

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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2018 Cast of the Kids Community Theater's production of *Esther*

Sunnyside & Belmont play a role on God's stage

Faith and friendships deepen through Kids Community Theater

By: Anna Buck, editor

At 6 p.m. on Sunday, March 4, 2018, a group of 39 costumed children eagerly shuffle into place outside of the Sunnyside Mennonite Church sanctuary. Chatter from the audience diminishes as this year's musical production of the story of Esther begins. This is the sixth performance put on by the Kids Community Theater, hosted by Sunnyside and Belmont Mennonite Church.

Just six years ago, members of Sunnyside gathered together to cast a vision for how to engage their congregation and community. Amy Kratzer, a pastor at Sunnyside describes the process, "The pastoral team was asked, 'Do you have a passion or strength that isn't currently being used in your pastoral work, and can you imagine what it would look like to tap into that?' The idea that bubbled to the surface for me was a musical theater with kids from local churches as well as neighborhood kids without a church family--a place where kids would grow in faith and friendship through the art of musical theater."

Prompted by the Holy Spirit and with the support of the church leadership team and congregation, the Kids Community Theater (KCT) was formed. In 2014, Belmont Mennonite partnered with Sunnyside and they have been cohosting ever since.

Volunteers from both congregations work diligently to keep this program running smoothly. Not only are they responsible for creating costumes and sets, collecting props, running sound, program design, choreography, etc., but before every rehearsal, they also prepare meals for the kids and their family members. "The meal is huge. It is such a gift to families who are busy with so many things. It is a precious way to connect with other members of the KCT family. It adds to the wonderful feeling of community that we experience together in the midst of the cold winter months," states Mandy Yoder, associate pastor at Belmont MC and KCT point person.

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Sunnyside & Belmont

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Families share a meal before *Esther* rehearsal, 2018: (left to right) Mia Schneider, Tonya Yoder Rupp, Logan Yoder Rupp, Caitlin Yoder Rupp

Flyers are sent out to churches, neighbors, and friends in early December and rehearsals begin in

January. All children are welcome, from kindergarten to fifth grade and no one is left without a part to play. According to Amy, "If you show up, you're in!" The shows are based on biblical stories and themes. Amy continues, "As the cast learns each musical, they are internalizing the lessons of God's Word—everything from the obedience of Moses to the vulnerability of Zacchaeus to the courage of Esther. In addition, they are memorizing scripture, strengthening friendships, and having a blast—all in church!"

The Spirit is felt and seen year after year as children and leaders gather together for Kids Community Theater. Before each show, the cast and volunteers huddle around for what Amy calls "Affirmations". During this time, the volunteers go around the room naming the gifts they have seen in each student and the different ways each student has grown over the season. Amy recounts, "There is laughter and there are tears as the Spirit's presence is acknowledged in each child and we remember together that this is about Someone much bigger than us. God is with us in those moments, and it is a holy space."

God is working through Kids Community Theater to engage and transform the hearts of these young performers. How-

"God is with us in those moments, and it is a holy space." - Amy Kratzer

ever, it is not just the students who are being changed by the Holy Spirit. Continuing with the theme of "Offering Ourselves for God's Renewing" from Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Annual Sessions 2018, Amy and Mandy were asked "how have you, your congregations and communities been renewed by KCT?" Amy states, "When there are kids really struggling with life at school or at home, needing an abundance of support, love and direction, this pushes us to dig deep and seek the Spirit's help. For Sunnyside, a congregation that has gotten smaller in the last 5 years, it has been renewing to see God continuing to use us in the world."



2016 production of "What's Up Zak": Front: Deborah Kratzer, Jacob Shenk; Back: (left to right) Lydia Shoemaker, Ian Mchugh, Abigail Kratzer, Hannah Rheinheimer, Hallie Davis, Caleb Chupp, Kate Rheinheimer

Mandy goes on, "For me the whole process is transforming and renewing. From engaging with a faith or biblical story in a deeper way, deepening friendships, making new friendship connections, getting to know our sister congregation better and creating something with them—it's all so life-giving and renewing... I have seen the Spirit at work bringing our two congregations together through the ministry of KCT. It is a profound experience to come together to create something like these shows together. Through shared meals, a shared project, and shared joys and challenges we now have a unity that we didn't have before, and it's a gift."

Kids Community Theater will enter its seventh season in January 2019. For more information, please contact:

Amy Kratzer, Sunnyside MC (amykratzer@gmail.com) or Mandy Yoder, Belmont MC (mandy@belmontmc.org).

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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Shirati bishops and church leaders gather for a group photo: Bishop Kateti and his wife Naomi are seated in the front row between Dan Miller, conference pastor and Paula Killough, moderator.

Updates from abroad

Conference leaders reflect on their trip to Shirati

By: Anna Buck, editor

On April 25, 2018. Paula Killough, conference moderator and Dan Miller, conference pastor, boarded a flight for Tanzania. Just one year previous, Bishop Kateti invited Indiana Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) to consider a relationship with Shirati diocese, one of twelve dioceses for Tanzania Mennonite Church. Now Dan and Paula were on their way to visit staff and pastors of the diocese.

