

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations
of indiana-michigan mennonite conference
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Photograph by Greg Leatherman Sommers

Above: delegates engage in discussion at the Southern regional meeting at First Mennonite, Indianapolis, on March 9.

Regional Delegate Meetings Fellowship & Conversation

By **Rachel Denlinger**, Communications Coordinator

Throughout February and March, regional delegate meetings were held in each of the five regions of IN-MI Conference. These meetings provided an opportunity for congregational delegates to interact, worship, and discuss various topics facing individual churches and the conference as a whole.

Delegates dwelled on the Annual Sessions scripture—Matthew 11:28-30—and shared insights they gleaned with each other on rest, burdens, and Jesus' yoke.

Following a time of worship, conversation shifted to missional transformation within congregations. Regional pastors shared their observations drawn from the congregations they oversee:

- Many congregations are in the early stages of missional transformation, learning which experiments or programs are more effective

- In some congregations, people's eyes light up when talking about what their church is up to
- Many people struggle with busyness and lack of time
- Some congregations have a sense of heaviness and failure about being missional
- Some are content with the way things are
- Some think of missional as another activity to do, rather than as a way of being
- Some desire more availability of resources: people, workshops, support.

Delegates were then asked with which statements they most identify, as well as what hopes and challenges they see in their own congregations. Many different topics were touched on, but an overwhelming number acknowledged that busyness is a big issue. (continued on page 4)

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meet our new staff

John Powell

New Regional Pastor for the Northern Region

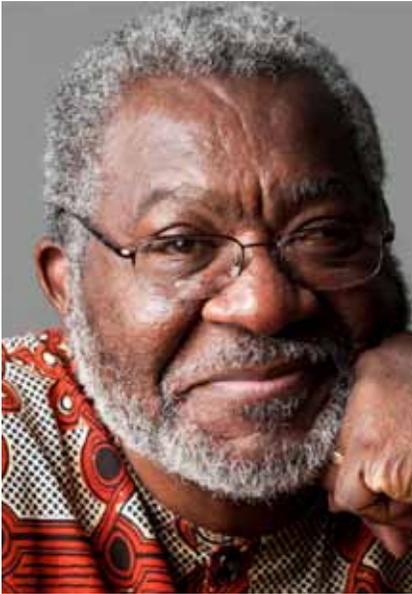


Photo by David Fisher Fast

On March 18, IN-MI Conference welcomed John Powell as the new regional pastor for the northern region. John was strongly affirmed by the northern region delegates to fill this role, formerly held by co-regional pastors Bill Scott and Jim Gerber. We wish to thank Bill and Jim for their service.

John and his wife, Shirley, live in Ypsilanti, Michigan. John is an ordained minister with Mennonite Church USA. He continues ongoing work with area conferences and congregations to equip churches with holistic ministries for community renewal. He helps identify and prepare leaders to connect

to mission in local and international settings. He brings a wealth of knowledge and diverse experiences to his new position with conference.

Could you share about your sense of call to this position and this type of work? I have been assisting congregations as they explore their missional identity and ways to engage their communities for the past 20 years. This position allows me to continue assisting congregations to develop the necessary skills and strategies for holistic ministry, both internally and externally.

What energizes you about pastoring? Observing and helping people develop a deeper faith and understanding of their relationship to Christ and the world is exciting to me. Members are at different stages in their spiritual development. Supporting people as they develop their ministry gifts gives me energy.

This issue is available online:
im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel



Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference—a conference of Mennonite Church USA—is a community of 77 congregations in Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee, gathered together for mutual encouragement in kingdom mission and inspiration to joyfully follow Jesus.

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Missional Leadership Team Members: Wes Bontreger, moderator, Goshen, IN; Jane Stoltzfus Buller, moderator-elect, Goshen, IN; Neil Amstutz, Goshen, IN; Aimee Mayeda, Indianapolis, IN; George Thompson, treasurer, Auburn Hills, MI; James Troyer, Manistique, MI; Anita Yoder, Goshen, IN.

What challenges do you anticipate facing in this new role? I think the major challenge that I will experience is helping congregational leaders and members focus on a common mission and call. Congregations are looking to grow numerically and spiritually; however, they don't always have a common vision to move their ministry forward. My task is to help them explore their ministry calling.

What do you see as strengths of IN-MI Conference? I think IN-MI Conference's strength is its congregations. I see members wanting to be "light" in their communities. When I've visited congregations in the conference, I have experienced a sense of community. There is a desire for those without faith to experience community and a reconciled life.

