

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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Photo by Greg Sommers

Above: Delegates who attend a southern regional meeting at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis enjoy table group conversation.

## Delegates move into March Two churches prepare for north, south meetings

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, interim editor

**T**he two churches selected for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference's delegate meetings in March are far apart in geographical distance and demographics. But they share the same heartbeat of excitement for hosting the events that will connect them to other congregations and pastors.

A rural congregation, Bethel Mennonite Church in Ashley, Michigan, will host the northern delegate meeting on Saturday, March 14. An urban congregation, First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, will host the southern delegate meeting on Saturday, March 21.

"We are committed to conference, and so the opportunity to offer hospitality in the midst of serious conversations is a gift for us," said Shannon Dycus, co-

pastor of First Mennonite. "We are geographically distant from most conference churches. We bridge that distance by having several of our members serve on conference teams. Being involved is our priority. It is who we are and what we do."

Joe Pendleton, pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church, said, "I don't get many opportunities to connect with pastors from across the area conference. I will hear first-hand about what is going on, rather than reading about it in the pastors' monthly e-mail newsletter."

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# leadership development

## Changes coming

### Future staff configuration

By **Janet Stoltzfus Buller**, conference moderator

**T**he Missional Leadership Team (MLT) has been discerning how to meet our goal of trimming \$100,000 from the proposed spending plan that will come to delegate meetings in March.

The timely evaluation of Dan Miller, Conference Pastor, was reviewed and shared with him in executive session. We were grateful for the feedback we received from those who took the time to respond to the questions and it is helpful in our ongoing work of restructure and staffing considerations.

At our August 2014 retreat, we reconfigured conference staffing for the next few years, which includes reducing staffing expenses by \$100,000.

We also developed three priorities to guide staff: 1) Connections and Communication; 2) Credentialing and Pastoral Transitions; and 3) Celebrations/Gatherings. These reflect input from the August Teams Retreat, from our existing staff and from our history of the ways congregations 'use' conference.

In the November 2014 meeting, we decided on a staffing structure of 2 FTE on ministry level and 1 FTE on administrative level.

We also created a sub-group to hear our staff even more deeply and then develop several configurations for the Missional Leadership Team to consider as possible ways to staff for our priorities and vision. We considered their helpful ideas and felt the Holy Spirit's presence as we decided on the way our staff could look for the next few years.

The challenge was deciding about who would fill these positions. We recognized the strength of all those who serve our congregations as conference staff and appreciate their work. Thus, it took much longer than we anticipated.

The MLT completed the task by phone Jan. 19, satisfied to move forward. Jane Stoltzfus Buller, Moderator, and Gene Hartman, Moderator-elect, met with the staff Jan. 20 to report the configuration and the people being invited to stay.

Those who responded affirmatively to the invitation are Dan Miller, Doug Kaufman, Mary Mininger, John Powell for the Ministry positions and Vanessa Kelleybrew and Janelle Martin for the Administrative position. Those whose positions will not continue after June 30 are Greg Sommers, Brent Eash, David Araujo and Russell Jensen.

We are working at how to develop job descriptions for the positions, which will be changing and evolving as we move forward. We hope to have a detailed communication for the delegates at our Delegate Meetings in March.

We also heard from the Ministry Credentialing Team on the credential review they are doing, and received a report from the Unity and Variance Discernment Group.

The MLT invites your prayers as we govern conference in these turbulent times. We are especially aware of those who won't be a part of our conference staff after June and ask that you keep all in your prayers as we live into the realities of 2015.

This issue is available online:

[im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel](http://im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel)



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# March meetings (continued from cover)

## Bethel Mennonite Church

Bethel Mennonite Church was established in the 1950s in rural Michigan for Mennonite farmers moving into the area. Joe Pendleton, pastor of Bethel Mennonite Church, describes the closest community to the congregation as a “small whistle stop on the railroad junket.” Within 10 miles in all directions are five different little towns. “One of our issues has been to decide which town to invest resources in so that they will know who we are,” he said.

