

Marlene Bogard serves for 25 Years



The perky voice and the welcoming smile of Marlene Bogard is exiting the Western District Conference library after almost 25 years of service. Marlene began her work as half-time Resource Librarian, went on to complete a Masters in Christian Ministry at Friends University, Wichita, and was ordained to Christian Ministry in 2007. Marlene is currently carrying three assignments as Associate Conference Minister of Christian Formation, Director of Annual Assembly and Director of the Resource Library. She will complete her work in February to become the Executive Director of Mennonite Women USA.

Major innovations in Marlene's tenure included guiding the physical renovation of the library, the cultivating of an expansive children's section, helping congregations implement Safe Sanctuary practices, and transitioning from the card catalogue to an online catalogue accessible from anywhere. The Year of the Bible initiative along with the Year of the Bible website was a crowning achievement that impacted many of our congregations in 2013-2014. The Anabaptist Faith Formation Launch on June 12-13 is being handed off to Katherine Goerzen, Director of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary – Kansas Center, and a team of WDC leaders.

A farewell reception is being planned for Sunday, March 1, 3-5 PM, at the Resource Library, North Newton, KS.

Make plans to attend the Anabaptist Faith Formation Launch!

Mark your calendars to attend this inspirational and educational resourcing event on June 12-13 at Bethel College, North Newton, KS. Modeled after the highly successful Year of the Bible Launch from 2013, this event will include presenters, breakout groups and experiential worship to provide both information, challenges, practical theology and hands-on learning.

This launch is for anyone who would like to intentionally form faith in their congregation, family or personally, but especially for teachers, pastors, parents, youth workers, education and faith formation committees, and worship planners. More information coming soon!



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

March 16-21
WDC Basketball Tournament
Bethel College, North Newton KS

April 11
WDC Reference Council
Hope Menn. Church, Wichita KS

June 12-13
Anabaptist Faith Formation—Growing in Christ Launch
Bethel College, North Newton KS

June 30 –July 5
Mennonite Church USA Convention
Kansas City KS

Oct. 30-31
WDC Annual Assembly
Bethel College, North Newton KS

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
February/March 2015



Dedication drives church planting dreams

by Laurie Oswald Robinson for Western District Conference

HESSTON, Kan. -- Making pastoral calls after a long day at another job is often reality for church planters in Western District Conference (WDC). But this is the dedication that drives their dreams.

It was the storytelling of such church planters that filled their Dec. 12-13 gathering – Catalyst Retreat for Church Planting. It inspired hope that the desire to dream big in the midst of small resources is how God often works to birth new communities of faith.



Church planters and their support teams, WDC Church Planting Commission members, WDC staff, resource persons and others met at Cross Wind

Conference Center to encourage each other in the fires of moving forward. The event drew about 25 persons and began with a retreat for church planters followed by an advance for all church planting dreamers. It included inspirational presentations, worship and prayer and vision-casting for the future.

On Dec. 13, main presenter Chet Miller-Eshelmen,

church planter and pastor of LifeBridge Community Church in Dover, Ohio, shared his journey. It included a story about a discouraging breaking point. To deal with his stress over setbacks, he said he spent some time in prayer in the woods, and heard God say, “Chet, it is not by your intelligence or sense of humor or charisma or energy or persistence that you are going to grow this church. I am Yahweh and I am going to build my church. It’s all about me.”

In response to his testimony, Gilberto Flores, WDC’s recently retired associate conference minister in Texas, invited WDC church planters to share their stories. What emerged were similar accounts of how it is God’s faithfulness, and not their dedication – as important as it is – that brings divine fruitfulness out of human labor. They shared how the Holy Spirit transforms roadblocks into creative conduits for growing their ministries.

“In my experience as a bivocational pastor, there is sometimes frustration,” said Jaime Cazares, church planter and pastor for *Iglesia Menonita Casa Betania*, Newton. “For example, when I



work at the Mennonite Central Committee Et Cetera Shop, persons come by the store to talk with me and unload.

“At first I told these folks we would have to wait until after work. But after I spoke about this with my managers, thank God, they were flexible and understanding. They told me that when that happens, I should feel free to stop and talk awhile before getting back to work. Because of their flexibility, I can make friendships and do two different jobs at once.”

Bi-vocational situations require sacrifice, as was evident in the stories shared by several other church planters in a panel discussion led by Flores. They said they crafted sermons in the car on the way to work, took pastoral calls at midnight before rising early for their second job, struggled with cross-cultural differences and sought support to avoid burn out.

“Listening to these stories gives hope that there are people crazy enough to follow Jesus in this way,” Flores said. “Likewise, it demonstrates that God is crazy enough to call us. God knows this is difficult and complex but is crazy enough to call human beings rather than angels to do this work.”

That’s why church planters need support. Two members of the support committee of Byron

Pellecer, church planter for *Aposento Alto Iglesia Menonita*, shared their experiences.

