

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

july/august 2015 | vol 96, no 4

Photo by Frank Kandel



Participants at Indiana-Michigan Conference's Annual Sessions tour a community garden in Indianapolis, Ind.

Joyfully following Jesus ... In loss and gain, drought and rain, waiting and pain



The stories and photos in this issue take readers on a journey through Indiana-Michigan Conference's Annual Sessions in Indianapolis, Indiana. The sessions were held at Broadway United Methodist Church on June 18-20. Stories and photos, unless otherwise noted, were provided by **Laurie Oswald Robinsion, interim editor.**

Indiana-Michigan Conference's Annual Sessions worship speakers encouraged the faithful to joyfully draw from the well of Jesus, their living water in a time of drought.

Though the past year could be described as a wandering in the wilderness regarding differing convictions on marriage and sexuality, the conference must keep Christ's life and joy as its guide in this wilderness time of discernment.

"As a conference, we are in an unknown time, a wilderness," said Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, speaker for opening worship June 19. "In the wilderness, there are dangers and opportunities. In the wilderness, we depend



John Powell, regional pastor for IN-MI Conference, and worship speaker June 20, said that "Jesus is the well that God has provided for us" in our desert places. We draw from him in joy and give thanks.

(continued on page 3)

inside

- 2 **Releasing and receiving**
- 3 **Following Jesus** continued
- 4 **engaging Indianapolis**
- 5 **engaging** continued
- 6 **Eph. 4:** paving the way
- 7 **Assembly 2016 site**
- 8 Pastors and **Transitions**

saying goodbye, saying hello



Releasing, receiving

Anual Sessions for IN-MI demonstrated how joyfully following Jesus includes both parting paths with longtime affiliations and intersecting with emerging ones.

During the two-day gathering, the conference said goodbye to eight congregations and hello to developing leaders and new church-plant initiatives.

In these losses and gains, hope can be found in maintaining relationships and sharing stories of God's eternal faithfulness in changing times, assembly goers said.

"Even though it feels as if our current conference structure is crumbling, our relationships need not be broken," said Beth Bontrager a member of the assembly planning committee and a worship leader.

"With many friends in these congregations, we will still come together to grieve the deaths of common loved ones, to celebrate milestones of our children. ... We still share faith in the same God and celebrate the same risen Christ."

During an open microphone time, table-group representative Dave Sutter shared his table's desire for people in IN-MI to tell more God stories. "Let's focus on the joy of our salvation by telling stories of God's work in our lives, congregations and neighborhoods," he said.

"The stories will inspire and enliven us for becoming missional."

One of the more painful parts of the story of God's people in IN-MI is the exodus of churches from the conference. On June 19, Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions, reported on six congregational withdrawals, one transfer of membership and one closing.

Withdrawals are: Stutsmanville Chapel, Harbor Springs, Mich.; Clinton Brick Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.; Naubinway (Mich.) Christian Fellowship; Rexton (Mich.) Mennonite Church; Germfask (Mich.) Mennonite Church; and Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor, Goshen. Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Goshen, is transferring its membership to South Central Mennonite Conference. Hilltop Fellowship in Petoskey, Mich., is closing.

God's story also involves the emergence of new leaders, church-plant initiatives and the latest shaping of a conference-wide congregational coach program. For example, Steve Slagel, chair of the IN-MI Plant Network, introduced candidates for new church-planting endeavors, Mike Yordy and Shakil Khondoker.

Dan Miller, conference pastor, presented oil lamps to JOURNEY graduates Tyrone Taylor and Shawn Lange, Sr., who recently completed the conference-based leadership program. The IN-MI Leadership Enhancement Team (LET) shared its latest developments concerning credentialed pastors and their accountability partners as well as core competency requirements.

This issue is available online:

im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel



Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference—a conference of **Mennonite Church USA**—is a community of congregations in Indiana, Michigan and Kentucky, gathered together for mutual encouragement in kingdom mission and inspiration to joyfully follow Jesus.

