



Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider

In recent months, COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down. WDC is responding by gathering resources for congregational ministry; connecting leaders to share ideas and encouragement; and helping congregations access support such as Everence matching funds and Everence/MCC/MDS relief grants. WDC is also mobilizing sharing within our conference.

WDC established the Hope Fund to receive contributions and assist congregations facing financial challenges due to COVID-19. Generous gifts have supported several grants and will provide further assistance in the coming months. We invited some recipients and donors to share their reflections about how the Hope Fund is making a difference:

A retired person in Kansas said, "Christians need to think carefully about the amount of difficulty those without means have been put through from the pandemic. The government is trying to help, but as a Christian I am interested in finding ways for Christians to rise up to help others. When the pandemic came, I asked, Where is the opportunity to activate the potential of congregations? When I read about the WDC Hope Fund, I thought - There it is! Don't think that what we do as a church is insignificant compared to the government. The church offers personal connections - a government check doesn't do that. As the church, we have the responsibility and the gift to work together to give beyond the dollar sign."

When Iglesia Menonita Casa del Alfarero in Pasadena, Texas, received a Hope Fund grant, pastors Alberto and Aurora Parchmont prayed for several days to discern the distribution of funds. They then took contributions to nine families who were out of work or had lost jobs due to the pandemic. "Wow!" some responded, "This will help us pay the rent - which we can't do with food stamps." Alberto and Aurora prayed for the families, with the reminder that these gifts come from people across WDC.

A couple from Texas said, "When the pandemic started, we realized we have more than enough, and needed to do something. The immediate shock of what was going on disheartened us; we knew some people would be hit much harder than we were, and would not receive government checks. We decided to give to the WDC Hope Fund to support the sharing concept of helping across the conference."

At Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Esperanza in Dallas, Texas, Pastor Damian Rodriguez said, "Most of our congregation members have lost jobs, and didn't qualify for the stimulus check because they are undocumented. One member (whose mother in Mexico is sick) hasn't worked since quarantine started. We gave her \$500 to help with her mother's hospital bills and hopefully have some money left for other needs. We helped another family with A.C. repair expenses." Pastor Damian is grateful that WDC was willing to help as well as all the people who donated funds. "We understand that we are all suffering one way or another," he said, "but are thankful there are people willing to help those who are suffering more than others."

A young-adult in Kansas wrote, "When I received my "stimulus" money, I wasn't sure about my own employment stability, but knew that, as we enter a time of economic instability, true security lies not in hoarding resources, but in nurturing a spirit of generosity. I give now because people have needs now and because I have money now. When I am in need, I put my trust in the continued generosity of the community of believers. This is mutual aid in a modern context."

In the face of inequity within our society and church community, may the witness of these sisters and brothers inspire us to seek God's justice and compassion.

We invite your contributions to WDC at <https://mennowdc.org> or sent to PO Box 306, N. Newton, KS 67117.



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



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Coming Events

Aug 1-2: WDC Virtual Annual Assembly

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
June/July/August 2020



Western District Conference

Annual Assembly 2020: Living in Exile

Theme Texts: *Jeremiah 29:4ff and 1 Peter 2:11-12*

Have pandemic limitations got you feeling like you're "Living in Exile?" For some of us this is a new awakening. For others, it's all too familiar. What can these times help us to discover about mission? About God's love for the exile? About God's call to us today?

We will gather for this year's Assembly virtually August 1-2. We'll meet through various online media platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Live, and YouTube. One of the gifts of a virtual Assembly is that people who could not afford to travel to Assembly can join us this year. We look forward to a diverse group of delegates and friends. If you've never joined us for Assembly, we invite you! We are also looking forward to seeing old friends online. Of course we will miss the handshakes and hugs among old and new friends, but we seek well-being for all, so we will gather online.

Another joy of meeting virtually is that friends from all over Mennonite Church USA are willing to offer their passion for and knowledge about Anabaptist-Christian faith with us.