Could you share about a Scripture passage that is meaningful for you? My ministry has always been keyed on Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This has been the mantra for my ministry as I have worked among congregations. As disciples of Jesus, I believe that this is the calling for a Christ centered people and congregation.

Who has encouraged you to use the gifts they've seen in you? There have been numerous people who have been my mentor and encourager. Most notably, Dr. M.L. King, who encouraged me, as a young civil rights worker, to use my ministry gifts to work at reconciliation. After a hiatus from the Mennonite Church, I was "evangelized" back by many in the church who felt that I had insights into the needs in the church. I have been grateful for that encouragement. (continued on back cover)

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Soli Deo gloria!

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intercultural transformation

MLK Day Dine and Dialogue

By **Kelly Oglesby**, Pastoral Intern at First Mennonite of Indianapolis

On Martin Luther King Day, First Mennonite of Indianapolis hosted Dine and Dialogue, a free event intended to provide a community engagement experience and to further the understanding and manifestation of the 'Beloved Community' espoused by King. As pastoral intern, I was ecstatic when the Pastor-Elder team embraced and supported the concept I shared in early August 2012. This type of engagement is significant to me. I have been hosting it in some form or another all of my adult life.



The vision for this event developed from a painful experience in high school when I shared an essay in class. The topic was to select two people I would most like to have a dinner conversation with and why. I chose Martin Luther King and John Howard Griffin. I believed the sacrifices they made to understand racial tension, and then go about eradicating it, could empower me to do the same in my generation. My peers did not understand

Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they can not communicate; they can not communicate because they are separated.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

the concept and I was loudly heckled and jeered. Disappointed but determined, I continued to believe in the power and possibilities of that essay theme — coming around the table and talking is powerful, purposeful, and full of possibilities.

On MLK day, over 50 people responded to the invitation to dine and dialogue on specific topics related to reconciliation, social justice, peace, and intentional racial and ethnic diversity. Round tables were used to allow participants to easily see, hear, and reach out to one another. Each table had a designated topic with a special guest facilitator along with a table host who was a member of First Mennonite. Table topics ranged from public education to intimate partner violence, from ministering to the margins to

(continued on back cover)

guest facilitators

Minister Lynn Martin and **Mr. Rob Smith** are former inmates of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Each shared their experiences before, during, and after incarceration and the support they have received and need from community and church. Martin is now in seminary and an entrepreneur, and Smith is a husband and father, presently employed and completing a Bachelor of Science degree.

Dawana Stubbs, M.D. is an internationally recognized researcher and presenter and a board certified internal medicine specialist, with a special interest in caring for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. **Ann Grissom-Wilkins** is an educator serving as president of the Indianapolis Educators Association. **Daniel Dempsey** is a seminarian from Christian Theological Seminary who speaks to issues surrounding openly gay clergy.

Three facilitators co-led a group session on intentional fellowship and worship in a racialized society: **John "Jay" Douthitt** is a board member of Edna Martin Christian Center and a member of First Baptist Church, **Herman Oglesby** is a seminarian at Christian Theological Seminary, and **Ian Yearwood** is a teacher at an inner city charter school. Jay's congregation is predominantly white, and yet his Sunday school class has intentionally contracted Herman, who is black, to create and deliver their lessons. The relationship has developed and surpassed the contract and they have become community. Ian, who is white, lived in the suburbs and was raised in Catholic schools and churches, has developed a strong commitment and passion for diversity that is authentic and allows him to connect across social strata with ease and trust.

Jude Sutharshan, a seminarian from Sri Lanka, shared the concerns of peace, justice, and reconciliation that resonate with him for his home nation. His sharing awakened a strong awareness in participants that our problems and politics are connected, as should be our prayers. **Carl Ellison**, the vice-president and chief operating officer of the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, shared about minority health disparities and the costs to all society.

upcoming annual sessions

2013 Theme: Come. Rest. Learn.

Come, all IN-MI Mennonite Conference congregations and delegates, to the 2013 Annual Sessions, June 7-9 at Bethany Christian Schools in Goshen, Ind. The theme this year—"Come. Rest. Learn."—is based on Matthew 11:28-30.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Find refreshment for your soul through Christian formation experiences, fellowship, and worship. Learn from Jesus' gentle and humble heart new ways to lead yourself and others along the paths toward transformation. Further information on scheduled activities as well as online registration can be found on the conference website at im.mennonite.net/calendar/annual-sessions. Join us for a time of resting and learning with fellow sisters and brothers as we seek to follow in the way of Jesus!

come. rest. learn.

