

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference
march/april 2016 | vol 97, no 2

Photo by Leannell Swartz



Nurse Denise Winchell (left), of Pine Grove Mennonite Church in Battle Creek, Mich., serves as a volunteer at the free medical camp in Kerugoya, Kenya, in 2007.

Blessing beyond Michigan Pine Grove members bond with Kenyans

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, editor

Leanell Swartz, a member of Pine Grove Mennonite Church in Beaver Creek, Mich., had been adamant with God that she would do anything but travel overseas -- especially not to Africa.

Her spirit took a 180-degree turn when she met Mary Wandri of Kerugoya, Kenya, in 2001.

That's when Leannell and her husband, Tom, pastor of Pine Grove, hosted Mary and her husband, Frances, in their home for a month. Frances Wandri is pastor of People's Church, a congregation in Kerugoya that has grown as a result of its long-term relationship with Pine Grove.

Over the past 15 years, Pine Grove's financial, prayer and mission-team support has helped the Kenyan congregation to build a new meetinghouse and to launch nine satellite congregations.

After sharing her heart with her Kenyan sister in Christ, Swartz was ready to say "yes" when God called her in 2003 to join a Pine Grove delegation to Kenya.

"I always thought of Africa as a pretty scary place," Swartz said. "But after I met Mary, and we shared our lives, I was ready to do something I never dreamed I would do.

"Having Mary here, and going there, has changed my perspective. The people in Africa have little in the way of material goods, but they give the most love and joy of anyone I have ever met.

"That's because they have the riches of God's love in their hearts."

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re-covenanting on Pentecost



Members of Belmont Mennonite Church and Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship engage with children in activities that are part of the two congregations' shared mission in Elkhart, Ind. Photo by Glenn Leinbach

Passing a Pentecost test Holy Spirit honors shared mission commitment

By **Russell Jensen**, pastor, Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship

Last Pentecost, Belmont Mennonite Church (BMC) and Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship (BNF) re-covenantated to our 'One Church, Two Congregations' model. We re-committed to shared mission in the neighborhood.

What happened after the service allowed the Holy Spirit to begin to test the tenacity of our commitment and honor it by bringing new ministry to our doorstep. The following story is how this adventure unfolded.

During the carry-in meal following the service, neighborhood children ate the grapes and crackers left over from

communion. They later threw grapes around the foyer and messed up a classroom before leaving.

Next Sunday the same five kids returned after BMC's morning service. They asked to play in the gym, but no one was available to supervise them and they were asked to leave. That evening they arrived in time for BNF's evening service. An usher had them pass out bulletins and attempted to supervise them during worship. But it didn't take long for us to realize that while these kids were clearly glad to be with us, they had no idea how to behave. It was the beginning of summer

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This issue is available online:

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.

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Missional Leadership Team Members: Gene Hartman, moderator, Topeka, IN; Paula Killough, moderator-elect, Elkhart, IN; Rebecca Kauffman, Orleans, 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.

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We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.

Blessing beyond (continued from cover)



From left, Tom and Leannell Swartz visit Mary and Frances Wandri in Kenya. Photo by

Because of God's grace, and a vision much bigger than their small congregation, Pine Grove has gifted their global church family with a total of about \$100,000.

They have also supplied the elbow grease and medical support of several mission teams that traveled to Kenya. The teams helped build People's Church new meeting-house as well as to participate in free medical clinics sponsored by Kenyan doctors and nurses.

"Whenever you remain outward focused, you know you are helping people," Tom Swartz said. "Though we are very small, we decided that we wanted to be a river rather than a reservoir. That keeps God's gifts flowing through us. We don't have much in our bank account, but something is always able to flow through."

This conduit applies to national and local projects as well as those in Kenya, Swartz said. For example, the congregation donates 10 percent of all its income to God's mission -- including Food Resource Bank, a Mennonite Central Committee project.

Locally, Pine Grove supports local Future Farmer of American projects as well as volunteers to do clowning in a nursing home once a month.

