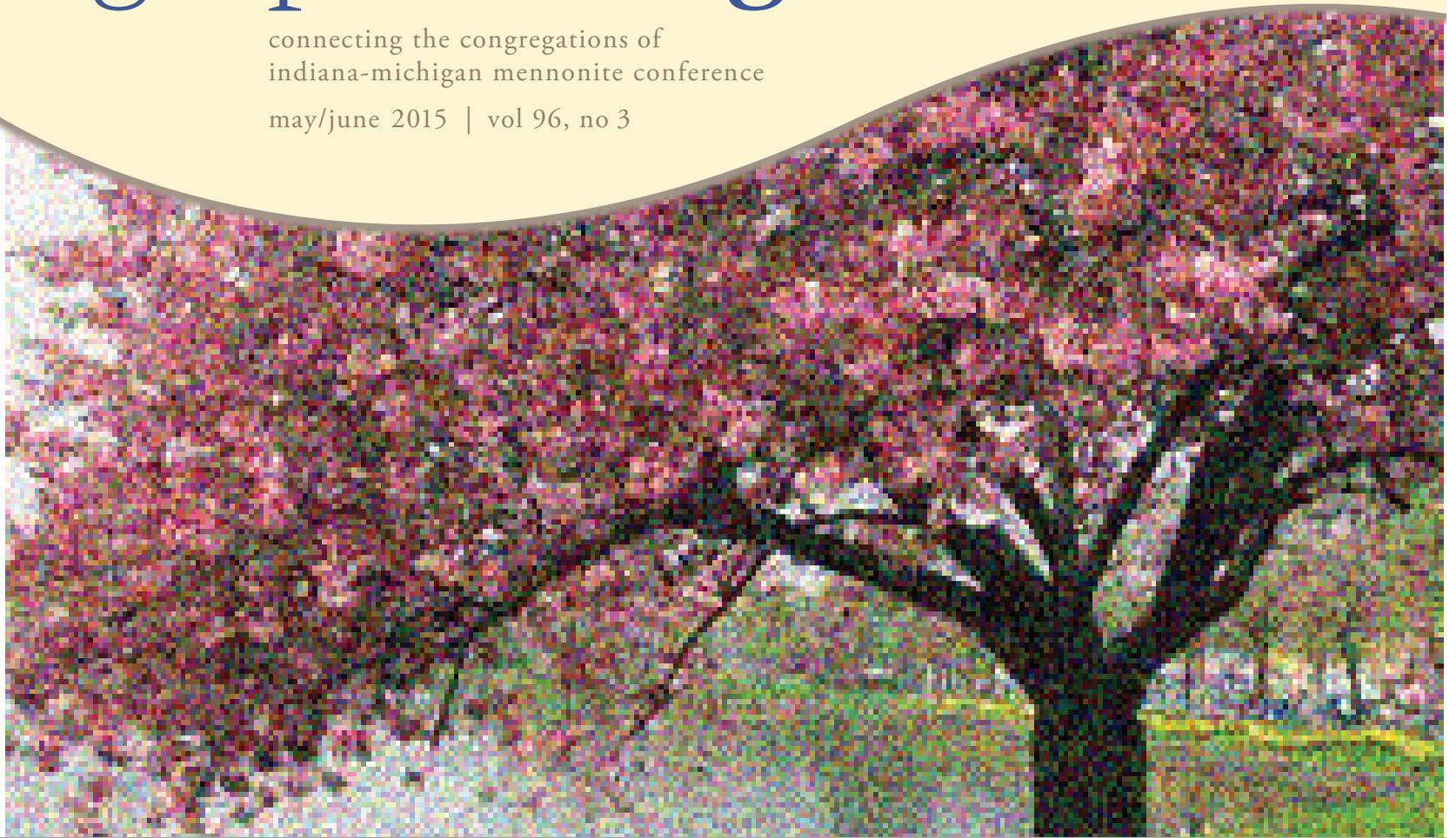


# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

may/june 2015 | vol 96, no 3



Artwork provided

## PLANT Network tills new soil When is the best time to plant a cherry tree?

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, interim editor

**W**hen is the best time to plant a cherry tree? That is the question that Steve Slagel, chair of IN-MI Conference's recently launched PLANT Network, posed to delegates during March regional meetings.

