

WDC Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-Based)
Kathy Neufeld Dunn
Assembly Report 2024

2023-24 finds many WDC congregations, including the 15 I support and am liaison for, doing their best to find their way in a culture where deep Christian faith is not the norm, where regular Christian practice as we have known it is diminishing, and where traditional congregational ministers are harder to find. These realities are challenging. At the same time, they may lead us to reflect on the Early Church when the earliest followers of Jesus lived in a time when “The Way” was not known, when people were not given time off to worship and study, when neighbors had no idea who Jesus was. Yet the Church flourished. Followers of Jesus acted very differently than others around them, so their neighbors and friends asked why.

I have been encouraging the congregations I serve to become focused on deep faith formation for all generations, deep faith that nurtures our spirits, relationships, and actions. I have also encouraged the congregations in search of a pastor to consider other leadership models. Lastly, I have been encouraged to see people from many WDC congregations engage their communities with the message of Christ’s peace and justice. Our faith in the risen Christ must burn bright like a city on a hill or nudge its way into the lives of those around us like yeast in bread.

Resourcing Healthy, Missional Churches

Interim and Transitional Ministers: I have done my best to introduce interim and transitional ministers to congregational leaders who are in-between pastors. As a group, these gifted pastors continue to be quite needed in WDC. Heidi, Sandra, and I meet monthly with all interim and transitional ministers serving WDC congregations for resourcing, support and prayer.

Church Safety Resourcing: During the year I had several important safety-related conversations with congregations, as well as with our newly appointed WDC Abuse Prevention and Response Resource Team, so they could also respond to congregational needs in this area. MC USA also hired an interim staff person to strengthen denominational church safety resourcing. I have helped congregations access these, as well.

Preaching at WDC Congregations: I enjoyed opportunities to preach in several WDC congregations throughout the year. It is an honor to be asked.

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

- *Israel-Palestine Task Force* has been quite active since October, keeping WDC congregations and individuals connected with the new non-profit Mennonite Action as together we have witnessed to the peace and justice of Christ in response to the terror and destruction in Gaza and among Israelis.

- *Farm Worker Health Task Force* continues to support KDHE staff and Health Promoters in our shared work of supporting migrant farm workers gaining access to basic health services. This task force specifically supports Low German and Spanish speaking Health Promoters around Kansas.
- *The Biconference Youth Committee* discontinued its formal work in anticipation of South Central Conference leaving MC USA. WDC Resource Commission is working with Dwight Regier and other staff to re-envision how to serve the youth and their adult leaders across the whole conference.
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Resource Commission has spent the past year listening to congregations' faith formation needs through the WDC Listening Process and surveys. Resource Commission also supported Jennie, Melissa and me as we brainstormed and dreamed together about how to creatively nurture faith in children. On behalf of the Resource Commission and the whole conference, I submitted a grant application to the Lilly Endowment. We are waiting to hear the result of these efforts.

Sustaining Transformational Pastors

Recognizing and Blessing Pastoral Transitions: I have joined congregations in worship as they welcome an interim pastor, or recognize a new ministerial credential status (licensing or ordination), or bless and release their pastor due to a call transition or retirement. It is a privilege to be part of worship during these special moments in congregational life.

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: These mandatory trainings help ministers grow in self-awareness regarding sustaining healthy relationships with the people we minister with, as well as growing in our own capacity for self-care and resilience as we minister. I offered 4 on-line trainings, 2 Healthy Boundaries 101 basic trainings, and 2 Healthy Boundaries 201 advanced trainings. WDC ministers and ministers from across MC USA participated.

Being a Pastoral Presence: I continue to keep my ears and heart open as I listen to the needs and concerns of hard-working ministers, interim and transitional ministers, pastors in transition, chaplains, retired pastors, and those considering candidating in WDC.

Connect Congregations and Pastors with MC USA and additional resources:

Area Conference Ministers' Meetings: Area Conference Ministers continue to gather monthly via Zoom. We discuss issues and learn what's new in MC USA. We gathered with our Canadian colleagues in Banff, AB this past fall. It is so important to listen to each other and grow in trust and fellowship.

Pastoral Search Processes: I continued to give a good portion of my time to supporting search committees and reaching out to potential candidates for WDC congregations. Our conference began this year with 13 congregations in search, with 8 of them mine to support and encourage. With congregational and pastoral transitions, I currently support 5 congregations in pastoral search.

Pastoral Review Advisors Group: Heidi, Sandra, and I continue to meet with this wise group of people who ask good questions and help guide congregational leaders in healthy pastoral review processes.

Prevention and Accountability Writing Project: This MC Canada/MC USA project that will update and potentially expand sexual abuse prevention, as well as the Ministerial Misconduct policy. This document will also offer a huge collection of prevention and accountability resources for congregations. We hope that delegates will be introduced to this resource at the next MennoCon gathering.

Coordinate Assembly Planning: I am so grateful to the many volunteers and WDC staff who helped to make our 2023 Annual Assembly August 11-13 at Tabor Mennonite Church, Newton, KS, such a rich experience of fellowship, discernment, and faith formation.

Once again I thank God and each of you for allowing me the honor and joy of serving as your Associate Conference Minister (KS-based).