

Atlantic Coast Conference
CURRENTS

Fall/Winter 2023/2024

Annual Report Edition

Volume 46, Issue 1



Youth from five ACC congregations gathered at James Street Mennonite Church on November 12 for ACC's first friendsgiving meal.


From the Moderator

ACC navigates transitions and continues seeing God at work

By Gina Burkhardt

For ACC 2023 was a year of transitions, both expected and unexpected, joyful and painful. The Executive Committee is grateful for the shared wisdom of the church and the presence of the Holy Spirit as we navigated through staffing changes, health crises, congregational losses, and credentialing discernment. We are especially thankful for the conference staff who kept the work going with a generous spirit of camaraderie. Personally, I am grateful for an amazing group of leaders who serve on the executive committee and on other conference committees offering countless hours of servant leadership. We are richly blessed by their expertise and their commitment to the church.

Despite new budget challenges and shifting patterns, the Executive Committee feels hopeful about the future of our conference and believes that God is at work! The diverse ways that congregations are sharing and living their faith is the heartbeat of who we are as a conference and we are encouraged by the creative and steadfast ways that congregations are being the church: nurturing children's faith, connecting conference youth to each other and the broader church, finding greater understanding of racism, adapting worship for new patterns, caring for creation, affirming new leaders, and making disciples who walk boldly in the footsteps of Jesus.

We give thanks for each congregation and member of ACC and we remain committed to our mission to be a community centered in Christ, building connections, and sharing God's love. What will that look like for us in the coming years? How will we be transformed as God's people? What new structures or activities or relationships will be needed? We welcome your prayers and conversations as we hold to the promise in Isaiah 43:19 "See I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up! Do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." We pray for eyes to see God's new work in our faith community and for the courage to embrace it! 

Staff Update

By Joanne H. Dietzel

Our life is truly a journey and we are always on the road. A new year gives opportunity to pause and reflect on where we have been and to ponder how the journey has been for us. Each new year invites us to set aside our fears, worries and concerns and open ourselves to God in the mystery, beauty, opportunities, wonder, and new relationships. At the beginning of 2023, I had no idea how much the following words from Joyce Rupp's *Out of the Ordinary* would minister to me throughout the year:

**“Come! Come!
Be not wary of what awaits you as
you enter the unknown terrain;
Be not doubtful of your ability to
grow from its joys and sorrows.
For I am with you. I will be your Guide.
I will be your Protector.
You will never be alone.”**

At the ACC Spring Assembly, we celebrated the 35 years that Merv Stoltzfus served on the ACC staff in various positions. When Merv announced his retirement, a committee was put into place to find a person to fill the position of Executive Conference Minister. After a few nudges, I agreed to meet with the committee for conversation and discernment. By early March, I agreed to accept the position which started on April 1. However, on March 10, I was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma and was soon receiving weekly chemo infusions. What did this mean for beginning a new position? The words, “Be not wary of what awaits you as you enter the unknown terrain” came to mind along with the support of Executive Committee and my oncologist – to keep moving forward in the position recognizing there were unknowns. The many thoughts, prayers, and support from the ACC faith community have carried me through 2023.

What a blessing it was to have Mick Sommers accept the position as a half-time Conference Minister in July. Mick works with several congregations and cluster groups along with meeting with Executive Committee and Ministerial Leadership

Committee. He has also represented ACC at the Constituency Leaders Council meetings and Conference Minister gatherings.

I continue to be grateful for the work of Ruth Yoder Wenger with our four congregations in New York City (Friendship Community, Grace and Peace, Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, North Bronx). Ruth is the pastor at North Bronx Mennonite Church and also serves on the board of the Brooklyn Peace Center. As a staff, we enjoy when she is able to be in the Lancaster area and we can meet together in person!

Throughout the year, Njoki Njoroge (Finance Secretary) faithfully and capably kept the finances of ACC up-to-date. She prepared monthly reports for Executive Committee and year-end reports for ACC delegates. Whenever there were questions about a line item in the budget or some historical background on a financial situation, we could depend on Njoki to find the answer or give counsel.

The whole of ACC benefits from the gifts and work of Brook Musselman in his role as Conference Coordinator and Youth Minister. He gives attention to the many details of the Annual Assembly as well as other events, webinars, etc. that are planned throughout the year. Brook very efficiently keeps pastor and chaplain credentials updated for ACC and MC USA. We all appreciate the more “youthful” perspective Brook brings to ideas and planning.

I am deeply appreciative of each of these persons and the many ways they stepped in and filled the gaps this past year while going through chemo infusions and then a stem cell transplant. With my oncologist telling me that I am in remission, I look forward to working with Mick, Njoki, Ruth, and Brook as we continue to walk alongside the pastors, leaders, and congregations of ACC.

Currents is a quarterly publication that seeks to inspire and inform about ways God is working in congregations and related ministries of Atlantic Coast Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

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Contributions of stories and photos for the Spring 2024 edition may be sent by April 12 to currents@atlanticcoastconference.net.

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2023 Executive Committee Action Summary

Approved the sponsorship of 2023 Stewardship University at the \$500 level (October 2022).

Approved six grants from the Congregational Leadership Fund totaling \$4,804 (December 2022).

Approved funding Kenn Thompson's participation in the Hope for the Future conference (January 2023).

Unanimously and enthusiastically recommended Joanne Dietzel for the position of Executive Conference Minister (January 2023).

Affirmed leadership slate nominees Michael Charles, Dwight Rohrer, and Elisa Parmer for committee leadership roles and recommended them to delegates for approval in April (January 2023).

Approved sending Daniel Jacke (Ridgeview) to MennoCon23 as a youth delegate representing ACC (March 2023).

Received letters from Hope Community Church and Oley Valley Mennonite Church sharing their decision to move their affiliation to LMC (April 2023).

Affirmed hiring Mick Sommers as part-time associate conference minister (July 2023).

Approved the addition of Juneteenth as a paid staff holiday beginning in 2024 (July 2023).

Approved six grants from the Congregational Leadership Fund totaling \$5,688 to be dispersed in July and an additional \$4,656 in December (July 2023).

Received a letter from Conestoga Mennonite Church noting their decision to move their membership to LMC effective immediately (August 2023).

Recommended to delegates the shift of the Missions Committee with the intention of merging its mission into that of a potentially renamed Peace & Justice Committee (October 2023).

Approved funding Anita Castle's participation in the Hope for the Future conference and that funding for a representative's attendance be included in future budgets (December 2023).

2023 ACC Timeline

February 4: ACC delegates (including credentialed ministers) attended a special meeting at Forest Hills Mennonite Church. This was a time for delegates to review congregational feedback, listen and share counsel ahead of the decision by ACC's Executive and Ministerial Leadership Committees on credentialing LGBTQ+ leaders.

February 6: The Ministerial Leadership Committee (MLC) of Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) affirmed its readiness to process credentialing requests for LGBTQ+ ministers.

March 31: Merv Stoltzfus retired as Executive Conference Minister after 35 years of ministry with ACC. Joanne Dietzel affirmed as next Executive Conference Minister of Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC).

April 22: ACC Annual Assembly at African Community Church. The theme of Re-storying God's Mission focused on practical kingdom-building in our communities.

Delegates released Hope Community Church and Oley Valley Mennonite Church from membership. Both joined LMC.

June 1: Conestoga Mennonite Church leaves ACC to join LMC.

