

Many Participate in Polity/Sexuality Survey

By Clarence Rempel, WDC Conference Minister

The Discernment Task Force of Western District Conference (WDC) is delighted with the strong participation in the twenty-statement online survey regarding human sexuality, polity, Membership Guidelines, Confession of Faith, and Scripture. There were 1,700 surveys returned, with 700 of those coming in during the last week in August. Comments from participants generated 500 pages of personal perspectives to sort through and categorize. The Task Force met on September 2 in a first round of processing 1,000 surveys. They will meet on October 11 to process the next 700 surveys and to plan for the Western District Conference Reference Council on November 15.

The WDC Executive Board appointed the Discernment Task Force to guide a year-long conversation across Western District Conference in response to a resolution brought by Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, in 2014. The resolution asks WDC to allow pastors and congregations “to officiate or refuse to officiate ceremonies that consecrate before God monogamous, life-long unions, regardless of the sexual orientation of those being united.” See <http://mennowdc.org/conference-life/annual-assembly/#2014> for the full text of the resolution and its introduction at Assembly 2014 in Waxahachie.

Jim Schrag, Task Force chair reflected, “As our discernment moves forward, the first question appears to be, not whether WDC will maintain a basic polity of congregationalism, but rather what kind of congregationalism will it be? What kind of covenants do WDC congregations need with each other? What can congregations decide on their own?”

The WDC Reference Council meeting at Eden Mennonite Church on November 15 will focus on these questions after receiving a full report of responses to the survey. In addition to members of WDC commissions, committees, task forces and pastors, congregations are encouraged to send representatives who will serve as delegates to WDC Assembly 2015 and to Mennonite Church USA’s biennial conference, Kansas City 2015.

Register for Reference Council at mennowdc.org/calendar/. All are welcome.



Loaves and Fishes Grant

The Western District Resource Commission is offering a \$500 *Loaves and Fishes Grant* to WDC congregations who are seeking to multiply God’s grace in their communities. This *Loaves and Fishes Grant* is made possible through Vision 2012 funds and will be available from September 1, 2014—September 1, 2015. The hope is that this grant will empower congregations to reach out in love and build relationships with the surrounding community. A maximum of 20 grants will be awarded. Find the application at: <http://mennowdc.org/resources/grants/>

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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Coming Events

Oct. 30

Pastors’ Day Apart
Shalom Mennonite Church
Newton, KS

Nov. 15

Reference Council
Eden Mennonite Church
Moundridge, KS

Dec. 12-13

Church Planting Retreat/Advance
Hesston, KS

June 12-13, 2015

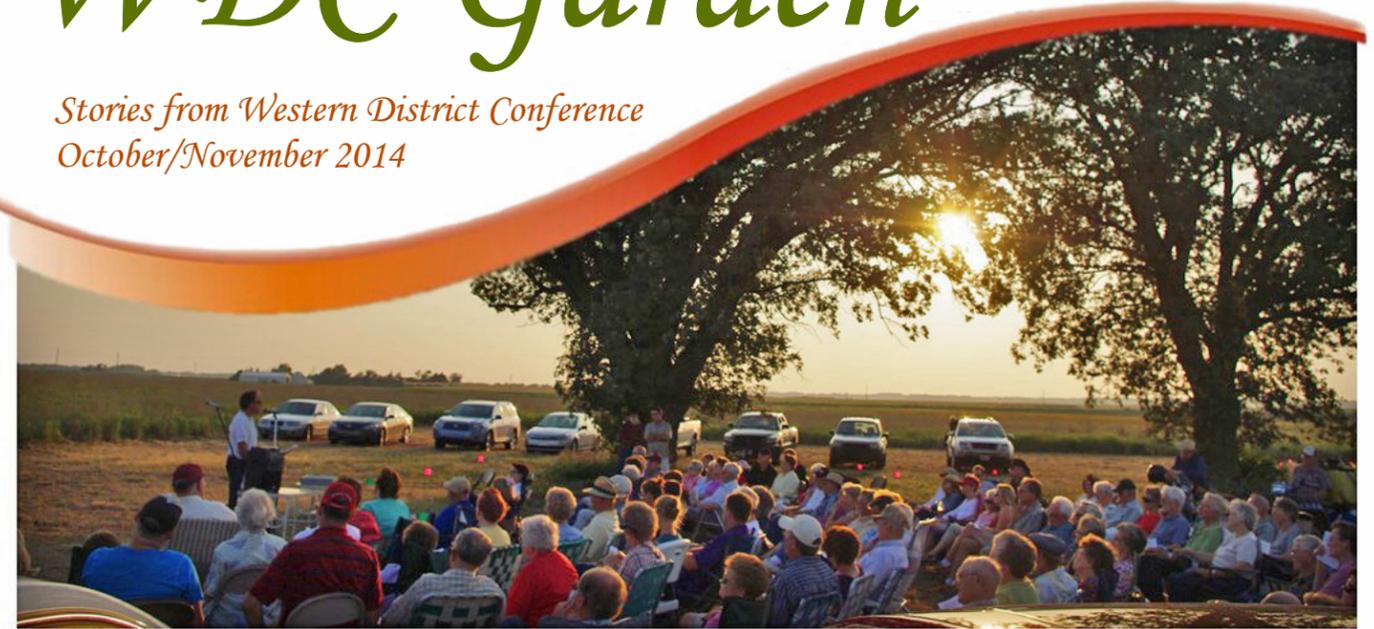
*Anabaptist Faith Formation—
Growing in Christ* Launch
Bethel College,
North Newton, KS

