballot for an initial first term. The Committee, as in the past, strives to prepare the ballot so that the board and commissions will have diversity in gender, age, ethnicity, as well as representation from a cross section of congregations and the conference's geographical area.

The Gifts Discernment Committee would like to thank Conference Minister Clarence Rempel for his guidance and wisdom in the discernment process these past years.

Committee members: Brian Stucky, chair, Eric Buller Secretary, Jane McNair, Susan Jantzen, Roberta Harms, Phyllis Goertzen, and Clarence Rempel, staff.



## **Discernment Task Force**

### **Jim Schrag, Chair**

Appointed by the Executive Board to assist them in evaluation of a resolution from Rainbow Mennonite Church in February, 2014, the Task Force has met six times from June, 2014 to July, 2015. Most of these meetings were joint meetings with the Board Executive Committee. The Task Force assisted the Executive Board in the preparation of the discussion agenda of the WDC Reference Council which met in November, 2014 and again in April, 2015.

Members of the Task Force were Jim Schrag, Newton, Kans., Chair, Bill Zuercher, Hesston, Kans., Secretary, Clarence Rempel, Newton, Kans., Conf. Minister, Kent Moore, Kansas City, Kans., Brett Klingenberg, Beatrice, Neb., Lee Lever, Austin, Tex., Sandra Martinez, Dallas, Tex., and Diana Schunn, Whitewater, Kans. Executive Committee members were Richard Gehring, Moderator, Anita Kehr, Moderator Elect, Wendy Funk Schrag, Secretary, and Clarence Rempel, Conf. Minister.

The issue facing the Executive Board and Task Force in the resolution from Rainbow Mennonite, if approved, is that it would essentially reinterpret agreements made in the Mennonite Church USA's Membership Guidelines at the formation of MC USA in 2001 which disallowed pastors from conducting same-sex covenant ceremonies. The Rainbow Church's resolution, if approved, would ensure that a pastor's credentials would not be put in jeopardy just because he or she provided this ministerial function.

At the July, 2014 delegate session, the Task Force outlined its plan of inquiry. This entailed two major steps—first, an inquiry into the understanding and practice of congregationalism based upon an every-member on-line survey; and second, an evaluation of the Rainbow Church resolution, using the context of the polity study conducted in the first step. Later, it was determined to postpone the 2015 delegate session from July, 2015 to October, 2015 in order to add the findings of discernment and action taken by the Mennonite Church USA delegate body in July, 2015.

The on-line survey spanned two months, from late July to early September, 2014. Almost 1,700 persons responded to 20 statements, resulting in about 500 pages of numerical data and expression of opinion. A report of the responses is not presented here; it has been presented elsewhere. In sum, the data showed a strong and often equal division of opinion on matters relating to same-sex relationships, pastors performing same-sex covenant ceremonies, and in views of the validity of the Mennonite Church USA's *Confession of Faith* statements on marriage and family. A significant majority of responses indicated a wish to continue the practice of congregationalism as well as expressing that they valued continuing relationships with other Mennonite Church USA conferences.

A comprehensive report of the survey results was presented to the Reference Council in November, 2014. A report was also presented to attendees which outlined some advantages and challenges inherent in congregationalism. The attendees were asked to express their preferences for the shape and scope of the practice of congregationalism that seemed best to them. A majority expressed preference for a both/and combination of congregational autonomy which would also be accompanied by significant relationships of mutuality with other congregations in the WDC.

The Reference Council meeting in April, 2015 focused on the content of the Rainbow resolution and polled the reactions of attendees on how passage of the resolution would affect their congregation, solicited questions they had before making a decision, and other similar issues. Attendees also gave input on the required majority needed to pass the resolution.

Finally, the Task Force met following the Mennonite Church USA delegate assembly in early July, 2015. They took note of the passage of both a resolution requesting "forbearance" in our current controversies about same-sex relationships, and a resolution that keeps the MC USA Membership Guidelines without change for another four years.



In their role of advising the Executive Board, the Task Force recommended the presentation of the Rainbow Church resolution to WDC delegates in October, 2015, requiring a simple majority for passage (with one opposing vote, and one abstention.) They also discussed statements of clarification that might be presented to delegates to address both the process and polity implications of the resolution, including an explanation to delegates of the function and authority of the Ministerial Leadership Commission.

As of its July, 2015 meeting, the Task Force understands their role to have been completed. The Executive Board's discretion will determine how the Rainbow Church resolution will be presented to delegates in October, 2015.

## **Church Planting Commission** **Marvin Zehr, Chair**

### **Introduction**

This is the first annual report of the newly formed Church Planting Commission. The commission was formed with a constitutional change approved by the delegate body of Western District Conference on July 5, 2014. Members of the commission were also elected at that time.

For the first six months of the year we worked with the leadership of Gilberto Flores until his retirement in March. Howard Garver was called as Associate Conference Minister and served in this role until August.

### **Church Planting Workshop**

A "Church Planting Dreamers Advance" was sponsored by our commission on December 13 at the Cross Wind Conference Center in Hesston, KS with Chet Miller-Eshleman as resource person. Chet is Church Planter and Pastor of LifeBridge Community Church in Dover, OH. The focus of this retreat was to provide support and inspiration for church planters, sponsor churches, prospective church planters, congregational mission or outreach committee members and support committee members. This event was especially appreciated by those serving as church planters in our conference.

### **Partnership Relationships**

Under the leadership of Howard Garver the commission developed and approved new guidelines for sponsoring and sister church relationships. Three documents are now in place to guide these relationships: 1) "Barnabas-Lydia Partnerships" for sponsoring churches and new church plants. This relationship continues until the time the church plant is firmly established, projected to be three years. 2) "Antioch Partnership" for sister church relationships for churches that are established and wish to partner as established congregations. 3) "Guiding Principles" which details the oversight team, spiritual oversight/accountability and financial implications of the Barnabas-Lydia Partnership. These documents will be especially helpful as relationships move from church planting partnerships to sister congregation relationships within the conference. A special task force has been appointed to assist in the establishment and oversight of the Antioch Partnership relationships.

### **Commission Retreat**

Two evenings, April 13-14, were set aside for a special retreat for members of the commission to devote an extended period of time to identify and develop a vision for church planting in the conference. Howard Garver provided leadership for this retreat. We shared from resources each of us had read seeking to bring together a number of perspectives and approaches to church planting. This was an important time for the fostering of relationships within our commission. During this retreat an interest was identified to establish an endowment fund for the development of new church plants. This will continue to be pursued in the coming year.

### **Current Church Plants**

**Aposento Alto**, Wichita, KS continues under the leadership of Byron Pellecer as church planter. The church is sponsored by Lorraine Ave., Hope, and Church of the Servant with subsidy from our commission. The congregation is at the mid-point of the three year plan.

**Camino de Santidad**, Liberal, KS is under the leadership of Moises Romero and meets in the Calvary Mennonite Church building. This spring they shared the joy of 12 persons being baptized. Brad Roth, pastor at West Zion Church in Moundridge, KS is serving as mentor for Moises. The Grace church plant in Gladewater, TX under the leadership of Karen Mascho is under review. Since Karen has been in CPE training the group is not having regular meetings.

Contacts are being nurtured with the possibility of a new church plant in Omaha, NE. Also the commission is currently in the process of exploring a new church plant in East Dallas, TX with Antonio Caceros as church planter. It is anticipated that this plant would begin in the fall with Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb as a Barnabas-Lydia Partnership congregation along with support from our commission. Other congregations in the conference will also be invited into this partnership.

### **Missional Essentials Study Guide**

Among the resources explored for our work was a study guide, "Missional Essentials for Cultivating a Missional Life." This is a 12 session guide for individuals, groups and congregations leading to practical action steps for mobilizing a faith community. We have identified several congregations that have agreed to use this study guide during the fall months of this year. We plan to meet with representatives from these congregations to learn from their experience. If these congregations have a positive experience with this study, we hope to expand this in the fall of 2016 to invite all congregations in the conference to share in this study. Out of these we anticipate that individuals and congregations will catch the vision to become more directly involved in the planting of new churches. This would represent a major shift in church planting in Western District, **moving from the conference planting churches to churches planting churches**. This we see as the wave of the future in church planting. Brad Brisco, co-author of this study guide, will lead a workshop at our assembly in October to introduce this study and provide input on church planting.

### **Inside the Commission**

For the first six months of the year we worked with the leadership of Gilberto Flores until his retirement in March. We appreciate the many gifts and passion that he brought to his task and the beginning of our work as a commission. Howard Garver was called as Associate Conference Minister and served in this role until August. We found Howard's experience and vision to be an important part of our work together. We were disappointed to learn of his decision to not continue in this role. We look forward with anticipation to the appointment of a replacement in the near future. In recent months we also accepted the resignation of Lici Roth as a member of the commission due to her desire to devote more time to relationships within her church and community. We are pleased that Veronica Robles, a member of Luz del Evangelio in Dallas, TX, has agreed to have her name on the ballot as a new member of our commission.

Marvin Zehr, Chair: Violeta Ajquejay, Nita Nikkel, Virgil Penner, and Lee Suderman

### **Ministerial Leadership Commission**

**Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Chair**

The Ministerial Leadership Commission's main responsibility is credentialing and resourcing persons for ministry.