The Swartzes are just two of many people in the 35-member congregation who have traveled to Kenya to be part of what God is doing in their adopted church family on the other side of the world.

Two others are Harold and Shelley Vogt. They participated in a couple of Pine Grove's mission trips to Kenya.

Harold helped attain permissions and logistical preparation from community leaders for the medical camps. Shelley, a registered nurse, volunteered to help the local doctors and nurses in one of the medical camps.

Prior to these experiences, the Vogts had not traveled to a Third World country and were impressed with the Kenyans' beautiful spirits.

"I was struck with their patience," Harold Vogt said. "I was there a week ahead of the medical camp to make sure things were in place, and some of the Kenyans were already waiting for it to begin. They had come in from the bush and had walked days and days to get there"

**"Though we are very small, we decided we wanted to be a river rather than a reservoir. That keeps God's gifts flowing through us."
—Tom Swartz**

Shelley Vogt said, "The experience made me very grateful for the medical care that we have here in the United States. But even with their hardships, they were very grateful for what care they were receiving. They were very quiet, very orderly, and there was no arguing or anyone trying to get ahead of anybody."

Despite differences between Michigan and Kenya, she now understands that when it comes to the faith walk, there are many similarities between people of all backgrounds and races. "We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we share a lot of the same struggles and challenges in our faith," she said.

Some Pine Grove members were not able to join one of the overseas trips. Yet the testimonies of those who did travel unified the congregation in its Kenya connection.

"Our relationship with the Kenyans has knit our church more closely together," Harold Vogt said. "It's taken a good number of years to raise the funds we needed, but the entire congregation took ownership of it."

Curriculum outside classroom

Discovering how peace, justice intersect with daily life

By **Kevin Miller**, Bethany communication director

For Bethany junior Abby Hochstetler, visiting Koinonia Farm in Americus, Ga., was a bit like walking on hallowed ground. She said, "seeing the shack where founder Clarence Jordan worked and died was so cool and will stick with me. I'd like to find a way to go back for a longer time."

The visit was part of Bethany School's J-Term activities, sponsored the first two weeks of January. That's when students take intensive courses that expand their learning through experiential activities. This year several courses focused on ways that Mennonite values of peacemaking and promoting justice intersect with everyday life.

ful atmosphere and spending time with my fellow classmates in a deeper way than I do at school."

Civil Rights and Mennonite Disaster Service

Another J-Term class focused on justice issues by studying civil rights in the U.S.-- primarily the African-American experience from slavery to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, but also current issues. In her research paper on Jim Crow laws, junior Pamela Ortiz noted that while blacks have been targets of discrimination throughout American history, other groups such as undocumented immigrants and Muslims have become targets today. Eric Kaufmann's class also spent one week serving with Mennonite Disaster Service in Texas rebuilding homes destroyed in a wildfire.

Children Who Experience Discrimination

Fourth and fifth graders spent part of their J-Term learning about how other children experience and handle discrimination. They focused on a child who made a difference despite a particular kind of discrimination: gender (Malala Yousafazi, Pakistani girl shot for pursuing an education), religious (Anne Frank, Jewish girl who died in a concentration camp), racial (Ruby Bridges, first African-American to integrate public schools), and disability (Ryan White, prohibited from attending school due to his diagnosis of AIDS).

Teacher Linda Hochstetler chose students at random to either be discriminated against or be part of the group who was doing the discrimination. When studying disability, students assigned diseases, such as Prickly Purple Pox, to those who weren't allowed to interact with "healthy" classmates.

Fourth-graders took a field trip to the Children's Museum of Indianapolis to see The Power of Children display that featured some of the children they studied. They also looked at ways to be more inclusive.

For example, they played a variation of musical chairs. Instead of someone being left out of the game each time a chair was removed, they made sure that everyone had a seat -- even when they got down to one chair!



