

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference



Ministry Calls and Affirmations

A calling to pastoral ministry leads couple to Germany in partnership with IMMC

By: Joanne Gallardo, Conference Co-minister

Did you know that Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference has a credentialed leader in Germany? David and Sophie Lapp Jost serve in Bammental, a village that is close to Heidelberg. Sophie is licensed toward ordination with IMMC. In September, they will have been in Bammental for 4 years. I was able to catch up with them (including baby Timothy) to better understand their ministry in their European setting.

Sophie hails from Goshen, Indiana and David from Harrisonburg, Virginia. Timothy joined their family last September. When David and Sophie became a couple, they felt called to do the work of the church overseas. Before this assignment in Germany, they lived and worked in Nazareth. Sophie felt called to pastoral ministry, but in Nazareth there weren't opportunities for women in congregations. Through connections, they learned that there was a church in Bammental looking for a pastor and David had a connection with the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK).

David now works with DMFK, and Sophie pastors the church in Bammental part-time. The Lapp Josts emphasized how great it was for this opening to come up and connections to happen when they were feeling led to the work they now do. Sophie had been leading devotions and doing chaplaincy work in Nazareth. She thought, "Where can a Mennonite woman be a pastor overseas?" This discernment played a part in their decision to move to Germany.

David shared a bit of the history of the DMFK. It was formed after World War Two to advocate for contentious objectors and called people to resist war in ways that have evolved over time. To that end, they support human rights work and refugees. He said it bears some similarity to Mennonite Central Committee and Community Peacemaker Teams. German Mennonites have separate missions,

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Ministry Calls and Affirmations



David & Sophie Lapp Jost receiving a blessing for Timothy from their church community.

relief, Christian service, and peace organizations, the latter being David's work.

Sophie's congregation also serves as the Mennonite church for nearby Heidelberg. Most congregants live in Bammmental. While the membership includes roughly 30 people, a regular Sunday has around 15 to 25 attenders, with the occasional attendance of 30-35. The church meets in a small building near downtown which they have rented for the past 30-40 years. This same building is also used for programs for the elderly. The age of attendees ranges from 7 months to 80 years old.

"Services in our congregation would feel familiar to a lot of U.S. Mennonites," Sophie said. They sing out of a German/Swiss Mennonite hymnal and follow a worship and liturgical style similar to many U.S. Mennonite churches. Sophie's responsibilities, like other Mennonite pastors, include coordinating worship leaders and preachers, worship leading and preaching herself, administrative tasks, and meetings. It's also important for her to engage her artistic gifts through worship visuals, painting, and creative activities with children and youth.

David's work focuses partly on solidarity with Israel/Palestine, coordinating and leading tours, and he works on fundraising for Lesbos in Greece. His job also includes writing, preaching, relating to churches, and other various projects. David leads tours of Israel/Palestine as part of his work and sets up tours for people in Germany. They do 1 tour a year. The Lapp Josts also hope to do tours for people in North America, including folks from College Mennonite. Israel/Palestine is where Sophie was born, and David has 2 great aunts who lived there and ran an orphanage in Hebron.

When asked what pulled them to this work, Sophie responded, "Because I was born when my parents were overseas, I've had connections in other countries. For me it was never a question if but where and when." She had thought the "where" might be Israel/Palestine. This brought Sophie and David to Nazareth. Their service there was rewarding and very positive. However, with significant visa limitations and with Sophie's call to ministry, it wasn't possible to stay. "As we were looking at different places, Germany was an obvious place," Sophie stated. There are no limitations on women pastors in German Mennonite churches. Other countries have limited options for a woman wanting to be in congregational ministry. David said that in

moving he could continue his advocacy work in a new setting.

The work of the Lapp Jost's is a ministry that comes out of College Mennonite Church (CMC) in Goshen. Sophie grew up at CMC and the Lapp Josts attended there together for four years, and they continue to keep in touch with the community. Their financial support needs are limited and met by CMC, through family, and through a Ministry Support Team at CMC. "It has worked really well," Sophie said, "It's been a very natural fit."

When asked about the joys in her work, Sophie said that it's a joy to get to know a small church. Having been a part of CMC, Sophie was used to a large congregation. While it does have its challenges, "It's a joy to pastor there." For David, being a part of a multicultural community is a joy. "I love working in different languages," he said. There are people from many cultures in the Lapp Jost's circles, and with that brings lots of different perspectives.

