

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

november/december 2015 | vol 96, no 6

Photo by Lynelle Mellady



Jeanie Miller, and her granddaughter, Lily Miller, prepare a meal to deliver to someone's home.

Sharing meals that heal Howard-Miami ministry feeds hunger for fellowship

By **Sarah Schlegel**, co-pastor of Howard-Miami Mennonite Church

After hosting a Sister Care seminar, the Women's Ministry Council at Howard-Miami Mennonite Church began preparing meals to help feed the hunger for healing, reconciliation and fellowship in a hurting church.

One of the instigators for this new ministry was Margi Bontrager. The idea to host Sister Care was sparked in her heart during Mennonite Church USA's Phoenix 2013 convention. It was there that Bontrager, a congregational delegate, learned about Sister Care, a ministry sponsored by Mennonite Women USA. It provides women with tools for ongoing personal healing, recognizing and celebrating God's grace in their lives and responding more confidently and effectively to the needs of others in their families, congregations and communities.

The more she learned about Sister Care, the more she felt her congregation in Kokomo, Ind., should host it. The church was hurting, due to several losses. Those losses included a pastoral resignation and families struggling with various issues.

The church rallied around the women's council by supporting fundraising events far beyond what the council had even hoped.

"As we got ready for Sister Care, healing was already happening for our hurting congregation," Bontrager said. "We were providing positive opportunities for us to be church together."

(continued on page 3)

inside

2 God Talk

3 Meals continued

4 at Bethany

5 at Amigo

6 IN-MI retreat

7 God Talk continued

8 journeying with our pastors

growing in faith



Artwork provided

Talk the walk with God

Sharing personal faith stories in public

By **Phil Waite**, pastoral team leader, College Mennonite Church

Several years ago while I was in ministry in another part of the country, I had occasion to visit three Mennonite churches not my own. I was beginning a program of study in preaching, and was looking forward to hearing preaching for a change, as opposed to being the preacher. I was also looking forward to hearing some good news.

Unfortunately for me, I found each of these services on what I call Service-Project-Reporting-Sunday. In each of these three services, youth and other members were reporting on service projects they had done. I was struck by the congratulatory feel, marked by a sense of pride in values of service shared by the congregation, and expressed by these projects. These services almost left me with a sense that the only good news to be heard in Mennonite churches is that Mennonites are nice

service-oriented people. I say *almost* because something happened in the third service that has changed the way I think about church and about worship.

During open microphone time for personal sharing, a man gave a testimony. He was going blind and recently had a medical procedure done that carried some risk. He was reluctant, acknowledging that God does not seem to heal everyone in need of healing, and that he was no more worthy than anyone else. He made clear to us that this story was not about him. He concluded with this echo of John 9. "I can't explain it, but this I know, once I was blind and now I can see."

This was a life changing moment for me.

(continued on page 7)

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.

Office: 109 E. Clinton St., Suite 100, Goshen, IN 46528
(574) 534-4006 or www.im.mennonite.net

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.

Editor: Laurie Oswald Robinson
Email: LaurieOR123@gmail.com

We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.

Meals that heal (continued from cover)

The congregation rallied by sponsoring a soup cook-off, silent auction and a potato bake meal. These events raised money for the costs of hosting Sister Care and provided joint purpose and fun fellowship for a hurting church.

After almost a year of planning and fundraising, the council prepared for a Sister Care weekend in April 2014. They had prayed and hoped for up to 45 women, and God blessed the event with the presence of 63.

An outgrowth of the weekend was an immediate sense of call on the part of the women's council to minister to hurting people in their congregation and around the world.

One way to respond to this call was to invite volunteers to prepare meals for people in the congregation, including shut-ins, families with a new baby or a recent death, or people with recent illnesses or hospitalization. For many years, people had provided meals for others, but not in a scheduled, systematic way, and often only for families with a new baby.

"We are so grateful to have a loving, caring church that supports us, not only with prayer and encouragement, but also with food lovingly prepared for us."

—Evelyn Miller

In this new ministry, the Women's Ministry Council makes a list of people each month who should receive a meal, and Martha Miller, a church member with administrative skills, organizes the volunteer schedule.

"I've learned we have some ladies in our church who are always willing to fix a meal, even though they are very busy," Miller said.



Members of the Sister Care weekend planning team at Howard-Miami were (back row from left) Karen Kendall, Margi Bontrager, Jeanie Miller and Sarah Schlegel. Front row, from left, Elsie Horner and Sadona Lowe. Photo by Rhoda Keener

The initial hope was to provide a meal for others. However, the most rewarding part of these meal gifts has been the hospitality shown to the meal makers. Many people have been asked to share a meal, or even a simple dessert, as yet another way to provide connection and fellowship for people unable to attend church due to health issues.

