

Resources for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Sunday

February 23, 2020

PURPOSES

- Engage the story of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC), a story that contributes to our identity as a community of congregations
- Celebrate and give thanks for God’s faithfulness to IMMC throughout our history
- Increase awareness of and appreciation for the congregations – people, pastors, locations – that make up IMMC
- Deepen a sense of connection to other congregations in one’s own region
- Broaden our sense of identity as Mennonite follower of Jesus beyond the local congregation

One of the core principles of the church for us as Mennonites is that the community is the center of life. We commit ourselves to following Christ, and we commit ourselves to each other in the community of faith. We invite you to help your congregation live into its commitment to the larger community of faith and to begin that by getting better acquainted with IMMC.

We believe a service of worship is the best place to hear stories of God’s faithfulness. We are all called to respond to the love, forgiveness and grace we have received. We respond by loving and being in relationship with God, neighbor and enemy. An “Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Sunday” is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our relationship with God and each other in the church and to deepen our resolve to love even those who are hard to love—our enemy.

Please note that this packet contains resources for you to use in your worship time and your adult education hour. These are meant to assist you. There are more resources here than you can use, therefore they are offered as a variety of options from which you may choose. We encourage you to make necessary adaptations to suit the needs of your congregation.

The Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) Missional Leadership Team and staff believe your congregation will be inspired and blessed by stories of the larger church family to which your congregation belongs. IMMC has a long, interesting story of the faithfulness and struggle of congregations working together to follow Jesus as his faithful followers and “disciple-makers.” Our story is a story of seeking to be faithful. It is a grace-filled story of our years of following Jesus and engaging in mission together through good times and hard. We are working together to provide resources to contribute to healthy congregations and healthy pastors, changed by our involvement in God’s mission to reconcile the world. You and your congregation are part of the story!

(This packet has been adapted from materials created by Central District Conference. We are grateful for their generosity in sharing it with us.)

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Order of Worship (see below for resources corresponding to each of the lettered items in the following outline)

Gathering Songs (A)*

Welcome and Intro to Conference Sunday (B)

Renewing a Vision Video (C)

Call to Worship/Opening Prayers (D)

Song of Praise (A)**

Offering & IMMC Congregations Slide Show (E)

Lighting Peace Lamp (if that is your practice) and Prayer for IMMC Congregations

Delegate Story (F)

Children's Time (G)

Historical monologue (written by Veronica Weirich Berkey (H)

Scripture Reading (I)

Sermon (J)

Song of Response (A)**

Congregational Prayer

Benediction

Sending Song (A)**

RECOMMENDED LIST OF VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

1. A photographer to capture the worship service and education time. The Conference office would like to have visual documentation of this event.
2. An IMMC Delegate: During the service, this person will share a story about her/his experiences being a part of Conference activities.
3. Monologue Reader

4. Delegate, Ministry team member, or Conference staff member: to lead the “Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference 101” class (see below)
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WORSHIP RESOURCES

A. Song Suggestions (SJ=Sing the Journey, SS=Sing the Story, HWB=Hymnal: A Worship Book)

***Gathering Songs**

- SJ #3 *Jesus calls us here to meet him*
 SJ #4 *You've got a place*
 HWB #12 *Come, let us all unite to sing*
 HWB #397 *God loves all his many people*
 SS #31 *Jesus, be the center*
 HWB #407 *We are people of God's peace (text by Menno Simons)*

****Praise, Response or Sending Songs**

- SJ #16 *Praise with joy the world's Creator*
 HWB #304 *There are many gifts but the same Spirit*
 SJ #64 *Somos el cuerpo de Cristo (We are the body of Christ)*
 HWB #307 *Will you let me be your servant*
 HWB #322 *For we are strangers no more*
 HWB #420 *Heart with loving heart united*
 SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*
 SS #40 *Som'landela (We will follow)*
 SS #94 *Sithi bonga (We sing praise)*
 SS #113 *I will stand in the congregation*
 SS # 120 *Somebody prayed for me*
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B. Introduction to Conference Sunday

One of the core principles of the church for us as Mennonites is that the community is the center of life. We commit ourselves to following Christ, and we commit ourselves to each other in the community of faith. We invite you to live into our commitment to the larger community of faith and to begin that by getting better acquainted with our conference, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC).

