



Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider

In March 2020, as COVID-19 began shutting down church gatherings, Mennonite Church USA denominational leaders began facilitating weekly meetings of conference ministers via zoom. These sessions were offered - and well attended - as a way to share information and check in on how each conference was coping with COVID-19. It was encouraging to know that we were not alone in our challenge to support congregations with resources for online technology, worship and preaching, pastoral care and faith formation, access to financial assistance, and best practices and protocols for safety. We swapped stories and questions about challenges such as online ordination, pastoral transition during a pandemic, and the difficulties of doing congregational discernment over zoom. MC USA leaders and agencies shared best practices and resources to assist us. Our meetings helped conference ministers get “on the balcony” to see the big picture, consider trends across the country, gain perspective, and share questions and ideas. For example, WDC’s Hope Fund was inspired by a similar fund initiated earlier by Mosaic (then Franconia) Conference. It was also helpful to acknowledge differences between our conferences and regional contexts, and how that impacted our respective responses to COVID-19.

As protests swept the nation following the murder of George Floyd, our conference ministers’ meetings shifted to a more specific focus on how MC USA is engaging the work of racial justice. We reflected on the status of our conferences related to anti-racism, and denominational leaders offered resourcing sessions and information about an anti-racism training for individuals, congregations and conferences. (See <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/anti-racism-resources-for-mennonite-churches/>.)

Recently, conference ministers across MC USA gathered via zoom with representatives from Mennonite Mission Network to learn more about how we can collaborate with the Sent Network for Church Planting.

Over the past six months, these regular meetings have built trust and appreciation between conference ministers, and also given us a deeper understanding of shared concerns as well as differences between conferences. Now, conference ministers and denominational leaders are once again reviewing our meeting frequency and focus, as we continue to adapt to changing circumstances and realities. I trust that our relationships will continue to grow, even as we enter new conversations and challenges in the future.

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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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Coming Events

Sept 26: WDC Reference Council

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
September/October/November 2020



Connection and Collaboration during COVID-19

By Heidi Regier Kreider, WDC Conference Minister

With the impact of COVID-19, new forms of communication have emerged and strengthened connections within WDC.

In April, pastors of the five WDC congregations along Kansas’ I-70 highway planned a joint online Good Friday worship service. In June, WDC’s six congregations in Newton, Kansas coordinated a joint online Vacation Bible School attended by over 80 children, including several from additional churches. To accompany online worship and activities, bags filled with recreation and craft supplies, workbooks and daily snacks were delivered to the children. In July, WDC congregations in Texas held a joint online worship service (see photo above with preacher John Garland, San Antonio Mennonite Church) coordinated by Sandra Montes Martinez and Samuel Voth Schrag, who were also on the WDC annual assembly planning team. They noted that this was a helpful “trial run” for WDC’s online gathering several weeks later, which also provided connections through technology such as language



interpretation channels on zoom, online webinars and video snapshots from congregations.

WDC has hosted Spanish and English zoom meetings for pastors to share resources, encouragement, and prayer. The WDC Resource Library has offered online story hour for children, and book bundles for study groups. The WDC Hope Fund has nurtured bonds of sharing across the conference, as generous contributions have provided grants and encouragement for congregations impacted financially by COVID-19.



God’s Spirit flows among us, beyond the barriers of a pandemic. It is the same Spirit who prompted Paul to write to the Thessalonians, when he was unable to be with them in-person: “Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us - just as we long to see you. For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. ...How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and

restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 9-13)



Reflections on a Virtual Assembly

First we grieved that we wouldn't be getting together at Camp Copass, Denton, Texas for Annual Assembly 2020. Then we accepted the fact that we wouldn't be together in the same room as delegates and friends anywhere. Then, some of us actually became excited that a virtual, online Assembly might offer some unexpected gifts, and it did.

Ray Reimer did a terrific job at multi-tasking as he moderated the virtual delegate session. Even though he had some friends monitoring the chat, he basically did it himself. He kept the agenda going smoothly and effectively. One of the delegates asked about how the decision to receive PPP funds was processed. This inspired some fruitful comment, as well as an on-the-spot poll, asking delegates how they felt about WDC receiving these government-sponsored funds. All in all, the delegate session went remarkably well in a virtual fashion.

Four webinars (or virtual seminars) were offered, and each of them was very well attended (25-55 participants). We received strong affirmation for each of the hosts of these webinars and their inspiring content. One person who attended the webinar on youth and faith asked for the link to the recording, so she could share it with the youth of her congregation as a conversation-starter. If there is a webinar you wanted to participate in, but could not, you, too, may watch the webinars on the “2020 WDC Assembly” YouTube channel. This is one of the gifts of a virtual Assembly. You may continue to read and watch videos of much of the Annual Assembly content.

