

Atlantic Coast Conference
CURRENTS

Fall 2022

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Brooklyn Peace Church hosts first service after reopening

By *Christle Hain*

The new Brooklyn (New York) Peace Church, a church plant of Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), and in partnership with Brooklyn Peace Center, held its first service on October 9, 2022. The church opening was delayed for two years due to renovations and the COVID-19 pandemic. With about 15 in attendance, the service was contemplative and reflective, centering on the gospel of peace. Attendees sang songs focusing on peace and justice from the Voices Together hymnal, led by Kate Umble Smucker, Peace Church launch team member.

Several weeks ago, Brooklyn Peace Church hosted its second church service, welcoming former members of Primera Iglesia Menonita de Brooklyn, who previously worshiped in this sanctuary, as well as pastors (and members) from Grace and Peace Mennonite Church, North Bronx Mennonite Church, Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, and Believers Mennonite Garifuna Ministries. Maria Aponte, social worker at New York Mennonite Immigration Program, provided translation.

Jason Storbakken, who currently provides pastoral, liturgical and organizational support for Brooklyn Peace Church, was initially contacted by organizers from the congregation and felt a calling to be involved in the church's reopening.

“God puts us in the messiness to work through it, I’m just trusting God, discerning, and helping to create space,” said Storbakken. “My hope is to work with the core group as they identify their structure, to be a support to them.”

The church services are bilingual with meditative practices, such as *Lectio Divina* (or passage meditation), among others. Ray and Anne Pacheco, who have a deep connection to Primera Iglesia Menonita de Brooklyn (and who served as pastors over different seasons), are part of the developing leadership team.

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The Peace Church met in a circle, seeking to embody a priesthood of all believers.



Bienvenido Manon, Brooklyn Peace Church member, added that, for him, the first service back was a good experience because of the family-friendly environment.


“In the end, we are brother and sister, that means we are family who belong to the body of Jesus Christ,” said Manon. “My vision for the Brooklyn Peace Center is to be of service to the community.”

Umble Smucker and her husband, Hans Smucker, are members of the launch team at Brooklyn Peace Church and have been part of the church launch. For Smucker, the impactful moments of the first church service were sharing the history of the space with former members and reflecting on how the space influenced their lives.

“Soon, too, I hope the Brooklyn

Peace Church can provide a space for the community to come and experience God in a variety of yet undefined ways,” said Smucker. “The unknown can be daunting, but also freeing at the same time, as we reimagine what an urban church can be and how God’s children can come and find rest and support.”

The Brooklyn Peace Center building originally housed a synagogue (1891-1962) and, more recently, Primera Iglesia Menonita de Brooklyn (1962-2019). Today, it hosts Brooklyn Peace Church, as well as Peace Café, a nonprofit that serves as a community hub. The center continues to expand as organizers are interested in the development of a space that is non-traditional, expansive and invitational.

Several like-minded organizations share office space in the center, including the New York Mennonite Immigration Program and Radical Living, an environmental justice youth organization. 



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MWC involvement leads to global music ministry

By Brook Musselman

Rashard Allen's first trip out of North America took him to the recent Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Indonesia. Neffsville Mennonite Church's Director of Music and Worship auditioned for and was invited as a member of the International Music Ensemble, which provided worship throughout the Assembly in July. The Ensemble was comprised of 10 individuals from 5 continents and 8 different countries.

"It was life-changing, to be sure," explained Allen of the experience. "Just being in that environment with people who have this bond, and even though there were language barriers, we all universally spoke the language of music and shared a love for Christ. It helped bond us in a way that's hard to quantify. We really became family during those two and a half weeks together."

Positive COVID tests, unexpected delays and technological issues brought the group together in unexpected ways. "Nothing happened the way it was supposed to, but the cool thing was that since we were all going through it together, we decided that we would lean into the experience, even if it was chaotic." The experience reminded Allen of the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer that reads,

*Lord let me be employed by thee or laid aside by thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.*

"I really came to embrace that attitude while I was there, prepared to do anything, and not do anything," remembered Allen, who missed several large-group worship gatherings due to a positive COVID test.

During the two weeks in Indonesia, Allen's long-dormant passion for cross-cultural worship exchange was rekindled. "It was incredible to be experiencing different people and cultures embracing one another around music and being really hyped up to share their own cultural ways of expression."

Since July, he has been looking for ways to bring this passion to his role as worship leader at Neffsville. "How can we learn from our own congregational connections and reflect new worship expressions while remaining within our own cultural DNA?" Allen asks. He is exploring how Neffsville's connections to believers in Puerto Rico and Peru might impact their own worship experience. "Let's let these other connections influence who we are. I think we should have that kind of cross cultural exchange as a body."