We believe a service of worship is a great place to hear stories of God's faithfulness. We are all called to live into the love, forgiveness and grace we have received. We respond to this call by loving and being in relationship with God, our neighbors and enemies. An “Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Sunday” is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our relationship with God and each other in the church and together we'll deepen our resolve to love even those who are hard to love—our enemy.

The IMMC Missional Leadership Team and staff believe we will be inspired and blessed by stories of the larger church family to which (*name your congregation*) belongs. IMMC has a long, interesting story of the faithfulness and struggle of congregations working together to follow Jesus as his faithful followers and

“disciple-makers.” It is a grace-filled story of our years together following Jesus and engaging in mission through good times and hard. And finally, our story here at (*name your congregation*) is part of the IMMC story because together with other congregations, WE ARE IMMC. IMMC’s story is your story!

C. Renewing a Vision video

A new video, highlighting some of the work of IMMC.

D. Call to Worship/Opening Prayer

Leader: We are the body of Christ!

Baptized in one Spirit, we are members of one body.

All: *Many and varied in gender, color, age, class, and ability, we are members of Christ’s beautiful body.*

Leader: None of us can say to another, “I have no need of you.”

All: *For only together can we find wholeness.*

Leader: None of us can say to another, “I will not care for you.”

All: *For we are connected like muscle and bone. If one suffers, we all suffer. If one rejoices, we all rejoice!*

Leader: Thanks be to God who, in Christ, has made us one.

All: *Let us worship God!*

Opening Prayer

O God,

we welcome you

in our midst.

Bring to our lives

the oil of justice,

the lamp of truth.

Strengthen us as we meet

in fellowship and doubt.

Guard us with your cherishing embrace.

Inspire us on the journey

with the vision of Christ’s passion

to bring light to the world. Amen.

E. IMMC Slide Show of Congregations- This will be sent out in the beginning of January.

This PowerPoint introduces each congregation in the conference with a photo of the church building, a photo of the pastor(s) and the congregation’s location on a map. This is a quick, visual way to see who we are as a conference and where we find ourselves. (similar to the “roll call” from Annual Sessions)

F. Delegate Story

We suggest asking a delegate or a member of one of the IMMC leadership teams from your congregation to talk about what being a part of Conference means to them. This is a time to share memories or stories of experiences of interacting with other congregations within IMMC, from Annual Sessions, Regional Meetings, etc.

G. Children's Time

(adapted from CDC Sunday resource packet)

Leader welcomes children saying, "Hello friends, good morning _____, hello _____" *(call some children by name)*. After they are seated, say, "Raise your hand if you know . . ." *(name a child in the group. Do this several times with different children's names)*. "Raise your hand if you know . . ." *(name your pastor)*.

When you came to sit down, I called you friends and some by name. That means we are connected because we know each other. Now I need some help. *(Pick out children to stand in 4 corners of the area where you are gathered. They do not need to be in a perfect square and can be at different distances from each other and you.)* Hand the end of a ball of yarn to one child, and say, "You are Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship in Kalamazoo, Michigan." *(Substitute any IMMC churches in this area of the story and be sure to include your own congregation.)* Then stretch the yarn across the group to another child standing, and say, "You are Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana." Stretch the yarn across the group to the third child and say, "You are Mara Christian Church of America in Indianapolis, Indiana." Continue with the yarn to the fourth child and say, "You are Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend, Indiana." Then begin passing the yarn to all the children still seated until all of them are holding some yarn.

Say, "Is everyone connected with the yarn now? I come to church here at *(name your congregation)*, and so do you. We come here because we believe in Jesus and the love he shares with all people. Because we all share that love from Jesus, that makes us part of a community. In fact, our community is even bigger than all of the people gathered here today. Our church agreed many years ago to connect with other churches where there are other friends – sisters and brothers in Christ. We are still *(name your congregation)*, but when we meet with these other churches and work and play together with these other churches, we also call ourselves Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. That is a big long name . . . say it with me: Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. We are part of a group of many churches. *(Point to the web of yarn):* This is what it is like to be part of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. We do not live in the same town or even the same state as all of the other churches, but we are all connected like you are right now with this yarn.

Raise your hand if you have family or friends who live far away. Do you ever play with any of those people? Have any of those people ever helped you? Have you ever helped any of them? This is what our church does with our IMMC community: we have fun together, we help each other, we worship together, and we share God's love together. That's why our church has decided to be a part of IMMC – we see that it is important to join together with other people who are part of God's family.

Let's pray: Dear God, we thank you for our community of friends here at *(name your congregation)* and in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. Help us to grow together in your love and show your love to others. Amen.

