

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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Photograph by Verlin Miller

Above: Men from five Elkhart congregations gathered on the first Saturday in April 2014 for a monthly meeting of the men's breakfast group held at Fellowship of Hope.

Elkhart Men's Breakfast Group

Building relationships, fostering discussion across racial boundaries

By **Rachel A. Denlinger**, communications coordinator

Nearly 25 years ago, Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, Ind., began a men's breakfast group that sought to nurture relationships among men in the congregation. They held book studies and discussed various topics of faith related to concerns and challenges that men face.

The group—initially composed of all Caucasian men—gradually grew to include a racially diverse mix of people from other churches, as they invited other men to join them. This includes participants from several predominantly African American

churches nearby—Church Without Walls, New Foundation United in Christ (formerly House of Power) and Dawning of a New Day. Several members of Prairie Street Mennonite—a nearby, mostly white congregation—have also been involved in recent years.

This group of Elkhart churches is situated in a diverse, relatively-urban neighborhood, with a blend of African Americans, Caucasians and Latinos. Current leaders of the group are Keith Kingsley and Jim Norton of (continued on page 4)

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Prison Ministry in Elkhart County

By **Rachel A. Denlinger**, communications coordinator

Cory Martin, chaplain for Elkhart County Jails, is relatively new in his position as jail chaplain—a non-denominational role—but he is very passionate about his work with inmates. “It’s not my job to save or convict them, that’s God’s work; but I am here to love them and build relationships.”

Prior to this role, Martin had personal experience with several incarcerated individuals. A student that lived with his family for a while got in trouble with the law and ended up in prison. He and his wife began visiting the young man in jail. “Through knowing him we got to know someone else in the jail,” he says. “We started visiting this woman and corresponding with her and we realized that for a lot of inmates, we were the only contact they had with people on the outside.”

Martin says that the most effective prison ministries are those that both build relationships with inmates on the inside, and also follow through with them when they get out, that offer a support system as they readjust to life on the outside. When inmates are released from prison, it can be very difficult to find their footing and establish healthy life patterns. They get out with nothing but the clothes on their back—no house, no job, no money, no transportation—and they often have broken ties with family and friends.

Part of Martin’s role is to speak at churches about his work and encourage people to get involved. He recently spoke at North Goshen Mennonite and shared a statistic that may come as a surprise—Mennonites are currently one of the most active denominations doing outreach to inmates in Elkhart County.

Martin is excited by the good work he sees being done by several Mennonite churches. He points to three in particular: College Mennonite, Waterford, and Holdeman. Each church has a unique story.



Jail Sisters at College

College Mennonite has an outreach group called Jail Sisters that has ministered to women inmates for many years. They provide monthly times of worship for women at the jail and

allow inmates to make prayer requests, either verbally or written down. They listen to their needs and pray with them. Prayer requests are often for children being cared for by other family members or foster parents, or for court dates coming up. They also ask inmates if they would like visits or continued contact of some form.

A number of years ago, the Jail Sisters made a special connection with a woman before she was moved to another facility down state. Several College families corresponded and visited with her over the years and she was recently released after serving a 20 year sentence. A group from the church helped her get settled when she got out. They helped her find a place to live and helped with transportation and budgeting assistance. All of this was vital to her successful reentry and gave her a place of belonging, of having a supportive community around her. She now attends College and hopes to help with Jail Sisters at some point in the future, once she has had some time to settle into her new surroundings.

Holdeman Mennonite

BJ Leichty, pastor at Holdeman Mennonite, has been visiting inmates in prison for a number of years. It started when

several teenagers loosely connected to the church got in trouble and found themselves in prison. BJ noticed one young man in particular, Troy, who didn’t have anyone else visiting him. She introduced Troy to Randy Detweiler, her co-pastor at Holdeman. Randy met with him and they stayed in touch over the phone and in person. Troy is the same age as one of Randy’s children and Randy says he knew that the young man was going to need some help once he got out.

Then Cory Martin invited Randy to a prayer breakfast where Troy shared his testimony. It was moving. At that breakfast Cory introduced Troy to a local business man who offered to give him a construction job when his prison term ended in a couple of months. Randy and his wife, Joy, had an extra room in their house that they were thinking of using for an exchange student. They decided at that gathering to invite Troy to live with them when he got out.