As for challenges, Sophie has been learning what it means to be a part of German culture. "What are the broader cultural differences, and what are the specific cultural differences in my congregation?" Sophie asks. David and Sophie live in an intentional community with church members, which has its challenges and many rewards. For David, "Being in another culture makes you a lot less effective at organizing people... we don't have our families here, and not nearly as many connections. In some ways we're vulnerable and limited."

When asked if they could share a story about when they felt God's presence, Sophie recounted recently feeling the Holy Spirit in a Palm Sunday service. David had been scheduled for preaching, and Sophie for worship leading. This, said Sophie, doesn't happen often. "I planned a skit and a processional with the children. It was just a really beautiful service—everything went together and people were really engaged."

David felt God's presence in an Israel/Palestine tour. He met with an Israeli Jewish peace activist that was cut off from family, attacked and beaten, all for his peace work. Yet, he continues with human rights work with Palestinians. "The theme passage for the tour was the Beatitudes," David said. "In particular we focused on 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake.'" David felt God's presence in the coalescing of themes.

If you feel called to directly support Sophie and David, visit their website at collegemennonite.org/lapp-jost-mission or email them at LappJostMinistry@collegemennonite.org. Sophie also encourages folks to remember German Mennonites, as there is a perception that Mennonites worldwide forget about their churches. When Mennonite Central Committee first came to Germany after the war, lots of connections were made. Now, there are fewer. German Mennonite churches have a broad spectrum of theology and aren't very different from North American Mennonites. They appreciate being connected to global Anabaptist community. You can support David's passion by engaging him around solar or energy efficiency projects. He is eager to work with people in who want develop more sustainably.

The family would like you to know that if you visit Germany, there's a guest spot for you in Bammmental.

Gathered for Spring Summits

Sharing Wisdom and Hope for Our Future

By: Clayton Gladish, Administrative Coordinator

Spring is a time of new life and new beginnings as part of God's brilliant design for the creation. Even though our Spring Summits took place on days that were more akin to winter, we were able to sense the life and love of the Holy Spirit as we gathered both in-person and virtually.

In both of the Spring Summits, we were first centered through a time of worship and a sermon from Osée Tshiwaape. Osée, a member of Prairie Street Mennonite Church and a regular preacher at Kern Road Mennonite Church, encouraged those present to seek oneness in the spirit. Differentiating unity and uniformity, his words were a powerful challenge to find ways to walk together even when we may think differently. This was an excellent precursor to the discussions that would follow.

As usual, the Spending Plan for the next fiscal year was presented to the delegates for consideration. While almost all noted that they were in favor of the plan, there were a few who noted that changes in giving may affect congregational giving to conference. The general sense among conference leaders is that we are in a stable position as a conference and trust that God will provide for the ministries we are called to even in the face of change.

The remainder of the time together at the Spring Summit was mostly spent in smaller groups (table groups for the in-person gathering and breakout rooms for the virtual gathering). This began with a brief presentation and conversation led by the Intercultural Working Group (IWG). During the in-person summit Jes Stoltzfus Buller, IWG Chairperson, led the delegates in discussing several introspective and visionary questions that would help to inform the group's work in the future. Joanne Gallardo, conference co-minister who works with IWG, filled in for Jes during the virtual summit with the same questions. Many reflected on their appreciation for the work of IWG and there was a great sense of desire to continue in the hard work of intercultural competence.

Following the IWG, the Missional Leadership Team (MLT) solicited feedback on potential changes to the Renewing a Vision document



Delegates were invited to close their time together in prayer for one another.

and the credentialing criteria used by the Ministerial Credentialing Team. With the official changes in polity passed by Mennonite Church USA delegates at the Special Delegate Session in May 2022, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference needed to review current policy and practices. Specifically, delegates were asked to consider the section entitled "Breadth of Variance," which outlines membership and credentialing criteria for LGBTQIA+ persons as well as allowances for credentialed persons performing same-sex covenanted unions.

