

Comments from the Conference Minister

By Heidi Regier Kreider

At the recent Anabaptist Vision & Discipleship Series at Hesston College, speaker Shane Claiborne described Jesus as “God with skin on.” Through Christ, “the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.” Shane urged us as the body of Christ to live out the incarnation by practicing a “theology of place,” alert to God’s work in the particular communities, land, people, and struggles around us.

Recently, particular places have been in my prayers, and on my heart and mind, as I seek glimpses of God’s presence in the world.

Hesston, KS, is in my prayers, following the shootings there in February. I lament the tragedy of death and pain in this community, and its impact on many others beyond this place. I also offer prayers of gratitude for the resilience, hope, compassion and courageous leadership shown by members of the community, revealing God’s healing presence in this place.

Israel/Palestine is on my heart as I travel April 1-13 with a *Come and See* learning tour to that region sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Central Committee. My heart is heavy, pondering decades of deep-rooted fear, insecurity and violence that have wounded relationships between people in this conflicted land. Yet, Israel/Palestine also represents God’s promises, faithfulness, and relentless desire for justice, restoration and reconciliation.

“Rural” and “Urban” are categories on my mind, in preparation for WDC Reference Council meetings April 23 in Beatrice, NE (*Being the Church in the Rural Context*), and October 22 in Dallas, TX (*Being the Church in the Urban Context*). How do we understand these particular contexts in which WDC churches are located? What stories can we tell of God at work in these places? What gifts and challenges do rural and urban churches offer each other, as partners in God’s mission in WDC? All congregation members, pastors, WDC board, commission and committee members are invited to attend Reference Councils, as opportunities to practice a “theology of place”.

Let us join God’s resurrection story, participating in God’s work of healing, hope and life in each and every place!

WDC SPRING REFERENCE COUNCIL

“Held Together in Mission: Being Church in the Rural Context”

April 23, 2016, 9 am—3 pm

First Mennonite Church, 6714 W. State Hwy. 4, Beatrice, NE

Sessions will include a panel discussion of WDC pastors working on a book-writing project on rural ministry and story telling about the unique experiences, gifts and challenges of being church in rural communities. Table and large group conversations will explore how rural and urban congregations can learn from one another as partners in God’s mission. Refreshments and lunch will be provided. Please RSVP by April 14 to: 316-283-6300 or wdc@mennowdc.org. Let us know if you want to carpool.

Coming Events

April 23, 2016—Spring Reference Council, “Held Together in Mission: Being Church in the Rural Context”, First Mennonite Church, Beatrice, NE

July 29-30, 2016—Annual Assembly, “Held Together in Mission”, Bethel College, North Newton, KS

October 22, 2016—Fall Reference Council, “Held Together in Mission: Being Church in the Urban Context”, Dallas, TX

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
April/May 2016



“Love Your Community” Day

From Linda Ewert, Associate Pastor at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church (Goessel, KS) received a *Loaves and Fishes* grant from WDC for the purpose of doing a “Love Your Community Day” on September 20, 2015. The following Sunday, we offered praise and thanksgiving to God, giving testimonies of where we saw God’s love and presence around us as we helped others in our community.

were included. As we worked together in a variety of ways, it was also an opportunity for us to learn to know each other better, and learn about each other’s interests and gifts as we worked together. It was an opportunity to learn about our community—to do more than look across the street or down the road—but to actually help in some small way.

Sixteen projects were identified, and there were 160 children, youth and adults who participated. The projects included cleaning up and weeding the school



“Love Your Community” Day was a day committed to sharing God’s love in real and practical ways. It was an opportunity to build relationships with people and share that we care. Everything we did was inter-generational—all ages from the littlest to the oldest



garden; repairing/painting a bridge, doing fall cleanup and providing a worship service at the nursing home; doing a prayer walk around town; doing yard clean-up; making freezer meals for people in need of food;

 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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painting at the Mennonite Heritage Museum and cutting firewood. Our little children colored pictures for nursing home residents and did little service projects around the church. Others tied comforters to be given to community families. Another group made a delicious meal for all to enjoy at noon.

The Bible verse we claimed as we declare our mission and purpose for that day was “whatever



Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church Provides Vital Household Items for Refugees

As a refugee resettlement organization, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is responsible for setting up households for clients prior to their arrival in Wichita. As part of this responsibility, the IRC must also provide the most basic necessities. Just a few of the necessary items include: a bed, blanket and pillow, as well as a bowl, cup, fork and a spoon per person. Clients are also provided the essential items to safely prepare food, a pot to boil water with and a pan to cook food. In addition, basic hygiene items, including a towel, wash cloth, soap and razors.