Suggestion: Always say "Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference," rather than IMMC (used for brevity in this document).

H. John F. Funk Historical Monologue by Veronica Weirich Berkey, October 2019

NOTES: Stage set is simple or could be nothing at all. If you prefer, a table and chair resembling a work desk, or a rocking chair to indicate a home setting would be appropriate. John F. Funk would have worn plain clothes, which can be approximated with black pants, a white shirt, suspenders and plain black tie (especially the kind that tied in a bow shape at the collar, or simply by wearing all black. The words are more important than the costume. I'm providing very little stage direction, so that the reader can interpret as they like.

Stands looking in the distance, as though through a window or lost in thought.

Looks around – as if seeing the place for the first time.

Yes, yes, I see you here. Though the place has changed, hasn't it? It was a little different in my day. My, my – you dress differently, my plain coat would seem so very out of place now, and my beard, well it isn't the hipster type. And the words – I thought learning English the first time was difficult.

My name is John F. Funk. Perhaps you've never heard of me. The F. stands for Fretz. They called me that when I was young – did you know? But my sister, she encouraged me to go by John. She said that Fretz could be confused for Fritz. *(chuckle)* She didn't want a Fritz for a brother. I guess I was never a Fritz.

But some things are not so very different, are they? *(gentle pause – and movement to a desk or a chair)*

I see you there – the ones that rejoice to come and to worship together and be a part of this community of faith and fellow believers. Your voices (the good and the not-so-good) rise in song, in harmonies that began when I was a preacher in Elkhart, Indiana. It was my friend Daniel Brenneman that told me once that he couldn't understand why God should give him a strong bass voice, and the lift of the spirit in hearing voices sing if we weren't to use them.

But let me tell you a little bit of my story, first. I was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1835, and grew up in a Mennonite family, attending the Line Lexington Old Mennonite congregation. But though it was a traditional, old Mennonite community, I thirsted for learning. The written words became friends and teachers. I was among the first to attend an academy for teachers – Freeland Seminary. I attended a Sunday School run by a local Baptist organization, and even taught there for a time. I worshiped with other congregations –

Dunkard, Episcopal, Reformed and Congregational. I taught for three years after receiving my credentials, and then another sister called me away.

You see, her husband asked me to come to Chicago to work with him in a lumber business. This was successful – so successful that I began my own lumber business and was well on my way to becoming a millionaire. During that time, I relished the opportunities that this big city gave me. I attended lectures on topics from temperance to phrenology, the study of how brain size and shape effects an individual. I joined a debate society and worked for the abolitionist movement.¹ Being in the city had its benefits, and the words were plentiful. I saw the church struggling with the response to the war between the states, and I feared I was seeing a movement away from Menno Simons' teachings on non-resistance. It was during this time that I wrote and published my first booklet – Christianity and War.

Words again – for many years I felt the call to teach and connect the Amish and Mennonites as they migrated and moved across the land. Printed words had the power to do this. I purchased a small printing press and began producing two periodicals – The Herald of Truth and Herold der Wahrheit [pronounced "Hair-old der Varheight"] in 1864, soon after I married my wife Salome.

You see, I was watching the Mennonite church around me dying. Around the Mennonites, other denominations had experienced a sort of Great Awakening. Missionaries, Sunday Schools and evangelistic meetings grew – and they spread their message to the people around them. Christian colleges and seminaries began to open and enroll more students who would then teach and preach.

But Mennonites resisted. Tradition, separation and humility were so central to our faith, that it was hard to understand how these "worldly" things could be anything but bad. It felt that we the church labeled things that we did not understand, or did not like as worldly, and therefore unacceptable to God. I began to wonder that these - new things, these changes - could be a way to a greater faithfulness, to living in the spirit of the gospel. In some ways we were trapped by our separatist ways, unable to live out and share the pure and simple Gospel message in the ways of Menno Simons.

I felt strongly that the words of the great teachers should be spread to all of our brothers and sisters, in the languages of our first home and our new home. It's funny – now – but there was a time when my sisters and brothers thought that God spoke only in German. I remember telling Salome one night that I loved the souls of those who do not understand German more than I love the language. Words, again – words in both languages (in all languages) speak the truth of the gospel.

Both of those first publications were a success. At the end of the first year, there were about 1000 subscribers.