Fall 2015 (TBA)

WDC Annual Assembly

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
October/November 2014



Hoffnungsaus congregation links 140 years of history to future hopes

by Laurie Oswald Robinson

During a Hoffnungsaus Mennonite Church (HMC) 140th anniversary event, signs pointing the way to tours of the historic Immigrant House site caused a stir that may have included stirrings of the Holy Spirit.

A local resident thought Mennonites may be housing Mexican youth crossing the border into the United States. That assumption was unfounded, said Cleo Koop, HMC pastor, during a recent interview. Nonetheless, the historical program and worship on July 20 at the site of the former houses built for the first Mennonite settlers to the Inman-Buhler area was not disconnected from immigration issues.

The service was one of several events hosted from January through July that linked the church’s past with its future hopes for providing a welcome to newcomers. In January Hoffnungsaus began a three-year sister church relationship with the Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Camino de Santidad, in Liberal, Kansas.

“As an immigrant congregation of the 1800’s, we can relate to an immigrant congregation of the 21st century,” he said. “In some ways, we have similar histories of persecution, economic hardship and language barriers. This relationship connects us with the broader culture and today’s immigration issues as well as with the growing population shift from whites being the majority to a more pluralistic society.

“There are approximately 10 million undocumented people in our country. We need to understand what this means for us and how we relate to all this with some sense of compassion and help and ministry.”

Camino members are already experiencing this compassion, said Marlene Aquino, a youth leader at Camino, which celebrated its third anniversary in March. Some members of Hoffnungsaus traveled to Liberal to join the anniversary celebration.

And 22 adults and children from Camino joined Hoffnungsaus’s July 27 celebration worship service and stayed in local homes, Aquino said in a recent interview. A Hispanic young female dance troupe participated in the service. It piqued the interest of young girls in the



Hoffnungsau congregation who want to learn more about worship dancing from their new Hispanic friends.

“We are from two very different congregations in different settings and cultures, and yet there are no boundaries stopping us from loving each other as brothers and sisters,” Aquino said. “Because of their history, they understand some of our feelings, and there is mutuality and warmth among us. They have been in our shoes, and therefore have a heart for what our people are going through.”



This monument, recognizing the spiritual leadership of the Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church during the past 140 years, lists the elders, lay ministers and pastors who have served the congregation. Louis Martens (trustee) and Pastor Cleo Koop (in the white shirts) led the monument dedication service.

Completing the historical circle

About 140-plus years ago, the first Mennonite settlers faced similar hardships. German Mennonites from Russia came over the ocean on the Teutonia. They established Hoffnungsau in a valley meadow south of Inman and north of Buhler, where the current meetinghouse sits today. The German word Hoffnungsau combines deacon Johann Dueck’s words upon first seeing the chosen site: “Dies ist ja hier eine wahrhaftige Hoffnungs Au” or (This is a very pleasant view; it is like looking onto a Meadow of Hope).

This meadow of hope generated hope in God for the first members of the Hoffnungsau congregation and evoked the start of several other area congregations, Koop said. They include Bethel Mennonite Church, Buhler Mennonite Church, Inman Mennonite Church and Hebron Mennonite Church, which no longer exists. Since January, the congregations have reflected on their history in a series of events titled “A Hopeful View: Celebrating the Past, Faithfully Embracing the Future.”