Several months later, Troy walked out of prison already having a place to live and a job to support himself. He worked in the construction job and lived with Randy and Joy for 4 or 5 months. Then Troy began struggling and slipping back into his old ways. So BJ and Randy formed a support group for him, including members from the church and also Cory Martin. But before they could do much to help, Troy left to live with his sister in another town and they lost contact with him.

Randy says, “We don’t know how this is going to end, but it’s not over yet. We planted some seeds in Troy’s life and we can only hope that those seeds will eventually take root and grow.” Cory adds, “Things don’t always work out, but we still need to do what we can to help. We have to trust that God is in control.”

Waterford Mennonite

Several years ago, Blake, the son of a couple who attends Waterford, was having trouble with drug addiction. He had been in jail once before and was trying to put his life back together. Russ Hochstetler, a member at Waterford, worked with Blake during this time.

Despite the mentoring relationship, Blake hit a rough patch and slipped back into drugs, ending up in jail again. This time he realized he couldn’t do it on his own. He needed God’s help. He started a Bible study group in jail with other inmates. Through the Bible studies, Blake met a man named Tim in his mid-forties. Tim was very alone with no outside support, so Blake suggested he contact Russ.

Russ started visiting Tim in person and they bonded. As Tim talked about things he wanted to do when he got out, he expressed his desire to be part of a church and have

a supportive community around him. Russ’s interactions with Blake and Tim inspired a group of 30 people from Waterford to take a tour of the jail. They have formed a group who want to reach out to inmates. Russ says that when Tim gets out, “we’re hoping to surround him with love and help him get on his feet.”

Ways to get involved

According to Martin, effective prison ministry is more than just conducting a Bible study or Sunday service in jail. It is about building and sustaining relationships with incarcerated individuals. “They’re dying to have someone they can talk to that will talk with them, be friends with them and treat them like a normal person.”

Engaging in prison ministry can start with small steps, like taking a tour of your local prison. Seeing the spaces where inmates live can be an eye-opening experience to the realities they face. Martin is happy to share about the work he does and other ways that church groups can get involved.

Another approach is to participate in a transitional program that helps inmates with reentry. One such program is the Transitional Coaching Program at the Center for Community Justice, located in Elkhart. They offer training for individuals to become mentors for inmates released from the Indiana Department of Corrections. Mentors work with inmates 6 months prior to their release and 12 months after. Programs like these have been shown to significantly decrease the likelihood of former inmates committing new offenses.

Crime and violence are sad realities in our communities. The brokenness we see around us can be discouraging, but we can be encouraged by the good work that is already being done and remember that we are God’s hands and feet in this world.



If you would like Cory Martin to speak at your church, you can contact him at 574-891-2279 or cmartin@elkhartcountysheriff.com. If you want to learn more about the Transitional Coaching Program at the Center for Community Justice, visit their website: www.centerforcommunityjustice.org.

If you or your church are doing prison ministry outside of Elkhart County we would love to hear about it! Send an email to communications@im.mennonite.net.

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im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel



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intercultural transformation

Men's Breakfast Group (continued from cover)

Fellowship of Hope, Jon Brown of Church Without Walls, and Dave Miller of Prairie Street—although others have taken leadership roles at various points over the years. The group meets once a month and is open to men of all backgrounds. On average, roughly 20 men participate.

Several times a year the men do work projects in the neighborhood. They contact the city government to ask who may be in danger of code violations due to property upkeep issues. Then they help those folks clean up their yard or make housing repairs, or whatever is most needed. Jon says, "It's a way to be involved in the community while also strengthening relationships with each other."

In April 2013, the group found themselves at a turning point when a murder took place across the street from Fellowship of Hope. This event—an act of violence so

close by—changed the focus of the group and they began actively talking about issues of racism and community violence. Members of the group say they have an increased awareness of violence in their neighborhood and surrounding areas. At least four other violent incidents have occurred in the last year, all within a mile radius.

In addition to racism and violence, they have been discussing white privilege and the "Beloved Community" advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They talk candidly and share personal experiences related to the issues. Art Stoltzfus of Prairie Street and Jon Brown both say they value the group as a cross cultural gathering where there is meaningful discussion and they get to know one another on a personal level.

The discussions help reveal misconceptions that often exist between different racial groups. Keith says, "The further away we whites are from contact with blacks, the more one might think there isn't a problem. Whites may feel there's no difference between black and white, that there's no longer racism—but that doesn't change the

fact that white privilege exists." The more whites interact with their black brothers, he says, the more the existence of racism becomes evident.