In time, I moved my family and my printing operations to Elkhart, Indiana, where I had connected strongly to the Mennonite congregations in Goshen, Topeka, LaGrange, and the railroads in Elkhart gave me the means to print more materials for the Mennonite Church. We printed copies of the *Martyr's Mirror* to replace those destroyed by war. We printed the complete works of Menno Simons. Though I was ordained to preach, that simple press became my most important pulpit.

¹ In Pursuit of Faithfulness by Rick Preheim, 2016, p. 54.

(again, pause and movement)

I see you there – the brothers and sisters mired in conflict and sometimes too tired or angry to drag yourself back to this place. I know conflict. I watched it change people and change the church. People are people wherever you are, and some could not or would not consider change. My brother Jacob Wisler was one of these. It wasn't long after we came to Elkhart that he censured my friend Daniel for attending evangelistic meetings, and then preaching in much the same way here at home. There were hostile words, and there were many tears and many hours spent on my knees. In the end, a council of sixteen ministers from four states and Canada were brought in to render a solution, and it still did not bring peace. *(sadly, tiredly)*

This particular conflict led us to an eventual parting. Jacob and one hundred others went away from the community to worship in their own way. I do not have the answers, only the advantage of hindsight. I can tell you that the departure of my brother Jacob opened doors, and in the spirit of the gospel we went on to do many good things in the Lord's name. Please hear me, I always believed the progress simply for the sake of progress was not in the best interest of the church. Rather, finding the way between rigid tradition and unfettered new-ness is the way to find new ways to strengthen our core beliefs, not to undermine them.²

(pause and small movement)

This was not the only moment that we disagreed. The conference rules and teachings were opposed to Sunday School.³ They thought that Sunday Schools were a way in which the young, especially, were going to be led away from the church – into the world. But they didn't understand what I had experienced. Learning had opened my heart to the very core of our faith, to the gospel message.

It took twenty years for the church to begin to accept the idea of teaching the congregation in this way. It was hard because the teaching materials that were available were non-denominational or of other denominations, and were often nationalistic and did not promote non-resistance, something that could not be overlooked. I began to put together little books, one for primary classes, one for intermediate classes, one for adult Bible class. These Mennonite teaching materials paved the way to words that reached our members at all ages and places. I suppose that our rather urban location compared to the rural locations of my childhood and my brothers and sisters gave us some freedom to try things that otherwise might not have been acceptable.

You must see-- things don't just change. They change because there's a reason. We must not change just for the sake of change, but we must not resist change, just for the sake of resistance. Let's not be for what was, let us be for what is good and faithful to our God.⁴

The words that flew from the printing presses that we put to work in Elkhart reached so much farther than I could have imagined. After a time, Mennonites in Russia were reading these words of the new world, and

² In Pursuit of Faithfulness, page ___.

³ An Address by John F. Funk on the occasion of the Ninety-Second Anniversary of His Birth at the Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind. April 6, 1927, p. 7.

⁴ Adapted words from Joel Kauffmann's monologue, Grossdaddy, written for Bethlehem, 1983.

experiencing persecution in their place, began to travel to us. Many of them came through our spaces in Elkhart, and I would assist them in finding temporary lodging and supplies until they could move on to more permanent homes.

The ones I remember most clearly arrived mere hours after my eight-week-old daughter, Alice, died in my arms from a fever. It was deeply moving to work with these immigrants to fill my empty arms with food and with blankets to allow them rest and hope in our church home very near to ours.

My business skills and organizational leadership were used often in the church. I lived to see many of the people I brought to Elkhart to work for the publishing company go on to do great things for the Lord. I was there for the first baby steps of a mission organization, as I heard God's call to see and hear the words of the oppressed and to reach out to them in love and healing. I see that there are still the oppressed and the silenced, now, as well. I ask you to see them, and to reach out to them with more than words, offering hope and healing.

I cannot see the future, any more than anyone else. The past should inform us, should be honored for what it was in that time. The present should be acknowledged - see what the vision and creativity of others has brought to us! We have more than we have ever had to further the work of the kingdom! Money. Technology. People! The future should be prepared for, may we continue to circle the globe with the light of Jesus Christ.

These are my own words from an address on the occasion of my 92nd birthday, and they hold true beyond my death to life on earth. (*pause and re-center*)

“And so I feel with these teachings and experiences that the Lord has been good unto me and I cannot refrain from expressing my trust and confidence in the Almighty Father, in the words of the poet, when he says:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below; Praise Him above ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”⁵

Resources

Bender, Harold S. “Funk, John Fretz (1835-1930).” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Web. 8 Oct 2019. [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk, John Fretz \(1835-1930\)&oldid=145207](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk,_John_Fretz_(1835-1930)&oldid=145207).

