

Granddaughter takes root cont.

passion for the project to her daughter, Ann, who sewed and filled dozens of school kits at the Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church where Katy grew up. So when Bergthal member Wynona Unruh mentored Pasnick for a couple of years before handing over the baton to the young woman, Pasnick was primed to take the reins with the help of hard workers.

“After we close our doors, I hope people remember us as a small but mighty group that was welcoming and helpful and joyful,” she said. “We put everything we’ve got into whatever project and activity we do.”

“I’ve learned that being involved with your community is really important. In the suburbs, I didn’t know some of my neighbors and wasn’t worried about meeting them. I learned how much we can get done when we have a common goal.”

School Kit Sunday is one of the highlights of the Bergthal church calendar, and everyone from the youngest to the oldest finds a job packing the bags. The highest count was in 2011 when a Ralph Buller Memorial enabled the congregation to pack more than 1,500 kits.



Before the church closes this summer, it will host one last School Kit Sunday. Pastor Lynn Schlosser hopes this event will help the congregation to complete its circle.

“Because we were smaller, we could give ourselves permission to pick and choose how to invest our energies and focus on special areas, like school kits,” she said.

“We are very sad to let go but have a deep sense the time is right. We have been a very progressive little church, and it will be hard for our folks to find another church like this in our immediate area.”

Bergthal’s closing will not cause Pasnick to close her chapter on Kansas, she said. She loves coming home from the checkout to the peaceful prairies, the lack of traffic, the deep friendships and the family historical markers that have marked her soul.

“It is all pretty sad for me, because it’s the first church where I felt I really belonged, and there aren’t any other Mennonite congregations nearby. ... But this is home.”

Western District financial report as of January 15, 2013

INCOME \$518,259

EXPENSES \$521,669

WDC will end their financial year on January 31, 2013.



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

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Coming events

Feb. 15-17: Senior High Snow Camp I— Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, CO

Mar. 1-2: WDC Reference Council/Mennonite Church USA Regional Immigration Gathering— Hope Mennonite Church, Wichita, KS

Mar. 3: Women’s Choir Festival—First Mennonite Church, Newton KS

Mar. 15-17: Senior High Snow Camp II— Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, CO

Mar. 21: Women in Mission Spring Supper— Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, KS

July 1-6: Mennonite Church USA Convention—Phoenix, AZ

Aug. 1: Year of the Bible launch—Bethel College, North Newton, KS

Aug. 2-3: WDC Annual Assembly— Bethel College & Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
February/March 2013



Open wide and say ahhh

by Laurie Oswald Robinson



Year of the Bible

PLAN IT READ IT STUDY IT
PRAY IT LIVE IT

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Members of Houston Mennonite Church know that daily Bible reading is at a scant 32 percent among Mennonites. But they also know it is not just a number “out there.” It reflects their struggle with honing a biblically-based identity in a world abuzz with secular distraction.

Rather than let the world shape it, Houston Mennonite decided to invite scripture to more deeply shape the church in a process called *12 Foundational Scriptures*. During August, the congregation discerned 12 foundational scripture texts that express its identity and calls the church into a future with God.

“By September they had solidified an open-ended list that allows for changes as the congregation grows and stretches,” said Kathryn Bauchelle, disciple committee chair.

“We began by brainstorming what scriptures were memorable to us as

individuals, and then narrowed those down to 12 that identified us as a congregation,” she said. “There was good give-and-take on what corporately resonated with us at this time in our church life.”

A favorite scripture for Bauchelle, who came to Houston from Australia, is Jeremiah 29:7, 11-13: “Seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace you will find your peace. . . .”

“Houston is a city of transplants,” she said. “This scripture reminds us to embrace a city not our traditional home and seek its peace and welfare. It encourages us in our mission to care about this city in ways that fit who we are.”

Renewed biblical focus is also taking hold among other Western District Conference (WDC) congregations. The movement is paving the way for WDC to launch the Year of the Bible (YOB) on August 1, immediately preceding WDC’s annual assembly. The hope that ancient scriptures can be forever new in

Open wide cont.

transforming power promises to stoke the “smoldering wick” of biblical literacy into a bright light.

To fan the fires, Marlene Bogard, WDC Minister of Christian Formation and Resource Library Director, sought resources through a \$9,980 grant from Schowalter Foundation.

In the months leading up to the launch, a planning team is shaping a YOB website www.yearofthebible.org that provides resources for individuals and congregations to craft their own programs. They are also planning some events that support the conference-wide biblical focus.

“You can’t be missional unless you are being formed in Christ,” Bogard said. “Scripture is foundational to our faith. When we have strong foundations, we are more likely to develop a view that looks beyond ourselves to the needs of the world.

“If we want leaders 20 years from now, we need to teach the scriptures to our youth and children now. God is active in our world and we are invited to work alongside God in a living partnership. And we can’t work alongside God if we don’t know God’s biggest message to us—the scriptures.”

Pastor Peter Goerzen helped Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, Kans., engage with a 12 foundational scriptures project this past fall. “In college, God used biblical studies to renew my spiritual life. Today, I want to be part of renewing our love for scripture and developing better habits. It is

exciting to allow God’s story to more deeply shape our lives and congregations.”

In Wichita, Kans., Hope Mennonite engaged in a *Reading the Bible in 90 Days* project, which guided about 50 members of the congregation in reading 12 pages of the Bible every day for 90 days.

