

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference
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Photograph by Dan Miller

First Leadership Retreat Are we effective?

By **Jane Stoltzfus Buller**, conference moderator

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is experimenting! As we respond to the findings of an organizational structure review, we are thinking together about how we can 'Joyfully follow Jesus...' together, through the good times and the challenging times.

If you were a member of one of the Leadership Teams of Conference, which included the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), the Leadership Enhancement Team (LET), the Missional Credentialing Team (MCT), the Stewardship Team (ST), the Advisory Council (AC), the Conference Program Planning Committee (CPPC), or the Gifts Development Team (GDT) you would have received an invitation in your email box inviting you to a first ever Leadership Retreat for IMMC on Sept. 5-6, 2014. Our goals were spelled out:

1. Have our imagination sparked and leave with energy for 'joyfully following Jesus;'
2. As a conference organization, see what we are doing and with whom we are doing it;
3. Focus on congregations as the center of our work and organization.

We were excited about this gathering of conference leadership persons. We playfully spoke of our 'grazing' together and 'feasting' on our mission statement - Joyfully following Jesus...' Our hope was to join together to more truly become a conference of congregations—communities of grace, joy and peace where God's healing and hope flow through us to the world. Did we accomplish what we hoped? (continued on page 3)

Above: Participants (from left to right) Marcella Hershberger, George Thompson, Izaete Nafziger, Marilyn Rudy-Froese and Aimee Mayeda participate in a table discussion at the Leadership Retreat.

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meet our new staff member

Introducing Chris Rahe

Interim Communication Coordinator

By **Chris Rahe**, interim communication coordinator

The trickiest part of my first issue of *Gospel Evangel* is to write this article introducing myself as the new Interim Communication Coordinator, as of September 8, 2014.

I'll let Dan Miller, conference pastor begin, "Chris brings a wide array of experience in communication, and we anticipate benefitting from that experience. Staff have begun talking about the need to update the conference communication strategy, and Chris has been through that process in other settings."

Miller continued, "Feedback at the September leadership retreat emphasized the importance of effective communication with donors and members."

I recently spent about six years at Mennonite Church USA as the Web Services Director. Before that I worked as the Marketing Director at a hospital, the webmaster for an international environmental organization and a writer and editor for the state medical association.

As you can see, my career path hasn't exactly been a straight line. Likewise, my faith journey has been similarly circuitous. I began my life as a Missouri Synod Lutheran, baptized at one month old and confirmed in eighth grade.

I went off to college at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana where I majored in Public and Corporate Communications. College is also where I became a bit of a spiritual wanderer with no regular church home.

Eventually I settled down and got married in the church my wife, Carolyn, irregularly attended, First Mennonite of Indianapolis. I must admit that we didn't become regular attendees, even after beginning our wedded bliss there.

Fortunately God is patient and persistent. We went through a brief time in the woods of southern Indiana where we found a church home at a small Presbyterian congregation. Then we connected with a Quaker meeting near Plainfield.

We adopted three children; Devon, Shelby and Hayden. Our house was too small for the five of us, and in a rare bout of temporary sanity, we decided it would be sensible to move closer to family as we raised our children. Carolyn won the coin toss, so we chose northern Indiana where she grew up and most of her family still lives.

We now live in the small town of Bourbon, Ind. and have found a church home at Holdeman Mennonite in Wakarusa. Drawn to the Anabaptist commitment to peace and living out the love of Christ in community, I was even re-baptized there a few years ago, making me a literal anabaptist.

Outside of work, I enjoy books, movies and comedy podcasts. I also spend a lot of time at school activities and helping out on our small, hobby farm which doesn't seem as "small" as it sounded when my wife proposed the idea.

As Communication Coordinator, I hope to maintain and strengthen connections between the congregations of our conference through a growing number of communication channels. I also hope to highlight the various ways congregations connect with their communities.



Chris Rahe, interim communication coordinator

This issue is available online:

im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel



Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference—a conference of **Mennonite Church USA**—is a community of 71 congregations in Indiana, Michigan and Kentucky, gathered together for mutual encouragement in kingdom mission and inspiration to joyfully follow Jesus.

