

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10

The above verse is one of the key scriptures for IN-MI Conference's Annual Sessions on June 16-18 at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

Restore our Joy/Restore us, O God Annual Sessions to call IN-MI deeper into God's Kingdom

By **Elkhart Mennonite pastors**

God is the One that restores all of creation, including Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. This reality is what Elkhart Mennonite pastors seek to inspire at Annual Sessions on June 16-18.

The site of the sessions is Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind. That's where the wall sculpture of the Lord's prayer -- "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" -- will focus IN-MI on whose Kingdom it strives toward, and the One who empowers it to do so.

During their planning, Elkhart pastors sought to shape 2016 sessions around the theme "Restore Our Joy/ Restore us, O God." Psalm 51 is one of the scripture texts highlighting this theme: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

Planners said, "We wondered if the image of creating/recreating

wasn't just personal but also corporate, as if God is creating a new thing, a new world inside not just each of us, but also as the gathered churches of IN-MI Conference. And it is out of this recreation that joy is restored, a gift we pray for and receive, yet don't generate ourselves."

In opening worship, Alan Kreider, Professor Emeritus of Church History and Mission at AMBS, will explore the joy of the early Christians in his sermon, "Patient Ferment," as he describes the resilience of the early church and its implications for today.

A strong focus at the sessions will be storytelling. The Elkhart area
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relating in regions



From left: 1 Cheryl Martin, Shalom Mennonite Church 2. Mark Schloneger, North Goshen Mennonite Church 3. Mara Weaver, Prairie Street Mennonite Church and George Thompson, Missional Leadership Team member. Photos provided.

Delegates share wisdom Gather in Wyoming, Mich., and Kokomo, Ind.

By IN-MI Conference staff

Though the future has yet to unfold, delegates at two regional meetings in March shared their wisdom regarding IN-MI Conference's journey forward.

After members of the conference's Missional Leadership Team (MLT) shared a draft vision, they invited delegates to create "wisdom sheets" at their table groups. The sheets were gathered and studied as fuel for further discernment during Annual Sessions on June 16-18.

Participants who shared their wisdom included the north delegates, who met March 5 at Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich; and the south

delegates, who met March 12 at Howard-Miami Church in Kokomo, Ind.

"The delegates did a wonderful job of engaging one another about the vision," said Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor. They discussed the draft vision after Gene Hartman, IN-MI Conference moderator, shared "Pieces of a Vision" and "Regarding breadth of variance."

"We invite pastors and congregations to strive for a more comprehensive vision than simply on breadth of variance we are willing and able to live with," Hartman said. "Looking down the road as best we can, we want

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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.

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relating in regions

to set in place a few things to shape conference direction without creating structure that inhibits the Spirit.”

Some pieces of that direction include: 1) centering conference life around the unified confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior 2) a possible revision of the IN-MI mission statement to convey: “We are a community of congregations centered on Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, acting through grace and love, engaging the world God loves in the spirit of peace” 3) centering ourselves on Jesus in worship, celebration and witness and 4) sharing spiritual practices, including prayer, fasting and generous giving.

Other elements of the delegate events included an opening worship, lunch and time for visiting and communion.

This collage of photos gives a glimpse of the joy, prayer, wisdom, reflection and fellowship that unfolded at the gatherings.



From top clockwise: 1. Left, Sarah and Ben Schlegel, Howard-Miami Mennonite, Jane Stotlzfus Buller, Walnut Hill Mennonite and Eleanor Kreider, Prairie Street Mennonite 2. Amigo Centre display 3. Left, Jonathon Brown, Church Without Walls, Mike Yordy, Journey Church, Barb Christophel, Holdeman Mennonite, Marcella Hershberger, Bonneyville Mennonite Church and Steve Slagel, Maple River Mennonite Church. 4. Bob Yoder, Missional Leadership Team 5. Steve Klotz, Olive Mennonite Church 6. Dwelling in the word, center Rebecca Kauffman, Paoli Mennonite Church, and Lane Miller, Kern Road Mennonite Church 7. Mary Mininger, regional pastor 8. Erin Lian, Mara Christian Church of America. Photos provided.

Engaging with the Bible Study of scriptures becomes guide for life

By **Kevin Miller**, Bethany Christian Schools communication coordinator

The Bible forms the basis for how I should act and treat people around me, said Bethany Christian Schools senior Alex Reinhardt. Yet at the same time, he admits that if not for Bible classes at Bethany, he probably wouldn't engage with the Bible like he should.

If we are honest, many church members -- not just youth like Alex -- would find a disparity between the time we wish we spent with the Bible and actual time spent with the Bible. A 2013 study by Lifeway Research found that only 25 percent of adult churchgoers study the Bible at least weekly and 53 percent admit to never or rarely studying it.

