



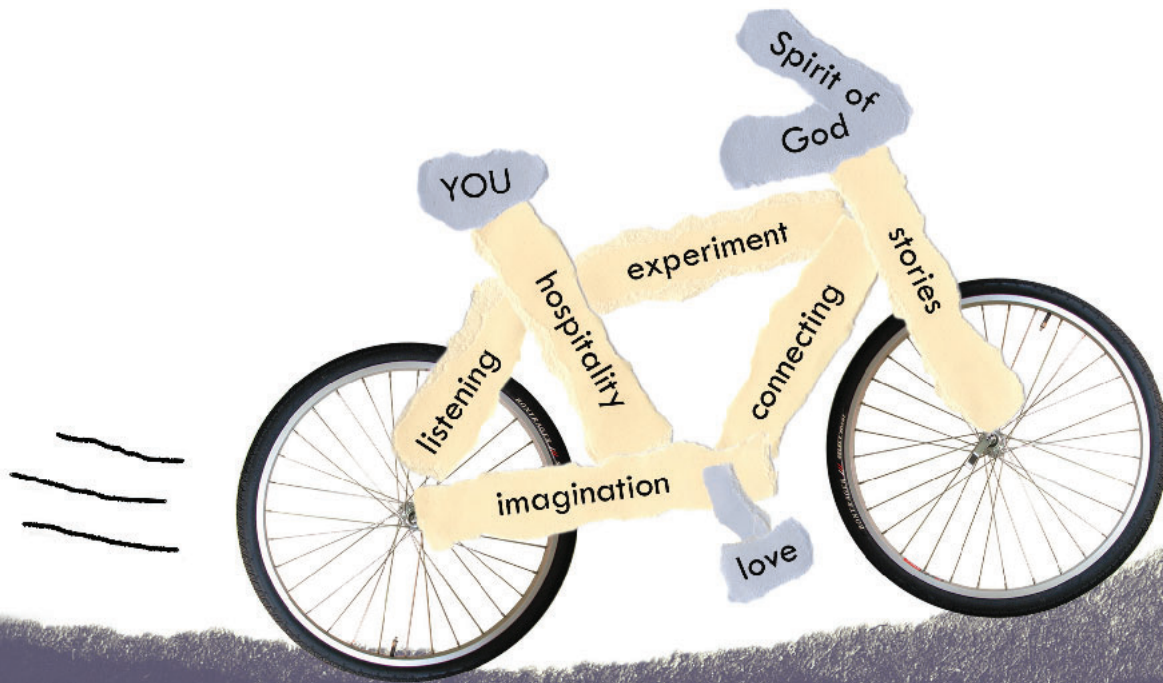
**Indiana-Michigan
Mennonite
Conference**

An area conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Gospel Evangel

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Once upon a time ...
signs and wonderings



Annual Sessions 2009

June 18–20 | Clinton Frame Mennonite, Goshen, Ind.

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Learning to ride our missional bike

An introduction to this year's theme

by **Pamela Yoder**, chair, Conference Program Planning Committee

DO YOU REMEMBER what it was like when you first learned to ride a bike? Were you scared? Excited? Challenged? Maybe a little of all of these? Did you skin your knees or scrape your hands in the process? Did you have to try many times?

Our journey to live out God's call is not without similar types of bumps and bruises, tries and discoveries. Though we desire to join in God's activity in the people, community and world around us, it doesn't mean we always get it right the first time.

As the Conference Program Planning Committee gathered to plan a theme for our Annual Sessions, we shared bicycle stories: one person didn't really want to learn but was encouraged by a loved one; another had to find some unique ways to get momentum started; another shared how difficult it was to let go of training wheels. We had a hearty discussion about hard-learned lessons and brave experiments that can be true of our faith stories as well.

We also had several conversations about **Acts 2:43-47** and **John 15:9-11**. The latter reflects Jesus' command to love one another, and the former is one striking example of how to do so. We felt that both passages have important things to tell us in this time and space in IN-MI Conference, and we wanted delegates to be able to join in this exploration.

