

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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Photo by Bruce Nofziger



Benton Mennonite Church co-pastors Brenda Meyer and Doug Kaufman baptize Levi Smucker in the Elkhart River several hundred feet from the church building.

Preserving the rivers of God Honoring Creator and created

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, editor

Members of Benton Mennonite Church have discovered a direct link between the worship of their Creator and how they treat God's creation.

That realization has led the congregation -- located southeast of Goshen along Highway 33 -- to join Hoosier Riverwatch, a program sponsored by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

To participate, three or four times a year the church monitors the water quality of the portion of the Elkhart River that lies several hundred feet beyond its sanctuary.

"About 12 years ago, we began doing full immersion baptisms in the river," said Doug Kaufman, co-pastor at Benton Mennonite with Brenda Meyer. "At that time, the

Elkhart County Health Department was warning that the river was not safe for body contact.

"We joined this program to be good stewards of the piece of creation we interact with and to assure our baptismal candidates that the process was physically safe as well as spiritually meaningful."

The testing is multifaceted. It includes gathering information from water samples that is entered into a statewide data base. That base tracks levels of fecal matter as well as the numbers of river-dwelling critters -- i.e. larvae and worms -- that thrive both in clean and polluted water.

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reviving communities



Revive teams move beyond church walls to engage with neighbors in farm yards, city blocks and factories. Photo provided

Reviving Indiana Anabaptists join ecumenical evangelism

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, editor

Some IN-MI congregations discovered in 2015 that even though different groups use varying evangelism styles, the message of Jesus' healing and hope is the same.

It was the power of this unifying message that IN-MI pastors Merle Hostetler, Verlin Haarer and Ben Schlegel experienced during Time to Revive events last year. Christians from many different stripes in communities throughout Indiana unified to take the gospel beyond church walls and into neighborhood streets, workplaces, living rooms and broken hearts seeking God's love.

During the Revive event in Elkhart and LaGrange counties, lasting for 52 days in the spring, Hostetler, pastor at East Goshen Mennonite Church, joined a support-prayer gathering of participating pastors, which still meets.

This group -- including Baptist, Methodist and Assemblies of God pastors -- is teaching Hostetler to engage with other perspectives without abandoning his own, he said. "When you bring various traditions together, it can create fireworks," he said. "I by no means carry all the same convictions as my fellow pastors, and yet I find it is very

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Rivers of God (continued from cover)

Though the process seems to be heavy on science, it helps the congregation nurture its faith, Kaufman said.

"We mostly see our involvement as part of loving the world that God loves, and understanding that God loves the entire world, and not just humans," he said.

The river is only one focus that Benton Mennonite sponsors, Meyer said. For example, one of the congregation's small groups -- the Green Group -- facilitates programs focused on creation care, including a monthly sharing time in worship.

For example, during a recent "moment in creation care," Stan Grove stood up with an afghan wrapped around himself. "He encouraged people during the cold season to think about the other things they could do to keep warm, other than turning up the thermostat and burning more fuel," Meyer said.

"We mostly see our involvement as part of loving the world that God loves." —Doug Kaufman

Two other IN-MI congregations involved in creation care are Paoli (Ind.) Mennonite Fellowship and Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Ind.

Along with doing Riverwatch, Paoli Mennonite devotes additional energy to forest care, said Rebecca Kauffman, Paoli's pastor. One of the congregation's families -- involved in the maple syrup business -- helped the church to realize the treasure it had in its 15 acres of wooded property.

"The trees surrounding the church building, which we love for their beauty, could also produce a flow of sweet sap," Kauffman said.

"So [over the past few years,] sap collecting has become a spring tradition that involves all ages. We are blessed by the fruit of the land and seek to bless others through the gift."

Towards that end, the congregation makes the syrup available for donation in a fundraiser for Foods Resource



Rebecca Kauffman, pastor of Paoli (Ind.) Mennonite Fellowship, lugs buckets of maple sap with Clark Johnson. Photo by Curtis Thill

Bank, an interdenominational agency that works for global food security.

Unlike rural Paoli Mennonite, Shalom Mennonite is located in urbanity. However, its building is also near woods. The church owns a section of woods that it has developed into a green space for its city-dwelling neighbors.

Shalom has entered into a three-year partnership with the Indiana Urban Forestry Council to increase the tree canopy in the city by planting native trees.

Shalom is also a member of the East Side Creation Care Network, an ecumenical consortium of 10 congregations on Indianapolis' east side. "Shalom is hosting an informational gathering on converting to the use of solar power," said Marilyn Teel, chair of Shalom's Creation Care Team. "So far, three other congregations in the network have already converted. I hope solar is in Shalom's future."

