

# Menno-Life



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## CDC transitions

During the Central District Conference annual meeting, a blessing was offered for Doug Luginbill (center), incoming conference minister, with James D. Rissler and Nancy Kauffmann.



## One Spirit *Wanda Stopher*

Our connections and relationships as a congregation are important for many reasons. They're just as important as they are in our personal lives. We discover who we are in the context of relationships. We work at challenges in life with the support and encouragement of others. And we learn and grow as we interact with others. We sharpen our thinking about issues in conversations with one another, both with those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree.

Again, just as the local body of Christ is made up of many members, there is a real sense in which the universal church is made up of many local congregational expressions of the body of Christ. It is good, therefore, that we give deliberate attention to our relationships and connections to other congregations. One way we work at this is through our connections with congregations in Central District Conference (CDC).

This year, the annual assembly of CDC was held June 23-25 at Columbus Mennonite Church in Columbus, OH. When we entered the Columbus Mennonite Church sanctuary we were greeted by a sea of 180 comforters, pieced and knotted by the congregation's "Piecemakers" group. The comforters, folded and draped over the backs of the pews became a visible representation of the Holy Comforter, surrounding us in work and worship with love and grace.

Abounding in love, and abiding in grace, the weekend was a celebration of God's love that exceeds our wildest expectations, crosses our human-made boundaries and walls. Yet, in contrast to the Holy Comforter image, we were also challenged to recognize God at work even in the agitations of our lives, a Holy Agitator. We met Jesus who, instead of comforting, sometimes agitated those in positions of power and all who had ears to hear, challenging all to see that world in new ways, with kingdom eyes.

I think these seemingly contradictory images of God, at the same time comforting and agitating, may be helpful for us as individuals and at all levels as communities of faith, as congregations, conferences and denomination. As we continue to find our identity in Christ hidden in the relationships with other Christ-followers, we will be challenged to hold these two images together, instead of resolving the dissonance in either direction.

Perhaps an example from the end of the conference gathering will help make the point. As we wrapped up our time together in delegate session, there was sharing at open mic. While one shared a call to live into a commitment to recognize all people's gifts and to hear all people's voices by appointing LGBTQ sisters and brothers to roles in conference leadership, another voice called us to remember that there are those among us whose voices may have been ignored or silenced even at our gathering whose theological leanings are more conservative. This call reminded us that although the conference is finding its voice of inclusion, not all individuals or congregations are at the same place on this journey.

Likewise, we at First Mennonite Church have developed a Welcoming Statement and Policy. The support for it was strong. Most helpfully, the process helped us recognize where we are as a congregation regarding these things. Least helpful will be if we forget that we are not all at the same place on this issue, or on the other hand, that we lapse into inaction or apathy because we do not have unanimity. As we find our way together, we will continue to look to the Holy Comforter to provide what we need to engage one another with love and grace. At the same time we will look to the Holy Agitator to provide what we need to continue to engage one another with the new kingdom eyes required to see what God is doing and to hear God's call to live into God's reign of justice and peace. May this one Spirit, in all her complexity, be our guide.

## **Notes of condolence, gratitude**

We have received many notes from the wider church over the past month – notes sharing our loss and sadness and others sharing gratitude. We will continue posting these notes on the pillar near the kitchen.

*To the First Mennonite Church Congregation,*

As I sit here writing this letter to you, the presence of the morning is all around me. Mornings have always been a favorite part of the day for me and my dad. The air seems to hold promise and is ripe with anticipation of the time to come. After a restful night of sleep, the mind is calm and focused. It is with this state of mind that I write this letter to you.

I have often heard of the healing power of the church and although the concept has always made sense to me in a logical sort of way, I am not sure that I had entirely understood this concept from my own experiences -- that which I could truly feel. In the past days, weeks, months and years leading up to and following the passing of my dad, I have felt this power in ways that I could not have made sense of before. Your support has restored in me my faith in people and the ability of people to care for each other.

Over the years, I have gradually come to know many of you and have always returned to Michigan from visits in Bluffton with the feeling that FMC is truly comprised of remarkable and kind people. I cannot thank you enough for your support of our family through these hard times and will always be grateful to you for it.

*With much love and gratitude, Aaron Yoder*

*Dear friends,*

Just wanted to send you a big thanks for all your acts of kindness and mercy to my beloved son and daughter-in-law, Steve and Janet. The memorial service was beautiful and the bountiful meal afterward said a lot about First Mennonite. No wonder Steve always spoke highly of his congregation...