Given the transitions and newness we are experiencing in our conference—this is the first Annual Sessions with the new organizational structure—it is especially important for us to hear one another, to hear each others' stories, both congregationally and individually and more broadly as a conference body. How are you inspired and motivated to break bread with others and praise God together? How are you seeing signs of God's work in these tough times? What are you left wondering about? How are you seeing God touching people's lives?

Participants were invited to join their voices to these learnings, questions, conversations and story sharing as we gathered for **"Once upon a time ... signs and wonderings,"** our 2009 Annual Sessions.

Editor's note: This piece appeared as the foreword in the Annual Sessions report book.



Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a community of 79 congregations in Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee, gathering together for mutual encouragement in kingdom mission and inspiration to joyfully follow Jesus.

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All glory and honor go to God for any way that this issue extends God's kingdom.

The sound of a bicycle bell ringing called Annual Sessions participants to gather for worship and worshipful work sessions; Mennonite Disabilities Committee (MDC) Goldenrod clients including **Bill** (above) rode this new three-wheeled bike and rang the bell.

The bike belonged to Terry, an MDC client who died unexpectedly on the day before Annual Sessions following hip surgery. David Heusinkveld, MDC Goldenrod's executive director, shared that Terry, who had not yet ridden his new bike, had offered that it be used at Annual Sessions and wanted the first ride to occur there. Terry's family honored his wish. Annual Sessions participants were invited to sign condolence cards for Terry's family.

(Photos and reporting by Annette Brill Bergstresser)

Hosting congregations

A huge thank you to all who played a part in hosting these Annual Sessions! These Southeast Goshen area churches planned energetically and enthusiastically for months to welcome us: **Benton, Clinton Brick, Clinton Frame, River of Life, Waterford, and Wawasee Lakeside Chapel.** A few of the many ways we were welcomed included:

- local coordinators bringing supper unannounced on Wednesday evening after a full day of setup;
- extra volunteers showing up;
- teenagers volunteering the whole weekend, and younger children washing dishes just because "I like to do this";
- intentional efforts to be good stewards of the Earth by using only washable dishes and silverware, and good stewards of money by making all food from scratch;
- free blood-pressure screenings for participants;
- at 10 p.m. Thursday, custodial staff rescuing a participant whose car had a dead battery in the parking lot.

Planning committee members

Pamela Yoder (chair) of First Mennonite of Middlebury (Ind.); **Virginia Leichty** of Burr Oak Mennonite, Rensselaer, Ind.; **Deron Brill Bergstresser** of Faith Mennonite, Goshen, Ind.; **Aaron Lehman** of Waterford Mennonite, Goshen; **Anita Yoder** of Clinton Frame Mennonite, Goshen; **Dan Miller**, staff; **Heidi King**, staff

Communication Advisory Committee: Tyler Hartford, chair, Goshen, Ind.; Bill Beck, Sturgis, Mich.; Zulma Prieto, Goshen; Heidi King, staff; Charlotte Long, staff; Annette Brill Bergstresser, staff

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Worship

“We are witnesses of these things ...”

WOVEN THROUGHOUT our three days together were stories of the movement of God’s Spirit in our lives, accompanied by regular doses of bicycle imagery. Participants were invited to affirm the presence of God in each story by responding with the refrain, “We are witnesses of these things.”

Opening worship: “Once upon a time ...”

As worship leader Deron Brill Bergstresser introduced the seven regional clusters (represented onstage by seven bicycles), he invited those present from each congregation to stand and be blessed. Steve Fath presented John 15:5-17 from memory. (All Scriptures were presented from memory.)

Terry Diener, lead pastor of Clinton Frame Mennonite, shared two stories of “abiding in God’s love.” In the first story, he spoke of the economic challenges that people in his congregation had faced in the last year, and of their efforts to learn the blessings of both giving and receiving. One Sunday, the congregation received a second offering after the usual offering, with the instructions, “If you have an abundance and are willing to give, what you give will go into the sharing fund. If you have need, feel free to receive when it goes past you. There will be no judgments—no questions asked. As a congregation and as God’s people, we are in this together. We trust each other and are here to help each other.”



The prayer shawl Terry Diener is holding represents the prayers and care he received from his congregation during his illness: “This was abiding in God’s love, as fully expressed by His people.”

the words of Psalm 121:1-2 came to him, over and over; the Spirit interceded on his behalf. “What a gift of the Spirit of God!” Terry said.

