

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

october/ november/ december 2020



Members of Piedra Viva Mennonite Church (Elkhart, IN) gather for a group photo.

## Piedra Viva Mennonite Church Welcoming a new congregation

By: Anna Board, editor

It all began in the 1990's when a young boy, Naun Cerrato, immigrated with his family from Honduras to Goshen, Indiana. Despite having a diverse and growing Hispanic community, there was only one Spanish-speaking Mennonite Church in Goshen. Cerrato, saw a disconnect between the many traditional churches in Elkhart County and the community of which he was a part.

While Cerrato was completing a degree in peace studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2018, he felt a deep responsibility to fill this need with Spanish-speaking Mennonite churches across Michiana.

Planting a church doesn't happen overnight. For years, Cerrato prayed for direction on how best to use his passion for starting a Hispanic church with an Anabaptist identity and peace theology. He connected with individuals at Mennonite Mission Network and began talking with church leaders in the area. Around 2016 Cerrato first spoke with Charles Geiser, about his desire to plant a church. At

that time, Geiser was pastoring at Hively Mennonite (Elkhart, IN). Over the next couple of years, Geiser and Cerrato continued meeting periodically. Geiser recalls that during these meetings, Cerrato would share his vision of planting Anabaptist churches and Geiser would say, "When you're ready, let me know and we'll find you a space."

Naun began gathering a group of leaders for Bible study, prayer and dreaming. By the summer of 2019, they were ready to meet publicly. Naun Cerrato reached out to Geiser who was now on the pastoral team at Sunnyside Mennonite. Geiser initiated conversations with Sunnyside's leadership and the congregation offered the use of their building. The first service of this new church, Piedra Viva, took place on December 22, 2019.

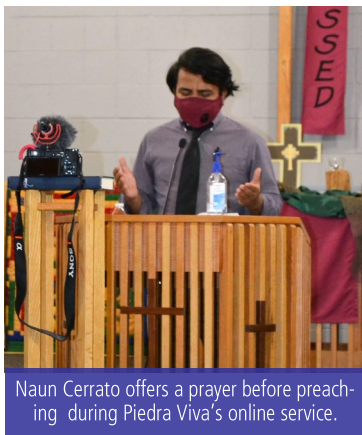
Cerrato values connections with other congregations and with a conference. "I think it's very important to have accountability. I don't believe in

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# Piedra Viva Mennonite Church



Naun Cerrato offers a prayer before preaching during Piedra Viva's online service.

independent churches." In addition to the accountability, he also sees it as an opportunity to work with and to teach others to how to minister to the growing Hispanic community. He states, "Since we are a Mennonite Anabaptist church, Sunnyside said 'well maybe this is an opportunity for us to learn about the [Hispanic] community.' Because Sunnyside is primarily anglo. There is nothing wrong with that, but if

you want to be a church of the community, it doesn't reflect the reality."

Geiser says, "It's for our good as a congregation. Sunnyside will benefit from having them here. Walking this journey together and seeing what it means for us both...it is a step of faith." Before

**"Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."  
- 1 Peter 2:4-5**

the realities of COVID19 hit, the two congregations agreed to share a monthly meal and to support on another's ministries. Geiser serves as a pastoral mentor to Cerrato.

The church's name Piedra Viva, or Living Stone, comes from 1 Peter 2:4-10. Jesus Christ is the living stone, the cornerstone of the Church. The centrality of Jesus along with his message of peace and reconciliation are foundational for this congregation. Saúl Estrada, the music director at Piedra Viva, was intrigued by



Children gather for a puppet show during the Children's sermon.

this concept of peace when he decided to join Piedra Viva, "There is a theme of peace and community... That's the theme for whatever we do, whatever the goal is, that's the vision and I really resonate with that. I can say that's why I was drawn to help out and be a part of it."

