

## “Thank you, Lois. And thanks be to God.”

**T**his work has been so good,” Lois Johns Kaufmann said in the June 24 worship service at the Central District Conference (CDC) annual meeting. “It hasn’t been all easy, but I kind of felt guilty because I enjoyed my work so much.”

Lois will end her work as conference minister on July 31 after serving for eight years. The annual meeting provided an opportunity for the CDC ministerial committee to shower her with words of thanks while they also showered her with rose petals.

Committee members reflected, “You have been there with us, calm, steady, encouraging and reminding us that God was always with us. You called us to be followers of Christ and challenged us to be our best selves.”

Several times the committee asked the congregation how to say thanks, and the refrain was repeated: “We say it like this! Thank you, Lois! And thanks be to God.”

Lois responded with reflections on her ministry with CDC, noting, “This is a wonderful conference. I have reaped the joy of serving a conference that knows something about grace.”

Among the things she appreciated was the opportunity to listen to stories of pastors and congregations. “I have worshipped in every one of your congregations and in every one I have sensed that God is transforming lives.”

Lois concluded with an emphasis on prayer:



*When Lois Johns Kaufmann was honored for serving as conference minister for eight years, members of the CDC ministerial committee showered her with rose petals and words of thanks. Committee members shown with Lois are Margaret Sawatsky, Ray Person and Joel Miller.*

“We can’t do this on our own. We need each other; we need the connection with God through prayer; we need the Holy One.”



*Blessings abounded at the CDC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, including those for new and continuing officers and committee members. After delegates affirmed the slate, everyone joined in the affirmation of those who are serving in leadership roles in the conference.*

## Worship forms the core of the annual gathering

The schedule for a Central District Conference annual meeting includes more time for worship than anything else. At the June 23–25 event, from Thursday evening to Saturday noon, three worship services drew the group together for prayer, singing, Scripture study and bold preaching.

Columbus Mennonite Church welcomed participants for the gathering with the color and warmth of 180 (more or less) comforters draped over the pews. These are a mission of the congregation, created to donate to Mennonite Central Committee, and the annual dedication service was set for the day after the annual meeting ended.

Musicians, pastors, Scripture readers and worship leaders from the Mennonite congregations in eastern Ohio led the worship experiences. The theme, “Abounding in love ... Abiding in grace,” was taken from the hymn, “The Lord lift you up,” by Patty Shelly, which closed each service.

Three passages from Luke formed the foundation for the services. First came the parable of the sower, then the story of Jesus and the disciples in the storm on the boat, and finally Jesus casting evil spirits from the man called Legion.



*Mark Rupp*

On Thursday evening, Mark Rupp, pastor at Columbus Mennonite, extended a call for the denomination to recognize and use the gifts of LGBTQ people. “It is time to stop treating us as the thorn in their sides,” he insisted. “It is time for MC USA to start believing in the God of abundance and helping all of us to abide in places where good fruit becomes possible, wherever that might be.”

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau, pastor at Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.,

*Reporter*

Central District Conference



*Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau*

emphasized how using “kingdom eyes” helps us see things differently and how we are sometimes “agitated”—feeling or becoming uncomfortable because God is at work. “We in CDC are called to use our kingdom eyes to agitate and open possibilities for everyone to see the very presence of God right here,” she said in her conclusion.

The third preacher was Charles Bontrager, pastor at First Mennonite in Wadsworth, Ohio. In a parallel with the story of the man possessed by demons, he challenged listeners to consider ways in which they have been “occupied”—by racism, sexism, able-ism, heterosexism, consumerism, and more.



*Charles Bontrager*

Having freed us, as Jesus did the man in the Luke text, “Jesus returns us to ourselves. This is where the good news starts—remembering who we are, embracing our identity as God’s beloved children, and proclaiming that we have been created good.”

Recordings of the sermons are available from links on the CDC website: [www.mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2016/](http://www.mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2016/)

## Struggles of Palestinian people

From guest speaker Rev. Dr. Alex Awad, annual meeting participants heard about struggles in the Middle East—personal family stories, an insider’s view of the challenges of Palestinian people, and reflections on how these struggles affect the Christian church and the world as a whole.

In a plenary session at the gathering, Dr. Awad told the story of his own family in



*Rev. Dr. Awad is a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church. In Israel/Palestine he was the pastor of a small international church in East Jerusalem and was affiliated with Bethlehem Bible College as professor, dean of students, and board member.*

Palestine, including the death of his father when he was a child and the strong Christian faith of his mother who taught them to always forgive and look forward.

