

Growing anew: what God is doing at Camp Mennoscah

By Olivia Bartel, Camp Mennoscah Director



Camp Mennoscah is having a growth spurt. We've recently become our own nonprofit organization. We have a new Board of Directors that is sprouting ideas for improving our programs. There's a Master Plan showing plans for growing camp grounds into the future and two new staff positions (full-time maintenance and half-time office assistant) to help take care of all this new growth.

New mattresses and ovens have been acquired. New and renovated bathhouses are being designed. New trails for hiking and new ways to use the areas across the river are being planned. Our Family Camp is back in our schedule and folks are discussing possibilities for new retreats.

It's exciting. God is creating a new space in a familiar place. With each of these things that we are doing at Camp Mennoscah, we want to create a place that people can't wait to come to. We want folks to have an experience that opens them to God and community, to nature and rest, to rejuvenation and hope. These things are possible because God is working through you, your generous gifts, and our faithful volunteers.

In all things, we want to grow anew. The Camp Mennoscah Master Plan can be seen at www.campmennoscah.org. Keep looking for more information on the renovations we are doing. You can also help grow seeds of faith in the children and youth around you by sending them to one of our summer youth camps. More information can be found under Camps on the Camp Mennoscah webpage.

Coming Events

Aug 1-2, 2013:
Year of the Bible Launch
Bethel College

Aug 2-3, 2013:
WDC Annual Assembly
Bethel College

Sept 15, 2013:
Youth Leader Training
Event
South Central, Kansas

Oct 31, 2013:
New Pastor Orientation

Nov 1, 2013:
Pastor Misconduct
Prevention Training

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
April/May 2013



WDC congregations welcome strangers as friends in Christ

Longtime camp program yields fresh crop of God's goodness each summer

By Laurie Oswald Robinson



Delon Martens has served as program director for pre-junior high at Camp Mennoscah for the past 39 years. And yet he expects the 40th summer in 2013 to yield a fresh crop of God's goodness all its own.

Martens, an elementary-school math teacher and principal for the Haven School District, said each fresh batch of kids gives him a fresh opportunity to plant and water new seeds of faith. He will serve as co-program director with Tammy Duvanel Unruh for one of two sessions serving fourth and fifth graders.

"Something unique happens each summer, because you never know how each group of kids will respond," said Martens, of First Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, Kan. "It's always fun to get out there each summer and see how God is going to work."

"One thing I can always depend on is watching how God uses camp as a special juncture in the kids' faith journey. ... I get thrilled when I work with counselors who were my former campers. It gives me the sense that we really are planting and watering seeds of faith that grow up and give back."

He and Duvanel Unruh are two of 15 program directors who will serve in this year's eight summer camps provided for children and youth from third grade up through high school. This year's theme is "All Things New! Look What God is Doing!"

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

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By Laurie Oswald Robinson



Jesus Martinez (left) and Steve Kaufman at the recent Immigration Gathering.

Jesus Martinez, who shared his story at a recent immigration workshop, is grateful for the support of Faith Mennonite Church in Newton, Kan. It's one of several congregations in Western District Conference (WDC) that are embracing the call to welcome strangers as friends in Christ.

Martinez -- an agronomist with a bachelor's degree in agriculture who lost everything after a U.S. farm bill dashed farming pursuits in his homeland -- moved from Mexico to the United States in 2006. Later, his wife, Brenda, and two children, Jesús Jr. and Alejandra, joined him in Newton, where their once-barren life is transforming into a blessing because of the support of local Mennonites.

"It's amazing what Mennonite people can do with faith," he said at the regional immigration workshop, "Citizens of God's Kingdom,"

sponsored March 1-2 by Mennonite Church USA and WDC at Hope Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kan.

"I was unskilled, undocumented and did not know English. I was stressed, and had no faith, no work, no house and no money. ... But now I am getting skilled. ... I also have less stress, good work, financial resources and am buying a house. I have brothers in Christ and God in my heart."

Martinez' testimony encourages members at Faith Mennonite who have welcomed the family. They include interim co-pastors Weldon and Florence Schloneger who began their roles after Sara and the late Fremont Regier had first helped the family acclimate to the church and community.

"I feel so strongly that God in Christ calls us to reach out to the strangers and aliens and sojourners among us," Florence Schloneger said. "There are so many references in scripture that call us to reach out to immigrants -- a word that describes what we all once were at one time in our family histories."

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Two other WDC congregations in Moundridge, Kan. – First Mennonite Church of Christian and West Zion Mennonite Church – are also welcoming immigrant families.

“A big challenge is the fact that undocumented families do not have access to government safety nets as others do,” said Laura Neufeld, pastor of First Mennonite Church of Christian. “When illness or unemployment strikes, it takes a lot of difficult discernment on the part of the church to determine how much assistance we are able to provide.”

“We are also challenged to ‘be church’ and ‘be community’ on a deeper level. ... We become involved in one another’s lives in deeper ways in facing these challenges. Families from different cultures also expose us to new perspectives, new values, and new traditions that enrich our church community.”



Sessions were led by three main presenters at the gathering attended by over 100 participants. The presenters were Jason B. Boone, coordinating minister for Mennonite Church USA’s Peace and Justice Support Network; Tammy Alexander, senior legislative associate, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) U.S. Washington Office; and Saulo Padilla, MCC U.S. immigration education coordinator.

They shared how issues of economics, militarization and safety and religious freedom have driven immigration in all times and how those issues impact the 21st century specifically. At a lunch interview March 2, they also expressed appreciation for how WDC is leading the charge in tackling national issues on a local and regional level.