During the past year the Commission had the joy of interviewing a number of persons for credentialing (in chronological order):

### **Ordination**

- Simon Tlumang, Chin Emmanuel Church, Houston, TX
- Phil Schmidt, Tabor Mennonite Church, Newton, KS
- Nathan Koontz, First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, KS
- Laura (Neufeld) Goerzen, First Mennonite Church of Christian, Moundridge, KS

- Elizabeth Raid, Chaplain, Mennonite Friendship Communities; ordination request from Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS
- Nadine Friesen, Chaplain, Showalter Villa; ordination request from First Mennonite Church, Hillsboro, KS
- Rosie Jantz, Tabor Mennonite, Newton, KS

#### **License toward Ordination**

- John Tyson, Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS
- Jaime Cazares, Iglesia Mennonita Casa Betania, Newton, KS

#### **License for Specific Ministry**

- Isabel Hernandez, Iglesia Mennonita Casa de Dios, Garland, TX
- Jesus Natividad Hernandez, Iglesia Mennonita Casa de Dios, Garland, TX

#### **Pastoral Resourcing Opportunity**

- **Pastors' Day Apart:** J Denny Weaver, "Nonviolent God," October 30, 2014

**Church Planting Taskforce became Church Planting Commission** in the past year with the delegates' approval at the Western District Conference Assembly July 2014. Therefore, this commission no longer has the privilege and responsibility to encourage and coordinate missional work. We are grateful that the Church Planting Commission will have adequate time and energy to dream and plan for expanded missional endeavors.

**Commission Name Change:** Delegates voted to change the name of this commission at Assembly. We were Leadership Commission. Now we are known as Ministerial Leadership Commission.

**Commission members:** Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Renee Kanagy, Lee Lever, Terry Rediger, Weldon Schloneger, June Thomsen and Brad Roth (finishing Renee Kanagy's unexpired term).

### **Resource Commission**

#### **Jeff Koller, Chair**

The Resource Commission continues to follow the direction given in our mission statement. We are to "Empower WDC congregations as they witness to Jesus Christ in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition, connect with God's mission in the world, and provide faith formation resources for all ages."

2015 has been a year of change for us. We said goodbye to Marlene Bogard as Minister of Christian Formation, and Resource Library Director. Marlene served WDC for 25 years with passion, insight, and integrity. She kept the Conference Resource Library current in both collections and technology and leaves it in a solid position to pass to her replacement. She will be missed in her role in the organizing of our annual conference events, and we deeply appreciate the thoughtful work and long hours she invested to accomplish this huge task! With the retirement of Conference Pastor Clarence Rempel, we needed to wait until Heidi Regier Kreider began her duties as Conference Pastor to make hiring and staffing decisions for Marlene's replacement.

We are fortunate to have Jeanette Roberts working as librarian on a part-time basis in the Resource Library. She has kept the Facebook page current (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/553219161360258/>) with entries that offer a continuous feed of new ideas and additions to the Library.

This past year saw the completion of the "Year of the Bible" at the conference level. We are pleased that there are a number of congregations doing their YOB this year. The Resource Commission hosted an Anabaptist Faith Formation Launch June 12-13 at Bethel College. Faith Formation experts, including keynote speakers Rachel Miller Jacobs, Andy Brubacher Kaethler, Shana Peachey Boshart, and Rachel S. Gerber, along with 13 breakout session leaders, presented on a wide variety of topics. The event was well attended with around 100 attendees. We funded scholarships for people who participated in an AMBS-

Kansas Center hosted short course on the Sermon on the Mount. This course was taught by Jerry Truex and met June 1, 8, 15, and 22 at Hesston Mennonite Church.

In addition to the Year of the Bible efforts, the commission received and granted requests for extensions of several of the task forces and committees who we oversee.

We are also working on discernment for use of funds allocated to our commission as we go forward. We had a trust fund CD mature, and invested the funds in an endowment account through Everance. This endowment will ensure a steady income for many years going forward. We reviewed other Task Force funds that have been inactive and closed accounts and reallocated remaining funds to appropriate active accounts. We endeavor to utilize funds in a way that will serve to deepen the faith of the people who use the many resources of the Western District Conference and Resource Library.

The current Resource Commission members are: Katherine Goerzen (Grace Hill, Newton); Vicki Hinz-Ensz (First Mennonite, Beatrice); Gordon Houser (New Creation, Newton); Ryan Koehn (First Mennonite, Newton); Jeff Koller (Eden Mennonite, Moundridge); and Jennie Wintermote (New Creation, Newton).

### **End the Death Penalty Task Force**

#### **Peter Goerzen**

The WDC End the Death Penalty Task Force expresses gratitude and congratulations to our Nebraska members for supporting a successful campaign to end the death penalty in Nebraska this year! The task force provided support to the Nebraska Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

The task force also worked closely with the Kansas Coalition Against the Death Penalty (KCADP), encouraging congregations to write letters in support of death penalty repeal in the Kansas Legislature (championed by Steven Becker of Buhler Mennonite Church). KCADP received over 380 letters from Mennonite congregations (an increase over last year's similar effort), which they distributed to legislators. Congregations in and near Topeka provided vital personal presence at the statehouse. While the bill did not get a hearing in committee this year, Rep. Becker and our KCADP partners are hopeful for a hearing and successful effort next year. Task force members and conference staff worked at publicity in Mennonite World Review, WDC communications, and several newspapers, as well as in a press conference in Topeka of Kansas faith leaders in support of abolishing the death penalty.

The task force is grateful for the persistent work and witness of WDC members in Oklahoma and Texas as well, and looks forward to the day when the death penalty will be completely abolished.

Thanks to all who participated in efforts to repeal the death penalty and raise awareness in each state. We will renew our efforts again this year, as we witness to the peacemaking, enemy-love, transformation, grace, and mercy of Christ.

Task Force Members: Stan Bohn, Duane Friesen, Peter Goerzen, Tim Huber, Jim Juhnke, Jeff Koller, Eric Massanari, Miles Reimer, John Tyson

### **Historical Committee**

#### **Roger Juhnke**

The WDC Historical Committee has been inactive this past year.

### **Low German Mennonites from Mexico Support Task Force**

#### **Margaret Goering, Chair**

Low German Mennonites from Mexico Task Force Members: Margaret Goering, chair, Harold D. Thieszen, vice-chair, Milton Claassen, secretary, Lottie Boschmann, Lillian Quiring, Carola Ratzlaff, and Lici Roth.

This is a partnership with Western District Conference (WDC), which supplies the task force members to monitor and advocate healthy eating and living for Low German Mennonites in partnership with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), which supplies vouchers for direct medical and dental services supported through bi-lingual case managers and health promoters. All funding for the work of this task force is from KDHE grants.

This year a Health Assessment Survey was conducted by phone to assess the needs of the Low German and Hispanic farm workers. Lici Roth conducted 404 Spanish surveys and Elizabeth Harder Schrock conducted 94 Low German surveys. The plan is to add behavioral health and mental health services to what is already provided.

Harold Thieszen represents the Task Force on the Kansas Statewide Farmworker Health Program Advisory Council.

### **Tournament Task Force**

#### **Lynn Eichelberger**

The WDC Annual Basketball Tournament was held on March 19-21 at Bethel College. Nine teams participated this year: Alexanderwohl, Whitestone, Grace Hill/Zion, **Eden (Division I Champions)**, Hoffnungsau, Tabor-Goessel, **Zion/Grace Hill (Division II Champions)**, Journey-Yoder, Bethel College. All went well and thank you again to Bethel College for letting us use their gyms again this year. This was my last year to run the tournament. Coaching high school baseball in the spring just has caused too many conflicts.

### **Worship and Music Task Force**

#### **Kay Schroeder, Chair**

Task Force Members: Carol Klingenberg, Steven Miller, Holly Swartzendruber, Kay Schroeder, chair.

We planned a children's choir festival in the spring of 2015 with Jennifer Potochnik and the Newton Community Children's Choir. Many churches no longer have children's choirs; so the event was cancelled due to lack of participation.

We sponsored a workshop led by Ken Rodgers at the Anabaptist Faith Formation conference in June.

We worked in the WDC Music Library and processed donated choir music.

On September 26 we will have a Choir Director's Round Table event with area church choir directors. We will include music for the Christmas season.

Because of the importance of worship and music in the life of the church, we are excited and grateful for the opportunity to continue as a task force and will work on projects that resource and encourage growth in the areas of worship and particularly music in our churches.



## **Stewardship Commission**

### **Stan Voth, Chairperson**

We thank the following Stewardship Commission members for their dedicated service to the Western District Conference: Stan Voth (chairperson), Karen Zehr (secretary), Jim Yoder (Trustee Task Force liaison), Stephen Hochstetler (Staff Relations Committee liaison), Leanna Ediger, and Dwight Flaming. Phyllis Regier (Business Manager) and Clarence Rempel (Conference Minister) provide invaluable staff representation and support to the commission. This year, with Clarence's retirement, we extend special thanks to him for his enthusiastic leadership and dedicated service to the conference. We look forward to working together with Heidi Regier Krieder, the new Conference Minister, on WDC stewardship commission considerations.

With major changes to Leadership and Executive Boards' staffing, the Stewardship Commission final budget preparation work for budget year 2016 was postponed from April until September. This coincides with the WDC Annual Assembly to be held October 2015. This budget year we are very grateful that income exceeded expenses. The following initiatives and activities contributed positively to this year's budget status:

- 1) Implementation of efficiency practices by dedicated WDC staff operating programs and managing facilities and property,
- 2) Excellent response to the fund drive request letters mailed out twice a year,
- 3) Generous support for church plants,
- 4) Culmination of the Year of The Bible program broadly implemented by WDC churches and adopted conference-wide by MCUSA,
- 5) Intensive and effective constituent communication in the form of "Seeds", "Sprouts", and "Garden" publications,
- 6) Implementation of generosity practices to foster a conference culture of generosity, including a collaborative WDC/MCUSA Treasurer Handbook. It is available on the WDC website to facilitate the treasurers' work in each of the WDC constituent congregations.

Next year's budget will include some of the following considerations:

- 1) Supporting and building on a very loyal, faithful, and generous foundation of WDC member congregations,
- 2) Staff changes to Leadership and Executive Board staff,
- 3) Increased support for the maintenance and utilities of the WDC office building in North Newton, 2500 Place,
- 4) Implementation of social media stewardship techniques to reach out to younger generations and increase their participation.
- 5) Ongoing emphasis on church plants.