Bethany School's high school juniors visit Koinonia Farm in Americus, Ga., during their 2016 J-Term in January. Photo by

Hochstetler and her classmates studied and visited Koinonia Farm, a small but influential religious intentional community in Georgia that began in 1942 as a "demonstration plot for the kingdom of God." The community's faith commitment to racial equality, pacifism and economic sharing played a significant early role in the Civil Rights movement and birthed partner ministries such as Habitat for Humanity and Jubilee Partners.

Students lived, worshipped and worked alongside community members. Bethany teachers Krysten Parson and John Mast said the students were "blown away" by the spirit of the people and grasped that it's about relationships and their call to follow Jesus by accepting anyone.

Sophomore Skylar Lazarre reflects, "I was touched with how welcoming they were of 24 loud teenagers into their quiet community," she said. "I enjoyed the peace-

Memories shape future moments

2016 summer camp program to form identity

By **Amanda Hunsberger/Emily Short**, Amigo Centre staff

When we think about our past experiences at Amigo's summer camp, we picture children (and staff members) running around outside, living in community and growing in their relationship with God. We picture expressions of joy on children's faces as they play together. Perhaps this sounds a little unrealistic, but those are our memories. And, just as our memories shape who we are, our memories of summer camp shape what summer camp will become in the future. If any part of our past summer camp experiences are reflected in this coming summer, there is no doubt that summer camp 2016 is going to be epic!

Summer camp is a counter-cultural experience that can strongly impact every child who spends a week at camp. At Amigo, we seek to provide each child with a safe environment to shape and discover qualities that form a part of their identity, both in relation to God and to other people.

One way of accomplishing this goal that differs from other camps is our co-op activities. These activities are challenges that help children learn to use their problem-solving skills and communicate in order to work as a group to complete a task. Co-op is my (Amanda) personal favorite part of Amigo's summer camp program. However, it is only one of the many other activities that shape the camp week, such as worship, devotions, hiking, fishing, swimming and more. Each child walks away with his or her own experience that helps shape his or her identity. Summer camp is an experience that a person doesn't quickly forget.

Each year, since 1970, Amigo has provided a free week of camp for students from St. Joseph County, Mich. We rely on donations from individuals, churches and groups, along with our annual Golf Scramble, to cover costs of providing a week of camp for up to 80 campers. If you have contributed in the past – thank you! If you are seeking a project to donate to, please consider sending a child to camp for a week (\$250-\$300 per child). It can be a life-changing experience. If you would like someone to share with your group or congregation, please contact us at Amigo. We will be happy to share our stories with you. Also – if you are a golfer, consider participating in our Golf Scramble, scheduled for June 4 at Klinger Lake Country Club. Registration information is available online at www.amigocentre.org Thank you for your support!



Amigo Centre staff (names?) organize activities for summer campers (names?). Photo by

Also – mark your calendars! This is the year for Know Jesus – an event just for Junior High age youth and sponsors held on the campus of Goshen College. This year's event is July 29-31. Registration information will be coming soon.

Summer Camps 2016

Week 1, June 12-17: Discover, Encounter & Day Camp + First Camp

Week 2, June 19-24: Adventure Camp & Experience Camp

Week 3, June 26-July 1: Discover, Encounter and Day Camp

Week 5, July 10-15: Discover, Encounter and Day Camp

July 18-22: Day Camp

July 25-29: Day Camp

planning annual sessions



Worship during IN-MI Conference's 2016 Annual Sessions will be held in the Sermon on the Mount chapel on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Photo by

Restoring joy at Annual Sessions Elkhart pastors plan focal point on Holy One

By **Laurie Oswald Robinson**, editor

The Elkhart, Ind., area council pastors are preparing to focus this year's Annual Sessions on the Holy One who can restore the Lord's joy in IN-MI Conference.

"In our planning, one of the hopes that has risen to the surface is that we fill this time together with worship and fellowship," said planning committee member Suella Graber, pastor of Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart.

The pastors' committee is both planning and hosting the gathering. This is a new model for organizing the annual event, Gerber said. "We did not just want to be ushers and volunteers as hosts -- we wanted to actually help to shape our time together," she said.