- Sue Park-Hur, Mennonite Church USA leader from Pasadena, California, will share her family's experience as migrants and her own reflections on what it means to live as exiles and sojourners, and to be the light of Christ in these complicated times.
- Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, Hesston College, will host an online conversation about what missional lessons we've learned lately.
- Several friends from Mennonite Central Committee will share videos about creation care, immigration justice, and other ways to engage the world through faith today.
- Our own Resource Librarian, Jennie Wintermote, is eager to tell you all about our library resources about faith formation available at a distance, digitally and otherwise.
- Our keynote speaker, Danny Carroll R, Wheaton College professor and author of the new book, *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration*, will engage us in thoughtful conversation about God's people and their migration in biblical times and today. Want a taste of his gentle reflection? Go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3441Cajdz4>.

No registration fee! One more advantage of meeting virtually is the cost savings. This Assembly will cost less than recent on-site mass gatherings. The savings may allow many of us to be generous. To cover Assembly costs, we invite congregations who have an "Assembly Delegate" line item in their budgets to still send in that amount, as you are able. Once reduced costs are covered, all other individual and congregational donations will go into the WDC Hope Fund to assist our WDC brothers and sisters and their congregations who are experiencing their own sense of exile at this time.

Join us August 1 and 2 as we explore what it means to follow Jesus into this very challenging time that is also ripe with missional possibility!

More information and delegate registration at:
<https://mennowdc.org/2020-wdc-annual-assembly/>

Resource Library News

Virtual Summer Story Hour

Children ages 3-8, come take a dip in the ocean through Summer Story Hour! Virtually join Library Director Jennie Wintermote and volunteer Marjie Warkentine for "Oceans of Fun" with eight weekly sessions June 15-August 3. Sign up today at <https://forms.gle/61539e9zGnE7u98y5> The first 15 children to sign up will receive a kit of supplies needed for each weekly project. (Others will receive a list of supplies.) Join us for "oceans" of stories and fun!



Summer Reading Programs-- Running June 1-August 15

Adults--You're invited to read any title in our collection and submit a brief review. Each review will be a ticket into our prize drawings for books, gift-cards, and more. Reviews may be submitted at <https://forms.gle/r4kpXQBQqZPuGjw8>, posted on the WDC Resource Library FaceBook page, or given to Library Director, Jennie Wintermote.

Children--Download a reading log (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rW8pLb6fgWQFjgi5XpKX65icSv369Va/view>) and mark off a box for each book you read (picture books) or every 15 pages (chapter books), or contact the library for a log. After August 15, submit your log (by mail, email, or drop it off at the library) for fun prizes! Register your child(ren) at <https://forms.gle/mgPPft74HBDs9ZMu6> so we can have enough prizes ready!

Library Reopening--Curbside Pickup Starting Soon (When Harvey County, Kansas enters Phase 3)

You can start reserving items at any time through our online catalog at <https://mennowdc.booksys.net/opac/crl/> Once the library is open for curbside checkout, these items will be pulled and available during pickup hours (or mailed to you). In order to reserve items, you will need to log on with your library barcode number (please email the library if you need your library card number).

You are also welcome to email Library Director, Jennie, at crlib@mennowdc.org in order to reserve items. Jennie is also happy to offer suggestions for individual study, children's story, group discussion and other resourcing needs.

Check the Library Webpage for Info on our Digital Services! <https://mennowdc.org/library>

Please contact the library with any questions!



WDC Seeds

Creative ideas and missional initiatives from WDC congregations during the Covid-19 global pandemic

- At Grace Hill Mennonite Church, Whitewater, KS, pastor Weldon Martens sends a newssheet to the congregation with items such as a devotional and prayer, updates on members, hymn reflections, interesting facts and helpful hints for staying safe and in touch with the church.
- Trinity Mennonite Church, Hillsboro, KS has used Zoom to meet for Sunday school and worship. They note, "The Early Church started in homes and now here it is again in homes. This proves that the church is not the building!"
- Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb, Dallas, TX: "As witnesses to God's love, we proclaim the gospel of peace by caring for and around the faith community. A WDC Mustard Seed grant allowed us to make 100 reusable cloth masks. Many who received the masks are essential workers and their employers did not offer PPE."
- Southern Hills Mennonite Church, Topeka, KS, sent out a survey to the congregation inviting them to share their feelings, needs and input as the church council plans for reopening in-person activities.

