

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

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IMMC leaders at Worshipful Work during Annual Sessions 2019. From Left to right: Dan Haarer, Dan Miller, Bob Yoder, Paula Killough.

Lessons and Stories

Dan Miller reflects on his last 12 years as IMMC Conference Pastor.

By: Anna Board, editor

We are living in an unknown time; and God is with us. -Dan Miller

Dan Miller served in the role of Conference Pastor for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) for the last twelve years. Much has happened since he began in the end of January 2009. It is fair to say that IMMC is not the same conference that it was over a decade ago.

Dan's connection to IMMC stretches back to the mid '80s when Dan served as a congregational delegate to conference. For over a decade, Dan worked as a transitional pastor for various congregations, a work that prepared him well for his role as conference pastor. Dan recalls, "I've always done transitions and what this whole thing looked like was a conference going through a big change...that seemed like maybe it was a fit for what I did." Conference was initiating a leaner and more nimble structure that saw the life of the conference being in the congregations. The number of members in the governing body decreased considerably and there were several structural changes to staffing. These many changes suited the giftings of a transitional pastor.

Over the next twelve years, IMMC would continue living into its

nimble new reality when facing significant challenges. Differences regarding same-sex marriage and biblical authority resulted in divisions amongst IMMC congregations. "There are some things that come and you have no control over, and you can't stop them," Dan reflects. "The only thing you can do is figure out who you want to be on the other side." Approximately 25 congregations left the conference over a period of about four years. This was an incredibly difficult time in IMMC's life, and for Dan in particular.

Adopting *Renewing a Vision* in 2017 was part of IMMC deciding who it wanted to be. It gave IMMC a vision to seek as a community of congregations. This document, consisting of a mission statement and spiritual practices, encouraged character building, and focused on Jesus. In thinking on the importance of *Renewing a Vision* Dan shares, "I believe that character is more important than your positions on a lot of things...if a person's character is deep, they can reach across the difference to relate to somebody else because of their value...I hope this lasts past me. *Renewing a Vision* isn't going to last forever, but I hope that those pieces somehow have been an important

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Lessons and stories



Left to right: Richard Marindi, Bishop Kateti, Dan Miller, Paula Killough in Tanzania, 2018

articulation of something that is at the heart of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.” Dan has learned a great deal from his time with IMMC. In an interview, Dan shared four significant lessons he discovered

during his time as conference pastor.

- “God is with us.” Throughout the struggles, amidst the unknown, God remains present and at work.
- “Nothing that is worth doing can be accomplished in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope.” from Reinhold Niebuhr. The important things take a long time.
- “Sometimes you just have to step forward even when you don’t know for sure.” There are times when one must step out on faith and trust that this step is part of something that will happen in the future.
- “All of the big things that happened were cooperative efforts.” The important work of creating *Renewing a Vision* resulted from collaboration between multiple volunteer groups and staff. It was the power of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the Unity and Variance Task Group with the MLT and Dan, that led to the completion of this document.

Throughout the interview, Dan mentioned how grateful he is for the extraordinary pastors of IMMC. Dan meets individually with each IMMC pastor each year as a way of checking in on their well-being and to fellowship. Dan states, “We have incredible pastors. My conversations with pastors, I love them because I have an opportunity to hear them and seek their heart and offer

affirmation...It’s an incredible privilege.” Surely it is the love of IMMC pastors and leaders that has continued to drive Dan’s twelve years of ministry.

As Dan’s time as conference pastor nears its end, there is much to be grateful for. Dan is

proud of the financial position of IMMC as the conference enters this new season. Before this position, Dan had little to no experience

creating a spending plan for an organization. Over the years, Dan learned a great deal from Greg Sommers, the Stewardship Team and Stewardship Team chairs who thoughtfully worked with IMMC finances. As congregations were leaving, and the financial teams anticipated a decline in giving, they were regularly surprised when contributions did not dip as much as they expected. This financial stability allows for the conference to dream about future ministry opportunities.

Dan is also grateful for the intercultural competence work that has become a priority in recent years. Dan shares, “In my very first sermon in June of 2009, I remember saying that Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference has not lived up to its’ best

intentions in how we treat people of color. I wish we could have gotten to it earlier...but now we are, and I feel hopeful about that.” Part of Dan’s hope comes from the fact that this is not just an organizational initiative. Intercultural competence and anti-racism work are being done within congregations. After all, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite conference is its’ congregations, as Dan is quick to say. He goes on “We are doing it together...and there is potential to learn from one another which is vital for any effort like this.”

Finally, what does one say to those he has served the last twelve years? When asked this question, Dan respond with two things, “One” he said first, “would be ‘thank you’- this has been the most fun and the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. It is such a privilege and I consider it an honor. And I hope that we can celebrate what has been done in these years that has been good and where God has been faithful.” Second, “The future is in front of us. And so live into the future and meet God there.”

There is no telling what the future holds, but God remains present and at work. After all, as Dan reminds all of us, “We are not called to understand God, we are called to love God... We will never be able to know God better than God knows Godself. But we are to love. We are to love.”

A celebration for Dan Miller will be held on June 19th from 4:30-6:30pm at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, MI following Annual Sessions 2021. More information about this celebration and how to RSVP can be found on the conference website: <https://im.mennonite.net/2021-annual-sessions>



Dan Miller at Annual Sessions 2017. Photo by Joe Pendleton.



Journey graduation for Janice Wagner (Wildwood). From left to right: Janice Wagner, Anna Troyer (Cedar Grove), and David Miller (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary), Dan Miller.