Evelyn Miller has battled cancer for several years, and she and her husband have been on the meal list every month. Due to her chemo treatments, she does not always have the energy to attend church and values the opportunity to visit with those who bring them meals.

She said, "We are so grateful to have a loving, caring church that supports us, not only with prayer and encouragement, but also with food lovingly prepared for us.

"Most all of these women are employed full time. So it takes much effort to prepare and deliver meals. We know it is a sacrifice. We enjoy the time they have to visit with us, not always a lot, but it is welcome. It is a good way of connecting with people that we may not see or talk to often."

Working together as a congregation has brought a surprising gift of reconciliation in the midst of conflict and tension. Showing acts of love, even in the offering of a simple meal, provides healing for the church.

at Bethany



From left, Bethany students Ethan Lapp, Alicia Thomas (fourth from left), Leah Beachey (fifth from left) enjoy Dutch Blitz with three of their new friends in Paraguay. Photo by Ethan Lapp

Bonding in Paraguay

Finding friends in Christ far from home

By **Kevin Miller**, Bethany communication director

Senior Alicia Thomas discovered this past June that followers of Christ can travel anywhere in the world and be surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ.

For most of their culture and language immersion trip June 2-17 to Paraguay, she and other Bethany students were among fellow Christians as they were hosted by Christian families with children attending *Colegio Alberto Schweitzer* in Asunción. In turn, it sends students to Bethany in even-numbered years.

Most days included cultural field trips and learning experiences, such as attending a soccer game, visiting Iguazu Falls, shopping in an open-air market, playing rugby in wheelchairs with mobility-challenged people and zip-lining on a ropes course in the mountains.

Bethany students also attended classes with their hosts and participated in family activities, which for some included attending church meetings.

At a Bible study, junior Nathan Nafziger studied evangelism and how youth can teach others about God. Some days before school, he and his host brother met with other students to sing Christian music, accompanied by

a keyboard and guitar. Nafziger said. "They ended with a few words and prayer, and then headed to classes," he said. "It was all student led with no adults present."

Parties were common and often happened late in the evening with lots of meat, tereré (a tealike drink), and opportunities to practice Spanish and get to know one another better. Some of their hosts enjoyed learning to play Dutch Blitz!

"Many families weren't rich, but they gave what was in their reach." — Christian Ramirez

"Some of my best memories were with my host family," senior Martin Gerig said. "They accepted me and made me feel at home. My host mom even referred to me as her *otro hijo* (other son) or *hijo nuevo* (new son). Our host families were some of the most hospitable people we've ever met." Classmate Christian Ramirez added, "Many families weren't rich, but they gave what was in their reach."

Marked by memories

Executive director ends five years of service

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

When the Amigo Centre Board called me to serve as Amigo's executive director in 2010, we agreed that a five-year window of service was a good beginning point.

On December 1, I will have served at Amigo for five years. As the five-year mark neared, I spent time in prayer, reflection and in conversation with family, friends and colleagues. The fruit of that process has been a decision to end my service at Amigo and seek other opportunities. The board has targeted January 1 as a time of transition to new leadership. Information about the position and the search process are available on Amigo's website: www.amigocentre.org.

I prepare to leave Amigo with many memories of good surprises and with great hope for Amigo's future.

Good Surprises

- While standing at the check-out at the Speedway in Goshen, wearing a jacket that displayed Amigo's logo and "Amigo Staff," the cashier looked at my jacket and exclaimed, "I know about Camp Amigo! I went there when I was in school. It was the best three days of my life! I love that place." As she told her co-worker about the memories, the co-worker smiled and said, "I went there, too, and I loved every minute of it."

- I sat on the wooden swing by Amigo's goldfish pond with a person from Massachusetts. He was part of Amigo's Road Scholar program, "Amish and Mennonite History: A Shared Heritage," and was probably 80 years young. He sketched out his life story, including decisions in his late teen years to reject the rigid teachings of the church of his parents. He tried for many years to live as far from the Christian faith as he could, and now he was ready to come back. "It is the right time," he said.

Memories

- Listening to a camper who was very clear he did not want to go to evening worship because it was boring, and then watching him the next night as he sang all the words of all the songs. Though I did not grow up camping as a child, I have had the priceless opportunity these



Cliff Brubaker, executive director, Amigo Centre, Sturgis, Mich.

Photo by Cheryl Mast

past five years to see how God's voice is often heard more easily at camp and how lives are changed.

- Experiencing the many ways God sustained Amigo's ministry through generosity. It has been humbling to share Amigo's needs and to experience the deep wells of friendship that help sustain Amigo's ministry.

Opportunities

- Amigo's last major fund drive was in the early 1990's when the Retreat Centre and the Activity Centre were built. Those buildings have served many people well in the past 25 years. Upgrades are needed. How can these useful facilities be reshaped to meet expectations of current and future guests and campers?