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Leadership Retreat (continued from cover)

In many respects we did. Close to two thirds of all our Teams were able to come to Amigo Centre and engage together. We began our time together with two questions everyone responded to around our large circle:

- What are the signs that your congregation is joyfully following Jesus?
- How is conference encouraging and supporting your congregation to joyfully follow Jesus?

We heard that our congregations are being cultivated for mission as their 'missional' work gives joy. We heard testimony of Jesus' joy expressed through the lives and testimonies of youth and young adults. We heard of loyalty, commitment and love in congregational life. We heard that our congregations are indeed 'joyfully following Jesus.'

We then heard how many of our congregations appreciate the conference relationships in times of transition or trouble. Conference connections, often geographical in nature, were important for many. One person around the circle said it as succinctly as one can: 'Conference is there 'for us' and it is where we go to find our people.' Expressions of appreciation for specific conference personnel pointed to the importance of 'seeing a face' representing the organization. Some were not sure how conference encouraged or supported their congregations and said so. As Leaders

In some way we were able to experience conference with new eyes and from varied perspectives.

of conference, we heard our conference story through the varied reflections and sharing.

Saturday morning Suella Gerber had prepared a visual presentation of conference workings and connections from responses to an inventory each chair and staff person had completed. We spent some time observing, noticing, and sharing together reflections about this visual image. After reflecting together, we all were asked to hold in a period of silence this question:

- Are we effectively doing what we want to be doing - serving, supporting, and encouraging our congre-

gations in joyfully following Jesus and cultivating missional imaginations....

When the period of silence and prayer was closed, we were invited to respond with green (yes), yellow (kind of), or red (no) cards to the question of effectiveness. There were a few no's, a few more greens and mostly yellows--most of the group saying we are kind of effective but could be better.



Bob Yoder (left) and George Thompson met on Thursday evening before the rest of the leadership group members convened on Friday

After a break, we broke up into seven groups from the various teams and engaged in group work imagining how the organization could be strengthened for engaging together as a conference of congregations 'joyfully following Jesus' and 'cultivating missional imaginations'.

From these imaginative responses, the MLT and the LET will be working together to strengthen our conference of congregations. With realities of budget changes and challenging times, our expectation is we will be streamlining our ministry staff as we focus conference leadership attention more specifically on what is needed and desired by our congregations.

We ate a lovely lunch together and spent a little time enjoying the beauty of Amigo's natural environment before a block of time to meet as Leadership Teams and specific team agenda.

This was indeed an experiment. It was a rich experience for many, especially those beginning terms of service on our leadership teams. In some way we were able to experience conference with new eyes and from varied perspectives. Will it be repeated? I hope so!

intercultural transformation

Changes at El Buen Pastor

By **David Araujo**, pastor at Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor

For over 40 years, Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor has been a well-known landmark in the landscape of the Hispanic community in Goshen, Ind. The church was planted in the 1970s with the specific mission to minister to the needs of Spanish-speaking migrant workers from Mexico and Central America. El Buen Pastor has prided itself in being the only Hispanic Mennonite Church in Goshen and has always identified with the ever growing Spanish speaking population. With a majority vote in the early 80's, the founding members of the church sought to ensure that El Buen Pastor continued to be a Spanish

“How do you turn around a struggling congregation and help it gain new energy...?”

speaking congregation, holding worship services in Spanish only and discouraging the English language at church gatherings. While the desire to hold on to one's cultural roots is a noble one, it did not take into account the fact that changes in demographics, technology and immigration policies would affect it in very powerful ways. After four decades of significant changes, it became very difficult to adhere to the Spanish only policies. The children of the founding members, the second and third generations, grew up in a country and town that is very much home to them and became naturally estranged

from their parents' culture and country of origin. These children, upon entering the Goshen Public School System, learned English and began to forget the Spanish language that their parents hoped they would embrace. The decrease in migrant workers to the Goshen area due to drastic and very intimidating immigration policies caused El Buen Pastor to decline in its membership and further outreach efforts.

These sobering changes caused the congregation to take a hard look at the new

realities facing it; something had to be done to stem the decline. None of the members, were willing or ready to consider burying their heads in the sand or simply giving up and closing their doors.



Photo provided.

