



Comments from the Conference Minister

Heidi Regier Kreider

2020 has been a year of loss and learning, struggle and opportunity. COVID 19 has turned our world upside down, disrupting personal life and congregational activities. Systemic racism and inequity have been starkly exposed once again, calling for a reckoning of social and economic justice. An election season full of turmoil has exacerbated divisions in our communities and eroded trust in civic leadership. Fires and hurricanes have signaled the grim reality of climate change and the disproportionate impact on those who are least responsible for it. And, the ongoing pandemic continues to bring loss and lament, as we grieve the deaths of loved ones.

In the midst of all this, “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39). Through this powerful love of God, the body of Christ is called to be the church precisely for such a time as this.

In this way, 2020 has also been a year of courageous and faithful witnesses within Western District Conference. Congregations have explored new technologies to continue worshiping and proclaiming God’s word, and to collaborate with other congregations. Pastors have connected with each other for support, encouragement and prayer in their ministry challenges. Members of WDC have contributed generously to the Hope Fund to assist congregations most impacted by COVID 19. Congregations have done anti-racism studies and advocacy, drive-through fundraising meals for mission and service projects, alternative forms of vacation Bible school and Sunday school for children and their families, deliveries of care-packages and groceries for those who are isolated, and many other expressions of faith and witness.

As we look ahead to the ongoing challenges of the coming year, let us deepen our roots in God’s powerful love and focus our priorities to bear witness to that love. Let us pray for courageous leaders who are ready to experiment and risk. Let us nurture compassion that embraces both lament and hope in the midst of suffering. Let us practice the courage and humility to reach out across divisions. Let us allow seeds of transformation and new life to grow out of the ground of suffering and chaos.

WDC will continue to provide crucial support for ministers and resources for congregations to meet these challenges, with the support of your prayers, participation and financial gifts. We are working together, to be the church “for such a time as this!”

Coming Events

July 30-Aug 1, 2021—WDC Annual Assembly

WDC Garden

Stories from Western District Conference
December 2020/January/February 2021



Dwelling in just and loving relationships

By Heidi Regier Kreider, WDC Conference Minister

WDC’s mission is to empower Anabaptist/Mennonite congregations to Witness and invite others to faith in Jesus Christ, Dwell in just and loving relationships, and Connect to God’s mission in the world. The second priority - “Dwell in just and loving relationships” - was the theme of WDC Reference Council on September 26. Members of WDC’s elected leadership groups (Executive Board, Commissions, and Gifts Discernment committee) and staff met by zoom to collaborate in connecting this aspect of WDC’s mission to our current context. Conversation focused especially on racial justice and cultural diversity, with break-out times for each group to discuss how they are engaging these issues, what challenges they face, and what is needed to work more effectively towards greater justice and equity in WDC.

Groups reported back a variety of observations. It was noted that we Anabaptists have a great opportunity to bring hope into our current context, but we need to gain better understanding of the cultural and racial diversity of our communities. We need more Anabaptist resources in languages other

than English. The WDC Hope Fund has supported needs of diverse congregations in WDC, and the quality of relationships in WDC also impacts the ongoing financial vitality of congregations and the conference. It is important to expand perspectives and build new relationships as we confront the fact that WDC culture and structures have been shaped largely by white people. How might we hear more diverse voices, both in contemporary stories and in historical narratives?

To conclude Reference Council, Heidi Regier Kreider presented information about anti-racism resources from Mennonite Church USA. This includes the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a tool to assess and develop intercultural competence, and online anti-racism training to gain an understanding of historical roots, individual



#BringThePeace is Mennonite Church USA’s call to action for individuals and congregations to extend peace in our communities. <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/bring-the-peace/>

Contributions to WDC
may be made online at <https://tinyurl.com/yycb3os6>
or sent to PO Box 306, North 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



316-283-6300

wdc@mennowdc.org

www.mennowdc.org

manifestations and internal dynamics of institutional racism, and to develop a shared vocabulary, analysis, and road map to dismantle institutional racism.

Following Reference Council, at its meeting in November, the Executive Board affirmed a proposal for members of the Board and staff to take the Intercultural Development Inventory, with the intention to move forward to take online anti-racism training in 2021. WDC commissions and congregations are also encouraged to explore these resources, as tools to equip us to work towards greater systemic justice in WDC. For more information, see: <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/anti-racism-resources-for-mennonite-churches/>.



Walking with hope and grace in a time of pandemic

For congregations, the year 2020 began with optimism and hope. I still remember the work plan proposed at the first annual meeting of our congregation, which now seems like a long time ago. For Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb, as well as for most at the conference, the impact of the pandemic has been challenging in many aspects of congregational life.

During this time of physical distancing and limitations in the way of life as we knew it, we can reflect on what we have learned or unlearned to survive and adapt to a new reality that affects us globally.

The Hispanic church in WDC has been impacted in an extraordinary way. We see how we have taken refuge in giving each other mutual support, keeping in frequent contact through chats and video calls, sharing resources, from what measures to implement to protect congregants, to sharing reasons of prayer when we have no other alternatives.