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship Relationships Deepen as Hope for the Future Increases

By: Anna Board, editor

Before March of 2020, the members of Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship (KMF) met weekly at the house of Will and Bess Fitzgerald for worship and a meal. This intimate community of believers has been gathering together in Kalamazoo, MI since their founding in 2007. But how does a house church live out its purposes during a pandemic?

When so much of church life happens through relationships and presence, it is a struggle to feel connected while physically distanced. For the members of KMF, the struggle brought them together. CarolSue Borkholder, the congregational chair at KMF, shares that, "It was our willingness to be vulnerable about that difficulty that brought us together. We couldn't pretend that we were ok, yet in honestly sharing that mutual struggle we found the space to support and care for one another. It is in these difficult times that CarolSue experiences the church body drawing together.



Grant Miller, Kalamazoo
Mennonite Fellowship,
Kalamazoo, MI

The circumstances caused by the pandemic came at a time of transition in the life of this congregation. Grant Miller, the pastor at KMF, began in October 2019 - just five months before pandemic restrictions hit. In addition to bringing on a new pastor, the fellowship also saw both the welcomed arrival of new congregants as well as the departure of cherished others. Everything was changing.

From March through June, the group met online; however, in mid-June, worship services were held outside at different people's houses. Grant recalls, "When we met again, we were a really different group than we had been. We had to get to know each other again and get to know each other as a group. In some ways, the pandemic kind of eased the transition because everything was different." As the fellowship continues to live into this time of change, they are also looking ahead and imagining the future.

KMF is small, but that smallness is a gift in many ways. "When you're smaller, you can form close relationships with every person in the congregation," says CarolSue. Everyone knows one another and there is a sense of pulling together when a member is in need. From the start, KMF has served as a place of solace and refuge for many who passed through its shared spaces. This was true for CarolSue who came to KMF during a very difficult time in her life. The church welcomed her in and

cared for her. She says, "It seems like people come to our fellowship when they find themselves in a particular time of transition or discernment, and I pray that God will continue to have us be a place where those moments are honored." God is shaping this community of believers through the ministry opportunities and circumstances God provides.


KMF members are eager to take the next step towards what God is calling them to be. Grant shares, "As we think about what sustainability looks like for us, the church is open to entertaining a lot of different ideas. Can we partner with other house churches in the region? Are we looking to try and grow as our own group? In what ways are we called to be a resource or refuge or both?"

He continues, "This congregation has a real awareness that the church is more than just the local gathered body. The church is also a global and mystical entity and our little group is a part of that--recognizing and valuing the intimacy and the embodied nature of the church as well as the institutional and global dimensions of the church." The members of KMF recognize that they are a part of the larger Body of Christ and they are living into their unique calling.

Both Grant and CarolSue are looking forward to summer when everyone can gather in person again, but for now, Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship continues to gather virtually for worship. As the future remains uncertain, the members of Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship are trusting in God's faithfulness to bring them into God's next good work.



CarolSue Borkholder participates in a
summer service at Kalamazoo, Mennonite
Fellowship.

The logo for 'becoming ONE' features a large, stylized human figure composed of many smaller, diverse human silhouettes. Below the figure, the text 'becoming ONE' is written in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'ONE' in a larger, bolder font. Underneath that, in smaller text, it says 'ANNUAL SESSIONS 2021'.

SAVE THE DATE
**June 18-19, 2020, Amigo Centre,
Sturgis, MI**

The Annual Sessions planners are excited to welcome you to Annual Sessions 2021. The theme this year derives from the thought "Becoming One" sculpted from Ephesians 4:1-16.

More information at: <https://im.mennonite.net/2021-annual-sessions/>

journeying with our pastors



Bob Yoder, IMMC moderator, reflects on the importance of intercultural competency work.

The Missional Leadership Team tested the Growing Our Intercultural Witness document during our recent March delegate meetings. There was 100% affirmation for our conference to continue in this direction! We were also cautioned to take it slow and not overburden people of color with leadership tasks, reminding us that there are no “quick fixes” and that this is not the first time white leaders have called for change and growth. There was encouragement for more specificity of measurable goals and outcomes and accountability dates to review our progress.

Why has MLT more recently given energy to this topic? One reason is that for the past two years the MLT has been the whitest that it has ever been. Other conference leadership teams were also mostly white. For all of our past efforts to include and celebrate the racial/ethnic diversity within our conference, the make-up of our leadership teams might imply that we were

a white organization for white people. Was there something about our organizational structures and practices that hindered the full representation of who we are as a conference body to serve on our leadership teams?

During the delegate meetings I shared that our first conversations with Nekeisha Alayna Alexis, our intercultural and undoing racism coach, began in September, 2019. She has encouraged us to take little steps of discovery and action, which then may lead to other steps of discovery and action. In other words, rather than provide a detailed “3-year plan that will solve all of our challenges” as some consultants might offer, she encouraged us to find out who we really are (i.e. the demographic survey/interviews) and then keep taking little steps, paying attention to the Holy Spirit’s leading. This is our commitment. This is our continued journey.

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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ministry transitions

Beginnings & Endings



Frances Ringenberg above, began as sabbatical pastor at East Goshen Mennonite Church on February 1, 2021



Randy Detweiler, above, concluded his ministry at Holdeman Mennonite, Wakarusa, January 31, 2021. He began as Development Associate at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, February 1st.



Richard Kauffman above, began as interim pastoral team member at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship on February 15, 2021.



Dan Schrock, above, concluded his ministry at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, IN on January 31, 2021.

financial report

Fiscal Year to date 7/1/2020 - 2/28/2021