Regional Delegate Meetings (cont.)

People desire to do many things but lack time and feel stretched too far. Many were drawn to the idea that missional "is a way of being rather than doing."

Next, time was spent discussing financial issues and new ways of looking at congregational generosity. Then, delegates examined a proposal for a new task force on doctrinal variance. The task force's scope would address a wide range of issues, not just hot-button topics like sexual-

ity. In general, most participants agreed that, regardless of outcomes, ongoing discussion and deliberation on difficult issues is necessary and healthy for the life of the conference.

The meetings were a time of fruitful discussion—an opportunity for church leaders to connect with each other and learn and share ideas. We are glad for all who came and participated, and we especially thank the hosting congregations for their hospitality!



Northern regional meeting at Rexton Mennonite (Naubinway, Mich.)



Western regional meeting at Church Without Walls (Elkhart, Ind.)



Central regional meeting at East Goshen Mennonite (Ind.)



Eastern regional meeting at Liberty Christian Fellowship (Mich.)

Photos by conference staff

update: advisory council

Strengthening Connections

By **Jane Stoltzfus Buller**, Advisory Council chair

The Advisory Council met on January 26-27, Friday evening through Saturday afternoon, at Amigo Centre. We spent the evening hours dwelling in the Word using the text for our Annual Sessions—Matthew 11:28-30. It was a rich experience of considering yokes, Jesus’ invitations, learning, and resting. We then shared congregational and personal burdens we carry, as well as our thanksgiving for God’s goodness.

On Saturday morning we gathered in table groups. Each table group thought together about what the future church would be like if it were a truly authentic Christian Community. Ideas ranged from nurturing strong connections, especially as communities became more relevant in local neighborhoods, having multi-functioning buildings with a variety of uses, technological changes which would impact community life, changing demographics, and more Anabaptist in practice.

The council considered the two core principles the Missional Leadership Team (MLT) is suggesting will shape our work in 2013-2014. These principles are:

- 1) strengthening our connections and love for one another
- 2) cultivating a missional imagination and culture in our congregations



Photo by conference staff

We discussed how the seven Mennonite Church USA priorities provide a way to work at this. Table groups then shared how connections are happening in our conference and how we might foster our connectedness. The council was encouraged to ask the churches in their regions how they are connecting to conference.

And finally, the council looked at the proposal for a task force to develop a process for discerning ‘how we shall live together’ amidst a changing culture and diverse understandings. The council encouraged a focus on listening, prayer, honesty, scriptural foundation, and hearing from other conferences about what they are doing.

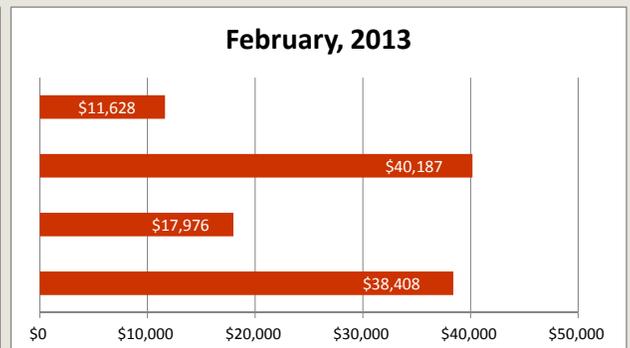
The Advisory Council is made up of about 25 people and we regularly have 18-20 at our meetings. Our next meeting is the last weekend of August.

financial report

By **Greg Leatherman Sommers**, Conference Administrator

We’ve had good stewardship discussions with congregational delegates at our regional meetings. Delegates have been providing valuable feedback to conference leadership during our conversations and through written feedback gathered at the end of each meeting.

February was a difficult month for conference finances. Compared to fiscal year 2011-2012, giving to conference is down over \$18,000 so far. Congregational donations lagged far behind expectations for the month of February. Giving to other ministries through conference also dropped significantly. Expenses for the month were slightly more than expected, largely due to increased travel and restocking supplies. Spending remains under budget for the fiscal year to date. Based on the last 5 years, our current fiscal year will end in deficit by \$33,000. Please consider increasing your support in each of these four ways: prayers, people (volunteer time), funding, and feedback.



Is “Missional” a Good Word?