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

Hope Fellowship, Waco, Texas

Continuing a series featuring profiles of congregations in WDC

Hope Fellowship, a member congregation of Western District Conference, is located in Waco, situated along the Brazos River and I-35, halfway between Dallas and Austin. The mission of Hope Fellowship, is: *By God's grace, to be the church, to love each other, to serve our neighbors, to proclaim God's peace and forgiveness given to the world in Jesus Christ.*

As an intentional Christian community, Hope Fellowship looks to Acts 2:44-46 for inspiration. "All who believed were together and had all things in common." From Hope's Vision Statement:

Hope Fellowship is our life together – it is not a building, a worship service, or a collection of programs. We try to organize our lives so that we have daily contact with each other in a variety of ways. Some of us live close to or work with each other, share childcare or living space, and find ways that our paths will cross whether for praying, socializing, or meetings (Acts 2.46).

The community life and ministries of Hope Fellowship are rich and diverse. They have made commitments in energy and finances to the ministries of World Hunger Relief and Habitat for Humanity. The Fellowship has a prayer garden, the site of work days and the locus of small groups and meditation for many in the fellowship and in the neighborhood.

Hope Fellowship's origins go back to 1986 when Joe and Nancy Gatlin moved to Waco, Joe's hometown, for Joe to serve as the founding director of Waco Habitat for Humanity. In 1993, the Gatlins, their daughters, Gabriela and Analí, and another couple, Don and LouAnna Arterburn, moved into a century-old home in the neighborhood to begin a Christian community named Hope Community. During the ups and downs of its early years, the new community received guidance from Reba Place Fellowship, a mature, like-minded, intentional community formed in the 1950's in Evanston, Illinois. Hope Community eventually became known as Hope Fellowship, affiliated with Western District Conference in 1994 and officially became Hope Fellowship in 2001. Hope Fellowship also has affiliations with Shalom Mission Communities and Nurturing Communities Network.

Hope Fellowship has 25 family units with 75 individuals, including about 25 children. Most Hope people live within a ten minute walk of the meeting house. About 20 of the adults are bilingual (English-Spanish) and several were born in Spanish-speaking countries. People in the fellowship have a variety of jobs - professors, teachers, cook, internet technician, property managers, social workers, not-for-profit staff, newspaper editor, health clinic executive, jubilationists (aka retirees), immigration attorney, and others. There are connections with Baylor University.

Hope Fellowship has an unpaid pastoral team of four (Ruth Boardman-Alexander, Matthew Porter, Fernando Arroyo, and Bethany Smith) and a church council of three. Everyone in the community contributes to the life and welfare of the community. Koinonia groups focus on discipleship and discernment. Ministry teams lead different areas of community life: worship; spiritual formation and care for children and youth, missions (external relationships), fun & care, and finance & facilities. Hope Fellowship has monthly meetings of the community. Prior to the pandemic, Sunday worship was bi-lingual in two locations (a block apart) followed by Sunday school in the meeting house. The community is currently gathering on Zoom. A highpoint of the year is the Easter retreat (photo below) when the whole church travels to a retreat center for a weekend of worship, fun, cooking and celebration.

Immigration is a concern and focus for the community. The Fellowship is supportive of Grupo de Apoyo y Esperanza, a group of Latina first-generation immigrants meeting together for mutual support, education, and worship. Hope members are involved with Waco Immigrant Alliance and teach English to immigrants. An immigration lawyer with a non-profit practice is part of the Fellowship. Hope has an 18 year relationship with Valle Nuevo, a community of Salvadoran campesinos who were refugees during the civil war and repatriated to El Salvador. Hope Fellowship members are part of yearly delegations to Valle Nuevo. This relationship has brought healing and unity to communities historically alienated by colonialism and imperialism.

-Lee Lever, WDC Interim Conference Ministry Liaison, Texas