Office: 109 E. Clinton St., Suite 100, Goshen, IN 46528
(574) 534-4006 or (800) 288-8486; www.im.mennonite.net

Missional Leadership Team Members: Gene Hartman, moderator, Topeka, IN; Paula Killough, moderator-elect, Elkhart, IN; Rebecca Kauffman, Orleans, IN; Aimee Mayeda, Indianapolis, IN; George Thompson, treasurer, Auburn Hills, MI; Bob Yoder, Goshen, IN.

Gospel Evangel is published six times annually by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May/Jun, Jul/Aug, Sep/Oct, Nov/Dec). It is printed and mailed by Duley Press, 2906 N. Home Street, Mishawaka, IN 46545. Periodical postage is paid at Nappanee, IN 46550 (USPS 575-940). Postmaster: Send address changes to IN-MI Mennonite Conference, 109 E. Clinton St., Suite 100, Goshen, IN 46528.

Interim Editor: Laurie Oswald Robinson
Email: LaurieOR123@gmail.com

We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.

joyfully following Jesus

Jesus is the well (continued from cover)



Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, and Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator for Mennonite Church USA, use Isaiah 12: 1-6 as their sermon text.

differently on God's leading – the pillar of fire by day and the pillar of fire by night. God is not absent. God provided for the people in the wilderness in a different way than when they settled the land."

Miller focused on three ways he believes Isaiah 12 shows how God provides for God's people in the wilderness:

1. Emboldens us to forge real relationships -- "to get messy and connected and involved and angry and sorrowful and everything else that deeply engaged people are supposed to get," he said.
2. Helps us to balance the inner and outer dimensions of striving for a vision of peace and justice: personal and corporate expressions of life together; trust and declaration; and private and public spirituality.
3. Calls us to strive for joy rather than happiness. "Happy people like receiving benefits from others while people leading meaningful lives get a lot of joy from giving to others, transcending their own needs," he said.

The well [Jesus] is bottomless and endless and brings liberation. It reaches to the depths so we can proclaim the righteousness of God." — John Powell

Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator for Mennonite Church USA, and John Powell, IN-MI regional pastor, added to Miller's encouragements.

For example, Soto, during evening worship June 19, said, "Leaders of this beautiful conference, each one of you [like Isaiah] are prophets in-between times, in-between kingdoms, in-between exile and returning. Like you, it was hard for Isaiah to be in the in-between time. Yet he says the joy of our salvation is God. ... [Isaiah] cries, 'I trust in

God, I do not trust in Syria or the Babylonian kingdom. I trust in God because he only is my salvation.'"

Trusting in God involves drawing from the well God has provided in Jesus, John Powell said during worship June 20. "The well we are talking about is bottomless and endless and brings liberation," he said. "It reaches to the depths so we can proclaim the righteousness of God, so God's community can grow."



From left, Paula Killough, IN-MI moderator-elect, Gene Hartman, moderator, Jane Stoltzfus Buller, outgoing moderator.

Helping IN-MI to draw from the well of Jesus are members of the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), chaired by the conference moderator. At Indianapolis, Jane Stoltzfus Buller, pastor of Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., concluded as moderator. Gene Hartman, pastor of Emma Mennonite Church, Topeka, Ind., began as moderator. Paula Killough, senior executive for Mennonite Mission Network and a member of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., became moderator-elect.

Buller said she has become more aware of how "we are a people for whom Jesus broke down the barriers, and we don't need to build them back up again."

Hartman wrote, "There has been much time and energy devoted to the question concerning inclusion of LGBTQ persons. ... I hope that with the findings and recommendations of the Unity and Variance Discernment Group, we can move forward with renewed energy ... channeled into the growth areas of our conference, i.e. church planting, making better and stronger connections within Conference, and equipping churches to reach out in their local communities, making a positive difference as a witness to the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ."

