

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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The signing of the covenant (May 2018): (left to right) Rose Shetler, Esther Farmwald, Timothy Burkholder and John Kaufman

Covenanting Together Waterford Mennonite finds unity amidst diversity

By: Anna Buck, editor

What does it mean to covenant? How does one congregation commit to a larger body of believers while also maintaining autonomy? Can accountability exist without excessive rigidity and enforcement? How do we live in a spirit of unity when we have differing opinions?

These are questions that the people at Waterford Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN) wrestled with as they responded to the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference's (IMMC) *Renewing a Vision* document. On June 16, 2018, following a May congregational meeting, four delegates from Waterford Mennonite Church signed the covenant with IMMC.

IMMC's *Renewing a Vision* (RaV) invites congregations and credentialed persons to covenant as an outward expression of the commitment to be members of a "community of congregations centered on Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, acting through grace,

love and peace, and engaging the world God loves" (IMMC Vision Statement). Covenanting congregations commit to engaging the shared spiritual practices, to participate in conference affairs (via volunteers, delegates, finances, prayers, and communications), to use the communal discernment process as needed, and to foster inter-congregational relationships (RaV document).

Waterford's decision to sign the covenant did not occur overnight. The process began in January 2017 and continued through May 2018. Leadership wanted the congregation to be well informed.

Reflecting about the Waterford process, Neil Amstutz, pastor at Waterford, recounts, "Before this May (2018) congregational meeting which actually agreed to proceed with signing the covenant, we had two kinds of open roundtable conversations at

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Covenanting together

church about the draft of the *Renewing a Vision* (RaV)... We had Dan [Miller] come and make a bit of a summary presentation about *Renewing a Vision* as it was developing. And if I remember right, then we had two general invitation congregational meetings that were not about decision making. They were just about responding to the draft."

During the round table discussions, attendees filled out worksheets pertaining to sections of *Renewing a Vision*. Each worksheet asked what they wanted to have clarified, what they affirmed, and any questions or concerns they might have. For some, there was concern about the breadth of variance and its implications on LGBT persons within a congregation and on credentialed leaders.

We're going commit to be brothers and sisters in Christ together. And then we figure our way through these faith challenges.

Timothy Burkholder

Timothy Burkholder, chair of Ministry Leadership Council (MLC) states, "There were three tables that were okay [to sign] but were concerned [about] the third point [of *Renewing a Vision*] relating to the LGBT issues."

Neil goes on, "Those three tables that were concerned with the points, at least some of them were saying we don't want to prevent LGBTQ people from being credentialed. So, it was on a progressive side of having some questions about the *Renewing a Vision* document. But those are not the only reservations on that point because there were some of the tables that were not in an agreement on a conservative direction. They were not in agreement with that portion of it."

"The issue that seemed to be arising," says Tim, "was...does this have us as a congregation taking a stand? And we attempted to say 'no', but it really is a congregational responsibility. It's not a conference responsibility. We attempted to clarify that." Both

leaders agree clarification on this point was an important part of the process. Signing covenant did not commit the congregation to a predetermined position, or that everyone agreed with the conference breadth of variance.

On the way toward a decision, leaders and congregants considered what it means to be a part of a community of congregations. Tim recalls, "There was a sense, even before, but particularly in that meeting that remaining a part of Mennonite Church USA was important. Obviously, that means remaining a part of the Conference." He continues, "We heard lots of reflections on that which indicated this was the overriding factor. We want to remain a part of Mennonite Church USA....knowing that there are some pieces of it that are a little touchy, but not enough to derail it. That was the risk that we took. And we (leadership) were clearly signaling that we value this relationship enough that we can find our way to work through these things that we need to."

At the conclusion of their meeting in May 2018, eight of the twelve tables affirmed signing the covenant while four remained unsure. With a clear majority, leadership at Waterford moved forward on signing the covenant.

Tim believes that the whole discussion of covenanting together is captured in Ephesians 4:1-3. Tim states, "It talks about making a commitment to the unity of the Spirit...In other words, we're going to work together in spite of our differences. And then, in verse 13 it talks about growing into unity of faith. It's not the other way around. You don't have to have unity of faith before you can be a Body. It talks about a unity of Spirit. And you then can grow into the unity of faith. And it seems to me, that speaks into forbearance like nothing else does. We're going to commit to be brothers and sisters in Christ together. And then we figure our way through these faith challenges."

Signing the covenant does not answer all of Waterford's questions, nor can it. However, they are hopeful that they will continue to seek the Spirit while remaining as members of a larger Body of congregations.

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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Search Guides

Building relationships and serving one another

By: Anna Buck, editor

Search Guides are individuals trained by Conference staff to walk with pastoral search committees as they seek new pastoral leadership for their congregation. Search guides orient the committee to the search process, provide perspective as job description and congregational information documents are written, and introduce them to reading MLIs (Ministerial Leadership Information forms) to learn about potential candidates.