Thursday evening worship: “Bringing what we have”

The service began with a video of two people sharing their experiences of learning to ride a bike. Worship leader Aaron Lehman reflected on various aspects of bike riding as images of ourselves in conference, learning to be missional and not dwelling on failures: “What’s important is that you get back on the bike.”

He invited listeners to think of a personal hope and disappointment while coming forward to pick up a bolt and nut. During a time of confession, people shared with each other in pairs their hope and disappointment. Later, as they



Anita Yoder and musicians from Clinton Frame’s worship team lead songs of worship and praise.

brought forward the bolt and nut threaded together, the sanctuary filled with the sound of the pieces of metal being dropped into a bucket. (The nut/bolt pairs were then affixed to a cross used in worship on Friday.) Following prayer, Karla Minter presented Luke 10:38-42.

Dan Miller, lead conference minister, connected the story of Mary and Martha with attempts to be missional in IN-MI Conference. While Martha intended to be hospitable to Jesus and to welcome him, he said, she



was so busy that she didn’t accomplish her goal. But Dan noted that Jesus did not condemn her; instead, he “held up a mirror” so she could see herself.

“This was one time, but it wasn’t the end of the story,” he said, reminding listeners that Martha had a long-term relationship with Jesus.

Dan shared stories of vision-driven changes in various conference congregations and noted other situations where intentions had failed, such as establishing multicultural and gender diversity in conference leadership.

“Just because sometimes we haven’t accomplished what we’ve intended doesn’t mean it’s over,” Dan said. “Because, you see, Jesus loves IN-MI Conference. And *(continued)*”

Dan Miller gives the message during Thursday evening worship: “My hope is that we have congregations who are knit together and love each other, challenge each other and need each other in order to be faithful to the call of Jesus. We need one another to push ourselves past where we’re comfortable going, because if we’re not pushed by somebody else, we don’t get there.”

Perspective: Mary Jo Bowman

Harlan (Ky.) Mennonite | delegate

As a newcomer, I felt welcomed. I enjoyed the spirit of openness in the conversations around the table and at other times. I noticed an amazing sense of lack of anxiety; we seem to me to be embracing the opportunity to be creative and imaginative in the midst of a lot of change.





During worship on Friday, people were invited to reflect in table groups on the four stories they had heard, to tell their own stories, pray for one another and share communion. One person concluded, "We don't have it all together, and yet the Spirit is at work."

we have an opportunity to look in the mirror and stay in that love relationship. This is not the end of the story. We are learning to ride that missional bike, and we are going to learn balance, and how to turn corners, and how to ride on gravel, and that when we fall, it's okay. Because Jesus is still calling, and because we want to respond."

Friday evening worship: "Signs and wonderings"

Worship leader Pamela Yoder introduced the theme for the evening: storytelling about how God has been present in our life or in the life of our congregation. Cynthia Kauffmann recited Acts 2:43-47. Musicians from Benton Mennonite led singing.

Leighton Miller,

Wildwood Mennonite, Engadine, Mich.

A sheep farmer, Leighton shared about how his congregation, who is without a pastor, has been experimenting with a four-person leadership team.

"We often feel like we can't keep up with what God's doing around us," he reflected. "We think God is working and we should be doing something, and by the time we figure it out and respond, God's already doing something new."

"It's like when I feed my sheep," he continued. "When I take the grain out, they crowd around me and bump into my legs,

love and His healing power, and the people are coming, and it's all we can do to get out of the way and stay with them, or we're going to get knocked down by the herd.

"People are coming to our church who are very different from us, and we're being bumped around. And God is using these new people and new situations to push our congregation toward Him. I see Him working as we begin to share openly with each other, listen to one another, and to care compassionately without having to 'fix' each other. Yes, God is working at Wildwood. He is calling, leading, loving, healing and changing us and our community."

Nancy Rodríguez-Lora,

True Vine Tabernacle, Elkhart, Ind.