“I applaud WDC for addressing issues that are easy to push under the rug because they impact people who are in the shadows of our communities,” Boone said. “The time spent here is not about facts and figures. It is a spiritual investment and has everything to do with the quality of our relationship to Christ.”



Regional immigration workshop participants place pins on a map to indicate their country of origin reminding them that they all were once immigrants.

Alexander said, “Immigration reform is not going to happen at the national level until it is addressed on the local and regional levels. ... That makes it all the more important that folks in WDC are a step ahead of other area conferences. This conference can be a motivator for others.”

Padilla said, “The participants here are becoming more informed, and as they become more informed, they will, one person at a time, help the entire church to know how important immigration issues are to us as citizens in God’s kingdom.”

More information on the conference as well as immigration issues can be found at: www.washingtonmemo.org/2013/03/07/citizens-of-gods-kingdom/ and www.mennowdc.org/committees-task-forces/. The WDC Immigration Task Force is available to resource congregations, small groups, and Sunday school classes (contact Nathan Koontz at 316-212-4593). Print, DVD and curriculum resources on immigration are available at the WDC Resource Library (www.mennowdc.org/library/).



Discover and experience...

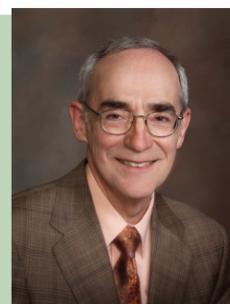
- What is an "Anabaptist approach to understanding Scripture?"
- What does Biblical illiteracy mean and what can we do?
- How can we make the Bible come alive through simple dramas?
- How do children and youth best learn about the Bible?
- What does a Biblically-focused experiential worship service look like?

Bring a team of folks from your congregation to attend the **Year of the Bible Launch!**

www.yearofthebiblenetwork.org
Don't miss the Launch - August 1-2, 2013
Bethel College, North Newton, KS

The pastor's heart

by Clarence Rempel,
Conference Minister



For the Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality... [God] loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners (Deut. 10:17-19). At least 28 such instructions pepper the Torah. Unlike the gods of other nations, the grand Almighty God of Israel cares and provides for foreigners. And God’s people are to imitate God’s love in action.

Jesus’ ministry reflected this care for those on the margins. Jesus’ instruction was that hospitality to the stranger was essential behavior for his followers (Matt. 25:35f). Near the end of the Bible we are again reminded, *Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it* (Heb. 13:2).

What a delight to hear of Western District Conference churches practicing God’s vision of hospitality to the stranger at the recent Reference Council gathering on immigration. We are first of all citizens of God’s new nation and respond to human needs accordingly. We do it in imitation of God and out of remembering our own story of being welcomed and helped.

Global friendship inspires faith, forges new meetinghouse in Thailand

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

Jeff Wintermote, pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Hillsboro, Kan., has learned that sacrificial faith is just as important as secure finances when it comes to laying the foundation of a church.

What’s even more powerful is when these elements are forged in the kind of global friendship experienced by Asian Christians and North American Anabaptists. It’s a friendship that Wintermote has been part of since 2005 when he took his first trip to Thailand and Laos.

Wintermote has been deeply inspired by a congregation of Thai believers who make up part of the less than 1 percent of Christians in the largely-Buddhist land. His inspiration reached a new peak when he traveled with a North American delegation to the small village of Nahongtai, Thailand, in November 2012 to participate in the dedication service of the group’s new \$18,000 meetinghouse.

More than \$10,000 was provided by Trinity and other congregations in Mennonite Church USA to help fund the project. Other financial gifts came from a Schowalter Foundation grant and other Thai groups. The resources enabled the congregation to build a two-story, concrete church with classrooms, an office and a sanctuary to replace a dilapidated bamboo hut.

“As a pastor, who is constantly called upon to give and give and give, it’s always a blessing to find places that fuel my inspiration and hope, and that is what my global friends have done,” he said. “They did a lot of the labor themselves, including the women who scooped out sand from the river and carried it to the work site to be mixed for cement. They made the cement one bucketful at a time because there was no way for a cement truck to get to them.”

Wintermote first connected with the Hmong in Thailand when Max Ediger, of Turpin (Okla.) Mennonite Church where Wintermote served before Trinity, invited Wintermote on an overseas trip. Ediger had been a longtime Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker in Asia.

Five more pilgrimages followed for Wintermote. During a 2009 trip, three members from Trinity as well as one member of Zion Mennonite Church in Elbing traveled there with Wintermote. That’s when the idea for helping them raise funds for the new meetinghouse took root.

“We visited 14 Hmong churches in the villages, where we saw the broken-down bamboo hut and thought, *we have to do something*,” Wintermote said. “The church had purchased 1.5 acres of land but did not have funds to build the actual meetinghouse.”

The meetinghouse is a palace compared to the bamboo huts that dot the small village of farmers. They earn no more than \$1.50 a day by selling what their family doesn’t eat from their corn and cabbage crops, Wintermote said.



Congregations in Thailand must belong to one of five umbrella groups – none of which are Anabaptist – so the congregation is not Mennonite. Nevertheless, the Thai congregation and Christians in neighboring Laos are interested in the Anabaptist emphasis on peacemaking because of the violence in their society.

“There is an ongoing discussion among the Hmong and Anglos in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada about how we can best reach out to our global brothers and sisters and share our Mennonite theology,” he said. “Despite the distance, we share an affinity for close-knit communities, family life and peace. ... There is a lot of hope and inspiration that can flow between our two lands.”