

## Comments from the Conference Minister

By Heidi Regier Kreider

I traveled in April on a *Come and See* learning tour to Palestine/Israel, co-sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Central Committee, together with Western District Conference and South Central Conference. *Come and See* tours are one way MC USA is implementing a resolution approved by delegates in 2015, to support Palestinian and Israeli partners in peacemaking. The resolution is a commitment to understand more fully the social, economical and political context; to reflect on our own theological and political understandings of the land of Israel-Palestine; and to discern ways we can see a more just future for all peoples of Israel and Palestine.

The *Come and See* tour helped us learn more about the history of this land: The legacy of fear created by anti-Semitism and the Holocaust; the suffering of Palestinians through the destruction of villages and communities at the establishment of the state of Israel and in the continuing Israeli occupation; and the presence of the Christian church and other religious traditions through the centuries. We witnessed contemporary realities: Palestinian refugee camps; illegal Israeli settlements; the segregation wall that restricts movement and imprisons Palestinians; house demolitions and detentions that devastate Palestinian families and communities; and the cycle of militarization and violence that dehumanizes both Israelis and Palestinians. We were sobered by the stories how violence, fear and oppression impact their lives. We were also inspired by those working persistently for justice and peace through faith-based organizations, church communities, political diplomacy, economic development, social activism, and international partnerships.



Tour group shares a meal with MCC staff in Bethlehem.

Our tour group returned feeling a deeper bond with sisters and brothers in the global church, a greater respect for the common humanity we share with all the people of Israel/Palestine, and a commitment to tell their stories as we join their work for justice and peace.

(Note: Kansas-based participants in the *Come and See* tour will present a program on June 7, 7 pm at the First Mennonite Church, Newton, KS. Tour participants from WDC were Anita Kebr, Jonathan Wenger, Heidi Regier Kreider and Bill Zuercher.)

## Coming Events

June 17, 2016 (8 am–8 pm)—Conference Resource Library Open House

July 29, 2016—Pastors' Afternoon Apart, Bethel College, North Newton, KS

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  
June/July/August 2016

Therefore go and make  
disciples of all nations

Matthew 28:19a

## Held together in mission

Western District Conference Annual Assembly ♦ July 29-30, 2016 ♦ Bethel College, North Newton, KS

## Come to the WDC Annual Assembly!

We look forward to seeing as many delegates and friends as possible at the next WDC Assembly, Friday, July 29, evening and all day Saturday, July 30, on the Bethel College campus, North Newton, Kansas. Children and adults are invited for inspired worship, shared stories of mission, a multitude of workshops, children's programming, a "mini music" festival, and new staff installation and recognition. We will celebrate and share how God has been at work among us.

The preacher for Friday worship is Marty Troyer, Houston Mennonite Church pastor, and author of the new book *The Gospel Next Door: Following Jesus Right Where You Are*. He and his congregation have been sharing the holistic gospel in creative ways in their context. We look forward to hearing their stories, as well as the accounts of Sister Church Partnerships that have strengthened both church plants and their supporting congregations. Delegates will also have a chance to share stories of how they and their congregations are joining God in mission in their own communities.

Music is a great way to come together in joy and hope. Saturday evening delegates and friends, as well as the broader community, will be invited to a

"mini music festival" with a variety of musical styles to enjoy at several venues around the Bethel campus.

We are "held together in mission." Let's celebrate together! —Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Assembly Planning Director

### ANNUAL ASSEMBLY PREACHER



**Marty Troyer** is a pastor, husband, father, and writer in Houston, Texas, where he has served at Houston Mennonite Church: The Church of the Sermon on the Mount, since 2008. He blogs widely as *The Peace Pastor*. Troyer is a graduate of Hesston College, Wheaton College, and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He and his wife, Hannah, have three children.

### ANNUAL ASSEMBLY WORKSHOPS

There are many exciting workshops to choose from, including: Discerning local ministry opportunities, grounding our faith through a sense of place, the power of stories, rural mission, creative prayer, a guided walk on the Sand Creek Trail, historical connections between Mennonites and Jews, social justice, the "Come and See" Palestine and Israel tour, a guided tour of the Kauffman Museum, and others. A full listing and description of the workshops will be available when you arrive!

 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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## ANNUAL ASSEMBLY SCHEDULE

### Friday, July 29

12:00-5:00 pm Pastors' Afternoon Apart  
4:00 Check-in opens  
5:30 Pastors/families appreciation dinner  
7:00 Worship with communion

### Saturday, July 30

8:30 am Delegate session: Worship and the work of the church  
12:00 pm Lunch or Mennonite Women Lunch  
1:15 Workshop Session 1  
2:30 Workshop Session 2  
3:30 Snack break  
3:30-5:30 Conference Resource Library open  
4:00 Workshop Session 3  
5:00 Free time  
5:30 Dinner  
7:00 Mini Music Festival

**Information and registration materials available in church offices or online at: [www.mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/#2016annualAssembly](http://www.mennowdc.org/annual-assembly/#2016annualAssembly)**

**Please register by July 15!**



**And just for Pastors...**

### **PASTORS' AFTERNOON APART**

Preceding Annual Assembly will be a "Pastors' Afternoon Apart" resourcing event: *Holy and Whole: Faithful Response to Sexual Abuse in the Congregation*, on Friday, July 29, Noon - 5 pm in the Bethel College Cafeteria. This event will help to better equip pastors to respond when sexual violence occurs within the church community, and to more effectively promote healthy sexuality in the congregation. The main presenter for the event will be Melissa Hofstetter, PhD, MDiv, and Licensed Clinical Psychologist who is also a trainer for Dove's Nest, an organization dedicated to empowering and equipping faith communities to keep children safe in their homes, churches, and communities. "Pastors' Afternoon Apart" registration is \$25, register at: [mennowdc.org/pastors-afternoon-apart-july-29-2016/](http://mennowdc.org/pastors-afternoon-apart-july-29-2016/) or call 316-283-6300, or email: [wdc@mennowdc.org](mailto:wdc@mennowdc.org).