Two years ago, I became the new pastor of this struggling congregation that for too long had been stuck in survival mode. I had serious work to do. How do you turn around a struggling congregation and help it gain new energy, overcome its survival mentality and start to flourish once again? I was very much in need of information and insight as to why the church was not experiencing growth and vitality.

I began by visiting some of the families that were no longer attending El Buen Pastor. I asked very candidly if they would share the reasons why they were now attending an English speaking community church instead of the



Photo provided.



El Buen Pastor's worship times are: Sunday bilingual worship at 9:50 am and Sunday school at 11:20 -Small group Bible Study on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm. Photo provided.

church where they had come to know the saving knowledge of Christ. Their response was a helpful eye opener. Several families pointed to the fact that their kids, who had reached high school age, no longer felt comfortable in an all-Spanish speaking church that preached in a language that they could not understand. One mother told me that the English speaking church they now attended ministers to their children's spiritual needs in the language they most identify with, and they also have a ministry to the parents which is led by a Spanish speaking pastor in charge of outreach and evangelism.

El Buen Pastor acknowledged the fact that they had changed and were no longer a fully Spanish speaking church. The intermarriage between Latinos and Anglos, as well as the new generations that continued to ask for English language ministries, helped them name their true identity. As a result of an honest look at the reality of a dying church, the members took a step of faith and decided to implement much needed changes in its structure and worship services. There were fears and misperceptions at the beginning, but faith and trust in God proved to be a more powerful motivator. Today El Buen Pastor is a bilingual congregation that is happy and comfortable with both English and Spanish being spoken. Once this reality had been embraced, the congregation could now

move forward with a new vision for its present and future years of ministry to the community of Goshen and surrounding areas.

If you visit Iglesia Menonita del Buen Pastor today, you will find the worship services are bilingual and the sermons I preach are done in consecutive mode where a sentence or two is spoken in one language and then immediately translated. This enables both young and old to be fed the word of God, and others are welcome to join no matter their language preference. Two years ago there were only 30 to 35 regular Sunday attendees and now the church is thriving with a regular Sunday attendance of 50 to 60. El Buen Pastor has no other way to go but up. It is my hope and prayer that congregations in our conference who are struggling and perhaps thinking of closing their doors, may find faith and encouragement to not give up; to reevaluate and embrace the new identity that God is calling them to, so that they can be effective ministers of the Gospel.



Photo provided.

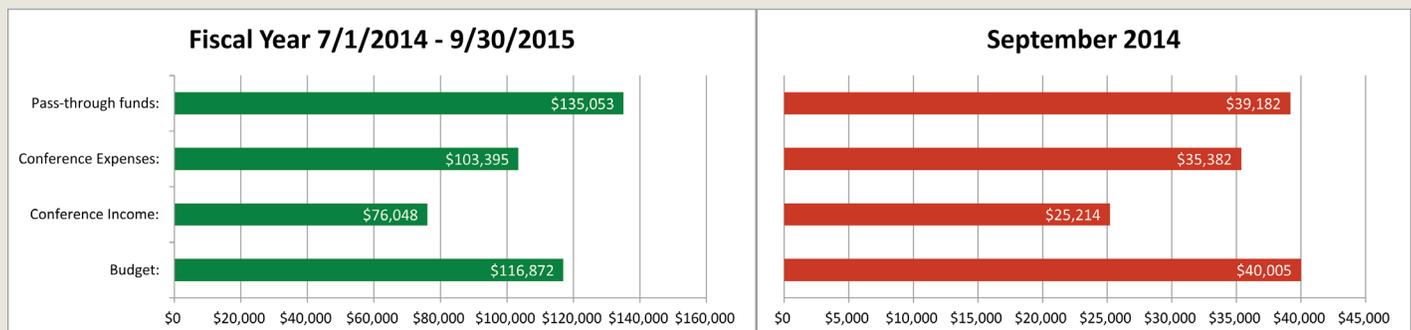
financial report

By **Marcella Hershberger**, interim conference administrator

We have completed the first quarter of the new fiscal year. After a very bleak start in July, August was much improved. September has again brought another significant shortfall of \$14,791 for the month even though expenses were \$4,623 under what was budgeted. In addition to contributions to conference, congregations gave an additional \$39,182 through conference to various ministries this month.

