

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

april/may/june 2017 | vol 98, no 2

Photo provided



Jeremiah Chuiha, pastor of Emmanuel Living Christian Church in Indianapolis, Ind., is helping his congregation seek membership in IN-MI Conference.

Welcoming the stranger Chin church seeks spiritual home with IN-MI

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

When Jeremiah Chuiha met Max Ediger in Thailand in 1999, they had no idea that connection would blossom 15 years later within Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

After immigrating in 2010 from India to a refugee resettlement program in Canada, Chuiha became pastor of Emmanuel Living Christian Church in Indianapolis, a congregation that consists of Chin refugees from the Dai tribe.

During this time of transition, he sought to reconnect with Mennonites who had showed him a way of peace in a violent world. That search has led him and Emmanuel to seek membership with IN-MI this summer.

The first step of that journey began in a Mennonite Central

Committee program, in which he and Ediger served people facing human rights abuses. During that time, the Mennonites shaped his views on Christian discipleship. Chuiha is from a Chin people group in Burma, a country rife with civil war and religious persecution. He wanted to walk a journey of peace, and Mennonites were good models.

"While with the Mennonites, I learned how to interpret the Bible and scripture from the standpoint of living in peaceful community," he said in a recent interview. "I believe that is how Jesus taught his disciples to live on this Earth. I had some background for this in the village where I grew up in

(continued on page 2)

inside

2 cont., **Welcoming**

3 **Perserving pastor**

4 **Journeying** with our pastors

welcoming the stranger

(continued from page one)

in Burma. Neighbors invited people into their homes for dinner or lunch, and we helped each other and showed each other love and welcome."

As a result of the Mennonites' influence, he sensed a call to enter theological education in India, which he pursued before coming to Canada. Chuiha found this loving welcome with the Mennonites in America, where Mennonite friends in Oklahoma put him in touch with Andre Gingerich Stoner, a Mennonite Church USA staff member.

Stoner led Chuiha to Brian Bither, a pastor at Shalom Mennonite Church in Indianapolis. Bither has been instrumental in Chuiha's journey.

"He is a Canadian citizen and was hired by a church in Indianapolis on a three-year visa that was about to expire," Bither said. "We hope to extend Jeremiah's legal status in the United States first by enrolling him in Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. It has been a long process, but in the meantime, we have become trusted friends."

This friendship is expanding as Emmanuel seeks IN-MI membership. And because of the cross-cultural pollination, both groups are enriched and strengthened in giving and receiving gifts from the other.

"Though our group is relatively new to the Mennonite world, we are learning the importance of seeking the wisdom of God from fellow Mennonite congregations," Chuiha said. "We all need each other to help carry the message of Jesus to the world and to society."

Bither said it has been really refreshing to have another perspective, and the Chin congregation helps Shalom to think more globally.



Gathering for a photo is the Church Board of Emmanuel Living Christian Church in Indianapolis, Ind. Third from the right is Jeremiah Chuiha. Far left is Frank Kandel, Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis. Third from the left is Brian Bither, pastor of Shalom. Photo provided

"When we in America talk about ethnicity, we tend to talk in terms of black, white and Hispanic and perhaps some others on the fringes. But Chuiha and his people are reminder that we are really a part of a much more diverse global community. It is good to be stretched in everything from language and customs and how we do business, as well as how we plan and structure church."

The largest population of Burmese in the United States resides in Indianapolis. That's where Emmanuel is the second Chin congregation to express interest in joining IN-MI.

Last summer, their congregation was introduced to conference on the same weekend that the Mara Christian Church was accepted as a member congregation.

"The most important gift we can bring to the Mennonite church here is our witness that a people can survive the oppression and persecution of seven decades, and can continue to witness to the hope of Jesus," Chuiha said.

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: Bob Yoder, acting moderator Goshen, IN; Paula Killough, moderator-elect, Elkhart, 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

We invite you to submit articles and article ideas.

Printed on 30% PCW recycled paper.

persevering in pastoral ministry

Kentucky pastor perseveres

Orlo Fisher mines God's riches for five decades

By Laurie Oswald Robinson, editor

The first time Orlo Fisher, 83, went to Talcum, Ky., he helped to build a chicken house. For the past 53 years, he's built God's kingdom there as the longest serving pastor in an Indiana-Michigan Conference congregation.

With no seminary training but a heart for the Lord, Fisher, with his late wife, Dorothy, moved in the 1960s to the southeastern Appalachian foothills. He began serving as pastor at Talcum Mennonite Church, a small congregation of many coal miners. Through decades of change including a coal industry decline, he mined God's riches in his simple, though profound and preserving way.