“At our meetings, we start with worship and then share what has been happening in our lives in the past month as well as vision for future direction,” said Geneva Hershberger, Mennonite Church of the Servant. “We are developing church among us right there as we are working at building the church plant.”

Marcus Logenbill, of Hope Mennonite Church, said, “Two things I’ve learned is that one, we need capable, dedicated and compassionate leaders as church planters. And two, communication between the support group members and the church planter is very important.”

In concluding worship, Lee Suderman, a WDC Church Planting Commission member, said the Holy Spirit is the most important member of any support team. “Who knows what will be built in five years in WDC through the power of the Holy Spirit if we pick up a blueprint and hammer and start building.”



Unique Leadership Training Offered in 2015

by Clarence Rempel



The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), located in Wichita, recently created a special grant opportunity for church-related organizations. Acting on an invitation from KLC staff, Western District Conference (WDC) and South Central Conference (SCC) submitted a joint application. Out of 17 proposals, we were one of 5 successful applicants, resulting in an award of \$50,000 worth of leadership training, which will be divided 2/3 to WDC and 1/3 to SCC.

What is the purpose of the Kansas Leadership Center?

The Kansas Leadership Center defines its purpose to “equip people with skills to make lasting, positive change for the common good. KLC is unique in the field of leadership development. Our goal is to assist and partner with Kansans to help them become more effective at exercising leadership, which will help make Kansas communities healthier, stronger and more prosperous.” This grant can also be utilized by persons living outside Kansas.

What does this grant mean for us?

In its application, WDC wrote that our “first purpose is to sustain transformational pastors. This leadership grant will enable both pastors and congregational leaders to reflect on and articulate specific leadership challenges and then discover tools that will help them maneuver through challenges to new ministries in their

communities. WDC’s second purpose is to resource healthy, missional churches. The experience at the Kansas Leadership Center will provide a framework for understanding the various dynamics of their congregations, and church leaders will receive coaching to achieve their goals. They will come away with a new vocabulary, new action steps and new techniques to become better leaders for the common good.”

The WDC share of the grant will make it possible for approximately 34 people to participate in one of the seminars to help church leaders move towards what they care about most deeply. Small congregational teams are encouraged to participate together.

New Associate Conference Minister Begins



Howard Garver has accepted a call from the Executive Board of Western District Conference to serve as Associate Conference Minister for Texas and Director of Church Planting

beginning January 1, 2015. It was the role held by Gilberto Flores who retired January 31. Howard will be serving one week per month for the first eight months commuting from his home in Sarasota, Florida, where he is currently serving as Transitional Pastor for Bayshore Mennonite Church. He applied at the recommendation of Marco Guete, Conference Minister for Southeast Mennonite Conference and former WDC Associate Conference Minister in Texas. Howard is a new Mennonite who appreciates the wholistic perspective of following Christ in all of life in shared community with a missional purpose.

Howard grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. High school peers and teachers were the witnesses in Howard’s life that brought him to Christ. He is a graduate of Messiah College where he met his wife Becky from Abilene, KS. They served with Brethren in Christ World Missions in Venezuela for five years in support of church planting. He next served as an Associate Pastor at Collin Creek Community Church, 1997-2003, in Plano, Texas, which was a

What is the next step?

Go to mennowdc.org/grants/ to find the grant application form with a description of the three different seminars that are available throughout 2015. The seminars are valued at \$800 to \$1,500 which includes tuition, meals and lodging. Western District Conference is asking for \$100 per applicant. When your scholarship is approved you will receive a password to register directly with the Kansas Leadership Center. Staff Clarence Rempel and Marlene Bogard attended “You. Lead. Now.” in 2014 and are happy to respond to your questions.

“Leadership is an activity, not a position. Anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere.”

new Wesleyan church. During this time he also worked as Director of Evangelism and Church Growth with a focus on church planting in Louisiana, Texas, and Peru for the Wesleyan Church. He then served as the senior pastor of the Levant Wesleyan Church, Falconer, New York, from 2003-13. It was a church in substantial distress with a \$1 million debt that he guided to stability and a new missional focus. He worked with a number of new missional initiatives in the community including Open Table, an accompaniment ministry for persons wanting to move out of poverty. In addition to mentoring, he prepared tax returns for low-income families.

In his acceptance Howard writes:

I am excited to join the Western District Conference! I understand what Paul was feeling as he wrote the letter to the Romans. He had heard a good report of their faith and wrote of his plans to be with them so that in some way he could contribute. We will begin the year commuting back and forth from Florida, getting to understand the history and vision of the congregations and conference. Later in the year, Lord willing, Becky and I will relocate to the Dallas/Fort Worth area in order to more fully engage in the work. We are humbled and honored by this call to serve Christ and his Church in this way. We ask for your prayers and grace as we begin.