Serving the Hispanic community is at the heart of Piedra Viva's mission. Mariela Sanchez Padilla, the director of women and children's ministry, connected with this mission on a personal level. She spoke about the great difficulty of immigrating to a new country. Sanchez shared about how desperately she needed community when she immigrated to Indiana from Mexico. Immigrants grieve the

loss people and things left behind and are often overwhelmed at the learning needed to navigate in an unfamiliar country. Like Saúl, she was drawn to the vision of the church to bring peace and reconciliation in tangible ways.



Saúl Estrada and Mariela Sanchez Padilla lead worship during a Sunday service.

This is a vibrant congregation seeking to be the hands and feet of Jesus to a growing Hispanic community in Elkhart County. In addition to their Sunday services, Piedra Viva also holds weekly English language classes and workshops to educate people about immigration laws and procedures. They are creating a unique immigration center for Hispanics by Hispanics. Building on the existing language classes and immigration workshops, the immigration center will add other services such as counseling services.

Piedra Viva has requested membership in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, and Sharon Yoder introduced the congregation to delegates at Annual Sessions in June. The video Naun shared with delegates is available on the conference website. Delegates will act on a recommendation in 2021 to receive the congregation. Receiving new sisters and brothers offers an opportunity to have new experiences and gain new insights into who Jesus is. New relationships can expose current blind spots and deepen appreciation for the diversity of God's world and the beauty of different cultures.

Between now and June 2021 conference leadership invites member congregations to become acquainted with Piedra Viva Mennonite Church. Anyone is welcome to worship with them. For information on worship times or ways to be involved in the congregation's life, visit their Facebook Page.



Sharing Stories

Three Snapshots of Ministry in the Time of COVID19

By: Anna Board, editor

Amidst the realities of COVID-19 and increasing political and racial tensions in the US, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference congregations are living into these uncertain times and discovering new ways of being the Church. Here are three snapshots of how leaders from First Mennonite Church (Indianapolis, IN), Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington (Bloomington, IN) and Church Without Walls (Elkhart, IN) are adapting to this new "normal".



Jon Brown, Church Without Walls (Elkhart, IN).

Each of these congregations made the shift to online church services in March. Zoom and Facebook Live have become normal and necessary. How does one minister to the community and to the congregation when church is confined to a screen? Although some now gather for in-person worship at Church Without Walls, their experience is still limited. Pastor Jon Brown laments, "We miss the fellowship

times, the hugs, the handshakes, the potlucks that were commonplace within our congregation. We miss the personal contact with the older members of our congregation... We miss the fellowship and personal interactions with other congregations in our community."

Bob and Mag Richer Smith, bridge pastors at First Mennonite, shared similar feelings, "We all are grieving not being able to gather in person in a large gathering, not meeting in our meetinghouse, not being physically close, and not hearing our voices raised in song together." Andrea Grotenhuis, interim pastor at First Mennonite says, "I've learned how much I discern about the congregation just by being physically present in gatherings. I can't rely on that approach, so it has been a combination of intense listening, noticing, guessing, and hoping that I will follow where God leads. It gives me more of an opportunity to exercise my faith in this way."



Bob and Mag Richer Smith, First Mennonite (Indianapolis, IN).



Andrea Grotenhuis, First Mennonite (Indianapolis, IN).

All pastors expressed ongoing concern for their members of their congregations who are considered high-risk. With questions about how or when to open up, churches are considering the needs of those who are vulnerable and those who have a likelihood of high-exposure (i.e. children in school and essential workers).

Even in these challenging times, these churches find ways to speak to issues they care about John Sauder, coordinator at Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington shares, "During the past months we have had some heavy discussion on current issues. We Zoomed in with a person that lived blocks from where George Floyd took his last breath. We also had the Dean of University of Florida share with us growing up with a Mennonite connection and living as a black person in our society."

Members at First Mennonite formed new groups seeking racial justice and protesting racial oppression. They are finding creative ways to care for those who are ill, shut-in and/or grieving. Church Without Walls is seeing God provide for the needs of those experiencing income loss and unemployment. They persevere in providing food and clothing to homeless women and children in their community.



Members of Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington.

