

**Conference Minister**  
**Heidi Regier Kreider**

Highlights from my work this past year are listed in the primary areas of my ministry:

Tending the “big picture” and overall vision for WDC, through board, commission and committee work:

- WDC’s constitution says that WDC “seeks to foster a biblical, multicultural vision of the missional church by being inclusive of, walking with and learning from many cultural and racial/ethnic groups” and “we seek to dismantle racism and prejudice...” To this end, Reference Council in Fall 2020 focused on the theme “Dwell in just and loving relationships,” the second of WDC’s three mission emphases. We shared information about the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and anti-racism resources provided by Mennonite Church USA. Members of Staff, Executive Board (EB) and Ministerial Leadership Commission (MLC) subsequently took the IDI and participated in group introductory and debrief sessions with facilitator Michelle Armster, and are currently taking online anti-racism training through Widerstand Consulting, sponsored by MC USA. This is one step in addressing systemic racism and increasing intercultural competency in WDC. I also value ongoing conversations with the Gifts Discernment Committee as we seek diverse representation in nominations for elected positions in WDC, and consider the structural changes and resources that are necessary to make that a reality.
- My *Sprouts* articles over the year featured a variety of topics such as encouraging participation in WDC annual assembly, creation care in the face of climate change, minister’s self-care and mental health, God’s presence in the Advent/Christmas season, following Jesus in an election season, alternatives to policing, mitigating the spread of COVID, and post-pandemic congregational discernment. I wrote a pastoral letter to WDC congregations following the January 6 insurrection.
- The pandemic has accelerated a learning curve that has prompted WDC staff to assess communication needs and update the WDC website (still a work in progress).
- Policies and processes related to the prevention of and response to ministerial misconduct have been important concerns this past year. See additional comments below.\*
- Updating WDC’s Policy Manual has been an ongoing project. This past year I worked with MLC on a new policy for communications regarding ministerial credential status, and with the Staff Relations Committee on personnel policies related to employee privacy, and harassment/abuse prevention and response. Former EB member Kent Moore graciously volunteered time and expertise to help reorganize the overall policy manual to align its contents and incorporate new items. A draft is being reviewed to prepare it for EB approval.

Staff supervision

- Thank you to Lee Lever who served as interim conference ministry liaison for Texas through November 2020. Sandra Montes Martinez began as Associate Conference Minister (Texas-based) in December 2020, and Violeta Ajquejay Suastegi began part time in February 2021 as Interim Administrative Assistant to Sandra. Nancy Funk, Administrative Assistant in the North Newton, KS, office, has announced her retirement effective August 31, 2021. We are deeply grateful for her competent, friendly and efficient service over the last 17 years, and will miss her! The Administrative Assistant opening has been announced, with the goal of filling that position in late August.

- Due to the pandemic, from Nov 2020 - Mar 2021 staff worked from home and the WDC office and Resource Library in North Newton were closed to the public. Since then, offices and library have opened and work has resumed at the office with some adjustments due to ongoing safety protocols and use of telecommunications.
- My deep thanks goes to all staff members for their resilience, creativity, dedication and good faith in the midst of the disruptions of this past year of pandemic, staff transitions, changes in technology and other challenges in our lives. We have learned and grown together through it, thanks to God's faithfulness and the support of WDC and the wider church.

#### Support for credentialed ministers and congregations

- Pastoral search processes continued over the past year, though with some delay due to the challenges congregations and candidates face in doing discernment during a pandemic. Of the congregations for which I serve as liaison, two congregations called pastors during the past year, and transition or search processes are ongoing at a significant number of other congregations in WDC.
- Each of us conference ministers pre-recorded a video sermon for congregations to use after Easter. I also welcomed opportunities to make about twenty personal visits (virtually or in person) to congregations to speak, or lead in ministers' transition or credentialing events.
- Zoom provided the opportunity to attend regular gatherings of several pastor peer groups for sharing, support and resourcing; and I consulted with the pastor-congregation review advisors group to update the description and guidelines for their work.
- I sent condolence letters and attended memorial services at the death of several retired credentialed ministers in WDC, and for Esther Rinner who had served as a secretary for WDC. These are meaningful opportunities to reflect on, learn from and celebrate the faith, witness and leadership of those who go before us.

#### Institutional relationships:

- Bethel College invited me to serve for the past year as a WDC representative on a Faith Formation Task Force facilitated by campus pastor Michael Unruh. I am also on the planning team for Bethel's bi-annual Worship and Arts Symposium, *Joining Voices Together* in November 2021 featuring the new MC USA hymnal.
- Regular zoom meetings with MC USA conference ministers have been informative, supportive and sustaining in the midst of the challenges and complexities of conference ministry in this season. Instead of an annual in-person retreat, conference ministers had a zoom seminar with Canadian author/teacher Brad Jersak on "A Christian-like Approach to Leading Polarized People."
- I completed a term as worship facilitator for MC USA Constituency Leaders Council, and attended CLC meetings in October and March as a WDC representative.
- Two members of WDC's Church Planting Commission and I participated in the SENT Network sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network, a series of twelve bi-weekly online sessions of training for church planting. This was an opportunity to learn about church planting models and principles, engage in dialogue with denominational leaders and others about church planting, and consider what WDC can learn for our church planting ministry.
- I attended Camp Mennoscah's virtual annual meeting to bring greetings from WDC.
- Kansas Leadership Center renewed a joint Leadership Transformation Grant for WDC and South Central Mennonite Conference (SCMC), which covers registration expenses for 29 spots in KLC's

three primary training programs in 2021 (online). Our joint Core Team for facilitating this grant bid farewell to Phil Schmidt with gratitude for his involvement in adaptive leadership in WDC over recent years, and welcomed Eric Buller as a new team member; Kathy Neufeld Dunn and I also serve on the team along with SCMC representatives.

- Eastern Mennonite Seminary and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary each hosted their annual leaders/pastors resourcing events virtually. I attended one day at EMS, and multiple days at AMBS, including gatherings for conference ministers with students exploring ministry opportunities.
- SCMC's recent proposed resolution to dissolve their conference has prompted me to consult with denominational and conference leaders to consider potential impact on and response by WDC, as we await the outcome of SCMC's decision.

#### Stewardship and development:

- I give thanks for the generous financial, volunteer and prayer support of WDC members and friends through this past year, allowing WDC to cover regular ministry expenses and also to offer grants through the Hope Fund to assist congregations and ministers facing difficult circumstances due to COVID. EB approved an expansion of the Hope Fund guidelines to include assistance to congregations in response to other natural disasters in addition to the pandemic.
- WDC Business Manager Beth Yoder worked diligently to make the shift to new accounting software at the beginning of the fiscal year February 1, which will allow better reporting formats and compliance with accounting standards.

#### Professional growth:

- I focused reading and attendance at webinars this past year on issues of racial justice, trauma healing, restorative justice and peacemaking. I particularly recommend these books from the WDC Resource Library: *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* by Jennifer Harvey; *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith and Evangelical Culture* by Felipe Hinojosa; *Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse: Hope Through Trauma* by Judah Oudshoorn, Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, et al.; *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World (Second Edition)* by Serene Jones; *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* by Elaine Enns and Ched Myers.
- EB approved my proposal to take sabbatical leave Nov 15 - Dec 31, 2021.

#### **Comments regarding Ministerial Misconduct**

Ministerial Leadership Commission (MLC), Executive Board and I have had conversation about questions and concerns WDC has received regarding processing of ministerial misconduct within WDC. This statement offers background, acknowledgements and clarification related to these concerns.

In the early 2000s, WDC response to ministerial misconduct was guided by *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (c. 1996), *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* (c. 2000) and the companion document *Justice Making: The Church Responds to Clergy Misconduct*. Prevention of clergy misconduct sessions were offered periodically, with Healthy Boundary training for credentialed ministers beginning in 2010.

Over time, there has been growing understanding within WDC about the nature of ministerial misconduct, abuse of power, sexual abuse and trauma. This growing awareness and understanding has paralleled development within Mennonite Church USA and WDC of new programs for ministerial misconduct prevention and healthy boundaries training, as well as policies and procedures for response to ministerial misconduct. Specifically:

- In 2017, the WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission (MLC) adopted the MC USA *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* (2016), which places higher priority on communicating with the complainant, addressing conflicts of interest, and making appropriate notifications regarding the misconduct - [https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MinisterialSexualMisconductPolicy\\_FINAL2018.pdf](https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MinisterialSexualMisconductPolicy_FINAL2018.pdf) The MLC has also noted areas in the *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* (2016) that still need further clarity. This includes:
  - more appropriate procedures to respond to non-sexual misconduct allegations;
  - more adequate guidelines for assessing when to initiate a misconduct complaint process;
  - resources for caring for the complainant, the accused, their families and congregation(s);
  - guidelines to determine what level of expertise, objectivity, and resources are required to conduct a ministerial misconduct process with integrity;
  - criteria for disclosure of information and records retention;
  - implications of legal or criminal processes in relation to ministerial misconduct processes.We have communicated these concerns to MC USA for consideration in future revisions of the *Policy and Procedure*.
- In 2017 the MLC approved a *Procedure Regarding Ministerial Ethics*, updating requirements for healthy boundary training for credentialed ministers according to new Mennonite Church USA recommendations - <https://mennowdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WDC-Procedure-regarding-ministerial-ethics-signature-form.pdf>
- In 2019 the MLC adopted a *Record Retention Policy for Credential Files* - <https://mennowdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WDC-Record-Retention-Policy-for-Credential-Files.pdf> (currently being reviewed again for additional revisions). This includes protocol for misconduct files, in keeping with the *Protocol and Procedure for Ministerial Misconduct Files* of Mennonite Church USA. [https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MinisterialMisconductFiles\\_Protocol\\_Policy\\_2021-1.pdf](https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MinisterialMisconductFiles_Protocol_Policy_2021-1.pdf) This updated protocol indicates that conference ministers and the national office will consult the misconduct file of any credentialed leader who desires to renew their Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) file, seeks a new ministry position within Mennonite Church USA, or is being vetted for volunteer or employment by an MC USA agency. Conference ministers will alert any interested search committee in writing of a credentialed leader's misconduct, including the date and nature of the charge, the resulting judgement, all sanctions and the compliance of the credentialed leader. Additionally, the MLI form itself indicates a candidate's previous incidents of misconduct.

- In 2020 (effective January 1, 2021), the MLC adopted a *Policy for Communication of Ministerial Credential Status* which includes a public announcement to the WDC constituency regarding ministerial credential changes. [Policy for Communication of Ministerial Credential Status](#)

As we have learned more about the nature of ministerial misconduct, abuse of power, sexual abuse and trauma, we acknowledge that WDC's response to ministerial misconduct over recent decades has been inadequate in a variety of ways. There has been a lack of sufficient sensitivity and care for victims and survivors of misconduct, with the primary focus primarily on determining the accused minister's guilt or innocence. There has also been a tendency to protect or favor those who are in positions of power, and to move too quickly to forgiveness of the accused minister or restoration of credentials, rather than appropriate accountability and care for the minister and protection of the wider church community and those who are most vulnerable. Dual relationships and conflicts of interest have compromised decisions and interpretation around misconduct. And confidentiality has been maintained in ways that, though following the policies at the time, resulted in a lack of transparency and diminished trust.

WDC regrets the harm these factors have caused for victims and survivors of abuse, for ministers, and for congregations and their leaders. We believe that open and transparent communication increases accountability for credentialed leaders, congregations, and the conference. We hold ministers to a high standard of ethical conduct and pray that our policies, procedures, and training for credentialed ministers will promote safe and ethical interactions between the ministers and participants in the faith community. We are committed to ongoing learning and growth towards greater integrity and faithfulness in ministry.