Slagel -- who with a team of several other members is guiding the conference's church planting efforts -- unearthed the answer to this question prior to the delegate meetings. As he and his wife, Barbara, prepared to move to Traverse City, Michigan, he did some research on their future home and discovered a story about Peter Dougherty.

He was an early missionary to the area who lived among the Native Americans. He provided religious studies, education, trade, farming and medical care.

Most importantly, he planted a cherry tree. As a result, today, Traverse City is the cherry capital of the world,

which grows 80 percent of the world's cherries. "Against everyone's advice, in 1852, Dougherty planted a cherry tree," Slagel said. "Wisdom suggests that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. In this case, it was 150 years ago. Michigan was a remote forested area that sustained a thriving logging industry for generations.

"But once the trees are cut, it's 25 years before saplings are to be harvested again."

If the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, the second best time to plant a tree is today, Slagel continued.

"For many years, the IN-MI forest has been in decline, and frankly, our ability to impact  
(continued on page 4)

### inside

**2 Moving in Mission**

**3 Mission** continued

**4 PLANT Network**  
continued

**5 MLT** report

**6 Delegate moments**

**7 Delegate** continued

**8 Final notes:** fYi

# moving in mission



## From sanctuary to the streets Indianapolis, Ind., congregation strives for change

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, interim editor

**S**am and Carol Bixler soon hope to have new neighbors in east Indianapolis where they have lived since 1999. It is where their congregation, Shalom Mennonite Church, was planted as an outreach in the city.

Outreach to the high-crime, low-income neighborhood however, has been a challenge for Shalom members-- all of whom, except for the Bixlers, drive to church from other neighborhoods

"People on our block see Shalom members as 'church people' and not as neighbors or friends," said Carol Bixler, a member of Shalom's Outreach Board that is reconfiguring Shalom's attitudes about ministry.

"That kind of attitude is deepened every time something happens and outsiders come in to fix things."

For example, about seven years ago, a taxi driver was killed a block away from the Bixlers and a lot of church people [not a reference to Shalom members] came into the neighborhood

to pray and to campaign for justice, as if they knew this neighborhood intimately. But they had never been there before.

"When that happened, I realized that I didn't want our church to be that way and longed for the day when others from Shalom would join us here," she said.

It seems that Bixler's hopes may become reality as a result of how a holy dissatisfaction with the drive-in culture is bubbling into new action, said Shalom pastor Brian Bither. Last fall, about a half dozen Shalom members -- including himself and Carol Bixler -- engaged with an asset training. It was sponsored by Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, the site of IN-MI Conference's Annual Sessions in June.

The training helps congregations minister outreach in mutual ways based on gift-sharing and people's assets rather than on a helper-helpee model based on problems and needs.

Shalom followed up this training with an affirmative congregational decision in February to move ahead with this "incarnational" approach. The invitation is of two types -- connectors and networkers. Families and individuals who move into the

This issue is available online:

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



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

**Office:** 109 E. Clinton St., Suite 100, Goshen, IN 46528  
(574) 534-4006 or (800) 288-8486; [www.im.mennonite.net](http://www.im.mennonite.net)

**Missional Leadership Team Members:** Jane Stoltzfus Buller, moderator, Goshen, IN; Gene Hartman, moderator-elect, Topeka, IN; Rebecca Kauffman, Orleans, IN; Aimee Mayeda, Indianapolis, IN; George Thompson, treasurer, Auburn Hills, MI; Bob Yoder, Goshen, IN.

**Gospel Evangel** is published six times annually by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May/Jun, Jul/Aug, Sep/Oct, Nov/Dec). It is printed and mailed by Duley Press, 2906 N. Home Street, Mishawaka, IN 46545. Periodical postage is paid at Nappanee, IN 46550 (USPS 575-940). Postmaster: Send address changes to IN-MI Mennonite Conference, 109 E. Clinton St., Suite 100, Goshen, IN 46528.

