

## New pastor peers help each other persevere

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

After two years serving in his first lead pastor role, Brett Klingenberg, First Mennonite Church in Beatrice, Neb., is seeking to grow stronger in his pastoral identity. Because Western District Conference (WDC) is sponsoring a new pastor's group, he does not have to strive alone.

He and five other new WDC pastors are participating in a cohort of peers guided by **Ron Flaming** (pictured right), leadership coach and organization development consultant for Coaching Leaders International. In the next eight months, Flaming, an ordained pastor within Mennonite Church USA, will guide the six participants in group action-reflection sessions that blend group and individual coaching. Each pastor will also meet one-on-one with Flaming as well as share their journey with a partner peer.



"I had been a youth pastor before, but this is my first lead pastor role, and it was a big jump in the overall scope of responsibility for me," said Klingenberg, 32, after the first meeting Sept. 3. "I hope this group can help me live more into that role than I am and to claim the pastoral identity for myself."

"The desire of Klingenberg, a graduate from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va., to further solidify pastoral identity is a common experience," Flaming said. "Most ministers develop their leadership practices and form their pastoral habits in the critical first years of ministry," he said. "During this period, especially, pastors need mentors and peers who help them work through difficult situations and flourish in parish life. The group will help participants use their strengths to develop a stronger pastoral identity. Participants will also create their own personal pastoral leadership plan and develop a community of practice with their peers."

Five other participants are joining Klingenberg in this adventure. They are Laura Neufeld, First Mennonite of Christian, Moundridge, Kan.; Bob Beecher, Beatrice (Neb.) Mennonite Church; Brian Harmon, First Mennonite Church, Halstead, Kan.; Caleb Regehr, youth pastor at three congregations in Kansas, including Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church and Inman Mennonite Church in Inman, as well as Buhler Mennonite Church; and Phil Schmidt, Tabor Mennonite Church, rural Newton.

Clarence Rempel, WDC conference minister, initiated launching this group. He said, "We have a wonderful cadre of new pastors in first-time assignments. The beginning years are critical in shaping a trajectory of effective and fruitful ministry. The patterns of self-generated work and relational leadership skills are formed in these first years. I am delighted to be able to provide the kind of coaching Ron Flaming gives with the help of a Schowalter grant."

## Coming Events

**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

**Nov 16, 2013:**  
Out of the Pew (youth event)  
Location TBA in Newton area

**Nov 21, 2013:**  
Pastors' Day Apart ("Journeys  
with Scripture")  
Location TBA

# WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference  
October/November 2013



## YOB sparks Tabor congregation to journey from Genesis to Revelation

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

As Tabor Mennonite Church engages with Year of the Bible (YOB) sponsored by Western District Conference (WDC), the congregation isn't fiddling with a verse here, a chapter there.

Rather, the congregation – guided by Philip Schmidt, pastor, and Rosie Jantz, associate pastor – are tracing the whole story of scripture from Genesis to Revelation in the form of the *heilsgeschichte*. That's the German word for salvation history. This fall, the church began its exploration of the biblical timeline and study material taught by Bible professors Marion Bontrager and Michele Hershberger at Hesston (Kan.) College.

Each Sunday will include worship, a biblical-oriented snack and "formation stations." For example, on Sept. 8, the theme was creation. Schmidt preached a sermon on the topic. The snacks were chocolate balls covered with foil pictures of creation and animal crackers. And seven formation stations – implemented by Jantz as Sunday school electives -- focused the theme through prayer, Bible study, discussion, peace, visual arts, music and drama.

"The YOB is providing a unique opportunity for our congregation to dive into God's word so that we can embrace God's story as our own and live into God's story in our world today," Schmidt said.

Jantz said, "The YOB is helping us in our seven stations to reflect on how God works in our daily lives through different lenses."

Schmidt and Jantz have developed materials to complement the themes, including a huge *heilsgeschichte* banner stretched across the front of the sanctuary. Three-ring binders include the timeline, worship schedule, a chronological Bible reading plan, weekly handouts that highlight the scriptures used in the sermon, family discussion questions, a few reflection questions and room for notes. The children also participate in a children's time and receive a smaller, age-appropriate binder.

"We want to help people creatively respond to God's written Word in ways they may not have tried before," Jantz said.

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

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## Moving from divisiveness to dialogue on human sexuality in the church

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

In hopes of moving from divisiveness to dialogue, Western District Conference (WDC) will focus its fall Reference Council on the topic of human sexuality on Oct. 26 at Faith Mennonite Church in Newton.