Funk, John F. “*An Address by John F. Funk on the Occasion of the Ninety-Second Anniversary of His Birth at the Mennonite Church Elkhart, Ind. April 6, 1927*”, printed pamphlet by unknown, reviewed at the Mennonite Historical Library.

Kauffman, Joel. *Grossdaddy*. A play created for Bethlehem conference 1983. Reviewed at the Mennonite Historical Library.

⁵ An Address by John F. Funk, April 6, 1927, p. 13.

Preheim, Rick. *In Pursuit of Faithfulness: Conviction, Conflict and Compromise in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference*. Herald Press: Harrisonburg, Virginia. 2016.

Sent Magazine, August 1983. Synopsis, additional information and photos of “Grossdaddy” by Joel Kauffmann for Bethlehem, 1983.

I. Scripture Reading

Philippians 1:3-11
 Philippians 2:1-11
 Philippians 2:19-30
 Acts 16:11-40

J. Scripture and Sermon focus suggestion for IMMC Sunday

Philippians 1:3-11
 Philippians 2:1-11
 Philippians 2:19-30
 Acts 16:11-40

Sermon title: *“We need each other”*

Sermon focus:

For IMMC Sunday we are suggesting that congregations look at the relationship that Paul had with the believers in Philippi. This was a mutually beneficial relationship in which Paul both received and gave, and the believers in Philippi also both received and gave. This story of Paul’s first encounter at Philippi and the letter at a later time help understand how this mutuality happens. Paul shares the good news with Lydia’s household, and they are baptized, but Lydia invites Paul and his entourage to stay at her house (Acts 16:14-15; 16:40). This is a wonderful account of generosity, hospitality, compassion, and responsiveness.

Years later we pick up the story when Paul (now in prison in Rome) sends a letter to the believers in Philippi. This is a letter of thankfulness, of encouragement, of challenge and of exhortation, but it is also a letter that acknowledges the more recent ways that the Philippian believers had supported and encouraged Paul. Paul is sending back Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians had sent to support and attend to Paul’s needs while in prison (Philippians 2:19-30). The encouragement that Paul gives in this letter grows out of the very “mind of Christ”—we look out for the interest and well-being of others.

We suggest that these passages become the foundation for us to look at the ways the IMMC congregations can function with the same relationships that existed between Paul (and his friends) and Lydia (and the believers in Philippi.)

We hope that we can use this Sunday to consider the ways in which we can encourage, support, challenge and respond to each other as we work in a common ministry. *We really do need each other!*

May each of our congregations be a place that would also be a recipient of this wonderful letter from Paul and Timothy.

Other possible sermon foci, scriptures and metaphors of church

A body - I Cor 12; Eph 1:22-23

A family - II Cor 6:18

Vine and branches - John 15:1-11

Transformed/Many gifts but one body - Rom 12

CHRISTIAN ED HOUR POSSIBILITIES

(see below for resources corresponding to each of the lettered items in the list)

Engaging with *Renewing a Vision (RaV)* (K)

Heilsgeschichte in Song (L)

Discussion based on part two of *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* (M)

***Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference 101: A Community of Congregations* (N)**

K. Engaging with *Renewing a Vision (RaV)*

The Missional Leadership Team of IMMC is leading a process to renew a vision of how our community of congregations can center around Jesus and engage in practices that open us to the work of God's Spirit. The document, *Renewing a Vision*, is guiding that effort.

Make sure each person in the class has the summarized version of *RaV* to engage in the following reflections and discussion. From the expanded version of *RaV*, read **Introduction, "For 100 years . . ."**

- Ask people in your group to read aloud three times the Mission Statement and the three points following it.
- As you reflect on this part of the document, identify the following:
 1. What words, phrases or sentences encourage you personally?
 2. Which parts do you see as a stretch goal for your congregation to live into? Or another way to ask—what do you see as an area of growth for your congregation to pursue?
 3. What do you think is missing here? What do you wish were included?
- As you reflect on the shared spiritual practices (on the back of the document), which do you think your congregation is already doing? Which would you like to begin or do more of?
- Share your answers to the above questions around the circle, have someone in your group write down the main points.