This summer, Fisher plans to retire and to move to live with his son an hour away from Talcum. Yet, that hasn't caused him to retire from his passion for the pastoral ministry. For the past 26 years, due to breaking a leg in carpentry work, he also did chaplaincy along with his pastorate. Currently, he's also serving alongside assistant pastor Craig Schuls.

"I didn't graduate from seminary of any kind, the Lord just taught me everything I knew," Fisher said in a recent interview. "The congregation has backed me up all of the way, and there has never been a time when I felt I should leave.

"The beauty of longevity is seeing the fruits of your ministry from one generation to the next. You witness to the steadfast faith of the people. They have taken God's message to heart."

Fisher took the gospel message to heart in his own life, which began on a Mennonite farm in southeast Iowa. That's where he completed eighth grade, helped his dad with farming and became a member of Lower Deer Creek Mennonite Church. In 1955, he married Dorothy Gingerich, who he met in Michigan during his voluntary service. They first spent several years in Texas, where he earned his GED and heeded God's call to move to Kentucky to become a pastor.

"We first came here for a couple weeks in September, 1962, to help build a chicken house for a couple who



Orlo and the late Dorothy Fisher. Photo provided

wanted to sell eggs," he said. "We were ministry minded, so we asked the Elkhart board [former Mennonite Board of Missions] if there was a congregation that could use our assistance.

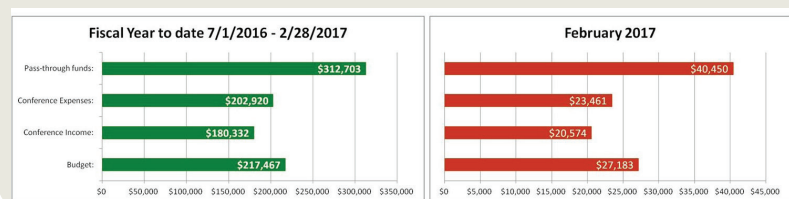
"We then went to assist in Corpus Christi, Texas. In the course of time, we sensed a call to Talcum. It's where we had established relationships because of our earlier connection with the building project. I have never felt so much at home as I have here. (continued page 4)

financial report

By Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor

Most recent financial report

The income for February is \$6,609 less than the budgeted giving for the month and \$37,135 less than the budgeted giving for the year. The expenses are \$2,887 less than the budgeted expenses for the month and \$14,860 less than the budgeted expenses for the year. For the year to date our contributions are \$22,588 less than our expenses. Conference leaders continue monitoring the financial picture and listening for the Spirit's direction as we seek to become the community of churches Jesus calls us to be.



journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IN-MI conference pastor, reflects on how Jesus is present and walking with the conference in all situations.



In March this year we held a series of three delegate meetings in the central, south and north areas of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. It is always good to spend time with people in different locations around conference, and I was impressed with the way delegates worshiped and worked. I was confident of Jesus walking among us.

As a staff team we completed about a dozen pastoral searches in 2016. We walked with church leaders closing their congregation. Last April several of us travelled to the Upper Peninsula for James Troyer's funeral and were impressed with the impact he and Anna have had in their community.

We processed personal losses and financial challenges with pastors. Two staff and several other persons are exploring new ministry possibilities in Detroit after Mennonite Disaster Service called a consultation in the fall of 2016. Office staff scheduled four different events. I don't know that this list sounds exciting, but it is part of the holy work we do. Thank you for the opportunity. Jesus is present with us in all these situations.

The stories about pastors Orlo Fisher and Jeremiah Chuiha illustrate the variety in our community of congregations. I hope they warm and stretch your hearts in gratitude. Jesus' resurrection life keeps transforming us.

(continued from page 3)

Conference leaders say they deeply appreciate Fisher's longtime service. Mary Mininger, IN-MI regional pastor for the southern region, describes it as a "long obedience in the same direction," a phrase coined from Eugene Peterson. Today, five decades of continuous ministry in one place is a rare thing, she said in a recent telephone interview.

"Orlo has been a gentle, humble servant," she said. "He's been a non-anxious presence and has blessed many people for a long time. People trust him. He is trustworthy."

Fisher said longevity is one of the best tools for building trust. "My advice for pastors today is not to set their eyes upon seeing how they can be moving but to be thinking long term," he said. "Often, a pastor will leave just after having gotten rooted and grounded. People then have to start all over."

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Frank Kandel, left, was ordained Jan. 29 at Shalom Mennonite Church by Dan Miller. He was serving in his second transitional pastorate at Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington, Ind.

Endings



Veva Mumaw, above, concluded as associate pastor for children, youth and young adults at Olive Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., on Dec. 15, 2016.



Dale Shenk, not pictured, concluded as pastor at Bonneyville Mennonite Church, Bristol, Ind., on March 19, 2016.

Randall Miller, left, a member of Walnut Hill Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., concluded as transitional pastor at Metamora (Ill.) Mennonite Church on Feb. 12.