Currently, there are seven women and men serving as search guides. This article highlights comments by three guides at various places in the process: Will Fitzgerald, Rebecca Horst, and Richard Kauffman.

Will Fitzgerald (Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship), Becky Horst (College Mennonite) and Richard Kauffman (College Mennonite) trained to be search guides in October 2017. Each person trained at that time had been nominated by someone who believed they had the gifts to accompany search committees through the process.



Becky Horst, above search guide at Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship, Elkhart, IN

Becky Horst recently began working with the search committee at Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship, Elkhart, IN. Horst states, "I agreed to participate in training to be a search guide because I love the church and want it to be the best possible partner in God's work in the world. I believe good leadership is essential, and that finding a good match between congregation and pastor is very important."

Richard Kauffman served as guide for Sunnyside Mennonite, Elkhart, IN. Kauffman's experience and practical knowledge led him to become a search guide. "I had been part of the process of pastoral searches before, both as a pastoral candidate and as a member of a congregation. In the latter case, I was actually chair of the search committee. I thought I had some ideas about what would work well and what not so well. I care about good process, so I thought I could be overseer of the process."

Working with congregations during these times of transition builds deep connections. Search Guides gain a unique perspective on what is happening outside of their own congregations. Fitzgerald, who, along with his wife Bess, works with Cedar Grove, Manistiquie, MI

and Maple River, Brutus, MI, says, "We loved getting to know these vibrant churches elsewhere in the state. We've also learned how difficult it is to place people in traditional ways in these churches."

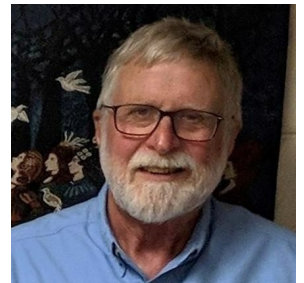


Bess and Will Fitzgerald, above search guide at Maple River and Cedar Grove

He goes on, "We have developed an even greater affection for our fellow Michigan churches, especially! And it's caused to start asking questions about new ways of doing things when resources, both at the conference level and at the individual level, are so tight."

Every congregation brings different needs when looking for a pastor. Congregations appoint search committees who lead the search process and represent the culture of their congregation. Reflecting on his time as a Search Guide Kauffman says, "I had a terrific experience. Usually I inwardly groan when I have an evening meeting, but I always looked forward to these meetings. It was clear the congregation chose their search committee well. They were all spiritually mature persons who didn't come with their own agendas. They represented the congregation well. They were respectful of each other, even when they didn't always agree."

Search Guides are an example of being conference with one another. They engage with brothers and sisters in other congregations, developing bonds of friendship and investing in one another.



Richard Kauffman, above served as search guide for Sunnyside Mennonite Church, Elkhart, IN.

For more information about search guides, or to nominate someone to be a search guide, please contact the Conference Office.



Registration is now OPEN!
See insert for more details on Annual Sessions 2019: Practicing Our Hope
June 13-15, Amigo Centre, Sturgis MI

journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC pastor, looks ahead to Annual Sessions 2019.

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference continues to be an exciting place. Congregations are experimenting with spiritual practices and ways of connecting with their communities.

This year Missional Leadership Team (MLT) took a Sabbath from February and March regional meetings, encouraging groups instead to do something in the community or brainstorm new ways of being conference. It is very likely that the way we have organized as a conference for the last fifty years will not serve us well moving into the future. This is an acknowledgement of the changes going on around us and not a critique of what has been. MLT is making time available at Annual Sessions to hear new ideas coming out of those sabbatical activities.

This issue features two new stories of being conference for each other. Last summer, delegates from Waterford Mennonite signed the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference covenant. The

cover article describes how they made that decision.

The inside article shares experiences of Search Guides, who walk with pastoral search committees as a congregation seeks new pastoral leadership. Search Guides are able to be present beyond ways staff have been able to do. Learn about this relatively new way of being conference with each other.

There has been an uptick in interest about congregational coaches since that role was featured in the last issue of Gospel Evangel. Leadership Enhancement Team will be glad to help your congregational leaders consider the benefits of a coach, and identify possible coaches. Contact the office or an LET member to begin.

As always, more information about both of these topics can be found on our website: im.mennonite.net.

ministry transitions

Beginnings

& Endings



Anna Ruth Hershberger above, concluded her time as transitional pastor of at Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship on December 31, 2018.



Terri and Charles Geiser, above, were installed at Sunnyside Mennonite Church on January 6, 2019.



Tim Lichti above, began as congregational coach for Holdeman Mennonite Church on February 17, 2019.



Steve Slagel above, began as transitional pastor at North Goshen on January 1, 2019.



Mark Schloneger above, began as pastor at Berkey Avenue on February 1, 2019.

financial report

