

New Stirrings in God's Family ... continued

force member of Wichita. "The congregation is the cultivator of God's hope in their communities as it re-imagines how its strengths can empower that cultivation.

"To get dream teams going, a congregation needs to have individuals who can see the big picture as well as the people who focus more on doing the practical and smaller details. We need people with vision and the people who can also ask the hard questions about process."

Mascho's church-planting journey, taken with her husband, Steve, is one example of creative dreaming and doing. The couple began a worship service in the community room of a local housing complex in Gladewater. Luncheon participant Wendy Funk Schrag, WDC Board secretary and member of First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kan., said Mascho's story enlarged her own understanding of what constitutes a church plant.

"There are the more traditional reasons for planting churches, such as no Mennonite churches in specific areas or churches that outgrow their buildings," Funk Schrag said. "There are also reasons to plant churches in communities if there are needs that aren't being met in a traditional church building.

"Gladewater's choice of a meeting space allows the church to provide direct ministries to the people who live at the housing complex as well as to meet together as a fellowship. There may be more opportunities for this type of church planting in all kinds of communities."



Loren Johns

Assembly participants also enjoyed worship, keynote messages and seminars focused on the theme, "Shaped by God's Story, Word and Spirit in the Book of Acts." The two evening messages by Loren Johns, professor of New Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., were "The Bible and Anabaptist Interpretation," and "The Work of the Discerning Community."

Preceding his message on Aug. 2 was the memorized presentation of Acts 2:1-47 by four children of Delmar and Suzanne Miller, members of First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, Kan. The children were Katie 12, Betsy 10, Charlie 8, and Lucy Rose, 5. Their homeschooling mother places a strong emphasis on literature and biblical literacy.

"My charge as a parent is to put scripture in their heart and their head, so that in a clutch and in the challenges of life, the words of God will be there for them to draw upon," Suzanne Miller said. "As Mennonites, we are people of 'the book'. I want to pass on to my children the love of God's word."

Following the children's presentation, Johns explored how Anabaptists interpret the Bible - through the rule of Paul, the rule of Christ and Christocentrism, or through Christ as the word of God.

"The rule of Paul ... says that you don't have to be a priest or a doctor of the law to discern God's will. ... The Bible is best read in the congregation, and the job of the seminary is to develop people who can lead the people of God to discern for themselves.

"The rule of Christ is basically ... not about church discipline. ... but how we are to be there for each other in giving and receiving counsel, seeking each other's well-being and giving and receiving trust."

## Coming Events

**Sept 15, 2013:**  
The Art of Bible Storying, Michael Novelli (Youth Leader Training Event), Faith Mennonite Church, Newton, KS

**Oct 25, 2013:**  
"Engaging Our Sexual Culture" Bethel College, North Newton, KS

**Oct 26, 2013:**  
WDC Reference Council  
"The Church and Homosexuality: A Conversation that Can Hold Us Together", Faith Mennonite Church, Newton, KS

**Oct 31, 2013:**  
New Pastor Orientation  
WDC Office, North Newton, KS

**Nov 1, 2013:**  
Pastor Misconduct Prevention Training, Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS



Charlie, Katie, Betsy and Lucy Rose Miller

# WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference  
September 2013



## New Stirrings in God's Family

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

During its annual assembly Aug. 3, Western District Conference (WDC) - which seeks to open new church plant doors as one of its main priorities - felt deep joy over how a God-delivered gift to its doorstep last year has become family.

The 250 attendees received *Chin Emmanuel Church*, Houston, Tex., as a full member congregation during their afternoon session in Memorial Hall at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan. They celebrated this unbidden gift from God with a standing ovation, as more than a dozen members of *Chin Emmanuel* absorbed the welcome with wide smiles.

Pastor Simon Lian Hmung Tlumang held their membership plaque to the ceiling amidst loud applause followed by handshakes, hugs and prayers from Clarence Rempel, WDC Conference Minister, and Gilberto Flores, Associate Conference Minister, who first met Pastor Simon in winter 2012.

That was when Pastor Simon first contacted Flores about his church wanting to connect with Mennonites. The Chin people represent a persecuted ethnic group from Burma that is seeking religious freedom in the United States. Pastor Simon's call led to many visits from Flores, followed by the church becoming an emerging

congregation last summer, and a full member this August. "New things are stirring, and we're being challenged in being open, nimble and flexible in responding to new possibilities," said Clarence Rempel. "Jesus talks about reaping where we haven't sown, and that has been the case with several recent church plantings. ... The Chin leaders said they were praying and fasting about who to connect with, and God directed them to us!"

Pastor Simon said, "We now have a 'father' and a 'mother'. Because we now belong to you, the Mennonites, we are fatherless no more."