**Interim Editor:** Laurie Oswald Robinson  
**Email:** [LaurieOR123@gmail.com](mailto:LaurieOR123@gmail.com)

We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.

# moving in mission

neighborhood are connectors. Shalom hopes a family will come forward by the end of July, to join the Bixlers. Those who support this hands-on approach in others ways without moving to the neighborhood -- such as galvanizing teams of people to work together -- will be networkers. Jim and Linda Showalter are committing to this role.

"The assets training helps you to flip your approach around," Bither said. "Instead of asking about the problems and the needs, we explore the gifts and the strengths of the community and work together to develop neighborhood in positive ways."



**Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, has posted this sign-up sheet to identify those people who want to engage in more hands-on ministry in the church's east-side neighborhood. Photo by Carol Bixler**

Situations abound of how this could work, he said. For example, the congregation may discover that there are a bunch of teenagers who are failing in school. "Rather than set up a tutoring program that is based on a more traditional deficit-based mentality, we could explore whether we have retired history professor in

the neighborhood, or someone else who is really good at math," he said. "We could link up those people as a way to celebrate gifts and to foster mutually-positive relationships."

**"People think we are offering a new program, but we're not. It's simply about hanging out with people, about noticing the gifts and talents all around us, and finding ways to celebrate that." — Mike Mather**

Communities often address the symptoms rather than the roots of the issues, said Mike Mather, pastor at Broadway United Methodist who developed the asset training. While paying people's utility bills, providing tutoring programs and hosting food pantries can help members of congregations feel better about themselves, those efforts often do not develop the inner sense of self and giftedness of those being served.

For example, during 1986 through 1991 he ran a neighborhood youth program that appeared to be wildly successful until the last nine months of 1991.

"I did nine funerals for young men under 21 years of age -- all within a nine-block radius of our church," he said. "That deeply challenged me to realize that I was not nearly as helpful as I had thought.

"People think we are offering a new program, but we're not. It's simply about hanging out with people, about noticing the gifts and talents all around us, and finding ways to celebrate that."

## ministry transitions

### Beginnings

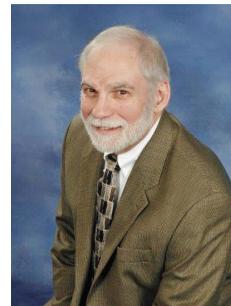


**Kelly Bates Oglesby** on April 12 was installed and licensed toward ordination recognition as pastor at Parkview Mennonite Church in Kokomo, Indiana., by Dan Miller, conference pastor.

### Endings



**Steve Slagel** ended as pastor at East Goshen (Ind.) Mennonite Church on April 12.



**Willie Kanagy** ended as pastor of facilities and finance at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, April 29.

# future/following Jesus

## Planting a vision (continued from cover)

our region has been in decline as well," he said. "We have struggled to sustain congregations and to maintain our missional focus."

It is this struggle that Dan Miller, conference pastor, strove to address when he invited Slagel a year and a half ago to spearhead church-planting efforts. Others now joining in that focus are PLANT Network cohorts Russell Jensen, Gary Martin and Marshall Anderson.

"I think church planting is a positive thing anytime, but especially in times of unrest or anxiety," said Anderson, pastor of North Leo (Ind.) Mennonite Church. "It is always good to have life-changing things going on."

"I believe our time has come in the Anabaptist church to let our light shine. There is a hunger in our world for all the things we focus on -- active peacemaking, social justice, service, engaging with community and benefitting those around us beyond the church. We have much to offer our culture, and it is time that we connect with it."

PLANT Network is one of the ways conference congregations can begin connecting more deeply, Slagel and Anderson said. Towards that end, the Network is

currently working with potential church planters. "We are not able to share specifics yet," Slagel said. "But we hope we can introduce these emerging church planters to you at the Annual Sessions in Indianapolis."

