P astors, church leaders, and spouses from the Northern Michigan region met for an annual retreat January 17–19. The weekend’s theme centered on illustrations of how Christians are called to be salt and light to the world.

“We are called to live in such a way that other people come to us because they see that what we have makes a difference,” said David B. Miller, who facilitated the retreat at the Augustine Center in Conway, Mich. Miller is the director of Missional Leadership Development at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Miller reminded the retreat participants of the history of the church before, during, and after “Christendom.” Our challenge today, he said, is to reach unbelievers not by our rational explanations, but rather by our demonstrations of forgiveness and love.

(continued on back cover)
Marion Mennonite Church is a rural congregation that sits roughly seven miles northeast of Shipshewana, Ind. While its setting is fairly remote, its reach into the surrounding community goes deep. Marion began as a church plant of Shore Mennonite in 1941. Since that time, it has seen its fair share of change. In just the last five years, the church’s size has more than doubled from 70 to nearly 180 regular attendees. But numbers don’t really tell the story.

Marion’s story is one of a vibrant and adaptive church with a prayer-centered approach to issues that have brought conflict in the past. A decade ago, a painful church split reduced the congregation to half its former size. “That was very difficult,” says Gary Mast, pastor. “That’s the only time we’ve had much conflict in the church, but it brought conflict in the past. A decade ago, a painful church split reduced the congregation to half its former size. “That was very difficult,” says Gary Mast, pastor. “That’s the only time we’ve had much conflict in the church, but it brought conflict in the past.”

The church split resulted in a new congregation and a large range of religious backgrounds present in its participants. With the recent increase in regular attenders, church leaders began to pray about how to handle their overcrowded sanctuary. Should they launch a church plant or build an addition? They created a prayer wall to pray about it, and leaders began to pray about handling their over-crowded sanctuary. The enthusiasm and friendliness of its members. There is a strong ‘come-as-you-are’ atmosphere. “People feel comfortable here,” says Gary. “They accept who they are, and good-natured hospitality and home cooking are extended freely.

A big part of what keeps people coming back is that “everybody has a chance to get plugged in,” Gary says. “That’s crucial.” The church has a number of ministry groups for people to get involved in and feel part of the church family.

Another factor in Marion’s growth is its youth program. Bible studies, service projects, and mentors have provided a supportive community for young people. Unlike some rural churches who find their youth leaving for college never to return, Marion has seen many former youth members come back after college.

Marion church members gathered in the old sanctuary to help with a service project. On the left is Mike Mast and on the right are Gary Mast (seated) and his wife Lynnette Mast.

Pastor Char Roth points to the fact that, “When college students come home on breaks they have a place to plug in. They feel a part of the church.” They stay in the area, get married, and start families of their own, remaining actively involved in the congregation.

Elder Mike and his wife Judy served for a number of years as youth leaders and now work with the young adult group. Mike says, “Young people invite their friends—many from non-religious backgrounds—and they stick around. It’s pretty amazing to see.” Although their high school age group is smaller now than in previous years, their young adult group is flourishing. “People recognize that the enthusiasm and friendliness of its members. There is a strong ‘come-as-you-are’ atmosphere. “People feel comfortable here,” says Gary. “They accept who they are, and good-natured hospitality and home cooking are extended freely.

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leadership transitions

A Unique Pastoral Transition at Pleasant View

By Tyler Hartford, Pleasant View Mennonite

In August 2006, I began serving Pleasant View Mennonite Church as associate pastor. This was my first assignment out of seminary, and the last seven years have flown by. While there have been the usual ministry challenges, the congregation and I have connected well and we share a mutual respect and love. In the fall of 2013, Pleasant View’s long-time lead pastor, Ron Diener, approached the elder team with a proposal for his moving to three-quarter time associate pastor so he could spend more time in volunteer work and pursuing other personal interests. Part of his proposal included processing with the congregation whether I should be moved to lead pastor. This conversation paralleled one that he and I had a year earlier. In August, the congregation heard from Ron and the elder team, and several weeks were provided for questions and feedback. On September 29, we held a congregational round table discussion. Individuals were encouraged to provide feedback on half-sheets of paper, allowing elders to hear concerns and address them. An affirmation ballot was presented on October 27 asking the congregation if it was ready for me to assume the lead pastor role and for Ron to move to associate pastor; and the ballot was approved. On November 10, we had a special service where Pastor Ron has a gift for mentoring other pastors and allowing them space to grow and exercise their gifts. And while the congregational structure on paper appears to be very vertical, the leadership team is more horizontal. Preaching, visitation, visioning and other pastoral roles have been shared, with Ron holding many tasks in an open palm. The congregation also rarely uses formal titles for the leaders, simply calling them Pastors. Our personalities are very different but our theological framework is very similar. We are a classic introvert/extrovert pairing with complementary strengths regarding administration, pastoral care, artistic expression and more. This allows us to be a form of “sparking” for each other as we serve. This contrast continues to be a place of learning restraint and respect as we sort through the different ways we might handle situations.