The commission is very grateful for the financial and spiritual support from our constituents. We look forward to meeting the challenges, and providing the WDC with resources to help spread the good news of God working among us.

## **Staff Relations Committee**

### **Sondra Bandy Koontz, Chairperson**

The Staff Relations Committee meets quarterly with the conference pastor. Committee members receive the conference pastor's report, and discuss the joys, concerns, and issues facing the conference. Committee members provide support and a sounding board for the conference pastor.

Committee members receive reports on individual staff and volunteers and their areas of work. This year, at the request of the WD Board, committee members addressed issues and language of the WD's sixty day retirement and resignation policy. After research, in order to maintain consistency in the denomination and the conference, the Staff Relations Committee recommended a ninety day retirement and resignation notice for WD Conference pastor and WD staff. The WD Board approved this recommendation.



The chair of the Staff Relations Committee chaired the WD Conference pastor search committee, and consulted with the WD Board on the job description and memo of understanding for the new conference pastor.

Staff Relations Committee Members: Sondra Bandy Koontz, Christy Schunn-Sebes, Janice Good, Stephen Hochstetler

**Trustee Task Force**  
**Phyllis Regier, Staff**

The Trustees Task Force was formed to review loan applications for the Revolving Loan Fund, make recommendations as to the acceptance of property or disposal of property, evaluate and enter into legal contracts (real property) and to supervise and manage Conference property. As of January 31, 2015, the Revolving Loan Fund had four loans receivable totaling \$38,981.

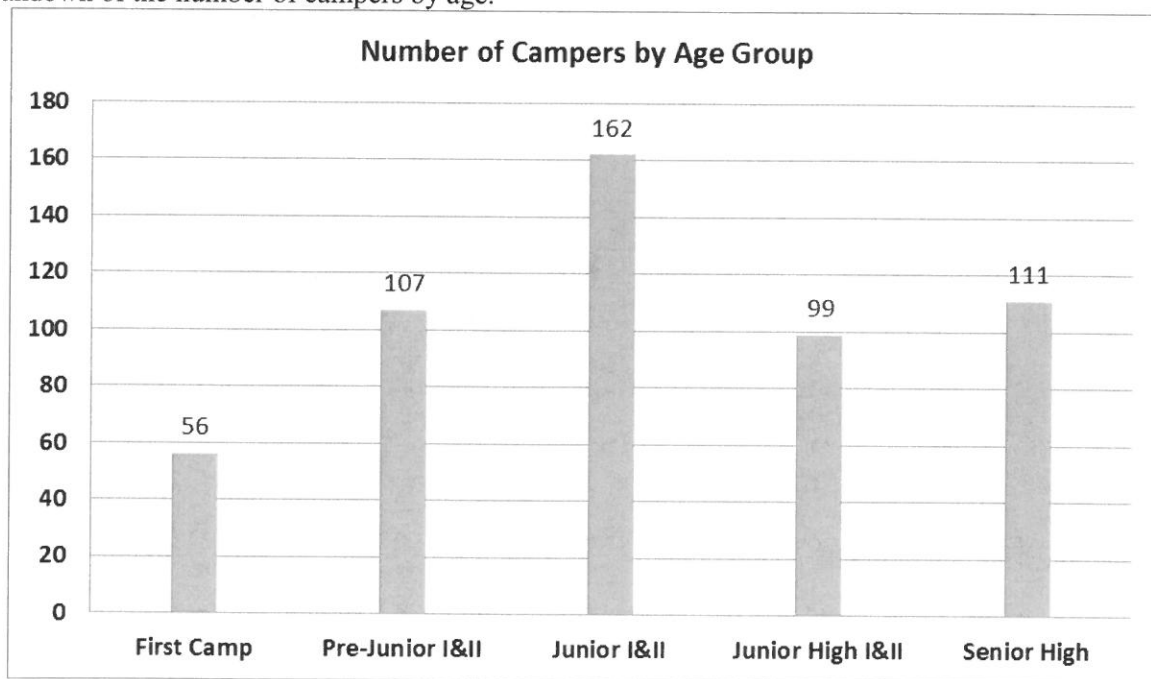
Gary Rediger (Chairperson), Eric Bruce, Rick Krehbiel, Leanna Ediger, (Stewardship Commission liaison) and Phyllis Regier (ex officio)



**Camp Mennoscah Association**  
**John Stoesz, Executive Director**

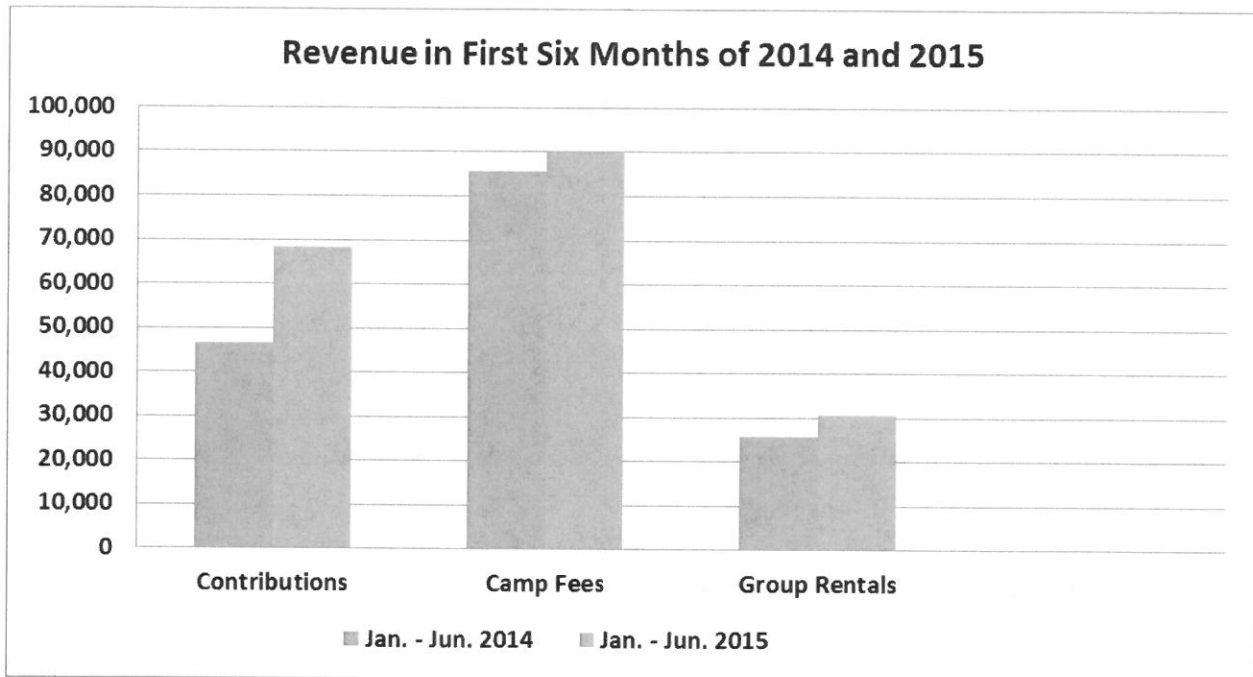
Greetings from Camp Mennoscah! As I write this in early August the summer youth camps have just ended. Camp Director Olivia Bartel and the Summer Staff – Adam Voth, Amy Wedel, Erin Doerksen, Kate Joliff, Keri Kauffman and Kyndell Hightree – are just leaving camp to enjoy a well-deserved farewell meal. Congratulations on a job well done!

Wow – what a great summer! There were a total of 535 campers and 185 volunteers. The gaga ball games, midnight swims, hayrides, campfires, meals, riverplay, singing and so much more are memories for this year – but will return next summer. Here's a breakdown of the number of campers by age.



In addition to the youth camps there are numerous retreats – for churches, families and others – that continue year-round. This spring there was a big turnout for the Retirees' Relaxation Retreat. Seventy people enjoyed excellent presentations on "Ukraine Revisited" – as well as great fellowship with each other.

As Camp Mennoscah makes the transition from being under the Western District Conference umbrella to being legally independent yet in close partnership, we at Camp are assuming responsibility for our own fundraising. How is that going? Camp Mennoscah has three primary sources of revenue: contributions, camp fees and group rentals. Here's what revenue for the base budget looks like the first six months of last year compared to the same period this year.



Designated contributions are being used for capital improvements. As I write this the new bath houses are nearing completion. Hallelujah!



Also, Camp Mennoscah will soon be the proud owners of a brand new disc golf course. Eric Preheim – a Bethel College student who designed the college's course – is designing the Camp course. It should be ready by the time you read this. Stay tuned for the next capital project!

**Mennonite Agri-Urban  
Alan Entz, President**

We want to give thanks for what God has done for Agri-Urban and look forward to what he has planned for the future. We have been blessed with the help of many people that make Agri-Urban work. Without these people Agri-Urban would not go on. We thank all of you for your hard work.

Due to numerous circumstances the board has decided that the Day on the Farm will not continue on. We want to thank Maynard Knepp and Carol Duerksen for their support of this event over the last 16 years. Many kids, parents and grandparents have had a good time at this event.

Thank you to all participants for your donations of time, money and energy in 2014 that helped us give \$41,633.68 to Bethel College, Western District and Mennonite Church USA.

### **Mennonite Central Committee Central States**

#### **Michelle E. Armster, MCC Central States Transitional Executive Director**

The title, *Growing together in Christ*, is the 2015 invitation from J. Ron Byler, MCC U.S. Executive Director and Don Peters, MCC Canada Executive Directors, to all staff to reflect on 1 Corinthians 3:6-11:

*<sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

*<sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

The last couple of years, the entire MCC system has been tilling, seeding and watering. The New Wine New Wineskins (NWNW) process and reorganizing, based on the finding of the NWNW process, has been a faith filled and humbling journey. Now, we have a strategic plan that all regions and provinces have agreed to. We have a strategic plan that will take us into the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MCC. We have a strategic plan- AND we are always mindful that "God gives the growth."