- How can we shift our programming to meet the needs of a new, emerging generation and hold to our history of respect for nature and for community?

I am deeply thankful to have been a small part of the Amigo story. I am grateful to the board and staff and to the churches of the IN-MI Conference. May the next chapter of Amigo's history be filled with stories of the way God uses Amigo to connect people with God, with nature and with others.

Meeting in the “wilderness”

Conference teams celebrate complementarity

By **Angy Moore**, Ministry Credentialing Team member

When Indiana-Michigan Conference team members and leaders met in August at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Mich., the natural surroundings primed them to relate to the input by John Powell, IN-MI northern regional pastor.

“In a spiritual wilderness, one thing we can do is to turn our mess into a positive message,” he said in a worship session. “The wilderness can help us to reflect on what it is we think we have lost, and to emerge stronger than we were before. It is also a place where we discover hope in the midst of seeming hopelessness.”



Members of the IN-MI Advisory Council meet for a break out session during the retreat. From left, they are Rebecca Kauffman, Gene Hartman, Don Rohrer, Izaete Nafziger, Mary Berkey, Derrick Ramer, Rex Jones and Peter Janzen. Photo by Dan Miller

The “wilderness” is also a good time to relate more deeply to God and to others. The 30 team members and leaders at this second annual retreat on August 21-22 forged deeper relationships with each other. They also became more familiar with each team’s mission.

On Friday evening, the participants celebrated the life-giving aspects of their work. “I was encouraged to hear others speak positively of work that I would personally find difficult,” said Angy Moore, member of the IN-MI Ministry Credentialing Team. “It is a sign that we all have our own gifts and affinities, and conference has found people suited to its diverse needs.”

On Saturday morning, participants reflected on future goals in light of IN-MI’s three “C” priorities: Credentialing,

IN-MI has five teams that guide -- with staff -- the ministry of conference. The teams are: Ministerial Leadership, Leadership Enhancement, Ministerial Credentialing, Stewardship and Gifts Development.

Connecting and Celebrating. Participants rated each conference team on their level of support for the three Cs.

Moore observed that because each conference team specializes in doing its own work, some groups scored much higher in some categories. For example, the Ministry Credentialing Team understandably received fairly high ratings in Credentialing, but the numbers were lower in Connecting and Celebrating.

“A question arose for me,” she said. “Should teams pay more attention to their low-scoring Cs, or are the variations in score a natural result of each team doing its work?” Moore said she leans toward the latter view.

“It is easy to view number ratings as a grade card and feel like a low rating equals failure,” she said. “But I don’t think that is particularly helpful. No team of conference is a complete whole.

“The whole of conference is the teams, leadership and member congregations together. We should complement each other’s work. Though we are many members with different gifts, we form one body.” (Romans 12:4-8.)

Mary Mininger, IN-MI southern regional pastor, said, “I think the annual retreat is a good time to better communicate among all our parts.”

It’s also a time for the teams to minister to individuals. For example, the group spent considerable, unplanned time ministering to a pastor who is in the wilderness of depression as he grapples with the decision of his church to close.

“The level of concern others extended to him demonstrated to me that even in the wilderness, caring and compassion can still flourish,” Powell said.

God talk (continued from page 2)

His testimony made me want to lift my voice in praise to the Great Healer, led into worship as if for the first time. I also began to wonder why we do not use this kind of language more often, and what might it take for us to reclaim it?

As a pastor, I hear many people give this kind of testimony in the privacy and intimacy of the pastoral relationship. I know we still possess this almost naïve language of faith. But I suspect we are increasingly reluctant to use it in public, and I wonder why? Is it because we are afraid people will think we are simpletons? Are we worried about hurting the feelings of those who do not experience healing? Is it simply that these events are hard to explain almost by definition? Is it because we feel a compulsion to place events in a rigid framework of dogma or bias?

I don't know. But this I do know. The testimony of the man going blind unleashed joy and praise in me, and renewed in me a hunger for more, a hunger for God.

My suspicion is that people are not going to church looking for good Mennonites, but are looking for more. They are looking for God. What stories do we have to tell? And how can we free those stories from the inhibitions that bind them, and share them in a respectful way that glorifies God? I suggest these steps:

How to reclaim public testimony:

1. Pastors must take the lead: Pastors must provide space for, as well as personally model, the sharing of testimonies in which God is given credit for events in a person's life. In our scientific age, we have become reluctant to attribute to God what may be providential or miraculous, because we can't prove it. But giving up certainty is what faith is all about.

2. Use the biblical text to frame our own storytelling: A good example of this framing is how the man who was going blind used the conversion story in John 9 as a metaphor for his own experience.

3. Make God the subject: It is important for us to consider the kind of speech we use in worship. We must ask ourselves: How much is God the subject of what we say, and how much are we the subject?