Before leaving Indonesia, Allen met Simon Okoth, the bishop of the Uganda Mennonite Conference. They recognized

one another as MWC participants and Allen was invited to Uganda to share his worship experience. On a follow up call several weeks later, an official invitation was extended and dates in early 2023 confirmed for Allen to visit Uganda to train church leaders in music and worship.

Since these plans were finalized, a church leader from Peru, with whom Neffsville has connection through past service trips, invited Allen to come and lead a training there. He now has plans to lead a training retreat in Lima, Peru in April 2023.

For Allen, this developing ministry is a convergence of two budding interests – intercultural connection and training the next generation of worship leaders. He holds a doctorate in worship studies and enjoys sharing what he's learned to bless other worship leaders and renew worship in their own churches.

"I want to teach the things that are transcultural as opposed to imposing Western norms onto other cultures, things like biblical/theological foundations of worship. I won't teach songs in Uganda. They need to know how to most effectively use or write their own songs in their own context to renew their own worship, not to make it look like American worship."

Rashard has received extensive support for the upcoming trip to Uganda from the Neffsville Mennonite community and continues to seek partners for his April trip and any future international trainings. Please keep him in prayer as he continues to develop this new ministry. 

Cover Photo:

Used with permission from the Brooklyn Peace Center



Changing despair into dance

By Amy Yoder McGloughlin

This summer, while on sabbatical, I spent several weeks in Palestine, working with Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT). CPT in the West Bank walks in solidarity with Palestinians, providing accompaniment through checkpoints and responding to crises in Hebron and the South Hebron hills. The roots of CPT are in the Anabaptist tradition; many Mennonite communities are connected to this work of active peacemaking.

The following is an excerpt of a sermon from October 9th, preached at Frazer Mennonite Church when I returned from sabbatical. In it, I reflect on Psalm 30, where the psalmist writes: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” (vs 5b) and “You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my death shroud, and clothed me with joy.” (vs 11)

My first day working with the CPT team in the old city, I went out on patrol with one of my teammates, Farah. She’s Palestinian and was born and raised in Hebron where we were working. We walked the city that afternoon, checking in at the usual checkpoints as children were walking home from school. We were looking for soldiers who might be in the community, and we were ensuring that checkpoints remained open as the schools were letting out.

We arrived at one checkpoint and saw kids throwing stones. This is not unusual. In a city with 2,000 soldiers there to protect the illegal settlements in the city, rock throwing is bound to happen. The

kids quickly dispersed and Farah and I stayed to see if there would be any kind of military response.

And there was.

Within fifteen minutes a jeep full of soldiers roared into the neighborhood, and stopped in front of a pack of boys. They grabbed two boys—brothers as it turned out—who were 7 and 8 years old, and marched them back to the checkpoint. Farah and I followed behind the soldiers who were holding the boys by the collars, and she shouted to the boys, “What are your names? What school are you from? Who are your parents?” Farah’s voice was emphatic and shaking and I knew she was scared, for the boys, but also for herself. Some of our Palestinian teammates had been detained at a checkpoint just last week just for taking a photo.

The children were too scared to respond much, but we did manage to get the first name of one of them before the soldiers turned towards us and threatened to arrest us too.

We sat near the checkpoint and watched to see what would happen next. We called the local United Nations representative, and he was able to get in touch with the military representative. We learned that the soldiers knew these boys didn’t throw the stones, but they wanted them to give up the names of the boys who did.

We waited some more.



A child returns from school near a checkpoint in the city of Hebron.

We watched the father of these little boys run up to the checkpoint. He was turned away, so he went to the school of his other children, picked them up, and returned to the checkpoint to wait. A dad and two five-year olds with him, playing outside a checkpoint, while their older brothers waited inside, without food or water, without being able to hug their father or talk to him.

The boys waited inside that checkpoint for four hours that day. And Farah and I waited outside with the dad and their brothers, watching, bearing witness, refusing to look away.

When the boys were finally released, we returned to the office and debriefed with the rest of the team—what did we know, what did we do that went well, what could have been done differently, and how were we feeling. The office was quiet and we were reflective as we sipped tea and looked off the balcony at the old city.

And then the city erupted with sound bombs echoing off the stone walls. Farah and I looked at each other, took a deep breath and headed back out into the city.