The members of Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church (Wichita, KS) have pledged to provide items necessary for household set-up and care. Items such as paper towels, trash bags, dish soap, all purpose cleaner, laundry detergent and light bulbs are some of the items donated by members of the congregation. “People are bringing the items to church where they are stored and then delivered to the IRC,” said Lois Harder, Pastor. IRC’s Case Workers can take the packages with them when they are setting up an apartment.

“We are hopeful that by providing these household items, the newly arriving families will be

you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (I Corinthians 10:31)

On Sunday, September 27, our worship service was a celebration of praise and thanksgiving for all the ways God was at work strengthening our faith, forming relationships and building friendships as a community and the body of Christ. We learned that “when we go out to help others, God’s presence meets us and equips us to do whatever is set before us to do. In other words, the kingdom of God flows through those who are open to being dispensers of God’s love and presence to others.” To God be the glory!



able to use their resources on other necessities, and will feel supported and welcomed into our community.” Harder said.

These donated items have a big effect on our client’s lives, saving the individual or family around \$40-\$60 per household set-up. Having these items donated, the money that would have been used to purchase these items can be given back to the client and used towards rent or utilities. The donation of these boxes is not only financially helpful to the client, but also helps to create a community that welcomes refugees and helps them on their path to self-sufficiency.



For more information about ways you or your organization may help the clients served by the IRC, please call 316-261-2795. *Article used with permission from IRC website: <http://www.rescue.org>*

Sister Care—Western District Women in Mission

By Pam Schrag (WDWM President) and Jennie Wintermote (WDWM Vice President)

Are you a woman? Do you attend a WDC congregation? Then you are a member of Western District Women in Mission (WDWM)!

What does WDWM do? We gather for Bible study and sewing circles. We raise money for WDC, Camp Mennoscah, Bethel College, Mennonite Women USA and local projects. We gather to laugh, sing, and pray together. We connect and find ways to support one another. WDWM groups look different in each congregation; they are anywhere women gather to support each other, their congregations, the conference and/or the denomination.



One way WDC women are learning new ways to support each other is through Sister Care events led by Carolyn Heggen and Rhoda Keener. Sister Care seminars (a program of Mennonite Women USA) provide women with tools for ongoing personal healing for recognizing and celebrating God’s grace in their lives. It creates the space for responding more confidently and effectively to the needs of others.

WDWM sponsored a Sister Care event January 29-30 at Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton. Seventy-four women from 17 congregations in four states were in attendance.

The weekend provided connections on a large level for all the women who attended, but also more closely with those who came together from their congregations. Five sessions focused on reclaiming our belovedness as daughters of God, celebrating our gifts as nurturers and caregivers, enlarging our circles of care and embracing our life stories. The time together provided so much joy and togetherness.

As the weekend closed, the women planned what they might do next as they journey together. One church made friendship bracelets to share with each other. Another church started a Sister Care class for women in their church and another began sister prayer partners with monthly meetings. Along with many individual blessings, this event will continue to richly bless the many congregations as our sisters share their stories.

WDWM was also a sponsor of the Sister Care for college women, held at Bethel College in February. Thank you Western District Mennonite women for donating to WDWM so we can provide sponsorship and Mennonite Women USA for Sister Care.

Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Camino Nuevo

Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Camino Nuevo in Dallas, TX, is a new WDC church plant begun in fall 2015 under the leadership of Pastor Antonio Caceros (pictured right). Participants are meeting Sunday afternoons in the pastor’s home and in house churches during the week, sharing Bible study with neighbors in the east Dallas area. In January, Pastor Caceros received his chaplain’s license, allowing him to visit in hospital and prison settings as part of a support group for in-



dividuals and families dealing with addiction. The church plant is looking for a location to rent for meetings of the church plant and support group.

Pastor Caceros previously served at Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb in Dallas. Sandra Montes-Martinez is now pastor at Monte Horeb, which is supporting Camino Nuevo along with Monte Horeb’s sister church, Southern Hills Mennonite Church (Topeka, KS). Other partner congregations are Iglesia Luz del Evangelio and Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Esperanza in Dallas. This partnership is coordinated by the WDC Church Planting Commission, which also contributes financially through WDC. Please pray for this new church plant, and contact the WDC Church Planting Commission if your congregation is interested in supporting similar models of church planting in WDC in the future.