At the end of the first quarter of this fiscal year, conference expenditures were \$13,477 lower than the budget. However, expenses exceeded actual contributions by \$27,347. Both the Stewardship Team and Missional Leadership Team are monitoring the financial situation, and are mindful of current realities as they form next year's spending plan.

Please pray for the conference office, as well as all of our congregations, as we seek to use our resources wisely and live with a spirit of faithfulness, generosity and gratitude to God for what we have received. Thank you for your support.



And the waters prevailed

By **Cliff Brubaker**, executive director at Amigo Centre

"And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters." Genesis 7:17 KJV

Amigo's flood did not last 40 days and 40 nights. No one built an ark to navigate the waters. On the other hand, the translation above chosen by those who worked on the King James Version seemed to capture the moment for Amigo's staff recently.



Photo provided

On Aug. 8, a fitting on the 3" water line from the well into Amigo's Retreat Centre broke, and the rush of water very quickly covered the floor of the entire lower level of the Retreat Centre. Some facts:

- The water was at least 2-3" deep in all the 14 guest rooms, meeting rooms, and storage rooms.
- A foot of drywall had to be removed from all outside walls to allow the insulation to dry.
- The 95 high-capacity fans and 10 large dehumidifiers placed by SERVPRO used an estimated \$900 of electricity as they helped dry out the walls.
- All vinyl flooring and vinyl baseboard had to be removed and replaced.

- The break was caused by "well hammer" which was likely caused by a faulty check valve in the well.

We have many blessings which we count:

- The flood waters were clean, drinkable water.
- One staff member was at a Sunday School class party when the flood occurred and brought the entire class of 15 young adults to help move furniture and mop up the water. They worked from 10:30 p.m. until 2:30 a.m., getting the worst of the water out quickly.
 - A quick and effective dry-down resulted in no mold or mildew problems.
 - We lost no furniture from water damage.
 - Our insurance coverage has been good.
 - We were able, with some adjustments in schedules, patience from some of our guests, and hard work from the staff, to keep all our guest groups. We are particularly thankful for that outcome, since the break occurred at the very busiest time of the entire year for the Retreat Centre.
 - On September 19, the last paint was applied. There is no sign left of the flood. And we rejoice!

Some fallout from the flood still lingers:

- Our staff worked long hours to set things back together, and they enter the fall season with lingering weariness. We would appreciate your prayers!
- Though insurance has covered much of the cost of drying out the facility, repairing drywall, painting and other things that were damaged, there are costs that won't be covered. Considerable unplanned staff time went into the project. We would appreciate your generosity this fall as you plan your giving.

Noah's flood gave his family and the earth a fresh start. We look forward to serving you this fall and in the coming year in a Retreat Centre that is fresh and ready to provide a place for you, your friends, and Amigo's community to connect with God, Creation, and others.

Computer-aided Learning

Seniors Create Investment Portfolios

By **Kevin Miller**, communication coordinator at Bethany Christian Schools

Not that students are hoping that guidance counselor Jim Buller will retire any time soon, but seniors in Josh Weaver's Business Math class created investment portfolios for him to consider in preparation for that eventual day.

Working in three groups, students were given a mythical \$200,000 to invest in stocks, bonds, and cash equivalents and tasked with researching investment opportunities to build a portfolio that they project to increase to \$300,000 within five years. Each group had one member specialize in researching investment types (bonds, cash, large-cap stocks, mid-cap stocks, and small-cap stocks) and then collaborated to build a portfolio to meet that goal.

Bethany's one-to-one computer program was pivotal for the success of this project, which allowed students to work together from their individual computers, whether in class or at home. Using a shared Google spreadsheet, each student contributed data, shared research notes, and built on each others' work as they wrote formulas to project growth rates, tracked their investments, and created charts and graphs for their presentation.