- **Share what is written down with your pastor to bring to the Area Council meeting for further reflection.**
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L. Singing Salvation Story – Singing the “Heilsgeschichte”

(Approximately 25 minutes using verses listed; if more time is available, more verses could be included if appropriate to that part of Salvation Story.)

Reader: For all of us as followers of Jesus, God’s story is central --the Bible is central. Through it we have come to know about God and God’s mission among us. One can think of the Bible as a collection of 66 books in two sections: Old Testament and New Testament. And we can also think of the Bible as *one story* with a plot, characters, tension and resolution--the story of God’s relationship with humanity. Today we will sing God’s story, Salvation Story. The German word used for ‘Salvation Story’ is Heilsgeshichte. We will be singing the ‘Heilsgeshichte’ today, with a bit of narration to connect the songs to the various chapters in the story.

The story begins with God, the 1st character, the main character. God created the world and delighted in it. God said it was *very good*. God made us--humanity--in God’s image and was in close communion with those first humans. I love the KJV phrase—God walked with them “in the cool of the day.” It is a beautiful image of companionship and closeness. It was *very good!*

Creation: HWB 46 *I sing the mighty power of God*, vs 1 & 2

Reader: The closeness between God & humans was broken by sin. God set about bringing humanity back by making a covenant with Abraham and Sara, and blessing them so that through their family, all humanity would be blessed. But the way was hard. Eventually the people of God, the people of Israel, found themselves in slavery in Egypt. Yet always God’s desire was to restore the close relationship that had been there at the beginning.

Exodus: HWB 164 *When Israel was in Egypt’s land*, vs 1 & 4

Reader: God reached out through Moses and made a covenant with the people. Yahweh would be their God and they would be God’s people. That is amazing grace! Through the covenant God taught them what it meant to be God’s people...how to love God and love others. God’s presence led them. With visible symbols of God’s presence--the Ark of the Covenant, the Cloud and Pillar of Fire, God led them.

Wandering: HWB 419 *Lead on O cloud of presence*, vs 1 & 2

Reader: Eventually they made their way to the Canaan, the Promised Land... There was the era of judges, then the era of the prophets and kings. The Bible says of the good kings, “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” But the other kings, well..., not so much. So, God used Assyria to conquer Israel and Babylon to conquer Judah...taking away God’s people into captivity. Just as we have our times of exile, the people of Israel felt far from God, far from the visible reminders of their place in God’s love. (We will sing the next two songs back to back. Second song--**just the refrain 2x.**) Hear their longing for a restored relationship with God, for returning to Zion, Jerusalem.

Exile: HWB 148 *By the waters* (sing once in unison, then as a round)

Return from exile: SS 6 *Save us, O Lord*, (sing refrain X2)

Reader: The prophets challenged the people to return to God and offered hope for the fulfillment of all their longings for God. God would send the Promised One & again be their God. When? How? Would they recognize the Anointed One?

Waiting for Jesus: HWB 172 *O Come, O Come, Immanuel*, vs 1 & 5

Reader: God came and pitched his tent among humans. God humbly took human form, the Incarnation--God with us! That indeed was good news! And with it came surprises. The Promised One was both more and quite different from what God's people had expected.

Coming of Jesus: SS 37 *Firstborn of Mary* (sing twice)

Reader: Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God--the Reign of God. He healed. He proclaimed good news for the poor and to outsiders. Jesus critiqued those who were the religious leaders of the day--perhaps the equivalent of the conference leaders of that day! Jesus' life bore witness to the close and intimate relationship God desired with humans. We love these stories. These stories of Jesus' life and Jesus' teachings are central to understanding God's mission in the world and our own mission. If we are to follow Jesus in life, we need to know these stories. We need to sign up to be part of the New Covenant --the covenant of love which Jesus brought.

Jesus' Ministry: *Tell me the stories of Jesus*, vs 1 & 4 (lyrics and score [can be found here](#))

Reader: But it all fell apart, seemingly. God Incarnate died a humiliating death--the death of a criminal.

Jesus' Death: HWB 257 *Were you there*, vs 1 & 4

Reader: But the reign of God did not come to an end the day Jesus died! On the third day Jesus rose and is alive today. Hope is re-born!

Resurrection: HWB 280 *Christ the Lord is risen today*, v 1

Reader: When Jesus left the earth in bodily form, he sent his Spirit to lead us in continuing the work of Jesus, in continuing to proclaim and live in God's reign--not primarily as individuals, but as a body, the church, the new creation. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to breathe the church into life and give us the gifts we need to continue God's work of reconciliation. (We will sing the next 3 songs back to back without further comment.) Note how each song leads to the next and expands the vision of the church.

