

## **WDC Interim Conference Ministry Liaison for Texas**

**Lee Lever**

Texas has 13 Mennonite churches affiliated with Western District Conference, the majority are Spanish-speaking or bilingual. These congregations are located in or near the major urban areas in the state.

1. Austin Mennonite Church, Austin, TX
2. Chin Emmanuel Baptist Church, Houston, TX
3. Hope Fellowship, Waco, TX
4. Houston Mennonite Church, Houston, TX
5. Iglesia Luz del Evangelio, Dallas TX
6. Iglesia Menonita Casa de Dios, Garland TX
7. Iglesia Menonita Casa del Alfarero, Pasadena TX
8. Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Esperanza, Dallas TX
9. Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Vida, San Antonio TX
10. Iglesia Menonita Fuente de Restauración, Houston TX (Church Plant)
11. Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb, Dallas TX
12. Peace Mennonite Church, Dallas TX
13. San Antonio Mennonite Church, San Antonio TX

For a number of years bilingual (Spanish/English) associate conference ministers have served the Texas Mennonite churches. Rev. Byron Pellecer ended his ministry as WDC Associate Conference Minister, Texas-based, at the end of January 2020 after serving for three and half years in that position. Byron moved to Virginia to be with his wife and family. As pastor of the Austin Mennonite Church I appreciated Byron's ministry with the Texas Mennonite congregations. I was asked by WDC Conference Minister Heidi Regier Kreider to serve part-time as the WDC Interim Conference Ministry Liaison for Texas on a volunteer basis, 3-4 days per month beginning February 1, 2020 through May 2020 while WDC was searching for an associate conference minister for Texas. The interim term was extended to the end of July with some flexibility depending on the beginning date of the new associate conference minister. I appreciate the generosity of the Austin Mennonite congregation in allowing me to serve the conference in this role.

In the last six months a significant part of my time has been spent meeting and communicating online with Texas pastors and community leaders navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. We usually met once or twice a month via Zoom and I met occasionally with individual pastors for other matters such as credentialing issues or pastoral support. The online meetings have been a source of encouragement and support for Texas Mennonite pastors and have fostered closer relationships among the pastors of congregations who are geographically distant from each other. English-speaking and bilingual pastors meet together and Spanish-speaking pastors meet together. I appreciate the interpreting skills and help of Pastor Sandra Montes Martinez. Sandra is also the WDC Administrative Assistant for Texas. She has been instrumental in helping Texas and other Mennonite congregations apply for assistance through the various grants available from the government and church agencies. I am grateful for the generous support of the wider church during this pandemic. These grants enabled congregations to pay basic expenses and help their members and neighbors through the pandemic difficulties.

Texas Mennonite pastors and community leaders are a gifted group of church leaders caring for and guiding their congregations in worship, ministry and mission during difficult times. I have grown in appreciation for the Texas Mennonite churches and their pastoral leaders and I continue to pray for their well-being as they embody the way of Jesus and witness to the good news of God's Reign.

I attended WDC staff meetings and had periodic check-ins with Heidi Regier Kreider. I appreciate Heidi's perceptive and competent leadership through these times of pandemic and social unrest. The WDC staff are a very dedicated and capable crew.