Stewarding the internet Unmasking the shame of online pornography

By **Kevin Miller**, Bethany communication director

In the process of re-accreditation by Mennonite Education Agency several years ago, Bethany Christian Schools identified stewardship education as a high school improvement goal: for students to “grow in their understanding of and commitment to stewardship of their bodies, finances, and environment” by taking care of the things God has given us.

During this school year, Bethany focused its stewardship week on addressing internet pornography. Understanding that God created people to be in healthy relationships -- and that our Bethany community is based on respectfully honoring each other -- provided the framework from which to examine the effects of pornography on our lives, as individuals and as a community.

One group leader said, “It feels lousy that many of us struggle with pornography at some level, yet comforting to know we are not alone.”

To acknowledge an ongoing commitment to respect each other and to value the relationships we have at Bethany, students had opportunity to sign posters that said “You are my brother” and “You are my sister.”

Twenty-five percent of internet searches are for pornography, and the average age of the first use is age 11. Sixty percent of U.S. children first learn about sex from pornography.
—Internet Filter Review

We are fortunate to operate in a context of faith where expectations of moral behavior are clearly communicated -- including teaching responsible use of internet and social media as part of digital literacy curriculum. Yet we recognize that here at Bethany we are not immune to the addictions present in mainstream society.

Bethany teachers and a Mennonite pastor, Steve Thomas, presented biblical views of sexuality, noted psychological effects of addictions and provided statistics that overwhelmingly show how pervasive and accessible pornography has become. Pornography is increasingly affecting both boys and girls. According to Internet Filter Review, 25 percent of internet searches are for pornography, and the average age of first use is age 11. Sixty percent of U.S. children first learn about sex from pornography.

A common thread of discussion in gender-based groups was surprise at the overwhelming use in society and the acknowledgement that this is a problem for many.



Bethany students sign a “You are my Brother” poster during the school’s weeklong focus on tackling internet pornography. Photo by Alicia Thomas

Some took additional steps. Two male students committed to help each other, agreeing, “We will not do pornography.” That is friendship and community at its best -- developing meaningful relationships that allow vulnerability and holding each other accountable.

Chapel planners provided parents with daily chapel summaries so they could further dialogue with their children.

Typical parent responses included one mother who said, “A great topic to address from a spiritual perspective! It’s a wonderful way to start the conversation around a topic that is typically shrouded in secrecy and shame. Bringing it out into the light, within the community of faith and spiritual perspective, is just awesome.” Her husband added, “This is the type of reason why we send our kids to Bethany.”

Winter is waiting

2016 youth retreat weekends scheduled

By **Addie Leaman**, youth program director, Amigo Centre

I will never forget my very first Winter Youth Retreat; we still called it "Snow Camp" then. Our youth group stayed in the cabins, which I admit was not something I was super excited about.

But as I reflect back, it was those years that we stayed in the cabins that stand out the most. I think our group found a sense of camaraderie as we lugged our bags, pillows, boots and snow pants to and from cabins.

I remember bonding with friends from school over a cup of hot chocolate, and a lot of trips down the tube run. Winter Youth Retreat, "Snow Camp" is a lasting memory for me, and I pray it will be for others, as well.

Winter Youth Retreat is just around the corner, and as I plan and prepare for that time, I pray those weekends will be as meaningful for all who attend as they were for me.

As a youth sponsor for several years, my memories shift a little. My favorite time is always late at night, getting to know the youth more, playing games in the retreat center or watching them "duke it out" on the basketball court. I enjoy connecting with other youth sponsors and pastors to hear how things are going for their group.

Sunshine, rain or snow, we look forward to spending time together in God's beautiful creation. We look forward to meeting new people, spending time with old friends and building each other up as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Most of all, we look forward to time set aside to spend with our Lord and Savior, Jesus. This year it's our prayer that each person who comes, youth and sponsors, will take the opportunity to spend time with Jesus, enjoy meaningful worship, great food, fun games and a lot of coffee! (Or tea or hot chocolate, you choose!)

Junior high youth groups are welcome to join us January 8-10 or February 12-14. High school youth groups are welcome January 15-17 or February 19-21.

Check out the Amigo Centre website www.amigocentre.org for more detailed information and online registration.