Nancy told of coming to Elkhart from a New York City congregation six years ago to serve as pastor at True Vine. "My husband and I wondered why God would want us to be here," she remembers. Now the congregation of about 140 people has participants from nine different cultures and various socioeconomic levels. They have both English and Spanish worship services on Sundays.

"Our church is a place where people feel welcome and where the Spirit of the Lord moves," Nancy said. "We've had healings; God heals. This is

what continues to touch the lives of people who know Him."

She shared that True Vine's Friday evening intercessory prayer services are almost as full as their Sunday worship times: "It's different every Friday night. People are not afraid to ask for help and to say they're broken. It's amazing how God's Spirit continues to move."

"It is a joy to see the lost be found and the blind see," she concluded. "My husband and I both work full-time jobs and pastor this church and have a family of three. But it's all been worth it. This city girl has come to love this part of the country, because God's Spirit is here, too."



Sher King placed her knitting on this cross as she began her story of seeing God at work through the formation of a knitting support group. The cross contained nut/bolt pairs that participants had threaded to represent the holding together of disappointment and hope.

Sher King, College Mennonite, Goshen, Ind.

Sher told the story of Yarn Overcomers (YO!), a knitting support group that she and others began to help people in their community affected by the stress of unemployment. "Anyone who knits knows the therapeutic power of knitting," she said.

She shared about how the group had been provided for in amazing ways: volunteers were willing to help form the program; meeting places and a financial umbrella were provided; and they received plentiful donations of materials, funds, and the design of a brochure and poster.

In the first month, eight volunteers taught 25 people to knit. During their meetings, Sher said, stories were shared, relationships built, and stress reduced.

Perspective:

Izaete Nafziger

North Goshen (Ind.) Mennonite | pastor, delegate, Hispanic representative on IN-MI Advisory Council



I'm very excited to share with my congregation about the storytelling I experienced here on Friday night. I will tell my church, "You are not alone. Other churches go through this, too."

I've really enjoyed this time because of the diversity and hearing about the different realities and different church relationships. The conversation at our table is helping us to understand, relate to and identify with each other. I've committed myself to give support to these congregations and to pray for them.

Perspective: Larry Rohrer

Belmont Mennonite, Elkhart, Ind. | pastor, delegate



Being here has been a good means of getting acquainted with fellow pastors and others involved in IN-MI Conference and of getting an idea of where the support structures lie. (I was part of Ohio Conference for many years.) The sense of fellowship here has been really positive.

“I don’t have enough time to tell you what it’s done for my faith personally,” Sher said, “and what a positive impact YO! has had on our students. And how they’re impacting us, the committee members.”

“Without the economic crisis, this program wouldn’t exist,” she noted. She also shared that when MSNBC featured YO! on their home page, people from all over the country wanted to know how to start such programs and how to donate materials. (Note: YO! still has need for a web site.)

Kelly Carson,

Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington (Ind.) Kelly shared that the fellowship group at Bloomington had been meeting on Sunday evenings, but when they doubled in size, they began to meet for regular worship. She recounted a list of the congregation’s various experiences of worship, ministry, study, fellowship and mutual support over the three years that she has been a part of the group.

“When I think of God’s presence, the first thing that always comes to mind is so simple that it hardly seems worth mentioning: Gifts of kindness to one another, making manifest our mantra that we adopted: ‘A place of healing and hope in our journey together with Jesus Christ,’” she said.

Sending worship: “And here we go!”

On Saturday, a dramatic reading of the three Scripture texts woven together accompanied a visual of figures silhouetted on a screen, adopting the postures described in the texts.

John Troyer, youth pastor at Clinton Frame and Missional Leadership Team member, reflected on the stories that had been shared at the event. He spoke of removing our blinders so we can see all that God is doing among us.

He noted that Jesus healed people in unexpected and strange ways, using different approaches with different people: “The beauty of what Jesus does is that he keeps mixing things up.” He encouraged participants to think about God’s potential to work “in the strangest and oddest ways.”

John named two words whose threads are woven throughout Scripture and our stories: **poverty**, which creates a need and longing within us; and **plea**, a passionate plea to God to help us get through what we’re facing.

“Living in that poverty and in that plea is the essence of what happens when God breaks in in powerful ways so that God gets credit for what happens,” he said.