Helping to shape the event are IN-MI's Missional Leadership Team (MLT) materials. "These materials and counsel from the MLT are helping our committee to understand some of the dynamics in our conference and informing what we want to happen as a result," Gerber said. "Part of our conference tagline is 'joyfully following Jesus.' So we want to help restore that joy."

Annual sessions will begin Thursday afternoon with Bible study, workshops and worshipful work. The sessions will close Saturday morning with a prayer walk led by local pastors, culminating with a final worship and sending.

To help participants to better know their sisters and brothers in the Elkhart area, each worship service will begin with stories ranging from accounts of the earliest inhabitants to current congregations and local ministries.

"Our hope and prayer is that when people leave Annual Sessions, they will be glad they are part of IN-MI Conference," Gerber said. "Rather than have them say, 'thank goodness, that's done,' we want them to say, 'I am glad to have been part of that.'"

SAVE THE DATE 2016

**IN-MI Conference's Annual Sessions:
June 16-18, AMBS Campus, Elkhart, Ind.**

"While there is work that will need to be tended to, it is our deep and earnest desire to use the majority of our time and energies grounded in worshiping the Holy One and nurturing our relationships with one another."

To fulfill that hope, the committee has created the theme, "Restore our Joy," for the Annual Sessions planned for June 16-18 on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart. Each worship service in the Sermon on the Mount chapel will be a variation of this theme.

Holy Spirit honors (continued from page 2)

vacation, and the neighborhood children became a daily presence on the street and around the church. Staff began to learn names and build trust, but we also needed to come up with plans to engage them...fast!

BMC organized persons willing to welcome the children for an hour of open gym and a simple lunch. BNF created behavior guidelines to integrate the children into our evening program of Sunday school, worship and a meal.

For example, each child was required to sit with an adult in worship. The morning program worked well, but as the group of children grew to 10, BNF struggled to accommodate them and risked losing folk.

BNF scheduled a congregational meeting, during which we recognized that God brought the community engagement we sought right to our doorstep. However, our limited human resources were overwhelmed. We could no longer include the children in our full evening program.

It was the hardest thing we have ever done, but we chose instead to experiment with an hour-long "Kids

Club" in place of Sunday school. We staffed it with volunteers from both BNF and BMC. The first half hour includes action songs and a Bible story, followed by an activity or craft. They are then served a snack, followed by some free play.

"The fresh engagement is opening eyes to needs right on our doorstep and shaking us out of our comfort zone." —Russell Jensen

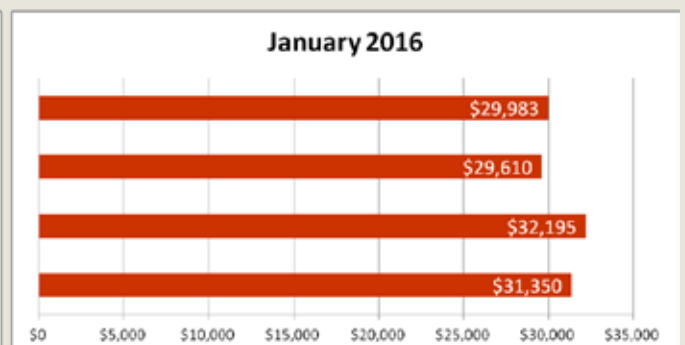
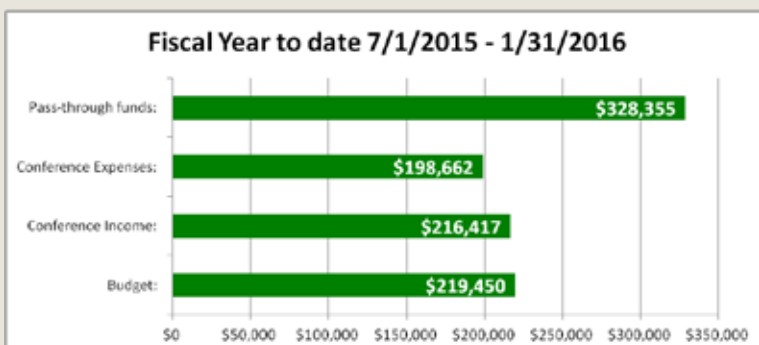
Months later, as we serve together, we are experiencing improved behavior and deepening relationships with the children and between members of BNF and BMC. Our Christmas program was a first step toward reintegrating them into worship, and we look toward more regular involvement in the spring.