As we begin this next part of the journey, I would like to share some of the 2014 reflections from the wonderful staff of MCC Central States.

#### **Introduction**

The MCC Central States region covers 16 states. The region runs from North Dakota to Texas and from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River, including the state of Mississippi. Approximately 450 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations are in the region.

#### **Programs and Support Services**

2014 saw the addition of a **Young Adult Programs Coordinator** to the Central States region. Sharon Nelson works out of Denver, Co. and offices with DOOR, a ministry of Mennonite Mission Network. We were also blessed with a new **office manager**, Denise Voth. Denise's experience and knowledge has been key to establishing a clearer financial picture. Denise states, "I began working for MCC in July 2014. I have learned a great deal about my job duties and feel like I continue to improve at what is asked of me on a daily basis. I've also learned a good deal about MCC as an organization and am honored to be working for the organization."

MCC CS **New Orleans** program staff hosted several groups of Mennonite constituents this past summer. A group from Eastern Mennonite Seminary spent a week in the city in meetings with a number of community partners discussing issues of housing and worker justice, the school to prison pipeline, and criminal justice system reform. MCC staff also facilitated a dialogue on race with a youth group from Warwick River Mennonite Church in Newport News, VA as part of their orientation for a service trip to the city.

The "Loss of Turtle Island", a participatory learning experience that depicts the historic relationship between European settlers and Indigenous nations, is gaining interest across the U.S. This year Erica Littlewolf- **Indigenous Visioning Center** Coordinator, and Karin Kaufman Wall- **Peace & Justice** Educator, facilitated the experience eight times in Albuquerque, NM, Mt. Pleasant, IA, Colorado Springs, CO, Hesston, KS, Seattle, WA and Cedar Falls, IA. Many participants have shared that they learned history that they never learned in school and express a new openness to learning more about their own

connection to the history and present-day realities. At this point they are planning to lead the experience at least six more times in the next fiscal year – including Central Plains Mennonite Conference annual assembly, the MCUSA convention in Kansas City and Mennonite World Conference in PA.

Sharon Nelson reports, “These past 8 months as **Young Adult Program Coordinator** have been inspiring and full of possibility. I have been able to connect with young adults throughout our region at Relief Sales, churches, BIC YouthQuest, and at the Mountain States Mennonite Conference. I have found that being able to connect with young adults by listening to what is on their hearts and minds to be both inspiring and full of hope. I am looking forward to continue building relationships with young adults and our constituent churches as we work towards education and action towards peace and justice.”

**Immigration and Education** work continues to connect with grassroots organizations in Houston, Texas to support immigrants' rights and be informed about immigrants' struggles. We have developed connections with new nonprofits that are working on legal matters with unaccompanied minors and facilitated two grants for the organizations to address this issue. We are assessing and working on developing curriculum and workshops with a social justice component to be shared primarily in Latino/a church settings on topics that have been identified previously in discernment to better resource our Latino/a constituency.

The **Northern Tier** hosted the 2014 Black Hills Bike Hike with 30 participants, with the next one planned for 2016. The focus was on raising awareness for the work of MCC Indigenous Visioning Center. The first South Dakota MCC Relief Sale in July was held in Freeman and the Twin Cities Relief Sale found a new home at Woodlands Hills Church in St. Paul, Minn.

Welcoming new staff has been a highlight this past year within **Human Resources**. Denise Voth started as the regional "Office Manager / Bookkeeper" working out of the North Newton, Kansas, office on July 1st. Sharon Nelson started as the "Young Adult Program Coordinator" working out of Denver, Colorado, on July 16th. Another highlight has been participating in a newly formed Central States Alumni Relations Team, which is focusing on effective and consistent outreach and relationship-building with regional alumni.

This past year, the MCC Central States **Donor Relations** Team worked intentionally on forming a strategic plan that focused on top donor cultivation. It is our continued goal to improve relationships with those who give to MCC. Moreover, we are working closely with the U.S. Thrift Shop Development Coordinator to encourage Central States **Thrift Shops** to use best business practices.

**Communicating** the work, needs and stories of MCC's work in the Central States region and around the world continued in the past year. MCC launched a new website in 2014 and is also exploring different ways of engaging with constituency via social media. Part of that work includes reaching out to our alumni in more meaningful and intentional ways in the coming years.

In the last year, the **Recycling** program sold over 500,000 pounds of clothes, shoes, belts and purses, generating over \$100,000 for MCC Central States. We continued to process many material aid donations and sent two shipping containers directly out of Central States warehouse; one of canned meat to Haiti and one of canned meat and relief kits to Ethiopia.

We continue to be blessed by volunteers who work at the 11 Thrift stores, coordinate the 12 Relief Sales, labor at Meat Canning in various locations.

#### **Executive Director Thoughts:**

As the intentional Transitional Executive Director, 2014 was a time to:

- Encourage and strengthen MCC Central States board
- Create space and opportunity for staff to reimagine their work

- Implement a robust and impartial assessment of the organization's effectiveness and current functioning

Although the work is ongoing, I have been encouraged by the commitment, of the staff and board, to the mission and passions of MCC Central States and to the larger organization. I am moved by the transparency and vulnerability of board and staff. I look forward to 2015, as we continue to plant the seeds and nurture the ground so that the new executive director will be encouraged and empowered to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Thank you for your support and prayers.

**Mennonite Disaster Service – Annual Meeting - January 18, 2015  
(Submitted by Jordan Miller)**

Pastor Clayton Gladish opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and shared devotions with the topic of "why is there suffering in the world?" He read from Matthew 7:7-12 and said "There is power in prayer and furthermore there is power in us acting as responders in prayer.

Ken Rodgers shared his gift of music by playing a beautiful song on the piano.

Becky Koller shared the minutes from the 2014 MDS Annual Meeting.

Don Horst shared the treasurer's report. The balance at the beginning of 2014 was \$8,798.88. The balance at the end of the 2014 was \$15,015.56.

MDS Kansas Coordinator, Gordon Unruh shared that it had been a quiet year in Kansas. The areas MDS worked with in Kansas included a garage fire in Canton. The home owner's two vehicles and all his plumbing equipment were lost in the fire. The garage was close enough to the house that it melted some of the siding and broke out several windows. MDS helped replace the siding and windows.

A man from Salina has purchased a skid steer to use specifically for MDS. He spent several days helping after the Baxter Springs, Kansas tornado.

Three Saturdays were spent roofing a house in Canton. It wasn't damage due to disaster, but it was a need that a single mother with two children had.

Another project MDS was involved in this year was helping prepare a farm sale for the widow of an Inman man who was faithful MDS volunteer. The day of the sale she provided food to serve a meal at the sale. There was no charge for the meal, but a jar was set up for donations to MDS. It brought in over \$1,000 for the van fund.

Al Kroeker, Region 3 Director shared appreciation for the Kansas vans to take people to projects. He encouraged people to stop by the display table he and Jan had set up. He said there were maps there showing what Region 3 included and a lot of information about what is happening in Region 3. In 2014 drought in Region 3 caused wildfires in both Texas and Colorado. Local MDS units have been rebuilding in Colorado. There were tornadoes in Missouri, South Dakota, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. Because of tornadoes in Nebraska the next bi-national project will be set up in Pilger, Nebraska. Volunteers will begin working there February 2.

Al and Jan have focused on the Church Contact Person in 2014. This person is a key point for getting people to projects.

The Montana MDS unit is standing by to help rebuild a church in Wolf Point that was lost to fire.

Ken Rodgers led the group in two hymns.



A slide show was presented from the flooding of Jamestown, Colorado, with Jeff Koller, Jordan Miller, and Don Horst sharing. Jeff Koller who serves as Disaster Response Coordinator for MDS shared about the flooding and the early visits of MDS to the area. There have been many frustrations with government agencies in getting the project set up. The project has been up and running since May, but because of the involvement of the government agencies, MDS was unable to begin building a new house until January of 2015. Volunteers have shared frustration because they are used to going and building new houses, not just rehabbing damaged houses. But the impact MDS is making in the community is making a big difference. The owner of one of the homes that was rehabbed by MDS said, "Observing the Mennonites is the first time in my life I've seen Christians that truly live their faith and act on what they say they believe."

Jordan shared about taking his youth group and six adult sponsors to work in Jamestown. They helped build and stand up the walls on a new home in Jamestown. He said the youth commented on how meaningful it was to have the homeowners working alongside them the three days they worked in the community.

Don shared about Jamestown being his first experience with serving as a Project Director. He enjoyed building relationships with the people in the community. He also found a lot of value in attending the town meetings and hearing how members of the community shared about how they wanted Jamestown to be in five, ten and twenty years from today. The mayor and her volunteer coordinator are very good listeners and do a good job of handling the meetings. He also talked about how the roads were still being rebuilt while he was there. He spent time talking to the many truck drivers who were bringing loads of dirt in for that project. He talked about how important each person was in the task of rebuilding Jamestown.

After the sharing about Jamestown, Ken Rodgers led the group in singing one more song to close the meeting. The song we sang was one that Ken Rodgers had written. He shared that his parents are one of the founding couples of MDS. It was begun by a Sunday school class more than 60 years ago that felt like more should be done to help after disasters. Pastor Gladish closed the meeting with prayer.

### **Prairie View, Behavioral & Mental Healthcare** **Jessie Kay, President & CEO**

During 2014, Prairie View continued the tradition of innovation and achieved even higher levels of integration and collaboration across our communities. With our third year of foundation funding, we continued learning and adjusting practice models with our primary care partners to provide comprehensive and holistic care to our many patients with both medical and behavioral health needs. This results in better overall health and improved patient satisfaction.