*With love, Lydia Yoder*

*To First Mennonite,*

I am so sad with you for your pastor Steve Yoder's death. I have known Steve since I began pastoring ten years ago, first at Cincinnati Mennonite and now at Columbus Mennonite...Over the years I came to consider Steve as an informal mentor and a friend. His warmth made him an easy person to talk and listen to...

*Joel Miller and Columbus Mennonite*

## **Happy birthday to:**

Luther Shetler, 99, July 1; Geneva Shetler, 97, July 8; Sam Diller, 82, July 29

## **“Strangers No More” on display; Blau Rock Café July 24**

We observed Peace Sunday on July 3 with Mark Rupp, Columbus Mennonite pastor, as our guest preacher, and Jackie Well's art display on the theme of “Strangers no More.” Jackie's artwork highlights portraits of LGBTQ people within the Mennonite Church, including our congregation, affirming that they are not strangers but belong in our community. First Mennonite will host the art display through the month of July and will close with a Blau Rock Cafe July 24 from 4-7 p.m. The theme of the café is “Strangers no More,” although not all performances must connect to the theme. Spoken word, skits, magic, music and more are welcome. Contact [wendy@mennofolk.org](mailto:wendy@mennofolk.org) if you would like to perform.

## **New team heads up school kits**

“Back to School” sales start soon. That means the beginning of MCC School Kit collection at FMC. During the sales, kit contents can be purchased for about \$5 or less. Let's stretch ourselves in filling a large number of kits this year!

Please limit your generosity to the following items for each kit:

- 4 spiral or perforated notebooks (8 ½ x 10 ½ in. and 70 sheets)
- 8 unsharpened pencils
- 1 ruler (flat, flexible plastic; indicating both 30cm and 12 in.)
- 12 colored pencils (in packaging)
- 1 large pencil eraser

We also need bag fabric and people to sew bags. (Heavier fabric is ideal for school kits.) Sewing directions are on the kit card in the kit collection area of the fellowship hall. Some precut bags and cords are also there. (If making your own bags, please note that the bag size has changed over the years and fabric is cut 12 ½ x 38 in.)

We are teaming to head up the MCC kits this year. Thanks to Ginger Theis for her many years of service in this position. If you have any questions, please contact one of us.

-- Sue Schaaf and Jean Miller

## **FMC welcomes pastoral associate George O'Reilly**

### **Your last name suggests you might be Irish. Are you?**

My grandfather was 100% Irish as I understand it. His father was apparently an orphan in Ireland, who at 16 years old stowed away on a ship to Canada. He made his way to Guelph, Ontario and an Irish, immigrant community. He married an Irish immigrant woman from that community. Later they moved down into the US settling in Kansas. My grandfather was the first to pursue advanced education in his family, becoming a pharmacist. He began dating a protestant, and after much ado was ostracized by his Catholic church. He relocated to another community and married my grandmother who was German in background. So at this point I consider myself ¼ Irish, although I confess I have not run down my ancestry.

### **Where did you grow up?**

I was born and raised early on in Pittsburg, KS, a moderate- sized southeastern city of the state. Just after my 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, my family moved to Northern Arizona about 75 miles from Four Corners on the Navajo Reservation. We lived on the reservation for four years, and then moved just off the reservation to Page, AZ, just a few miles from Lake Powell and Utah.

### **I know you worked in various occupations before becoming a pastor. Tell us about some of those jobs and what led you to them.**

I worked as a mechanic right out of college after graduating with a degree in Industrial Education. When managing a service station back in Page, AZ, I became interested in elementary school teaching, went back to college and acquired an elementary education certificate and taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade for five years. Student population was 50% Navajo, 50% white. I drove limousine while in seminary just to make ends meet. I also worked as an incognito bus driver evaluator for the RTD of Denver again to make ends meet. Both were fairly interesting.

### **When did you decide to attend seminary? Where did you earn your degree?**

While teaching school in Page, Karen and I attended and served in a moderate-sized Baptist church. After seven years there we became convinced we were being called to seminary. I attended Denver Conservative Baptist, a school much like Fuller theological, mostly because of familiarity with the seminary built through my college years. I received an MDiv. degree in 1988. I have taken a number of courses at AMBS over the years.

### **What type of ministry were you first interested in?**

My focus emphasized pastoral ministry, but I also had interest in and served some in jail chaplaincy. I am readily intrigued by any variety of ministry endeavors.

