

gospel evangel

connecting the congregations of
Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference



Musical Arts Indiana Vesper Chorale rehearsing at Kern Road Mennonite Church.

The Sacred Becomes the Shared

When our churches become more than worship spaces many experience belonging.

By: Clayton Gladish, Administrative Coordinator

Space and place are things we can easily take for granted. When I worked for a well-known coffee chain, one of their goals was for their stores to become a “third place” for people to gather. The theory is that our first place is our home, and our second place is where we work. The third place, however, is more flexible and comes as we find comfort and belonging in a space. Church buildings easily become this sought-after third place as they are designed to bring people together in community. But most congregations only meet a small handful of times throughout the week, leaving their buildings unoccupied more than they are occupied.

It can be tempting to keep a church building holy, set apart only for the official work of the church. It is certainly easier to know from week to week what happens in the building and to know that you will find things just as you left them. But as many Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) congregations have learned, sharing their space

with other organizations and congregations can bring opportunities for others to find a third place within its walls.

Early in the Fall of 2023, I reached out to IMMC congregations to learn more about how they share their buildings with other groups. It would seem that church buildings having a single use is the exception, not the rule. Several congregations have multiple organizations or congregations that use their space anywhere from quarterly right up to daily. It is encouraging to hear of the ways IMMC congregations are able to share out of their abundance for the benefit of their local community.

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Both Belmont Mennonite Church (Elkhart) and College Mennonite

The Sacred Becomes the Shared



Drive-thru food pantry cares for the community around **Morning Star Church**.



Sunnyside Mennonite Church hosts a Spanish-speaking GED preparation class.

Church (Goshen) share their space with childcare organizations from Monday to Friday. Belmont recently started sharing their building with New Generation Child Care Ministry, a ministry of New Beginnings United Worship Center. They offer childcare services to members of the community, including school drop-off and pick-up. College has a long-standing relationship with Campus Center for Young Children, which provides full- and part-time care and programming for children from 12 -months to 5 years old.

Fellowship of Hope (Elkhart) shares their building with an Hispanic congregation named El Shaddai. "They use it more than we do," commented Sharon Norton (transitional pastor), "with multiple evening services throughout the week and their main service on Sunday afternoon. They also have more people than we do and chairs get rearranged for them."

Kern Road Mennonite Church (South Bend) is host to the Swannee Area Council of Pastors and the Hudson group regional meetings in addition to being the rehearsal and performance space for the Vesper Chorale of Musical Arts Indiana, South Bend. They also open their space for

weekend retreats by L.O.G. (Love of God) Teen Retreats, a ministry of Michiana Youth Ministries.

Last year, Maple River Mennonite Church (Brutus, MI) provided a warm place to meet in the winter months for a group that focuses on "... worship and mutually helpful interaction for persons with history of incarceration, substance abuse, etc. who are not necessarily comfortable in a 'church service' setting," explains Stan Kauffman. "We expect we will host them again in our building come about November."

Morning Star Church (Muncie, IN) recently acquired a new building but planned a little differently than one might expect. Instead of choosing a building that served the needs of their worshipping community first, they chose a building that would be best for the Food Pantry that serves their area. The Food Pantry has become an important connection point in the community and is church for many of those it serves. The congregation has adapted to use the remaining space for worship and other church activities. Read more in a brief article by Sharon Yoder on page three.

Why I give to IMMC

Join Cindy in giving by visiting
im.mennonite.net/give



Having served on a conference committee and as an office volunteer, I have seen the inner workings of conference and the many things that happen behind the scenes. Our IMMC staff are passionate about their work and care deeply about our congregations and the well-being of the pastors. I give because I want them to know their work matters. We are privileged to have staff and leadership teams that provide support and resources for pastors and congregations which also benefits each one of us. It gives me joy to know that my gifts are being used to build up our community of congregations to share God's love with all people.

Cindy Steiner, East Goshen Mennonite Church

Sunnyside Mennonite Church (Ekhart) shares their space in a variety of ways. They share their building with Iglesia Piedra Viva, a church plant that joined IMMC in 2021, every Sunday and occasionally at other times throughout the year. They are also the host of La Posada, an immigration aid organization. A Spanish-speaking GED class meets at Sunnyside 3 times per week as well.

Waterford Mennonite Church (Goshen) has several groups meeting in their space throughout the week. Rock Run Co-op, a homeschooling group meets in both their indoor and outdoor space on Fridays. A Narcotics Anonymous group meets bi-monthly on Saturdays. Maple City Quilters also meets there one Saturday a month. And a group called Aspiring Allies used their space on a short-term basis recently.

