

# gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of  
Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference



## Seeking Our Unity in Love

Annual Sessions 2023 Features Worship and Discernment For Continued Work Together

By: **Brenda Hostetler Meyer**, Conference Moderator (July 2021—June 2023)

*"If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ...if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you...then do me a favor: ....love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Think of yourself the way Christ Jesus thought of himself." Philippians 2:1-5, excerpted.*

These lines from our theme verses, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, appeared on the screen each day during worship at the 2023 Annual Sessions at Amigo Centre.

It was clear from the lively greetings and energized conversation as we gathered on Friday evening that many attendees might have thought they already knew quite a bit about deep-spirited friendship. But in her sermon, Cyneatha Millsaps, Executive Director of Mennonite Women, challenged us with Paul's words to actually center what's good for the other and the whole rather than just ourselves. She commended the movie *Women Talking* as a model of deep-spirited friends wrestling with hard questions and imagined congregations and conferences who

take time and energy to speak up and listen together on things that matter.

We heard two congregational stories that modeled this kind of honest communication. Simon and Lucy Muange, church planters from Detroit, brought us not just a success story, but an engaging testimony of work that moves slowly, of unexpected relationships bearing fruit, and of daily dependence and trust in God's leading. They reminded us that we are in this together, and they need the continued prayers and support of the rest of the body. Grant Miller, pastor of Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship, talked about the challenges of church life during a pandemic and some of the gifts that emerged in their small fellowship, including an ongoing commitment to meeting outside when they can.

### inside

- 2 Seeking Our **Unity in Love**
- 4 **Journeying** with our pastors

# Seeking Our Unity in Love



Gathered in the Gym at Amigo Centre, delegates hear reports and discern together.

We got another opportunity to practice being a community of the Spirit as we considered proposals around delegate tables on Saturday morning. In light of last year's decision by MCUSA delegates to rescind the Membership Guidelines, the MLT proposed a change in our credentialing practice, proposing that IMMC "will not deny credentials to someone called to ministry in IMMC because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. Congregations continue to be the deciding bodies about their pastoral leadership and thus can, without fear of interference, choose to call or not call as a pastor any person equipped for pastoral leadership as determined by the Credentialing Guidelines and the Ministry Credentialing Team." The fact that this proposal passed by over 90% did not minimize the emotional impact for those for whom this direction weighs heavily on their conscience. While some struggled with this change, others celebrated the freedom this gives congregations to call pastors who do not fit traditional categories, while affirming that all congregations have a choice in their leadership. The tone was muted as we listened to each other's perspectives and feelings, the pain of having different perspectives on important matters, and acknowledging the depth of the relationships that keep us together.

The spending plan conversation was lively because of two surprises since our March regional meetings: a large cost-of-living raise recommended by the MCUSA Salary Guidelines, and lower than expected giving over the past months. The Missional Leadership Team



Conference Co-Ministers Sharon Yoder and Joanne Gallardo address the delegates.

told delegates they are committed to supporting staff by following the salary guidelines. There was vigorous give and take about contingency options for balancing income and expense, and delegates in the end voted to approve the spending plan.

But the biggest surprise was yet to come! The month following annual sessions saw a dramatic uptick in giving that more than covers the potential deficit for the past year and brings with it a vote of confidence in the work of our conference staff and programs. Praise be to God and the Spirit community!

In her sermon during the closing worship service on Saturday afternoon, Conference Co-Minister Sharon Yoder once again challenged us with real-life working out of deep-spirited love. In her family, rejection and distance was transformed over time, not with changed opinions and convictions, but by persistent loving communication that exceeded the still-vast differences of perspective. Worship participants celebrated communion together with the emotion of that story still resonating in the room, claiming our allegiance to Jesus, the deep-spirited friend who beckons us to keep learning and following, together.

## Why I give to IMMC



I've always been a firm believer that we are better, and can do more when we journey together with others. I experienced this as a pastor in IMMC, and through my time with Amigo Centre. Our conference vision resonates deeply with me, as I strive to follow Jesus in my own life. I'm excited to journey with people seeking this vision!

