

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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Photo provided



Tanzanian Mennonite (KMT) leaders met with IMMC leaders in July. From left: Doug Kaufman, IMMC pastor for leadership transitions, Bishop Amos Muhagachi, Bishop Chriss Kateti, Bishop Joseph Mutorela, Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor, and John Wambura, KMT general secretary.

## Coming full circle

### Tanzanians, Indiana-Michigan forge future fraternity

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

**A**lmost 85 years ago, the first Mennonites went to Tanzania to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This past summer, a delegation of Tanzanian Mennonite bishops came to remind their brothers and sisters in North America that their “family” relationship still matters.

Amos Muhagachi, a bishop from *Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania* (KMT, the Tanzanian Mennonite Church) was part of the delegation. He is currently on sabbatical and is a student in peace studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

Muhagachi is in the first stages of beginning an internship at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart. While attending this year’s Indiana-Michigan Mennonite

Conference (IMMC) Annual Sessions at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Mich., he told delegates that KMT has been praying for IMMC -- and other area conferences -- for years.

In a phone interview he said, “I shared with delegates that we are who we are today in Tanzania because of the Mennonites who came to us those many years ago. [The late John Mosemann, who served in Tanzania with Eastern Mennonite Missions and Charities, was a former IMMC pastor and conference leader.]

“We have not forgotten that relationship and have been praying for the church in North America. ... We know that the church here has been struggling, and anything that affects you, affects us. We

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# coming full circle

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want to partner with you so that we all can learn from each other and encourage each other.”

Muhagachi and the other bishops also invited IMMC leaders to establish sister-church relationships between congregations in Tanzania and IMMC. To begin strengthening bonds and moving in that direction, the Tanzanian bishops invited IMMC leaders to visit Tanzania in the near future.

**“Most significant to me about our new connection is that we didn’t initiate it, but they came to us. That is a gift we want to receive with open hands.” — Dan Miller**

It’s an invitation that IMMC is seriously discerning, said Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor. The desires for deepening relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ came as a surprise to IMMC -- and is a gift of God.

“Most significant to me about our new connection is that we didn’t initiate it, but that they came to us,” Miller said. “That is a gift that we want to receive with open hands.”

Other conference leaders and delegates were also deeply touched by the Tanzanian visit and said it was a nudge from the Holy Spirit to strive for fraternal support and unity -- globally and locally.

“It was pretty powerful for us to hear that other churches in Tanzania had been praying for us, even though we were not aware of it,” she said. “It made me realize that we are in community with each other, even though we live thousands of miles apart.”

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.

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Amos Muhagachi (right) visits with Marilyn Rudy-Froese during Annual Sessions in mid-June at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Mich. Photo by Joe Pendleton

Doug Kaufman, IMMC pastor for leadership transitions, said KMT is a good model for IMMC because of KMT’s ability to stay in unity in a polarizing time.

“Part of Amos’ message is the importance of promoting Christian unity and striving to be a peace church and to live peacefully with each other in the midst of differing convictions,” Kaufman said.

Muhagachi shared how when factions within KMT could not resolve divergence on such issues as polygamy and military and politic involvements, they prayed for four years for discernment on what to do about the variance.

“We decided not to divide but to disagree in love,” he said. “By developing the Tanzanian peace-building initiative, we want to model how we can live side by side with each other in peace. I am also praying for the revival of Anabaptist churches around the globe, for the Spirit to forge a deeper friendship between national churches so we can pray for each other and hold each other accountable.”

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# bridging the distance

## Bridging miles with prayers

### Michigan congregations launch prayer circle

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

**W**ill Fitzgerald, pastor of Kalamazoo (Mich.) Mennonite Fellowship, is discovering there is no match for prayer when it comes to connecting across miles.

Every two weeks or so since late June, Fitzgerald has connected with Phil Bontrager, pastor of Grand Marais (Mich.) Mennonite Church, by e-mail to ask for Bontrager's prayer requests and to encourage and support him.

This effort is part of the launch of a new prayer circle across the Michigan congregations in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC). John Powell, former IMMC regional pastor for Michigan, planted the seed of the idea before he recently retired. His prayer was that the seed would grow into a strong plant of fraternal support among congregations separated by geographic distance.

Fitzgerald said the seed is growing between the Kalamazoo and Grand Marais congregations, separated by 400 miles and a six-hour drive.

"Most of our congregations are situated very far apart geographically, and the circular nature of this effort breaks through some of the isolation that happens because of that," Fitzgerald said.

"I think this prayer circle model fits with one of the goals of our recently adopted *Renewing a Vision* for IMMC. Part



of that vision includes the building of a stronger network of connections between churches. The launching of our prayer circle is one small piece of this."

