

## **Annual Report, August 2023.**

**Sandra Montes-Martinez**

### **WDC Associate Conference Minister (Texas-Based)**

I am grateful for the privilege of serving as the Associate Conference Minister for WDC, and for the trust placed in me by the conference staff, leadership, commissions, pastors, and congregations. The work highlighted in this report are the result of collective efforts, dedicated teamwork, and the grace of God working through us. It is with great joy and gratitude that I share this report with you.

#### **Support Pastor and Congregations.**

Throughout the year, I provided pastoral care, support, and guidance to ministers, congregations, and lay leaders. This included regular check-ins, mentoring, consultation, and training, assistance during times of transition or challenges, focused on effective communication, conflict resolution, church structures and strategic planning.

-As staff liaisons for congregations in Texas and the Hispanic ministry in WDC I provide support to congregations in transitions, assisting transitional team/pastor, giving feedback on the preparation of the CIF, assembling the pastor search committee, reviewing MLI and preparing for candidate interview, and the negotiations until the congregation is ready to call their pastor. Assessment of church structure and suggestion of best practice for ministry and staff relations process. I would like to highlight Casa Betania pastoral transition as the first Transitional Ministry in a Hispanic congregation in WDC. Thanks to the collaboration of the supporting churches in Newton KS, and WDC staff this intentional work has been made possible, which will serve as a reference to contribute to the vitality of other congregations and ministries in WDC.

-A significant part of my work this year has being related to accountability and best practice for pastors and congregation. I worked closely with CM Heidi Regier Kreider and MLC in accountability process for credential leaders, church structure and accountability.

- Pastors and credential leaders: As part of our ongoing commitment to support our conference leaders, we host monthly peer group for Texas Bi-lingual /English speaking pastors and Hispanic Ministry peer group, offer support for interim/transitional, Pastor Review Advisors' group, once a year WDC & SCMC Chaplains gathering meeting.

- Church visits are one way to connect getting to know the congregations, promote WDC resources and programs and get acquainted with the culture and practices of the church to be able to serve assertively. I have the blessing to join in person and virtually 16 congregations and 3 church plants in over 30 visits this year, and several congregational and leadership meetings engaging with pastors, lay leaders, and congregants. These visits allowed me to provide pastoral care, address concerns, and offer support to local communities. I encouraged congregations to discern their mission, develop strategic plans, and implement initiatives that would strengthen their ministry and impact their neighborhoods positively.

#### **Leadership development and Gatherings.**

Throughout the year, we helped organize and conducted several impactful events and gatherings within our conference. These included Annual Assembly, workshops, and regional meetings. These events provided opportunities for fellowship, worship, learning, and networking among ministers, lay leaders,

and congregants. Feedback from participants indicated their appreciation for the spiritual nourishment and community-building experiences.

-CPC Summit: the event took place in Dallas TX, on April 21 and 22. We had around 35 people attending, among the participants we had pastors, church planters, and leaders. The theme was Being the Church: Meeting Our Neighbors Where They Are. This was the first pilot of how to equip our leaders in a contextual and culturally sensitive way. We were able to interact in both languages having simultaneous translation into Spanish and English for worship and sharing our story and with focused workshop for church planting and church revitalization in their own language and context. The Summit was mostly funded by the Schowalter Foundation Grant awarded in 2022.

-Faith and Mission: during the 2022 assembly in collaboration with Tim Amor we led a CPC workshop, "New Doors to the Church" exploring new ways people engage church communities in modern, post-COVID times. having faith conversations with our neighbors. The workshop explored ideas to make it easier to invite others to follow Jesus alongside us.

Preaching and equipping leadership and congregations thriving and planting, empowering our church leaders to serve their communities in contextual ways.

### **Church Planting:**

In my work one of the most life-giving experiences is to be able to be part of the new emerging community of faith. This is the work of a village/Conference, where every part of the conference has something to participate in. From dream and imaging a new church, to assess prospective church planters, and develop a church plant project, we can experience the transformative work of God. The Church Planting Commission and Support Team, join what God is already doing in our midst, my part as staff liaison is to provide support for emerging church plant, discipleship, and missional initiatives, oversee and coordinate projects with CPC and Support Team, maintain monthly communication with church planters for coaching and training with tools for effective ministry.

-through our work two new church plants were certified by the WDC Executive Board: **Casa de Restauracion in Houston, TX**, aims to establish vibrant and inclusive Christian community in underserved areas, with a mission to bring the transformative message of hope, love, and faith to individuals and families who seek spiritual connection and a sense of belonging. **Arca de Salvación, in Uspantan, Guatemala**, is an indigenous Quiché congregation seeking to strengthen discipleship and leadership education, empower women, and minister in their community.

-Write articles, and announcements in the WDC website.

-Collaborations and partnerships: Through the work of the Auxiliary Church Plant Support Team, we have had contact with 40 congregations to invite them to engage in church planting projects and consider participation in our Sister Church Partnership initiative. Established congregations are energized when they have opportunities for "being the church together."

### **Ministry Assistant highlights**

I oversee the work of Ministry Assistant Violeta Ajquejay Suastegui, which concentrates her work for pastors and congregations, intercultural competency, clerical and logistical support, communications, and translation in English and Spanish to support the core tasks in WDC.

We meet weekly to Coordinate the verbal interpretation for boards meeting and commissions, maintaining regular communication and updates with WDC pastors and congregational leaders in Texas/

Hispanic Ministry and Church Planters, translation minutes, written material for board and commissions, publications, WDC Delegate Assembly and any other announcement or article in WDC.

**Other engagements:**

- Weekly meetings with CM Heidi Regier Kreider
- Monthly meetings with WDC Conference Ministers for updates and consultation.
- Monthly meeting with WDC staff.
- Monthly meeting with Church Planting Commission
- I participated and collaborated in the Anti-Racism Audit Team
- Contributing to the planning and logistics of Annual Assembly 2022 at Camp Copass, TX

**Collaborative and Denominational Engagements:**

As an Associate Conference Minister, I actively participated in collaborative efforts with other conferences, denominational leaders, and organizations. These partnerships and engagements allowed us to coordinate joint initiatives, share resources, and contribute to the wider mission of our denomination.

- MC USA conference ministers virtual gathering.
- Director of the Anabaptist Missional Leadership Academy (ALMA) a program of the Hispanic Mennonite Church/ MC USA.
- Leadership discernment committee (LDC) of MC USA.
- Everence National Chapter Grant Board Member
- AMBS Pastors & Leaders Advisory Committee /Program Advisor for Practical Leadership Training.
- Hope for the Future an annual gathering of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).
- IMH Biannual assembly
- MC USA convention/ Assembly 2023 as WDC delegated.
- MC USA and annual MC USA / Canada conference ministers' retreat, Nov 30 - Dec 2
- SEMILLA Learning tour to Guatemala Aug 11-17 for MC USA conference leaders.
- Pastors and Leaders Week Feb 13-16 at AMBS.

**Personal/ Professional growth:**

- Continuing SeBAH a MEA program of MC USA.
- Candidate to the master's in theology program at AMBS
- Continuing education course "Faith Community Therapists"

**Future Planning and Vision:**

Looking ahead, we are actively engaged in strategic planning, envisioning the future of our conference. We are exploring new ways to enhance our support systems, strengthen leadership development programs, and cultivate a culture of collaboration and innovation. We seek to adapt to the changing needs of our churches and communities while remaining faithful to our core values and mission.