

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider



In the previous issue of *Garden* I reflected on connections between congregations in WDC. Now, let's consider connections beyond WDC, with the wider church and other Mennonite-related organizations.

WDC is strengthened through agencies and resources of our denomination, **Mennonite Church USA**. Our congregations extend their mission by supporting workers and ministries through Mennonite Mission Network, and benefit from financial assistance grants and stewardship resources from Everence. We use faith formation and worship resources from MennoMedia, and receive high-quality education at Mennonite schools. In particular, WDC is enriched through our historical and ongoing relationship with Bethel College. Our members participate in institutions affiliated with Mennonite Health Services, including Prairie View mental health center with which WDC maintains a covenant relationship. Constituency groups such as Iglesia Menonita Hispana, Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Men link our members to broader fellowship and resources. Our children, youth, and adults are enriched through MC USA conventions; leaders are equipped through denominational resources... and so much more!

WDC also partners with other Mennonite-related organizations with whom we share history and offer mutual support. (See <http://mennowdc.org/institutional-relationships/>) For example:

Out of 600 children and youth attending **Camp Mennoscah** this summer, over half were from WDC congregations. Camp Mennoscah was the location for a retreat last April on pastoral responses to climate change, and will host a Transitional Ministers' Training in October - both great opportunities for WDC leaders!

Our congregations witness to God's love by sending volunteers and contributions to support **Mennonite Disaster Service**. The MDS "Pastors to Projects" program offers travel reimbursement for pastors and spouses to have a hands-on experience at an MDS worksite.

Mennonite Central Committee - Central States and WDC co-sponsored an immigration learning tour to the U.S.-Mexico border this year, and offer "know your rights" trainings and legal counsel for immigrants. Our congregations support MCC workers, and help with MCC meat-canning, regional relief sales, comforters and kit-making. This past year, 92-year old Marieanna Siemens from Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church (rural Inman, KS), sewed 800 school-kit bags for MCC! "I grew up poor," she recalls. "Mom sewed all our clothes from cheap remnants, and was always sewing clothes for relief, too." Her church's strong support of MCC and its relief efforts were formative for her. Marieanna started sewing in 7th grade and has continued ever since. She took the lead coordinating quilt making by the Hoffnungsau women's Happy Hour Circle for the annual MCC sale until 2016. Her creative gifts, passion for service and dedication to the church have produced a harvest of righteousness! (2 Cor. 9:10)



May we all be so inspired to connect with God's mission in the world! Thanks be to God for the many opportunities we have to join together in ministries of healing, learning, justice, mercy and peace.

Coming Events

September 14, 2019
WDC Reference Council
gathering of Executive Board
& Commissions

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
September/October/November 2019



Love the Stranger! Get the Word Out!

By Kathy Neufeld Dunn, WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based)

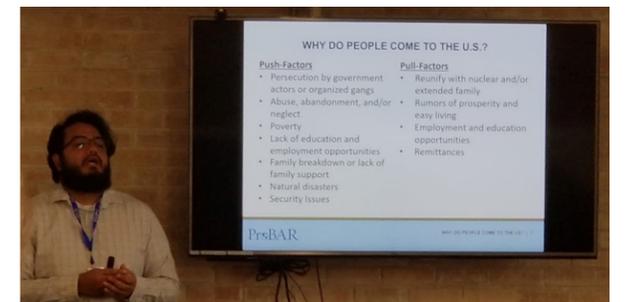
For the LORD your God ...loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10.17, 19)

If you had seen the long lines of young families at the Catholic Charities Respite Center, McAllen, TX, who were seeking asylum, you would grow in love for the stranger. I will never forget two of the kids. One boy, seven or eight, held his little brother on his lap. When I smiled at them, they stared vacantly back. They had the look of little kids who had experienced things kids should never experience. None of the children were playing. They were sitting and staring or clinging to their parents' hands. What would happen to these little ones and their parents if they were forced to return to Mexico or even their home country to await their asylum hearing?

"...love the stranger, for you were strangers" is from the Law of Moses. This scripture is in response to the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" How are we called to "love the stranger" today?

The seventeen of us who recently went on an MCC South Texas-Mexico Borderlands Learning Tour

heard diverse stories of compassion and care. Though lawyers legitimately critique some of the unregulated detention centers where unaccompanied minors seeking asylum are being held, we heard the commitment to the well-being and resilience of these kids by the director of the Southwest Key, a regulated shelter. The kids work through trauma through play, learning, and having their basic needs cared for. We



listened to the long-term commitment of the lawyers of ProBar who specialize in offering pro bono legal representation to asylum-seekers, both adults and children. Without an attorney such migrants have a 12% chance of receiving asylum. With representation, it goes up to 79%. The nuns at the Catholic Charities Respite Center thought they would be assisting asylum-seekers for perhaps a few months at the longest. Now

 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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five years and thousands of migrants later, the handful of sisters and their volunteers are still helping migrants enroute to their sponsors get a bit of rest, a meal or two, a shower and change of clothes, a phone call to their sponsor for a bus or plane ticket, and transport to the bus station or McAllen airport. Volunteers from the Southern Texas Human Rights Center coordinate both water stations for migrants on their journeys through the desert, as well as DNA research into the remains of those who do not make it to safety.