Helping youth become more biblically literate and develop practices they can continue as adults is a significant benefit of Bethany's Bible curriculum. Bethany provides biblical instruction in grades 4-12 that includes engaging students with reading and understanding the Bible.



Fifth grader Samuel Klopfenstein has fun with the 1 and 2 Samuel notecards that he and classmates use to practice Bible memorization. Photo by Bethany Christian Schools

A 2013 Lifeway Research study found that only 25 percent of adult churchgoers study the Bible at least weekly and 53 percent admit to never or rarely studying it.

An important starting point for engaging the Bible is learning to know the books of the Bible. Students may have some familiarity with the Bible from home and church. But few students know how to find biblical passages (e.g. less than half of the sixth graders this year).

These basic skills are important to using the Bible regularly in (or outside of) class, whether fifth graders studying the Pentateuch, seventh graders studying the life of Jesus in Luke, or high school students digging deeper into the Old and New Testaments.

Scripture memorization also helps students engage with the Bible. For lower grades this may be a verse related to a study unit. High school students memorize larger portions. Sophomore New Testament students memorize the Sermon on the Mount.

Seniors examine different ways people study and interpret the Bible. They write a series of reflective essays on authorities in their lives, the role and importance of the Bible for them and who helps them interpret passages they find confusing.

Senior Lindsey Riddle uses a multi-step hermeneutical approach by studying different translations, consulting others individually or in a small group and prayer.

Senior Alicia Thomas stresses the importance of church community, saying, "I look up to people who helped raise me. Though I may not agree with some of their beliefs, I still find them valuable to hear."

Reinhardt also values the importance of community in reading, discussing, and understanding scripture. He says, "I am a man of faith but also a man of reason and science. God gave us the power of reason and thought, and we should use that to the best of our capability."



Matt Ropp, new executive director at Amigo Centre, wife Rachel and baby Eli. Photo provided

Making a move for Christ

Transitioning from corporate work to non-profit ministry

By **Matt Ropp**, Amigo Centre Executive Director

In January, I made a major life change when I became Executive Director at Amigo Centre. I left a corporate accounting position in a publicly traded company to assume a leadership position at a non-profit.

I didn't hear a voice calling me to make this move, but it was something that fell into place. The move is allowing me and my family a new avenue for meaningful work.

Camping has played an important role in my life. I grew up in Iowa City, Iowa, and attended summer camps at Crooked Creek Christian Camp in Washington, Iowa. It was where I accepted Christ into my heart and worked as a summer counselor. Being on summer staff is a privilege. I know camps struggle to find quality individuals, especially males, to fill these roles. It is a great opportunity to explore a calling to ministry.

As a high school student, my family attended family camp at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp (RMMC). It has been an important place for my family; we occasionally return for a week to enjoy the mountains.

Between my time at Hesston (Kan.) College and Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., I spent a year

volunteering at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center. My wife, Rachel, and I worked in guest services -- a generic, open-ended title that meant we did a little bit of everything. We helped in the kitchen, with maintenance and did office work. We chased bears, pulled snakes out of dryer vents and attended programs when duties were done.

"I didn't hear a voice calling me to make this move, but it was something that fell into place." — Matt Ropp

Camp is where kids often commit to Christ. And camps minister to those outside of the church. Amigo Centre hosts a camp for kids given scholarships provided by donations and a fundraiser golf tournament. This shows Christ's love to families that may not experience it on a regular basis.

Camp creates a space for people to refocus and rebuild relationships with Christ, nature and others. It is where learning happens and the Holy Spirit is felt.

We hope to continue doing this at Amigo Centre. Our hope and prayer is that all of our guests experience Christ's love in our space and through our service.

Exploring conference history Author Rich Preheim unearths story of faithfulness

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

Author-historian Rich Preheim shares reflections on his writing of *The Pursuit of Faithfulness* (Herald Press, 2016). In the book, he investigates the heritage and innovations of IN-MI Conference that have profoundly shaped Mennonite faith and practice since the 19th century.

QUESTION: What surprised you most in your research for this book?

ANSWER: How germane the Indiana-Michigan story is to my own story as well as to the vast numbers of American Mennonites and international Mennonites. This conference's story is not just a provincial history and that was really striking for me.

What happened here has been at the fore of a lot of major developments in the church -- both positive and

ential American Mennonite period. He for sure rivaled the late H.S. Bender. Also, IN-MI is home to Prairie Street Mennonite Church that birthed Elkhart Institute, which became Goshen College. Mennonite Central Committee was founded in Elkhart, and Mennonite Board of Missions originated as an IN-MI project.

I came to the IN-MI story as the descendent of Russian Mennonites and the General Conference Mennonite Church journey. And yet, I found so much in my research that pointed back to the roots of all that has shaped my own personal history -- journalism, mutual aid, schools and publishing.