In closing, anointing was offered to all participants to be blessed with gladness and strength. “*We are witnesses of these things.*”



Delegates open a worshipful work session in song. Anita Yoder led singing throughout the business sessions.

Worshipful work sessions

Our conference in transition

▪ **This Annual Sessions was the first one for the conference’s new structure.** Much transition has happened in conference leadership during the last year. **Staff transitions** have included goodbyes to Tim Burkholder, Nancy Kauffmann, Tim Lichti and Loanne Harms; and hellos to Dan Miller, Anita Yoder Kehr, Virgil Hershberger, Jim Carpenter, Seferina G. DeLeón, Randy Detweiler, Jon Brown and Doug Kaufman.

Structural transitions have included the endings of the Executive Committee, Gifts Discernment Committee, two full-time ministry positions, and a part-time ministry with youth and young adults position; and the beginnings of the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), Advisory Council, Gifts Development Team, the part-time regional pastor model, and the half-time search and credentialing position.

Some parts of the new conference structure are in place, while others are still in process.

The Stewardship and Finance Commission and Church Life Commission, who will complete their work in the next year, were recognized and thanked. The Transition Team, who has worked for two years to implement the new structure, also is formally ending its work.

▪ **Clusters changing to regions.** The MLT has regrouped existing area councils into five regions, which will replace the current seven clusters.

▪ **Regional pastors and decentralization.**

Dan Miller, lead conference minister, spoke about the new model for dispersed ministry staff and presented job narratives for part-time regional pastors and for a half-time conference minister for leadership transitions. Participants were invited to nominate people for these positions.

▪ **The place of overseers** in the new system continues to be discussed. About a third of our churches have overseers. The overseers plan to bring a proposal to the MLT this fall.

▪ **Action to approve the continued suspension of the Constitution and Bylaws.**

Although a revised constitution was expected to be brought this year, consultations with a lawyer brought up other changes that need to be made for the document to be legally sound, delaying completion of the revision. Delegates unanimously affirmed a revised comprehensive operational plan for 2009–10 that includes suspending the parts of the constitution and bylaws that conflict with implementation of the new conference structure, and considers the MLT to be an executive committee for the conference.

▪ **What’s important for us to keep?** Transition Team members Sarah Schlegel and John Troyer (also an MLT member) rode a tandem bicycle to illustrate that all parts of the system will need to do their part and work together, not assume (continued)

Perspective: Kelly Carson

Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington (Ind.) | delegate

These are the first IN-MI Conference Annual Sessions I’ve attended. The table time and the questions we discussed were really good. And coming from a small congregation, I’ve enjoyed the singing a lot.

When the vote was so close in the budget discussion [69 to 70], it impressed me that our votes really do matter. I appreciated that it was a respectful discussion even though it was an emotionally charged issue. I’m also impressed with how much work the conference leaders and staff have done in thinking about restructuring and getting from the way things used to be, to the way they can be.





Frances Ringenberg, Missional Leadership Team member, invites delegates to discuss in table groups their responses to themes, images and questions coming out of the Advisory Council's Listening Report (see p. 7), while Dan Miller, lead conference minister, and Brent Eash, moderator, listen. Frances noted that the Advisory Council hoped that participants' conversations would spark new questions, experiments and actions. Table hosts were preassigned to guide the discussion times. Each table group recorded their responses, which will be reviewed by an outside team.

Perspective: C.J. Irelan

Prairie Street Mennonite, Elkhart, Ind. | delegate



Re: worshipful work: It still takes Mennonites a long time to decide. A couple of us were thinking about ways to streamline the decision-making process and still have people's voices heard. Depending on how connected people are to the internet, you could put proposals online and get amendments and people's responses to them ahead of time.

I appreciated the interactions at our table; we had a range of ages. It was really good that we got to talk together, on the same level. I'd have liked to have more time to really develop thoughts and good conversation. That's what conference should be about: connecting people and speaking plainly, passionately, honestly among believers.

Also, the seminars we attended—"The dark night of the soul" and "Telling the biblical story"—were very good, really equipping participants for ministry and communicating the Word.

ing that others will be the only ones steering and pedaling. Dan Miller spoke of the need for all to help tend relationships and facilitate systems of caring. Participants were invited to discuss and record what had been important to them in the former conference system that they would like to see carried forward.

