

God's story becomes WDC's story during Year of the Bible

by Laurie Oswald Robinson



L-R: Preachers Anita Kehr (First Mennonite Church, Newton, KS), Steve Schmidt (Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, KS), Brad Roth (West Zion Mennonite Church, Moundridge, KS), Raymond Reimer (Zion Mennonite Church, Elbing, KS), Tonya Ramer Wenger (First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, KS)

During opening worship July 4 at Western District Conference's (WDC) annual assembly in Waxahachie, Texas, five Mennonite pastors did in one hour what took millennia for writers of the books of the Bible to do – share God's redemption story.

In a tag-team sermon, the pastors celebrated WDC's culmination of its Year of the Bible (YOB) by surveying Genesis through Revelation in light of the assembly theme, "God With Us: Patient and Persistent."

They also shared how they and their congregations learned more about God's patience and persistence this past year by reading the Bible in 90 days, doing a Sunday sermon series covering the entire biblical story and choosing 12 scriptures that guide congregational identity and growth.

These are only some of the vast riches unearthed during this past year, said Marlene Bogard, WDC's Minister of Christian Formation and Resource Library Director. She set YOB in motion by calling together a planning team that launched YOB in August 2013.

Since then she's heard countless stories of how men have brought Bibles on golf weekends, wives and husbands have spent winter evenings reading the Bible, families have played Bible games and pastors have tackled pesky biblical passages.

"The Year of the Bible was a dream that grew wings and flew off into uncharted and imaginative territory," she said. "Our planning team prayed that *some folks in some congregations* might try some things. But the Spirit led many people and pastors in many congregations to engage in the Scriptures in many creative and formative ways. **Thanks be to God!**"



Marlene Bogard shows Annual Assembly participants the Year of the Bible "Scripture Doodle" book (a collection of 20 black & white patterns created for coloring, meditation and memorization). Copies are available for purchase (\$10 each + shipping) by emailing mbogard@mennowdc.org.

Coming Events

Aug. 16
Day on the Farm
Rural Hillsboro, KS

Oct. 30
Pastors' Day Apart
Location TBA

Nov. 15
Reference Council
Location TBA

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
August/September 2014



New Church Planting Commission to invite guests into God's banquet

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

What church planters Byron Pellecer, Karen Mascho and Moises Romero shared at Western District Conference's (WDC) annual assembly July 4-6 in Waxahachie, Texas, served as an "appetizer" of what's to come.

replace the current Church Planting Task Force to give greater focus to new initiatives, and delegates approved the proposal.

Gilberto Flores, WDC associate conference minister in Texas, led the three pastors in a panel discussion during evening worship July 5 at the Lakeview Camp and Retreat Center. The discussion focused on Acts 10-11. It drew parallels between their experiences and the biblical story of how God forged unlikely connections through dreams and prayers between unbeliever Cornelius and disciple Peter.

For example, Romero, pastor of *Iglesia Camino de Santidad*, Liberal, Kan., shared how the dreams and prayers of him and Lou Gomez, former pastor of Calvary Mennonite Church in Liberal, intersected several years ago. That intersection led Romero's congregation to begin sharing worship space in Calvary's sanctuary. His tiny congregation overflowed his living room and they needed more space.

"Every time I went to work, I passed by Calvary," Romero said. "One day I dreamt that I would someday walk into that church. The dream grew so big inside of me that one day I actually knocked on Calvary's door. ... Pastor Lou opened the door and told me that he had dreamt that someone new would come knocking on the church door. He began praying for that to occur, and then I appeared."

Mascho, who with her husband, Steve, helped to plant Grace Mennonite Fellowship in Gladewater, Texas, shared



L-R: WDC Associate Conference Minister Gilberto Flores with Church Planters Byron Pellecer, Karen Mascho and Moises Romero

Their storytelling was meant to inspire hope among 180 assembly participants that WDC – through its new Church Planting Commission -- will become more creative and daring in inviting people to the banquet of God's kingdom. The WDC Leadership Commission and Executive Board proposed that the new commission

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

Western District Conference

PO Box 306, 2517 N Main, North Newton, KS 67117



316-283-6300

wdc@mennowdc.org

www.mennowdc.org

about the unlikely connection she made between being female and being a pastor. “As God led us to expand the scope of our ministry from motorcyclists to an underserved population, God also enlarged my understanding of the possibilities of my serving as a woman in pastoral ministry,” she said.

In another vein, Pellecer, pastor of *Aposento Alto Iglesia Menonita*, a church plant in Wichita, Kan., shared how God helped make him more flexible as a pastoral leader called to serve a multiplicity of Latino cultures within one congregation in south Florida.

“As a Guatemalan, I had been in my own little monocultural bubble,” he said. “I needed to stop seeing people through my own biases and empty myself so I could embrace others. ... So I began pastoral visitations and invited people to tell their stories from their country of origin and I shared mine. As a result, we began to cry with each other and to listen to each other.”

“God’s patience and persistence shaped these three church planters and can also help shape WDC’s church-planting journey,” said Clarence Rempel, WDC conference minister. He tied WDC’s historic and present church planting to the assembly theme – “God with Us – Patient and Persistent.”

