

Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider



One day last June I found myself in the unlikely spot of riding to a meeting in Wichita along with Bob Atchison, member of Manhattan (KS) Mennonite Church and Rural Forestry Program Coordinator for the Kansas Forest Service. It was a planning meeting for a conference on resilient ecosystems and economies in a changing climate. (The conference will be June 16-18, 2020 in Wichita, KS. For more information, see <https://www.ksforestryassociation.org>). As a faith leader, I definitely felt out of place at this gathering next to foresters, ecologists, economists and scientists! Yet Bob had invited me to the meeting because the planning team was interested in adding an ethics dimension to the conference. He wondered if WDC might be able to help out with this, as a witness to the importance of climate justice in the midst of other urgent environmental concerns.

I conveyed this invitation to the WDC Resource Commission, which approved a grant to sponsor Christy Miller Hesed, a member of Shalom Mennonite Church and environmental anthropologist, to speak at the conference on the topic of climate justice. Christy had spoken about her work with African American churches affected by flooding in the Chesapeake Bay area at a retreat hosted by Camp Mennoscah in April 2019 on "*Who cares about climate change? Pastoral responses to denial and despair.*" The retreat was facilitated by Doug Kaufman, Director of Pastoral Ecology at the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions, and Jennifer Schrock, Director of Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN). A follow-up gathering hosted by WDC the next month provided opportunity for retreat participants to share further reflections, as well as ideas and resources for future action, study and prayer.

Since then, creation care momentum has continued in WDC through a variety of other activities and initiatives: A workshop at Assembly featured intergenerational conversations on climate change, for people of different ages to share questions and perspectives with each other; the WDC Resource Library collection has expanded its collection related to creation care (see list on library website); and a variety of congregations are exploring creative ways to practice creation care (see "Seeds" in this issue of *Garden*). So far, at least ten WDC congregations are listed as "Green Patchwork Congregations" on the MCCN website at <https://mennocreacioncare.org>. For more resources and connections, see also the Mennonite Church USA "Learn, Pray, Join" initiative on climate justice at <http://mennoniteusa.org/climatejustice/>

In the midst of a growing global movement to address climate change, let's join others across the church to care for God's creation!

Like us on Facebook!

facebook

Coming Events

March 12: WDC Women in Mission Spring Supper, Faith Mennonite Church, Newton KS

March 30: Leadership Launch, Kansas Leadership Center, Wichita KS

July 31-Aug 2: WDC Annual Assembly, Camp Copass, Denton TX

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
March/April/May 2020



Shared Space, Shared Convictions: Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto & Mennonite Church of the Servant

Continuing a series featuring profiles of congregations in WDC

Maybe it's no surprise that Mennonite Church of the Servant and Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto (Wichita, Kansas) share a consistent commitment to immigration justice. After all, they share a building and are continuing to get to know each other. What you may not know is that Mennonite Church of the Servant had been concerned about the issue of justice for refugees and immigrants long before they began sharing a building with Latino and Latina brothers and sisters in Christ.

Another bit of history that both groups share is that they were each Western District Conference church plants, Mennonite Church of the Servant in 1977 and Iglesia Menonita Aposento Alto beginning in 2014. As urban church plants, both groups also include many "convinced Mennonites." Lois Barrett noted, "Some folks who came to be Mennonites as adults are very committed, sometimes more committed than those who grew up in the Mennonite church."

The two congregations also have other shared values. They share Anabaptist Christian faith which is lived out through worship of God and care for their neighbors. Each congregation has invited the other to their special worship services and outreach ministries from time-to-time. Aposento Alto invited Mennonite Church of the Servant to their Thanksgiving worship last fall. Mennonite Church of the Servant asked Aposento Alto to join them at their Immigration Rights Fair last year. At the fair, members of Church of the Servant passed out "Know Your Rights" cards by MCC in both Spanish and English. These small cards can help an immigrant know his or her rights as an immigrant if ICE agents knock on their door. At the same event, Aposento Alto friends passed out free BBQ. Neighbors who may or may not have immigration documentation saw their Anglo and Latino neighbors working together to support them in their concerns and fears.

Not all neighborhood outreach of the two congregations is quite so sobering. Both congregations have joined together to play soccer and kickball with neighborhood kids. They also participated in a neighborhood garage

Western District Conference is a regional grouping of Mennonite Church USA congregations located in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Western District Conference

PO Box 306, 2517 N Main, North Newton, KS 67117



316-283-6300

wdc@mennowdc.org

www.mennowdc.org

sale. The two groups are planning an ice cream social in the park this summer. Sometimes Christian hospitality is just plain fun.

The two congregations are making a conscious effort to get to know each other better. This is important because both groups experience a certain amount of transience, with church members and friends moving away. This is common in any urban environment, but with the complications of the immigration system, this is even more of an issue for Aposento Alto right now. Pastors Jaime Cazares of Aposento Alto and Asia Frye of Mennonite Church of the Servant are committed to planning fun events between the congregations they serve. Recently, they raised their voices in a bilingual hymn sing, then played board games and ate together.

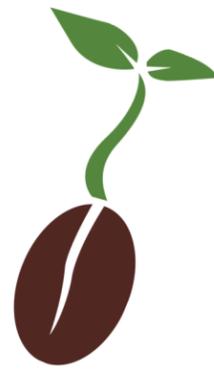


In addition to sharing a worship space, the two groups share Anabaptist Christian values. It's no wonder they make time for God, for their neighbors, and for each other.