For Robert Hunt of Dawning of a New Day, growing up in a black neighborhood in Chicago gave him very little contact with whites. Those he did encounter were adults in positions of authority at school and merchants who were only in the neighborhood from 9 am to 5 pm. Having personal conversations with white brothers in the men's group has given him an opportunity to see things in a new way. He says, "When blacks and whites sit down and talk with each other, we realize we're not all that different."

Jon says the group has given people like himself and Robert the opportunity to share their mission and vision for outreach with their white brothers. Jon talks about the work he and his wife do with Emerge Ministries—a shelter for women and children. Robert has a street ministry to youth in the neighborhood, seeking to keep youth out of gangs.

Sharing their passions for outreach helps everyone to see the values they share in common.

Jim Norton says, "a big focus of the group is asking, what is a good and healthy way of dealing with this problem of racism and white privilege in our community?" They talk about this question a lot, and answers aren't easy.

One thing is clear—talking with each other is a good first step. It fosters understanding and connection between people of different racial backgrounds. Robert says that if he overhears his children or grandchildren speaking negatively about whites in general, he can point to men like Keith who he knows personally, who he knows is genuinely concerned about the injustices of the past and present.

"This men's group serves as a melting pot among our own families," says Robert. "This group is breaking down walls and breaking negative stereotypes."

"The more whites interact with their black brothers, the more the existence of racism and white privilege becomes evident."



Pictured directly above: Daniel Foxvog (Fellowship of Hope), Pastor Shawn Lange (New Foundation), and Keith Kingsley (Fellowship of Hope). Pictured at right: John Graber (Fellowship of Hope) and Robert Hunt (Dawning of a New Day). (Photography by Verlin Miller)

financial report

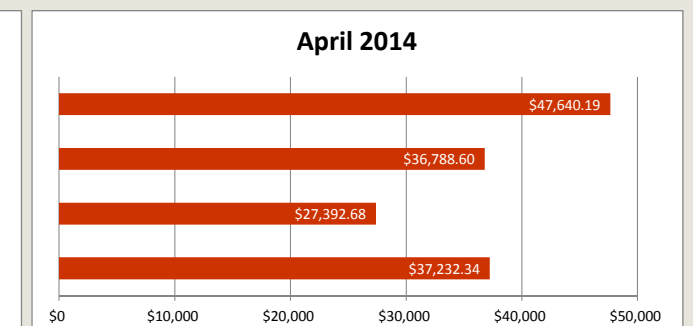
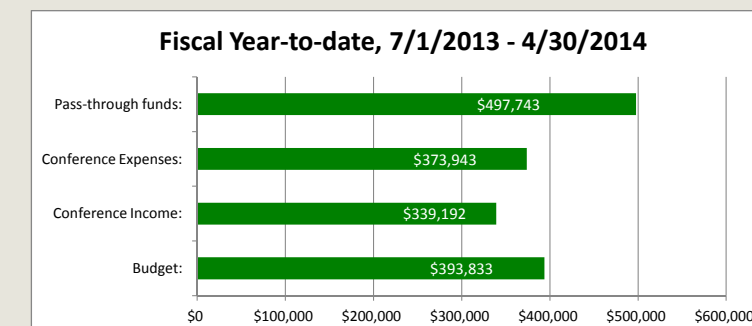
By **Greg Leatherman Sommers**, conference administrator

Support for conference operations in April was down nearly \$2,000 from the same period last year, and \$4,477 less than projected in the current spending plan. Expenses were held down, spending approximately \$2,500 less for the month than during 2013, and \$444 less than planned for the month. So far this year, financial support for conference has been \$25,000 less than anticipated. Fortunately, conference spent nearly \$20,000 less than budgeted so far this fiscal year.

The Missional Leadership Team spent time on recent and potential changes in support for conference at the April meeting. Members considered alternatives in how to respond if conference continues to experience further income decline. The MLT plans to work on long-term solutions during the next year, hopes to consult with the Advisory Council on the matter, and is committed to maintaining current staffing levels at least through June, 2015.

Congregations provided \$47,640 in earmarked donations to local, regional, and national ministries during April. That brings the total up to \$497,743 so far this fiscal year. On top of those earmarked donations from congregations, conference donated \$2,978 from our operating fund to Mennonite Church USA ministries in April and \$36,786 so far this fiscal year.