The welcome and hospitality they encountered was warm and extravagant. Dan states, "Bishop Kateti put together a wonderful schedule of meetings, visits and learning trips for us. He also arranged for us to stay in the home of Dr. Esther Kawira." Dr. Kawira has roots at College Mennonite and worked to provide healthcare in Shirati for 35 years.

The two-week trip was filled with fellowship and teaching. Paula writes, "We were asked to share from our experience in the area of pastoral care where we focused on leaders finding times of Sabbath and encouraging these leaders and their spouses who work so hard." Learning about pastoral care is significant for these leaders. In addition to shepherding their congregants, the men and women pastoring in Tanzania work full-time jobs, making Sabbath a difficult thing to practice.

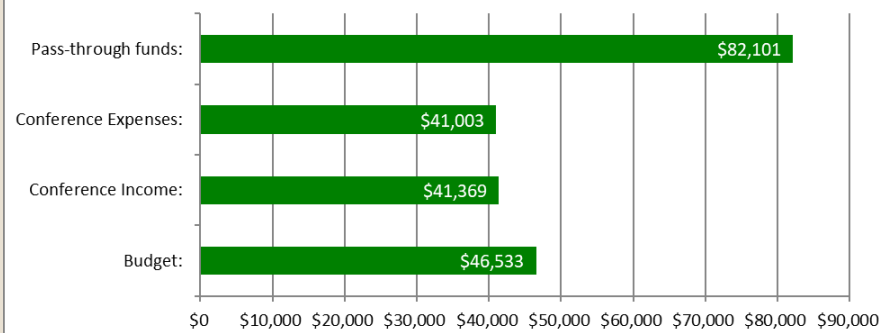
Paula was able to speak with and encourage the female leaders. This proved to be a powerful experience for her. "There were many

deeply meaningful interactions for me with women and children. It was in those moments where I felt certain that God had sent me as a woman leader to pastor and minister and learn." Dan reflects on his time there, "I am grateful that several of us were able to open this conversation by being present in Shirati. We had a chance to interact with numerous diocesan staff, pastors and youth leaders. It was an amazing time. I feel like I left a part of my heart there."

What comes next? Dan comments, "Since the visit, I am in favor of continuing to explore a relationship. Because any decision about relating with Shirati Diocese must be a conference-wide conversation, Paula and I believe a team must lead the process." Moving forward, Missional Leadership Team (MLT) anticipates forming a team comprised of persons with a heart to invest in this decision. Such persons may contact the office to register their interest. As always, it is exciting to see what the Lord will do in the future.

financial report

Fiscal Year to date 7/1/2017 - 6/30/2018



journeying with our pastors



Timothy Burkholder,
interim IN-MI
Conference Pastor

Greetings from your Interim Conference Pastor, working to make Dan Miller's sabbatical free of worries about the job.

By now, congregations have gotten back into the rhythm of a new program year. While it is back to work in many ways, I trust that the congregational work is one of joy in serving our Lord.

To help our leaders as they get back into their rhythm, we are happy to offer the Pastor Gathering November 5-7, 2018 at Amigo Centre (see save the date ad in this issue). Furthermore, we just announced the registration fees have been reduced from \$95 last year to \$30 through the use of our Pastoral Training Fund. It is our hope that this will enable most of our pastors to attend the gathering.

Congregations are encouraged to take even further steps to make this happen by providing child care to allow any pastors with young children to attend and you could even consider covering the remaining \$30 as a way to remove any cost barriers that might prevent them from being able to attend.

With the conference realigning the budget over the last

several years, including the reduction of staff, there are several key groups of people that will become important as we seek to continue providing the pastoral and congregational support that has been a key mission for the conference. Some of these are search guides and congregational coaches. Another key group is the self-led Area Councils.

Following Dan's lead, I have or am planning to attend most of the area council meetings and I will look forward to engaging with congregational leaders in those events. In the meantime, may you as members of the conference and your individual congregations sense the Holy Spirit's presence in your work and know that you are engaged in a high calling which brings you a sense of satisfaction in your soul.

SAVE THE DATE

"Pathways into Faithful and Fruitful Ministry"

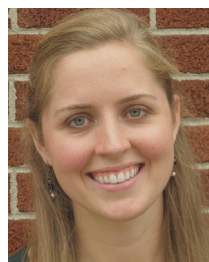
This year's Pastor Gathering will be held at Amigo Center on Monday, Nov. 5th— Wednesday, Nov. 7th. More information will be available on the conference website: im.mennonite.net.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



David and Madeline Maldonado, above, were installed as pastors for community outreach at College Mennonite Church on July 1st.



Naomi Yoder above, was ordained at East Goshen Mennonite Church on September 23rd.



Steve Thomas, above, began his role as transitional pastor at Prairie Street Mennonite Church on July 1st.

& Endings



Ruben Chupp above, retired from North Main Mennonite Church on July 31st.



Nelson Kraybill above, retired from Prairie Street Mennonite Church on April 8th.



Steve Slagel above, concluded his time as transitional pastor at Valparaiso on April 29th.



Randy Miller above, concluded his time as transitional pastor at Sunnyside Mennonite Church on September 30th.



Mark Schloneger above, concluded his time as minister at North Goshen Mennonite Church on October 2nd.