Kent Miller, College Mennonite Church

Join Kent in giving by visiting  
[im.mennonite.net/give](https://im.mennonite.net/give)



# Annual Sessions 2023



Annual Sessions attendees are brought together around meals shared in the Dining Hall.



Marisa Smucker shares about the work of the Intercultural Working Group.



Attendees are gathered together for worship in song and spoken word.



**Brenda Hostetler Meyer** leads the delegates during the *Discernment in Community* sessions on Saturday.



The graduation of **Ursula Hess** (center) from the Journey Program at AMBS was celebrated. Others pictured (left to right) Jewel Gingerich Longenecker (AMBS Dean of Lifelong Learning), Karsten Hess (Ursula's son), Mary Hochstetler (Ursula's mentor), Joanne Gallardo (Conference Co-Minister and Journey Program Instructor)



# journeying with our pastors



**Joanne Gallardo**,  
IMMC Conference  
Co-Minister, reflects  
on the pastoral  
vocation of listening.

In a book for my Doctor of Ministry course, "Compassionate Leadership: How to Do Hard Things in a Human Way," authors Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter talk about empathy versus compassion in leadership. Empathy is the ability to see someone's pain and take it on yourself. Compassion is empathy + action, moving in a way that helps alleviate the burden.

This may seem obvious to pastors. We're taught healthy boundaries, transference, self-care, and self-awareness. A trap I see for pastors has less to do with too much or too little empathy and compassion but the desire to "fix" things in the lives of our hurting people. This is the thinking that says solutions are fixes. They are not always the same.

Leaders are a solution-oriented breed. We see problems and go through the steps in our mind about how to get to a better place. "If these folks would just sit down with these other folks and talk about their problems, we'd solve everything. They just need to get in a room together and hash it out." Or possibly, "If this person were more secure in

themselves, their life would be so much better! How do we change that for them?"

But when someone comes through your office door with a problem, rarely do they need a solution. What they need is a listener. We can often forget the power of sitting with people, making sure they are seen and heard. Oftentimes our people want their feelings validated and their pain acknowledged.

If we absorb their pain like a sponge, we are hurting ourselves and become frozen in our feelings. If we're compassionate, we take that feeling and move to action. Listening is not passive, it's very much active. The ability to truly listen takes time, energy, and wisdom. The ability to listen empowers us as leaders.

Do you have a ministry of listening? Are you able to not soak up pain, not tell people what to do, but hear them, see them, and remind them they are beloved? We all can grow in this area; I know I can. To lead as pastors is to listen.

## ministry transitions

### Endings



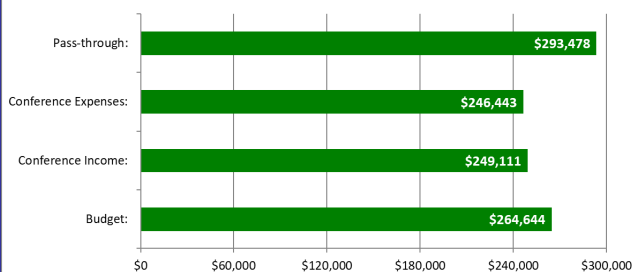
**Steve Slagel**  
completed his role as  
transitional pastor at  
Holdeman Mennonite  
Church on April 30.



**Dave and Janice Yordy Sutter** ended 35  
years of pastoral ministry at Kern Road  
Mennonite Church on June 11.

## financial report

### Fiscal Year to Date 7/1/2022 - 6/30/2023



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 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](mailto: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.

**Gospel Evangel** is published four times annually by Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (Jan/Feb/Mar, Apr/May/Jun, Jul/Aug/Sept, Oct/Nov/Dec). It is printed and mailed by Duley Press, 2906 N. Home Street, Mishawaka, IN 46545. Periodical postage is paid at Nappanee, IN 46550 (USPS 575-940). Postmaster: Send address changes to Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, PO Box 702, Goshen, IN 46527.