**"I believe our time has come in the Anabaptist church to let our light shine. There's a hunger in our world for all the things we focus on -- active peacemaking, social justice, service, engaging with the community and benefitting those around us beyond the church." — Marshall Anderson**

"As these possibilities are developing, PLANT Network is creating systems of discernment, assessment, support, training and coaching to foster strong, effective, creative leaders who will plant churches."

Church planting is not the mission of a team but of all conference congregations who are invited into God's mission. Here are his suggestions for preparing the soil for new church-planting efforts:

**Praying:** For the conference and its various regions as well as for God to raise up entrepreneurial leaders.

**Connecting:** Build the capacity of your congregation to support new churches through imagination, passion, prayer and physical support.

**Thinking missionally:** Congregations need to ask: What can we do to make the most dramatic impact in our region?

**For more information, contact:**

**[im.mennonite.net](http://im.mennonite.net)**

## Hard times, good times

When is the good time to plant a church? IN-MI Conference history reveals that hard times can be good times for doing so, according to James Krabill, Mennonite Mission Network.

At the outset of the Great Depression in 1929, members of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana, answered that question with this: "It looks like the economy may be tanking, let's plant a church." Prairie Street planted Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart. Belmont became a full member of the conference 20 years later, in 1949."

And then in 1936, with the dramatic effects of economic crisis still being felt, Prairie Street answered that question with, "The Depression is pretty bad right now, let's start something new!" That's when the congregation began Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Jefferson Township, north of Goshen, Indiana. By 1942 Pleasant View became an independent congregation with the conference.

And then in 1950, Pleasant View began a new work in International Falls, Minnesota. In 1960, they planted Tri-Lakes Chapel in Bristol, Indiana.

# Communicating the three C's: Credentialing, Connecting, Celebrating

By **Daniel Miller**, conference pastor

**S**taffing for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is changing on July 1. The Missional Leadership Team (MLT), as the leadership board for our conference, has set three staffing priorities that emphasize the important aspects of conference life and address decreasing revenue. These priorities do not replace our mission statement but do describe how we will staff to support the mission.

**Credentialing:** One of the most concrete ways conference networks assist congregations is during pastoral searches and installations. Conference staff work closely with search committees to prepare and walk through transition times. Leadership teams assist in assessing leadership and encouraging ongoing growth. IN-MI licenses and ordains pastors in our member congregations.

**Connecting:** Networks such as IN-MI Conference offer opportunities for resourcing and learning from one another. Area councils, delegate meetings, leadership retreat and Annual Sessions all provide opportunities for connecting. Formal communication channels can enhance this congregation-to-congregation and pastor-to-pastor connection. As groups called and equipped by God, congregations have wisdom, strength and hope – and often questions – to share with others. We hope to include stories of connections to community and that enhance connections across conference.

**We hope to tell stories of congregations being transformed by mission. Not stories of success, but of congregations experimenting along the way.**

**Celebrating:** As people who emphasize the centrality of discipleship, it is important to remember that God's grace is first, and our response is truly a response to God's initiative. The conference mission statement begins by referring to the joy of following Jesus. New Testament writers recognize both the radical reordering of priorities and the abundant life that come with responding to

the call to follow Jesus. John 3:16 talks of God's great motivating love for the world. God takes the initiative to redeem and reconcile us and invites us into a transforming life. Delegate meetings and Annual Sessions offer times for celebrating God's grace as we gather from across the geography of conference.

**... congregations have wisdom, strength and hope – and often questions – to share with others.**

As we look to the next year of *Gospel Evangel*, we imagine these priorities could shape the stories we tell. We hope to tell stories of congregations being transformed by mission. Not stories of success, but of congregations experimenting and learning along the way. We hope this strengthens relationships between congregations, and encourages new opportunities to learn from one another. We welcome your responses and ideas along the way.



**Team members top row: Gene Hartman, conference moderator-elect, Rebecca Kauffman and Aimee Mayeda. Bottom row, Bob Yoder, Jane Stoltzfus Buller, conference moderator, and George Thompson. Photos provided**

# capturing delegate moments

## Blessed be the ties

Delegates share hopes, concerns in regional sessions



This photo essay chronicles the prayers, hopes, dialogues and worship that delegates experienced March 14 and 21 at regional meetings. Photographers were Pastor Joe Pendleton (north) and Mandy Yoder, Amigo Centre (south).