## Welcome to new WDC Staff!



**Byron Pellecer** began May 15 as Associate Conference Minister (Texas-based). In this full-time position, he will work with the WDC Church Planting Commission to guide church planting throughout WDC, support pastors and congregations in Texas, facilitate IBA (Instituto Biblico Anabautista) training, and coordinate planning of annual assembly when it takes place in Texas. Byron was previously church planter and pastor at Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto (Wichita, KS), and has worked in church planting, discipleship programs and leadership education in Virginia Mennonite Conference and Southeast Mennonite Conference.

**Kathy Neufeld Dunn** will begin July 1 as Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-based). In this 3/4 time position, she will work with the WDC Resource Library Director and Resource Commission to equip congregations in areas such as faith formation, worship, witness, peace & justice, and prevention of sexual abuse; assist the Conference Minister to support pastors and congregations in Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma; and coordinate planning of annual assembly when it takes place in the north region of WDC. Kathy is serving as Interim 2016 Assembly Planning Director until she begins her new position in July. She was pastor at First Mennonite Church in McPherson, KS from 2006-16, and previously interim pastor at Peace Mennonite Church (Lawrence, KS) and pastor at Shalom Community Church (Ann Arbor, MI).



## Conference Resource Library Open House! June 17, 2016, 8 am—8 pm

- ◆ Read alouds at 8, 10, 12, 2,4, and 6 o'clock.
- ◆ Explore our NEW Makerspace Creation Station.  
Make your own stickers.  
Turn bananas into a piano with our new Makey Makey.
- ◆ Snacks.
- ◆ Sign up for the summer reading program (adults too).
- ◆ Take a poster home with you.

## Western District Conference Reference Council

By Jennie Wintermote, WDC Staff

About 45 people from across Western District Conference gathered at First Mennonite Church in Beatrice, NE for WDC's Spring Reference Council.

The day's theme, *Held Together in Mission: Being Church in the Rural Context*, framed the stories, discussions, and questions shared throughout the day. After a brief welcome by conference staff and members of the Executive Board, hosting pastors Tim Amor (Beatrice Mennonite) and Brett Klingenberg (First Mennonite) led the group in a short time of worship through song and prayer.

Highlights of the day included table talk focused on the definition of "rural" and on how participants' congregations and WDC are impacted by current realities in the rural context. Table groups also discussed answers to these questions: Where do you see God at work in the rural context? What is your vision for the rural church in the future? What are the gifts that rural congregations offer to your congregation, to WDC, and to the wider church?

These times of table talk were divided by periods of rich, heartfelt storytelling from pastors and laypeople who live and worship in rural contexts. Each presentation was memorable for different reasons, from Terry Rediger (Turpin Mennonite) who reminded us that "People are attracted to a church that is having fun together," to 97-year old business owner, Louis Goossen (First Mennonite, Beatrice) (pictured right), who reflected on the experiences of his life, and on the ways that the Holy Spirit has been present in his life and will be in our lives and congregations "if we only ask." Brandon and Kristi Unruh (Tabor) shared about their choice to raise their family in a rural community and reminded the group that "God is around us, working in our lives." Harold Thieszen (Bethel College Mennonite) provided an introduction to WDC's Low German Mennonites from Mexico Task Force and the unique work they do with this undocumented population.



Young pastors Brad Roth (West Zion), Laura Neufeld Goerzen (First Mennonite of Christian), Brett

Klingenberg, Phil Schmidt (Tabor), Peter Goerzen (formerly Grace Hill, current Bethel campus pastor), and Katherine Goerzen (Tabor) shared their reflections on pastoring in the rural context and an introduction to an upcoming book project focused on rural ministry.



Brett Klingenberg used the rural geography of Gage County (Beatrice's location) to describe the physical boundaries of the creeks around the church. He then compared those "sustaining features" or boundaries to some sustaining features of our Mennonite congregations that can become boundaries to others seeking to join us. He then challenged the group to not throw out these features because of their sustaining power, and instead to be intentional in creating crossing points or access points for others to cross these boundaries.

The fall Reference Council will be October 22, 2016 in Dallas TX with the theme *Held Together in Mission: Being Church in the Urban Context*. Executive Board member, Cynthia Loganbill hopes that those who attended in Beatrice will also make the trip to Dallas. She says, "WDC is both rural and urban. If we don't get to know each other's contexts and settings, how can we effectively work together?" She went on to say, "Now the diversity hits home and the rural church has a face."

The day ended with another time of worship. These beginning and closing times of worship reminded those present that ultimately we are held together in our common mission of worship, service, and witness as followers of Christ.