The final powerful example of those who put feet to their love of the stranger was the Brownsville

Bus Station staff. Their emergency services manager saw the huge needs of the hundreds of people dropped off at the bus station with nothing but their sponsor's phone number in their pockets and she coordinated services with many individuals and agencies in the city, so asylum-seekers would have a safe place to land for a few hours until they were on their way again. She seemed like a modern-day Esther, someone who had been prepared vocationally for "such a time as this" to assist those most in need passing through her city.

We heard the stories of people like you and me doing what they could out of love for the stranger. What is God calling you to do?



WDC Commissions: Joining in Mission

WDC's four commissions provide leadership and resources to carry out the priorities and ministries of the conference. Each issue of the Garden in 2019 will feature a glimpse of one commission's work.

Stewardship Commission

What are your resources? How do you use them? Are you using them the best way possible?

Whether it's time, money, or talents, these are questions the Stewardship Commission works with.

God has given resources to each of us. Like lilies of the field or birds of the air, we receive care from God. In return, we are asked to dedicate our resources towards furthering God's Shalom.

God provides for WDC through generous contributions from congregations and individual donors. When you give to WDC, Stewardship Commission ensures that your contributions are used for ministry such as supporting pastors, purchasing new resources for the conference library, and spreading God's word to new places.

This year, the Stewardship Commission also plans for WDC to participate in Giving Tuesday on December 3, 2019—the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, coming on the heels of Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday. In the midst of the biggest shopping season of the year, Giving Tuesday invites us to benefit our communities and world, rather than spending money for ourselves. Whether you are a long-time donor or first-time giver, plan now to celebrate generosity and make a special gift to WDC on Giving Tuesday!

#GIVINGTUESDAY

Stewardship Commission is honored to be entrusted with the church's resources. Whatever you choose to give, know that the Stewardship Commission is working to ensure it is used for the glory of God.

-Matt Lehman Wiens, Stewardship Commission member

WDC Resource Library

Looking Back: Summer was fun as adults and children participated in the Summer Reading Program! Congratulations to Katherine Goerzen and Brenda Turner, the prize winners of the Adult program. And we loved hearing giggles and moos as excited children explored the "farm" during Summer Story Hour, with our farm-tastically-fun volunteer leader, Marjie Warkentine. Join us next year for these great summer programs!



Looking Forward: It's the beginning of a new school year, and the new liturgical year begins with Advent on December 1. As we prepare for these new beginnings, try something new in exploring your walk with God. We have thousands of DVDs, books, studies, and children's resources to help you explore faith and deepen your walk with God. Contact the library for ideas or check out our online catalog at mennowdc.org/library.

Congregational snapshot: First Mennonite Church, Beatrice, NE

Third in a series featuring congregations in WDC

First Mennonite Church is a rural congregation located outside Beatrice, a town of about 12,000. The church was founded in 1877 by immigrants from Prussia seeking a home that might grant them exemption from military service.

First Mennonite values service to its own members and the community. Several people volunteer with Mother to Mother Ministries which was founded by Mennonites and provides resources and friendship to mothers searching for community and assistance. Women's Mission Society meets every Tuesday afternoon, featuring some of the best desserts north of Interstate 70. Every winter the church organizes an MDS trip to aid in rebuilding efforts. The annual church highlight is the MCC Mini-Auction in October. A jar of strawberry jam goes for a \$100 donation!



Our community enjoys spending time with each other. People vacation together and enjoy a Shepherd Group which plans regular

social gatherings so that we get to know each other. We partner with Beatrice Mennonite Church sharing Wednesday night activities and other gatherings. This summer both congregations held a joint Sunday School class to hear personal stories of service while the kids tended a new flower garden called "Menno's Garden."

-Pastor Brett Klingenberg

"We are witnesses to all that [Jesus] did..." (Acts 10:39)

This was the WDC Annual Assembly theme, echoing Peter and Cornelius. Through worship, workshops, delegate sessions, and fellowship, we witnessed and bore witness to what the Spirit of God is doing in our Western District congregations.

During worship, Glen Guyton, MC USA Executive Director, shared his testimony of joining the Men-

nonite church while he was in the military. Church people welcomed him as he was and shared with him the power of peace shown through Jesus. Glen's life was transformed. Now he shares with Mennonites across the country how he sees God at work through the church.



We attended workshops where we heard the ways God is at work including: on the US/Mexico border; in relationships between indigenous people and settlers; in faith formation in WDC churches; through climate care; in church plants. We celebrated 40 years of Mennonite women in ordained ministry! Like Mary at the tomb, women continue to be important witnesses to Jesus in our churches and communities.



Through our delegate sessions, we heard about work being done by and through our conference. We are not called to advance the Kingdom of God alone. We are part of the *body* of Christ, with many members engaging in diverse, holy work across our region and beyond. There are people who witness through supporting pastors, managing money, resourcing churches, providing camp experiences, and planting new churches. As part of Western District Conference, we are each part of this good work! The highlight of our delegate gathering was welcoming Iglesia Camino de Santidad (Liberal, KS) as a member congregation of WDC.

Our time together ended with fellowship and play Saturday night. With inflatable slides, music and food, people of all ages had fun together. This event reminded us that we also show who Jesus is by the kind of community we are. As we worshiped, worked, and played together, we were, indeed, witnesses to all that Jesus has done—and is doing—among us and through us.

-Joanna Harader, Assembly Planning Team

Other planning team members: Marshall Anderson, Eric Buller, Kathy Neufeld Dunn (WDC Staff), Derrick Ramer, Samuel Voth Schrag, and Bill Zuercher (WDC volunteer staff)