By **Sadie Gustafson-Zook**, Bethany senior

The missional label is often overused. Some books insert “missional” into the title as a selling point. But what might a missional church look like and why is the Mennonite church concerned with being missional today?



Early Anabaptists were very missional-minded. They shared their beliefs with their neighbors and were dedicated to living out their faith, even to the point of death. This public dedication gradually disappeared and Mennonites became content to quietly live with the mentality “let us worship in private and we won’t bother you.”

Sadie Gustafson-Zook is a senior at Bethany and attends Faith Mennonite with her parents Les and Gwen Gustafson-Zook. Sadie is a member of the school’s orchestra and performing arts troupe, Emmaus. She has performed in folk concerts with her parents for ten years, and in 2010 released her own CD, *Melange*. In September 2011 she became the youngest person to win a first-place award in the New Song Showcase at the internationally renowned Walnut Valley Festival for her song, “Unless I Loved,” which is based on 1 Corinthians 13. Sadie plans to attend Goshen College to major in music. (Photo provided)

In the first half of the 20th century, Mennonites became increasingly interested in mission, in terms of “saving souls from hell.” In retrospect, this interpretation of mission may give the term “missional” bad connotations, if missional implies forcing people to get rid of their local customs and adopt Western Christianity.

During World War II, conscientious objectors began serving others without the intent to evangelize. H.S. Bender articulates this expression of faith in his essay, “The Anabaptist Vision.”

These ideas about mission combined with declining church membership and a more literal interpretation of the Great Commission contributed to the emergence of the missional movement of the late 20th century. This movement centers around going and making disciples (both locally and globally) instead of waiting for people to come to the church.

Many churches wrestle with ways to make their church more “missional,” but it isn’t easy. My Church History class at Bethany was given the challenge of organizing a hypothetical missional church. The teacher, Dale Shenk, split us into table groups and assigned each table a church responsibility: mission, worship, education, and fellowship. We talked in groups about how our area of the church could be missional; how we could extend the church into the community and increase membership.

Our ideas for missional integration include:

- Organizing diverse worship services in different community locations every week
- Sending longterm missions groups to international locations with a focus on building relationships
- Advertisements or invitations with the message of “meeting you on your faith journey”
- Offering missionary preparation classes (mainly for international missions, but also for lessons on how to best relate to the local community)
- Creating weekly or monthly community service days combined with a fellowship meal
- Starting a community organization run by church members to get the church immersed in the community

When the “missional” label is seen solely as a way to convert people and increase church membership, it turns young people away from the church. That type of missionality isn’t appealing or life giving. If churches focus more on relationship building between churches and the community and less on conversion, the church would grow. Focusing on interpersonal relationships with people different from us is one of the most appealing ways the Mennonite church can attract new people and retain its young people.



On Sunday, March 3, the annual **Mennonite Youth Choir Festival** was held at the Goshen College Music Center. Lola Gingerich was recognized for making the youth choir festival what it is today over the past 20+ years. A founder of the festival in 1992, she has worked quietly, tirelessly, and effectively behind the scenes to give hundreds of young singers the opportunity to practice and perform with others of like talent to the Glory of God. Her dedication and vision has kept choral singing alive among the youth in the Mennonite church and in other faith traditions. (Photo by Greg Leatherman Sommers)

Remembering Damdouane

By **Cheryl Mast**, Outdoor and Environmental Education Coordinator

"I tired" and "you fired!" were two phrases often heard out of Damdouane Mounsithiraj's mouth at Amigo Centre.

If you ever tasted her egg rolls, you appreciate how she tirelessly poured her love into her work in the Amigo kitchen. Damdouane's egg rolls were a beloved staple that she took pride in making. They were a hot seller at the annual Celebrate Amigo auction, were a favorite at staff/board dinners, and enjoyed by hosted groups such as the Andrews University faculty for their annual Friday night meal.

While Damdouane was very diligent in her work and had a keen eye for the presentation of food, she also possessed a great sense of humor! For summer staff and full time staff hearing "you fired!" was a routine proclamation, but it was her way of saying she cared.

Damdouane served in the Amigo kitchen for the past fifteen years. Not only did she touch lives through her cooking, she also touched a lot of hearts along the way as well. She left her earthly body on January 11, 2013 after a short battle with cancer. Stories shared at her memorial and on



Photo provided

Amigo's Facebook page are a reminder of what a special lady she was. She is survived by four children and nine grandchildren.