Skiing is sometimes enjoyed during winter youth retreats. Photo by Cheryl Mast

Winter Youth Retreats 2016

Junior High:

Jan. 8-10 and Feb. 12-14

High School:

Jan. 15-17 and Feb. 19-20

www.amigocentre.org

Confirming the call Ordination further affirms longtime ministry

By **Rod Hollinger-Janzen**, executive coordinator for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission

I've been engaged in ministry alongside African churches now for almost three decades, so one could ask, why ordination now? I have no final answer for that question, but I am happy that I said "yes" to the promptings that led me.

There were comments over the years from persons who expressed surprise that, in my former missionary work in West Africa, or my current leadership role with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, the church had never formally ordained me for roles that were clearly pastoral in nature.

However, a deeper prompting was my own growing sense that I was expressing who I was through ministry. Having the church community recognize that through ordination was spiritually and practically useful. The process became a journey that connected different parts of my life which, before then, had seemed more disparate and unconnected.

The Mennonite church has traditionally rejected the view that ordination is a sacrament that effects a change in the person being ordained. But insofar as persons are always affected and changed by covenant experiences, ordination may become a life-shaping and identity-giving moment. ... Ordination offers a leadership-ministry assignment from which the person seeks to fulfill his or her calling. While ordination is a high calling for a few in the church, it is not a holier status but a place from which to live and work for the church. —*A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA*

It began with a conversation with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission's International Central Council (board). African and North American board members unanimously supported my desire to be ordained. Several board members followed through by contacting Pastor Neil Amstutz at my home congregation, Waterford Mennonite. His highly encouraging affirmation for my ordination, and Pastor Cindy Voth's work in planning the ceremony, strengthened my feeling of connectedness and linked my work life to my congregation in ways that it had not been before.

Meetings with Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for



Rod Hollinger-Janzen, center, celebrates his ordination with his wife, Lynda, on July 12 at Waterford Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. Doug Kaufman, IN-MI conference pastor for leadership transitions, officiated. Photo by Charles Buller

leadership transitions, and later with the IN-MI Conference Ministry Credentialing Team, was a healthy, life-giving process. I was asked questions that delved where ordinary conversation does not often go -- good questions, sometimes probing questions, which became part of my spiritual mirror, helping me to better see and understand myself.

For example, when engaged in ministry, persons will express gratitude to me for strengths that I have. It is much more difficult for them to ask me about my weaknesses. Yet that is part of the utility of a spiritual review. At one point in our conversation, I was shown how the way I interacted with my family as a boy helped to nourish pride and self righteousness in my persona. Yet, those kinds of questions and comments in the vetting and interview process made this a spiritually useful exercise.

The ordination ceremony brought my worlds together unlike before. Colleagues from Africa, Europe and North America, plus former AIMM missionaries, joined with my home congregation and IN-MI Conference to ordain me, all with my life companion, Lynda, beside me.

This ordination journey has reaffirmed my calling; connected AIMM's ministry more strongly to my local congregation; increased my sense of accountability to the church; and enabled me to explain to others, and to be recognized for, both the visible and less visible parts of the work to which I believe the Lord has called me.

Evangelism (continued from page 2)

important to leave those different views at the door for the sake of unity in the body of Christ and our common goal of sharing Jesus with people who need him.”

Because of their unified effort, many people found new healing and hope in Christ. The flood of response was unlike anything Time to Revive founder Kyle Martin, who grew up in Middlebury, Ind., and his staff, had seen up to that point. The outpouring of the Spirit caused them to extend the campaign in northern Indiana from the initial weeklong event to almost two months.

For example, some RV factory owners invited Revive teams into their workplaces to share with workers during breaks, Hostetler said. Other people received emotional, physical and spiritual healing. Marriages were restored, and some people came to Christ. Discipling groups were formed.

The working of God’s Spirit overflowed beyond northern Indiana into other communities. Other examples of IN-MI involvement (though not an exhaustive list) include participation by some members of Howard-Miami Mennonite Church in Kokomo, Carroll Community Worship Center in Fort Wayne, First Mennonite Church in Middlebury and Valparaiso Mennonite Church.

Schlegel, co-pastor at Howard-Miami, said he was skeptical about Revive, given his preconceived notions about how it might be too “pushy.” But he found something very different once he risked involvement.

“We were encouraged to discern carefully how to follow the Spirit in various situations,” Schlegel said. “For example, if we met some people and sensed a stone wall, and they weren’t ready to hear the gospel, we did not force it on them. We simply asked if there was anything they would like us to pray about.”

