

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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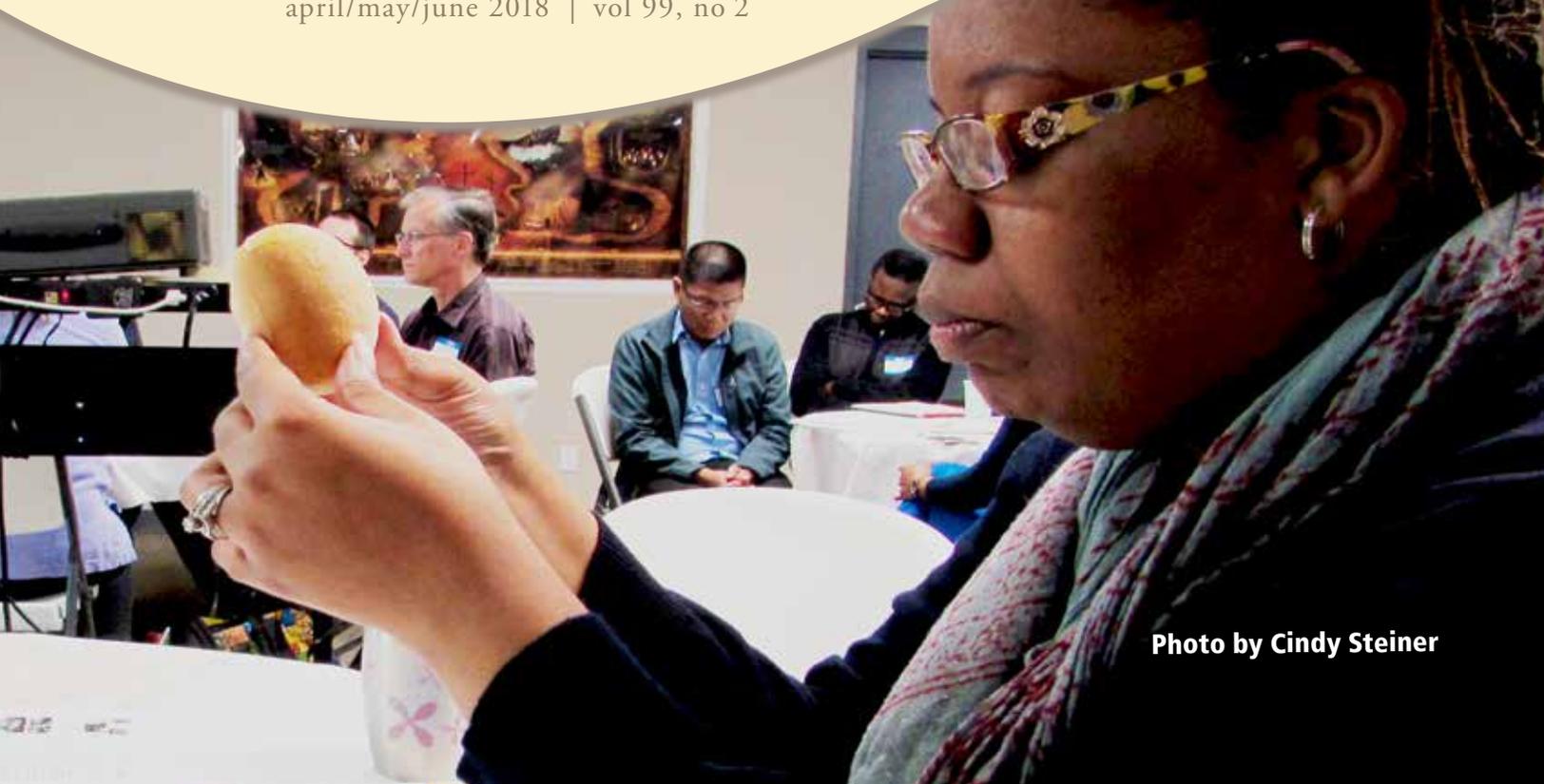


Photo by Cindy Steiner

Shannon Dycus, pastor of First Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, Ind., holds communion bread during the south regional meeting.

Hearing the heartbeat Congregational delegates share their dreams, practices

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

To take the pulse of the dreams and spiritual practices that congregations in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) are pursuing, the three spring IMMC regional meetings pivoted around a World Cafe exercise.

The exercise helped IMMC to hear its heartbeat as congregations explored: How is God moving in our midst? Answers were grouped within several thematic questions.

"The World Cafe process helps to host large group dialogue about our community of congregations," said Paula Killough, IMMC moderator who helped lead the process. "This form of discernment was used at the Orlando 2017 Future Church Summit last year and also at IMMC's fall retreat. It is one way to gather the best discernment from large groups on questions that matter."

Participants also engaged with Romans 12:1-10 by using scripture sheets scattered around the meeting rooms. They visited five stations and wrote their prayers, thanks and needs on sticky notes that they placed on prayer boards. The boards were passed from one meeting to the next.

"These boards provided a visual crescendo of our prayers and thanks," Killough said. "We invite each of you and your congregations to continue to pray using the Romans 12 guide that will also be used at annual sessions."

Newsletter readers are invited to follow a sampling of the regional meeting participants' journey on the next page.

(continued on page 2)

inside

2 cont., **Hearing the heartbeat**

3 **Breaking bread**

4 **Journeying** with our pastors

hearing the heartbeat

(continued from page one)



Photo above: Members of Mara Christian Church in Indianapolis, Ind., serve a meal to participants during the southern region meeting. Photo by Cindy Steiner. Photo below: Congregational delegates engage with one of five prayer stations based on Romans 12. Photo by Cindy Steiner.

