

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

jan/feb/march 2018 | vol 99, no 1



Photo by Marcia Carpenter

Hudson Lake (Ind.) Mennonite Church members help launch Skye is the Limit Art Studio in Buchanan, Mich., by enjoying lunch on site of the new studio.

## Hudson Lake seeks authenticity

### Small congregation thrives by being itself

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

**T**wo decades ago when Hudson Lake (Ind.) Mennonite Church decided to keep its doors open despite decline, it made a second decision: It would strive to become itself.

That journey of self-discovery -- aided by practicing spiritual disciplines such as new types of prayer and nurturing a mindset of abundance -- has brought Hudson Lake to a place of peace with itself and God's plans.

Today, the 25-some-member church strives for trusting God and being authentic. That includes nurturing its many senior members on fixed incomes, inviting all members to use their gifts and encouraging healthy relationships.

"During that time of transition, we decided that Hudson Lake was God's church, and that we would be here as long

as God intended us to be here," said Marcia Carpenter, a longtime member. "That meant believing God would provide what we needed to stay open if that was God's plan."

At that critical juncture, the church felt it had enough resources to remain open three more years. Yet because of its attitude-changing decisions, the congregation today is resilient and hopeful, as well as focused on spiritual formation (being) as a prelude to spiritual outreach (doing).

Hudson Lake decided it would not simply survive but thrive. How? It began -- through personal and communal prayer and dwelling in scriptures together -- listening for what a generous God was calling the church to be, said Heidi King, also a longtime member.

(continued on page 2)

## inside

2 cont., **Seeking** authenticity

3 Demonstrating **gratitude**

4 **Journeying** with our pastors

# seeking authenticity

(continued from page one)



**Hudson Lake holds a worship service for the community at a local park. Photo by Marcia Carpenter**

"For me, the heartbeat of our congregational life is the desire to maintain strong relationships, rather than focusing on uniform doctrine or theology," King said.

"That doesn't mean anything goes. But it does mean the core of our theology is the importance of forging loving relationships that mirror God, who is love."

King said the congregation's mode of maintaining relationships does not mean conflict avoidance. Rather, it means developing the safety that comes with trust.

"Because we are small, and operate like a family, nothing is swept under the rug," she said. "When issues become known, they are addressed relatively quickly. That makes our church a safe place to learn and grow together."

Esther Lanting, who became pastor in 1995, agrees with her sisters in Christ. The growth in spiritual depth within individuals and the community has led to new ways of gauging its health: attention to the inner life, the non-fearful way of handling finances, its relationship-based orientation versus a top-down structure and its natural outgrowth of ministries that fit its nature.

"At one point, we were running ourselves ragged trying to do VBS for children, and then we realized that was not who we really were," she said.

"That's when we asked ourselves, 'Why are we spending all our energies on trying to get children to come in when it was seniors who were drawn to us?' We then began relaxing and exploring who we really were, and what God was calling us to do out of that."

To uncover its true self, the congregation strengthened is communal spiritual formation by dwelling on passages of scripture together. Hudson Lake also encourages its members to personally deepen their spiritual lives by going on retreats and spending quiet times with God.

The congregation even offers financial stipends to all those who want to engage with retreat-type encounters, Lanting said.

This generosity of spirit also overflows into other arenas. For example, despite the fact that many members are on fixed incomes, the church sustains a three-quarters pastorate with full medical benefits.

Also, the church operates with an "all hands on deck" attitude. It invites all its members to use their gifts to shape its worship services. And it engages with community in various ways, including sponsoring its Christmas banquet some years at a local senior center, where it also sets up shop for quilting periodically.

"I really love the fact that our church is open to using everyone's gifts," King said. "Because we are a small church, we need everyone and in ways that aren't perfect. The music isn't perfect. The scripture-reading isn't perfect. But it's meaningful, because we are offering our real gifts out of our real selves. And God honors that."

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 <http://im.mennonite.net>

**Missional Leadership Team Members:** Paula Killough, moderator, Elkhart, IN; Bob Yoder, moderator-elect, Goshen, IN; Wilma Cender, Valparaiso, IN; Rebecca Kauffman, Orleans, IN; Izaete Nafziger, Goshen; and George Thompson, treasurer, Auburn Hills, MI.