The Holy Spirit took our re-commitment to neighborhood mission seriously. The fresh engagement is opening our eyes to needs right on our doorstep, and shaking us out of our comfort zone. God is challenging us to do things differently. As a result, God's love and acceptance is impacting young lives in new and powerful ways.

financial report

By **Jim Norton**, IN-MI bookkeeper

We are grateful for the generosity of congregations in this year of adjustment. For January, income of \$32,195 exceeds expenses of \$29,610 with a resultant balance of \$1,585. For July through January, income exceeds expenses by just under \$16,000. Thank you, and thanks be to God.



journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, reflects on the messy adventure of congregational mission faithfulness--both locally and globally.



As followers of Jesus Christ, members of Indiana-Michigan congregations seek to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace. This is often messy for believers – and life-giving. C.S. Lewis has Mr. Beaver describe Aslan, the Christ figure in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* in these ways:

“He’s wild you know, not like a tame lion.”

“Course he isn’t safe, but he’s good.”

“He’ll be coming and going,” he had said. “One day you’ll see him and another you won’t. ... He’ll often drop in. Only you mustn’t press him. He’s wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.”

Those words– “He’s wild you know, not like a tame lion.” – capture my imagination. I’ve experienced the truth that Jesus doesn’t want to be contained by my understandings. I’ve had to let God act in ways that are theologically questionable. This is the reality of being involved in God’s mission and continually being converted.

In this issue, we again tell two stories of congregations being changed by mission. One story is of congregation in Elkhart, where we will meet for Annual Sessions in June. I hope you will come to hear other stories of God’s activity in Elkhart, which has all the diversity and challenges of a city.

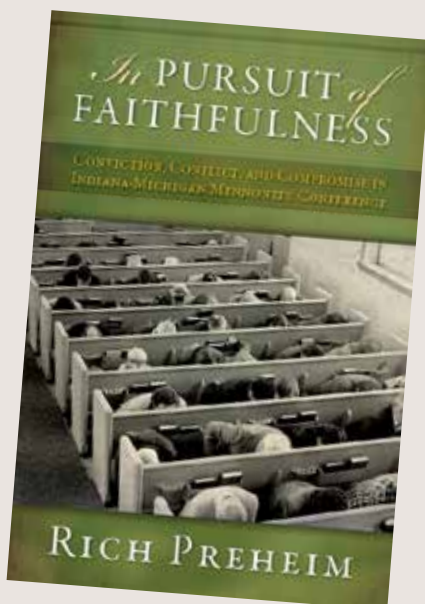
The other story is about international missions. In all the emphasis on connecting with the local community, we can downplay the impact of relationships with people around the world. But the God of our Lord Jesus Christ uses many influences to convert us. I hope these stories challenge and encourage you.

25 % off!

In Pursuit of Faithfulness: Conviction, Conflict and Compromise in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference will be available at Annual Sessions in June for a 25 percent savings.

The hardcover book, written by Rich Preheim and published by Herald Press, will be available in late May for retail \$49.95.

Preheim, historian and journalist, investigates the heritage and innovations of IN-MI Conference that have profoundly shaped Mennonite faith and practice since the 19th century.



ministry transitions

Endings



Dagne Assefa retired as pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, Ind., on Dec. 31, 2015.



Harold Yoder retired as pastor at Yellow Creek Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on Nov. 15, 2015.



Marshall Anderson concluded as pastor of North Leo Mennonite Church, Leo, Ind., on Jan. 31.