A highlight in our service to the larger community was the relocation of a county health department, local community health clinic and pharmacy to Prairie View's Pine Street Health Services building.

Also in the past year, Prairie View became a Health Home provider for eligible KanCare members who can benefit from care coordination, health promotion, support and assistance in accessing needed health-related services. Prairie View's health home staff are based at our Pine Street Health Services building.

We have achieved success in obtaining approval from a commercial insurance company to cover TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation) services for patients with chronic depression. Hopefully, this is the first step toward other insurers providing like coverage, making help more available to those who have not experienced success through medication or other treatment.

Our inpatient services, including the hospital for adults, our Turning Point psychiatric residential treatment facility for adolescents and Addictions Treatment Center have remained busy throughout the year. We are pleased to continue limited chaplaincy services in these programs on the Newton campus and have added a weekly chapel service for staff. We are seeking additional charitable funding to expand these services and to develop pastoral care offerings at the Chapel of Healing and Hope at Pine Street Health Services.



We are deeply grateful to the individuals, groups, congregations and foundations of the Western District Conference who have generously supported the Prairie View mission. With your involvement, we continue to transform lives. We welcome your invitation to bring a message during worship or lead a discussion in a Sunday School class or other group. *Visit us on the web at [PrairieView.org](http://PrairieView.org)*

**Western District Conference Women in Mission**  
**Dayle Toews, President**

Western District Women in Mission have enjoyed some inspirational events this past year. At the Women in Mission dinner at Western District Annual Assembly we were encouraged by the speaker, Rosa Flores, as she gave a talk entitled, “A Time for Courage.” This was held on July, 5, 2014, at Waxahachie, Texas.

The annual Women’s and Girls’ Retreat at Camp Mennoscah, which we co-host with South Central Conference, was held September 5-7, 2014. The featured speaker was Norma Duerksen, whose theme was “How Can I Forgive?” Her sessions were an invitation to discuss what forgiveness has meant and could mean to us. Norma is an ordained minister and is now pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Hillsboro, KS. On Friday evening we had a relaxing and delightful time at “Menno Spa” activities in the dining hall.

The annual Spring Supper, which was planned jointly with South Central Conference’s Women’s Ministry, was held at Hesston Mennonite Church on March 26, 2015. Speaker for this event was Carolene Jackson, President of South Central Women’s Ministry, and former teacher. Since retiring, she has taught early childhood educators in China and volunteers to work with children. Her message was “Until We Become as Little Children.” She showed pictures and inspired us to come to Jesus, willing to go about His work. Music was provided by the McKinney Sisters, a gospel bluegrass trio from Moundridge, who love to share their love for this music and its message.

In addition to supporting the above events, WDC Women in Mission have contributed to scholarships for international women at Bethel College, Mennonite Women USA, Camp Mennoscah, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Western District Conference, and scholarships for WDC women at AMBS.

Western District Women in Mission does many good things, and we appreciate all the women who participate in and take on responsibilities in order to further our ministry in this world. We are planning for and looking forward to a SisterCare seminar at Bethel College Mennonite Church on January 29-30, 2016.

## Report to Western District Conference

*Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*  
—Romans 12:4-5

Because we belong to each other, we celebrate the work of individuals, families, congregations and conferences who together form the body of believers that is Mennonite Church USA. Here are a few examples of ways we collaborate with each other:



**Returning veterans.** The violence of war can destroy lives even after combat ceases. Some Mennonite congregations are responding to veterans with understanding and compassion as they seek healing for their emotional and spiritual wounds. The Peace and Justice Support Network (a partnership of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Mission Network) is working with Mennonite Central Committee U.S. to support these efforts by providing a monthly newsletter and developing a six-week Sunday school curriculum and a congregational training on relating to veterans.



**Israel-Palestine learning tours.** More than 30 Mennonite leaders have participated in learning tours to Israel-Palestine through the "Come and See" fund that was established by Mennonite Church USA, Everence, Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Central Committee U.S. in response to Kairos Palestine, an appeal from Palestinian Christians. Our goal is to help 100 leaders participate in the next five years so that we can be more faithful and effective witnesses to Jesus' desire for peace in this region. Groups meet with Palestinians and Israelis; Christians, Jews and Muslims; and refugees, businessmen, pastors and farmers to gain a deeper understanding of the issues.



**Women in Leadership Project.** In February 2014, nearly 200 women gathered for a conference in Leesburg, Va., titled *All You Need is Love: Honoring the diversity of women's voices in theology* and hosted by the Women in Leadership Project of Mennonite Church USA. Participants wrestled together with what it means for a Christian community to hold together the tensions and complexities of pain, suffering, anger and injustice.



**Begin Anew: Christian Discipleship Seminars** is a 16-session series of studies to make disciples in small groups and congregations. Based on the idea that Christianity is a combination of believing, belonging, becoming and behaving, the course is for anyone interested in growing in Christian faith from an Anabaptist perspective. *Begin Anew* is written by Palmer Becker and is a joint project of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.



**Radical Hospitality: Responding to the issue of immigration.** This free Bible study unpacks questions such as, "What are the basic facts about U.S. immigration? Who are the people involved? What does the Bible have to say to us as Christians about immigration? What role might we fill as Anabaptists within this age-old challenge?" The core curriculum is based on five videos (each 15–20 min.) and an accompanying Resource Guide.



**KC2015: June 30–July 5, 2015: On the way/En el camino** (Luke 24). Mennonite Church USA's biennial conventions are places where people's lives are transformed and faith is renewed. Convention offers opportunities for networking and fellowship, learning and inspiration, and space for conversations about issues the church is facing. Representatives to the Delegate Assembly play an important role in churchwide decision-making.



**Pastoral placements.** It's not unusual for the Leadership Development office to receive an inquiry each day from pastors looking for assignments. The office maintains a national list that conference ministers use as they work with congregational search committees, as well as an online list of available pastoral positions. Staff members are always energized when a good pastor-congregation match is found.



[www.MennoniteUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org)  
[www.facebook.com/MennoniteChurchUSA](https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteChurchUSA)  
Toll-free: 866-866-2872

# Be salt. Be light. Be the Gospel.



## Thank you!

We give thanks to Western District Conference congregations for partnering in God's mission with Mennonite Mission Network. By working together, people around the world experience Christ's

light and love. We are deeply grateful for your enthusiasm for God's mission! Your prayers, people, time, and contributions are an important part in sharing the gospel.

Thank you for your partnership. We consider it an honor to extend the

missional reach of Western District Conference and its congregations.

Stanley W. Green, Executive Director for Mennonite Mission Network

## Western District Conference + Mennonite Mission Network

### Service participants

Five Journey International participants this past year hail from Western District Conference congregations: **Travis Duerksen** and **Heath Goertzen**, both of Alexanderwohl Mennonite; **Elizabeth Epp** and **Ashlynn Hamm**, both of First Mennonite–Newton; and **Garrett Smith** of First Mennonite–Moundridge.

Youth Venture participants included **Matthew Rodenberg** of Hoffnungsau Mennonite and **Nickolas Funk** of First Mennonite–Beatrice.

Service Adventure participants who served in Anchorage include **Tyler Gehring** of First Mennonite–Hutchinson and **Elizabeth Schrag** of Eden Mennonite. **Henry Jantzen** of Faith Mennonite served in Philippi, West Virginia; and **Rebecca Schrag** of First Mennonite–Newton served in Albany, Oregon.

Mennonite Voluntary Service participants include **April Kabagambe** of First Mennonite–Newton, serving in Seattle; **Megan Leary** of Bethel College Mennonite serving in Tucson, Arizona; **Emma Regier** of Shalom Mennonite serving in Alamosa, Colorado; **Marika Stucky** of Eden Mennonite serving in Madison, Wisconsin; and **Anna Woelk** of Goessel Mennonite, serving in Kansas City, Kansas.

### Mission worker support

Western District Conference congregations provide support for the following Mission Network workers: Bethel College Mennonite is the lead supporting congregation for **Janet Stucky** in Benin. Other congregations supporting Janet's work include First Mennonite–McPherson and Manhattan Mennonite.

New Creation Fellowship Church is the lead supporting congregation for **Deborah and Wesley Bergen**. Additional support comes from Tabor Mennonite, Turpin Mennonite, Grace Hill Mennonite, First Mennonite–Halstead and Zion Mennonite.

Eden Mennonite Church helps support **Mark and Mary Hurst** in Australia, the **David Shenk family** in Ecuador, and **George and Tobia Veith** in Macau.

**Gamaliel and Amanda Falla's** work in Colombia is supported in part by Houston Mennonite.

West Zion supports the work of **Wayne and Jeannie Larson**.

**Margrit Kipfer Barrón** receives support from First Mennonite–Beatrice, as do **David and Rebekka Stutzman** in Germany.

**Mary Raber**, who serves in Ukraine, receives support from Lorraine Avenue Mennonite, Inman Mennonite, Faith Mennonite and Hope Mennonite churches. San Antonio Mennonite helps support the work of **Laura Schlabach** in Mongolia.

### 48 prayer partners

pray daily for Mission Network and its workers

### Globe bank gifts

**\$1,621.41** from the children of Faith, Koinonia and Tabor Mennonite churches!



**Thank you for your continued partnership in God's mission!**



## *Western District Conference*

Mennonite Education Agency report  
October 2015 annual gathering

### ***Greetings!***

MEA is pleased to share information with you for your annual conference. We are partnering with Mennonite educational institutions, preschool through continuing education to transform students to become Christ followers, service givers, peace seekers, rigorous learners, difference embracers and community builders.

This year **13,589 students** are enrolled at Mennonite institutions – 31 Mennonite School Council (MSC) schools, 5 colleges/universities, 2 seminaries and 2 Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education (HPLE) programs. Many future church and community leaders are being shaped with skills need to succeed.