Pastoral/congregational agenda

- **Congregational changes.** Anita Yoderkehr reported on Lafayette Mennonite Fellowship's decision to disband in late 2008, noting the congregation's call to the conference to engage more in Anabaptist-influenced ministries in secular, urban university settings, particularly ministering to those not born into Mennonite traditions. She reported that Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington, established in the 1960s, recently doubled their numbers, began to worship in new ways and are searching for a half-time pastor—a leap of faith for them.
- Candles were lit in memory of former pastors who died in the last year. Pastors installed in the last year were recognized and prayed for.

Other actions and reports

- **Action to accept the 2009–10 Spending Plan as proposed.** Karl Cender, interim chair of the Stewardship and Finance Commission, gave the financial report. Giving decreased this year, and in January the commission pared back the spending plan. For six years, the spending plans have been larger than the receipts. Karl invited suggestions for working with this situation. He also encouraged people to enroll in the new Missional Seeds Giving Club. (During the event, 24 joined, doubling the membership!)

The proposed spending plan projected \$510,000 in income. Expenses would not include any salary increases.

An amendment was brought to change the next year's projected income to be the same as the actual income for 2008–09, and for the S&F Commission to present a revised expense plan to delegates for approval by the end of August. After discussion and prayer, a vote was taken on the motion to amend by a show of hands; 69 supported the amendment, and 70 did not.

Karl suggested that in view of the close vote, the commission would watch the finances closely and make adjustments as necessary during the year. After more discussion, delegates voted 128 to 21 to accept the original proposed spending plan. (The S&F Commission will serve until the new Stewardship Team is selected.)

- **Action to accept the Gifts Development Team ballot.** Bob Yoder, chair, shared about the work of the new team, whose vision is broader than only discernment of gifts; they want to help the conference foster a culture of call and help congregations find ways to find the right people. He invited delegates' input and nominations for people to serve in conference leadership roles. The names on the ballot were approved with at least 97 percent support.
- **Advisory Council (AC) Listening Report.** In these Annual Sessions, delegates had more time to listen to each other about how God is at work in their lives and congregations. Much of this sharing took place as table groups responded to the AC's Listening Report (see p. 7).

Perspective: Steve Klotz

Olive Mennonite, Elkhart, Ind. | delegate

Change is challenging, but also kind of exciting. The discussions and sharing at our table have been helpful. Although we have different perspectives, we're experiencing similar issues.

I grew up in the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.). Coming to Annual Sessions as a delegate these last six to seven years has given me opportunities to meet people and learn about issues the church is facing.

I voted not to accept the budget amendment because I know the Stewardship and Finance members prayed and discerned as they planned. I felt it was important to support them and to allow ourselves and our faith to be stretched.



Seferina García DeLeón of Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor, Goshen, Ind. (also serving as an interim assistant conference regional minister), shares with her table group on Thursday afternoon. At right is Klaudia Smucker of College Mennonite, Goshen.

Delegates discuss feedback from listening interviews

This spring, the Advisory Council—the conference's new discerning, advising and recommending body—began a process of conducting listening interviews with a variety of people in our conference, with the goal of increasing our sense of "missional connectedness." A listening group reviewed the interview reports and identified common themes and images. At Annual Sessions, table groups spent about an hour and a half responding to this feedback, which included the following questions, comments and images:

What do you see God doing in your church that energizes your faith?

- Bringing new people into our congregations, arriving with new needs, new gifts, new ideas, diverse cultures and backgrounds.
- Building community: causing both a unity within/among congregations and a greater sharing across economic and cultural lines.
- Forming and affirming pastors and new leaders with a wider variety of gifts; more members are involved; not just relying on clergy.

Image: A growing tree with new branches; surrounded on its upper half by an environment that both nourishes and threatens, and on its lower half grounded ever deeper in rich soil.

What concerns you about what's happening in our churches today?