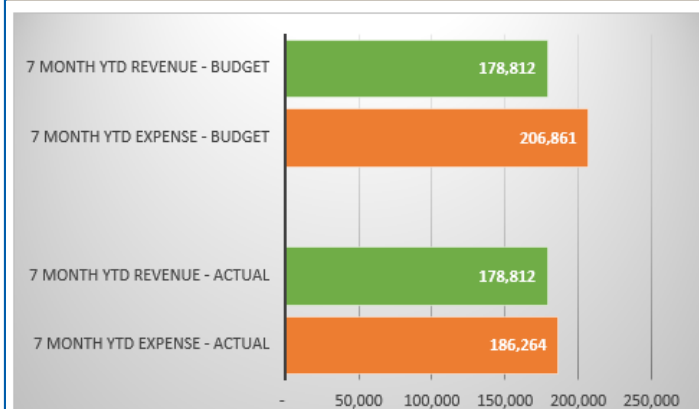
June 18: ACC along with several member congregations hosted Theatre of the Beat's presentation of Selah's Song at Blossom Hill Mennonite Church.

July 3: Nearly 100 youth and adults travel together to MennoCon23 in Kansas City.

September 8-10: ACC Youth gathered for the annual Fall Retreat at Refreshing Mountain.

December 31: Neffsville Mennonite Church left ACC to join Mosaic Mennonite Conference

ACC finances at a glance: January 31, 2024



Leadership Transitions

Beginnings:

Angelique Chelton began her role as Pastor of Pilgrims Mennonite Church on September 1.

Jonathan Landis was granted a License Toward Ordination for his ongoing role as Minister of Music and Worship at James Street Mennonite Church.

Dorcus Lehman began her role as Interim Lead Pastor of James Street Mennonite Church on February 1.

Anna Ressler was granted a License Toward Ordination. She began as Pastor of Hebron Mennonite Church on September 1.

Klaudia Smucker began her role as Interim Pastor of Ridgeview Mennonite Church on April 1.

Endings:

Mindy Nolt ended her role as Associate Pastor of Blossom Hill Mennonite Church on January 31.

Stan Shantz ended his role as Lead Pastor of James Street Mennonite Church on December 31.

Nelson Yoder ended his role as Pastor of Pilgrims Mennonite Church on September 1.

ACC to release Ark, Conestoga, Neffsville and Zion congregations

Since our 2023 Assembly in April, we have said goodbye to two more congregations as Conestoga and Neffsville Mennonite Churches have taken steps to connect with other conferences. In July 2023, Conestoga was granted membership with LMC after a period of discernment about new affiliation.

Neffsville joined Mosaic Mennonite Conference on January 1, 2024 as an associate member after its own time of discernment. Joanne Dietzel, ACC's Executive Conference Minister, joined the transition service on January 7 to offer a blessing on the congregation as it builds new relationships and connections.

Zion also informed conference leaders of its decision to join LMC. Joanne Dietzel and Merv Stoltzfus joined the congregation for a farewell and transition on January 7. Ark Bible Chapel also indicated its plans to move to LMC in a February-dated letter to conference leaders.

These departures follow Hope Community Church and Oley Valley Mennonite Church which both withdrew their affiliation with ACC in April, 2023. Conestoga, Neffsville, and Zion will be released by delegate council action at the March 16 Assembly. [↪](#)



2023 Peace Mug Awarded to Boston Immigration Supporters

ACC's Peace and Justice Committee selects a peace mug recipient each year to highlight and recognize past and present Shalom work being done in our communities. This year the committee selected Kendra Eshleman and Rebecca Pries of Mennonite Congregation of Boston as its recipients.

Becca and Kendra serve with their local branch of Refugee Immigration Ministries to support refugee families in our community. They have been dedicated and relentless advocates and supporters for two families in particular over the past few years. Their work includes connecting the families to services and supports in the community such as safe housing, food, clothing, medical assistance, vocational training, and more, organizing financial help, and just walking with these families as they navigate various systems and barriers.

They began five years ago after feeling a need as their community received a higher than normal number of resettled refugees and as the anti-refugee rhetoric increased. They have been matched with two families over these years, both single Ugandan mothers with small children. Besides housing, they provided whatever material or social support was needed as these families transitioned and navigated the immigration process.

One of the sobering aspects for Becca and Kendra has been sharing the feeling of helplessness that families experience in the system.

"What impressed upon me is what it is like to have your fate and the fate of your children completely at the mercy of a state agency," noted Becca. "We sat with the family as they waited to learn whether they would find a place to stay by the end of that day. It was a relief to her that she got into a place that was very well run. But her asylum application has been put off time and time again and it will be years until it is resolved."

Kendra explained that as families wait for their cases to be heard, they are often not allowed to work and dependent on an unreliable amount of benefits provided to those in their situation. "Many are stuck in limbo for years and have little help to navigate the process," she explained.

"It's an honor to be able to do this with these families and gratifying to know how we've been able to help them but also sobering to realize that it's a tiny, tiny tip of the iceberg," shared Becca of the experience.

If you have someone in your congregation you'd like to nominate for next year's peace mug, send their name and involvement to office@atlanticcoastconference.net. [↪](#)

Congregational Stories



Akron Mennonite Church, Akron, PA

A core value of Akron Mennonite Church is to care for creation which has guided much of our work together this past year. We have watched and participated in the transformation of our property into a nature preserve. On July 31, 2022, we held a service of blessing in our Grove before the work of moving earth began on August 1. Neighbors, representatives from sister churches and Akron Borough, and Diamond Street Early Childhood Center staff joined us in the 3pm gathering of song, thanksgiving, and prayer. In August and September, the ground was prepared, a sidewalk installed, and a cover crop of clover and rye was sown to inhibit erosion. We hosted a "Goodbye Invasives Party" on September 10. On Saturday, October 15, 125 people planted 410 native trees. The event brought together congregational attendees (from a 1-year-old to a 92-year-old), neighbors and people belonging to Mennonite sister congregations, Akron Lions Club, the Ephrata High School Future Farmers of America, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. A few weeks later, a landscaping company planted an additional 30 larger native trees. In early December mulch walking paths were installed. And then we and the earth rested until spring.

Care for the earth and our physical bodies are intertwined. Upon our death we return to the earth from which we have come. As part of our year of transformation, on March 29, 2023, we gathered to celebrate the life of a beloved member with a green burial. Our journey of transformation was documented in the May 5 Anabaptist World issue. We worshiped in the grove on June 25, 2023 during a series entitled, "We are standing on Holy ground." During that service we walked through the nature preserve. We are pilgrims walking together with the Divine in our care for the earth.

Bethel Mennonite Church, Gettysburg, PA

In late June, Bethel hosted VBS/Kids Club for three days. Nineteen children along with some adults made and delivered homemade cards to residents of a nursing home. The overall VBS theme was "God Speaks to Us" and God spoke through

the actions of youth and adults visiting, singing to, and sharing with the residents of the home. A follow-up Family Fun Night in August provided VBS families and others the opportunity to come for a slip-n-slide and campfire with food and fellowship.

Bethel's Community Yard Sale welcomes those from the community to set up in the church parking lot and sell their own stuff. Many are blessed by fellowship and getting to know each other. Sometimes prayer happens between people; and some ongoing friendships have grown from this event.



Birch Grove Mennonite Church, Port Allegheny, PA

At Birch Grove, one of the services we look forward to is our annual outdoor service. Although this year it was a little chilly, it was good to worship in the outdoors of God's creation! Following the service we gathered around the table in a time of fellowship and enjoyed a delicious meal together!

In the last year we have met several times prayerfully discerning who God is calling us to be as his church. Since the pandemic, we have experienced new life and sensed God doing a new thing in and among us! We strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we seek to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God! We strive to be a place where everyone feels welcome and finds a place to belong!

One of the ways we strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus is through our monthly food distribution which God continues to bless in many ways! It's our prayer that everyone has food to eat and that no one hungers!



Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

Blossom Hill Mennonite Church has many things to be grateful for this past year. One of the highlights was being able to pay off the mortgage on our building addition from 2007. Our fall congregational retreat will help us to re-envision how we shape our budget. We now have the ability to create a fund for building shalom in our community and beyond.

Another recent joyful happening is the addition of a new staff position, Director of Children and Youth. Crystal Wenger began her work in August, and we look forward to the ways she will help to support our growing children and youth program.