4. Embrace humility: Mennonites appropriately don't want to draw attention to themselves or give the impression that they are special in some way because they have been the beneficiaries of God's goodness. But in our fear of being prideful, we sometimes go too far in the opposite direction and attribute all our doing to the work of our human hands. We must acknowledge that anything we do is a response to God's divine doing.

financial report

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

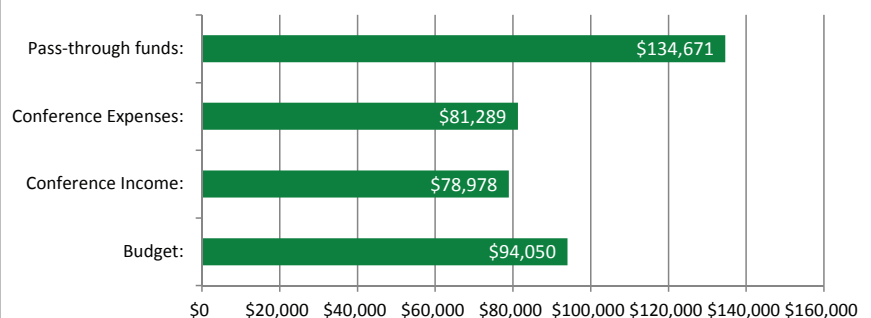
Fiscal year-end

Income for the year was \$394,182 and expenses were \$446,161, resulting in a negative balance for the year of \$51,979. \$10,000 of that was a contribution the Missional Leadership Team made from the general fund to the Care and Prevention Fund set up by the Mennonite Church USA Discernment Group on sexual abuse and the church. This ongoing negative balance is being addressed in the new 2015-16 spending plan. Conference leadership will continue monitoring the situation. Pass through funds (funds accepted by Conference and forwarded to many different agencies – both Mennonite and non-Mennonite) remain high at \$600,029.

First quarter of 2015-16 fiscal year

Thanks to your generosity, September contributions are only about \$300 less than last year. With expenses \$5,700 less than September 2014, we are running a small deficit of \$2300. Overall in the first quarter of the fiscal year, contributions are slightly ahead of this time last year. It appears this is the slow time of the year for contributions, so we should be looking better as the year progresses.

Fiscal Year to date 7/1/2015 - 9/30/2015



journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, conference pastor for IN-MI Conference, offers reflections about telling our less-than-perfect stories as a way to connect with one another as we share our adventures in faithfulness.

In September I began attending area council meetings across northern Indiana as my role shifts to being regional pastor for those churches. In the LaGrange area council, I was amazed to learn that all the congregations present had fall baptism services planned that included adults and youth. In addition, I was excited that each church was baptizing someone who did not grow up in the church! As a movement whose forbears wouldn't allow being chained to their beds to stop them from sharing their testimonies of Jesus, this seems like something to celebrate!

It's possible there is no significance to this development. It might be coincidence. But it might not. What if it's God? What if God is doing something as congregations engage in God's mission with the world God loves? What if God is taking our congregational experiments, and opening us to new possibilities we wouldn't have celebrated before? These are the stories we want to tell!

With this issue of the *Gospel Evangel* we continue telling stories about congregations learning as they engage the world God loves. Like most individuals, congregations also learn by doing. As congregations shift toward engagement with the world, we do some things well and others not so well. Maybe they go well by surprise or by accident and not because we are such great planners. Maybe they are embarrassing, missing the mark of what we intended.

The success stories we want to tell are about congregations who learn and are changed because of their engagement, whether it goes well or is completely embarrassing. It's only a failure if we fail to learn. If we fail to listen for the insight of the Spirit We want to be realistic in telling the sometimes messy stories.

A second characteristic of the stories we want to tell is that they are ongoing. The story and the learning continue. We are like clay in a potter's hands. Have you had the experience of listening to someone who has it all figured out? We all like to look good, but when we are honest we are doing the best we can do to faithfully follow Jesus.

As conference continues focusing on the 3 C's – credentialing, connecting and celebrating – sharing congregational stories is one way of connecting. We learn we are not alone as we share our adventures in faithfulness.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Lane Miller was installed Sept. 27 as pastor of worship and formation at Kern Road Mennonite Church, South Bend, Ind., by Dan Miller, conference pastor.



Frank Kandel was installed Sept. 13 as transitional pastor at Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington, Ind., by Doug Kaufman.



Steve Slagel was installed Aug. 23 as transitional pastor at Maple River Mennonite Church, Brutus, Mich., by Doug Kaufman, IN-MI conference pastor for leadership transitions.

Got story?

Conference is searching for stories about what ***your*** congregation is learning as it engages the world that God loves.

Please call the conference office with your ideas:

574-534-4006