MEA is working with school leaders and teachers to ensure schools have the tools they need to transform lives through an Anabaptist lens. Over the past year we have:

- Partnered with AdvancED to offer a performance based accreditation grounded in Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives. Twelve MSC schools are using this integrated protocol.
- Implemented the collaborative MBA program between Bluffton University, Goshen College, and Eastern Mennonite University which began in the fall of 2014.
- Provided professional development training (Mennonite Educators Conference) for over 400 educators and planned professional board development training for February 2015 (Education Leaders Gathering).
- Managed the investments of 19 Mennonite-related institutions through the MEA Investment Fund.
- Worked towards greater cultural inclusion by administering the Intercultural Development Inventory and facilitating/ participating in Hope for the Future.
- Noted an increase in giving to the HPLE programs for the 2013-14 fiscal year. However, there is a decrease in giving this year.
- Entered into conversations with the MEA board and committees on the current landscape of the denomination and its implications.
- Administered the Congregational Giving program.
- Translated the first IBA book into English and started the first English IBA center in Texas.
- Provided board support and development to the many Mennonite educational institution boards.

***We are grateful*** to members of your conference who are serving on Mennonite educational boards and committees.

- **AMBS:** Sara Dick, Shalom
- **Bethel College:**  
Chair: Heather Esau Zerger, Rainbow;  
Linda Buller, Lorraine; Jim Ens, First (Beatrice);  
Joe Friesen, Zion; Dean Kroeker, Eden; Berneil Rupp Mueller and John R. Suderman, Bethel College; Sharon Nance, Peace (Dallas); Ray Penner, Faith; Debbie Schmidt, Shalom

*We regret any omissions or errors. Please send corrections to [info@MennoniteEducation.org](mailto:info@MennoniteEducation.org).*

**Thank you** to Western District Conference congregations who support Mennonite education\*:

Feb. 1, 2014 – Jan. 31, 2015 -- \$79,854.26

*\*Giving includes gifts for higher education, MEA, Racial/Ethnic Leadership Education and Hispanic Pastoral Leadership Education.*

---

**One of our greatest accomplishments is the testimony of students to the transforming power of Mennonite education.** Stories are plentiful and many of you could echo these words from a current Mennonite college student: “Attending a Mennonite college shaped who I am today and brought me to my own understanding and ownership of my Mennonite faith.” Thank you for your work in partnering with Mennonite schools of all kinds as well as Mennonite Education Agency. ***We are grateful for your support.***



Carlos Romero, MEA Executive  
Director



# AMBS

Report to Western District Conference

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary;  
Sara Wenger Shenk, president

**Graduates:** Fifteen students graduated in May 2015. **Katherine Goerzen** and **Peter Goerzen** each earned the Master of Divinity degree; **Eugene Thieszen** earned a Certificate in Theological Studies.

**Students:** **Cynthia Smith White** has been a student in the undergraduate Pastoral Studies Distance Education program in the last year.

Taking AMBS classes last year were **Kristine Regehr Bottorff, Ronald Moyo, Karen Mascho, James Branum, Laurel Mast Swartzendruber, Rosie Jantz, Brian Harmon, Renee Reimer, Laura Goerzen, Leland Suderman, Hope Graber, Caley Ortman, Asia Frye, Jocelyn Graber, Katherine Goerzen, Peter Goerzen, Dorothy Nickel Friesen, Cleo Koop, Eugene Thieszen, Linda Ewert, Joel Schroeder, Doug Krehbiel, Angela Smith and Stanley Epp.** Some of these students took classes at AMBS Kansas Center, including a January course on rural ministry; and some took online or hybrid courses from their home settings, some were students on the Elkhart campus.

#### **AMBS Kansas Center events and courses:**

A **January master's-level course and corresponding continuing education event** focused on rural ministry and was led by **S. Roy Kaufman**.

In summer, **Jerry Truex** taught a **course on the Sermon on the Mount**, cosponsored with the WDC Resource Commission. This was taught on four evenings in June as a non-credit short course to make it convenient for people in the region to participate.

AMBS Kansas Center and the center's coordinator, **Katherine Goerzen**, worked with the Mennonite Church USA convention prayer team to host a **pre-convention prayer retreat** in May and to make resources for similar retreats available across the church.

**Rooted and Grounded:** AMBS hosts the second Rooted and Grounded conference on land and Christian discipleship, October 1–3, 2015. Scholars, teachers, creation care advocates and farmers and gardeners of all kinds again gather to worship and explore biblical and theological themes of care for the land we live on. Information is available at [www.ambs.edu/rootedandgrounded](http://www.ambs.edu/rootedandgrounded).

**Faculty:** **Janna Hunter-Bowman**, PhD, is the new assistant professor of peace studies and social ethics.

**Board member:** **Sara Dick** from Newton, Kan., serves on the board.

**Lifelong learning:** In 2014-15 year, there were 661 enrollments in AMBS Church Leadership Center events and offerings. The Center offers webinars; workshops; online, non-credit short courses; Pastoral Studies Distance Education; Business Leaders and Pastors Workshops; and more.

**Pastors Week:** *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* is a question five speakers answered at Pastors Week, in January 2015. Recordings are available online: [www.ambs.edu/news-events/iTunesU.cfm](http://www.ambs.edu/news-events/iTunesU.cfm). In January 2016, **Jewel Gingerich Longenecker**, AMBS associate dean for leadership education; and **Bryan Moyer Suderman**, itinerant Bible teacher and music minister, will lead the Pastors Week focus on *The Bible Says What? Discovering Scripture Anew in Jesus' Company*.

#### **Resources for all in the church**

**Anabaptist Witness**, copublished with Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Church Canada, fosters a global Anabaptist and Mennonite dialogue on key issues facing the church in mission: [AnabaptistWitness.org](http://AnabaptistWitness.org)

**Practicing Reconciliation**, a blog by Sara Wenger Shenk, asks questions and engages issues in the church: [www.ambs.edu/practicingreconciliation](http://www.ambs.edu/practicingreconciliation)



**The Circle**, a new AMBS Church Leadership Center blog, features presenters scheduled for upcoming events: [www.ambs.edu/thecircle](http://www.ambs.edu/thecircle)

**Short Courses and webinars**, online and non-credit, for people wanting to explore issues in Anabaptism, the Bible or the church today. Visit [www.ambs.edu](http://www.ambs.edu), select *Lifelong Learning*.

**Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology**, copublished with Canadian Mennonite University, focuses on Sabbath in the spring 2015 issue: [www.mennovision.org](http://www.mennovision.org)

*We thank God for your support and ask for your prayers as we continue to prepare leaders for mission, peacemaking and spiritual vitality in the church of Jesus Christ.*

July 2015

3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517   [www.ambs.edu](http://www.ambs.edu)   574.295.3726

---

Bethel College has been privileged to serve Mennonite Church USA and the Western District Conference in a special way this past year by hosting a number of significant meetings and services with implications for the broader church:

- The Constituency Leaders Council held meetings on the Bethel College campus. The meeting was chaired by the moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA, Bethel College's own Dr. Patricia Shelly.
- Providing ten seminars and two worship speakers for the Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City.
- A release of *Mennonite Life* with major articles Vincent Harding and John Howard Yoder, among others.
- Commissioning and hosting important research from Walter Sawatzky with significant implications for Anabaptist traditions world-wide.
- Sending eight students to visit AMBS for seminary preview day.
- Hosting Sarah Thomson, Executive Director of Christian Peacemaker Teams, as our MLK Celebration speaker.
- Providing speakers and musicians for local (mostly WDC) congregations roughly two-thirds of the Sundays while classes are in session.
- A biennial study trip to Israel-Palestine, in which many guests and pastors participated.
- Hosting MCC Central States' Annual Meeting and Learning Experiences.
- Working closely with AMBS-Kansas Center to provide courses for seminary credit.
- Placing two students in summer Ministry Inquiry Program assignments, including Allie Shoup of New Creation Fellowship, at Bethel College Mennonite Church.

Student chaplains planned and hosted another very successful 24-Hour Prayer Event, and the Campus Ministries team hosted a number of powerful chapel services and enriching Bible and small group studies.

After thirty years at Bethel College, Dale Schrag retired as Campus Pastor and Director of Church Relations in June 2014. Bethel will continue to be blessed by Dale's passion, wisdom, and deep love of college and church for many years to come.

I began in this role near the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year. I am excited and blessed to serve Bethel College's mission, vision, and values. I am thankful to work with a team of exceedingly talented and wise-in-the-Spirit student chaplains. Our academic year began with two special days of activities, including a campus-wide service project, in which we packaged 50,000 meals for needy members of our community. God is indeed at work at Bethel!

In gratitude for the prayers and good wishes from the Western District Conference, we humbly ask for your continued support.



## Report to Western District Conference 2015

### Students help to rebuild hope

Three years after Hurricane Sandy slammed the East Coast, residents of Far Rockaway, Queens, New York, are still rebuilding what was lost. For a week in March, 13 Bluffton University students and staff spent their spring break trying to help.

In association with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), the group assisted Sandy victims whose homes had been heavily damaged by the storm, which caused more than 200 deaths and an estimated \$68 billion in damage overall. Among other things, they repaired cracked walls and floors and painted the homes of residents who couldn't afford to fix them anymore.

"Hearing there was still work to be done from Sandy really hit me hard, and I wanted to go make a difference there," said Rachel Keske, a sophomore from Lima, Ohio, and president of the campus organization SERVE. "The impact I had in helping these families take one step closer to normalcy will be one of the most beneficial feelings I'll ever have."

Keske worked for the same residents throughout the trip. She and MDS members mudded and sanded cracked and patchy drywall before applying a long-needed, new coat of paint. Although the process took all week, that week was full of laughter and inspiration for Keske.

"I never dreaded waking up at 6 a.m. to begin the day because I knew we would be helping them move their lives to the next step, after sitting still since October 2012," when the storm hit, she said.

