

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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Photograph by Rachel A. Denlinger

## 2014 Annual Sessions Issue “Broken...Beloved”

By **Dan Miller**, conference pastor

**W**e, all of us in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, are broken and beloved. As we gathered for Annual Sessions this year, there was an underlying sense that the theme was appropriate for this time. God was present with us as we were present to the reality of being both broken and beloved.

Our worship services highlighted this truth. Opening worship identified individual brokenness and beloved-ness. The second worship service identified brokenness at the level of our life together—ways we are challenged to live into the new life God is bringing us. Communion in this service focused on receiving God’s love. The third worship service identified obstacles that get in the way as we try to love one another, and how God’s love given in Jesus helps us overcome these obstacles. Communion in the third service emphasized our response to God’s love.

Worshipful Work sessions addressed numerous significant items. In light of Clinton Frame Mennonite’s recent congregational vote to leave IN-MI Conference, and in consultation with their leadership, the

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# annual sessions recap

(continued from front cover)

Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT) and the Missional Leadership Team (MLT) presented a motion to accept their withdrawal with sadness.



Top: moderator **Jane Stoltzfus Buller** addresses delegates. Above: **Kevin Yoder**, Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT) chair, speaks on behalf of the MCT.

Given the timing of developments, some felt there was inadequate advance notice to process the withdrawal. Delegates raised significant questions about the process and what a no vote might mean. Clinton Frame pastors were present during the weekend and available for conversations. Terry Diener, lead pastor, spoke to the delegate body at one point about their decision to leave.

Final action was delayed until Saturday afternoon, when delegates ultimately approved the initial motion as presented by the MCT and MLT. A clay vessel and cards were made available for delegates to write notes of farewell and blessing to Clinton Frame. The jar and notes were delivered to Clinton Frame on July 3.

Kevin Yoder, MCT chair, informed delegates of a decision by Assembly Mennonite affirming their "pastors' full participation in pastoral care, rites and blessings for all individuals and families." After that congregational decision, a same-sex covenant ceremony was held at Assembly.

Mennonite Church USA guidelines do not permit a pastor to perform a same-sex ceremony. Such an action is grounds for reviewing the pastor's credential, and the MCT has begun that review. Assembly pastors were present during the weekend, and available for conversation. There was no floor time given to this announcement as there was no motion for action before the delegate body.

Delegates reviewed the current financial situation, learning that predictions for the current fiscal year were fairly accurate. With possible congregational realignments, it is difficult to predict the exact financial repercussions. Therefore the MLT decided to keep staffing at current levels for the coming fiscal year, spending down some surplus as necessary to do so. Individual contributions to conference are up this year, and Stewardship Team plans to continue with the advancement plan. Voting on approval of the spending plan was delayed until Saturday afternoon, at which time the delegates gave strong approval.

The worshipful work time on Saturday morning was dedicated to beginning the Unity and Variance Discernment process. Mark Schloneger, chair of the task group, laid a positive foundation for the time with a statement that he is hopeful about the future of the church, including Mennonite Church USA.

Using worship as the context for the morning, Michael Gulker, president of the Colossian Forum, challenged those present to make Jesus lord of our conflicts. He recognized that some may think the time for discussion is over, or that the process is a cover for shifting left, and continued to point toward conversation. Specific questions were given to tables and participants were given an hour for discussion, followed by a brief plenary time.



Members of the Ministry Credentialing Team and Brian Bither of Shalom Mennonite met with leaders of the Mara church over lunch on Saturday.

**Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference**—a conference of **Mennonite Church USA**—is a community of 72 congregations in Indiana, Michigan and Kentucky, gathered together for mutual encouragement in kingdom mission and inspiration to joyfully follow Jesus.

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On Saturday morning, delegates heard from Mark Schloneger, chair of the Unity and Variance Discernment Task Force, and Michael Gulker, president of the Colossian Forum. Audio recordings of their talks are available on the conference website: [im.mennonite.net](http://im.mennonite.net).



Annual Sessions photos by staff.