- Hispanic residents of the United States have been three times as likely to become infected by COVID-19 than their white neighbors and twice as likely to die, according to a New York Times analysis of information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- The jobless rate among Hispanics has increased from 4.5% in July 2019 to 12.9% in July 2020, outpacing unemployment rates for white men and women, according to U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Economic hardship and compromised access to healthcare and government assistance make immigrant populations especially vulnerable.
- In turn, disadvantaged communities suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, making it harder for them to cope and recover, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

But through all these of challenges, hope has prevailed, through the aid funds of the conference, denomination, agencies, efforts of the denomination's own racial groups and contributions of individuals with the interest that the congregations remain and continue to be witnesses in the local communities.

*--Sandra Montes-Martinez, Pastor
Iglesia Menonita Monte Horeb, Dallas TX*



Seeds for Celebration

- Last year on Epiphany Sunday, Mennonite Church of the Servant (Wichita, KS) gave members and friends a simple wooden star with a word on the back of it--words like peace, joy, patience, kindness, love, etc. People were encouraged to put their star in a prominent place as a prompt for prayer throughout the year.
- Recently Peace Mennonite Church (Dallas, TX) sponsored a game night for youth and their sponsors to play online Jackbox Games, along with youth from Austin (TX) Mennonite Church. They hope that youth from other Texas congregations will join in future game nights!
- New Creation Fellowship (Newton, KS) reaches out to their neighbors through a Blessing Box, which is stocked with non-perishable food and personal hygiene items. Mac & Cheese seems to be a favorite item. Their prayers are that God would bless the givers and the receivers.

Hope for Immigration Justice

Why are we talking about immigration justice in our Western District Conference newsletter? Advocating for the rights of the poor and those who have fled from violence is not a matter of choosing political sides. Jesus had few resources. His own parents fled to Egypt with him from Herod's death threats. Jesus was not born into a seat of power. So he had a heart for those living on the margins of their community or under the threat of violence and oppression. In Jesus' name and by his example, we, too, speak on behalf of those who have no voice in the halls of power.

The WDC Immigration Task Force invites you to write your congress people to be a voice for the voiceless. Ask your legislator to:

- Raise the cap on the number of refugees to the U.S. to at least 125,000 per year.
- Undo current restrictions on asylum-seekers. The "remain in Mexico" practice must end. This has led to those fleeing violence and hardship to experiencing more violence.
- Make the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) permanent for these hard-working young people.
- Pass laws with oversight to hold Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) accountable for inhumane treatment of those held under their auspices.
- Pass immigration legislation that would offer a path to citizenship for undocumented people in our country. Many undocumented people pay taxes, but do not receive government services because of their status.
- Create policies that will make both temporary and permanent work visas more available.
- Work across the aisle to create ways to support immigrants living in the U.S. with health care, education, and employment resources. Most of us have grandparents and great grandparents who were immigrants to this country. Let us have compassion on migrants, as others had compassion on our own ancestors.

These advocacy ideas are reprinted from the website, Mennonites Without Borders, October 19, 2020.

*--Kathy Neufeld Dunn
WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based)*



Welcome to Sandra Montes-Martinez, Associate Conference Minister

Sandra Montes-Martinez will begin in December as an Associate Conference Minister for WDC serving as liaison with the Church Planting Commission and congregations and pastors in Texas. She will continue ongoing leadership with Academia Liderazgo Misional Anabautista - a missional leadership initiative of Iglesia Menonita Hispana (IMH), and will conclude part-time positions as WDC Administrative Assistant in Texas, pastor at Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Monte Horeb (Dallas, TX), and Executive Director for IMH. As Sandra moves into a new leadership position in WDC, Lee Lever (Pastor at Austin Mennonite Church) ends his volunteer role as Interim Conference Ministry Liaison. Thank you, Lee! And best wishes and prayers for you, Sandra!

Resource Library News

Common Read



Join others across WDC to discuss *I Am Not Your Enemy: Stories to Transform a Divided World* by Michael T. McRay. This Common Read is a partnership between Herald Press, MC Canada, and MC USA.

WDC-based Zoom discussions will take place on Jan. 11, 11:30am-12:30pm and Jan. 28, 7-8pm. Join for one or both discussions. To borrow a copy of the book (limited number) or to register for the discussion, email crlib@mennowd.org

Preschool Story Hour

Virtual Preschool Story Hour will continue January through April on Tuesdays at 10:00am. Kids age 3-5 (and their younger/older siblings) are welcome for stories, songs and rhymes. Sign up at: <https://forms.gle/vpk7DXRwwHAbSo5A7>

Give A Resource this Christmas!

Looking for a unique Christmas gift idea? Donate a resource to the Conference Resource Library in the name of your loved one or friend! Check the library wish list at <https://faithandlifebookstore.net/wdc-2020-christmas-wish-list/>. Donated books will include a bookplate honoring the "recipient" of this Christmas gift.