Jenna Moreo, a sophomore from Spencerville, Ohio, worked in several homes. She helped repaint the interior of a house that had endured extensive water damage, loaded shipments of drywall for delivery to the houses and insulated a basement that had been flooded to its ceiling. "It may seem like all we had to do was work on houses, but it was so much more than that," she said. "We actually got to meet the homeowners and talk to them about what happened."

"Hearing how the people whose homes were damaged still have so much hope after two years" was definitely worthwhile, said Kati O'Neill, a sophomore from Wapakoneta, Ohio, who worked with Moreo on the basement insulation project. "You can't even imagine what happened to them and what they are going through. God is truly incredible and moves mountains."

Although there's still much to be done in Far Rockaway, the Bluffton students were happy to help as much as they could before returning to school, and many are eager to serve next spring break, too.

"To be able to give someone something back that we take for granted is a wonderful feeling," said Danielle Moore, a sophomore from Plymouth, Ohio. "It was a blessing to get to know the families and people at MDS."

#### 'Plowshares' book available

Copies of "Swords to Plowshares," the picture book published recently by The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center of Bluffton University, may be ordered at [www.bluffton.edu/lionlamb](http://www.bluffton.edu/lionlamb) or by calling 419-358-3207. Cost is \$21.35—including tax—or \$24.50 for book buyers who would like it sent to them. All proceeds from book sales will support the center's peace education mission.

#### Thank you, Western District Conference!

Two students from Western District Conference churches attended Bluffton in 2014-15. **Mary Schrag**, who graduated in May with a bachelor's degree in biblical and theological studies, is from Eden Mennonite in Moundridge, Kan., while **Bethanie Wedel**, now a senior, is from First Mennonite in Newton, Kan. Their respective congregations supported them with Church Matching Scholarship funds.

**For more information on Bluffton University:**  
**Robin Bowlus, director of public relations**  
[bowlusr@bluffton.edu](mailto:bowlusr@bluffton.edu) [www.bluffton.edu](http://www.bluffton.edu)

### President opens year with message on Global Citizenship

During the 2014-15 school year, the college is focusing on its core value of "global citizenship." President James E. Brenneman opened the year with an invitation for students and employees to expand their understanding of this core value, noting that a primary understanding of global citizenship is that of people-to-people diplomacy and intercultural relationships, which the college has excelled at and focused on throughout its history. But, he said, "to be a global citizen first and foremost is to desire to experience, understand and steward the many and varied multi-cultures – the bio-diversity – of the natural world around us." The president encouraged all to pay attention to the pulse of life, to learn from nature and to take action that cares for all of creation. Brenneman, a 1977 graduate of Goshen College, was reappointed this summer to a third term.

### Conference connections

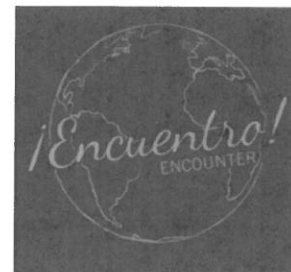
This academic year we have 14 students enrolled from 10 Western District Conference congregations. These 10 congregations have generously pledged \$36,260 in congregational student aid for the academic year. The Goshen College Church Aid Matching Grant program provides a dollar-for-dollar match of the first \$1,000 per student and a 1:4 match after that, up to full tuition.

Students from the conference are involved on- and off-campus in many edifying ways but we particularly recognize Grace Boehm of Rainbow Mennonite Church, who studied and served in China this past fall through GC's Study Service Term program. Joanna Epp of First Mennonite Church (Newton, KS) spent her spring semester in Peru.

Erin Bergen of Bethel College Mennonite and Isaiah Friesen of First Mennonite Church (Beatrice, NE) are spending this summer in Nicaragua.

### 2014-15 Campus ministries theme

The Campus Ministries theme this year is "Encuentro! Encounter." Eleven Ministry Leaders, five Worship Assistants, and countless other Goshen College students provide leadership as we explore what it means to have meaningful encounters with God, with one another, and with the world around us. In the first chapel of the year, Campus Pastor Bob Yoder examined the first encounter between Lydia and the Apostle Paul, and the ripple effects it had on the Philippian church community. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul encountered many people, cities, and cultures throughout the Mediterranean region. Then, students were invited to write down and bring forward ideas for how they can bring about meaningful encounters during the school year. Students and employees were also invited to engage the theme through the GC Prayer Book, which includes twelve devotions written by students. This material is available to people in both print and electronic formats. Visit <http://www.goshen.edu/cmin/> to learn more about GC Campus Ministries.



For more information, contact Dan Koop Liechty, Director of Alumni and Career Networks. Call (574) 535-7002 or e-mail [churchrelations@goshen.edu](mailto:churchrelations@goshen.edu).

## WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE CHURCH USA REPORT July 2015

**2014-15 enrollment** – Hesston College welcomed 237 new students for 2014-15, an increase of 10 percent from last year. Total enrollment for the year was 428 students from 33 states and 12 countries, including 46 percent from Kansas and 11 percent international. Spring semester in January brought 20 new students. Mennonites made up 34 percent of the student population.

**Commencement 2015** – Kevin King, executive director of Mennonite Disaster Service, instrumental in the formation of Hesston's Disaster Management Program, spoke to the 148 graduates at Commencement exercises May 10. Malcom Mann from Plano, Texas, and Jordan Waidelich from Stryker, Ohio, delivered the student addresses. Students recognized in special ceremonies included fifty nursing graduates, ten completing the disaster management program, nine related to aviation programs and one in pastoral ministries.

**Campus theme** - The 15-16 First-year Experience course invites the local community to participate in its "common read" with the theme, "Be the Change that Matters." Regina Calcaterra's memoir *Etched in Sand* traces her childhood experiences of abandonment, physical abuse and fear of the foster system she and her four siblings endured. The common read serves as a catalyst for a series of student projects, campus forums, community discussions and service activities. Calcaterra will visit campus Oct. 5.

### **Homecoming 2015** - Campus

Transformation will be the theme for A Hesston College Homecoming Sept. 24 to 27. The weekend celebrates a new north entryway to campus, renovations to the Northlawn performing arts building and the first official chiming of the new alumni carillon bells. A scale replica of Green Gables, the campus' first visual marker, will be unveiled, emeritus faculty recognized and outstanding performers who got their START at Hesston College will participate in a Performing Arts Showcase following the Saturday evening alumni banquet.

### **AVDS conference to encourage vibrant faith practices every day**

Ordinary Radical and follower of Christ, Shane Claiborne, founder and board member of *The Simple Way*, will join other peacebuilders, youth leaders and social justice advocates at the college's Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series conference Feb. 19 to 21, 2016. The conference theme, "Not Just on Sunday" will help attendees explore what it looks like to live a vibrant Sunday through Saturday faith - to live as if Jesus meant what he said and he was talking to us. Claiborne is the author of over a dozen books and was a worship speaker at MCUSA Convention 2015.

**Congregational student aid** – Hesston College offers a match grant for scholarships provided by students' churches. During the 2014-15 year, 87 churches contributed \$195,193 in congregational aid to 121 recipients. Hesston College matched a total of \$127,621. The average church aid per student was \$1,613 while the average church-and-college aid per student was \$2,667. **If your congregation is interested in providing a scholarship program to support Mennonite higher education, contact the Church Relations Office at 866-437-7866.**

Read these full stories and more at hesston.edu. For questions or more information, contact Dallas Stutzman, director of Alumni and Church Relations toll free at 866-437-7866.

### **2015-16 campus theme verse**

"The Greatest Commandment"

Mark 12:30-31 (New International Version)

### **Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA Statistics and Connections**

#### **2014-2015 Academic Year Students – 15**

**Congregational Student Aid** – 10 congregations provided \$14,900.00 in tuition assistance for 12 students as of June 1, 2015.

**Hesston College Board of Overseers** – Luke Roth-Mullet, New Creation Fellowship Church, Newton, KS.

**Unified and Designated Giving** – We are grateful for the financial support of conference churches to Mennonite colleges and Mennonite Education Agency through Unified and Designated Giving and for personal contributions given from individuals.

Howard Keim, President

Dallas Stutzman, Director of Alumni and Church Relations

Phyllis Weaver, Development Officer

Bethany Miller, Admissions Representative



# Sing praises to God

## Everence 2015 report

Western District Conference  
October 30-31, 2015



### **Everence and congregations: a healthy partnership**

*I have sought a sense of call when it comes to key decisions, and the summer of 2014 was the right time to answer the call to join Everence. My new role combines my financial services vocation with my deep interest in church and community service.*

*A major priority for me is spending time with church leaders and members to hear about their experiences with Everence and how we can strengthen our relationship further. Everence values the connections we have made with our church friends over the last 70 years, and we look forward to continuing to serve the Anabaptist community as partners in stewardship.*

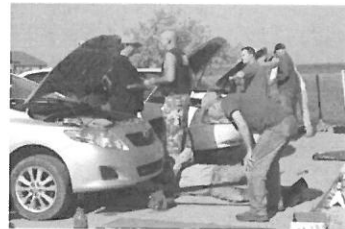
*Kenneth D. Hochstetler  
President and CEO*

### **Hochstetler took helm at Everence last summer**

Kenneth D. Hochstetler joined Everence in September 2014, becoming President and CEO following the retirement of Larry D. Miller. Ken and his wife, Sue, moved to Goshen, Ind., from southeastern Pennsylvania, where Ken was Senior Executive Vice President at Univest Corporation (and chief executive of several subsidiaries), which provides banking, trust, financial planning, investment, foundation and insurance services.

Ken is a Goshen native who earned a bachelor's degree in business and computer science from Goshen College and a master's degree in business administration from Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.