Holy Spirit: HWB 293 *God sends us the Spirit*, vs 1 & 3

Church: HWB 304 *There are many gifts*, vs 2 & 3

Church's calling: SJ 61 *How can we be silent*, vs 1, 3 & 4

Reader: We wait in hope **for the time when all of creation will be reconciled to God**, and God's kingdom, which is near us and among us and within us, will finally come in all its fullness!

Our hope: HWB 323 *Beyond a dying sun*, vs 1 & 2

Come, Lord Jesus!

Join me in prayer: Oh God, we long for that day when your kingdom will come in all its fullness. For the day when our grieving will turn to laughter and the sting of death will pierce our hearts no more. We long for the new world that is coming, when all God's people will live in justice, love and peace. Come, Lord Jesus! Until that day, give us the courage and clarity to live inside that vision for life. Make us more fully your kingdom people. Your new creation. Your church. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

M. Discussion using *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* (from the Vol. 18 of the *Missio Dei* series from MMN in booklet form, also available on MMN website:

<https://assets.mennonites.org/Downloads/DL.MissioDei18.E.pdf>

The second focus of *Missio Dei* is “Community is the center of our life.” Do you agree that it takes all three “Bs” -- believing, belonging and behaving -- to be a faithful follower of Christ? Which of the three does your congregation do best? Share examples. (p. 8-13, 22 for content and other questions)

N. *Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference 101: A Community of Congregations*

OPTIONS:

- Invite someone from your congregation who is a member of one of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) leadership teams to lead the Adult Education hour: Leadership Enhancement Team or Ministry Credentialing Team member; Conference Pastor, Daniel Z. Miller; Conference Pastor for Leadership Transitions, Sharon Yoder; or a retired IMMC pastor (*see notes following these pearls*).
 - Share a brief history of IMMC
 - Describe the structure of the ministry teams
 - Describe the work of the Search Guides and Ministry Credentialing Teams
 - Describe the work of the Stewardship Team, Leadership Training Grant (use Case for Support*)
 - Describe regional meetings and annual sessions
 - Look at the IMMC Narrative Spending Plan*
 - Describe the relationship of IMMC to MC USA
 - Talk about the vision of IMMC for the future (*Renewing a Vision**)
- *denotes a handout/resource

Who Is Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC)? What does a conference do? Why does it exist? How does it help your pastor and congregation stay strong?

1. ***IMMC is made up of congregations joining together to do what a single congregation cannot do as well alone.*** Working together on mission, finding and credentialing pastors, ongoing work of helping pastors stay connected with other pastors and providing resources for them. Through the conference MC USA is connected to individual congregations--for the purposes of mutual discernment and connecting to resources for pastoral searches, the common commitments and priorities of MC USA, etc. (see detailed outline below)

2. ***A Community of Congregations.*** Many of you have seen the *Renewing a Vision* brochure. This document is the result of a three-year process of discernment by delegates and church leaders. Now, what you may not have paid much attention to is the image on the front. You'll notice it looks a bit like a web connecting each individual church to another. This web represents IMMC. The first line of our mission statement says that we are “A Community of Congregations”. IMMC isn't a conference office, it is all of us. We are Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

Another way to look at IMMC is to think of it like a sequoia tree. Sequoia trees are some of the tallest trees in the world! They are long and slender with branches reaching high into the sky. They are also able to survive thousands of years. According to the National Park Service, the oldest sequoia is 3,266 years old.

What makes some trees able to keep on going for centuries and millennia? Grow so large?

- roots intertwine with those of other trees nearby to hold each other in place
- roots are not visible, mostly unnoticed, BUT are absolutely crucial to their health and longevity or when storms come

Your congregation is like a *sequoia tree*; it looks like it stands alone. Yet there are ways it is connected, behind the scenes, through your pastor, through congregation to congregation connections, through those who serve as delegates or on conference leadership teams and all who link roots with other congregations, other pastors and with conference leadership. The conference is like a *sequoia grove*. Or like the image of the web. Together we hold each other in place in quiet and often unnoticed ways. Much of what staff and the leadership teams do, even our regional and annual meetings go mostly unnoticed, but you need the interconnections and the relationships that conference provides to stay strong, especially when the storms come.