These brief glimpses into three IMMC congregations are representative of many congregations God, through the Spirit and the Church, continues to provide for the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of God's people. You are invited to share your story of how God is working in your congregation on the IMMC Facebook Page.

This issue is available online:  
[im.mennonite.net/gospel-evangel](http://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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# journeying with our pastors



Dan Miller, IMMC pastor, reflects on the importance of spiritual practices.

In August I informed the Missional Leadership Team (MLT) that I plan to not renew when my current term as conference pastor ends at the end of June 2021. It is not an easy decision. I sense God’s activity in so many good things happening in Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC). But I feel the work for us to do together is reaching its completion. I am overwhelmingly grateful for the opportunity to be conference pastor.

MLT is already setting plans in place, and we will work together for a smooth transition. Between now and June 30 I will continue working diligently on behalf of IMMC and the vision we have set. Vision orients us in the midst of change and challenge. Vision reminds us of our hoped-for outcomes and priorities.

IMMC’s vision identifies three points, and they all remain relevant through the transition: 1) Jesus, 2) practices and 3) discernment. First, we have committed to center life around Jesus. “Jesus is a person, the fullest expression we have of our Creator and the original intent for the salvation of the world. We follow this Jesus whom God sent into the world (Colossians 2:6).” The life and teachings of Jesus become our ori-

enting principles. As Jesus-followers we look for clues of God’s activities around us and find ways to join with God. We gather to encourage one another with stories of what God has done.

Second, we have committed to a set of spiritual practices that “bend us toward Christ.” Practice is what people do to prepare for the game or the concert or opening night. Practices are what we do so that when crunch time comes we naturally act like Jesus. Some practices come naturally, and others are a stretch. “We believe that by committing ourselves, together, to work at these spiritual practices, God will bring transformation toward Christ-likeness and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

Third, we have committed to communal biblical discernment. Communal biblical discernment acknowledges our need for one another when seeking God’s heart and mind. Discernment is about discovering God’s activity and choosing from multiple options that which most closely aligns with a sense of what God is doing.

Let us continue to encourage one another in this vision of following Jesus.

## ministry transitions

### Beginnings



Carmen Horst above, was licensed and installed at Walnut Hill, September 13th.

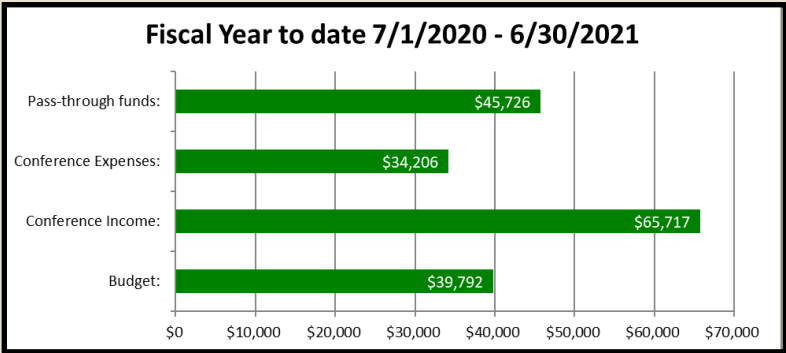


Nathan Graber McCrae, above, was licensed and installed at North Goshen, September 20th.

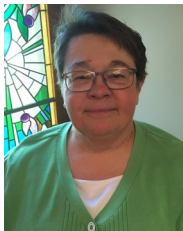


Sharon Norton, above, was licensed for ministry as co-director of Europe and Africa at Mennonite Mission Network, August 23rd.

## financial report



### & Endings



Jane Miller, above, concluded interim ministry at Walnut Hill on August 30, 2020.

## Celebrating Together

Fellowship of Hope, Elkhart, Indiana, is celebrating its 50th year. One of the ways we are marking this milestone is with a weekend of storytelling and reunion-ing. On **October 23-25** we will meet, via Zoom, for storytelling and discussions as well as reunion times. If you'd like to join these events, send a note to [fohchurch@gmail.com](mailto:fohchurch@gmail.com) and we will include you.