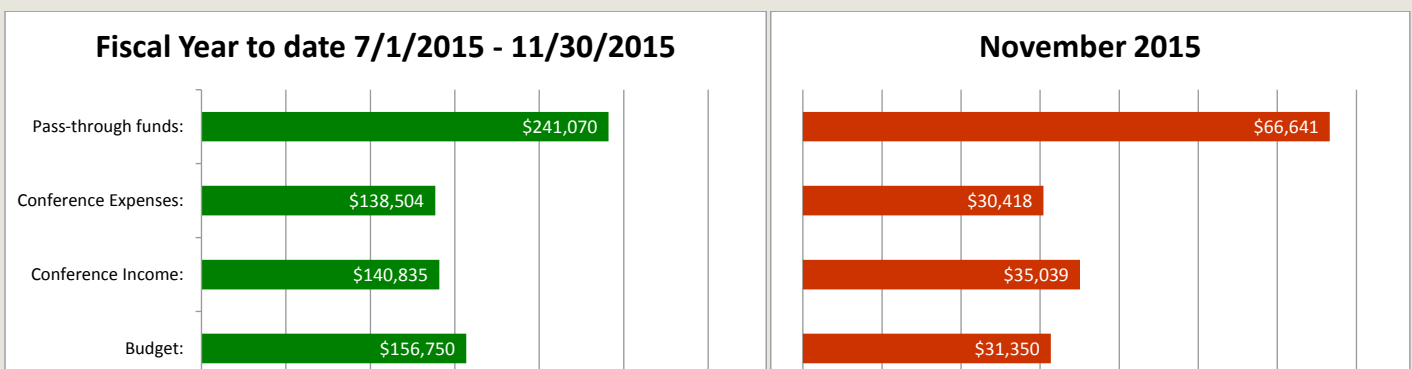
“We were encouraged to discern carefully how to follow the Spirit in various situations.” —Ben Schlegel

Schlegel wasn’t alone in his fears about the methods being too pushy. “A number of churches refused to have anything to do with Revive Indiana,” said Haarer, pastor of Carroll Community Worship Center. “But for those who got involved, it really transformed their lives and their churches. It put a whole new emphasis on the fact that we are one church, one body.”

financial report

By **Jim Norton**, IN-MI bookkeeper

Thanks to your generous contributions during the month of November, our income was ahead of budget for the month by \$4,621.00. That brought our income ahead of expenses for the year by \$2,331.00. In comparison to this time last year, our income is almost \$5,000 ahead of last year’s giving. Thank you for your standing with us as we do the work God has called us to perform.



journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, reflects on the importance of congregations being faithful to their local mission.

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a community of congregations from northern Michigan to Kentucky. Taken alone, each congregation is unique, yet limited. That is, no single congregation has the capacity to be a spiritual home for everyone.

For 16 years, I served as a transitional pastor. In that role, I learned to appreciate the personality and gifts of each congregation. Each could be a spiritual home to particular people. I usually chuckled (unless I was frustrated) when people talked about how friendly their church was – as if that meant it was friendly to everyone. But that was not the case. Every congregation has boundaries that are shaped by its personality and strengths. This is normal.

As I got to know multiple congregations, I better appreciated the fullness of Christ expressed through their personalities and practices. Our ultimate goal as a conference is not to fixate on the beauty of our corporate life. Rather, we celebrate that in each location, people are responding to God's initiative, becoming ambassadors for reconciliation locally.

Sharing our stories about what God is doing in our local contexts helps us to encourage one another. *Gospel Evangel* tells a variety of stories from various contexts and highlights how people are being changed as they engage with God's mission.

This issue again features two stories of congregations seeking to join Jesus locally. One is about the stewardship of the earth God created and the other is about evangelistic outreach. We hope they encourage you and your church in engaging your community. It may not be tidy. It may not be easy, and it may not all work. But it will be real. And Jesus promises to be with us.



ministry transitions

Beginnings



Shawn Lange, left, was ordained by Dan Miller on Nov. 1 as pastor at New Foundation United in Christ Mennonite Fellowship in Elkhart, Ind.



Brent Siegest, below, was ordained as pastor by Dan Miller on Nov. 8 at Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen.



Emily Hostetler was licensed and installed as worship and community life pastor by Dan Miller on Dec. 6 at Yellow Creek Mennonite Church, Goshen.

Tyrone Taylor, right, was ordained by Dan Miller on Nov. 1 as associate pastor at New Foundation United in Christ Mennonite Fellowship in Elkhart.



Mike Yordy was licensed and installed as Journey church planter by Dan Miller on Nov. 15 at Waterford Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.



Endings



Peter Janzen concluded as pastor at First Mennonite Church, Fort Wayne, Ind., at their final service as a congregation on Nov. 22.

GOT STORY ABOUT HOW YOUR CONGREGATION IS REACHING OUT LOCALLY? Call 574-534-4006