QUESTION: What was your biggest challenge in researching and writing this book?

ANSWER: Writing in a balanced and sensitive way about the legacy and lament of John Howard Yoder. Unlike many other parts of this book that occurred generations ago, this is current. There are still so many raw emotions and woundedness at the surface without having the benefit that comes with the passage of more time.

QUESTION: What lessons can be gleaned from the journey of IN-MI Conference?

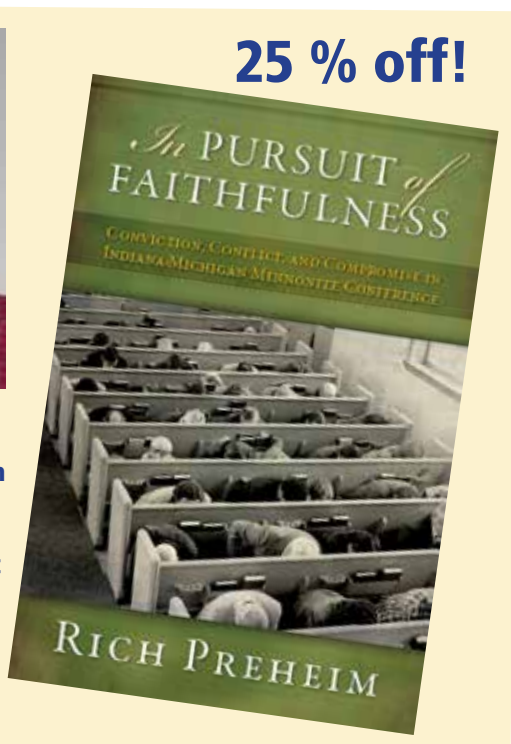
ANSWER: The study of the conflicts of the past can help us identify the roots of our conflicts today. For example, our struggles over the LGBTQ issue today may represent a new topic. But the polarization that has emerged from it is very similar to the polarizations in the past -- those who wanted to ordain women, those who didn't; those who wanted plain dress and those who didn't.

Most importantly, a careful reading of our past shows that people on both sides of an issue have, for the most part, desired to be faithful to a faithful God. By examining the IN-MI story -- its pursuit of faithfulness in its context -- we can better see how differing views of faithfulness can arouse conflict and divisiveness.

God knows fallible humans try to be faithful in the context they perceive and are shaped within. God knows that people who seek to be faithful will struggle. It is we who forget that. History can help us remember.



Rich Preheim explores the history of Indiana-Michigan Conference. The book will sell for a 25 percent discount at Annual Sessions. Retail: \$49.95, hardcover; \$34.95, softcover.



25 % off!

conflictual. On the positive side, for example, the genesis of Mennonite missions began in IN-MI. It was also where the late John F. Funk left his mark on the Mennonite world. In my opinion, he was the most influential Mennonite of the 19th century, and possibly the most influ-

Restoring our joy (continued from page 1)

congregations will share stories that describe their histories, current faith family journeys and the ways they engage their communities with the good news of Jesus.

Worshipful work sessions will include a focus on a draft of IN-MI's vision statement seeking to give direction for next steps together. The conference's Missional Leadership Team (MLT) will give presentations on the draft vision and then invite table group discussion and communal feedback.

Four directions identified in this draft are:

- * Centering life around Jesus
- * Creating a new covenant organized around beliefs and spiritual practices
- * Identifying a discernment process
- * Incorporating the Unity and Variance recommendations into this larger picture for moving ahead

A larger segment of the sessions is also being reserved for corporate worship as a way to usher in a restoration of the joy of Christ's kingdom within IN-MI conference.

ANNUAL SESSIONS, June 16-18, AMBS *SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS*

Thursday: Registration will begin at **noon**. Alan Kreider will give a workshop, "Patient Ferment," from **1 to 3 p.m.** From **3 to 5:15 p.m.**, worshipful work. At **5:30 p.m.**, pastors will enjoy an appreciation dinner at Belmont Mennonite. Other participants will have supper in the Lambright Center.

Friday: From **9-10 a.m.**, Roll call and the first set of Gathering Stories from Elkhart churches. From **10:30 to 11:50 a.m.**, worshipful work. From **12 noon -1:15 p.m.**, lunch. From **1:30-2:30 p.m.**, worshipful work. From **3 to 3:30 p.m.**, Gathering Stories II. From **3:30-5:00 p.m.**, "Patient Ferment." From **7-7:30 p.m.**, Gathering Stories III. From **7:30-8:30 p.m.**, worship. At **9 p.m.**, IN-MI update.

Saturday: From **8:30-9:30 a.m.**, Prayer walk led by Elkhart pastors. From **10-11:30 a.m.**, closing worship and blessing.