Visit Amigo Centre's Facebook page to read the stories and share your own.

Amigo Lifelong Learning

By **Mandy Yoder**, Adult Program Director

Amigo Centre is celebrating an exciting new program for seniors with curiosity and a desire to learn! Officially known as Amigo Lifelong Learning, or ALL for short, we are providing opportunities for seniors 55 and older to enjoy stimulating and affordable short courses and activities

covering a variety of interests. No tests or grades—just pure JOY in learning, with no pre-requisites!

- Classes and field trips will be held primarily on Wednesdays.
- Sessions will be held in the morning from 9–11:30 and in the afternoon from 1:30–4, including short breaks.
- Lunch at Amigo Centre is optional for participants.
- May 1 through mid-October, 2013, multiple options will be available for each session.
- Additional limited events will continue over the winter months.
- Membership fees of \$25 per individual or \$35 per couple and members are asked to complete a brief survey.



Photo provided

There will be an introductory meeting at Amigo Centre on April 10, 2013, beginning at 10:00am. Anyone is welcome. If you'd like to stay for lunch there is a \$10 fee for non-members. To register for this meeting or to learn more, call Amigo Centre at 269-651-2811.



Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions, took a spill on February 16 during one of his frequent ice skating excursions and suffered a serious concussion. A CT scan showed a mild subdural hematoma (bleeding in the brain). After spending a night in the hospital for observation, he returned home with instructions to rest. He experienced some vertigo and severe fatigue the first few weeks, but his prognosis is good and full recovery is expected in about eight weeks. During this time he has done minimal amounts of work from home and is slowly increasing his workload. After a month, the vertigo subsided and he was given the go-ahead to return to tasks such as driving and biking. Since Doug is a very active person, this experience has required a lot of patience, but he remains upbeat. Thanks go to members of the Ministry Credentialing Team, who have picked up some of Doug's responsibilities while he recovers.

Dine and Dialogue (cont.) John Powell (cont.)

eradicating disparities in health care, from fellowship in a racialized society to poverty and unmasking the pain and people behind the numbers, and more.

The participants were randomly assigned a table, because that is how life seems to happen—at the most random time we find ourselves in the middle of a social situation. Participants engaged in a shared meal while discussing these meaningful topics. The facilitators presented a brief overview of their perspective and then open discussion followed. The table hosts were there to keep the flow from becoming too intense or from languishing. After about 50 minutes, the participants were assigned to a new table.

At first there was trepidation that the topics were dangerous. Afterwards the consensus was that the danger lies in not having the discussions. The conversation flowed and connections were made; the atmosphere was genuinely alive with interest, hope, and possibilities.

There was no charge to share a meal and all facilitators volunteered their time. It was a unique opportunity to spend time with community members sharing experiences and learning how we can become living expressions of peace, justice, and equality for one another.

Could you tell us a little about your background?

I was born and reared in Alabama in the Baptist tradition. I was encouraged to seek membership in a historic peace church after becoming a pacifist during the civil rights movement in the 1960's. After I got married, my wife and I moved to Detroit where I was licensed to the ministry at Detroit Mennonite Church (now Peace Mennonite). I have pastored in Detroit, Wichita, Kan. and Buffalo, N.Y. giving me a variety of experiences. I served as an Overseer of congregations in New York Mennonite Conference during my tenure in Buffalo.

Could you tell us about your family?

I am married to Shirley J. Powell (nee) Hochstedler. We have been married for 47 years. Prior to retiring in 1993, Shirley was Executive Director for Hunger Action Coalition of Michigan. We have three adult children and three grandchildren.

What are some of your hobbies and interests?

I am a gospel singer, an aspiring writer, and a computer geek.

Favorite book: *The Book of God: The Bible as a Novel* by Walter Wangerin, Jr.

When I was a kid, I dreamed of being: a US Senator.

Favorite musical genres: gospel, jazz, and classical.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Cindy Voht was installed as pastor of community life at Waterford Mennonite (Goshen, Ind.) on February 3 by Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions.



Lora Nafziger was licensed and installed at Assembly Mennonite (Goshen, Ind.) on March 3 by Jacob Elias, Ministry Credentialing Team member, along with Lois Kaufmann, conference minister of Central District Conference.



Randy Miller was ordained for pastoral ministry on March 3 at Walnut Hill (Goshen, Ind.) by Jacob Elias. Randy is currently serving as transitional pastor at Howard-Miami (Kokomo, Ind.).