Killough said she believes that God is going to do a new thing among us. "It will not be what any of us have pictured in our limited ability to see through the glass dimly," she said. "I pray we have the patience to wait upon the Lord for that new thing."

engaging Indianapolis

About 160 Annual Sessions participants found joy in following Jesus at Indianapolis by engaging with Isaiah 12-focused worship, robust singing, thoughtful delegate sessions, lively fellowship around food, silent prayer, hidden tears, spontaneous belly laughs and Saturday morning play. Follow their footsteps in this photo essay. All photos by Laurie Oswald Robinson



Clockwise from top: 1. Heidi Burkhart, Maple River Mennonite Church, Brutus, Mich., and Dan Hess, Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, chat before a Saturday morning field trip. 2. Suella Gerber, Fellowship of Hope, Elkhart, Ind., and Zenebe Abebe, executive director for MCC Great Lakes, Shalom Mennonite, share table group time. 3. Beth and Lee Roy Berry, Berkey Avenue Mennonite Church, Goshen, savor a meal prepared by caterer Lali Hess. 4. Michael Yeakey, North Goshen Mennonite Church, prays. 5. Delegates said goodbye to eight churches in a service of lament.



engaging Indianapolis



“With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation.” -- Isaiah 12:3



Clockwise from top: 1. Releasing and receiving. 2. Martha Yoder Maust, Shalom Mennonite, Indianapolis, and Gretchen Kingsey, Fellowship of Hope, share encouragement. 3. Cheryl Beachy (left) and Vanessa Kellybrew tend details. 4. A delegate naps. 5. Barbara Hodel (center), Waterford Mennonite, Middlebury, Ind., and Robert Love, First Mennonite, Indianapolis, enjoy hymn-singing. 6. Dan Miller, conference pastor, receives a T-shirt from Broadway United Methodist, assembly site. 7. Frank Kandel (left), volunteer event coordinator, and Ronald Rodgers, First Mennonite, Indianapolis.

varying & unifying

Ephesians 4 can pave the way

Sharing mid-journey reflections on winding road

The Unity and Variance Discernment Group (UVDG) is halfway through its two-year assignment to help Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference think about the breadth of diversity we are willing to live with.

In the last year, eight congregations have left because of varying convictions on same-sex marriage. While the current discussions about the place of LGBT individuals in the church is a major focus, it is one of the many topics the contemporary church is struggling with.

Commissioned in its work last year in June 2014, the UVDG at Annual Sessions this year offered mid-point reflections and half-formed direction for the future. They will continue listening, testing and refining recommendations.

UVDG chair Mark Schloneger led delegates in a somber reflection around tables about what life they wish to see in the IN-MI Conference that they are not seeing. He also invited them to name what life they are seeing.

The UVDG begins its meetings by reading Eph. 4: 1-6. They pray for these verses to become a reality in congregations, the conference and the denomination. They ask, "How can we be faithful -- how can we exhibit the fruits of the Spirit -- while we address our differences?"

"Through prayer time, and listening to God and to each other, we will find our way," said Paula Killough, UVDG member. The UVDG believes the way will be made clear as the conference centers its life on Jesus and his teachings, prays for God's will to be accomplished and for Emmanuel, "God with us," to be visible in the conference.

Toward that end, the UVDG shared half-formed recommendations from its work thus far:

- 1.** Build capacity to answer the question shared above, "How can we be faithful -- how can we exhibit fruits of the Spirit -- while we address our differences?"
- 2.** Likely recommend-- though this is not at all certain-- that individual congregations be allowed to decide what it means for them to be faithful to God's call and vision in IN-MI. This is based on a survey in IN-MI indicating that most people are willing to live in faithful disagreement with people with whom they disagree on LGBT inclusion.



Unity and Variance Discernment Group members clockwise from center are Joe Liechty, Paula Killough, Will Fitzgerald, Mark Schloneger and Mandy Yoder.

3. Provide safety for congregations to share hard truths spoken in love. One third of the people who responded to the conference survey believe IN-MI should remove from fellowship those churches that dissent from the current teaching position of Mennonite Church USA regarding same-sex marriage. (Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 19: "God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.")

4. Provide resources to help people sort out complicated questions around human sexuality. This will likely include worship and education materials, and laments for the ways we have failed one another.

5. Invite IN-MI to pay more attention to common practices shared by its congregations -- proclaiming the gospel, becoming faithful disciples of Jesus, attending to Scripture and worship, peace and reconciliation.

Waiting together on the Spirit is key for the ongoing journey, said Schloneger. "In a time of division and unrest, maybe we can learn something together," he said. "I call it the spiritual discipline of standing in one place."