Finally, one popular idea that came from a member of our congregation was the addition of what we called Mixer Small Groups to our Small Group program. People from the congregation could sign up for these groups which were divided into small groups that met bi-weekly for about 2 months. This was an attempt for new folks to get to know others in the congregation and also for everyone to get to know others in a deeper way. People enjoyed the ability to connect in an organized and shortened time frame that was easier to commit to with busy schedules.

Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Lancaster, PA

After pandemic-related delays, this past year brought welcome progress on a couple of ways that CMCL has been seeking to live out our core values:

- Recently, we celebrated the installation of a mural we commissioned following the killing of George Floyd. Local artist Salina Almanzar-Oree engaged us and our local neighbors in the development and painting of the design she entitled: For the Beauty of the Earth. Using a stained glass style, Salina created a parrot (symbolizing the Spirit of God) soaring across the building's actual location. Hidden within the leaves around the parrot are vignettes that honor the past, present and hoped-for future of our Lancaster neighborhood: Susquehannock longhouses, waterways, the printing company that once occupied the building, local civil rights actions, a dancer from



a recent Puerto Rican parade in Lancaster, and martyr Dirk Willems to symbolize our Anabaptist faith.

- Over the last year, CMCLers with construction experience renovated the building on which the mural now hangs. We're excited that this first floor community gathering space and second floor one-bedroom low-income apartment are now being used. (Thanks to Chestnut Housing for managing the apartment rental!)
- We finalized plans to improve accessibility to our church building with an elevator lift to bring differently-abled visitors into the Christian Ed lobby.
- We learned about our country's past and present racial injustices and we continue to ask ourselves how God's Spirit is calling us to participate in reparations and racial justice.
- As a new church year begins, we look forward to continuing to gather together before God for worship, fellowship, and service.

CrossWay Church, Ocean City, MD

Crossway Church is pleased to say that 2023 has been a blessed and enjoyable year. As always, we have continued to see many familiar faces of extended family who visit us while in Ocean City on vacation. How awesome it is that they count us as their home away from home. We have also been blessed this year with new growth. We have been pleased to welcome a large family into our fold and enjoy sharing our lives with them. So great to hear some young kids again! We have also been blessed with a new couple who have taken on the responsibilities of worship leader and running the computer during service. It is great to have a worship team again. We have had many successful outreach, fellowship breakfasts, yard sales, Wednesday night Bible studies, women's Bible studies and summer camp. As always, our Training Station preschool is enrolled to full capacity. At Crossway Church we are truly blessed to call each other family, and we look forward to praise, worship, and serve an ever-loving God as He teaches and leads us to be His people.



East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

What does it mean to follow Jesus in these times of food insecurity, climate crisis, political polarization, economic injustice, and racial inequity? We seek to be a congregation that is actively grappling with these questions in our lives together.

We are grateful for the new ministry of our associate pastor Elisa Parmer among us. She is entering her second year of studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary.

Our Community Meal every Monday is part of a network of faith communities working shoulder to shoulder to address food insecurity in our city. At our church, we are grateful to be able to collaborate on these meals with other ACC congregations, including Neffsville, Blossom Hill, Rossmere, and James Street.

Chestnut Housing Corporation continues to renovate affordable spaces for households coming out of homelessness. We are excited about its new strategic plan to create or preserve 100 affordable homes in five years.

Our worship of God continues to nourish our congregation's life and mission. We are deeply grateful for the way that our faith rituals—like communion, baptism, and anointing—help us to experience God's grace, renewal, and healing in our lives together.

Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, PA

Forest Hills Mennonite Church is following Jesus. Together. We gather regularly for worship, fellowship, study, and service. Our physical building is located in Leola, PA, and we've also been working to understand the dynamics of online worship services, which sometimes challenges our geographically-bounded sense of identity.

One growth edge for Forest Hills has been welcoming and integrating newer attendees, including several from more conservative or plain Anabaptist backgrounds. Discovering points of commonality in our shared heritage—as well exploring areas of difference and divergence—has been richly rewarding.

We have also said goodbye to several attendees, with some departures resulting from differing perspectives on how



the broader church relates with the LGBTQ+ community. Maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace remains a core priority of our congregation, but it is often easier said than done.

Forest Hills congregants serve in many ways, including volunteering with Atlantic Coast Conference, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, and other organizations. Closer to home, we partner with programs like Bridge of Hope, Conestoga Valley Christian Community Services and Conestoga Valley SEEDS, a new nonprofit focusing on housing, education, and health.

We marked several significant milestones this year, including births and parent child dedications, high school and college graduations, baptisms (two) and membership transfers, weddings, and funerals. Worship themes have included communion and community, liminal experiences, understandings of sin, our culture's "knowledge crisis," the parables found in Luke 15, and the Epistle of 1 John.



Hebron Mennonite Church, Hagerstown, PA

Hebron Mennonite Church in Hagerstown, Maryland welcomed new pastor, Anna Ressler, on September 1! Anna comes from Kidron, Ohio, having grown up in the Sonnenberg Mennonite Church congregation. She graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart,

Indiana in 2023 with a Master of Divinity degree. She majored in Pastoral Ministry and received the seminary's award for Excellence in Biblical Interpretation. Anna is an avid baker and Biblical storyteller. She enjoys theater, singing, hiking and dark chocolate.

Hebron recently installed 16 solar panels on our South-facing roof. We look forward to a decrease in our electric bills in the near future. Our community garden is thriving. The garden is now fenced to discourage wildlife from helping themselves!



James Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

A big year of transitions! Our Administrator of 22 years (Kelly Winters) moved on to work at Tenfold in April and our Pastor of 19 years (Stan Shantz) retired at the end of December. Our Minister of Youth, Alysha Argot, moved on to work at Friendship Community and is graciously helping us out until the end of September. We have a new Administrator (Mary Lapp) and will have a new Interim Pastor, Lead Pastor and Minister of Youth eventually! We will miss Kelly, Stan and Alysha, but we are excited for everyone's new adventures and plan to keep in touch.

MC USA Convention 2023! Stan Shantz, Carmen Horst Okanya and Jonathan Landis were all delegates. Our very own Nelson Okanya was an opening night speaker and Bonita Garber is a member of the Resolutions Committee. The fellowship and connection were greatly enjoyed – in addition to good Kansas BBQ!

Settling into post-Covid life. We are getting our Congregational and Community Connections fully in motion! We had our annual Adventurers Backpacking trip in May and have a camping trip planned for October. We are having a Community Yard Sale and Lunch together with our neighborhood scheduled for late August and September. We also served on a Mennonite Disaster Service trip in late fall in Arcadia, FL, and again hosted the Roots program this winter.

All in all, we are grateful for the goodness of God and have lots to be excited about!

Landisville Mennonite Church, Landisville, PA

It's been a good year at Landisville Mennonite Church, with many signs of the Spirit's presence at work in and around us. One of those signs is the change that's happened in our forest and meadow project. What a gift to see young trees growing beyond their containers, and the lovely colors sprouting in the meadow. Another was hearing several of our youth share their first experiences from a Mennonite Convention. They learned much and enjoyed every minute of it. As part of a multi-year discernment process, we are offering an elective Sunday School class for adults this fall, using the Peaceful Practices curriculum from MCC. We are also planning to host a day-long training on communication facilitated by Advoz. Our hope is to continue to develop and grow our ability to engage with each other in healthy ways at all times, and especially in times of disagreement. These signs of the Spirit's work among us make for a good year and a hopeful one too.



Laurel Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

In April we were filled with a mix of emotions as we sadly said goodbye to our pastors, Ron and Judy Zook, and celebrated the beginning of their retirement. We are so thankful for the leadership of Transitional Pastor, Steve Crane, as we move forward!

Over the past year and a half, our congregation has shown vulnerability and humility as we worked together to create a living document which communicates where we stand on inclusion of members of the LGBTQ community.