He also outlined the history of the creation of the country of Israel in 1948 and successive developments and wars that have taken land away from the Palestinians. The wall now being built to separate Israelis from Palestinians is the most contentious issue, Dr. Awad emphasized. It does not follow the lines that divide the two

groups; instead, 90 percent of the wall is within Palestinian territory.

We should be concerned about the church in Holy Land, Dr. Awad said, because “it is the land where the church was born.” He added, “The good news is, if we can create peace in the Holy Land among Jews, Christians and Muslims, it will have an effect all around the Middle East and all over the world.”

Dr. Awad noted how Mennonites and Quakers have been active in providing assistance to Palestinians, even as early as supporting the refugees in 1948 when Israel was created. However, he also asked listeners to consider two questions: 1) what more can Mennonites do to assure the continued presence of Christianity in the region; and 2) how can Mennonites influence members of the U.S. Congress to advance peace and justice in Israel/Palestine.

There are signs of hope, according to Dr. Awad: “I believe in God and Jesus Christ; that is what really gives me hope.” He also sees that many people are eager for peace, are less willing to blindly support the policies of the Israeli government and are becoming strong advocates for peace and justice for Palestinians. At the same time many Palestinians are turning toward non-violence. In addition, some church groups are taking steps to divest from companies that support the military occupation and that do harm in the West Bank Palestinian areas.

He concluded, “God is able to create peace in the Holy Land and Mennonites can help.”

Dr. Awad is speaking at several regional gatherings in Mennonite Church USA as a result of a decision at the 2015 denominational gathering in Kansas City. That decision tabled the vote on a resolution expressing opposition to Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian land. Dr. Awad’s presentations are an opportunity to become better informed in advance of addressing the resolution again next summer when Mennonite Church USA meets in Orlando, Fla.

**From the president of the CDC board, Lisa Weaver  
Pray for leadership transitions in the conference**

My heart is full as I think back over the past twelve months, and contemplate the twelve months yet to come. In the forefront of my mind is the upcoming conference minister transition within Central District. Lois Johns Kaufmann is retiring as of July 31, and Doug Luginbill will begin his new term on August 15.

I sent out a request for prayers, favorite scriptures and words of thanks for Lois, to compile in a gratitude journal. Organizing the messages became a helpful way for me to come to terms with saying good-bye to Lois as our conference minister. Here is a small sample of the overwhelming love and appreciation expressed for Lois:

“You showed me how to be clear in my convictions and generous towards those who do not share them.”

“Thank you for your wise pastoral hand and your commitment to keeping us in accountable relationships beyond ourselves.”

“Please know that you have had an enduring impact on CDC.”

“You so clearly lived out God’s love to us.”

“Lois, I simply don’t know what we would have done without you.”

One respondent remarked that some of the most moving moments in the Bible are when God’s messengers show up and say, “Do not be afraid, I have good news....” I thank Lois for

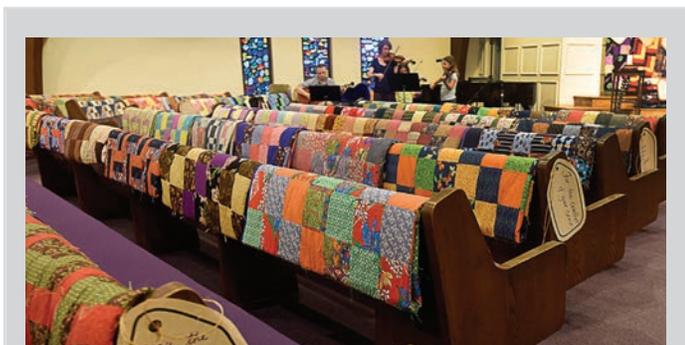


*Lisa Weaver shared “State of the Conference” reflections at the annual meeting, summarized here in this newsletter contribution.*

being one of those messengers—one of God’s faithful children who shares the good news. We have been blessed by her work and ministry.

However, along with the sweet sorrow of saying good-bye, is the opportunity for a new and exciting hello! Doug Luginbill, our incoming CDC conference minister, brings with him fourteen years of pastoral ministry experience, seven years of experience as director of Camp Friedenswald and more than six years of administrative experience as director of resource development and church relations at Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio. Doug is a member of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, where he lives with Paula, his wife. Doug plans to maintain a home office in Bluffton, though he will be in regular and frequent contact with conference administrator Emma Hartman in the Goshen CDC office.