- Kathy Neufeld Dunn, WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based) - with thanks to Lois Barrett and Nita Nikkel for their reflections

Leadership Launch: Celebrating and Looking Ahead!

A free dessert reception recognizing five years of joint partnership of Western District Conference and South Central Conference with Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), will take place Monday, March 30, 6:30-8:00 pm at KLC, 325 E Douglas Avenue, Wichita, KS. Refreshments will be served, with a brief program at 7:00 pm featuring greetings and stories from KLC, WDC and SCC about how adaptive leadership is strengthening the church and its ministry. This will also be a time to connect with other church members who have taken training at KLC, and to learn more about KLC and training opportunities through our Leadership Transformation Grant. The 2020 grant covers full registration cost for a selected number of participants to attend one of KLC's three primary leadership training programs. For more information, see: <http://mennowdc.org/grants/>. Members of the Core Team for implementing WDC/SCC's grant are Heidi Regier Kreider, Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Phil Schmidt, Howard Keim and Isaac Landis.



WDC Seeds

Creative ideas and missional initiatives from WDC congregations

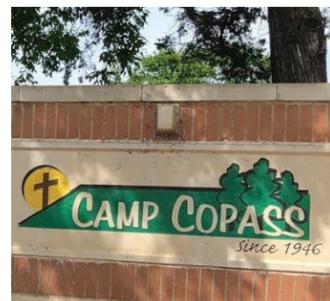
The Creation Care Committee at Bethel College Mennonite Church offers a monthly "climate challenge," encouraging members to practice stewardship of God's creation in practical ways throughout the year. A changing display in the foyer features creative and fun suggestions, colorful examples, and a response journal for participants to share comments about their experience. Recent months have focused on reducing meat in our diets, avoiding energy "vampires", creating an eco-friendly Christmas, reducing plastic, and saving water. Interested in adapting this idea for your congregation? To learn more, contact BCMC Creation Care Committee member, Lorna Harder, lornajhh@gmail.com, 316-841-2061.

Submit YOUR ideas, practices and connections within WDC to: wdc@mennowdc.org.



WDC Annual Assembly 2020 Camp Copass, Denton, Texas

Mark your calendar for the WDC Annual Assembly July 31-August 2!



Get ready for —

- Bus rides and new friendships
- Biblical discernment on immigration with keynote speaker Danny Carroll
- Storytelling and worship with a Latinx beat
- Swimming and mini golf and zip-lining (and much more!)
- Fun for the whole family! (Kids under 12 are free!)
- Housing for most budgets—from bunk beds to hotel rooms to RV spaces
- Conversation and connections with people across WDC

More information to come!

New at the WDC Resource Library: Book Bundles for Group Study



Your Sunday school class/ small group/ Wednesday night group can now borrow multiple copies (10-15) of the same title for group study. Current offerings include:

- **What is the Bible and How Do We Understand It?** by Dennis R. Edwards
- **Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament** by Melissa Florer-Bixler
- **Raising Disciples: How to Make Faith Matter for Our Kids** by Natalie Frisk
- **The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong** by Karen Gonzalez
- **The Bible Unwrapped** by Meghan Larissa Good
- **Why Did Jesus Die and What Difference Does it Make?** Michele Hershberger
- **Invited: The Power of Hospitality in an Age of Loneliness** by Leslie Verner

To borrow or find out more about the program, contact Jennie Wintermote, Library Director at 316-283-6300 or crlib@mennowdc.org.



Resources R Us!

What an exciting set of responses to the Curriculum Questionnaire sent out to WDC congregations this winter from the Resource Commission! We had been curious about the faith formation practices in congregations across our conference and wondering how we can better serve you by finding more ways to make connections. We received 26 responses, full of information about class groupings and materials used.

We also now have an enlarged field of vision of what else is needed in your various contexts. We're excited for the possibilities ahead!

Your responses help Jennie Wintermote, our Resource Library Director, connect you to existing materials and choose new materials for the library. As well, we see opportunities for congregations to participate in faith formation cross-fertilization. Did you say you were looking for solid youth curriculum? There are congregations that listed some. Want to try new things in adult classes? Some of your Western District Conference neighbors have ideas. Are you curious how other congregations like yours are grouping children's classes or creating their own curriculums? We hope you'll want to share these sorts of resources with one another across our conference.

There are lists of titles of videos and books that have been used with adults, children, and youth, as well as intriguing ideas like writing as a spiritual practice, conversations on art, and a self-made series on peacemaking. This successful questionnaire also points forward toward better communication with and between each of our congregations. We have hopes that coming together as a conference can be more than making important decisions together, more than worshipping together at assembly. WDC congregations can develop vital relationships with one another that fill each other's desires for re-energized faith formation. We have such a richly diverse and strongly rooted grouping of congregations in our conference and we'd love to facilitate more resourcing among you.



If you participated in this questionnaire, Thank You! Be watching for news of others' responses being made available to you. Did you miss out on participating in this questionnaire? We'd still love to hear from you! Email Jennie Wintermote (crlib@mennowdc.org) and request a link to the form.

—Melissa Atchison, WDC Resource Commission member