A group of parents with young children began a monthly small group this past year, during which beautiful connections were made among parents and children through sharing meals, conversations, and laughter!

Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, Manhattan, NY

Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship meets at the 15th Street Friends Meeting House in the heart of New York City. Our congregation is small, yet robust, in part due to the dynamic

nature of the city. MMF is a home for both ethnic Mennonites and those who've been called to this third way Christianity. While sometimes it is challenging to have people join with the church for a limited time, such as for a few years while completing a graduate program, we are blessed as a congregation to have this ebb and flow of people contributing to the spiritual life of the fellowship. We continue to participate in various ways with the NYC Council of Mennonite Churches, learning and growing together as we seek to embody God's love and sacred ways. We look forward to the annual fall retreat at Camp Deerpark where the NYC ACC congregations have sponsored a cabin (named Wisdom). Although MMF is several hours from most ACC churches, we are thankful for the network, community, and family that is formed through our conference.



class a month, we focused on a different slice of our history. "The church emerged as a unique Mennonite expression in contrast to the surrounding rural Mennonite environment. New Holland Mennonite provides a setting to find God's Spirit at work in the midst of sociological, cultural, and even theological changes." (From "A People on the Way: History of the New Holland Mennonite Church: Seventy-Five Years 1922-1997" by Darvin L. Martin.) This is as true then as it is today.



One of the theological changes that we explored this year was our understanding of LGBTQIA. In May we adopted the following statement, which begins with our core values statement: "With Jesus as our center, we commit to including all people, strengthening our relationships, and practicing peace and justice. Therefore, New Holland Mennonite Church acknowledges the past treatment and exclusion of persons from the LGBTQIA community and welcomes people of all gender identities and sexual orientations into the full participation of the church community, which includes baptism, membership, marriage, leadership, and pastoral ministry."

Mennonite Congregation of Boston, Cambridge, MA

The Mennonite Congregation of Boston is living a year of change! Last March, three generations of MCOBers gathered for our first Winter Retreat (and the first retreat since before the pandemic) at the wonderful Woolman Hill Quaker Retreat Center in Deerfield, MA. On May 14th, we installed Kate André as our long-term pastor. Two babies have been born into the congregation so far this year. We gathered in June to grieve the loss of one of our founding members. And beginning September 2023, we'll be moving to a new worship space at the Friends Meeting at Cambridge, further strengthening our local Anabaptist connections. If anyone finds themselves in the Greater Boston Area, please know that you are most welcome at the Mennonite Congregation of Boston: <https://mennonitecongregationofboston.org> May the months ahead be filled with expansions in the congregation's direct service, the joyful arrival of newcomers, and plenty of potlucks!

New Holland Mennonite Church includes two unique ministries in the New Holland Early Learning Center and the Sprouts for Peace Garden. On the fourth Friday of each month this summer, the three ministries combined in a Sprouts for Peace Garden Church. When the weather cooperated, we fed body (simple meal), mind (worship) and soul (garden work). Friday evening worship replaced Sunday morning worship.

A highlight of our summer was an outdoor worship, baptism of Davin Esbenshade, and a picnic at the Esbenshade Farm in July.

New Holland Mennonite Church, New Holland, PA

Happy Birthday New Holland Mennonite Church! On November 18, 2023 New Holland Mennonite Church will celebrate its 100th birthday. This year, during one Sunday school

North Baltimore Mennonite Church, Baltimore, MD

After several years in transition, North Baltimore Mennonite Church rejoices to have two pastoral hires to share. Arthur Stewart, our new Lead Pastor, began in May and was formally installed on September 17. Arthur and his wife Margie moved to Baltimore from Fresno, California, where they lived and served for several years. Previously, Arthur had been in South Africa for 16 years, working primarily in areas of spiritual



formation, peacemaking, and leadership training. He is also currently working on a Doctor of Ministry at AMBS.

We are also excited to have hired Ashley Hoard as our Associate Pastor for Children and Youth. Ashley has been faithfully serving in a number of roles at our church, including as the youth coordinator. She is currently pursuing her Master of Divinity at AMBS, and we anticipate the ways her pastoral gifting will be lived out amongst us.

Finally, our ministry at the Reservoir Hill House of Peace (RHHP) and residential Asylum Seekers Housing Network (ASHN) continues to grow as a vibrant ministry in Baltimore. New residents, grant funding for improving the physical plant and services, and new house coordinators (Jim Yoder and Linda Bertsche) contribute to our ability to provide stability, safety, welcome, and community to asylum seekers. The fall we will also host two International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP, MCC) participants from Chad at RHHP.



Pilgrims Mennonite Church, Akron, PA

Being a church family, updating our Statement of Mission and Commitment, and seeking additional ways to engage with our community have been key activities of the past year at Pilgrims Mennonite. Our life together has included the baptism of three youth, appreciating an increase in the number of people attending worship, individuals participating in personal retreats and a retreat day for the congregation, and many conversations and

prayers as we walk together. Participation in a small group and weekly worship services are central experiences offering support, care, and opportunities for growth. Over time a number of congregants have found it difficult to be part of a small group so we are imagining new ways to have meaningful relationships that offer care and support to each other and also remain accountable to the congregation. We continue to annually sign our covenant, expressed in our Statement of Mission and Commitment, which was updated to clearly state our welcome of LGBTQ persons and their families to full participation in church life and ministry. Community Action Teams formed, letting people identify and implement ways to engage with the community and share information about the congregation. We became a member congregation of POWER Interfaith to join ministries for justice in the community. Our congregation continues to have two families serving in international settings. We anticipate having a new pastoral elder as Nelson Yoder concludes his time with us.



Rossmere Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

The first week of July found many Rossmerites out of the state, out of the country, and enjoying live music. Five youth and one adult sponsor (along with Pastor Todd) spent the week in Kansas City for MennoCon 23. The youth were energized by times of worship, challenged by speakers and seminar leaders, and motivated by the Climate Summit at the end of the week. Connections were made with other youth groups and a place of belonging was found in the wider church.

At the same time as MennoCon, a multigenerational group of children and adults traveled to Hidden Acres Camp in Ontario. For the first time in four years RISE (Rossmere in Service Experience) took place, providing an opportunity for service and fellowship. Participants helped construct a deck for staff housing, cut/stacked wood, cleaned cabins, and spent time enjoying each other's company. There were also ample opportunities to reconnect with the Brent & Mary Anne Musser family, former attendees of Rossmere who now live at the camp.

Those who weren't able to travel that week were treated to a concert by the Walking Roots Band. Even though the threat of rain moved the band's performance from the church lawn to under the carport the concert was able to go on.

Conference Related Ministry Stories



Bridge of Hope - National

Felix is a typical 7-year-old boy who doesn't sit still – he likes monster trucks, his second grade teacher and seeing his friends at school. Felix, his mom and little sister had to move in with a family friend, all three sharing one bedroom. Felix is excited about the possibility of having a room all to himself when his mom finds a new home – he wants to put monster truck posters on the walls! But he is worried that moving to a new place could mean having to switch schools.

For Lucia, Felix's mom, it's difficult to live "doubled up" like this, constantly feeling like she has to live on someone else's schedule. She is very cautious not to get in the way and to clean up after themselves – it feels like walking on eggshells.

Lucia reached out to Bridge of Hope for help. Her case manager and Neighboring Volunteers are helping the family to look for a place of their own, but affordable housing options are slim right now.

The whole family needs love and support from a group of Neighboring Volunteers. Supportive Neighboring relationships developed in Bridge of Hope can also help to move families beyond traumatic experiences such as homelessness and encourage the process of healing.

The nationwide affordable housing crisis is affecting so many families like Lucia and Felix. We have received a shocking 284% increase in calls for help from families in the past three years.

