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Christian Formation Resource of the Month

Belmont Mennonite — Spiritual Direction Groups

Spiritual Direction groups are used for discernment, deepening individual relationships with God, and asking difficult spiritual questions. Given this specific purpose, they differ from traditional small groups. Groups include four people plus a facilitator. Facilitators are lay persons selected for their spiritual maturity and experience with spiritual direction, and are trained in leading Spiritual Direction groups. Groups may be based on gender, or could also be both women and men. Pastors take responsibility to place persons. Groups make a 2-year commitment and meet once a month.

What our experience has taught us: Groups of this type have been a positive experience for the congregation. Group members have felt paying attention to God in the space and time that their group is together helps them pay closer attention to God's presence at other times, too. Group members find it easier to make connections between scripture and their own lives as they become more deeply acquainted with it by engaging in *Lectio Divina* at the beginning of each session. Spiritual awareness overall within the congregation deepens as groups like this come together to listen to God and to care deeply for each other. One of the challenges has been the level of commitment needed for participating in this type of group. Some have difficulty making a 2-year commitment. While this takes quite a bit of "start up" energy, it has proved valuable.

To view more formation practices compiled by the Christian Formation Task Group,

Conference News

Administrative Team update

Conference leadership groups gathered this past weekend at Amigo Centre for an experiment in considering together how we joyfully follow Jesus and cultivate a missional imagination in every congregation. Missional Leadership Team (MLT) met Thursday evening and Friday to anticipate the coming year and imagine its work. Friday



evening and Saturday other leadership groups joined in: Advisory Council (AC), Leadership Enhancement Team (LET), Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT), Stewardship Team (ST), Gifts Development Team (GDT) and Conference Program Planning Committee (CPPC). As we gathered, conference moderator Jane Stoltzfus Buller and LET chair Suella Gerber led participants in considering ways congregations are joyfully following Jesus and ways our life together supports congregational life. We also took time to understand the work done and people touched by different groups. People affirmed the different ways conference works at leadership calling and development and congregational peer learning, and repeatedly identified communication as a primary challenge. Engagement and energy were good.

I am grateful for the gifted people who invest in the life of our conference and congregations.

Marcella Hershberger, interim conference administrator, led the search for a communications coordinator as Rachel Denlinger ended in mid-August. She has continued one day a week to help with the transition. Chris Rahe began September 8 as an interim. He comes with wide experience in the different aspects of communication, including a time at Mennonite Church USA offices. We hope to utilize his experience to update our communications strategy.

Thanks to many who have prayed for Brent Eash, regional pastor. He was admitted to the hospital in early August. We give thanks for the improvements he has experienced in the last month.

August was a month of contrasts. In many ways it was a slow month, but there was no lack of work. Vanessa worked hard at arrangements and registration for the leadership retreat. Congregations continue to send in leadership forms. Doug has worked with four new pastoral searches beginning soon and visited two northern Michigan congregations with pastoral leadership possibilities. Doug and I were both out of the office for several days for a wedding in Oregon.

The Journey board met and the Journey Weekend Learning Event is coming up September 12-14. Four new applicants needed to be assigned mentors. Three will start this fall and one will wait until winter to begin.

After spending several meetings on different credential reviews, the Ministry

Credentialing Team (MCT) gave most of its August meeting to other items that had been neglected, including several congregations seeking conference affiliation.

Dan preached at Hudson Lake Mennonite Church and engaged in conversation during the education hour. Doug preached at Valparaiso Mennonite Church and talked with their leadership. Both of us, plus the regional pastors, are available to preach in worship and engage during the Sunday School hour. We welcome requests to visit any conference congregation!

Jane and I met with the Unity and Variance Discernment Task Group for their first meeting on August 21. Members of the group are Mark Schloneger (chair), Will Fitzgerald, Joe Liechty, and Mandy Yoder. Unfortunately Jennifer Hayes stepped down because of some new challenges closer to home. The Missional Leadership Team (MLT) is looking for someone to fill that position. The task group is meeting regularly this fall. Information about the process will be sent out as it is available.