Over lunch on Saturday, both Mennonite Women and Mennonite Men had special gatherings. The retired pastors affinity group also met over lunch with Suella Gerber, chair of the Leadership Enhancement Team (LET), to explore possibilities. The Ministry Credentialing Team met with leaders from Mara Christian Church in America (MCCA) of Indianapolis to continue the exploration of affiliating with IN-MI Conference.

This year's schedule again offered seminars, after several years of outings. Each seminar related somehow to the Annual Sessions theme of "Broken . . . Beloved." Evaluations spoke positively of the seminars, while others lamented a lack of outings.

A highlight of the weekend occurred in the Saturday afternoon session, with an introduction of the MCCA leaders to the delegate body. William Maung spoke on behalf of the Mara leaders, expressing gratitude for the developing relationship with IN-MI Conference. Delegates gave a standing ovation. The MCT also introduced two other groups exploring affiliation with conference: Goshen House Church (Goshen, Ind.) and Iglesia Restauración (Elkhart, Ind.). Congregations are invited to develop relationships with these groups over the coming year.

Four congregations invited Annual Sessions participants to worship with them Sunday morning. While it is difficult to get attendance figures, initial reports indicate a low turnout for Sunday morning.

A **big thank you** to the many staff and volunteers who gave with a generous spirit to make this gathering happen, to Goshen College and College Mennonite Church for serving as host site, and to the Goshen Mennonite Ministers Council for hosting us. In the preparation stages, different individuals picked up responsibilities, sometimes at the last minute, to keep plans moving. Suella Gerber was back as temporary staff to oversee Annual Sessions planning, and

## Introducing new congregations

Three churches are exploring conference membership over the coming year. On Saturday afternoon, leaders from two congregations spoke to the delegates: the Mara Christian Church of Indianapolis (below) and Iglesia Restauración (bottom). The third congregation exploring membership is Goshen House Church.



the LET planned Saturday afternoon seminars. The event staff at Goshen College prepared well in advance and worked graciously as some arrangements needed to be adjusted at the last minute.

Next year, CAMFELL area council will host Annual Sessions in Indianapolis, June 18–21, 2015. Watch for details as they become available.

# annual sessions photo highlights

## Table Groups



## reflections and table wisdom

### What stands out for you from Annual Sessions this year?

"The theme of Broken and Beloved—very relevant for me at this time."

"The civil tone of our dialogue with brothers and sisters with whom we strongly disagree."

"The dichotomy of losing a congregation while also receiving new congregations."

"Opportunities to interact and share our perspectives around a table of people with varying convictions; it helps us grow."

"The Unity & Variance session on Saturday morning with Mark Schloneger and Michael Gulker."

"The pastor-spouse appreciation dinner is very much appreciated."

"Having the spectrum from Assembly to Clinton Frame, having them both represented and talked about respectfully called us to a higher level. It felt like we grew as a conference in trust in each other."

"Having a leader from Clinton Frame at my table: the care and sadness regarding leaving and being with the person in the midst of diverse thinking."

Towards the end of Annual Sessions, moderator Jane Stoltzfus Buller asked this question of delegates: **As a table group, what wisdom do you offer conference leadership for the 2014-2015 year?**

- Continue to provide us with tools and opportunities to work with each other.
- Help us tell, listen to, and share stories about how God is present and at work in our congregations even in the midst of tension.
- Engage youth and young adults. Find ways to bring them into leadership roles.
- Encourage settled congregations to serve as mentors to new incoming groups (financial, practical and relational support).
- More connection between congregations by worshipping together—hold quarterly or semi-annual worship gatherings.
- See the forest, not the tree. Don't get caught up in details and, therein, forget to think about visioning. Discern the things that are eternal.
- Keep Jesus and scripture at the center. Focus on our common values: confession of faith, discernment in the body of Christ, etc.
- Provide better communication about important issues such as a congregation considering leaving conference.
- Keep an outward/missional focus and not get stuck in the mire of more inward church "stuff."
- Encourage and facilitate inter-congregational sharing to find new ways of worship, bringing additional excitement, joyfulness and new ways to reach our communities.
- Mission and vision should come from congregations.
- Focus our meetings on what is life-giving, what God is doing in conference and congregations.
- Provide strong communication with congregations, particularly in the work of the Unity and Variance Task Force.
- Alongside difficult discussions, devote energy to encouraging positive growth in the conference, new congregation development, revitalization of rural churches and resources for Christian formation.
- More intentional personal connection between conference leadership and congregations.
- Help us to define who we are to each other in scripture and deed.

