

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Annual Session 2020

Congregational Updates

Update on Congregational Membership Process

Dawning of a New Day

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Piedra Viva

Dawning of A New Day

In 2017, Robert Hunt began the process of associating with IMMC, with the goal of his small congregation, Dawning of a New Day, becoming part of the conference. Since that time, Robert has had a heart attack and open heart surgery, in March 2018, and upon recovery has needed to pursue employment. Along with other health issues, and most recently the coronavirus limitations, Robert and his wife Earlene have not been able to sustain a ministry of congregational development and nurture, with the consequence that the congregation has dispersed, and the Hunts have associated with another local congregation.

Robert has a deep appreciation for the IMMC's eagerness to receive and support his ministry. He continues to feel the call of God upon his life, and wants to maintain relationship with Mennonite churches and pastors in Elkhart. However, in light of present circumstances, he acknowledges the reality that he's not leading a local congregation that can seek IMMC involvement, nor is he able to pursue credentialing at this time. He thanks the Conference for its support and on-going prayers, and thanks God for God's faithfulness to him and Earlene and for God's mission to call disciples and create a Beloved Community.

Respectfully submitted by Keith Kingsley, Robert Hunt, and Jon Brown

North Main Street Mennonite Church

140 years ago, David Burkholder was ordained minister to a group of Mennonites who were meeting in Nappanee, IN, thus establishing the North Main St. Mennonite Church. It grew and flourished, surviving a split in 1923 when a number of people formed another church and joined the General Conference Mennonite Church. The North Main St. meeting house was enlarged in 1912, 1921, and 1952. God has used this church to reach out to many people needing the love of Christ in their lives. In more recent history, their numbers began to seriously decline until the small congregation was made up of mostly retired people. The end of July in 2018, longstanding pastor Ruben Chupp retired. This seemed to nudge more people to look for another church. Danny Jones agreed to preach between the time Ruben left and Randy was able to come.

Randy Miller came as a transitional pastor and helped the small congregation work through some heart wrenching decisions on what to do. Should they find a new pastor and continue as they had been doing (noting that most pastors looking for a church were looking for full time involvement), or should they close their doors and sell the building. Financially, it was becoming very difficult for the small older congregation to maintain the large building. These people still had a lot to offer a church, but it was becoming evident that they just couldn't do it all. The Sunday school hour was used for a number of meetings where people were encouraged to share their feelings and opinions without judgement.

The decision was finally reached to close North Main St. Mennonite Church and sell the building, plus some rental homes on adjoining properties that the church also owned. The Berea Christian Fellowship church bought the building and the North Main congregation was gratified to know that all the Sunday school rooms downstairs would soon be buzzing with the happy voices of children again.

A special service was held on July 28, 2019 where many past members came to celebrate the life of North Main St. Mennonite Church. The final service was held on August 18, 2019.

The monies from the sale of the properties were used to pay off any outstanding financial obligations the church had before the rest was donated in various increments to the following: Indiana Michigan Conference-Church Planting, Mennonite Mission Network, Bethany Christian Schools, Amigo Centre, AMBS, World Conference, Associate Groups, Mennonite Disabilities Committee, Mennonite Central Committee, Meat Canning, Relief Sale Project, MCC Relief Sale, RETA, Faith Mission, Boys & Girls Club, Bible Memory Program, Mennonite Disaster Service, Family Christian Development Center, WA-NEE Released Time, IN/MI Women in Mission, Mennonite Women USA, and MennoMedia-Curriculum Development. The official closing will be by the end of 2020 after all checks have cleared the bank.

The congregation is grateful to IN/MI Conference for their assistance, through Randy Miller and Dan Miller, in walking through this difficult process with them.

Submitted by Vera Leinbach

Lake Bethel Mennonite Church

Lake Bethel Mennonite Church began in Milford Township of LaGrange County Indiana in 1956 as an outpost of the Plato congregation, also in LaGrange County. Titus Morningstar was the first licensed minister to serve the congregation. Lake Bethel has maintained a consistent Mennonite presence in the eastern part of the county, also maintaining the practice of acapella singing in its Sunday morning service.

Mike Brudney, the current pastor, is a 2013 graduate of Journey: A Leadership Development Program begun by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC), AMBS (now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) and Central District Conference. Mike has a moving testimony of God's grace in his life and connected the church in new ways with the LaGrange community.

In a letter received August 27, 2019, the conference received this communication from the pastor and elders:

We have pondered, and prayed, and earnestly sought guidance from the Holy Spirit as to our mission in our community.

We will continue to uphold the theology of the Anabaptist tradition as we aspire to serve God and humanity. And we feel compelled to align ourselves with other churches that carry the same belief structure. God's blessings on all of you, and the congregations of Indiana-Michigan Conference.

The congregation's intent was for their change in affiliation to take effect December 31, 2018. The Ministry Credentialing Team acknowledged this change at their September 21, 2019 meeting, along with the congregation's intended effectiveness date.

Submitted by Dan Miller, conference pastor

Paoli Mennonite Fellowship

In 1974 a group of physicians and nurses attending First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis moved to Paoli, Indiana, to begin a medical practice which would serve the needs of a rural community. Shortly after their move to Paoli the group decided to begin a Mennonite fellowship. In the fall of that year a small house church was formed and chose the name Paoli Mennonite Fellowship. This house church grew until they were no longer able to meet in homes. In 1976 the local Methodist church invited the group to worship in their facility Sunday evenings. After moving to several other locations the group decided to build a church building which was completed in 1986. From the beginning the congregation was committed to being a part of both Indiana Michigan Conference and Central District Conference.

Tom Kauffman began his ministry with the congregation in 1976. Other pastors serving the congregation include: Chuck and Linda Watson, Mary and Phil Mininger, Matt Pflederer and Rebecca Kauffman. Congregational participants have served in leadership positions at various times throughout the history of the congregation. The congregation is currently in the search process for a pastor.

In an August 16 2019 letter, the conference received this communication on behalf of the pastor elder team:

We do not take lightly the significant history of relationships with IN-MICH staff and congregations throughout our 45 year history! It is with heavy hearts that we accept this change.

The change to single affiliation with Central District Conference took effect on December 31, 2019.

Submitted by Evie Shellenberger

Piedra Viva

On August 25, 2016 Steve Slagel and Dan Miller met with Rolando Sosa and Naun Cerrato to talk about Naun's desire to plant a Spanish-speaking congregation that would be part of IMMC. Naun articulated a vision for Spanish-speaking congregations across the Michiana area. At the time, Naun was working and taking a class at AMBS. He graduated in May 2018.

In early 2019 Naun contacted the conference office to talk about a church he had started, Piedra Viva, and that he wanted the church to become a member of IMMC. He was gathering a leadership group and having Bible studies with them. He asked about a place to meet, and we talked about three or four Elkhart County churches that had connections with the Latinx community.

Piedra Viva Mennonite Church had its first public worship service on December 22, 2019 at Sunnyside Mennonite Church building in Elkhart, Indiana. There were about 50 people present, including a number of special guests, with Naun and the leadership team leading service.

Sunnyside Mennonite Church has warmly welcomed Piedra Viva to meet in their building. Charlie Geiser, one of Sunnyside's pastors has related closely with Naun, functioning informally and formally as a mentor.

Members of the Ministry Credentialing Team have participated in Piedra Viva worship and also met with their leadership team. Naun was credentialed for his ministry and installed as pastor on June 14.

Submitted by Suella Lehman Gerber, MCT chair