### Worship : Hopes, concerns and communion

Regional Pastors introduced the theme, "Joyfully following Jesus," and scripture for Annual Sessions by having table groups reflect on the Isaiah 12 passage. Participants were invited to tie knots in pieces of string – at one end for concerns they brought with them and at the other end for hopes they have. Worship and prayer were woven throughout the day, and included communion at the end.

### Reports: Current realities and future vision

- The PLANT Network members reported on their work this year. They are engaging two strong church planting candidates and hope to have two church plants in the next year.



# capturing delegate moments

- Ministry Credentialing Team brought an update on its credential review process.
- Missional Leadership Team explained the process resulting in staffing decreases and reported how they are addressing related concerns and the conference priorities. Staffing changes begin July 1.
- Stewardship Team presented a financial update slightly better than this time last year; and a proposed spending plan based on Missional Leadership Team's directions on staffing.

## Unity & Variance and Spirit fruit

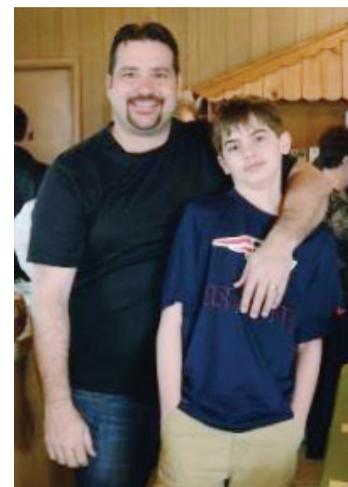
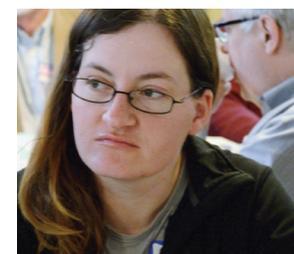
The Unity and Variance Discernment Group reported on their work so far, shared data from their survey of IN-MI members and discussed next steps. At both meetings, Mark Schloneger, chair, reviewed the UVDG mandate. Reading Ephesians 4:2-3 he asked, "How can we be faithful to Christ as we address our differences? How might we grow in the fruit of the Spirit?" He also emphasized confidence in God's faithfulness, citing the plain of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Delegates had time around tables to reflect on the survey report.

## Faithfulness in an unknown time

Conference pastor Dan Miller spoke about the unraveling of understandings regarding the foundations of relationships as congregations. "What are we to do?" he asked, "when our basis for life together unravels? We do what we have always said we do – seek God's direction and move faithfully. Anything less moves us away from being faithful followers of Jesus."

**"Some of us will leave. Some of us will stay. My own sense is the Spirit inviting me to stay. I invite you to come along with IN-MI Conference." — Dan Miller**

Miller identified Vision: Healing and Hope and the conference mission statement as points of commonality and described efforts in church planting, intercultural transformation and churches engaging their communities. "God's mission has a church."



Participants clockwise page 6: Delegates share at a table group; Russell Jensen, regional pastor, leads worship. Participants clockwise page 7: regional pastors Mary Mininger and David Araujo lead worship; Dan Schrock eats lunch; Jane Stoltzfus Buller, conference moderator; Heidi Burkhart; Suella and Ken Hollinger (left) greet John Powell; and Joe and son Jason Pendleton enjoy the coffee bar;

# final notes fYi



## To-do list for Annual Sessions

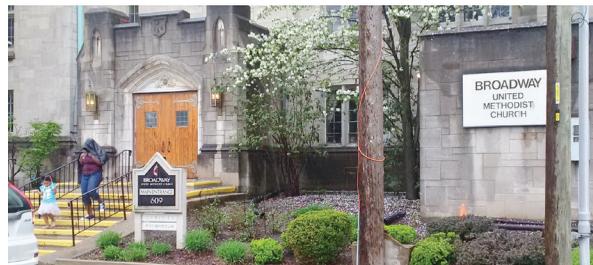
### #1: Register now and save for June 18-20

**Registration is only available online:** Beginning May 16, registration is \$75. The cost increases to \$90 at noon on June 8, EDT.