# annual sessions photo highlights

## Corporate Worship



## Seminars



## Pastor Appreciation Dinner



## Fellowship



## Registration



Annual Sessions photos by staff.

## Ryan Ahlgrim Completes 19 Years of Service



Ryan Ahlgrim, former lead pastor at First Mennonite of Indianapolis.

On June 29, 2014, First Mennonite Church (FMC) of Indianapolis, bid farewell to pastor Ryan Ahlgrim and his family. His 19 years of service at FMC included nine years of serving on the conference's Church Life Commission (CLC), and then as the first chair of the Ministry Credentialing Team, one of the successors of the CLC. Before that he served on the Communications Advisory Committee for six years. All told, he made about 115 trips up and down US 31 between Indianapolis and Goshen, putting about

34,500 miles on his car over the years. I was privileged to represent conference at Ryan's farewell celebration in June. —Doug Kaufman, conf. pastor for leadership transitions

The following reflections come from people who knew Pastor Ahlgrim. They are excerpted here from MennoExpressions, a publication of First Mennonite Church.

**Alison Schumacher**, MennoExpressions editor:

After 19 years of sermons, pastoral care, and keeping our congregation moving forward, Ryan and Laurie Ahlgrim are off to share their myriad gifts with Ryan's next ministry assignment, First Mennonite in Richmond, Va. I appreciate his leadership, sermons and theological perspective, as well as his quirky and endearing qualities. He shares personal and difficult topics, trusting yet challenging us. And after hearing him mention that he often selected his ties for Sunday morning based on the sermon topic, I tried in vain to visually decipher the link between the theme and the tie.

While we cannot reduce Ryan's gifts to us to mere numbers, his "stats" tell an important story too. Ryan was ordained in 1985, came to FMC in 1995, and since then, 175 people have joined FMC. Ryan has baptized 60 of them. He has married 40 couples and performed 11 funerals. He has preached over 800 sermons, given 86 lectures and Sunday school classes, and has had 89 writings published. Whew!

**John Koppitch**, Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis:

I was just beginning as the head of staff at Fairview Presbyterian Church when Ryan gave me a call, introduced himself and asked if I would be interested in forming a pastor support group. I welcomed Ryan's invitation and slowly our small group of 11 formed. Ryan took responsibility for keeping everyone informed of the time and place of the next meeting. He was also our primary recruiter for bringing new pastors into our group.

I've always enjoyed Ryan's intellect, creativity, candor, inquisitiveness, hospitality and pastoral sensitivity. And yes, I have to admit I even enjoyed his humor (as several of his stories have made their way into my own repertoire). I am grateful for his leadership in the larger church, through his involvement in the Mennonite Church and other ecumenical circles. But it is simply Ryan's presence that I will miss the most—a trustworthy colleague and friend in ministry.

**Mandy Yoder**, Belmont Mennonite Church:

FMC was my very first pastorate and I learned so much from Ryan. I am grateful to him for the many ways he mentored me over the four years that I was on staff. Ryan is a strong leader and it was a great learning experience for me to see him lead the congregation through a process of discernment regarding whether to add on to the building or plant a new church.

Working with Ryan also helped me learn one very important thing: how to space the tables in the fellowship hall in order to seat the maximum number of people and still leave sufficient room between the tables. Ryan figures this out by bending at the waist and spreading his arms out so that one hand touches one table and the other touches the next table. Given that I'm a different build than Ryan, I guess that actually isn't something I've carried with me, but it does highlight Ryan's deep care for the church—from the macro-level things right down to the little details.