**Gospel Evangel** is published four times annually by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (Jan/Feb/March, April/May/June, July/Aug/Sept and /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](mailto:LaurieOR123@gmail.com)

We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.



# demonstrating gratitude



From left, Mara Christian pastor Chhaki Khaimi and church secretary Eric Lian present Paula Killough, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) moderator, with a gift to show appreciation for an IMMC capital grant that enabled them to purchase their first church building. Photo provided

## Mara community gives thanks Congregation travels many miles to show gratitude

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

On Nov. 4 this past fall, a delegation from Mara Christian Church of America, Indianapolis, Ind., modeled how thanks in any language is best shown by actions.

Nine members from the congregation of Burmese immigrants traveled six hours round-trip in one van to Goshen. They came to thank IMMC for its \$50,000 capital grant that helped them purchase their first church building.

The congregation had been using Shalom Mennonite Fellowship's sanctuary for its worship services. Along with other resources, this grant -- administered through IMMC's Capital Fund -- has given them a space of their own.

They came bearing gifts -- a Mara hymnal, a Bible in the Mara language and a plaque -- for members of IMMC's Stewardship and Missional Leadership teams.

"It was so amazing to me that nine people traveled three hours to bring us gifts in person," said Paula Killough, IMMC moderator. "It is such a privilege to have people who have suffered so much want to be a part of us. It is inspiring to see their passion for the faith, and the sacrifices they make. It reminds me of the early church."

Eric Lian, secretary for the Mara congregation, said,

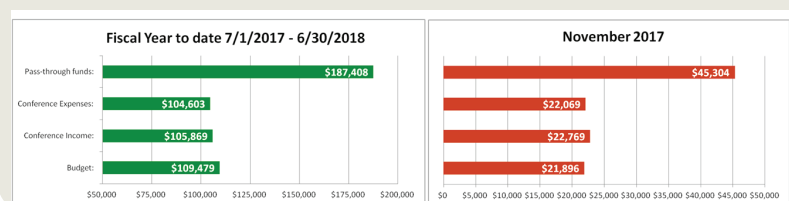
"We made this trip because that grant was very, very important to us. We have come from another country and now God has given us a new place. IMMC, as well as Shalom and its pastor, Brian Bither -- who aided us in completing so much important paperwork -- have been so helpful. Because of all of this, we are growing."

## financial report

By Jim Norton, IN-MI bookkeeper

### Most recent financial report

Thanks to your generous support this month our income was again above budget by \$873. While our expenses were \$173 above budget for this month for the year to date they are \$4,876 below budget. Still given this situation our year to date income is above expenses by \$1266. Thank you for your continued prayers as we make the necessary changes to meet your needs and yet stay within our means.



# journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor, reflects how Jesus-centered resilience helps congregations thrive in the face of challenges.

Resilience, the ability to recover quickly from setbacks, gets lots of attention these days. But it is nothing new for people of faith. With hope for the future, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians have overcome difficulties for many years. For me, resilience means changing course while keeping the destination; being curious rather than certain; remaining persistent without becoming stubborn.

A life of faith is challenging. Jesus recognized this when he discussed counting the cost in Luke 14. That's how we grow in faith, patience, humility, love. Merely surviving is not sufficient. We must overcome the bitterness and cynicism that can choke our gratitude and make us stingy. We are challenged to become generous, hospitable.

Few of us choose the challenges that confront us. They come unbidden. And yet once confronted, we get to choose our response. Every time.

As you read the stories about Hudson Lake Mennonite and Mara Christian Church, see where aspects of gratitude and generosity stick out for you. Resilience. I thank God for these and other stories that reflect the power of God's Spirit to lead and transform us. Contact us at [imoffice@im.mennonite.net](mailto:imoffice@im.mennonite.net) to share your congregation's story of resilience.

## ministry transitions

### Endings

Steve Norton, right, ended as pastor at Goshen City Church of the Brethren on Nov. 9, 2017.



Gary Martin, below, concluded as transitional pastor at Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis, on Oct. 29, 2017.



Doug Kaufman, right, concluded as Conference Pastor for Leadership Transitions at Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference on Dec. 31, 2017.



### Beginnings

Anna Ruth Hersberger, right, was installed as interim pastor Oct. 15, 2017, at Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship in Elkhart, Ind., by Dan Miller, IMMC conference pastor.



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