Brenda Hostetler Meyer, Conference Moderator, facilitated these table and breakout room discussions. Delegates were instructed to have conversation and provide a written record of their conversation. These were later summarized and returned to the delegates, providing space and account of all perspectives. Using the feedback gathered, the MLT will bring proposals at Annual Sessions 2023 for delegate approval.

The Spring Summits ended similar to how they began, with the encouragement to continue to foster unity in our love for God and one another. The final task of the delegates was to share in their groups about their congregations and offer prayers for one another. May we continue to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as we journey together!



Delegates from churches throughout IMMC gathered at Kern Road Mennonite Church (South Bend, IN)



Osée Tshiwaape delivers a message on Unity in Love.

journeying with our pastors



Sharon Yoder,
IMMC Conference
Co-Minister, reflects
on what it takes to go
far together as a
conference.

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.

Mailing Address & Contact Info:

PO Box 702, Goshen, IN 46527
(574) 534-4006
Email: imoffice@im.mennonite.net

Editor: Clayton Gladish,
administrative coordinator

Missional Leadership Team:

Brenda Meyer, moderator,
Goshen, IN; Steve Slagel
moderator-elect, Traverse City, MI;
Duane Yoder, treasurer, Ft.
Wayne, IN; Naomi Yoder,
secretary, Goshen, IN; Shawn
Lange, Elkhart, IN; Rolando Sosa
Granados, Elkhart, IN.

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"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. Please, let's go together." Osee Tschwape's words at Spring Summit continue to echo in my soul. These words summarized his sermon on our theme scripture for this year, Philippians 2:1-5. Verse 3 begins: "Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself." (The Message)

This is foundational for all our work at Conference. And many times we mess up. Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better." In recent years, our Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT) heard several painful credentialing stories from persons in our conference. We know that others in our conference experienced deep affirmation and great joy as they were credentialed. But the stories of pain gave us pause. We want to do better.

We hold power as we credential leaders in our

conference, and we seek greater accountability. We don't want to abuse our power. We don't want to be obsessed with our own advantage.

With humility, MCT is engaging a reparation process for harmful credentialing interviews. Our hope is to grow our capacity to think of ourselves as Jesus thought of himself (Philippians 2:1-5). As we hear stories of pain, we will extend institutional apology and offer a healing ritual. Hopefully we will grow in our ability to live into our vision of being centered on Jesus, Guided by the Spirit, Acting through Grace, Love, and Peace. In humility, we want to listen and learn. We want to go far. We want to go together.

To see MCT's letter of intent, please visit this page: www.im.mennonite.net/mct-reparation-letter. The listening process outlined there is a first step. We hope it will not be the last. For those wishing to submit a written account or to arrange for an in-person meeting, please reach out by an email to MCT@im.mennonite.net or by mail to IN-MI Mennonite Conference, ATTN: MCT Listening Process, P.O. Box 702, Goshen, IN 46527.

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Leandrea Lange was
ordained at New
foundation United in
Christ Fellowship on
February 19, 2023.



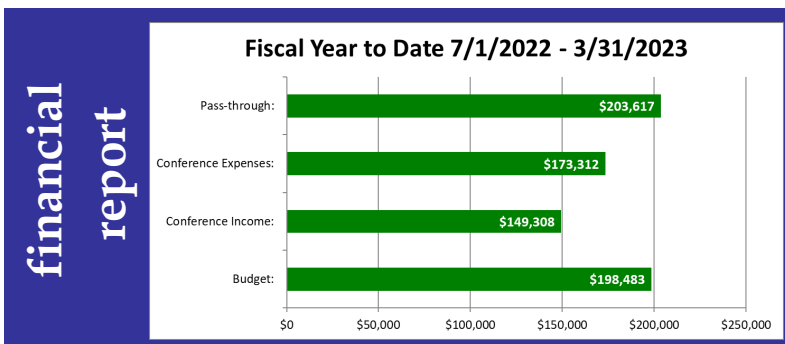
Keith Harris began as
pastor at New Hope
Community Church of
Midland on March 12,
2023



Cyneatha Millsaps
ended as pastor of
Prairie Street
Mennonite Church
February 28, 2023.
She continues as US
Coordinator for
Mennonite Women.



Mariah Martin ended
as pastor of
Bonneyville
Mennonite Church
March 26, 2023. She
continues on the
pastoral team at Faith
Mennonite, Central
District Conference.



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