**Dagne Assefa**, Shalom Mennonite Church:

When Ryan started serving at FMC, I was in my third year at Shalom serving as half-time pastor. Ryan's move to Indianapolis could not have been more timely for me as a new church planter and for Shalom. Not only did I have a colleague with whom I could share the joys and challenges of pastoral ministry, but I could also learn from his past church planting experiences, which he shared freely.

As a new and very small congregation, we were not more than 25-30 souls, including children. Ryan surprised me when he asked how I would feel if more FMC families joined us. Of course, I was very pleased to hear that come from him without my asking. More than a dozen households responded to Ryan's encouragement to join us, initially for a year, then another year. After two years, almost all those families who came to Shalom felt God's call to stay and grow with us.

Through the years our two congregations worked together on many different projects. Ryan also played a key role in the Mennonite pastors' fellowship that met faithfully 3-4 times a year. Ryan will be greatly missed. Go with God, my friend!

## 20+ Congregations Participate in Financial Training Webinar

By **Greg Leatherman Sommers**, conference administrator

Indiana-Michigan Conference recently hosted, "Giving for a Change," a free web seminar as part of the conference advancement process. This one-hour seminar provided an overview of the current financial landscape, offered tips for strengthening congregational finances, and gave time for participants to get direct answers to their questions.

At least 40 people, representing over 20 congregations, participated in the seminar held Thursday night and again on Saturday morning. Rich Gerig from Advancement Associates and Brad Miller from Everence served as presenters. Participants listened to the speakers while watching the presentation slides, and submitted questions in real time.

After completing a brief post-seminar survey, users were redirected to a conference web page with resources for download, links to the seminar recordings and other resources, and contact information for the presenters.

The seminars seemed to make a positive impact. One participant commented, "I heard some new thoughts about the fundraising subject, got some new ideas, and was



pointed toward some new resources..." Participants also offered suggestions for future web seminars, with topics including Biblical text discussions and how to lead difficult congregational meetings.

Conference is grateful for the time and effort invested by Brad and Rich, and to the many individuals who took the time to participate.

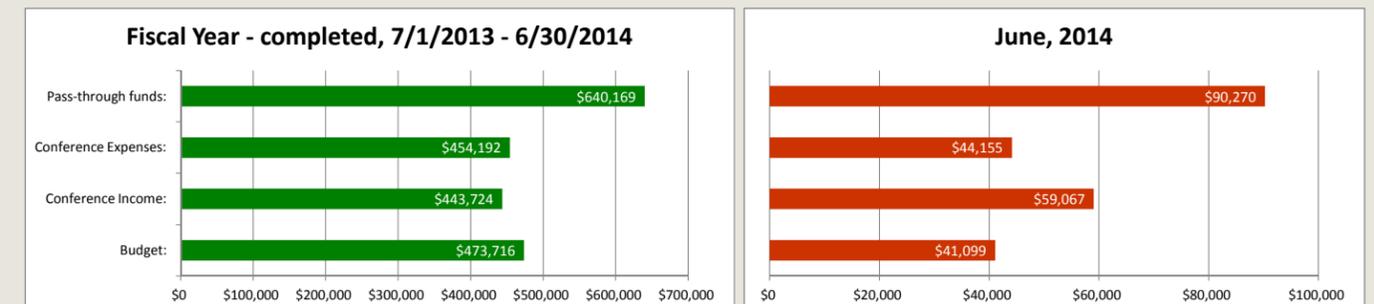
## financial report

By **Greg Leatherman Sommers**, conference administrator

June was an extraordinary month, with support for the month exceeding expectations by almost \$18,000. Monthly expenses were slightly higher than expected. The good news is that, while our spending plan anticipated an end-of-year deficit of more than \$18,000, we ended the fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) with a deficit of less than \$10,500. Thanks be to God!

Congregations provided \$90,270 in earmarked donations to local, regional, and national ministries through conference during the month of June. That brings the total up to \$640,169 for the fiscal year. In addition to these earmarked donations from congregations, conference donated \$6,267 from our operating fund to Mennonite Church USA ministries in June and \$48,290 for the fiscal year.