### **What was your first pastorate? What did you most and least enjoy about that position?**



I was pastor at Carlock (IL) Mennonite Church in my first pastorate, and in my first significant encounter with Mennonites. I served there 7 ½ years. I learned how gracious and warm persons of faith can truly be, and how complex some aspects of congregational ministry can be. People are what I enjoyed most. If I were to name what I liked least, probably it would be experiencing some places where things seemed “stuck” in some way or other.

**Where and in what positions have you served since then?**

After Carlock Mennonite, I served 11 years at Bethel Mennonite in Mountain Lake, MN. I moved into intentional interim ministry after Bethel and served Bethany Mennonite in Freeman, SD, Salem Mennonite in Shickley, NE, Wellman Mennonite in Wellman, IA and Salem Mennonite outside Freeman, SD. With a move to Canada, I served at Ottawa Mennonite in Ottawa, ON, then back to the US serving First Mennonite of Canton, Ohio.

During these various ministries, I served on Central Conference evangelism and church development committee, in various leadership roles in Northern District, on the integration committee for combining Northern District and Iowa/Nebraska Conferences into Central Plains Conference, and later as moderator of Central Plains Conference.

Most recently I served as Transitional Conference Leader of Ohio conference, and as facilitator of the year of Covenant for Ohio conference.

**What led you to First Mennonite? Were you familiar with Bluffton prior to this?**

My work in Ohio Conference was decreasing and changing and I knew I would need to find something else. I had been developing a feeling of need to move back more into congregational ministry. I came across the publicity about the position at First Mennonite Bluffton. I felt this was quite a good fit for my gifts, I had acquaintance with Wanda Stopher and a confidence that we could forge a positive ministry partnership, and I felt the needs at First, the timing of the opportunity, and some variety of factors pointed to this as one I should pursue. I knew some of First Mennonite mostly from my work in Central District as a pastor with students here, and from the ECDC.

**Tell me about your family – parents, siblings, wife, children, grandchildren? Tell us the story about the granddaughter who is already climbing with her dad.**

My parents and Karen’s parents are no longer living. I do have seven brothers and sisters and Karen has two sisters. Karen and I met at Northern Arizona University and have been married since 1974. We have two children—a son, Ryan, 35, who lives with his wife and their son in Michigan, and a daughter, Kelley, 33, who lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland with her husband and two daughters. The grandchildren have unique personalities of course. Liam, from Michigan is quiet mostly, thoughtful and can focus for a considerable time on things of interest to him. Evie (4+) and Becca (2+) from Northern Ireland are boisterous and noisy, very active and quick to change from one thing to the next. Evie has done some technical mountain climbing with her father who is a certified instructor of climbing instructors. She has a YouTube video of her climbing with a head cam which displays her adventurous personality.

**Your wife, Karen, is a schoolteacher, correct? What grades (or subject) does she teach? How did you meet her?**

Karen has taught secondary math for a number of years, grades 7-12 and courses from algebra to college prep courses. She has recently been offered a contract with Toledo Public Schools but has yet to know the school or subject.

We met through a ministry to college students called Campus Ambassadors at Northern Arizona University. I had known her sister somewhat the previous year, and we had one college class together. We began dating at the end of Karen’s freshman year and married in her senior year.

**How do you occupy your mind when traffic gets stalled by I-75 construction?**



I have very rarely been stuck in I-75 traffic, having adopted a couple of “escape routes” if problems begin to arise. I sometimes think about some topic or task as I drive, or listen to music of my choosing, or simply drive along. Once in a while, as I am stopped before getting on for the drive, I will use my ear piece and get a number ready to dial to visit as I drive. Then I just give one button a push and my cell dials the number. I can visit with minimal distraction and use the time productively. Of course this works well for some conversations but not so well for some kinds of conversations.

**Any hobbies? What do you do in your free time?**

Karen and I like to work around the house, watch movies together, watch our grandson at times, read books together, and go to Metro parks.

**If you could learn to do anything, what would it be?**

Probably to play the guitar with moderate proficiency.

**What are you really passionate about?**

I am passionate about the body of Christ, the organic, mysterious organism created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, and how the body of Christ can live as the incarnation of Jesus in the midst of the broken world, and in the reality of the body’s own frailty and perplexing complexity.