ACC Churches - Frazer Mennonite, Forest Hills Mennonite, James Street Mennonite, Rossmere Mennonite, and New Holland Mennonite - have supported Bridge of Hope's work through Neighboring, financial contributions, use of space for events, and more. Neffsville Mennonite currently rents a home to a family in Bridge of Hope at an affordable rate, helping in the face of an affordable

housing crisis. We are so grateful to Atlantic Coast church members for their Neighboring support, generosity and for their involvement on our Community Boards

Brooklyn Peace Center

Brooklyn Peace Center recently celebrated its two-year anniversary as an organization. Through partnerships, arts & culture events, workshops, and social enterprises, BPC serves as a catalyst for peacebuilding. Every fourth Saturday of the month, BPC hosts an art market with local artists and vendors, food and music. And, in partnership with a new organization called Little by Little Brooklyn, BPC hosts a monthly artist-in-residence that culminates in a performance for the community. Recently, BPC launched Peace Café, a social enterprise that serves excellent coffee and provides a community hub throughout the week. Peace Café barista, Stevie Lujan, a singer-songwriter who was born and raised in Maui, recently organized a Maui Benefit Concert (more than \$2k were raised and distributed to Maui Mutual Aid) at BPC for the NYC Hawaiian community and those who care. In regards to partnerships, Believers Mennonite Garifuna Ministries (LMC) continues to hold services on Sunday evenings; Brooklyn Peace Church (ACC) is a new peace church community that on the second Sunday of the month at 11 AM. Most recently, BPC has opened their doors to a congregation of Kichwa Christians, indigenous Ecuadorians, many of who recently migrated here. Brooklyn Peace Center remains grateful to ACC and the Mennonite faith family whom continues to support and make possible this work.

Camp Deerpark

In February 2023 executive director, Ken Bontrager announced his retirement. Deborah and Ken moved to Camp Deerpark with their two young sons on November 4, 1995. The youth from Conestoga Mennonite Church were here cutting firewood and helped unload their truck.

Over the past year, Ken and Deborah have been sensing that it may be time to move on and allow space for the next director to lead this ministry. Ken and the board are grateful to Ann Weaver who continues to serve as an executive coach and spiritual director through this process. Her guidance has helped to clarify that this is God's leading for camp and the Bontragers. She has also helped Ken and our board to prepare to welcome a new director.

Please keep the Camp Deerpark board and staff in your prayers as we work through this transition. Psalm 127:1-2



Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

God has been completely faithful to Camp Deerpark in so many ways and we believe God will again be faithful in calling the next director.

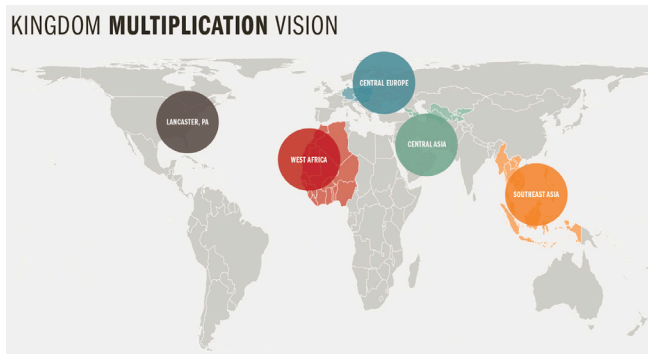
Meanwhile the ministry of Camp Deerpark is going strong. Thank you ACC for your support.



Camp Hebron

Summer season is past, and it was rich with God's presence and stories of lives impacted through the love of Christ. Over 1,700 campers have participated in program events. We have also been blessed to see hosted ministry numbers pass pre-Covid levels. We are so excited for the ways in which God is connecting people through the beauty of creation, fellowship, and worship. We continue to recruit volunteers to help us to grow ministry. We would welcome more volunteers and the chance to visit your churches and share more information about the camp. Fall is here and we are excited to be leading the Release Time school worship for 3rd-5th graders during the school day. Staff are leading the Senior High and Middle School Bible Clubs during the school day.

This past summer we celebrated the completion of the six upper loop cabins and dedicated them into ministry. We are raising funds to support the remodeling of the six lower loop cabins. The total cost of the project is \$680,000 and we are currently raising funds to match a \$100,000 matching grant. Please pray for our team as we continue to pursue God's direction and to share the good news and love of Jesus Christ. If you want a representative to visit your church, please feel free to contact us. You can find additional information about events and volunteer opportunities at www.camphebron.org.



Eastern Mennonite Missions

EMM's strategic focus is to identify, equip, and send missional leaders to serve on multi-generational and multi-ethnic teams who invite people to follow Jesus as maturing, multiplying disciples and nurture transforming communities of worship. We primarily focus on least-reached people groups of Central Asia, Central Europe, Southeast Asia, and West Africa, and refugees in Lancaster, Pa. through programs and partnerships at Hub 450 (hub450.org)

We are passionate about equipping and training the church around the world with missional Anabaptist resources. To fulfill this vision we collaboratively launched an online learning platform called RadixTraining.org. The 16th-century Radical Reformers — also known as the Anabaptists — looked to the “roots” of the church as their inspiration. The term “radical” comes from the Latin word “radix” which means “root.” The early Anabaptists wanted to see the kingdom of God restored to a kingdom that was not of this world — but a kingdom that transcended national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. We want everyone to be able to access these valuable courses, so all of our courses are being offered by donation or “pay what you can.”

Investing in the next generations is an important goal for EMM. We are now offering global and local opportunities for youth through Kingdom Teams and for young adults through Advance. In addition to local opportunities to serve and learn in Lancaster, Pa., and other cities in the Northeast U.S., we're offering outreach experiences in

places like Cambodia, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Thailand.

Friendship Community

Friendship Community is a Christian ministry cultivating capabilities of individuals with Intellectual Disability and Autism in south central Pennsylvania since 1972. Notes from 2023:

Residential services - 73 individuals served

Home-based services - 15 individuals served

Friendship Heart Gallery & Studio - 65 individuals served, in-person Art Auction resumed

Spiritual Nurture - All individuals and team members impacted by the love of Christ!



Lancaster Mennonite School

Lancaster Mennonite School (LM) celebrates the completion of our first school year on a unified PreK through 12th grade campus. The school year was filled with opportunities for new forms of collaboration between faculty across grade levels, classroom volunteering opportunities for older students, and enhanced outdoor learning for elementary students. As we reflect on this exciting year, we are deeply grateful for God's faithfulness and the incredible support of our community.

The year was filled with many highlights. Here are a few: our first class of Spanish Immersion students graduated with strong fluency, and we continue to see students of all ages flourish in this program, which is one way we live out our value of "Cultivate Global Citizens." Students grew holistically and excelled in various extracurriculars including drama, music, art, FFA, athletics, and academic competitions with three high school students receiving state-level honors in music and the boys basketball team winning a state championship.

Superintendent, Dr. Michael Badriaki, completed his first year in this role and is working closely with the Board of Directors and Administrative Team to develop a strategic plan that will carry Lancaster Mennonite School forward building on our 80+ years of excellent Christ-centered education. Our Core Values guide this process; they are: Seek Jesus Wholeheartedly, Live Compassionately, Build Bridges of Peace, Cultivate Global Citizens, Nurture Curiosity and Creativity, and Empower Lifelong Learning. We invite you to partner with us through prayer as we provide another year of faith-infused education for young world changers.



Landis Communities

This has been a year of growth and positive change for Landis Communities. Landis Place on King brings 79 low- and middle-income rental apartments to downtown Lancaster, PA. In addition to needed housing, it uses a new model providing a Care Navigator and Connector to work with residents in all areas of wellness. More information available at <https://www.landisplace.org/>.

Welsh Mountain Home, celebrating a century of providing housing in 2024, embarked on an important renovation and expansion project. Currently 21 additional restrooms are being added. This will decrease the sharing of restrooms, providing residents with increased care and privacy. Renovations will also increase laundry, fitness spaces and other needed repairs. Funding comes from a variety of sources, including congregations. Learn more at <https://welsh-mountainhome.org/giving/centuries-campaign/>.