Even though we didn't meet together face-to-face in Texas, we still experienced a bit of Texas flair, as we listened to Hope Parchmont praise God during the recorded worship service. So many people helped to

make this time of worship possible.

We are also so grateful that we met Assembly expenses by donations. Thank you to our generous congregations and individual delegates whose contributions helped make this possible.

Was it perfect? Of course not. Was it better than some of us expected? Yes, it was. This necessary experiment has given us additional ways to imagine sharing resources and support with the congregations and individuals of Western District Conference. We praise God for what we learned and the gifts we received from our time together (virtually).

-Kathy Neufeld Dunn, WDC Associate Conference Minister



Seeds of Hope

The WDC Hope Fund was created at a historic moment for the church, and it came as a gift from heaven, at a most economically and emotionally critical moment when we were being affected by unemployment and sick with the COVID-19 virus. The blessing was not only for the local churches but also for the relatives and neighbors and surrounding communities.

For us as a local church it was a great blessing, as you can see:

- A family was saved from being evicted from their apartment, suspension of utility services and loss of their vehicle, by catching up on their delinquent credits.
- The pastoral family received relief from their economic situation with a month's mortgage, while they were able to rent the house that was being used for the services of the local community.
- A woman victim of domestic violence who fled her home with her three children to save her life, received support to buy some clothes and gasoline for her vehicle. She was able to dress decently and go out to get a job.
- The leftover money is being used to help with food to people who are still in need.

God bless those who had this initiative of sharing and those who continue to contribute to nurture this fund!

-Blanca Vargas, Iglesia Menonita Comunidad de Vida San Antonio, Texas

Learn more about the WDC Hope Fund at: <https://mennowdc.org/wdc-hope-fund-response-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>



Turpin Mennonite Church Turpin, Oklahoma

Continuing a series featuring profiles of congregations in WDC



Turpin Mennonite Church is located in the panhandle of Oklahoma – the unincorporated town of Turpin is 13 miles south of Liberal, KS and 26 miles north of Perryton, TX. The church is in the country – 3 miles north, 4 east and 1 north of Turpin. The church has been in existence since 1907 and currently has 75 members with attendance hovering around 40.

Currently the church is without a pastor and has been for more than a year. However, God takes care of his people as less than a mile from the church a family of 6 lives and the parents are pastors ordained in the Church of God faith. Mike and Karen Isaacs agreed to be interim pastors from the moment the full-time pastor left and what a blessing they and their four children have been for the church. Mike and Karen take turns bringing the message and being worship leader, Karen fulfills many of the office duties, their son Jacob enjoys running the computer, their twins Hunter and Garrett are Sunday morning greeters and their daughter Nicole always has a smile to bring joy to all.

From March 22 to June 7 the church did not meet in the church building for worship services but Mike and Karen did online services. During Holy Week they had an online special service every day culminating on the final day with a virtual communion time.



Also during this time church members were blessed with a “flocking”. Flamingos with a message of “We are Glad You are a Part of Our Flock” were anonymously put on

lawns with a written request to place it on another member's lawn after taking your picture with the display. Each member and/or attendee eventually experienced this fun inclusion activity while sheltering in place.

As Mike and Karen are serving in this interim capacity, the search committee continues to seek a full-time pastor to serve the Turpin Mennonite Church.

-Submitted by members of the church

Resource Library News

Fall Preschool Story Hour

Starting September 8, children ages 3-5 from around the Conference are invited to our VIRTUAL LIVE story hours full of stories, rhymes, and craft ideas on Tuesdays at 10 am and Thursdays at 3:30 pm. Led by Jennie Wintermote, Library Director, sessions will be different; you can join for one or both sessions each week! Register at: <https://forms.gle/vpk7DXRwwHAbSo5A7>. Contact Jennie with any questions at clib@mennowdc.org.

MC USA Common Read Book Discussions



Join with readers across WDC to discuss September's MC USA “Common Read” entitled *Signs of Life: Resurrecting Hope Out of Ordinary Losses* by Stephanie Lobdell. Jennie Wintermote will host Zoom discussions on Monday, September 14, 11:30 am-12:30 pm and Thursday September 24, 7-8 pm. Contact Jennie for the Zoom link (see her email above).

Book Bundles for Group Study —They're for Everyone!!

In March we launched the **Book Bundles for Group Study Program**. These are sets of a single title available for your Sunday school class, small group, or other group to study together. This is a great flexible option whether you're meeting in person or via technology. Recently added titles:

- **Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism** by Drew G. I. Hart
- **Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice** by Dennis R. Edwards
- **Who Will Be a Witness: Igniting Activism for God's Love, Justice, and Deliverance** by Drew G. I. Hart
- **Signs of Life: Resurrecting Hope Out of Ordinary Losses** by Stephanie Lobdell
- **I Am Not Your Enemy: Stories to Transform a Divided World** by Michael T. McRay