Please book your rooms as soon as possible. Registration, lodging options and other information at <http://im.mennonite.net/calendar/annual-sessions/>.

On-site meals will not be available to those registering after June 1. Costs are listed on the registration form. Please make special diet requests with your registration in the "Special Needs" space. No refunds will be given for unused meal tickets.

**#2 Pray and pray again:** Pray in support of the gathering and that God guide and protect us as we gather. Meet with the delegates from your congregation to pray for the sessions and to review your delegate packets.



Sessions will be held at Broadway United Methodist Church, 609 E. 29th St., Indianapolis, Indiana. Photo by Dan Miller

**#3 Check out down-time options:** Many special meals, gatherings and tours have been planned. Go online to preview the options and pre-register when indicated. Thursday afternoon workshops include: Healthy Boundaries, by Dr. Melissa Hofstetter; and pastor-congregation evaluations. Service projects available.

## financial report

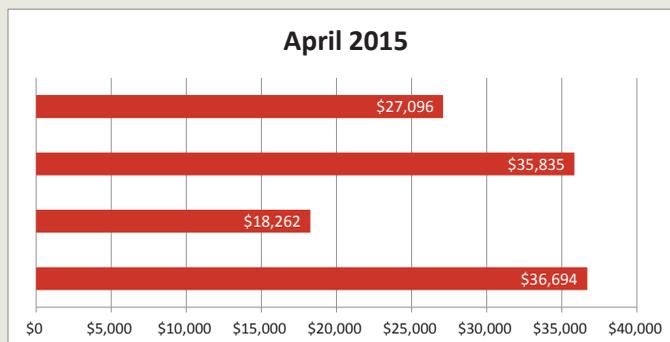
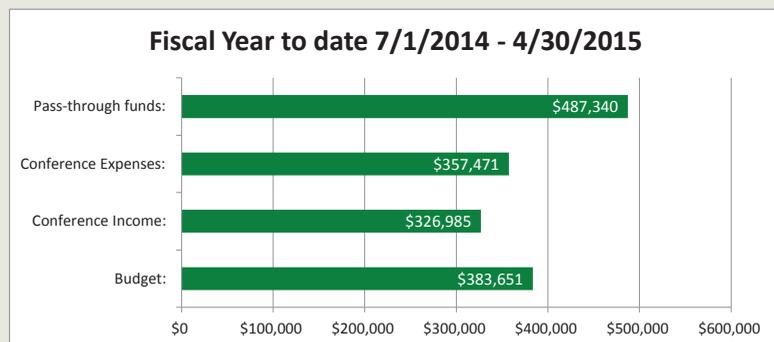
By **Greg Leatherman Sommers**, conference administrator

### April 2015 financial report

Conference has been blessed by opportunities to encourage congregations and leaders over the past few months. We awarded \$39,500 in a matching fund grant for Hopewell Mennonite Church, Kouts, Indiana. It is expanding and updating its facilities. The church is now running a child care, which has increased community awareness of the congregation. Conference still has over \$500,000 available for grants to churches.

In addition to this capital grant fund, conference is encouraging church planters by using several thousand dollars from the newly-established PLANT Fund to send them to a church planting conference in Chicago. As you may remember, the PLANT Fund was established using 10 percent of proceeds of the sale of North Pointe Fellowship in Warsaw (a former church plant).

Net income for April was negative \$17,573. The spending plan anticipated a shortfall of \$3,889 for April, and a negative \$17,733 balance at this point in our fiscal year. Despite spending \$26,180 less than planned fiscal year to date, decreased financial support has left conference \$30,486 in the hole so far. Using income and expense patterns from the five most recent years, we predict a loss of \$17,674 at the end of fiscal year 2014-2015 (based on the end of April figures).



# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

may/june 2015 | vol 96, no 3