### **Sharing Fund helps in many ways**



The Sharing Fund is a way for churches and Everence to work together to ease financial burdens for people in need. The fund – which distributed about \$925,000 in 2014 – helps people with everyday expenses and special needs, matching congregational contributions. It also helps church members share their skills with the wider community. Volunteers at one church provide free oil changes (pictured) for single moms and widows, aided by a Sharing Fund grant. The Sharing Fund makes a difference for thousands of people every year.

*Seven times a day I  
praise you ...*

Psalm 119:164



### **New financial planning service**

A new comprehensive financial planning service from Everence offers a tailored strategy to help people shape their financial paths in ways that fit their dreams, goals and values.

The service includes meeting with a qualified financial planner and access to powerful online software, Vine Vision 360, which helps people organize and track their finances and progress. Our planners walk members through seven branches of their financial lives – cash flow, protection, investment, retirement, tax, estate planning and charitable giving. Learn more at [everence.com/financial-planning](http://everence.com/financial-planning).

### **Video commentaries keep tabs on markets**

The health of financial markets has a big impact on the U.S. economy, so even if you don't directly invest in stocks or bonds, it makes sense to keep an eye on the markets.

We recently made it easier – just visit [everence.com](http://everence.com), where you'll now find a monthly market commentary video from Chad Horning, CFA, Everence Chief Investment Officer. Chad covers a different topic every month, such as inflation, fixed-income returns and some of the things serious investors look for as they consider which direction the markets might take – and why.

### **Asset management and generosity made easy**

Being generous may be easier than you think. Everence Asset Management services help people increase their capacity for charitable giving through planned gifts, retirement security and investment services.

Through professionally managed portfolios, access to faith-rooted

investment selection and a personal relationship with a financial advisor – you can grow your ability to make a profound impact on the people and ideas you care about. We'll help you simplify your finances into a streamlined strategy so that you can spend time on what matters to you.

### **Appreciating God's goodness**



*All the days of my life* is a new curriculum from Everence designed for Sunday school classes or small groups. Lessons draw from Psalm 23:6: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*. The curriculum also connects with a series of paintings by artist Thomas Cole called "Voyage of Life."

Lessons help us reflect on the past, focus on the present and prepare for the future. Learn more at [everence.com/stewardship-education](http://everence.com/stewardship-education).

### **Financial education for women introduced**

Spending, saving, debt, investing, charitable giving – these issues affect all of us, but sometimes affect women differently. Considering that women, on average, live longer than men, roughly 80 to 90 percent of women will be solely responsible for their finances at some point.

Everence has developed a new presentation focused on women and money, to help women prepare for potential financial

challenges. Call (800) 348-7468 or talk with your local Everence representative to learn more.

### **Targeting creation care**

Everence has engaged companies on environmental and sustainability concerns for more than 10 years. But since 2013, we've made shareholder advocacy on creation care a top priority. We've increased efforts to impact energy and related companies as scientific reports document a growing threat to our earth.

Our efforts seek development of emissions reduction plans, transparent political funding/lobbying and examination of carbon asset risk. We hope that our work will persuade companies to redirect dollars toward renewable energy sources.

### **Using this card helps charitable groups**

Everence Federal Credit Union donated \$14,000 from its Rebate for Missions™ program to global agencies MEDA and Mennonite World Conference in 2014. Rebate for Missions™ is supported by the credit union's 10 percent tithe of income generated when people use their Everence Visa credit cards.

Credit union branches also distribute grants in their own communities. Since the program started in 1995, the credit union has awarded more than \$360,000 to churches, missions and relief organizations. Learn more at [everence.com/banking](http://everence.com/banking).

---

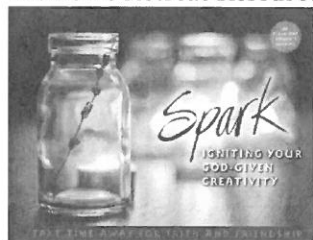
## Report to Western District Conference from MennoMedia August 2015

---

### MennoMedia Plans a new Hymnal

Mennonites sing together as a way to express our faith. This spring, a team from MennoMedia, Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Church USA planted seeds for a new song collection to be released in 2020. It will be more than a printed hymnal, with electronic versions and other supporting products. Next year a 10 to 12 member hymnal committee will be appointed and MennoMedia will hire a project director to oversee the process. We are eager to see this new song collection serve and nurture Anabaptist Mennonite believers as well as shape our common identity as followers of Jesus. To receive updates about the project, or to nominate a person for one of the committees, send an email to [hymnalinfo@mennomedia.org](mailto:hymnalinfo@mennomedia.org).

### Women's Retreat Resource



A new offering this fall is a women's retreat kit. *Spark: Igniting Your God-Given Creativity* helps women discover God as the original creator, the joys of being created in God's good image, and nurture their own creative spirits. The all-in-one *Spark* kit comes with everything you'll need to help plan and lead a successful women's retreat. Each session in the Bible study guide is accompanied by a creative guide, with individual, small group, and large group ideas to help women take the study even deeper. A participant guide encourages women to make personal connections and provides space for reflection throughout the retreat.

### Resource Samplers

Resource Samplers are a new kind of lending library from MennoMedia and Herald Press, designed to help you make curriculum choices. Each Resource Sampler contains five to six titles for Sunday school classes and small groups to sample, free of charge, for up to 60 days. Call our Customer Service department at 800-245-7894 for more information on the five types of samplers available.

### New Thirdway.com

Launched this spring was a new and updated "Third Way" website, replacing "Third Way Café," which was first introduced over 20 years ago, in the infancy of the Internet. Curating the best of materials that reflect "all things Anabaptist," it remains the most visited site for people looking for information on Mennonites and the Amish. Check it out at [thirdway.com](http://thirdway.com).

### Recently released by Herald Press:

- The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of Howard Zehr's *Changing Lenses*, an original and ground-breaking book on the subject of Restorative Justice.
- Believer's Church Bible Commentaries on *Lamentations & Song of Songs* by Wilma Ann Bailey and Christina Bucher and *Galatians* by George R. Brunk III.
- *My Calling to Fulfill* by John Sharp, a biography of MCC founder Orie O. Miller.
- *Rewilding the Way: Break Free to Follow an Untamed God* by Todd Wynward.



**MennoMedia**

An agency of Mennonite Church USA  
and Mennonite Church Canada

Russ Eanes  
Executive Director MennoMedia  
Harrisonburg, Virginia



*MennoMedia seeks to engage and shape church and society with resources for living the Christian life, from an Anabaptist perspective*

## 2015 REPORT TO WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE

MHS continues to carry out our mission to strengthen and extend Anabaptist-affiliated health and human services organizations. Within Western District Conference, the following organizations are part of MHS:

- Mennonite Friendship Communities, South Hutchinson, Kansas
- Prairie View, Newton, Kansas
- Bluestem Communities - Kidron Bethel Village, N. Newton and Schowalter Villa, Hesston, Kansas. MHS serves as the national sponsor

Our 2014 – 2015 activities included:

- The annual Mennonite Health Assembly, a March gathering in Cincinnati, Ohio for several hundred board and staff leaders to experience education and enrichment.
- A retreat for executives on succession planning and preparing an organization for transition.
- Affinity networks and an Executive Circle to provide facilitated peer support.
- Sponsorship of the Values-based Leadership Program, which had 44 graduates in February 2015.
- Planning for an international gathering of healthcare leaders in conjunction with the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in July 2015.
- Release of a guide for boards, called Sensitive Conversations, to help them navigate questions about same-sex employee benefits and residency policies, as well as other complicated topics faced by organizational leaders.
- Participation in the Mennonite Church USA convention in Kansas City where sponsoring the registration bags gave an opportunity for attendees to learn about the organizations that make up MHS.

### **ValuedLeadership.org – A NEW RESOURCE**

Anabaptist organizations face challenges and forces as they confront 21<sup>st</sup> Century social and organizational life. In March 2015, MHS launched a new website – ValuedLeadership.org - to help leaders explore what it means to be an Anabaptist organization today.

Through videos, blogs and reflection questions, the website guides visitors in discovering how to demonstrate the values of Anabaptism in a way that is relevant. It supports leaders who are not Anabaptist and want to reinforce the unique core values of our faith tradition.

Created for Anabaptist related health and human service organizations, the resources on the website are free and available to anyone interested in building, reinforcing, aligning, and integrating Anabaptist values into practice. Join the conversation at [www.ValuedLeadership.org](http://www.ValuedLeadership.org).

## **Safe Sanctuaries Task Force**

### **Kathy Wiens**

The Safe Sanctuary Task Force was created under the supervision of Marlene Bogard (former WDC staff) and the WDC Resource Commission. Members of the Task Force are: Diana Schunn, Ruth Mueller and Kathy Wiens

The purpose of the Task Force is to be available to talk to pastors and church leaders about particular dilemmas in their congregation regarding boundaries, safe touch and appropriate behavior. Their role is to provide education, clarity and encouragement regarding Safe Sanctuaries programs and child protections policies. They may also refer persons to helpful resources and websites. Providing in-person resourcing and training will be left to the discretion of the task force. This task force will not provide crisis care, nor in-depth counseling.

**May 3, 2015:** The task force was contacted by Olivia Bartel from Camp Mennoscah about someone giving a Safe Sanctuaries presentation the week of June 1-5. No one on the task force was available to give a presentation during that week. Olivia stated she had given the presentation in the past, so it was decided to have Olivia give the presentation again for Camp Mennascah.

**August 5, 2015:** Kathy Wiens met with Wilma Loganbill at Faith Mennonite in Newton, KS, to discuss their Safe Sanctuaries policy.

**September 13, 2015:** Kathy Wiens gave a Safe Sanctuaries presentation, during the Sunday school hour, at Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka, KS. This was requested by Karen Burkholder who is on the Safe Sanctuaries committee at Southern Hills.

*(Report received after completion of the Report Book. Normally it will be placed with the other Resource Commission Task Force reports.)*