- With increased diversity, we have the potential for increased polarity. How can we be a voice that opens dialogue and understanding? How is diversity both a liability and an asset? Do we know each other well enough to resolve differences?
- A perception that what is distinct about Anabaptism (peace, discipleship, holiness) is declining. Many cultural influences and priorities compete for our commitment. Can what is distinct help us maintain necessary boundaries, and yet help us to reach out in missional ways?

Image: Jesus breathes on his disciples—the Holy Spirit sneezes on them—and sends them out "infected" with purity and "infecting" the world as they go (John 20:22-23).

What are the opportunities you see our churches facing in these changing times?

- Greater need for an openness to economic sharing/generosity/simplicity, skill building and practice of peace/reconciliation, deepening discipleship, community, grace, service.
- The opportunity to connect with, listen to and learn from those on the fringes: those discovering our tradition for the first time, and those seeking spirituality but not the institutional forms of our past.

Images: A garden with many crops growing together; the Chinese character for crisis, which includes both "threat" and "opportunity."

What would you wish for the future of our community of churches?

- Spiritual growth: With increased needs and opportunities, may the Holy Spirit work to deepen our love for each other and for God.
- Building deeper connections between congregations so as to learn, encourage and grow in faith together.

Images: A salad dressing in which diverse ingredients create an emulsion by the continuous working of the Holy Spirit; a mobile buffeted by wind and always in transition as new people become attached, causing those already there to move over; sitting at each other's table enjoying a wider variety of foods together.

Ask your congregation's delegates about their table group discussions! If you'd like to respond as well, e-mail imoffice@im.mennonite.net.

ministry transitions



Faith: **Kay Bontrager-Singer**, co-pastor



Fellowship of Hope: **Suella Lehman Gerber**, pastor



First, Indianapolis: **Rene Hostetter**, associate pastor

Beginnings

- **Kay Bontrager-Singer**, co-pastor of Faith Mennonite, Goshen, Ind., was ordained June 14 by Anita Yoder Kehr, interim conference minister of search and credentialing processes, and Lois Kaufmann, conference minister for Central District Conference.
- **Suella Lehman Gerber** was licensed and installed June 14 as pastor of Fellowship of Hope, Elkhart, Ind., by Anita Yoder Kehr and Gordon Dyck, overseer.
- **Rene Hostetter** was licensed and installed as associate pastor of First Mennonite of Indianapolis June 21 by Anita Yoder Kehr.

Endings

- **Harvey Chupp** ended as overseer for Hopewell Mennonite, Kouts, Ind., May 31.
- **Bill Hooley** ended as overseer for Shore Mennonite, Shipshewana, Ind., June 1.
- **Andrew Kreider** ended as pastor at Prairie Street Mennonite, Elkhart, Ind., June 30.

conference finances

2008–09 year-end report. Thank you to all of the churches who gave to support the ministries of IN-MI Conference in this last fiscal year! Congregational contributions for this fiscal year—\$459,582—were \$63,346 (12.1 percent) lower than the \$522,928 contributed in the previous year. The good news is that for the month of June, congregational contributions totaled \$59,589, as compared to \$59,116 for the previous June.

Thank you to the individuals and others who also contributed generously to the conference! Individual contributions totaled \$11,416, and **Missional Seeds Giving Club** donations totaled \$6,338, for a total of \$17,754. We are grateful for the 53 households who have signed up for the giving club—you are truly making a difference! Please encourage others to join.

The year-end report shows an actual operating deficit of \$20,087, which is less than the previous year's deficit of \$27,298. It's encouraging that the operating deficit has decreased over the last four years in a row. The operating fund balance—\$21,188—is significantly less than one month of planned ministry activity and is an area of continued concern.

The **June 30** year-end figures:

	2008–09	2007–08
Estimated income*	\$512,000	\$689,207
Actual income	494,604	580,140
Estimated expenses	539,243	689,207
Actual expenses	514,691	607,438

*Based on updated projections of revenue by the S&F Commission as of April 15, 2009. Original spending plan revenue projections were \$649,126, and expenditures were \$649,126.

We are truly grateful that for the month of June we ended the year with a reduced operating deficit and with total support and revenue for the month, exceeding the plan and our expectations. As you know, 2008–09 has been a tumultuous year for all of us. The Stewardship and Finance Commission has worked diligently to monitor the financial situation and has attempted to take the necessary corrective steps. Conference leaders will continue to work proactively during the present fiscal year.