**Stitch and sew...**

A group of FMC women took over the fellowship hall recently to cut and sew comforter tops for the next Mennonite Women sewing project event. Mary Ann Suter (right), Pat Sheidler and Julie Mackey (below) were among those sewing. Thanks to Fred Steiner for providing us with photos of the sewing day.



## Menno-Life schedule for July-December 2016

The Menno-Life will be distributed via mailboxes and e-mail on the following dates (now through (through December 2016). Note deadline for submission of items in parentheses after each date.

August. 7 (**July 25 – note this change due to vacation schedules**)

September 4 (August 26)

October 2 (September 23)

November 6 (October 28)

December 4 (November 25)

## Youth help locally with community dinner and at a distance, with SWAP

The first month of summer vacation came and ended in a whirlwind. Even though I don't get to have a summer break anymore, it is still one of my favorite times of the year because it's a time of both Sabbath and adventure. For some of us, summer doesn't mean anything new. For some, it means kicking back and enjoying the outdoors without being bundled up in layers upon layers for cold and rainy weather. For those of us with youth in our lives, it's a time to forget about schoolwork and a time to try new things, relax, or getting excited about camp and other trips.

The youth grieved together over our dear Pastor Steve's passing. They served together at the meal following the memorial service, and guided friends and family to seats. I think Steve would have been delighted to see our youth dive right in to help and even offer their own seats when there wasn't enough room. We are still processing together with the rest of our congregation.

We have also been preparing our hearts for service. On June 16, Patrick Estell and Jacob Biesecker-Mast represented JHYF at the Bluffton Senior Center by helping serve the community meal. Their service was very much appreciated!

The SHYF was excited to work with Sharing With Appalachian People (SWAP) in Harlan, Kentucky June 27-July 2. Those participating included Seth Andreas, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Isaac Andreas, Christopher Harnish, Antony Kingsley, Douglas Nester, Levi Schumacher, Cassidy Bush, Elizabeth Nisly, Mitch Kingsley, Heather Theis, and me. We can't wait to report our experience to the congregation on July 24 during the Sunday school hour!

-- Shannon Thiebeau







Ready to head off to their week of service with Sharing With Appalachian People (SWAP) are (previous page from left) Mitch Kingsley, Heather Theis, Cassidy Bush, Douglas Nester, Shannon Thiebeau, Christopher Harnish, Levi Schumacher, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Antony Kingsley, Elizabeth Nisly, Isaac Andreas and Seth Andreas. Leaders Heather Theis, Shannon Thiebeau and Mitch Kingsley consult (above left.) Of course, they couldn't leave FMC without singing Happy Birthday to Shannon Thiebeau and Douglas Nester (above right.)

## Other organizations

### Salem Mennonite's next celebration event July 24

Salem Mennonite Church, Lima, invites all to attend their next "Celebrating 175 Years" event on Sunday, July 24, and featuring Alan and Eleanor Kreider, Mennonite missionaries, scholars, teachers and pastors, who have been studying and teaching about the early church for 40 years. For many years they served in England. At the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Alan taught church history and mission and Eleanor taught worship. The Kreiders will deliver the sermon, "Patient Ferment: the Life of the Early Church," at the 10:30 a.m. worship service. Lunch will be available (donations accepted) at noon, and the afternoon session on "Patience as a Life Style for a Missional Church: Visuals, Writings, Teaching" will begin at 1 p.m. Children are welcome to attend a special program during the afternoon session. Please RSVP for the afternoon meal by calling the church at 419-339-1505.

### Ohio Mennonite Annual Relief Sale Aug. 5-6

The Ohio Mennonite Annual Relief Sale will be held August 5-6 at the Wayne County Fairgrounds in Wooster. Food and booths open at 4 p.m. Friday, with the evening program at 6:30 p.m. Saturday begins with breakfast at 7 a.m., following by the 5K run and walk at 8 a.m., the woods, tool and art auction at 9 a.m., and the quilt auction at 10 a.m.

The main attractions are the art and collectible auction. There are 125 or so Amish and Mennonite Quilts plus wall hangings and crib quilts auctioned off in the quilt auction area, and the wood crafted items such as grandfather clocks, chests, games, and furniture auctioned off in a different area. There is a live demonstration of quilting, children's activities include a carnival, jumping house, face painting and a special children's auction. Open stands offer all kind of specialty foods such as baked goods in the Swiss Pantry, sausage or bratwurst sandwiches, or homemade ice cream. There are thousands of used books, plants and needlework as well as the special MCC display of items shipped in from 10,000 Villages.