A growing part of Landis Communities is Home and Community Based Services. One is Landis Adult Day Services (ADS), opened in 1989. ADS builds friendships and enriches daytime hours with meaningful activities and healthy meals for clients as well as giving family members peace of mind. Joe O'Hara is one of these clients. He has found a welcoming place and loves both the team members and the activities there. Recently diagnosed with dementia,

his wife, Esther, sees ADS as an important part of his recent rebound. “We had wondered if Joe attending now was needed, since he is still early in this journey, but are so glad he is there each week.” Read more at <https://landisadult-day.org/>.

Landis Communities is grateful for the prayers, volunteers and financial support from ACC congregations!



Mennonite Children's Choir of Lancaster

Over 150 young singers from 47 congregations, 45 schools and 12 denominations sing in the Mennonite Children's Choir of Lancaster (MCCL). Singing with others in a choir creates community in profound ways -

- learning to blend with others through attentive listening, gaining confidence through being part of a team, and
- engaging with the global church through music texts of faith. We are grateful to provide opportunities for young singers to develop musically, spiritually, and personally.

During our 2022-2023 choir year, MCCL singers shared music in awe-inspiring places like Historic St. Mary's Church in downtown Lancaster, performed and led worship at the Mennonite Disaster Service Annual Celebration, and traveled to Ontario, Canada for a five-day summer tour. Our spring concert theme "Making All Things New" engaged audiences with songs of lament, hope, and praise from the church around the world and across time. Fifteen elementary, middle and high school MCCL singers participated in the American Choral Directors Association honor choirs in February and July.

Highlights for our 2023-2024 choir season are: celebrating MCCL's 25th anniversary, hosting alumni and community singing events in the fall and spring, and sharing Christmas concerts featuring a brass quintet. We look forward to a year of choral singing and are eager to have the local community be a part of this significant year of celebration. To be added to our email list or for more information about choir happenings, please email mccl@lancastermennonite.org.

org.

Mennonite Home Communities

Despite the human toll of the pandemic, Mennonite Home Communities (MHC) has continued to grow and change to adapt to our new realities.

The number of people living at Woodcrest Villa, our independent living community, is the highest it has ever been – nearly 725 – with over 98% of our apartments and villas occupied or reserved. Ten new villas were recently constructed and are 100% occupied. This fall, we start construction of a 35-unit apartment building, Falcon Pointe. The common areas in our Robin Ridge apartment building were recently renovated. A second apartment building, Meadowlark, and a main dining and common area, the Hummingbird building, will undergo common area renovations later this year.

Nursing homes across the country are reducing their number of beds due to inadequate government funding, a strategy we have also adopted. Considering this reality, the Board approved the removal of the Juniata Building, which was replaced with a staff parking lot. MHC is committed to maintaining sufficient beds to provide high quality Skilled Nursing, Personal Care, and rehabilitation services to our Woodcrest Villa residents.

We have launched our Early Advantage Program, which appeals to people who want to ensure they can access our healthcare services when the time comes, without a move to Woodcrest Villa. MHC has led the way in maintaining competitive staff wages, which has benefited employees. We are cooperating with local efforts to beautify and restore the Little Conestoga Creek that traverses both the Mennonite Home and Woodcrest Villa campuses.

Mennonite Life

Mennonite Life has enjoyed an eventful year and welcomed thousands of guests to our museums, research archive and library, and the Biblical Tabernacle Experience.

This spring we kicked off a fundraiser to replace the roof of the Herr House, one of the most precious "artifacts" in our collection and an integral part of the 1719 Museum alongside the Lancaster Longhouse.

After extensive research we are preparing to replace the house's weathered shingles with a new, historically appropriate roof of over 7,000 hand-hewn red oak shingles. This is a significant project for us, and we are grateful for the continuing support the project has received, both through



grants and through our Adopt-a-Shingle campaign.

We have several exciting events coming up this fall, including the Bookworm Frolic, the Maize & Snitz Fest, and a Rare & Used Book auction featuring a Martyrs Mirror that was printed and bound at the Ephrata Cloister in 1748.

If you are interested in history and storytelling, Mennonite Life invites you to membership. Mennonite Life members gain access to extensive historical and genealogical research materials, and receive perks such as admission to exclusive events. We would love to have you join us!

Mennonite Life’s vision is diverse communities connecting across boundaries by knowing and valuing their own and each other’s stories of life, faith, cultures, and histories.

New Person Ministries

This past year has brought many unique challenges that we have never encountered before at New Person Ministries. Though it has been challenging, we have seen a new level of community within the program as residents. We have witnessed residents caring for each other at new levels and even caring for staff. In addition, we have forged a new relationships with employers and landlords and are excited for where God leads us in the next year.

Tel Hai Retirement Community

As we reflect on yet another year in living out the mission of Tel Hai Retirement Community, we have witnessed God’s blessing on our ministry.

Employer of Choice: In March 2023, Tel Hai Retirement Community was certified—for the second year in a row—as a ‘Great Place to Work’ and we couldn’t be more proud of our team members and our intentional focus on workplace culture. We received a ‘trust’ index score of 82%, with more than 91% reflecting they feel good in the ways and work they do to contribute to the community. We’ve made great strides to create an intentional, caring workplace

where team members are engaged, innovative and receive competitive wage and benefit packages.

Affordable Housing: Tel Hai continues to be dedicated to the ongoing management of Tel Haven Apartments, an affordable, limited-income rental option through our partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture/Rural Development Services (USDA/RDS). At Tel Haven, accommodations—which include a living room, eat-in kitchen, bedroom and private bath—are provided to low-income seniors or handicapped/disabled adults who financially qualify as very low, low or moderate as defined by governmental directives and guidelines.



The Shalom Project

The Shalom Project is a post-college gap year focused on service, spirituality, and community. Here are some ways we lived into those areas of focus over the past year:

Service: We established several new internship partnerships with local organizations: Chestnut Housing Corporation, Friendship Community, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, and the Demuth Foundation. Each of our participants is matched with one organization through which they serve the Lancaster community and develop a sense of vocation.

Spirituality: Weekly half-day seminars are part of the Shalom Project experience. This year’s seminars included a prayer labyrinth, learning about the enneagram, spiritual disciplines, and biblical hermeneutics, and meeting with other Christian intentional communities. We also partnered with a spiritual director to offer this resource to our participants.

Community: Our local alumni, board members, and other Lancaster-based intentional communities act as built-in community for incoming participants, many of whom don’t know anyone in Lancaster when they arrive. We’re also grateful for the ways your congregations support and welcome our participants!

Laura Pauls-Thomas (R) with members of East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church.



Creation Care Commuting at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pa.)

By Laura Pauls-Thomas


What if I told you that your congregation can simultaneously (1) reduce your transportation emissions and (2) build a culture of joyful climate action on Sunday mornings? At East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church (ECSMC) in downtown Lancaster, Pa., that's exactly what we're doing.

This past year I had the distinct privilege of being part of Anabaptist Climate Collaborative's Pastoral Care for Climate cohort, a group of U.S. and Canadian pastors and ministry leaders who met for an opening retreat in February, met periodically for Zoom calls with Anabaptist climate leaders throughout the year, and concluded with a closing retreat in December.

As part of the program, we were tasked with creating and implementing a climate change-related project in our congregation or ministry setting. I'm not a pastor, but I serve as Communications Director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)'s East Coast region and I'm a member of my Atlantic Coast Conference congregation's Creation Care Committee.

The Creation Care Committee at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church has been active for more than 16 years in community-based climate actions including tree and native species plantings, energy efficiency improvements to our meetinghouse, and the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.