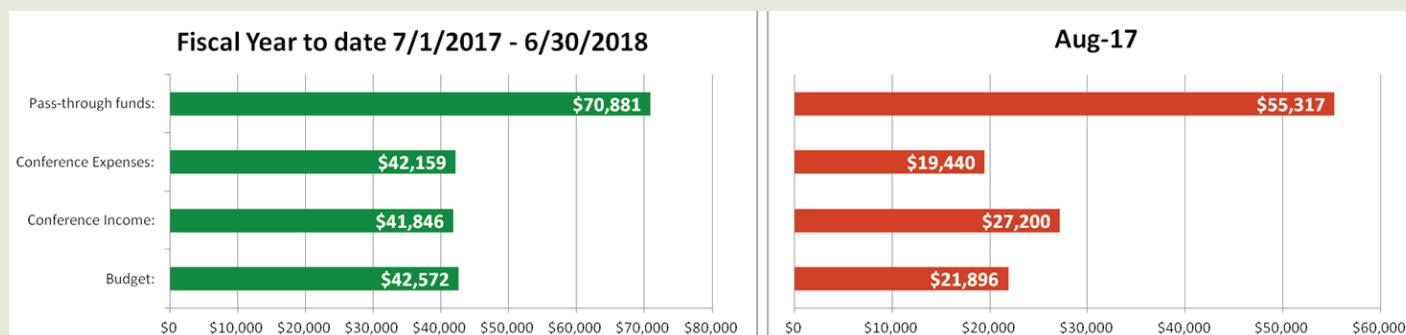
Kalamazoo is also on the receiving end, as Locust Grove Mennonite Church, Sturgis, Mich., is in the process of connecting with Fitzgerald and his church family. The plan is to have all 14 congregations in Michigan give support to a congregation and receive support from another. This will weave a web of 28 threads of prayer across the region.

"Theologically, the Michigan congregations are quite similar, but geographically, they are very diverse," Powell said. "I pray this initiative will build a stronger cohesion between them. I also hope they gain appreciation for one another as well as for the relationships they share with the rest of the congregations in IMMC."

## financial report

By Jim Norton, IMMC bookkeeper

Thank you for your generous contributions for August. Your contributions were \$5,304 above budget and expenses were \$2,456 below budget. This gives us a net income of \$7,759 for the month. Year to date, we are only \$313 behind budget.



# journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor

## ministry transitions

### Beginnings



Dan Schrock (above), and Joanne Gallardo (directly below) were installed as ongoing pastors Sept. 17 by Doug Kaufman at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Ind., along with deep listening consultant Paula Killough (second below).



As we joyfully follow Jesus, we seek to discern and respond to the Spirit's leading. Sometimes opportunities just come, almost as a gift. We highlight three items in this issue that have come as gifts. For example, the cover story recounts connections with leaders from Tanzania Mennonite Church. Bishop Amos Muhagachi spoke to conference delegates in June. Then a delegation of four Tanzanian leaders visited the conference office. We shared similar passions for extending the gospel in our contexts. They are inviting our leaders to visit Tanzania. Conference leaders are discerning when a delegation may visit.

*Renewing a Vision* identifies spiritual practices, like prayer, as key to being transformed Jesus' likeness. Churches in Michigan have formed a prayer circle to pray for one another. The prayer circle grows out of a twice-a-year gathering of Michigan pastors/leaders to support one another as a community of congregations engaged in mission (see page 3).

Central Plains Mennonite Conference, who shares our commitment to spiritual practices, has invited IMMC to share formation resources at [anabaptistfaithformation.org](http://anabaptistfaithformation.org). The website features ideas for families and curriculum for Sunday school or Bible studies. There is a section dedicated to the practices named in our vision. Check out the website for family, youth and adult ideas.



Ben Bouwman above, was installed July 23 as associate pastor of Walnut Hill Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., by Doug Kaufman.



Phil Bontrager, above, was installed as continuing pastor at Grand Marais (Mich.) Mennonite Church by Doug Kaufman on August 6.

### Endings



Marcella Hershberger, above, concluded as pastor at Bonneyville Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., on July 31.

Gwen Gustafson-Zook, not pictured, concluded as pastor at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on August 23.



Phil and Julie Bender, above, began August 27 as interim pastors at Bonneyville Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind.

**Clarification:** The Page 1 headline in the April-June 2017 issue of this publication read, "Welcoming the Stranger: Chin church seeks spiritual home with IN-MI." We regret that headline did not capture IMMC's intention to grow in intercultural competence, or to engage in mutual learning relationships. We will make every effort to not let this happen again.

Faith formation resources for all ages

[www.AnabaptistFaithFormation.org](http://www.AnabaptistFaithFormation.org)

Suggestions for Sunday School curriculum for children, youth and adults  
Ideas for faith talk at home • prayer practices • podcasts • online devos