Walnut Hill Mennonite Church (Goshen) shares their building with a variety of groups on a weekly basis, including an AA and Al-Anon meetings, and a Music Together class. For the last three years, a Spanish-speaking Seventh Day Adventist congregation has met weekly in their building on Saturdays.

And, last but not least, I want to give a shout out to East Goshen Mennonite Church (Goshen) who share their space with us at IMMC. We occupy a portion of their old sanctuary and a few rooms in that area. We are very grateful for this partnership as it allows us to keep our overhead costs low and gives opportunity to connect with one another. One of the highlights of my week is the coffee break we take together with the East Goshen staff on Wednesdays.

There are likely many more ways that we can share our buildings that haven't been mentioned above, including all kinds of gatherings from

one-time events to regularly scheduled meetings. It is encouraging to know that so many are finding third places in our church buildings throughout the week. Finding comfort and belonging could easily be something we only seek for ourselves and those in our own communities. However, sharing our space allows others to experience comfort and belonging as well, spreading the blessing of community even further.

When God entrusted humanity with the care of all creation, I see us fulfilling that calling as we share the ways we have been blessed with other groups and organizations around us. In many ways, our ministry within the community goes far beyond the number of people in pews on a Sunday morning. It also includes the many who are blessed by our facilities throughout the week, often without us even knowing. Thanks be to God!



The IMMC Staff are so grateful for our hosts at East Goshen Mennonite Church.

journeying with our pastors



Sharon Yoder,
IMMC Conference
Co-Minister, reflects
on her visit to
Morning Star Church.

When searching for a new facility for Morning Star Church (Muncie, IN), pastors Gladys Maina and Simon Mungai didn't look for a traditional church building. The priority was clear: they needed a facility that would house their outreach ministries. They'd been looking for a new property for 10 years but after their former building was damaged beyond repair by water and mold in 2022, the search became urgent.

There was much rejoicing when a new property became available across the road from their previous one. Once the purchase was final, the first renovation was to tear out walls to create their worship sanctuary. While the sanctuary is a fraction of their total space, the ministry is grounded in prayer and worship; this space is essential. Renovations of other sections of the building will come in stages, as donated time and supplies become available. Eventually they plan to have their food pantry, kitchen and meal service areas, a youth gathering room, and a computer room housed in their facility.

The ministry of Morning Star Church has a huge impact

on the depressed community in their part of Muncie. Case in point: around 150 families received a food box in the past weeks that includes a turkey or ham, sweet potatoes, and all the other fixings needed for a thanksgiving meal.

Gladys and Simon note that this is possible only because of a wider community who supports them. Volunteers serve on their board of directors; others offer countless hours of volunteer labor in their ministries and renovation projects. They're also grateful for generous financial and prayer support from sister congregations in IMMC and beyond. They covet our ongoing support; they'd be happy to preach in your morning services and they invite your visits. I encourage you to arrange a time to tour their facility and/or to take a team to work alongside them for a day.

If you want to witness a congregation who is sharing space with their community, engaging the world God loves, Gladys and Simon would love to welcome you. I promise your visit will bless you. I'm still ruminating on the visit I had with them this fall!

ministry transitions

Beginnings



Sophie Lapp Jost was ordained at College Mennonite on July 23 for role as pastor at Bammental Mennonite Church in Germany.



Steve Slagel began as transitional pastor at Kern Road Mennonite on August 1.



Sean Swanson began as interim pastor at Kern Road Mennonite on August 1.



Marcella Hershberger began as co-pastor at Hudson Lake on August 1.



Marcia Carpenter began as co-pastor at Hudson Lake on August 1.



Becky Helmuth began as transitional pastor at Benton Mennonite on September 1.

Endings



Becky Helmuth ended as transitional pastor at Hudson Lake Mennonite July 31.



Doug Kaufman ended as co-pastor at Benton Mennonite on August 13.



Daniel Yoder ended as pastor of youth at College Mennonite on August 15.



Brenda Hostetler Meyer ended as co-pastor at Benton Mennonite on August 27.



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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

Editor: Clayton Gladish, administrative coordinator

Missional Leadership Team:

Steve Slagel moderator-elect, Traverse City, MI; Brenda Meyer, post-moderator, Goshen, IN; Rebecca Helmuth, moderator-elect, New Paris, IN; Duane Yoder, treasurer, Ft. Wayne, IN; Naomi Yoder, secretary, Goshen, IN; Rolando Sosa Granados, Elkhart, IN.

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