“Jesus described for us God’s heart for distressed humanity with the story in Luke 14 of a man preparing a grand banquet for the town, but all invited gave last minute, rude excuses for not coming,” Rempel said. “The man says, ‘Go, invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Go to the broken. Invite the suffering.’ God is persistent, but there is still room. The man says, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’ God is persistent.”

“God’s redemptive mission is deeply personal and profoundly sociological -- new churches for new believers and new churches for new shalom restoration opportunities. This is God’s heart for the redemption of the world, and it has shaped my heart for church multiplication.”

The commission will provide leadership and resources for church planting initiatives and foster relationships with emerging Anabaptist/Mennonite groups. It will also help emerging groups and their leaders connect with congregations, resources, staff and WDC structure.

The commission hopes to craft a new approach to church planting that is rooted in a biblical context and yet spreads wings into 21st-century North America, new commission member Lee Suderman said. “In the old

paradigm, church planters looked for people to match the core group,” he said. “But in the new paradigm, we want to go out into the highways and byways and look for anyone who feels a need for faith.

“This will require a much more incarnational witness – living our lives in front of them and being open to their testing what we are sharing. This will likely lead us to evangelize unbelievers more than recruiting existing believers from other churches. It will mean we find a whole different kind of people and raise them up from Christianity 101. It’s a whole new world out there.”



Pastor Ryan Koch (Peace Mennonite Church, Dallas, TX) prays for five of the six newly-elected Church Planting Commission members: (L-R) Lee Suderman (Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, KS); Nita Nikkel (Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto, Wichita, KS); Violeta Ajquejay (Tabor Mennonite Church, Newton, KS); Alicia “Lici” Roth (West Zion Mennonite Church, Moundridge, KS); Marv Zehr (Shalom Mennonite Church, Newton, KS). Not pictured: Virgil Penner (Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, KS)

The Pastor’s Heart

by Clarence Rempel, Conference Minister

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth....From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts 17:24-28)

This is the story of God. This is the story of the Bible – *God with Us: Patient and Persistent*. And that was the theme of our recent Assembly in Waxahachie, Texas.

God is good. God is faithful. There is not one person that God is not pursuing with the shalom good news of Jesus Christ. And we get to be a part of God’s redeeming, reconciling, restoring global mission. Praise be to God!

Constituents across WDC to help shape human sexuality policies

By Laurie Oswald Robinson

By completing a survey by Aug. 31, constituents across Western District Conference (WDC) will help shape WDC’s response to a resolution calling for congregations to make their own decisions regarding human sexuality issues without censure from the conference.

On July 5 at its annual assembly in Waxahachie, Texas, WDC’s Executive Board announced its plan to send the survey by email to all teenagers (ninth grade and above) and adults. The survey will help WDC discern how best to respond to the resolution from Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City, Kan.

The resolution states:

“Be it resolved that the Western District Conference ... out of respect for the responsibility and commitment ‘to seek to understand and interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church,’ upholds the right of individual congregations to discern how homosexuality will be subject to Biblical interpretation.

“Be it further resolved that pastors, with the affirmation of their congregations, consistent with Mennonite policy, and without fear of censure, may officiate or refuse to officiate ceremonies that consecrate before God monogamous, life-long unions, regardless of sexual orientation of those being united.” (See full resolution at: <http://mennowdc.org/conference-life/annual-assembly/>)

During the afternoon delegate session, Ruth Harder, pastor of Rainbow Mennonite, said, “We at Rainbow value relationship with WDC and Mennonite Church USA and are thankful for the dialogue taking place. We hope we can continue to work in the spirit of love and faithfulness. We recognize that this is a divisive conversation and hope that by presenting it for discussion only, and by having a task force, that we will have the needed time to seek common ground and understanding.”

The resolution was brought July 5 to delegates for discussion only. The hope is that the survey and follow-up meetings will help WDC to have time to

better process its response and to seek counsel from Mennonite Church USA. The survey was explained in detail by Jim Schrag, chair of the Discernment Task Force commissioned to shepherd the process of using the survey as a tool in conference decision-making in the next year.

In an interview after the delegate session, Schrag said, “We are interested in more than just counting noses. We really would like to know what kind of context people in the pew have for all this. So often when committees and task forces share information, it is hard for them to separate out their own ideas from the broader context. We believe the grassroots is the place to begin our discernment, not the place to end it.”

The survey will have 20 statements after which respondents will mark strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. The statements are contained within four sections: Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective; Mennonite Church USA membership guidelines; polity regarding decision making among national body, area conferences and congregations; and views of how the church deals with sexuality and scripture and its documents and guidelines regarding sexuality.

After the results are tallied, they will be used as the basis for discussion at the WDC Reference Council (non-voting body) this November and in spring 2015. It’s likely that a voting decision will be made by delegates later in 2015.

“We desire that a good representation of all our churches participate in this survey of giving counsel to the leadership of Western District Conference and to the fellowship of churches as a whole,” said Clarence Rempel, WDC conference minister. “This will be an essential source of information for our Reference Council meeting on November 15 which will be expanded beyond WDC leadership to include delegates to Assembly 2014 and members of our congregations.”

To complete the survey, go to:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WDCopinon>.