As a result of my 2023 participation in the Pastoral Care for Climate cohort, I started a "Creation Care Commute" initiative that seeks to reduce transportation emissions and build community around climate action. Marlisa Yoder-Bontrager serves as the chair of the Creation Care Committee, and together we encourage East Chestnutters of all ages to walk, bicycle, or carpool together with other households on the third Sunday of each month, year-round. The initiative began in August 2023 and is going strong!

One aspect of the project that I particularly enjoy is the ECSMC Bike Bus, which rallies churchgoers of all ages to bicycle together through the city to arrive at Sunday worship together on a Creation Care Commute Sunday. To me, the Bike Bus is a beautiful visual representation of how Anabaptist climate action can and should be: joyful, intergenerational, and connecting us more deeply with each other and the community around us. 

Feeding Christ on Monday Nights

By Elisa Parmer

East Chestnut St. Mennonite Church (ECSMC) has been a part of the Lancaster Community Meal Program since 2001. Together, this loose network of churches and organizations serves a free meal for every meal of every day in Lancaster City. As hosts and coordinators of a meal site, we are a link in this bigger social support system that is crucial for many of our housed and unhoused neighbors and friends. But it only works because of the large system of churches and volunteers who support this ministry!

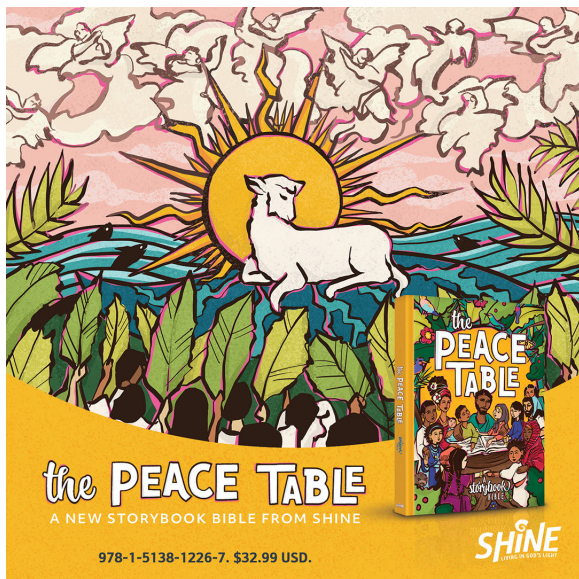
A recent study through the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank in collaboration with Hunger Free Lancaster County showed that “1 in 11 Lancasterians experiences limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” In Matthew 25:34-40, we find Jesus not simply identifying with those who are hungry, but as the hungry. Reminding us that whatever we’ve done to the least of his siblings, we have done to him. And indeed each Monday evening, Christ meets us in the face of each of our guests, showing up at the door, inviting our deeds to demonstrate our faith. These meals are crucial times when the presence of the church is felt in our community. As we begin the 2024 calendar year, we are looking for partners to assist us in providing this meal on Monday evenings. Come, meet Christ in our neighbors on Monday Nights. Please see the welcome packet at bit.ly/partner-meal-packet, to learn how you can participate in the Monday Night Meals at ECSMC. Please contact Pastor Elisa at elisa@ecsmc.



Currents to move to digital-only format

After 44 years of continuous printed publication, ACC's *Currents* newsletter will move to a digital-only format beginning with the Spring 2024 issue.

A shortened version of the newsletter will still be released quarterly and shared with congregations and those who opt into receiving issues by email. You can sign up for quarterly updates at the bottom of ACC's webpage, atlanticcoastconference.net.



The first issue of ACC's *Currents* newsletter from March-April, 1980. Ester Martin served as the first editor of the publication.

New anti-racism updates & resources

ACC approves Juneteenth as paid staff holiday

At its monthly meeting in July, ACC's Executive Committee approved adding Juneteenth to the list of ACC's approved staff holidays. This follows a similar move by the US government in 2021 to recognize June 19 as a federal holiday in celebration of the end of slavery. June 19 is the date in 1865 when, it is said, slaves in Galveston Texas were the last people in the US learned that they had been legally freed.

Originally celebrated only in Texas, Juneteenth has been expanded to celebrate the end of slavery and to acknowledge both that the struggle for racial equality continues and that this country was, in large part, built on the backs of enslaved people.

Gaps remain in our legal system and in our society's view of black and brown people as equal. Those of us with white skin born into a society dominated by white people naturally have biases that we must actively work to undo. This is the work of the people of God's kingdom, in which "is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ (RSV)."

ACC invites congregations to recognize Juneteenth and to join in the work of actively dismantling racism in our communities and in ourselves as individuals. To learn more about Juneteenth, visit the links below:

Juneteenth: A history, by Wilma A. Baily, Ph.D., Blog post from Menno Snapshots, June 16, 2023
<https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/juneteenth-a-history/>

Juneteenth acknowledges freedom delayed by Ben Tapper, blog post from Mennonite Mission Network, June 15, 2022
<https://www.mennonitemission.net/blog/4716/juneteenth-acknowledges-freedom-delayed>

What is Juneteenth? by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Article on pbs.org
<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-is-juneteenth/>

How then shall we live? An action plan toward racial equity

Learning about and internalizing the realities of racism in our culture has no endpoint, no finish line. Those living as part of the dominant white culture will always have more to learn about the experience of people of color (POC) and must meanwhile move into an active response in order to build racial equity in our communities. For this work we follow the lead and the recommendations of POC who have experienced racism and so have the most intimate view of where inequity remains.

This list is shared by Dr. Teman Cooke, a writer and educator from Lancaster, PA. Teman has a Ph.D. in Physics from Georgia Tech, and graduated with a Masters of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary. Having predominantly lived and worked in white spaces for almost forty years, he has a vested interest in finding ways to transform how we (as Americans) understand ourselves and others so as to seed a future built on forming authentically just and meaningfully equitable relationships between individuals and communities. He is married to a Mennonite pastor and has attended a Mennonite church for the past 16 years.

Our intention in sharing this list is to provide suggestions and points of emphasis as Atlantic Coast Conference and other faith communities move deeper into the work of racial equity.

This list is in addition to numerous others that provide excellent ideas for action on the part of the White community trying to be more faithful to the way of Jesus.

Church communities must ascertain how we as church communities have contributed to a culture of injustice.

What would it look like for us to form a truth and reconciliation commission to examine our own complicity as a church in patterns of inequity and unwelcome? Will we

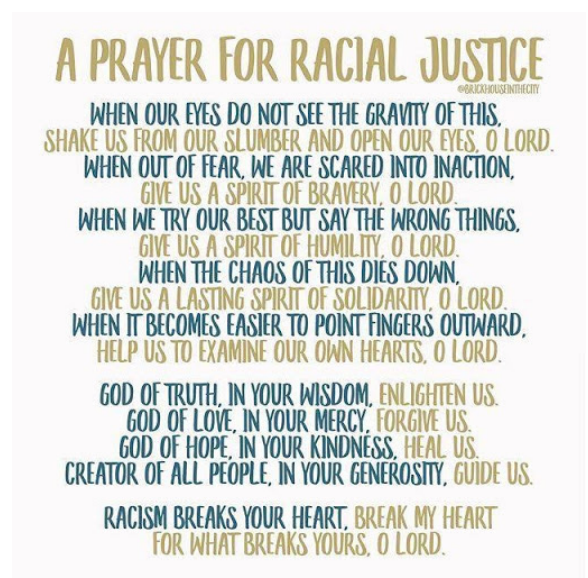
voluntarily uncover the ugliness of our participation in a society that has unfairly benefited some and excluded others? Acknowledging this reality through repentance and lament as a group is a powerful step.

Consider financial donations with no strings, expectations, or control.

Give to those who currently and historically have been disadvantaged. Give financially in a way that contributes toward restoration of historical inequities. Put our monetary influence into a tithe and release control of how it is used. Ideas: 1) Contribute to scholarship programs for disadvantaged youth to attend college. 2) Pay into a fund for using Afro-american spirituals in churches. 3) Donate to programs providing real estate purchasing assistance.

