

Church Planting Commission **Tonya Ramer Wenger, Chair**

Introduction

The Church Planting Commission's work grows out of and is inspired by **WDC's Mission**:

- **Witness & invite others to faith in Jesus Christ,**
- **Dwell in just & loving relationships,**
- **Connect to God's mission in the world.**

And **WDC's Core Tasks**:

- Sustaining Transformational Pastors
- Resourcing Healthy, Missional Churches
- Networking Anabaptist Church Planting Partnerships

Specifically, the commission provides leadership and resources for church planting initiates and fosters relationships with emerging Anabaptist/Mennonite groups. We also help emerging groups and their leaders connect with the congregations, resources, staff and structures of Western District Conference.

Church Planting Commission (CPC) members are: Tonya Ramer Wenger (Chair), Karen Mascho, Caleb Yoder, John Garland, Alberto Parchmont, Tim Amor. Through January 2020, the Commission worked closely with Associate Conference Minister Byron Pellecer. In the current transition and search period, Conference Minister Heidi Regier Kreider has been working with the CPC.

Current Church Plants

Aposento Alto, Wichita, KS, pastored by Jaime Cazares.

Palabra Viva, Liberal, KS, pastored by Jaime Rocha.

Iglesia Camino de Santidad in Liberal KS became a full member at the 2019 Assembly and is no longer considered a church plant.

Church Plant Conversations

The CPC is in exploratory conversations with Gilberto Flores in Guatemala about their congregation, Casa de Paz seeking possible affiliation with or membership in WDC. This opportunity presents some important questions and considerations, and at the same time opens new possibilities to be in further alignment with WDC's Mission to *connect to God's mission in the world*.

Commission Work (August 2019-July 2020)

The commission experienced a fair amount of transition during this year:

- the ending in July 2019 of Marv Zehr's tenure on the commission in which he added chair leadership, continuity, and vision;
- Associate Conference Minister Byron Pellecer's departure in February 2020;
- and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marv attended the August 2019 CPC meeting to provide some background and history as we oriented our new team members (Tim Amor and Alberto Parchmont). Marv pointed to two things of historical significance in our conference: the relationships between and among congregations, and church planting. Many of our urban churches now in existence were started at the initiative of rural congregations. He encouraged continued visibility and exposure for church planting in Western District Conference.

One step we took as a result of Byron's departure was to designate individual CPC members to connect with each our church planters to provide support, a listening ear, and a clear connection to the CPC. Those intentional contacts will remain in place at least until a new Associate Conference Minister has been hired.

Recurring themes in the discussion of this commission, now made up of fairly new members, are the challenges of and opportunities for fundraising and support for church plants. During 2020, the WDC Church Planting Commission budget provides \$1000 per month subsidy for Aposento Alto.

The CPC also invites WDC congregations to provide additional support for church plants by entering into either a Sister Church Relationship or a Partner Church Relationship. The Sister Church relationship is a relationship of mission among two or more congregations to build intercultural and missional bridges. Congregations share information, visits and prayer support (not necessarily financial support). The Partner Church Relationship seeks to cross ethnic and geographic lines and to provide emotional, financial and prayer support to emerging congregations. This partnership is for three years and may be renewed indefinitely in three year increments. It includes regular sharing of news stories, visits and pictures of each church in the partnership. The established church in the partnership makes a financial covenant to support new church development in WDC with a monthly contribution to WDC. We are grateful that Doug and Raylene Penner, members of the Southern Hills Church in Topeka, KS who coordinate both the Sister and Partner Church relationships. Congregations interested in establishing such a relationship with an emerging congregation are encouraged to contact the CPC.

In conversations throughout the year, the CPC has noted that ideas and practices related to church planting could be applied to existing churches as a renewal strategy. This could be especially helpful to congregations that are in a declining phase creating anxiety about long term viability.

A priority of the commission is to resource and support our church planters. To that end, the commission had planned to send our current church planters, along with several from the Church Planting Commission, to the SENT Conference (sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network) scheduled for April 24-25 in Philadelphia PA. That conference was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will tentatively happen in the fall.

The commission continues to develop Church Planting Guidelines.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all, our church plants are particularly vulnerable. Through this experience we are more aware of the diversity that exists among our congregations, and in the ways that they are finding to make adjustments and accommodations. We have learned that Kansas is the state with the highest rate of disproportionate incidence of COVID-19 illness and death affecting persons of color. WDC's Hope Fund is one source of support and help for congregations, including our church plants.

We as a commission are thankful for your prayers and financial support to support and encourage church planting throughout Western District Conference.