

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Annual Sessions 2021

Congregational Updates

Congregations Withdrawn

Talcum Mennonite Church

Wattles Park Faith Fellowship Mennonite

Wawasee Lakeside Chapel

Membership Recommendation to Delegates

Piedra Viva

Talcum Mennonite Church Withdrawal

In 1952 the Ball Creek mission station was opened in Talcum, Kentucky, by Clinton Frame Mennonite Church. Samuel Hostetler was ordained in 1953 and served the congregation until 1956. John F. Mishler succeeded him as a licensed minister in 1956 and was ordained in 1959.¹

In 1964 Orlo Fisher went to Talcum and helped build a chicken house. He and his (now late) wife Dorothy moved to the Appalachian foothills during the 1960s and began serving the small congregation of mostly coal miners until 2017, when he retired. Orlo continued to assist Craig Schultz, the current pastor, and he has enjoyed his long-term tenure at Talcum. His advice for pastors is “not to set their eyes upon seeing how they can be moving but to thinking long term.”²

In 1981 the congregation unanimously chose to become an independent church (that is, no longer dependent on financial support from conference). As such, it no longer relied on the Conference to support the expense of its property. In March 1982 that independence was achieved.

Under Orlo’s leadership, the church grew and became established in the community. Dorothy began a girls’ club, and a boys’ club and MYF were organized. Ladies’ meetings were also initiated. In March 1997 the Talcum congregation held a ground-breaking service for a new kitchen and fellowship hall. As it has occurred in many Mennonite churches over time, most of the labor for the addition was expected to be volunteer. Membership at that time was 35 and average attendance was 40 to 45.³

In a letter dated December 4, 2019, Larry Ritchie, Elder, stated that “due to doctrinal differences,” Talcum Mennonite Church was resigning from the Conference. He went on to state that, “Our time spent as members of the Conference has been important to us as believers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are grateful to you for providing this opportunity.”

Submitted by Helene Hoover

¹ Wenger, J. C. *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan*. Herald Press, Scottdale, PA. 1961.

² Robinson, Laurie Oswald, Ed. *Gospel Evangel*. IN-MI Mennonite Conference. 2017.

³ Ritchie, Larry. *Gospel Evangel*. IN-MI Mennonite Conference. Dec 1997.

Wattles Park Faith Fellowship Withdrawal

Pine Grove Mennonite Church was established in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1984. Early leaders in the congregation were Eldon Christophel and Tom Swartz.

Apparently this church evolved from an earlier congregation called Heath Street Mennonite in the same city, which was “established as a mission outpost” in 1952, where “dedication services for the new church building were held on July 24, 1955.” John M. Snyder was licensed as minister at that time, and he served until 1958. Membership was 21, with an average attendance of 40, in 1961.⁴ Transition regarding the name (and probably the new physical location) is unclear.

The name Pine Grove Mennonite was changed in 2019 to Wattles Park Faith Fellowship. The congregation’s building is located on Wattles Road and is in the area of Wattles Park. This change was made following vision and identity work done by the congregation in 2017-18.

The Conference received a letter dated July 30, 2020, cosigned by Pastor Thomas L. Schwartz and Council Chairman Harold Vogt. In that letter, the congregation requested that it be removed from all “conference related involvement” and that such an “action was approved at (its) general business meeting on January 17, 2019.

Submitted by Helene Hoover

⁴ Wenger, J. C. *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan*.

Wawasee Lakeside Chapel Withdrawal

In 1947 the Goshen College Young People's Christian Association began working in the Wawasee area, holding meetings in a country club building. In 1955 the Maple Grove congregation helped with the building of a new house of worship on the west side of the village of Wawasee. A dedication service was held July 17, 1955¹.

Herbert L. Yoder was licensed in 1953, ordained in 1955, and served until 1961. Jason S. Martin then served the congregation. At that time there were 32 members documented in the congregation. For the past 65 years, Harlan Steffen has been leading this church, and during that time the building was expanded and a fellowship hall added.⁵ Much of the church's growth came from outreach to the community. In addition to Harlan's leadership, Brad Cox currently serves as pastor.

Activities of the congregation over the years include an Elder-Council for leadership, the founding of a Habitat for Humanity chapter in Kosciusko County, and the establishment of both a food pantry and a half-way house for women. Probably the best-known feature of this congregation is the Boat-In Worship on the Oakwood Shore of Lake Wawasee. In 2019, there was a 50th anniversary of that service.

In light of the congregation's nonparticipation in conference gatherings for many years, Missional Leadership Team initiated conversation about affiliation with the congregation in January of this year. The relationship formally ended March 31, 2021.

Pastor Harlan acknowledged, in his letter of March 12, 2021, that the church has not been active in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. He also voiced the hope that his congregation has "not created problems for the (the Conference) but rather (has) been a good image for (it)." He concluded by offering his blessing to the ministry of the Conference and hoping that it considers Wawasee Lakeside Chapel as one of its successes.

Submitted by Helene Hoover

⁵ Wenger, J.C.

Piedra Viva (Living Stone) Mennonite Church
Elkhart, Indiana
Membership Recommendation to delegates

For delegate action at Annual Sessions 2021:

Missional Leadership Team recommends that Indiana Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) delegates receive Piedra Viva Mennonite Church as a member congregation.

Process:

On August 25, 2016, Steve Slagel and Dan Miller met with Rolando Sosa and Naun Cerrato to talk about Naun's desire to plant a Spanish-speaking congregation that would be part of IMMC. Naun articulated a vision for Spanish-speaking congregations across the Michiana area. Naun was an AMBS student at the time and graduated in May 2018.

In early 2019 Naun contacted the conference office to talk about a church he had started, Piedra Viva, and that he wanted the church to become a member of IMMC. He was gathering a leadership group and having Bible studies with them. On December 22, 2019, Piedra Viva Mennonite Church had its first public worship service at the Sunnyside Mennonite Church building in Elkhart, Indiana. There were about 50 people present, including a number of special guests, with Naun and the leadership team leading service.

Sunnyside Mennonite Church has warmly welcomed Piedra Viva to meet in their building. Charlie Geiser, one of Sunnyside's pastors has related closely with Naun, functioning informally and formally as a mentor.

Pastor Naun and Piedra Viva Mennonite Church were introduced to IMMC delegates in the June 2020 annual sessions. Ministry Credentialing Team members have participated in Piedra Viva worship and met with their leadership team twice in the past year. Naun was credentialed for his ministry and installed as pastor on June 14, 2020 and Rolando Sosa agreed to join the pastoral team early in 2021. Both Naun and Rolando greeted delegates at the March 2021 regional meetings and have engaged with the Elkhart pastors cluster group. They are committed to exercising and teaching Anabaptist Mennonite faith and practices in their lives and ministry.

The mission of Piedra Viva Mennonite Church is three-pronged: to plant a church; to provide English language instruction; and to provide immigration services. While the core membership of Piedra Viva remains small, their impact in the Hispanic community is profound because of their outreach ministry with English classes and immigration services.

Respectfully submitted in consultation with Ministry Credentialing Team
Sharon Witmer Yoder
May 10, 2021