

Safe Sanctuary Time!

by Marlene Bogard, WDC Minister of Christian Formation

“Safe Sanctuary” is the common term for a child and youth protection policy in a faith community. This policy, and the vision and training that accompany it, helps to ensure safety for children and youth. Dove’s Nest recommends that every faith community develop and implement a policy suited to its context. A resolution passed at the Mennonite Church USA Convention in Phoenix 2013, states, “We, therefore, resolve that the Mennonite Church USA will work proactively with its member congregations, conferences and affiliated organizations to promote the protection of children and youth from all forms of abuse and neglect and to advocate for their safety.”

A child protection policy should address the following questions:

- What is child abuse and neglect?
- How can we make our facilities safer?
- What personnel practices will reduce risks?
- What are best practices for programs involving children and youth?
- What training will be offered to those working with children?
- How will we respond to allegations of abuse?
- What if we have concerns about an individual’s behavior or if a known offender is attending our church?
- How can we promote the safety of children and youth in the wider community?

Answering these questions in times of crisis is very difficult, so it is best to be proactive and develop a robust policy before it is needed. See more information at: dovesnest.net/resources.



Children’s Time at Peace Mennonite Church, Dallas, TX

Coming Events

June 7, Aug. 2 (10 am-12 pm)
WDC Resource Library Open

June 22 (3 pm)
SHINE curriculum training
Lorraine Ave Mennonite
Church, Wichita, KS

July 4-6
WDC Annual Assembly
Lakeview Camp & Retreat Ctr.
Waxahachie, TX

WDC Garden

*Stories from Western District Conference
June/July/August 2014*



Peace Mennonite Church reaping rewards of risk

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

Members of Peace Mennonite Church (PMC) in Dallas are reaping the rewards of the risk they took last fall by moving to their own space and paying more than double for rent.

What has also more than doubled is its maturation of identity as a congregation – which began in 1971 as a house church -- and freedom to respond to new opportunities. For 32 years prior, the congregation with about 65 active attendees met in various spaces within the Midway Hills Christian Church. The rent was lower but so were the number of opportunities to expand their mission, said PMC pastor Ryan Koch.

Since late last October, PMC has been transforming 5,000-square feet of office space in a commercial strip mall in north Dallas into a worship and

fellowship center. On Sunday, May 4, the congregation dedicated its new home with a service in its new sanctuary. Down the hall sits another large room in which members created a fellowship space with a coffee bar and a children’s play area.

“Our new home has given us a sense of permanence and a sense that we’re maturing,” Koch said. “It’s a fresh step for Peace Mennonite and very exciting because we have the freedom to do what we want. Before we always had to work around someone else’s schedule.”

Ryan Springer, PMC congregational chair, said, “When we were renting from others, we felt like we somewhat had to fit around their identity. Now we have our own identity as Mennonite Christians and have more freedom to be more vocal about our peace outreach and different stances on things.”

Since PMC has moved to its new space, people have repeatedly said how comfortable they feel and how happy there are to share our own space with friends and neighbors, Koch said. “Having our own space has brought a new liveliness to worship, and people are staying longer after worship to fellowship. And when we have visitors, they tend to come back, which didn’t often happen in our old situation.”

Reaching out in the new locale has its challenges. The strip mall lies near many restaurants and some office



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

Western District Conference

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supply stores and advertising agencies. Yet even without residential neighbors, Koch and Springer are hopeful that PMC can be welcoming and mission-minded in other ways.

Part of that welcome is maintaining a strong presence on the Web, Springer said. “Even though we had a large sign out near the street in our old situation, most of our visitors had found us on the Web,” he said. “That indicates to us that we need to change how we market ourselves.”

Marketing needs mission behind it, and PMC is considering new ministries. “Peace Mennonite has always been very communally active in and around the Dallas area, such as starting the Dallas Peace Center in the early 1980s,” Koch said. “But it has



never had a strong neighborhood presence. It is new for us to ask what it will mean to be a church that can meet and do things other than on Sunday mornings. Asking that question is both exciting and scary.”

Despite growing pains, they have many gifts to utilize, Koch said. “We have many people who are counselors, social workers and teachers who are gifted in the mental health field,” he said. “So it’s likely we may offer seminars and workshops on mental health issues that are related to justice.”

Even before new ministries are formed, people have been taking responsibility for the development of the space as well as its upkeep, For example, Pam Hatcher served on a four-person design committee that helped to remodel the space. And others are helping to take care of the physical plant.

Her role on the committee was to create the fellowship center. “It was a big huge box of a room and one wall had two partitions sticking out of the

wall and a bunch of little cubicles,” she said. “I didn’t know how we were going to make it work. Before we did anything, we spent time watching how people



naturally moved about in the space and tried to respond to that.”