Thank you for your support for conference. Please consider adding support in one or more of these four ways: prayers, personnel (volunteer time), funding, and feedback.



# Mennonite Women's Fall Retreat

**A**migo Centre will once again be hosting the Indiana-Michigan Fall Women's Retreat on October 10–12, 2014. This year's theme is "Recovering Simplicity" and is resourced by Shirley Hershey Showalter. Participants are being asked to bring a favorite photo of themselves as a young girl. Don't you just want to know where this is going? Come join us for a weekend full of fun, relaxation,

connections and growth as we reflect on lessons of simplicity God wants us to learn today.

The following article was written for the College Mennonite Church Newsletter by Joann Smith last fall following our 2013 retreat. Joann has captured this event as only a gifted writer can. —**Mandy Yoder**, Amigo Program Director

## "This Treasure of a Camp"

By **Joann Smith**, College Mennonite



**E**very October, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Women organize a women's retreat at Camp Amigo. Among the 100 participants this year were 10 women from College Mennonite Church (CMC). With unusually balmy, sunny weather, the weekend of October 11–13 was especially glorious.

Sitting down for tea in a china cup along with chocolate tidbits to sample offered time to relax and connect with others. The unusually good menus were appreciated by everyone.

Participants were asked to bring a hat of some sort. After the Saturday evening Bible study, everyone paraded hats for a contest in several categories. Kathryn Aschliman won a prize for her Kate Middleton hat in three parts. The talent show included our own excellent jokester Mable Brunk.



Photos provided

Jackie Wyse-Rhodes led four Bible sessions on the theme of "Naomi, Ruth and Orpah: Exploring women's stories of survival, adventure and faithfulness" from the book of Ruth. Using art and music, she played off the biblical knowledge and feminine wisdom of her audience in a very engaging, interactive fashion. The women present will not soon forget how alive these women became, almost stepping off the page to walk among us. It was unlike any Bible study most women had ever experienced.

**"I had thought this retreat was for the officers of Mennonite Women, but it is open to all women in IN-MI Conference."**

I had fun playing the MCC Mennonite game. At one table I was joined by someone who didn't grow up Mennonite but had served in Congo 20 years after I had. The next person to sit down had also served there, but 2 years before me. Four women who had grown up in Africa, two in the Congo, one in Kenya, and one in Nigeria added a nice spice to this mostly Caucasian group.

The choices for Saturday afternoon activities were numerous. The weather was perfect for pontoon rides or walking the nature trails or labyrinth. Inside the gym were tables for making cards or bulletin boards, quilting, knotting comforters, or clay modeling. Possibilities for pampering were there with hand and foot paraffin treatments or neck wraps. Singing around the piano or sharing through books occupied some.

I had thought this retreat was for the officers of Mennonite Women, but it is really open to *all* women in IN-MI Conference. I was happy for the chance to experience this treasure of a camp as an adult.

## ministry transitions

### Beginnings



**Dave Hathaway** was ordained as pastor at Clinton Brick Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on June 22 by Doug Kaufman, conf. pastor for leadership transitions.



**Derrick Ramer** was installed as pastor of family life at First Mennonite, Middlebury, Ind., on June 29 by Dan Miller, conference pastor.

### Endings

On June 30, **Ryan Ahlgrim** completed his service as lead pastor at First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis.

## at bethany

"Life is a journey—a compilation of mini-journeys. Every step matters and is built on the foundation of the previous one," said Andy Brubacher Kaethler at Bethany's 60th commencement on June 1. Seniors Corey Hostetler and Katie Shank noted, "Our teachers and mentors have ingrained in us the importance of helping people, and we have begun to feel the desire to help others without the prompting of our elders." As a parting gift from Bethany, each senior received a ceramic bowl made by art teacher Eric Kaufmann.



Student speakers Corey Hostetler (Berkey Avenue) and Katie Shank (East Goshen).