To further explore these new stirrings of God, WDC's Church Planting Task Force sponsored a Church Planting Dreamers luncheon Aug. 3. About twenty participants interacted with task force members, Flores and three pastors: Jaime Cazares, who planted *Iglesia Menonita Casa Betania*, Newton, Kan., which became a full WDC member in 2011; Karen Mascho, *Grace Mennonite Fellowship*, Gladewater, Tex., and Moises Romero, *Iglesia Camino de Santidad*, Liberal, Kan.

"The local congregation is God's mission agency in its own context," said Nita Nikkel, task (continued on back)

Shaped by  
God's Story



Year of the Bible  
READ IT STUDY IT PRAY IT LIVE IT



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

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**Marlene Bogard, WDC Minister of Christian Formation** – “Take the initiative to plan and dream about what you want to do according to your needs and desires. Set forth a plan that you need to customize. It can mean that you read through the Bible in one year, but it doesn’t have to be that. It can also mean experimenting with art, music and drama as you engage with the scriptures in myriads of ways. The Year of the Bible (YOB) is not just for adults. We want to encourage multigenerational activities and storytelling, potlucks with biblical foods, camps and games. Christians everywhere are yearning for more biblical education. Faith practices surrounding a more intentional focus on the Bible can be kept going long after 365 days are up.

“Our website: [yearofthebible.org](http://yearofthebible.org), is the go-to place for ongoing resourcing. All of the YOB Launch handouts and presentations are on the site. Also the Facebook group, Year of the Bible Network, features weekly posts. Join up!”



# Year of the Bible

READ IT PRAY IT STUDY IT LIVE IT

## Glimpses from Year of the Bible Launch and Annual Assembly

**Peter Goerzen, pastor of Grace Hill Mennonite Church in Whitewater, Kan, and a member of the YOB committee:** “When younger people get involved with the church and the scriptures, it gives us hope that the church is carrying through the generations.”



**Caleb Regehr, member of the YOB planning committee and youth pastor for Inman, Buhler and Hoffnungsau Mennonite Churches, as well one of the planners for the young adult worship service:** “When I got asked to be on the planning committee for YOB, it made me think about how I could focus more on the Bible in my ministry with

junior high and high school youth. One thing I did for my junior high groups was form Bible studies that included time for reflection and dialogue on the passages we chose to study. I chose several selections that we engaged with for three months, including passages from James, I and II Corinthians and the Psalms. In the high school groups, we studied the book of John.”

**Deryll Amstutz, First Mennonite Church, Hillsboro, Kans.:** “As a member of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, I am very grateful for this conference. It will help us with our overall approach to scripture, including the presentation of passages for Sunday worship. When someone sings a solo, he or she practices ahead of time. But it doesn’t seem to be that way when someone reads scripture. Often, a reader bumbles through it at the podium on Sunday morning without having studied it beforehand. And rarely does anyone memorize scripture that is used in worship. I hope that some of these practices will change as we focus more intentionally on the Bible.”



**Rosie Epp, new co-pastor of Zion Mennonite Church, Elbing, Kan., with her husband, Ray Reimer (they brought one of the largest numbers of participants from their congregation):** “YOB helps us remember that historically, as Anabaptists, we have been people of the word. It is helping us reconnect with our roots and work towards not losing the focus we have had through the generations. The resources are helping us to incorporate scripture into the whole life of the church and to seek to keep the Bible as our guide. Anabaptists historically have interpreted scripture in the light of community discernment. This helps us remember that everyone in the community learns differently, and we need to accommodate that. Because of this community emphasis, I am not just encouraging people to the read the Bible at home, as important as that is. I am encouraging them to find a partner for such things as reading the Bible through in a year. That way, if an individual gets stuck in their reading, his or her partner can offer new insights that inspire them to keep going.”

**Susan Jantzen, YOB planning committee member, pastor of First Mennonite Church in Hillsboro, Kan., and guide for learning center titled “Walk This Way – Bible Walkn’ on the Plaza”:** “We know that Bible stories are containers, holders of meaning that we dip from as we go through our lives. That is why knowing the Bible is important. But God blesses, saves and remakes people and creation in specific settings -- certain culture, certain threats, certain hills, creeks, dry deserts and places of water and growth.

“Creating a map that is big enough (maps on the plaza were 8 by 10 feet and 16 by 20 feet) lets us ‘walk’ these Bible stories and experience more the specific settings. We remember the physical detail of the story, realize more deeply the risk, the trust, the provision that the Bible stories include.

“Then, seeing one of our own, an adult or a child, walking the way of Abram or Jacob, Miriam or Jesus, we have the occasion to clap and encourage our brother or sister to walk in faith. The public cheering on is a fun release and a blessing to all who want to keep saying yes to the walk in OUR specific settings, our hills and valleys, deserts and flowing springs.

“During the learning center, I shared some public education standards from third to seventh grade as a reminder of the map skills and world history our children and youth have. Maps are great fun! Our history as people of faith has a place in world history. The more we grasp of that history, the better we can see how God might be helping us shape our witness today.”