“We used a DVD series to guide us,” Pastor Brett Dewey said. “The materials gave us an overarching view and pegs that were especially helpful when trudging through tough parts of the Old Testament and other tricky texts.

“We weren’t just reading and skimming but gaining biblical literacy and contextual foundation. Many of the participants completed the program, but the goal wasn’t completion as much as it was simply to prompt people to read and understand more of the Bible than they had before.”

Iglesia Menonita Casa Betania (House of Bethany) in Newton, Kans., is also looking forward to YOB. Currently they have a mid-week Bible study and work at biblical literacy then. Pastor Jaime Cazares personally wants to buoy online engagement with the buffet of resources to be found there.

“Being part of the planning team has helped me to see how many resources there are online,” he said. “In accessing these resources for the first time, my perspective has broadened tremendously. Most of the adults in our congregation don’t use the Internet because of their language limitations. I want to encourage WDC to translate as many resources as possible into Spanish.”



Caleb Regehr works on developing a website for Year of the Bible.

A buffet of resources

Marlene Bogard can do a lot to ensure Western District Conference (WDC) Resource Library has the right materials to sync with the upcoming Year of the Bible (YOB). But she can’t force people to use them!



To uphold her end, Bogard, WDC Minister of Christian Formation and Director of the Resource Library, has assumed the role of “curator.” She looks at the enormity of what is available and discerns what is appropriate for WDC’s Anabaptist constituency.

She culls through every resource to see if it fits with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and understanding of biblical interpretation. She leaves the rest up to the Holy Spirit and God’s people. “Spiritual hunger comes from God’s Spirit. Motivating people is not my role. We offer specific recommendations and solid modeling on how to use those resources.

“Many of these resources will be on the YOB website at www.yearofthebible.org. The site provides a buffet of resources with new materials added continually.

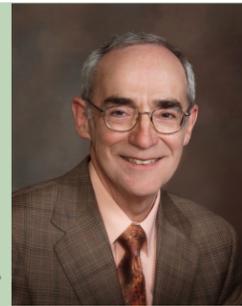
“The challenge in moving this forward is that the WDC planning team and staff will not be able to provide everything that every congregation or individual wants or needs,” she said.

“On the other hand, there is so much available already through Menno Media and other Christian publishers. It’s just a matter of accessing it and using it.”

The pastor’s heart

by Clarence Rempel,
Conference Minister

*Holy words, long preserved,
for our work in this world,
They resound with God’s own heart,
oh let the ancient words impart.*



These lyrics by Lynn deShazo resonate with the respect and honor I accord the Holy Scriptures. It is through these Holy Scriptures that I have met the one true shalom-pursuing God. It is through these Scriptures I see the vision for God’s redeeming work with humanity and God’s restoring work in all creation. It is through these Scriptures that I encountered Jesus who is now my Lord and who calls me friend. It is through these Scriptures that I caught God’s vision for the church to be the healing hands and helping feet of Jesus in the world. All the foundational wisdom for my life comes from this book we now call the Bible.

So, I take great delight in Western District Conference pursuing a “Year of the Bible” emphasis.

*Ancient words, ever true
changing me and changing you.
We have come with open hearts,
oh let the ancient words impart.*

Western District announces new communication model

SEEDS is emailed to WDC churches, pastors and leaders. This weekly paragraph announces what’s new and good in Western District Conference ministries and congregations. Churches are encouraged to forward SEEDS to its members. Pastors are invited to submit one paragraph summaries of kingdom initiatives that will encourage the networking of best practices across Western District

SPROUTS is emailed weekly to WDC churches, pastors and leaders. This email has messages from Conference staff and announcements.

GARDEN is the newsletter sent to churches in bulk for distribution to its members six times a year.

To subscribe to SEEDS or SPROUTS, email us at wdc@mennowdc.org or call 316-283-6300.

All publications are available on line at: www.mennowdc.org

Granddaughter takes root in a ready-to-close rural Kansas congregation

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

When Katy Pasnick came from Chicago to Pawnee Rock, Kans., in 2004 to care for her grandfather, Earl Schmidt, a longtime member of Bergthal Mennonite Church, she planned to stay for a month.

The month came and went. But the 35-year-old still lives on the multigenerational farm homestead. It’s where Earl and the late Maxlyn Schmidt raised Katy’s mother, Ann, and were part of the church that began in 1875.

The church – closing its doors this summer due to dwindling numbers – has become a second home to Pasnick. It’s where she’s been deeply engaged with church family and has helped to spearhead the annual School Kit Sunday each fall when more than 1,000 kits are created.

“One day when I heard my grandfather – who had lost our grandmother two years before that – talk on our voice mail, he sounded so sad,” Pasnick said. “I was in a corporate job that I wanted to leave, so I decided to quit and move to Pawnee Rock for a month to care for him.

“Eight years later, I am still here. I love this community and this church, and I have found a sense of roots and family history. ... My grandfather moved to Kidron Bethel [in North Newton, Kans.], but I decided to stay on the farm and drive to Newton every Friday to spend the day with him.”

Even though the pace of life in rural Kansas is much slower than the Chicago suburbs, she keeps busy and happy – caring for her 90-year-old grandfather who has Parkinson’s, working at Dillons part-time, tending the fires at the homestead and working on the school kit project.

School kit creation is a family tradition that Pasnick reconnected with on the prairies. Her grandmother passed on



Lynn Schlosser, pastor of Bergthal Mennonite Church, her husband Todd and family assemble school kits.