Thank you for your support for conference. Please consider adding support in one or more of these four ways: prayers, personnel (volunteer time), funding, and feedback.



Amigo Road Scholar Programs

By Carol Honderich and Mandy Yoder

Amigo Centre hosted their first “Elderhostel” program in 1994. That program, “Amish and Mennonites: A Study in Shared Heritage,” continues at Amigo Centre today. In 2010, during its 35th anniversary, the Elderhostel program name was changed to “Road Scholar.” Since its inception in 1975, over 5 million people and 238 providers worldwide have participated in Elderhostel programs.

In 2013, Amigo Centre hosted the first “Quilting” Road Scholar program. Adding a week-long quilting program to Road Scholar events was something Mandy Yoder wanted to do since beginning her role as



Participants from the Quilting Road Scholar Program in May 2014. (Photo provided)

Program Director for Amigo Centre. Combining a quilting program with Amigo’s well-established Amish and Mennonites heritage program, is a very complimentary fit. Now in its second year, the Quilting program is being offered a third week, scheduled for October 2014, due to popular demand.

Carol Honderich designed and taught the Amish-Mennonite Sampler Quilt project offered in 2013. In addition to teaching a variety of quilting techniques and tips for accuracy and speed in quilting, she shared personal and family stories of Amish and Mennonite quilters. The stories of women who passed on their love of quilting to the next generation generate great interest in the program.

The 2014 Road Scholar quilt project will focus on an Amish Mystery Quilt with quilt blocks representing true stories of Amish experiences. Each story will include elements of mystery. The stories represent Amish history and mindset, and offer insight into the Amish way of life, helping the participants gain a deeper understanding of Amish faith and culture.

Amigo Road Scholar participants have been lavish in their praise of Amigo staff hospitality. A sense of safety and a delight in the tranquil and beautiful surroundings are frequent comments received. Staff and program instructors’ expertise is praised, as well as the opportunity for participants to form new friendships with classmates.

Several first year quilting students are returning for this year’s program. The friendships that formed during those six days of learning and laughing together prompted some of those returning students to register as a group for this year’s program.

Carol, the quilting instructor, expressed how she was encouraged by the joy and excitement of students as they progressed through the week, gaining confidence in their quilting.

Other highlights from last year’s experience include:

- The small group size (limited to 15 students) was perfect for camaraderie and sharing.
- One new quilter’s quilt block was such a hit that she became the instructor for others wanting to make the same block.
- A husband shared at the end of the week that he hadn’t seen his wife this happy and relaxed for a long time.
- The friendships that formed during the week resulted in some participants planning to return together for another week this year.
- The appreciation expressed by participants at the opportunities to travel throughout the Michiana Amish area, meeting Amish quilters and learning from them, shopping in wonderful local quilt shops, learning about the history of the community, and hearing about local quilting legacies.

For more information and details about upcoming Road Scholar’s events, visit the Amigo Centre website at www.amigocentre.org.

Bethany Launches Capital Campaign for Sustainability

By Kevin Miller

On May 18, Bethany Christian Schools publicly launched a \$5.6 million *Capital Campaign for Sustainability* to fund urgently-needed and energy-efficient green technology, computer technology, and endowment needs.

Capital Campaign chair Alan Weldy, vice president at IU Health Goshen, emphasizes that sustainability for Bethany encompasses not only becoming more energy efficient, but also transforming the school into a living learning lab, staying on the cutting edge of educational tools and resources, and ensuring ongoing financial resources.

A New Frontier

Responding to advances in computer and green technology, Bethany commissioned a task force in 2011 to investigate and analyze opportunities to incorporate the latest cost-saving technology applications at Bethany.

This task force toured state-of-the-art facilities, met with energy industry experts, reviewed findings of a feasibility energy audit, and analyzed options. This led the task force to evaluate the implementation of green technology plant upgrades, assess opportunities for forward-looking computer technologies, examine financial alternatives for ensuring that initiatives would be sustainable and would position Bethany as a steward of resources congruent with Mennonite values.

A New Vision for Sustainability

Bethany envisions a transformation of its campus into a “living learning lab” where students and adults practice sustainability at new levels in their daily activities.

“Our campus will be an embodiment of the values we are trying to teach,” says Environmental Science teacher Amy Thut. “When I teach about the importance of conserving natural gas, I will be able to show students our geothermal heating system and newly-insulated roof.”