May we all experience the fullness of love and grace throughout this time of leadership transition. Please keep both Lois and Doug in your prayers. Blessings to each of you in your home congregations and communities.



*Comforters, made by Columbus Mennonite Church, graced the pews at the annual meeting while awaiting a blessing before being sent to Mennonite Central Committee for distribution around the world.*

## Delegate actions at annual meeting

Delegates at the 2016 annual meeting approved several recommendations:

- The 2016-17 spending plan (see below)
- The 2016-17 slate of officers and committee members
- Constitutional changes that affect how annual meetings are planned and how many members serve on the Missional Church Committee (a change from nine to seven)

In addition, delegates and other participants heard an introduction to Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, a new congregation in Goshen, Ind., that has applied for membership in CDC. Action will be taken on the application at the 2017 annual meeting.

## Financial Report

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Thanks to many individuals and generous Central District Conference congregations, the conference ended the fiscal year on June 30 with a surplus again this year! Giving from congregations exceeded the plan by about \$8,000 and registration for the annual meeting was up this year, so we had revenue of \$222,397 compared to a goal of \$214,582. Expenses for the year were \$7,600 under plan so the net positive was about \$15,000. The Stewardship Committee and the Board will consider how this surplus might be used to further the work of CDC.

At the CDC annual meeting, delegates approved a spending plan for 2016-17 (July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017), which includes an overall increase of about 9%, going from \$214,582 to \$234,516. Please keep this in mind as your congregation considers what level of financial support you can offer the conference. Included in the new plan is a goal of \$30,500 coming in to CDC over and above what the congregations provide. Please remember this goal as you think about your own charitable giving in the coming year.

— Roger Nafziger, Conference treasurer

## Doug Luginbill to be new conference minister

Doug Luginbill will become conference minister, beginning August 15, as announced by the CDC board in June.

Doug has pastoral ministry experience, including serving as pastor of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio. He served as director of Camp Friedenswald, Cassopolis, Mich and for the last six years he has been director of resource development and church relations for Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio.

Doug holds a BA from Bluffton University and a master of divinity from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

(See additional information about Doug on page 4.)



At the annual meeting, Doug Luginbill, incoming conference minister, received a blessing from James Risser, CDC board member, and Nancy Kauffmann, denominational minister for Mennonite Church USA.



Newly installed, licensed and ordained pastors were recognized at the annual meeting, and five of the 11 were present: Brian Sauder, Wanda Stopher, Brian Johnson, Rachel Nolt and Brian Bolton. Not pictured: Julia Gingrich, Rebecca Kauffman, Terri Geiser, Eric Rucker, Timothy Peebles, Emily Hedrick.

## George O'Reilly installed

On June 26, George O'Reilly was installed as pastoral associate at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.



Participating in the installation of George O'Reilly (second from left) were Darryl Nester (left), Lois Johns Kaufmann and Wanda Stopher.



Jorge Vielman, member of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., and staff member of Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes, shared in presenting one of the seminars during the annual meeting. He, along with Mark Claassen, also from Hively, and Lloyd Miller, Southside Fellowship in Elkhart, discussed issues of immigration and their experiences in a Border Learning Tour last summer, funded by a CDC Reign of God grant.

## Annual meeting is for children, too

Children who participate in the CDC annual meeting get an early start on learning about CDC's worship, fellowship and fun.

Each worship session included a time focused on the children, led by Phil Hart (see below). Daytime activities included a trip to the Columbus Zoo for the older children.



Phil Hart, member of the Columbus Mennonite congregation, wove together the theme, "Abounding in love ... Abiding in grace," and the Luke texts of the worship services in a song that served as the children's time in the services. The children and the congregation joined in on the chorus, singing, "Jesus help us to be free, loving the Lord in word and deed, that we may receive what we really need, abounding and abiding."

Photo credits: All photos were taken by **J. Tyler Klassen**, Goshen, Ind., except the photo of Jorge Vielman by **Mary E. Klassen** and the photo of George O'Reilly's installation by **Jim Kaufmann** on page 6.

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**Email:** [cdceditor@gmail.com](mailto:cdceditor@gmail.com)

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**Central District Office:**  
Lois Johns Kaufmann, conference minister  
Emma Hartman, administrator  
1015 Division St., Goshen, IN 46528  
**Toll-free:** 800.662.2264  
**Phone:** 574.534.1485  
**Fax:** 574.534.8654  
**Email:** [office@mcusacdc.org](mailto:office@mcusacdc.org)  
**Web:** [www.mcusacdc.org](http://www.mcusacdc.org)