

Annual Report - June 2024
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*“Grace to you and peace. We always **give thanks** to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers constantly, remembering before our God and Creator your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” - 1 Thessalonians 1:1b-3*

This is the theme verse for the WDC Listening Process, an important focus in my work this year. I **give thanks** for the Executive Board’s commitment to launch this initiative, and for 18 congregations that have already hosted or scheduled Listening Process Visits this year. I **give thanks** for planning team colleagues Wendy Funk Schrag (WDC Secretary), Doug Penner who served until March, and Mike Peters who has joined the team; for volunteers and staff who serve on 3-person teams to facilitate congregational sessions, and for WDC Administrative Assistant Michelle Hiebert who coordinates scheduling for these in-person visits. And I **give thanks** for a Fransen Family Foundation grant that WDC received to help with Listening Process travel and administrative expenses. In congregational visits, we invite members to participate in small group conversation on four questions:

1. *Can you tell about a time when you felt most alive and vibrant as a congregation, or as a participant of your congregation?*
2. *What is foundational and reassuring about this congregation that has helped in difficult times?*
3. *What activities or ministries are most important now for your congregation in connecting to and carrying out God’s work?*
4. *What do you hope for the future of your congregation, and what resources from WDC would be helpful for that?*

We gather responses to these questions, send a report back to the congregation and listen for common themes to shape priorities for congregational resourcing by WDC and connections between congregations. Listening Process visits are also opportunities to nurture relationships and tell about resources WDC currently offers. The Listening Process will continue through 2024. We invite congregations that have not yet participated to contact the WDC office to schedule a date to host a listening team visit!

I helped facilitate Listening Process sessions at five congregations this past year and also visited congregations to preach, mark pastoral transitions, worship and attend special events. I met with various congregational leadership groups to help equip discernment on topics such as pastoral transition and search processes, safe church practices, leadership and staffing structures. I **give thanks** for associate conference ministers Sandra Montes-Martinez and Kathy Neufeld Dunn, as we share in ministry with each of us being a liaison for a group of congregations and ministers. I **give thanks** for the 11 ministers who have served as interim or transitional pastors across WDC during the year, and for each candidate who accepted a call to a new settled ministry role! The associate conference ministers and I facilitated monthly gatherings for interim and transitional ministers to discuss ministry practices and share as a peer group. We also met bi-monthly with WDC Pastor Review Advisors who facilitated pastor/congregation reviews in five WDC congregations. I **give thanks** for Roger Neufeld

Smith, Doug Penner, Lee Lever, and Kathy Goering Reid who participated in the Advisors group this year. And I **give thanks** for the Ministerial Leadership Commission, with whom I served as staff liaison to accompany ministers by offering credentialing processes, orientation to WDC, grants for seminary study, continuing education and sabbaticals, various forms of accountability and support, resourcing for safe church practices, coordinating a ministers' retreat in Kansas in April, and planning for a ministers' retreat in Texas in September.

I worked closely with other staff, the Executive Board and other committees in stewardship of the facility, financial and personnel resources that undergird WDC's work. I **give thanks** for Mike Lamb, Fund Development Coordinator, who joined the WDC staff in September 2023, and for all those whose generous financial contributions support WDC's work. I **give thanks** for Business Manager Shari Scheffler and the Stewardship Commission who worked diligently to review and update accounting, restricted fund and investment procedures following the sale of the 2500 Place building and to prepare the 2025 budget; and for Cleo Koop, Stewardship Commission chair, who volunteered numerous hours to coordinate renovation of WDC's office space that we now lease in the 2500 Place building. I **give thanks** for everyone who visited the WDC offices at our open house in February and throughout the year, and for WDC Resource Library Director Jennie Wintermote who continually promoted relevant materials to nurture spiritual growth and discipleship among WDC congregations and members. And I **give thanks** for a spirit of care and team-work among all the WDC staff, who met for a Christmas family potluck dinner, had a spring retreat at Dyck Arboretum in Hesston, KS, and supported one another in facing personal challenges and grieving the deaths of several family members during the year.

Changes in our wider church context have prompted work with WDC staff and leadership on several special items this past year:

- With South Central Mennonite Conference's decision to withdraw from Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) and the disbanding of the Bi-Conference Youth Ministry Committee, I encouraged WDC staff and the Resource Commission to reimagine how WDC can support youth ministry across the conference in relevant ways in our current context. I **give thanks** for Dwight Regier, Youth Ministry Network Team Leader, as he offers his wisdom and experience in this discernment.
- A WDC congregation (West Zion Mennonite) decided to withdraw from WDC, and several SCMC congregations explored possible affiliation with WDC. I **give thanks** for WDC Moderator Delon Martens, Moderator-Elect Eric Buller, and Secretary Wendy Funk Schrag who joined me in some of the conversations with leaders from these congregations, as part of their discernment processes.
- There is a growing need for support for pastoral transition in WDC's Hispanic congregations, as MC USA and WDC lack Spanish-language and culturally-competent resources for this. In response to this challenge, Sandra Montes-Martinez and I drafted a proposal to hire personnel to provide transitional ministry resources for Hispanic congregations, and we worked with other staff and committees to submit a grant application for this. I **give thanks** that WDC has received a grant from Schowalter Foundation for this purpose, with the hope that additional matching and supplemental funds for this can be included in the 2025 budget.

I **give thanks** for Ministry Assistant Violeta Ajquejay Suastegui who also continues to coordinate Spanish/English interpretation and translation, and provide additional support as WDC connects with Hispanic congregations and leaders.

Finally, I **give thanks** for denominational and organizational partners that offered opportunities for collaboration and resourcing this past year. For example, I served as a WDC delegate to MennoCon23, attended MC USA Constituency Leaders Council meetings, and valued monthly conference minister zoom gatherings and the annual MC Canada / MC USA conference ministers' retreat. WDC received another Leadership Transformation Grant from the Kansas Leadership Center, providing WDC members with free registration spots in KLC's three core adaptive leadership training programs. I joined several other MC USA conference leaders on a Mennonite Disaster Service Learning Tour to Louisiana, participated in two Mennonite Action public witness events at legislators' offices calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, and am in a year-long Coaching for White Leaders cohort facilitated by Roots of Justice.

I **give thanks** for the many ways that God has worked through and beyond WDC this year, as we join God's mission in the world. May God bless and guide our gathering at Annual Assembly, as we share in fellowship, worship and discernment together.