Craigslist purchases and other donations helped create a gracious welcome, even on a slim \$1,500 budget for the entire office space, she said. “We weren’t just painting and buying new furniture just for aesthetics,” she said. “God is the one offering the invitation, and we are doing all this to cooperate with God in accepting people and making them feel welcome.”

The Pastor’s Heart

by Clarence Rempel, Conference Minister

God with Us: Patient and Persistent

There is not one person that God is not patiently and persistently pursuing. “God is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn’t want anyone lost. He’s giving everyone space and time to change” (II Peter 3:19 *The Message*). Jesus demonstrated this heart of God in conversations with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus. Jesus explained these conversations of pursuit with “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus handed off this patient, persistent pursuit to the Holy Spirit-filled church with “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). “Make disciples of all peoples” (Matthew 28:19). “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

God’s church doesn’t have a mission; God’s mission has a church. We are that church.

God with Us— Patient and Persistent Join us at Assembly 2014!

The Western District Conference Annual Assembly will gather at Lakeview Camp & Retreat Center in Waxahachie, TX on July 4-6.

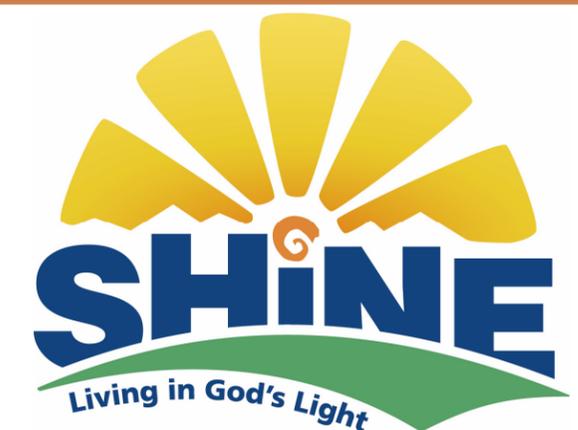


- **Join us as we celebrate** our phenomenal Year of the Bible initiative. Hear congregational stories and experience Tag-Team Preaching on Friday night with some of our very own WDC pastors who have helped lead Year of the Bible efforts in their own congregations: Pastors Anita Kehr (First Mennonite, Newton, KS), Ray Reimer (Zion Mennonite, Elbing, KS), Tonya Ramer Wenger (First Mennonite, Hutchinson, KS), Bradley Roth (West Zion, Moundridge, KS) and Steve Schmidt (Alexanderwohl Mennonite, Goessel, KS).
- **Join us as we learn** from our church plants: how God is working, how the Spirit is moving, how new Christians are learning to walk the Jesus way. On Saturday night, we will hear first-hand from Western District’s very own church planters: Moises Romero (Iglesia Camino de Santidad, Liberal, KS), Karen Mascho (Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Gladewater, TX), and Byron Pellecer (Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto, Wichita, KS).
- **Join us in fellowship** with each other during worship and communion, over meals, in the pool and on-the-road bus trip.

Special meals include the Mennonite Women luncheon with Rosa Flores speaking and the Pastor-Spouse meal.

- **Join us in discernment** as we consider a new Church Planting Commission and discuss a resolution submitted by Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, KS.
- **Join us in worship, Texas style and Hispanic style.** Friday and Saturday evenings, our worship will be led by these Texas pastors: Lee Lever, Austin Mennonite; Rachel Epp Miller, San Antonio Mennonite; Ryan Koch, Peace Mennonite, Dallas; and Karen Mascho, Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Gladewater. On Sunday morning, we will all attend Iglesia Luz del Evangelio (Light of the Gospel) in Dallas. Associate Conference Minister Gilberto Flores will preach on God With Us—Patient and Persistent.
- **Join us as we explore** during break-out sessions: *Our Faith & Our Story* with the Chin Emmanuel Church, Houston, TX; the new *SHINE!* Curriculum with Vicki Hinz-Enz (First Mennonite, Beatrice, NE) and Alicia Roth (West Zion Mennonite, Moundridge, KS), and a Q & A time with Terry Shue, Director of Leadership Development for Mennonite Church USA.

Register to attend today at mennowdc.org or see your church office for brochures. Questions can be addressed to Marlene Bogard, Assembly Director, at 316-283-6300 or mbogard@mennowdc.org.



SHINE LAUNCH!

Mark your calendars for **June 22** at 3 pm for a rousing introduction to the new faith formation curriculum from MennoMedia. Singing, worship, hands-on activities will help teachers and parents get acquainted with this tool for preschool through grade 8. Location: Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, Wichita, KS. Call 316-283-6300 to register.