“We examined our roots and foundation and the source of direction that people had in the past that included a focus on peacemaking, community, discipleship and scripture,” Koop said. “This reflection helps us know who we are today as well as where we want to go in the future. We are grappling with knowing how to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century, including embracing more diversity and varied worship styles.”

The sister church relationship is helping the congregation to branch out beyond the traditional community into new horizons, said Bob Poulseen, chair of the congregation who birthed the idea of the sister church relationship.

In the next two-plus years, Hoffnungsau hopes to involve their sister church in its mission supper, MCC School Kit Drive and Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale. The church also hopes to assist the Hispanic congregation in its various missions, he said.

“We sensed this relationship could help us both deepen spiritually as well as broaden culturally,” Poulseen said. “Because of our sister church relationship with a congregation far beyond our immediate area, we are being stretched and perhaps better prepared in the future to relate to people who are disenfranchised in our own backyard of the counties of Harvey, Reno and McPherson.”

Mutual Aid Music!
The WDC Music Lending Library has multiple copies of over 450 anthems, ready for your choir or ensemble. Plan now for Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas! You can view the entire library at: <http://mennowdc.org/library/music-library/> or stop in and we will guide you.

Rural Ministry Seminar:
The Mission of a Rural Congregation
S. Roy Kaufman will lead a Rural Ministry Seminar on January 24, 2015 from 8 am—noon at Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston, KS. This seminar, which is open to the public, will explore the mission of a rural congregation and the unique calling that God has for the church in a rural context. See more information at: www.mennowdc.org/calendar/

Save the Date
for the Next Big Thing!
June 12-13, 2015
Anabaptist Faith Formation - Growing in Christ Launch

50 years and counting for God

By Laurie Oswald Robinson



Gilberto Flores, associate conference minister for Western District Conference (WDC) in Texas, has traveled many miles since he began ministry 50-plus years ago. And yet he believes it’s the steps he took as a young man that most decidedly set his course.

As Flores and his wife, Rosa, were honored at WDC’s annual assembly July 5 for their longtime ministry, he cited his early spiritual formation and shoulder-tapping by church leaders as pivotal in his decision to enter ministry. He was born on Nov. 24, 1945, in the small city of Santa Ana, El Salvador, the son of Pioquinto and Maria Cristina (Campos) Flores. As a son of a Protestant pastor, prejudiced teachers and peers taunted him, but the modeling of his family helped him absorb these hardships in faith.

“I grew up hearing my parents saying that if we will die, we are ready, but we will not stop doing what we are doing,” Flores said. “I grew up with a sense that our life is in God’s hands, and only God decides how we live it and how we lose it.”

This passion for ministry became his. At 14, he witnessed about Jesus in school. At 16, he became a youth pastor and a deacon. At 18, he was licensed as a Christian education minister for 10 churches in El Salvador. At 24, he became a pastor of his first congregation as he finished seminary.

In 1972 he married Rosa Herrera and was ordained pastor of a congregation in southern Guatemala. It was there that the first seeds of his peace and justice focus sprouted and grew. It was a focus that shaped his ministry in that country and put his life in danger with the political powers.

After being a pastor, Flores became academic dean at the Mennonite seminary SEMILLA in Guatemala City. From 1990 through 1996, he and Rosa served as church planters in Venezuela and Texas. In 1996, they moved to Kansas, where Flores served in the church that became Mennonite Church USA. His ministries included being a director of Hispanic ministries, director of *Instituto Biblico Anabaustista*, a denominational minister and a director of missional church advancement.

In 2009, Flores came to WDC. His overarching passion has been to “create a mission-oriented and multicultural conference and to see that we are putting WDC into the world and not outside it.”

As assembly participants gave the couple a standing ovation, Flores announced he would retire in January 2015 from WDC – an area conference he deeply loves and respects, he said.

“At WDC I learned a conference is a good place to talk about our diversity and differences and still love and respect each other,” he said. “The leaders and staff in this conference have been really good people to work with. They have inspired me and challenged me. They are topmost.”



Brad Roth prays for Gilberto Flores at the 2014 WDC Annual Assembly. Also pictured L-R: Terry Rediger, Rosa Flores, Clarence Rempel, Sara Dick