As we rounded the corner near the office, locals instructed us on where to go. We headed towards the military base, heard the screams of a mother and ran towards the cries. We arrived to see

about a dozen soldiers, with two young men the age of my son (who is 21). The soldiers were beating the young men who were handcuffed and blindfolded. The mom was begging the soldiers to release her sons. “What did they do? They are good boys. They are just coming home from work!” The soldier’s response was to throw another sound bomb into the echoey corridors, to try to stop the pleading and the questions.

And then, the soldiers were gone with these two young men. And Farah and I were left with a weeping mother, and angry family members. We called the United Nations representative again. He was going to try to find out what happened. We took the family’s information, promising to tell them if we heard anything, and promising to visit them the next day.

And we headed back to the office.

We sat down on the balcony again to debrief. But we didn’t have any words left. Farah and I had seen too much suffering for one day. I grabbed Farah’s hand when I saw her face begin to fall, and she just wept. For ten minutes we held on to each other and cried.

I prayed the words of the psalmist: “Hear me God and be merciful. Help us God.”

The next day was Friday, a busy day in the office. It was the Muslim day of worship, and our work was to monitor the checkpoints around the Mosque, then observe the inevitable clashes that would happen on the other side of the city. No one liked working on Fridays.

My teammates started arriving mid-morning. Hassan put on tea, Hamed went to the computer to follow up on the events of the night before.

And then, they came to me sheepishly and said, “It’s time for a dance party.”

So we danced. First to a traditional Palestinian dance, which involved shaking my hips in ways they don’t shake anymore. And then they put on some Beyonce. Her song, “You won’t break

my soul” was the anthem for Fridays, a song that must be played and sung at top volume in preparation for an intense day. It was especially important for me that day, given all that I had seen the day before.



Amy Yoder McGloughlin with colleague and friend, Farah

After seeing elementary school boys detained for four hours—which, by the way, is illegal in 100 different ways—then seeing men my son’s age arrested and beaten, my heart was breaking. I wasn’t sure how I would be able to bear witness to any more suffering.

Dancing was the only thing that made sense. It was a dance to root us, to remind us the the occupation controls Palestinian movement but does not control our hearts, minds or souls. We know who we are. We are free.

Then God changed our despair into a dance. And we walked into the city shrouded that day in liberation that can only come when we know who we are and whose we are.

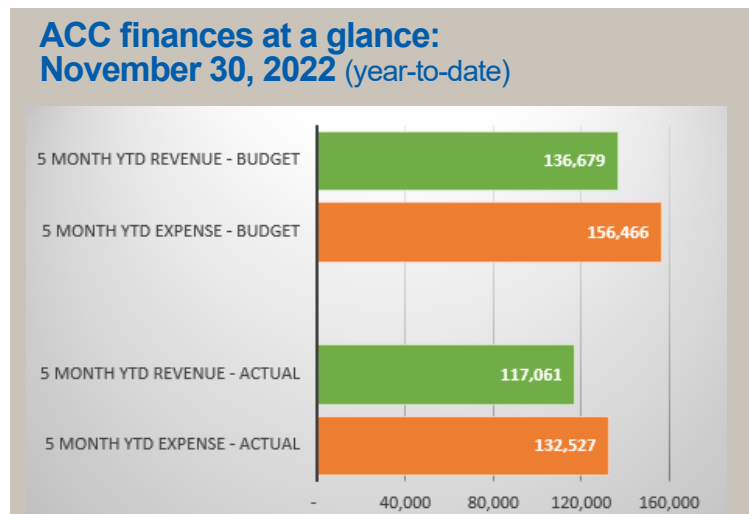
I’ve thought a lot about the joy in Palestine that I experienced. And feel a twinge of guilt about it. Things are so difficult there, how could I possibly have joy here? But I also heard the words of Jesus echoing when he said, “I’ve come that you might

have life, and life abundantly.” He said those words in Palestine, while under occupation. And when he said it, he didn’t care too much about his occupiers. He lived as a free person, who laughed with children, made his first miracle wine for a party, had compassion for those who needed it, who walked with people in struggles and invited them into liberation.

This world feels overwhelming. It has really gotten to me in the last few years. But we can’t put our heads in the sand. We have to see the world for what it is. And yet, there is still beauty in brokenness, and joy in the difficulty.

Let us be inspired to tend to our joy. There is difficulty. Work can feel overwhelming. Parenting can be too much. School is stressful. Politicians and global news make us despair. And yet, and yet, and yet....there is also joy. Joy is part of our life together. Joy is part of discipleship.

God changed the despair of the psalmist into dancing. God changed the psalmist’s tears into joy. And God does that for us too. So let us tend to the joy, let’s dance, let’s celebrate and be the liberated people God has made us to be.