Specific ways IMMC helps congregations: Doing together what they cannot do as well alone.

1. IMMC credentials pastors – MCUSA and conferences support each other in establishing guidelines for competence for the pastoral role
 - a. Is similar to professional certification in other professions
 - b. A license or ordination is an expression of blessing and authorization of MCUSA and IMMC
2. The Leadership Enhancement Team provides continuing education accountability and resources for pastors (IMMC, along with other conferences, is emphasizing Healthy Boundaries training and professional growth goals.) Leadership Training Grants are also available for continuing education.
3. IMMC assists with Pastoral Searches
 - a. Staff trains pastoral Search Guides, who orient and coach search committees and congregational leaders throughout a search process.
 - b. Staff provide a link to MC USA’s denominational register of available pastors—system for making more names available beyond just those the congregation or the conference pastor might know.
 - c. Search Guides help congregations choose pastors based on criteria other than just likeability or family connections.
 - d. Congregations receive assistance in finding Interim or Transitional Pastors—determined by the congregation’s situation.
4. IMMC functions as a link between the congregations and MC USA
 - a. Pastors from IMMC congregations meet several times a year and confer with one another as is helpful.
 - b. Constituency Leaders Council meets twice per year. It functions like an advisory council of elders to MC USA staff and Executive Board. One of the ways the IMMC relates to MC USA and to its congregations is by bringing awareness to both. There are three reps from each of 17 conferences who serve on Constituency Leaders Council, along with reps from agencies.
 - c. Sometimes agencies such as Mennonite Mission Network or Mennonite Education Agency also have direct connection with congregations.

5. IMMC supports congregations in their mission and helps congregations join in mission together
 - a. IMMC has several individuals who can assess skills and coach church planters and emerging congregations.
 - b. IMMC staff connect with congregations wishing to join IMMC.
 - i. Mara Christian Church and Emmanuel Living Christian Church (two Chin congregations in Indianapolis)
 - c. IMMC connects pastors within the conference for support and mutual learning. (Your pastors are more connected to each other than your congregations may realize.)
 - i. Area Council Meetings (mostly monthly)
 - ii. Annual Pastor Gathering
 - d. Other ways IMMC supports congregations with resources:
 - i. Print resources via email/mail/website
 1. Gospel Evangel
 2. *weLink*
 3. *Renewing a Vision*, Case for Support, etc.
 - ii. Leadership workshops/seminars
 - iii. Regional gatherings
 - iv. Congregational Coaches
 - v. An outside perspective on conflicts or challenges when needed
 - vi. Capital grants to enhance mission

Other things to know about the vision Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC)

“For over 100 years, . . .” (use this intro from *Renewing a Vision*)

1. IMMC understands the life of the conference is in the congregation
2. IMMC understands conference association to be a covenant that congregations enter voluntarily (as named in *Renewing a Vision*):
 - a. Centering conference and congregational life around Jesus
 - b. Participating in shared spiritual practices
 - c. Engaging in communal biblical discernment
 - d. Restating commitments to one another (this point is still being fleshed out)
3. IMMC understands congregation to congregation relationships to be central. Missional Leadership Team has identified these three points as hoped-for outcomes as we live into our vision:
 - a. Congregations will strengthen their relationships with each other to foster greater affection, understanding, and mutual sharing.
 - b. Conference activities will equip congregations to be spiritually and biblically grounded, led by Spirit-filled leaders, and telling stories and celebrating God-with us.
 - c. Each congregation and its members will grow in capacity for God-centered worship, Christ-like love, and reaching out to their neighbors in Spirit-led witness and service.
4. Many say they appreciate the worship and fellowship when IMMC gathers as a community. People experience healing, laughter and encouragement.
5. Can you be part of IMMC too? Yes! IMMC welcomes individuals and congregations seeking a home in the Anabaptist stream of faith. We are committed to inviting all to follow Jesus and growing our competence as a multicultural conference.

What is exciting about IMMC?

- With a rich heritage, IMMC is reaching with anticipation toward a future that is not completely clear to us, but where we know God is actively engaged.
- Stories of personal and congregational transformation through engaging the world God loves
- Developing leaders through Journey and pastoral internships
- Growing our capacity to speak with one another about things that matter, in ways that honor Jesus.
- Quality pastors, men and women (39% of pastors and church leaders are women in IMMC), offering wise spiritual leadership
- Demographics that are increasingly more multicultural