Accessing information on the internet was crucial for this project as the groups researched companies for potential investment and bank web sites for information on bonds and cash equivalents. Weaver notes that Google Finance was especially helpful by providing not only data on companies, but also current news stories. He says, "Students



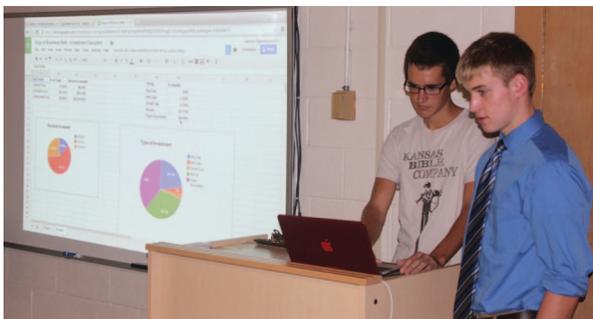
Sol Brenneman (Belmont Mennonite) and Business Math classmates work together on their project, each from their own computer. Photo provided.

learned to pay attention to what is happening in society that could affect a specific company or sector and how that might influence their investment decisions."

In the end, each group presented their investment portfolio, along with data to support their proposal, to Buller for his consideration. Each group had strengths in their portfolio that Buller highlighted when providing feedback to the class. While one group was strong in sales (promoting their portfolio), another had stronger supporting data, and the third did well at connecting with Buller's personal interests and values.

Buller's strongest affirmation though was for how well he saw the groups work together as a team in their presentations. He says, "I know from experience that group work is not easy—especially when someone is absent. But the marketplace is looking for people who work well in teams: someone to be a good spokesperson, others to be good data people. I'm impressed with your skills of working together."

Senior Sol Brenneman, who was a member of the "winning" team, was somewhat skeptical of the value of the assignment when he started, but in the end concluded this was one of the best school projects he's had. Sol says, "After both individual research and working together with other team members, I understand better how everything works together; this way of learning is a lot more valuable than just being told how to do it."



Hans Miller (Waterford Mennonite) and **Nate Nussbaum** (Kern Road Mennonite) prepare to present their portfolio. Photo provided.

at **Bethany**

Interim Head of School Named

By **Kevin Miller**, communication coordinator at Bethany Christian Schools

The Bethany Christian Schools (BCS) Board of Directors recently named Jim Buller, who has worked in leadership at BCS for the past seventeen years and who currently serves as a guidance counselor, the Interim Head of School beginning Jan. 1, 2015.



Jim Buller, Interim Head of School
(Photo provided)

The Board has been working with a search consultant to identify candidates from around the country who would be qualified and capable of leading the organization as Head of School. While competent candidates were identified, the search hasn't yet produced a candidate that seemed to be a good fit for the long and short term institutional leadership needs.

"Bethany is in capable hands with Jim Buller and the educational leadership team assembled by current Head of School Allan Dueck over the past number of years," said board chair Sharon Yoder. She added, "With a capable leadership team currently in place at Bethany, the priority is to find the right candidate rather than make an appointment by a specific time."

Given that many educational leaders were immersed in starting the school year and their own institutional responsibilities during the time the search was underway,

the board agreed to appoint an interim Head of School so that additional candidates might be considered and to give time to review the candidate criteria and the search selection process.

"We anticipate that more educational leaders will be considering new options later in the school year, when we'll be reviewing candidates for a summer 2015 appointment," noted Yoder.

The Bethany Board of Directors continues to welcome the names of individuals who might have an interest and encourages possible candidates to contact Sharon Yoder, as the board chair, or Jim Alvarez as the Search Committee chair.

With Bethany continuing to implement the strategic planning process that has guided the ongoing work of the organization for the past three years, the school is well-positioned for the year ahead. Mr. Buller will overlap for a month with the current Head of School Allan Dueck, who is planning to retire at the end of this calendar year.

While changes will take place at Bethany, some things will never change. Bethany will always be driven by their mission to be a dynamic learning community integrating faith development with academic excellence, providing an education with learning that lasts and faith that lives.

Bethany Christian Schools has accomplished a great deal in recent years and continuing growth and progress is expected. As an educational institution, BCS is strong financially and competitive academically. The Board is united in their commitment to find the best possible candidate to guide Bethany into the future.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Steve Thomas was installed as transitional pastor at First Mennonite, Indianapolis, Ind., on August 3 by Dan Miller, conference pastor.



Gwen Gustafson-Zook was installed as pastor of outreach and formation at College Mennonite, Goshen, Ind., on September 28 by Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions.