

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
indiana-michigan mennonite conference

april/may/june 2022

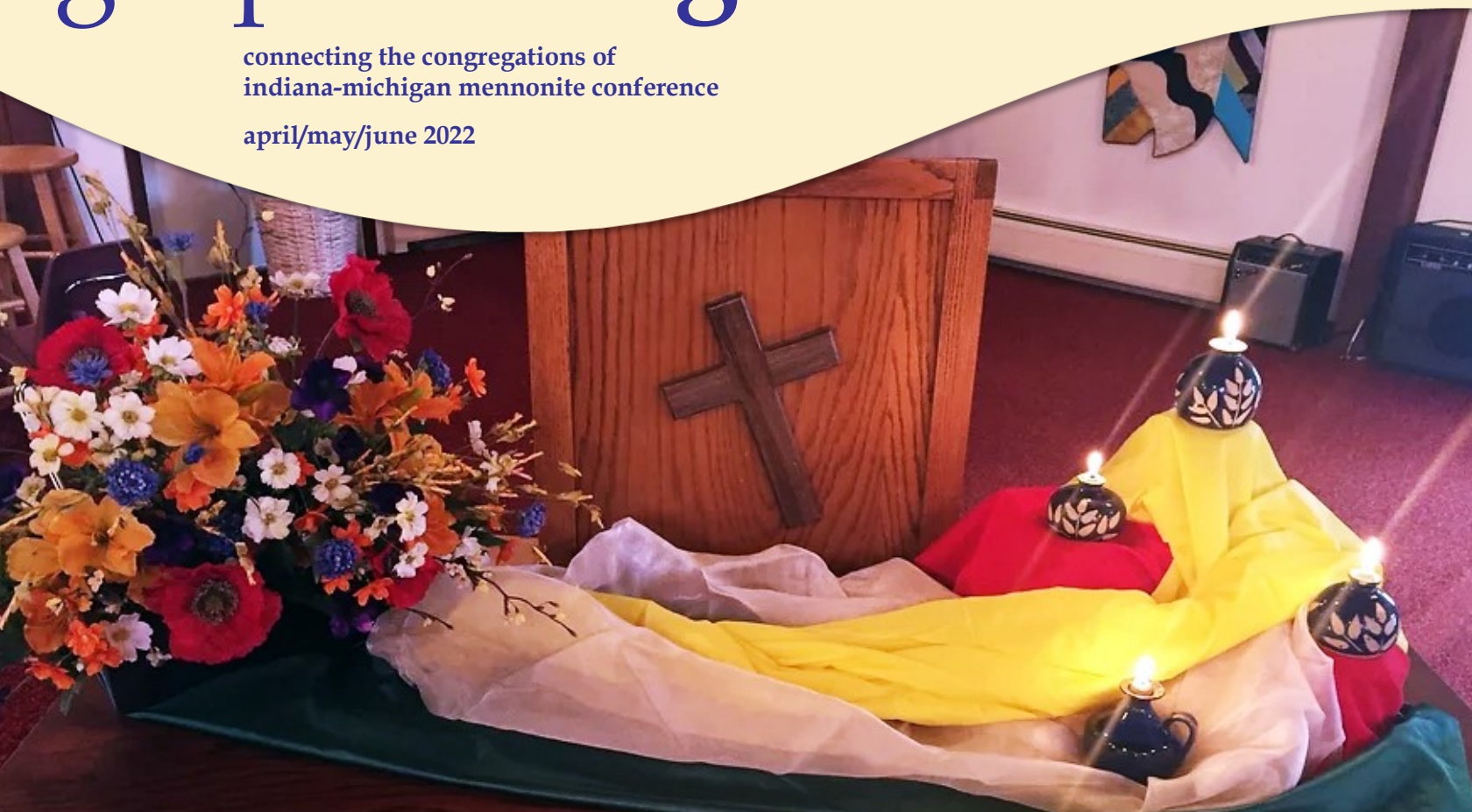


Photo Credit: bonneyvillemennonitechurch.com

Knit Together in Love and Mission

Bonneyville Mennonite Church approaches 60 years and is still looking forward

By: Joanne Gallardo, Conference Co-minister

If you are a part of a small congregation, you likely know the excitement and camaraderie that comes from partnering with another church on a specific project. There is energy in numbers and striving toward a common goal can be helpful as well as rewarding. Bonneyville Mennonite Church in Bristol, IN knows this excitement well, and will soon be partnering with Faith Mennonite Church in Goshen, IN (a congregation in Central District Conference) in a mission-focused project.

When I sat down with pastor Mariah Martin, I heard about the congregation's excitement for such an endeavor and learned more about their history. Bonneyville began as a congregation on May 20th, 1962, when they had their first service in their own building. This year is the 60th anniversary for Bonneyville as a congregation. Mariah mentioned that on average, Bonneyville has 30 people worshipping in person on any given Sunday. "Bonneyville is small, but mighty," Mariah said. Multiple people join on Zoom, and like many churches, they are working on creating a good, hospitable hybrid service. Mariah mentioned that now that services are online, her parents can join, something that wouldn't have happened before the pandemic.

Mariah describes Bonneyville as a "close-knit" congregation where many people have known each other for years. As a group, they are

theologically diverse and can be in relationship together because of their deep love for one another. She also noted that this makes for lively Sunday School class discussions! Bonneyville cares for one another, and as such, they don't leave all the pastoral care up to the pastor. This comes to their congregation naturally being borne out of love. Mariah recalled many vulnerable moments members have had with one another, particularly during Sunday School. "There's a tenderness you don't expect [out of Sunday School]," she said.

Bonneyville has also been touched by trauma in its past. Pastor Ken Livengood was killed in a motorcycle crash some years ago, which devastated the congregation. Mariah notes that many people were grateful for IMMC stepping in and helping during that time. There has been lots of transition, and added to that, the passing of many beloved older members, which Mariah recalled as painful moments in her pastorate. She noted a particular funeral she presided over, and how she felt close to both Bonneyville and God during that time.

Another moment Mariah felt close to God was when she was anointing children who had recently been adopted by a family in the

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Knit Together in Love and Mission



Sharon Yoder (left) officiates the ordination service for Mariah Martin (right) at Bonneyville Mennonite Church on January 4, 2022 as a hybrid service.

congregation. In fact, many of the joys experienced at Bonneyville involve children. Young community members are appreciated, loved, and bring joy to this congregation. Lots of joy is also had during their yearly summer camp-out on their lawn. This includes walking to the mill, playing in the water, and having a bonfire.

It is out of this love, joy, and closeness that Bonneyville engages in mission. Recognizing that many congregations can be insular, they are intentional about reaching beyond their walls. As is the case in many other churches, members are busy and look for concrete ways to be missional in ways that are useful. Mariah shared about how the congregation has just finished a "mission focus" with MCC and were eager to do more.

This is where Mariah's experience with Faith Mennonite Church comes in. Mariah completed her AMBS internship at Faith Mennonite and spent 3 years living at Hope House with her husband, Nick. Mariah remains on the Hope House board.

Faith House and Hope House were created as a response to the need for temporary and affordable housing in the area. Many "guests" who come to stay use the house as a steppingstone to more permanent housing. Multiple reasons cause this need for housing, be it leaving a dangerous situation or needing some time to get back on solid footing. Mariah stated that it's rare for someone to leave Faith House or Hope House and not end up in a more stable and safer place to call home.

During the month of April, Bonneyville will raise money to go toward the mortgage of Faith House and Hope House. Mariah reflected that asking for money to go toward a mortgage can be difficult, as it is nebulous and ongoing. "It's not asking for something concrete, like a new shower," Mariah said. Nevertheless, this is something that is needed for Faith's ministry to continue in the community.

Mariah plans on recording a tour of both houses to show her congregation as well as Faith Mennonite, so they have a sense of the work and partnership that takes place there. Bonneyville plans to invite former guests and current residents to come speak during their Sunday service. Bonneyville and Faith also plan to worship together. Faith will join Bonneyville for Easter brunch on April 17th, and Faith will lead music at that service. On April 24th, Bonneyville will join Faith for their evening service.

During this interview, Mariah's love for Bonneyville and commitment to their mission and life together shone through. It is her hope that this is one of many future partnerships in mission.

If you have interest in learning more about Bonneyville, their website is Bonneyvilemennonitechurch.com. They can also be found on Facebook.

Mariah has a podcast separate from her ministry at Bonneyville, "Called to be Bad," that explores unconventional or taboo topics in the Church today that she and others are passionate about. You can find this on YouTube and anywhere you listen to podcasts; new episodes come out every Monday.



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GOD IS LOVE GOD LOVES US LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

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Let us

LOVE

Annual Sessions 2022

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Introducing Spring Summit

Spring Summit Replaces Regional Meetings A New Era Makes Way for a New Kind of Delegate Gathering

By: Clayton Gladish, Administrative Coordinator

We have a history of gathering our conference delegates as a community of congregations in the Spring to engage in Jesus-centered worship and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit through those gathered. In the planning stages we realized that we have a unique opportunity to imagine different ways of gathering that would offer both an in-person option (March 19) and a virtual option (March 26) for gathering without sacrificing one for the sake of the other. As a result, both groups were able to experience worship, engage in conference related business, and enter into important conversations in fruitful ways that were adapted for the medium of choice.

With the new format, we decided a new name was in order as well. *Spring Summit* came as a fresh expression of what we strive to do in these meetings. Spring is a time of new life, or growth, and of creation restored. A summit (noun) is a conference of leaders from different places working together; to summit (verb) is movement upward and onward. Together, these words form a vision for a conference-wide event that helps us to work together and make progress on our work as *a community of congregations... engaging the world God loves*.

At Annual Sessions in June of 2021, the delegate body set a trajectory for conference in the approval of the *Growing Our Intercultural Witness* document. Conference leadership teams and staff have been working to integrate this trajectory into all that we do together. In that spirit, the second half of our time together in the Spring Summit was devoted to hearing what this looks like in our conference presently and discussing how we might move forward together in it as well.

Joanne Gallardo shared with us about our progress on the goals set in *Growing Our Intercultural Witness*. She included an update of the work in assembling an Intercultural Workgroup that will help facilitate our intercultural work, the initial stages of rolling out the Intercultural



Ben Tapper speaks to those in-person on March 19 and those online on March 26.

Diversity Inventory (IDI) with conference staff and board, and in an interview with Naun Cerrato, pastor of Piedra Viva Mennonite Church (Elkhart, IN). Participants were pleased to hear of the progress being made and appreciated hearing about the ways in which we are putting our words into practice.

We also invited Ben Tapper (co-founder of Kindred Collective, host of the *What Would it Take Podcast* and *The Center for Congregations Podcast*) to provide an equipping session for the delegates present at the Spring Summit. His presentation on Decentering Whiteness allowed us to acknowledge the progress that has been made but also name where work still needs to be done. He acknowledged both personal responsibilities and organizational challenges that must be addressed to create the kinds of collaborative environments in which White People and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) alike can thrive.

Many responses reflected that his presentation was engaging, timely, thought-provoking, and powerful. He shared stories and experiences in his own life and helped us to consider how our stories have formed us. He also named several ways that whiteness shows up in organizations in detrimental ways and provided a resource with suggestions of antidotes to these.

It was encouraging to experience the ongoing energy of members of our conference as they engaged with Ben Tapper and the content he presented. His experience with Mennonites played an important part in building a bridge between us and the content. The responses from those who participated indicate gratitude for the work of IMMC in growing our intercultural witness and a commitment to continued work in this area. May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire and lead us as we grow and challenge one another.



Joanne Gallardo shares with delegates in-person at Fairhaven Mennonite on March 19.

journeying with our pastors



Sharon Yoder, IMMC Conference Co-Minister, reflects on a Lenten practice of listening to the Spirit through *Every Time I Feel the Spirit* by Shannon Dycus.

Every time I feel the Spirit movin' in my heart, I will pray...

I seldom give up something for Lent. Instead, during this season of listening and turning towards God, I typically engage an intentional practice. This year I am meditating with a Bible study guide written by Shannon Dycus, *Every Time I Feel the Spirit* (MennoMedia 2019). And I'm listening to the African American spiritual that invites me to watch for Spirit movement within and around me. As I do so, I'm proclaiming my commitment to align with our conference mission statement calling us to be Guided by the Holy Spirit.

Singing about *God's Spirit movin'* in my heart and engaging the study with Shannon Dycus is also deliberate engagement with goals identified in my Intercultural Development Plan. This study creates space for me to learn from women who are part of the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community. As Shannon interacts with the stories of women in scripture and of contemporary women from around the world, I am invited to join them in proclaiming the Spirit's call to love and justice.

I will proclaim Spirit love and justice along with Claudette Colvin, who at age 15 was a forerunner for civil rights in Alabama. In March 1955, Claudette refused to give up her bus seat to a white traveler. Many of us haven't heard Claudette's story; it was hushed largely because of her age and her pregnancy. Yet her resistance was part of the Spirit work that led to the same act by Rosa Park nine months later. Claudette's resistance was a seed in God's Spirit movement towards freedom for our African American siblings. And God's Spirit is still moving (Dycus, 22-25).

So. I will continue to sing with the Spirit during this Lenten season, with the hope that seven weeks of practice may have planted some new seeds and formed some new habits. I want to continue walking with the Spirit, joining Jesus and many others who walked before me in naming, lamenting, and turning away from systemic injustice and oppression.

God's Spirit will not stop moving! *Every time I feel the Spirit movin'* in my heart, and in the hearts of our congregations and in our conference, I will pray that seeds for God's love and justice continue to be planted. And I will watch for the blooms.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Mariah Martin was ordained at Bonneyville Mennonite Church on January 2, 2022.



Frances Ringenberg began as interim pastor at Waterford Mennonite Church on March 1, 2022.

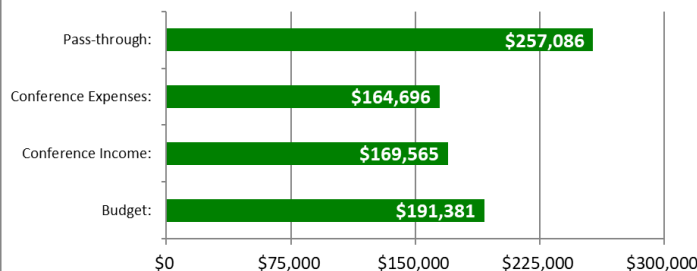
Ending



Neil Amstutz ended his time as pastor at Waterford Mennonite Church on February 1, 2022.

financial report

Fiscal Year to Date 7/1/2021 - 3/31/2021



This issue is available online:

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Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference

An area conference of Mennonite Church USA

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference—a conference of **Mennonite Church USA**—is a community of congregations in Indiana and Michigan.

We are a community of congregations, centered on Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, acting through grace, love and peace, engaging the world God loves.

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