"That means standing in one place where life has been found before -- in Scriptures, prayer, worship and service, in the faces of brothers and sisters who are singing in the same place we are, in peering into the darkness and abyss ... and in the name of Jesus ... boldly proclaiming amidst all evidence to the contrary, that life, even here in the most unlikely of places, is evident."

Bethany goes "green"

Will host tours of its renewable energy efforts



Bethany science students learn as they help to monitor water quality for the community. Photo provided

By **Kevin Miller**, Bethany's communication coordinator

Participants who attend Indiana-Michigan Conference's Annual Sessions on June 16-18, 2016, on the campus of Bethany Christian Schools, Goshen, Ind., can anticipate enjoying a "green" tour.

Assembly participants will learn about the school's latest renewable energy initiatives. In spring 2015, Bethany moved into Phase II of its energy conservation projects. Phase II includes plans to install 300 solar panels and a wind turbine on the school roof to generate renewable energy.

A \$100,000 grant from Indiana's Office of Energy Development will cover one-third of Phase II costs; the balance will be funded by the Capital Campaign for Sustainability (see bethanycs.net for more information).

Phase II follows the completion of Phase 1 -- the installation of geothermal energy, control and monitoring systems, an air handling system, insulation and new roof.

Once both phases are completed, Bethany's energy footprint will be much smaller. Reduced energy costs due to dramatically decreasing the usage of electricity, water, and gas are estimated to save \$50,000 per year in utility costs—\$12,000 alone from Phase II projects.

Inspiring students to appreciate the value of environmental conservation is an important value at Bethany. Ninth-grade students in the innovative Environmental Science class already use Bethany wetlands as a living

class room. And an energy monitoring system at school will provide additional real-life materials for student lessons and daily visible reminders.

With this project, Bethany can facilitate public awareness about the value of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in the community.

Bethany will host tours of its renewable energy initiatives -- including wind and solar power -- during IN-MI's Annual Sessions on June 16-18, 2016.

Partnering with next-door neighbor Waterford Elementary School allows Bethany to introduce the next generation to concepts about the relationship between humans and the environment. And Bethany students learn the material more thoroughly as they teach younger students.

Bethany will provide occasions for adults in the community to tour the equipment and learn about renewable energy when IN-MI hosts its annual assembly there. Bethany will also incorporate tours and educational opportunities such as seminars related to the use of wind and solar power.

Additionally, Bethany plans to share its best practices with businesses who have contributed funding to this project to provide inspiration for initiating their own "green" operations.

parting thoughts on pastors



Pastors and spouses enjoy an appreciation banquet June 18 during the IN-MI Conference Annual Sessions in Indianapolis, Ind. Part of the banquet included this Ethiopian coffee ceremony, prayer and anointing and encouragement from Dan Miller, conference pastor. Photo by Frank Kandel

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Marcella Hershberger was ordained May 17 at Bonneyville Mennonite Church, Bristol, Ind., by Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions, and overseer Leonard Wiebe.



Calvin Kaufman's ordination was reactivated May 2 at Goshen house church where he serves as pastor. June Yoder, Ministry Credentialing Team, and Dan Miller, conference pastor, led the service.



Kenzie Intemann was licensed and installed May 31 as associate pastor of Marion Mennonite Church, Shipshewana, Ind., by Dan Miller.



Sherm Kauffman was installed May 10 as interim pastor for East Goshen Mennonite Church by Dan Miller, conference pastor.



Veva Mumaw was ordained June 14 at Olive Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., for youth ministry by Dan Miller, conference pastor, and Michael Zehr, overseer.

Endings



Philip and Virginia Leichty retired as pastors at Burr Oak (Ind.) Mennonite Church on June 20.



Mike Score resigned his pastoral role at Ann Arbor (Mich.) Mennonite Church on May 4.



Mike Wilson, interim pastor at Hilltop Mennonite Fellowship, Petosky, Mich., resigned May 3. The congregation has decided to close and have their last service Aug. 23.



From left, Ron Kennel, interim pastor at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., and Marshall Anderson, pastor of North Leo Mennonite Church, Fort Wayne, Ind., discuss aspects of the IN-MI Leadership Enhancement Team (LET) during lunch June 19.

Editor's Note: The May-June 2015 financial statement was not available by press time. That report will appear in the September-October issue.