ANNUAL SESSIONS REGISTRATION INFORMATION:

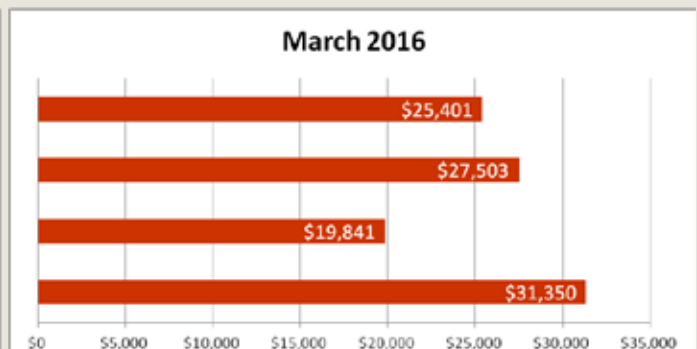
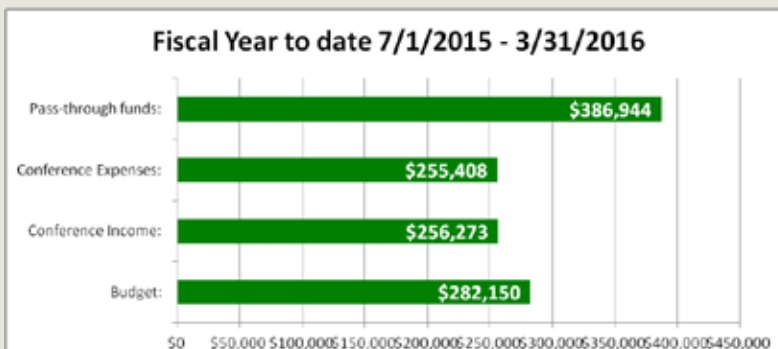
Before June 1, registration is \$90. After June 1, on-site cost is \$100.
To register online: im.mennonite.net/calendar/annual-sessions.
To obtain a printable form, contact IN-MI offices at 574- 534-4006.

Due to space limitations at AMBS, the first 200 people to register may attend.
So don't delay!!!!

financial report

By **Dan Miller**, IN-MI Conference pastor

February and March have been financially challenging months. We are especially grateful for the congregational contributions that we have received. Thank you and thanks be to God.



journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, reflects on both the outward and inward journey of following Jesus in engaging the world.

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a community of congregations seeking to faithfully follow Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we are called to engage the world God loves (outward) and to engage the God who loves the world (inward). Both outward and inward journeys nurture our relationship with God.

Conference leaders are testing pieces of a vision to carry us forward. You can read some about that on pages 2-3, where delegates responded in meetings March 5 and 12. A common comment as people discussed "Pieces of a Vision" at the March delegate meetings, was that Mennonites naturally think about doing, perhaps due partly to an emphasis on "following" Jesus. Following naturally implies outward activity. James writes, "...I by my works will show you my faith." (James 3:18) At the same time, we want our works to spring from a vibrant spiritual life. What if, as we discern new vision for conference, we asked the Holy Spirit to heal, transform and challenge us on both journeys?

The vision document speaks of shared practices. At one place it says, "We will practice prayer, fasting and generous giving to separate ourselves from the influence of the principalities and powers of this age and to make us available to fully participate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus." I'm suggesting between now and Annual Sessions on June 16-18 in Elkhart, Ind., we give ourselves to these three practices as an experiment, to see what difference they make in our outward and inward journey.

Maybe you've been doing this regularly for many years. Maybe you've done one, or perhaps they are all new to you. Will you try this experiment? Let's see what difference it makes.

tribute

On Sunday, January 10, Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, celebrated 24 years of pastoral ministry with Dagne Assefa, wife Carol Weaver, and his family. Regional pastor Mary Mininger referred to his work with the congregation and IN-MI as "a long obedience in the same direction!" (Eugene Peterson). Many words of deep love and appreciation were shared for Dagne's empowering, servant leadership and pastoral care. Copastor Brian Bither created a top 10 list of learnings from working beside Dagne. The top three were: 3. The small stuff matters 2. Empowering others to lead and 1. The greatest of these is love. Thank you, Dagne, for being the living face and feet of Christ in our midst.

ministry transitions



Lyle Miller (right below) concluded his pastoral ministry at Waterford Mennonite Church on March 31.

Stephen Post, not pictured, ended as pastor at Grand Marais on April 3.

Lee, (left), and Sue Dengler (right) concluded their pastoral ministry at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., on April 30.



Melissa Fisher Fast, above, ended her ministry at Sunnyside Mennoite Church on May 15.

Beginnings



Phil Bontrager was installed May 8 as transitional pastor at Grand Marais by Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership.



Sarah Thompson was licensed for ministry April 10 with Christian Peacemaker Teams by Sharon Yoder, interim pastor for leadership training.