At the semi-annual gathering of mid-states conference leaders, we considered the idea of doing something together on church planting. No decision was made, but we noted some activities are being planned for convention in Kansas City. Dan shared the process being developed by the IN-MI Conference PLANT Network. We also discussed responses to the executive board decision about the Mountain States credentialing decision. We have encouraged pastors to participate in the Mennonite Church USA survey sent to all pastors. We acknowledged the increasing complexity conferences face in relating with congregations that are dually affiliated. The most recent is with Central District and Indiana-Michigan conferences doing credential reviews in a dually affiliated congregation. Because both conferences hold one credential on behalf of MC USA, it is not clear how different decisions would be acknowledged.

In the next month, I will continue meeting with the search committee for a new head of school at Bethany Christian Schools. Allan Dueck will complete his service there at the end of 2014. There will be various activities planned to celebrate Allen's time at Bethany and to say goodbye.

Constituency Leaders council meets in early October.

—Dan Miller

Amigo Centre water leak

For those who are not aware, about a month ago Amigo Centre experienced a leak from a high volume pipe that resulted in several inches of water in the Retreat Center lower level. Drying out the walls required removing 6 inches of drywall along the bottom of every wall. Staff worked diligently to meet the needs of groups coming in while repairs were ongoing. No groups had to be cancelled, though one did



need to be rescheduled. When I was there on August 27 for a retreat day, repairs were being mudded and sanded. Just this past Friday the water in the Retreat Center was again approved for drinking. Why not send a word of encouragement to staff?

Pastoral Leadership Team Weekend

Amigo Centre and IN-MI Conference are once again partnering to hold the annual Pastoral Leadership Team Weekend at Amigo Centre on **November 7-9, 2014**. This year's theme is Radical Biblical Hospitality – Getting exactly what we need by giving all we've got: Re-thinking Biblical Hospitality.

As followers of Jesus we often view ourselves as having a good handle on hospitality. But do we truly understand the radicality of biblical hospitality? Join us for a weekend of looking at principles and examples from a different perspective. Our speaker will be Michele Hershberger, Chair of the Bible and Ministry Department at Hesston College, Hesston, Kansas.

Who should attend? Pastors, elders, leadership teams, mission committees, visioning committees, Sunday school teachers and others who have key responsibilities in relation to hospitality practices in the life of the congregation are welcome to attend.

The cost is \$140 if registered by **October 13**. A brochure and registration form is available [here](#). For more information, visit the Amigo website or call for details: www.amigocentre.org, 269-651-2811.

Financial report

After July's exceedingly dismal beginning to the new fiscal year, August finances have been back in the ballpark of what was projected for the year's budget. In August, conference income was \$39,311, roughly \$1500 below what was budgeted for the month. However, expenses were also kept under budget at \$38,959, so that income exceeded expenses for the month by \$352. The \$17,180 worth of expense over income for the year is reflective of July's deficit. Because patterns from earlier years have not been holding, July's low income was a surprise, and August's much-improved picture is cause for gratitude!

Congregations also provided \$80,795 in earmarked donations to local, regional, and national ministries through conference during the month of August. That raises the total for this fiscal year to \$95,872.

Thank you for your support for conference. Please continue to support conference in whatever ways you can, through prayer, personnel (volunteer time), funding, and feedback.

–*Marcella Hershberger, Interim Conference Administrator*



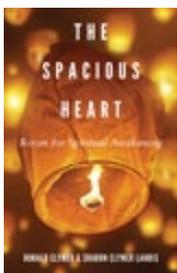
IN- MI Mennonite Women's fall retreat

Ladies, the annual IN-MI Mennonite Women's Fall Retreat is October 10-12 at Amigo Centre. The theme is "Recovering Simplicity" and the speaker will be Shirley Hershey Showalter. Worship will be led by Sidenotes (Janice Troyer, Lauren Eash Hershberger and Kelly Martin). More information and registration available at: amigocentre.org/in-mi-mennonite-womens-fall-retreat.html.