Thut continues, “A course unit on the Elkhart River will tie directly into how we are conserving water on campus... Our study of the detrimental effects of mining and burning coal for electricity will lead to an analysis of how our new lights are conserving kilowatts.”

Bethany anticipates additional benefits such as an enhanced classroom learning environment, lower costs

due to improved energy conservation and efficiency, the opportunity to demonstrate faith-based earth care values, and the differentiation of Bethany as a cutting-edge educational institution.

Green Energy Implementation

The significant piece of the first phase of the campaign—the green energy project—is the installation of a geothermal well field and plant controls that will provide 90% of energy needed for heating and cooling. Complementing this addition will be a computerized system to manage temperature throughout the facility, an upgrade to existing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, and a new roof that will house insulation and ductwork for the new HVAC system. The implementation of this first phase began in May with completion anticipated by fall 2014.

Phase two (anticipated for summer 2015) includes remaining items such as the installation of solar panels and a wind turbine, replacement of windows and doors, and moving the art room to the more energy-efficient main academic building.

Faithful Stewards

For 60 years, Bethany has enabled students to discover the call to follow Christ and live out their faith in the church

(continued on page 8)



Bethany Christian Schools’ juniors Jesse Amstutz and Landon Weldy unveil a check showing the \$4.1 million already raised at the May 18 public launching of Bethany’s \$5.6 million Capital Campaign for Sustainability. (Photo provided)

leadership development

Anabaptist Deaf Ministries Retreat

By **Sheila Yoder**, deaf ministries coordinator at College Mennonite, and **Rachel A. Denlinger**

The weekend of May 16-18, 2014, thirty-six people from the East and Midwest gathered at Laurelville (Pa.) Mennonite Church Center to worship, fellowship, and share faith stories—all in American Sign Language.

The retreat for deaf ministry leaders was coordinated by a three-member planning committee representing Deaf Christian Fellowship of College Mennonite, Goshen, Ind.; Signs of Life Deaf Fellowship of Staunton, Va.; and First Deaf Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pa. This “first” event built on the foundation of an earlier annual retreat coordinated in the 70s and 80s by the former Mennonite Board of Missions Deaf Ministries office.

In the planning stages, a group from the Deaf Christian Fellowship (DCF) of College Mennonite submitted a grant request to the Schowalter Foundation of Kansas. DCF members’ attendance at the retreat was made possible in part through the generous funding provided by the Schowalter Foundation.

Six members of DCF attended the event in Pennsylvania. One participant, Michele Ramer of Goshen, says, “The retreat was a great experience for me. I learned more about other Christians’ experiences and their journeys through life. It helped me reflect and grow closer to Christ. Everyone was very friendly and accepting and I really enjoyed fellowshiping with them.”

Husband and wife team Jeff and Jan Hoffer led the group through thoughtful discussion and sharing on the theme of “Faith, Fellowship and Fun.” Participants rejoiced in the gathering of like minds (and language!)—sharing stories of faith, renewing old and new acquaintances, and gaining inspiration to return to their home ministries. There was much hope and determination to make this an annual event for deaf people across the Mennonite Church.



Deaf leaders gathered at the retreat. From left: Nelson Gehman, Leola, Pa.; Ron Carpenter, Massillon, Oh.; Dorothy Kouroupis, Indianapolis, Ind.; Jim Nissley, South Bend, Ind. (Photo provided)

at bethany (cont. from p. 7)

and the world. Indeed, Bethany fosters “learning that lasts and faith that lives.”

Senior Katie Hurst says, “An important topic for my generation has been sustainability. Along with strong academic preparation and opportunities for critical thinking and growth, Bethany’s sustainability initiative prepares students to think about real world problems, and work at finding solutions.”

As of the May 18 kickoff, \$4.1 million in funds have been raised—nearly 75% of the goal—so additional funds are still needed.

As parent and business owner Steve Brenneman notes, “A campaign involves risk.” But when he envisions looking back in ten years on what he is proud of about Bethany, he believes this campaign will stand out.

People across the Bethany community embrace their various roles as faithful stewards: faculty who provide a safe, stimulating, and faith-filled Bethany experience for students; alumni who live out Bethany values; board members who govern and guide Bethany’s mission; and Bethany friends who provide financial resources. All are stewards of the physical plant and landscape that comprise the campus.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



On May 25, **Marty Lehman** was installed as administrative pastor at College Mennonite, Goshen, Ind., by Dan Miller, conference pastor.