Romans 12:4-7

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us ...”



Photo left: Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor (R), and Rebecca Kauffman explore vision with congregational delegates. Photo by Frank Kandel.

What spiritual practices are renewing your congregation?

* Learning about prayer from our brothers and sisters in Tanzania * Encouraging youth and children to lead worship * Listening to, and holding, disagreement * Sponsoring quarterly Faith in Action Sundays * Support peer coaching with other pastors in our area. **What new relationships have emerged in your congregation?** * with Mara church. * With Revive Indiana * with local churches composed of predominately non-European ethnic * with Fort Wayne Anabaptist Network.



What kind of congregation do you want your children to inherit?

***being part of a community of congregations that appreciates diversity * expresses historical and contemporary Anabaptist identity * encourages youth to live out their faith -- to get out of their heads and into the world.** How has your congregation studied the Bible in this past year? * **We did 40 days of reading the Bible during Lent * Kid's community theater performed a biblical story musical. * We hosted separate Bible study groups for women and men.**

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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Breaking bread for the broken

Morning Star Church reaches Muncie's disenfranchised

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

When Gladys Maina, Kenyan pastor of Morning Star Church in Muncie, Ind., first came to the church in the early 1990s, she could have been scared away by those who did not welcome people of color in the neighborhood.

But her strong sense of call to serve the needy with the bread of wholeness in Christ -- along with physical bread -- emboldened Maina to stand firm.

"Someone stopped me in the street and asked what I was doing there and told me a black person had never lived in their neighborhood before," Maina said. "He then said, 'It wasn't too long ago that we tarred and feathered people like you.'

"I told him that where I came from in Africa, we didn't think in terms of color, but rather in terms of whether people knew Jesus, or not."

Because she stayed and loved people with the love of Christ, some relatives of those who most strongly resisted her presence are now her friends. And they even help her with community outreaches.

Maina, with her husband, Simon Maina Mungai, help to lead the congregation's multifaceted ministry outreach. These ministries are supported in part by other area Mennonite congregations within Indiana-Mennonite Michigan Conference (IMMC) and churches of other denominations within Muncie.

Even though the congregation itself is tiny -- about 15 or so people attend Sunday morning services -- its many outreaches serve hundreds of people each year.

People they serve through meal, clothing and counseling ministries are largely those who have been left out by the dwindling social programs in the near-bankrupt city, she said. For example, about 65 to 75 percent of schoolchildren in Muncie receive government-backed free lunches.

"Many of the people we serve don't have strong roots and are wounded by brokenness in relationships," she said. "Abuse, addictions, sickness and unemployment are some of the contributing factors.



Morning Star Church summer community festival participants enjoy worship music and drama in Muncie, Ind. Photo provided.

"We walk alongside of them until they become stronger, but they don't always stay in church."

To meet these many needs, Morning Star has developed a Saturday morning meal program that feeds between 75 and 150. God's word is preached at every meal and there is opportunity for personal ministry. Prayer is one of the things that recipients enjoy the most, Maina said.

The church and its supporters have also developed food and clothes pantries and a summer community festival. Thanksgiving baskets are also provided annually to more than 125 needy families.

As its sources for stocking the food pantry have dwindled significantly, Morning Star is leaning more heavily on its supporting Mennonite churches and is grateful for donations. These have included beef, pork and sweet corn from farmers and groceries from congregations.

Back in the 1990s, the church prayed to grow in the traditional sense so as to become self-supporting, she said. Instead, the Lord called the church out into the highways and byways to minister to people who can't give back.

"This calling keeps us on our knees, praying to the Lord to multiply our small loaves and fishes," she said. "In the midst of these challenges, there is nothing more glorious than to see how one person who damaged an entire family system with addiction is transformed by the power of Jesus Christ to help bring healing to that very same family. This gives us the passion to keep telling the story."

journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor, expresses gratitude for the many gifts of time, talent and treasure shared by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference congregations and individuals.

ministry transitions Beginnings



Jenifer Helmuth Shenk, above, was installed Jan. 28 as associate pastor at Kern Road Mennonite Church.



Wilma Cender, above, was ordained at Valparaiso Mennonite Church on March 11.

I am filled with gratitude for our community of congregations:

* THANK YOU to those who hosted delegate meetings this year: Mara Christian Church, Ninth Street Community Church and Bethany Christian Schools. The conference's well-being is linked to your well-being. A brief summary of how congregations are living into the new conference vision is shared in this issue.

* THANK YOU to those who contributed at the delegate meetings for the upcoming trip to Tanzania.

* THANK YOU to those who are praying. Paula Killough and I leave April 25 for Tanzania to explore the possibility of new relationships with Shirati District.

* THANK YOU to those who contributed to the Leadership Development Fund. We have a goal of raising \$10,000 this year to increase conference capacity for leadership development.

* THANK YOU to Annual Session planners from CAMFELL Area Council who is developing the theme, "Offering Ourselves to God's Renewing," based on Romans 12. Our June gathering in Indianapolis will offer worship, seminars and outings that could change your thinking about our shared spiritual practices. Check out the conference website for the latest news, plus a link for our online registration. See below.

* THANK YOU for those who are experimenting your way forward in worship, Bible study, new relationships, community connections and upside-down ministry (like the Morning Star story in this issue)! The life of the conference is in congregations. Who we are together is informed and energized by you!

Thank you, and thanks be to God!

Save the Date: "Offering Ourselves to God's Renewing." This year's Annual Sessions are June 14-16 in Indianapolis, Ind. For more information and registration, visit im.mennonite.net/annual-sessions-2018.

financial report