Marriage Play: A Bicycle Built for Two

A Bicycle Built for Two is a hard-hitting comedy that takes a playful look at marriage, commitment, and divorce. It follows three couples at various stages in their relationships: a young couple, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed with their recent engagement, an aging pair of empty nesters who are trying to rediscover their marriage after some-odd 30 years and a dueling duo just entering a divorce. Come on out on Friday, September 12 at 7pm to Waterford Mennonite Church and catch the show. Tickets are \$10 per person.

Resource Corner



The Spacious Heart: Room for Spiritual Awakening

Why do people, including Christians, feel empty, estranged and cynical? Many of us have tired of the pat answers that the church and religion have provided about our questions about faith and meaning in life. We know there's more—and we stand on the cusp of spiritual awakening, longing to reshape our connection with God.

In the tradition of Ronald Rolheiser's *The Holy Longing*, Don Clymer and Sharon Clymer Landis (brother and sister, both spiritual directors and retreat leaders) take modern spirituality and turn it on its head to flesh out a Christian spirituality of emptying oneself. How can I know God more fully? What does it mean to be a true servant walking closely with God: brutally honest with oneself, and true to Christ? Through riveting stories and text grounded in scripture, the book speaks to the deep cynicism of soul and despair that grip so many in this age.

Anyone wanting to become more loving, in touch with feelings, friends and family will find hope and direction in this easy-to-read book on the spiritual journey. We are all hungry for a full-flavored life, yet we ignore our deepest soul and quiet our cravings with more of everything. How does one embrace a spiritually simple life—gracious, accepting and fulfilling?

Available from MennoMedia: <http://store.mennomedia.org/The-Spacious-Heart-P4284.aspx>

News from Conference Organizations

Amigo Centre

Celebrate Amigo

Please join us at Amigo Centre to “Celebrate Amigo” the weekend of **October 17-19, 2014**. There will be many opportunities to enjoy the Amigo grounds as well as support the ministry through various work projects. Childcare will be provided for portions of this event. Donations for our auctions are welcome anytime between now and October 17. Without the additional support of individuals and congregations, the ministry at Amigo Centre would not be possible. Thank you for your support! Information about this event will be mailed soon and is available online at www.amigocentre.org.

2015 Winter Youth Retreats

Save the dates! 2015 Winter Youth Retreats at Amigo Center:

- Junior High
 - January 9-11
 - February 13-15
- Senior High
 - January 16-18
 - February 20-22

Bethany Christian Schools

Class Reunions

Bethany Christian Schools will host class reunions for its alumni and their families on Saturday, Sept. 27, and all Bethany alumni will receive free admission to the Bethany-Westview boys soccer game on Friday, Sept. 26 (5:00 JV start). The following graduating classes will hold their reunions: 1959, 1969, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2009. Reunion classes will meet Saturday afternoon/evening for visiting and a catered dinner. Alumni interested in attending should register by Sept. 19. Find more details about each class reunion and register at www.bethanycs.net/reunions.

UB Bruin Club

Students in grades 3-5 who are planning to attend Bethany or just want to explore that option, should consider joining the UB Bruin Club. Children can make friends with future classmates and begin to have their own fun experiences at Bethany. The first event is Friday, Sept. 12, from 6:30 to 8:00 pm, when the club will meet for outdoor games. To learn more and register, visit [bethanycs.net/UB Bruin Club](http://bethanycs.net/UB_Bruin_Club).

weLink connects IN-MI Conference congregations to each other, to the conference organizations Amigo Centre and Bethany Christian Schools, and to the wider church. It is published on the second Wednesday of each month. *weLink* issues are archived on the conference website at im.mennonite.net/welink-archive/.



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