WDC's Human Sexuality Discernment Task Force is sponsoring the daylong gathering, "The Church and Homosexuality: A Conversation That Can Hold Us Together," for WDC leaders and interested members of congregations.

The invitation comes with prayers that the event – to include worship, presentations, panel discussion and table conversation – will foster greater unity and understanding regarding the church's discernment on same-sex orientation and same-sex couples, said task force members.

"We want to provide input from people who have done extensive study and teaching in these areas as well as responses on how this material sounds to people from their own journey of faith," said Heidi Regier Kreider, task force member and pastor of Bethel College Mennonite Church.

"We also want to provide a safe space for people to voice their convictions and their hopes and their understandings in a context in which they are not pressured to take positions or to make decisions. ... This gathering is focused on learning, discernment and dialogue."

Jim Stucky, task force chairperson, agrees. "We hope to cover as many perspectives as possible without being confrontational or advocating for any particular position. We want to allow different perspectives to live side by side, rather than becoming tools for opposition."

Different perspectives will be presented in the morning keynote addresses by **Keith Graber Miller**, professor of



Bible, religion and philosophy at Goshen (Ind.) College, and **David Boshart**, executive conference minister for Central Plains Conference. Four persons will offer ten-minute responses to these initial presentations, followed by wrap-up reflections by the presenters.



The afternoon will include table conversation centered on attendees' understandings of sexuality. Clarence Rempel, WDC conference minister, will guide reflection on ways to better maintain relationships in conflict from Romans 14 and 15.

On Friday, October 25, the task force and campus ministries at Bethel College will host an evening event, "Engaging our Sexual Culture," at Bethel College Krehbiel Auditorium at 7 pm.



Keith Graber Miller will present "Toward an Ethic of Sexuality." Joining him will be humorist, actor and theologian **Ted Swartz** of Ted and Company Theaterworks to present the premiere performance of a show created for the event. It is titled "A Peek Into the Church's Journey with Sexuality."

Tickets may be purchased for \$10 at Bethel College ticket office, [316-283-2500](tel:316-283-2500). All seats reserved.

The task force's sponsorship of the Oct. 25-26 events grows out of its mission to foster unity and to discern God's will in keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ and his saving love for all persons.

Other task force members are Nadine Reimer Penner, Wichita, Kan.; Brett Klingenberg, Beatrice, Neb.; and Marvin Zehr, Newton.

Register for "**The Church and Homosexuality**"

by October 18

online at: [www.mennowdc.org](http://www.mennowdc.org) (Events)

or call 316-283-6300

or email: [wdc@mennowdc.org](mailto:wdc@mennowdc.org)

## Children at First Mennonite identify their "circle of grace"

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

A hula hoop is a toy kids love to play with. But this summer at First Mennonite Church in Newton, the hoop during Circle of Grace lessons became a symbol of empowerment to keep oneself safe.

To help them understand how to maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual boundaries, each child stood within the hoop and practiced what to let in and what to keep out.



They did this by enacting the Circle of Grace Pledge. They raised their hands above their head and brought their arms down, keeping them outstretched. They extended their arms in front and behind themselves, and embraced the space around them. They were encouraged to know that God is in this space with them. Then they reached down to their feet. This space became their "circle of grace."

This object lesson was used during four-week Sunday school sessions when Grades K-4 used the curriculum in June, and Grades 5-6 used it in August.

The curriculum -- implemented for the first time by the congregation this summer -- empowers students to recognize that they are valued because God created them. And because of that, they are entitled to take action when their boundaries are being threatened/or violated.

"I feel one of the strongest components of the experience was helping the children discuss a whole variety of experiences that include components of danger – not just those that have to do with sexual abuse," said Kathy Wiens, curriculum organizer trained to offer this curriculum in a variety of settings and a fellow teacher with Judy Schrag and Renee Hamm.

"We talked about bullying and about how each child is a gift from God," Schrag said. "We helped children identify trusted adults, such as people in church and in their families. These are people they could go to if something was troubling them or if they were unsure about a situation. We tried to make a really big point of that, because those extra layers of support are such a big safeguard against bad things happening." We used Max Lucado's book, *You Are Special*, which tells the story of Punchinello, the wooden Wemmick who believes that he isn't good enough because of what others say about him. And then his maker reassures him that he was created special and unique, just the way he is."

For more information on how to engage Circle of Grace in your congregation, contact Jon Stanton, Dove's Nest program coordinator, at (402) 577-0866, or [Jon@DovesNest.net](mailto:Jon@DovesNest.net). Kathy Wiens is also available to present trainings on the Circle of Grace curriculum. Contact her at 316-283-9533.