The aging congregation is home to about 25 regular Sunday morning attenders. The church also hosts a Sunday evening service once a month to residents in the local care center in Ashley. And it also sponsors a youth meeting every other Saturday evening for its three teenagers, all from different school districts. “Rather than go door-to-door to hand out tracts, our three youth are creating a Facebook page as a platform for sharing the gospel,” Pendleton said.

New ministries include a men’s fellowship breakfast and missional outreaches for the women’s group, including sewing for a veteran’s hospital.

The church sits next to a main highway, U.S. 27. “This is a blessing, because it allows people to get to us from many different places,” he said. “One couple drives from Howard every Sunday. They pass by a lot of other churches on the way, but they make the trip because they are Mennonite at heart.”



## First Mennonite Church

First Mennonite Church also began in the 1950s, though as an urban church for young adults who moved to Indianapolis to fulfill their 1-W service. Today, the congregation with its Sunday morning attendance of about 200 people, draws many young families, many who did not grow up Mennonite. The ethnic mix is about 95 percent Caucasian, and about 5 percent African-American, Hispanic and Asian.

“We are made up of 53 percent ‘cradle’ Mennonites, and 47 percent of us are from other-than-Mennonite backgrounds, including myself,” said Shannon Dycus, co-pastor of First Mennonite. “We attract a lot of young professionals who first come to the city for continuing education or new work and are seeking community. We also become home for many curious about Anabaptist theology.”



Dycus said the congregation values community. “We share together and offer care to one another, as well as serve in our broader community,” she said. For example, First Mennonite participates in the Interfaith Hospitality Network. As part of that ministry, the congregation hosts homeless families periodically by providing lodging, transportation, meals and fellowship. First Mennonite also provides food to the local food pantry.

## Discontinuing

As a cost-cutting measure, conference will be terminating our toll-free and fax lines. This change will become effective July 1, 2015.

# unity & variance update

## Task group sets deadline

### Surveys due Feb. 21

By **Mark Schloneger, chair**, Unity & Variance Task Group

**H**ow can we be faithful to Christ as we address our differences? How might we grow in the fruit of the Spirit while we passionately disagree?

As you may know, the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference appointed the Unity & Variance Task Group to lead a process through which conference members can “engage issues of variance and give feedback or direction to conference leaders.” The task group is further instructed to ensure “that the process will be accessible and inclusive so that all members of conference have the opportunity to add their voice to the discernment.” (job description, Unity & Variance Task Group)

To further these ends, a survey has been sent to all conference congregations through their pastors and delegates. Everyone who is a part of a conference congregation is invited to complete the survey through the following links:

**Survey (English):**

<http://bit.ly/in-mi-unity-variance-en>

**Survey (Spanish):**

<http://bit.ly/in-mi-unity-variance-es>

For those without internet access, you may request a hard copy through your pastor or conference delegate.

We ask all responses to be submitted by Sunday, February 21 so that we can compile and report them during the regional delegate meetings on March 14 (Bethel Mennonite Church; Ashley, MI) and March 21 (First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, IN). All responses will be anonymous unless a name is voluntarily provided.

Although we recognize the inherent limitations of any survey, we hope that this survey will be a helpful tool for further conversations and discernment.

## Save the date



The Annual sessions for 2015 will be in Indianapolis on June 18-20 at Broadway Methodist Church. The theme is “Joyfully Following Jesus.” Isaiah 12 will be our primary scripture passage. For more information: <http://im.mennonite.net/calendar/annual-sessions/>

## ministry transitions

### Beginnings



**Susan Dengler** was ordained Jan. 11 as a pastor at College Mennonite Church by Douglas Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions. This was an affirmation of her growing sense of pastoral call during her 18 years of ministry with the congregation.



**Russell Jensen**, pastor at Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship in Elkhart, IN, became interim regional pastor for the western region of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. Contact Russell at [russellj@belmontmc.org](mailto:russellj@belmontmc.org).