

WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based)
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Assembly Report 2023

2022-23 was a year of rebuilding. If 2020-2022 were primarily about deconstruction, this past year in our conference was about reconstruction. Not about simply returning to “normal,” but discovering and living into the new normal of a post-pandemic, post-modern, even post-Christian culture creeping into society around us. How do we authentically pass on faith in Jesus from generation-to-generation when some have more questions than answers and others have deconstructed their faith that did not offer them hope or a framework for responding to complex situations like climate crisis, racial injustice and harm, or other trauma? As we see the rubble of deconstruction, WDC churches have been asking, “What is crucial to hang onto?” and “What new ideas can help us share faith that is authentic for this time and place?” If Jesus were sitting in our faith formation planning meetings, what would he say? What would he focus on? This is about rebuilding for the Church today and for the future.

Resourcing Healthy, Missional Churches

Interim and Transitional Ministers: I searched for and introduced interim and transitional ministers to congregational leaders. They are such gifted leaders and in short supply now. Heidi, Sandra, and I meet monthly with them for resourcing, support and prayer.

Church Safety Resourcing: I reviewed several congregational safety and abuse response policies that congregations were updating. I also pointed these individuals and their committees to denominational resources.

Preaching at WDC Congregations: I was delighted to be asked to preach in-person at several WDC congregations in the past year. It is a joy to reconnect with church members in person before and after worship.

Task Force Support: I did my best to support the task forces under the Resource Commission.

- *Israel-Palestine Task Force* spent significant time planning for 2 workshops at MennoCon23, as well as for our WDC Annual Assembly. Topics: How the boycott movement came home to Kansas for one of our pastoral families, and updates on how to join the Gaza Twinning initiative.
- *Immigration Task Force* did good work networking and updating congregations passionate about immigration and refugee justice. The task force discontinued their work 11/9/22 because of changing life circumstances of the task force members.
- *Farm Worker Health Task Force* continues to support KDHE staff and Health Advocates in our shared work of supporting gaining access to basic health needs of migrant workers in Kansas (Spanish and Low German speakers).

- *Biconference Youth Committee* hosted the in-person Know Jesus weekend 2/4-2/5/23 for youth in South Central and Western District Conferences at Hesston College.
- *History Committee* put a lot of work into Annual Assembly 2022's "Menno Jeopardy." Thank you to each of them! If your congregation has not sent in a brief church history, they would still appreciate receiving these as part of the history of WDC.

Resource Commission was in a rebuilding stage after the pandemic, as well as in the midst of great cultural shifts. We reinstated Mustard Seed grants, offered free access to Vibrant Faith faith formation resources, and conducted a congregational survey of what curriculum and other resources congregations are finding most useful today.

Sustaining Transformational Pastors

Recognizing and Blessing Pastoral Transitions: I offered words of support and blessing during interim/transitional pastor installations, only final Sundays of departing pastors, during 2 church centennial celebrations, the memorial service of Pastor Dave Stevens, and at the final Sunday of Trinity Mennonite Church as they closed.

Faith Formation Resourcing: I offered faith formation resourcing in-person, through website articles, and through helping pastors and others to access the Vibrant Faith Masterclass faith formation webinars, as well as working with Jennie Wintermote to point people toward our rich Resource Library resources.

Healthy Boundaries Training: This mandatory training helps pastors maintain and grow in awareness of their need for appropriate pastoral boundaries (what is their work and what is not) and the need for self care. I led 2 virtual trainings each of Healthy Boundaries 101 (basic) and Healthy Boundaries 201 (advanced) for WDC credentialed ministers and those across the denomination.

Being a Pastoral Presence: I continue to listen, pray with, and offer counsel to our settled pastors, interim and transitional ones during challenging times of ministry, as well as potential pastoral candidates as they navigate the candidating process.

Connect Congregations and Pastors with MC USA and additional resources:

Area Conference Ministers' Meetings: We moved from bi-weekly to monthly ACM meetings this year. We continue to support each other, as well as learn what's new at the denominational level. I missed this year's ACM gathering because I was on sabbatical November 15-December 31, 2022. I'm grateful for the time away for refreshment and renewal and glad to be back in your midst. I'll be glad to see US and Canadian colleagues this fall.

Pastoral Search Processes: A significant chunk of my time has gone to the important work of supporting and resourcing search committees and pastoral candidates. As I write this, we

have close to 30% of our WDC churches in pastoral search processes, with eight of my congregations in the transition process.

Pastoral Review Advisors Group: Heidi, Sandra and I meet with our WDC Pastoral Review Advisors regularly to help shape pastoral/congregational reviews that are healthy for congregations and pastors. Our advisors are very wise and astute in this ministry.

Prevention and Accountability Writing Project: This MC Canada/MC USA project will revise and greatly expand the policies and best practices surrounding how to prevent and respond to credible allegations of harassment and abuse of child, youth, vulnerable adults, or adults within congregations, whether the alleged offender is a credentialed minister, uncredentialed church leader, or others active in the congregation. I am part of the “prevention” writing team which we hope will be available in the next year to MC USA congregations and credentialed ministers.

Coordinate Assembly Planning: Many thanks to our hard-working WDC staff and the volunteers of the Annual Assembly Planning Team and during the weekend of July 29-31, 2022 who helped us have such a wonderful time of worship, delegate work, and recreation at Camp Copass, Denton, TX. We were clearly ready to be together again in-person and through hybrid tech.

Thank you for your prayers and words of encouragement as I continue to do the ministry I love with Western District Conference pastors and congregations.