I have observed that Mennonite theology and polity, more than some traditions, creates space for these kinds of transitions to occur. My conversations with leaders in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan revealed these transitions are rare, in part because many pastoral transitions happen when there is pastoral/congregational conflict or loss of energy on the part of pastoral leadership. But a transition of this kind for us as leaders and as a congregation marked the transition for both positions. During that service, a glass vial of oil was used for anointing us for our continuing ministry. The vial had been given to Ron at the start of his ministry by a former Pleasant View pastor, the late James Detweiler, and then was handed to me as a transition symbol.

There are several unique factors concerning this transition. Pastor Ron has a gift for mentoring other pastors and allowing them space to grow and exercise their gifts. And while the congregational structure on paper appears to be very vertical, the leadership team is more horizontal. Preaching, visitation, visioning and other pastoral roles have been shared, with Ron holding many tasks in an open palm. The congregation also rarely uses formal titles for the leaders, simply calling them Pastors.

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Winter Youth Retreats
By Kenzie Intemann, Amigo Youth Program Director and Alisha Snyder, Youth Program Intern

Winter Youth Retreats (WYR) are always a highlight for Junior and Senior High youth and their sponsors, as well as for us here at Amigo. We were able to host around 300 youth and sponsors in the first two weekends.

We started the WYR season off with the energetic T Mountsithiraj as our speaker and Emily Grimes and Friends as our worship team. T shared his story of coming to Christ and how he came to America. He spoke about how everyone is somebody to God, and how we should put our whole selves into all the activities.

We still have two more retreats coming in February. The weekend of February 14-16 we are excited to have Wendell Nofziger from North Clinton Mennonite Church in Ohio with us to share with the youth. The theme for the weekend is “Treasure Galore! Finding Our Joy in Jesus.” Kara Mishler and Friends will be joining us to lead the youth in singing.

The weekend of February 21-23 we are thrilled to have Tig Intagliata from Bluffton University. He is bringing along Bluffton’s worship ministry team Shining Through. Tig and Shining Through will be sharing with us about God’s Love and how it is beyond all measures. Shining Through will be leading us in singing and sharing their testimonies.

We hope more snow decides to come share its athletic fields in his honor. (Photo provided)

For the second WYR weekend, we had speaker Rachel Swartzendruber Miller from Hesston College and worship team leader Kent Miller and Friends. Rachel’s theme for the weekend was Decisions, Decisions: Exposing our Core. Both weekends were filled with lots of energy and sharing of God’s work in our lives. The slightly warmer temperatures made for a wet time, but this did not stop the youth from putting their whole selves into all the activities.

We have new youth group leader Kent Miller and Friends as our worship team. T shared his story of coming to Christ and how he came to America. He spoke about how everyone is somebody to God, and how we should give 100 percent to God.

Bluffton’s worship ministry team Shining Through, Tig and Shining Through will be sharing with us about God’s Love and how it is beyond all measures. Shining Through will be leading us in singing and sharing their testimonies.

We hope more snow decides to come share
Being Salt and Light  (continued from front cover)

During the retreat, Miller kept salt and a lighted candle on the altar. He reminded the group that salt was used as a fertil-izer to make the ground productive for receiving the seed. He also reminded us how Mennonites have acted as light in the past, such as bringing attention to the need for humane treatment of those with mental illnesses in the 1940s.

“The last word does not belong to the Roman cross of wrath,” Miller said. “The last word belongs to a God of love.”

At Bethany  (continued from p. 7)

memories of being taught to drive by Bod. Bod’s wide scope of influence is recognized by many, including current parent Cindy (Bontrager, ’82) Hawkins, who says, “When my daughter comments that she can’t believe Dan Bodiker was my driver education teacher, I smile at the memories of a wonderful and patient teacher and am thankful that he can have a part in nurturing my children also.”

Bod’s life work may not have included climbing a corporate ladder, but his ministry has extended towards students and faculty in the Bethany community for generations. He says that people’s life work should be something that they enjoy doing, not only for monetary reasons.

Bod exemplifies someone whose life accomplishments are measured not only by awards and honors, but rather by lives touched. The circle of people influenced by his life continues to grow. He recalls connections with former students and their work today, and says, “I have been very blessed to work at a school that is nurturing students who will be the church of tomorrow.”

Ministry Transitions

Beginnings

On December 15, Matthew Yoder was licensed towards ordination recognition as pastor of community life at Clinton Frame Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. by Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions.

On January 26, Moriah Hurst was ordained at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. (where she is a member) for her role as a Mennonite Mission Network associate with Praxis in Australia. Lois Kaufmann of Central District Conference and Doug Kaufman of IN-MI Conference were present to officiate.