Engage stumbling blocks – these are indicators that we're moving.

If your perspective or experience is being challenged, embrace it. For many of us it is difficult not to be perceived as "good". Naming and exploring biases, which all of us have as members of our society, gives us opportunities to embrace corrective moments. Learning and moving toward a posture of understanding is more important than prioritizing our good image of ourselves. ↪




Consider deemphasizing the creation of a multicultural world/church.

Focus on inequity first. Multiculturalism may come later but we can't expect the whiteness of our spaces to change quickly. When we change how we live in and engage the world, we'll build trust and create more welcoming spaces. Trust takes time. Many POCs have a long history of being harmed and disappointed by white communities. For now, wrap multiculturalism into what white churches do. Practice genuinely appreciating true diversity of thought and opinion and let go of the need for security and comfort in our traditions (yes, including our music styles). Go and worship in other cultural spaces. This experience can help us understand what it's like for minorities to come into our white churches.

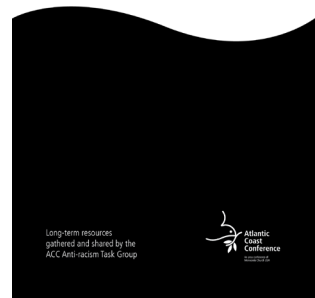
Develop ways to receive necessary feedback

Make it as easy as possible for POC's to trust so they will share their real experiences in our communities. Set up a closed system

of feedback with outside groups collecting responses so there is no connection between what people say and how reviewers hear it. POCs often carry extra work in white communities. They may feel obligated to do a significant amount of self-editing and consider how they appear and how they'll be received. Give them the gift of safety as we work to make our spaces more welcoming. 

This list is included in the Anti-racism Task Group's third resource booklet along with other resources you and your congregation may find helpful. Access and download all three booklets at <https://atlanticcoastconference.net/anti-racism/>

Resources for undoing racism in our churches
Part 3



Lancaster congregation contributes to systemic change with reparations fund

By Susan Gascho-Cooke

In August 2023, Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster committed to an "Action Fund in Lieu of National Reparations: addressing systemic racism in Lancaster County." Beginning with 1% of our budget, the goal is to increase by 1% each year until 10% (Leviticus 27:30) of the budget is reached (to be approved each year).

This fund grew out of long-term congregational discernment. In 2020, CMCL formed a Dismantling Racism Committee within the congregation to give focused attention to how our congregation might work toward dismantling racism.

Our work included:

Most of the congregation participated in a seven-week book discussion of *I'm Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown.

Dr. Drew Hart and Dr. Heather Cotignola-Pickens led us through a Congregational Assessment of Racism and Anti-Racism which involved surveys and interviews followed by congregational discussion of recommendations.

We brought in several guest preachers,

We subsidized a congregational bus trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture,

We brought Rev. Naomi Washington-

Leapheart in for six weeks of Adult Christian Education.

We invited Pastor Trevor Bechtel from Shalom Community Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan to share with us about their congregation's Reparative Act. <https://shalomcc.org/repair/>


(Some of the funding for these items came from a sabbatical grant received by CMCL)

Throughout, we used surveys and group conversations to gauge what actions our communal energy and conviction were moving us toward. The Action Fund in Lieu of National Reparations is just one such action. Our predominantly white congregation "understands it has benefited from white privilege and a legacy of white supremacy and acknowledges a responsibility to help dismantle racial inequities in policing, education, employment, health care and other systems. One substantial way CMCL can contribute to systemic change is to commit to reparations for Black People with a focus specifically in Lancaster County."

While there is essentially unanimous desire within the congregation to work on anti-racism, learning how to work together toward that is complicated! How do you

have frank conversations around topics that no one wants to sound "bad" or "wrong" about?

Deciding that one way to work toward anti-racism was to make a commitment from our congregational budget was not easy. Like many congregations, we have experienced more sporadic attendance since 2020, which makes communal discernment more difficult. We are also entering a year of financial stretch, due to significant pandemic-related increases to ongoing congregational commitments to rehab a building on our property for low-income housing and to improve our church building's accessibility. We discussed whether we should wait a year to enact this fund because 1% was a much lower starting point than we had hoped for. We decided that it was important to begin, even small.

Blessings on all congregations doing difficult and important discernment together! The giving for reparations will be held in a Community Fund and all places of worship are invited to contribute. We would love to hear from, and partner with, other congregations doing anti-racism and/or reparations work. 

2024 ACC Annual Assembly

Living the Change

Details &
registration @
[atlanticcoast
conference.net/
2024_assembly](http://atlanticcoastconference.net/2024_assembly)

Friday night
virtual gatherings
Friday, March 15,
7 – 8:30pm

Saturday sessions
@ Ridgeview
Saturday, March 16,
9am – 12:30pm

Assembly kids
program
Saturday, March 16,
9am – 12:30pm

You're invited to ACC's 2024 Assembly at Ridgeview Mennonite Church on March 15-16. Assembly is a time to gather, reconnect, worship, and learn together. We'll celebrate our shared ministry and faith. Assembly sessions, including delegate times, are an opportunity to talk together about what the church is and about its future.

Assembly's theme of "Living the Change" will explore how we deal with change in society and the church. How do we wrestle with old expectations and new realities? Many Christians are hungry for a place to live out vibrant, Jesus-centered life with others. How does the church nurture that today in a way that connects with all ages, races, and backgrounds? In what ways does "doing church" require a pivot to encounter Jesus and accomplish God's purposes?

We invite both delegates and non-delegates to join us for the weekend's events. These sessions may be especially worthwhile for church leaders, elders, and young people who are interested in helping to shape the future of our church.

Friday night virtual gatherings Friday, March 15, 7 – 8:30pm

Our Friday night session will feature keynote speaker Meghan Larissa Good, lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Phoenix. She is an author, theologian, and frequent speaker around

contemporary church topics.

Meghan will share about the opportunity of this moment in the life of the church. A Jesus-centered Anabaptist community is uniquely situated to meet the needs of those seeking connection and purpose, but meeting this challenge may sometimes require real commitment and change.

Everyone who registers will have access to the virtual gathering. But we encourage groups to gather in homes to listen to and process Meghan's words together.

You may form your own gathering or sign up to be matched with a gathering in your area.

Saturday sessions @ Ridgeview Saturday, March 16, 9am – 12:30pm

Saturday's delegate session will focus on the business of conference life and give delegates a greater familiarity with ACC congregations and our conference community. This session and delegate voting will be available virtually.

Following Saturday's delegate session we'll welcome guest artists from an improvisational ensemble that will invite and honor our stories, relations and calling in this pivotal time, stories that will come to life in a new way on stage.

Storytelling be followed by a facilitated opportunity to share and support each other in what's

Upcoming Events

ACC Annual Assembly

March 15-16, 2024

See details below

AmACcing Race

April 19, 2024

Save the date for this road race that will take groups to different ACC congregations for challenges and tomfulleries. For both jr & sr high students.

July Youth Game Night

July 21, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Join us for snacks and games at Landisville Mennonite Church

working and what's challenging in our congregations as we walk in these new times together.

River Crossing Playback Theatre is an ensemble building bridges of community through the portrayal of audience stories. In Playback Theatre, audiences tell, watch and learn from each other's stories, participating in a new common story that honors both their differences and common ground.

Assembly is for kids too!

Saturday, March 16,
9am – 12:30pm

New to ACC's Assembly is a program for kids ages K-5! Just like the adult program, the kids program will run from 9am to 12:30pm and feature games, crafts, songs and snacks led by Roots Anabaptist Kids. We'll also have a Makers Space project led by Lancaster Mennonite School where kids will complete a project using their creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

Childcare will also be provided for kids younger than Kindergarten age. Children should be registered along with their parent/guardian.

Registration for all Assembly sessions at atlanticcoastconference.net/2024_assembly by March 12.