

Introductions of congregations that have applied, and been recommended by the WDC Executive Board, to be received into membership in Western District Conference at the 2024 WDC Annual Assembly.

From the WDC Constitution:

“...Congregations may apply for membership by submitting in writing to the Executive Board, not less than 30 days before the Delegate Assembly, a brief history of the congregation and description of present activities, a membership covenant or statement of faith and constitution adopted by the group, and other helpful documents such as an annual report and a list of charter members. Congregations are encouraged to have at least ten members before seeking membership. The Executive Board will make a recommendation to the Delegate Assembly. The vote for acceptance into the Western District Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority of all delegate votes cast,”

New Life Christian Center, San Benito, TX



New Life Christian Center (originally named “Primera Mennonite Church”) began in 1987 in Brownsville, TX, as a church plant by Iglesia Menonita del Cordero shared support from the South Central Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Board of Missions. In 1994, Eduardo “Lalo,” Maria and Ana Alicia Hinojosa joined the church community and he began serving as pastor. The church was renting an old building that flooded frequently, but the congregation grew as they reached out by having cell groups in different homes. In 1999 the congregation built a new church building in San Benito with assistance from the congregation, volunteers and friends from the wider church, and the name was changed to New Life Christian Center. When the roof was finished, the congregation began to use the unfinished building. At their first service in the building, they had a lunch of “stone soup” because they had laid their foundation in Jesus Christ. Additional donations and fundraisers allowed them to complete the inside of the

building. Over the years, the congregation has had children's chapel, youth group gatherings, adult Bible study and prayer meetings, and programs to assist those in need in Mexico. The congregation grew to roughly 175 members that were constant for many years; after the pandemic they currently have about 30-35 members who are in attendance at Sunday worship services and Thursday Bible studies.

The congregation is grieving the death of Pastor Lalo Hinojosa on June 3, 2024. As his obituary said, "His vision and legacy at his church, New Life Christian Center will live on through many." Ana Alicia Hinojosa is Associate Pastor of the congregation and continues in that role in addition to her work as Senior Executive for Ventures at Mennonite Mission Network.

Over the past year, WDC Associate Conference Minister Sandra Montes-Martinez has had conversations with pastors Lalo and Anna as their congregation discerned conference affiliation, considering the core values of WDC and ways for the congregation and conference to work together.

On June 20, 2024, the WDC Executive Board reviewed membership application materials from New Life Christian Center and approved bringing a recommendation to WDC delegates to receive this congregation as a member of WDC.

Crystal Springs Mennonite Church, rural Harper, KS



Crystal Springs Mennonite Church was established in 1904 by Amish Mennonite families who moved to Harper County from McPherson County in Kansas, and also moved the meeting house, which was dismantled and the lumber hauled to Hutchinson to be shipped by rail to Harper County. The benches, pulpit doors, windows and frames were hauled by wagons, a distance of 85 miles. The meeting house was rebuilt and dedicated in 1905. In 1921 the Crystal Springs Amish Mennonite Church ended its Amish affiliation when it joined the Kansas-Missouri Mennonite Conference (Mennonite Church) which formed when the Western District Amish Mennonite Conference merged with MC conferences west of Indiana. The Kansas-Missouri Mennonite Conference changed its name in 1946 to South Central Mennonite Conference.

In 1928 Crystal Springs Mennonite Church tore down the old church building, and a new facility was built and is still in use today.

Crystal Springs Mennonite Church's peak membership was 140 in the 1940s, and has declined to 31 today with a small group now meeting for worship on Sundays and still feeling called to continue their mission to serve. The congregation was part of a partnership supporting the Samuelito Daycare center in Bolivia through Mennonite Mission Network, and they have connected to members of the Latino community and supported immigrant students in Harper. In discerning future conference affiliation, the congregation did a study of *God's Story, Our Story* by Michele Hersberger, which strengthened their sense of being a people whose identity is "not in their family line but in their saying yes to God and community built on trust and obedience." In spite of differences within the church, they "believe that we still can worship with each other and continue to further God's Kingdom." Currently the congregation is without a pastor, but continues to nurture bonds within the congregation and is eager to make connections within WDC.

Crystal Springs reached out to WDC to explore affiliation, and on March 24, 2024, WDC representatives (Executive Committee member Wendy Funk Schrag, and Conference Minister Heidi Regier Kreider) visited Crystal Springs Mennonite Church for worship and a meeting with the members to learn more about the congregation and share with them about WDC.

On May 4, 2024, the WDC Executive Board reviewed membership application materials from Crystal Springs Mennonite Church, and approved bringing a recommendation to WDC delegates to receive this congregation as a member of WDC.

Hesston Mennonite Church, Hesston, KS



Hesston Mennonite Church was organized on the campus of the Hesston Academy in 1910 with six families and several students then attending Hesston Academy. After meeting on campus for several decades, the congregation built a new building which was completed in 1956. In

2007 the current addition to the facility was completed, replacing the old sanctuary and adding an administrative wing. HMC grew to a membership of over 600 before declining to the current 343 current members. Post-COVID numbers for attendance are significantly less, although online attendance is also important. Hesston Mennonite Church has historically had a close relationship with Hesston College, sharing the church facility for chapels, concerts and special activities. The congregation also shares a special relationship with Schowalter Villa, with worship services and other programs live-streamed there. Jess Engle and Kay Schroeder are the pastors at Hesston Mennonite Church.

Though it comes out of the Mennonite Church (MC), Hesston Mennonite Church has a history of including people of both formerly MC and General Conference Mennonite backgrounds. The congregation has supported mission work, both locally and globally. While it has experienced periods of congregational distress, Hesston Mennonite Church notes its willingness to “have courageous conversations that seek to look at the true issues that cause the conflict, to hear each other, to seek to understand diverse viewpoints and scriptural understandings” and to seek “a way forward as a community that allows us to worship together despite these differences.”

As part of the congregation’s discernment process, the Conference Affiliation Task Force at Hesston Mennonite Church invited WDC representatives to meet with them on November 28, 2023, to learn more about WDC. WDC Moderator Delon Martens, Moderator-Elect Eric Buller and Conference Minister Heidi Regier Kreider joined this conversation. Following further correspondence and discernment, the Hesston Mennonite Church Governance Board accepted a recommendation from the Conference Affiliation Task Force that Hesston Mennonite Church pursue membership in WDC, and forwarded it to the congregation for affirmation. This recommendation was approved by the congregation on March 24, 2024.

On May 4, 2024, the WDC Executive Board reviewed membership application materials from Hesston Mennonite Church, and approved bringing a recommendation to WDC delegates to receive this congregation as a member of WDC.