Reflecting on the end of ACC's Mennonite Women Committee

By Elaine Shirk

It is with sadness that we close the Atlantic Coast Conference chapter of Mennonite Women USA. Several reasons led the MW Executive Committee and other conference leaders to this decision. Attendance at our spring and fall gatherings had been low for several years, and then the pandemic cancelled both events in 2020. More women have careers than a generation ago, and it can be hard to add one more activity to a family's calendar. The final blow was being unable to find anyone willing to chair the committee.

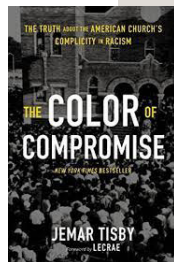
I have been the longest-running member of the executive committee of ACC MW, mainly because I enjoyed every moment of serving the women of our conference. As I reviewed my notes, the earliest I found was a meeting in fall 1998. I think I became involved a few years prior, but that puts me at serving for 24 years. I was the secretary for quite a few years, then became the historian, and finally spent the past two years as chair.

As I look over the programs and pictures from our gatherings, I feel renewed appreciation for the many beautiful women I met, both locally and nationally. I attended MW USA annual meetings several times, always traveling or meeting up with other Mennonite Women along the way. Our treasury amount of \$4000 will be forwarded to MW USA. Perhaps sometime another chapter of Mennonite Women will gather in the ACC, but for now we say thanks for all the memories and support locally and nationally for Mennonite Women here and around the globe.

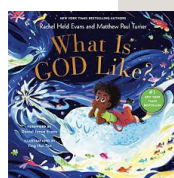
Thanks to Elaine Shirk and those who have given much time and energy to the Mennonite Women's ministries over the years! 

Safe for consumption: media to feed the soul

Each quarter someone in the ACC family will provide a list of new and old content that's worth consuming. This quarter's column comes from Jon Heinly, member at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church. Jon serves on ACC's Ministerial Leadership Committee.



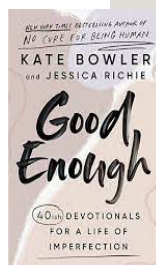
The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism by Jemar Tisby. The Lancaster Mennonite School admin team recently read this book together. It is an accessible text that brings to light the role of the church historically in enabling racism, and it offers a timely challenge for living into God's call to increase love, equity, inclusion, and justice.



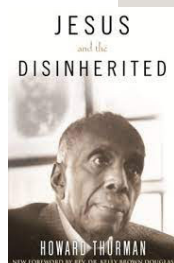
What is God Like? by Rachel Held Evans, Matthew Paul Turner, and Ying Hui Tan. As soon as it came out, Megan, my wife, and I bought copies of this for many of the children in our lives. The words and the illustrations are beautiful and invite us to understand what God is like through metaphors and similes, including many that are found in scripture. As with much children's literature, this book can speak to the hearts of adults as well as children.



Dare to Lead podcast by Brené Brown. In her typical style, Brené Brown weaves together stories, research, and engaging conversations with a diverse array of guests to address themes like vulnerability, shame, courage, equity, inclusion and belonging within the context of leadership. I regularly take away profound nuggets from these episodes and recommend them to anyone, regardless of whether your leadership is in a church, business, nonprofit, neighborhood, family, or other community.



Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Kate Bowler's writing and podcasts address the hardest areas of life—terminal illness, addiction, loneliness, grief, and so on—with honesty and genuine, albeit sometimes questioning, faith. This devotional offers reflections and prayers of blessing that frequently bring me to tears because of her willingness to go places that are often easier for us to avoid.



Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman. I first encountered this book in a seminary class with Rev. Dr. Jerry Streets where we read the text together slowly over much of a semester. Thurman was a theologian, chaplain, mystic, leader and mentor within the civil rights movement. It is a short book, but the depth of his reflections on the significance of Jesus's life for those who are disinherited in every era is what brings me back to this text again and again.

ACC to consider updated credentialing guidelines in response to MC USA resolutions

By ACC Staff

From its beginning in 1978, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) has valued being centered in Christ, building connections, and sharing God's love while extending significant congregational autonomy regarding life, structure, and ministry expressions in various congregational contexts. Both ACC and Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) view congregations as the primary unit of the church with authority to do ministry according to how they discern their particular contexts. ACC leadership continues to affirm the diverse ways that our congregations are led by the Holy Spirit to do ministry in their unique communities.