May God bless your congregations as you faithfully follow Jesus!

—*Karl Cender, interim chair, IN-MI Stewardship and Finance Commission*



Seminars. Hannah Livengood (center) was part of a panel of congregants from Walnut Hill Mennonite, Goshen, Ind., who led a seminar on “Doing church outside the box” about how they’ve worked to create safe spaces in their community for conversations about faith with people who are not part of a congregation. Other seminar titles included Congregational discernment as conversation, Faith and global warming, Understanding our economy, Calling out gifts in your congregation, Telling the biblical story, The dark night in congregational life, and The Corinthian Plan, among others.



Journey program graduates five. Rafael Barahona of the Church Leadership Center of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary awards Kent Towler of Burr Oak Mennonite, Rensselaer, Ind., a certificate marking Kent’s completion of the three-year Journey program. Philip Leichty (at right) has served as Kent’s mentor. Other graduates were Phil Bontrager (Kern Road), Cory Gilbert, Mia Gilbert (both of Pine Grove) and Ken Hollinger (Wildwood). Rafael also recognized and thanked the mentors: Dave Sutter, Tom Schwartz, Leannell Schwartz, Jim Gerber and Philip Leichty.

Perspective:
Sharon and James Brandenberger

Clinton Frame Mennonite, Goshen | local coordinators for Annual Sessions 2009



(Sharon) I like to plan, so it’s really been fun for me. It’s also been fun getting to know Heidi [King, administrative coordinator]. The staff members enjoy what they’re doing, so that makes us enjoy it, too! (James) It’s neat to see everyone come together from all the different churches. It’s fun to be able to know what people need, before they know they need it.

Thank you, Sharon and James, for all the ways you went the extra mile!

by the numbers

- 273** adults and **24** children registered, representing **53** of **79** congregations
- 13** two-way radios used behind-the-scenes
- \$1,086** offered for the travel pool (to help cover costs for those who came the farthest)
- \$439.36** raised at Thursday evening’s ice cream social to help send the youth from Clinton Frame to Columbus 2009
- 0** Styrofoam items used

Thank you, Transition Team, for your investment in working to implement our new conference system over the last two years! Those who’ve served: Gene Hartman, chair; Dan Miller; Phil Mininger; Sarah Schlegel; Bill Scott; Klaudia Smucker; John Troyer; Sherm Kauffman; Timothy Burkholder.

Thank you to Angela Miller and Jane Good for their care and creativity in coordinating childcare and children’s activities this year! ... and to **Dan Haarer** for serving as recorder and helping supply content for this issue!

After the Pastor Appreciation meal on Thursday, pastors and their spouses were offered the opportunity to receive anointing with the oil of gladness. Here, Church Life Commission members Janice Yordy Sutter and Ruben Chupp anoint Jason and Andrea Ramer of Yellow Creek Mennonite, Goshen, Ind., and Rene Hostetter of First Mennonite of Indianapolis.



Perspective: Ana Yoder

Olive Mennonite, Elkhart, Ind. | Goshen (Ind.) College junior serving at North Goshen Mennonite with the Ministry Inquiry Program



It’s been meaningful to me to just sit down and talk with people and hear what they have to say. I also enjoyed the Mennonite Women lunch.

My generation isn’t really here yet. I’m 20, and most others here are probably at least 20 years older. There are a lot of questions in my mind ... How do we deal with money in church? How will people in my generation see outreach and evangelism? Will there be the same level of commitment even if it looks different?

Perspective: Steve Miller

Naubinway (Mich.) Christian Fellowship | delegate

I’ve enjoyed hearing how God is at work in so many parts of our area, in the lives of people. It’s been an exciting weekend, and I’ve gleaned a lot.

Note: Steve rode his motorcycle 7.5 hours (about 475 miles) to attend Annual Sessions!



Perspective: Debbie Livermore

Germfask (Mich.) Mennonite | delegate

I love the way that Annual Sessions are now compared to when we first started attending. The event used to be more focused on business, and more structured. Now there’s more caring and sharing, and it feels more relaxed, with room for the Holy Spirit to move.