Processing credentials for ministry lies with the ACC Ministerial Leadership Committee. Changes in credentialing guidelines over the years (women in ministry, divorced persons,


youth ministry) have emerged from congregational feedback, delegate discernment, and prayerful decisions by the Ministerial Leadership Committee in conversation with the Executive Committee.

This past spring the MC USA Special Delegate Session passed a resolution calling for full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer, + persons, (LGBTQ+) including those in same-gender marriage, into the life and ministries of a congregation. Because diversity has long been present in ACC on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, the Executive and Ministerial Leadership Committees are inviting congregational and delegate feedback on whether to extend a credential if a congregation requests it for a person who is LGBTQ+, including someone in a same-gender marriage.

On February 4 ACC delegates are invited to gather and listen to

congregational responses and to share counsel on the subject of updating credentialing guidelines. Ministerial Leadership Committee, in conversation with Executive Committee, will then make a decision on whether it would make LGBTQ+ persons eligible for a credential with ACC.

Any decision is likely to affect ACC congregations and their members who hold differing views on credentialing. Several congregations have employed LGBTQ+ persons in staff ministry roles who so far have not been eligible for credentialing and ordination. A decision to expand credentialing eligibility would give space to affirm these individuals and their call to ministry. An expansion to eligibility could also be difficult for some congregations that would maintain a traditional view of marriage and would wish the conference to maintain that standard.

Please pray for this delegate gathering and for members of ACC's committees as they listen, pray and discern together over the next few months. 




Nearly \$4,000 raised for 2022 Nickels for Neighbors Grant

By ACC Staff

ACC congregations raised \$2879.08 for the New Holland Early Learning Center, ACC's 2022 recipient of the Nickels for Neighbors Grant.

Each year the grant is given to a ministry related to an ACC congregation that serves children. Congregations are encouraged to raise funds in Sunday School classes or services as a way to encourage giving among our children.

This year's grant will support the ongoing classroom needs of the Early Learning Center. Materials make it possible for the children to learn and experience real-life situations and work together. Any additional contributions may still be sent to the ACC office.

ACC's Missions Committee is accepting applications for the 2023 Nickels for Neighbors grant through March 3, 2023. Application and details can be found at acc-conf.link/n4n/app. 



Hiring: Office Coordinator

Rossmere Mennonite Church, a congregation of the Atlantic Coast Conference of Mennonite Church USA, is looking for a part-time Office Coordinator (approximately 20 hours/week). This individual should be proficient with office technologies, possess good communication skills, and be able to perform other administrative tasks as assigned. Key responsibilities will include assisting the pastor in maintaining and coordinating church records, signups, weekly bulletins and office related tasks. Additionally, they will be expected to attend and take minutes for the monthly church council meeting. Candidates should espouse faith and values consistent with that of the congregation. Please send resumes and references to pastor@rossmeremennonitechurch.org. A full job description can be found at rossmeremennonitechurch.org.

Upcoming Events



ACC Annual Spring Assembly

April 22, 2023

African Community Church of Lancaster, Manheim, PA

Plan to join us for the 2023 Annual Spring Assembly. This annual gathering of delegates is open to general attendees. Each Assembly includes times of worship together, learning, and sharing, along with the work of conference life. Look for more details in the coming months.



#MennoCon23

July 2-8, 2023

MennoCon23, Mennonite Church USA's largest faith formation gathering, will be held July 3-8, 2023, in Kansas City, Missouri.

There will be programming for all ages, including a one-day Climate Summit for youth and young adults. See the tentative block schedule here: mennoniteusa.org/mennocon-schedule

"The same Spirit that empowered Jesus also empowers us to love enemies, to forgive rather than to seek revenge, to practice right relationships, to rely on the community of faith to settle disputes, and to resist evil without violence."

**"Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,"
Article 22: Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance**

MASS INCARCERATION

Learn. Pray. Join. 

Mennonite Church USA launched the "Learn, Pray, Join: Mass Incarceration" initiative in September. This initiative, in conjunction with the "For Justice in the U.S. Criminal Legal System" resolution, examines the injustices in our criminal legal system that cause pain and suffering, especially for poor people and people of color. This initiative also calls us to claim our legacy as a historic peace church and to live into our Anabaptist faith values, resisting injustice in all forms and in all places.

The initiative provides MC USA members with opportunities to learn about mass incarceration, an invitation to pray for repentance for participating in a "culture of criminalization, and a call to join by ministering to those harmed by mass incarceration.. Read more here: mennoniteusa.org/news/lpj-mi

MC USA's regular "Learn, Pray, Join" initiatives seek to create opportunities across the church to deepen understanding around a common topic and to come together in prayer and support.