



## Remembering. Bearing witness.

While Central District (CDC) congregations are geographically distant from the U.S.-Mexico border, Reign of God grants are helping to bring closer to home the experience of those who cross that border from south to north. CDC helped a number of people join The Migrant Trail walk, completed in early June, and a Border Learning Tour in 2015.

The Migrant Trail is an organized 75-mile walk from Sásabe, Sonora, México, to Tucson, Arizona. The intent is to bear witness with migrant sisters and brothers who have walked the trail and lost their lives. Members of Southside Fellowship and Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, both in Elkhart, Ind., have shared reflections here on their experience.

**“During the walk,** I carried a cross with the name Tania Graciela Cedillo Marquez on it. All I know is that she was 22 years old and died in 2008 or 2009. As we left camp and our rest stops, we would each say the name on our cross out loud and the rest of the group would respond in unison, “presente,” meaning *present*. This became our litany on the walk. Throughout the week Tania became a part of me. On the second to last leg of our walk, as we rounded the corner and saw Tucson, I began to cry. Tania never made it to Tucson; she didn’t get to see her dreams realized. As I walked into Tucson, I felt that I was finishing her journey for her.” — *Julia Schmidt, Southside Fellowship*

**“As the week progressed** I called the name Audomar Pérez Lopez six or eight times a day, always with a choral response, ¡Presente! I also felt deep exhaustion take root in my feet and legs. I started to miss my spouse. I wanted to escape the intensifying heat, and I found myself daydreaming about showers and beds, about easy conversation with close friends back home.

And it was in that late-week exhaustion that I came just a hair closer to being present to Audomar—in the body ache of walking and the heart ache of missing, in the seemingly endless step-stepping on the dusty red sand.” — *Suzanne Ehst, Southside Fellowship*

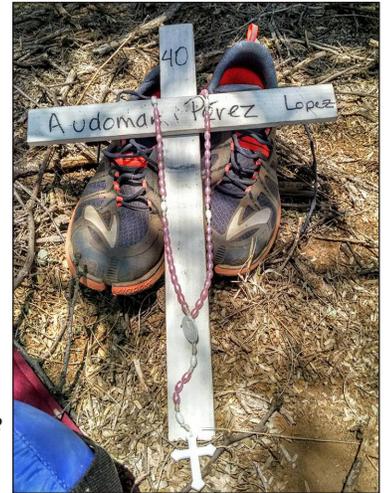


Photo by Suzanne Ehst

**“Those of us** from the seminary, Southside and Hively gathered for a reflection or devotional each night. As I prepared for a devotional, I couldn’t help but think about water. What I had previously taken to be the psalmist’s romantic longing for God in Psalm 63:1 was now viscerally clear to me: God is necessity. In the biblical narrative, water is a precious life-giver, and God’s wrath is meted out against any and all humans or institutions that attempt to use water

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Photo by Jorge Vielman

as a weapon. By the grace of God, in the power of the Spirit, may we follow Jesus in giving ordinary and living water to those who thirst through the desert, and may we make their lives less of a desert when they do cross safely and seek out life on the other side.” — *Andrew Austin, Hively*

“**The 2016 Migrant Trail** taught me about solidarity, witness, and hope. By focusing prayerfully on the lives of migrants who have died crossing the border, I was drawn to consider how Jesus identifies with the oppressed and how those who follow him must do the same. This identification, thanks be to God, is not merely an individual matter, but is an invitation that extends to all God’s people and beyond. We witness to oppression as communities. We have hope for transformation because we are not alone, we are accompanied by others and, above all, by God’s Spirit. I’m grateful to CDC for facilitating this trip.” — *Jamie Pitts, Hively*

For additional information about Reign of God grants, visit [mcusacdc.org/ /Resources/Reign-of-God-Grant/](http://mcusacdc.org/ /Resources/Reign-of-God-Grant/)

## In memoriam

**S**teven J. Yoder, pastor of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, died June 1 at Cleveland Clinic. He was 60 years old.

A memorial service for Steve was held at First Mennonite on June 6. In the service, he was remembered as being a “deeply committed, compassionate and humble man.” Lois Johns Kaufmann, sharing on behalf of the regional Mennonite pastors’ group, said, “He always leaned toward grace, choosing to see and bring out the best in others.”

Steve had been a pastor in Mennonite congregations for 22 years, coming to First Mennonite from Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, Kan.

Surviving are Janet, his wife; his sons and two daughters-in-law, Neil (Youngju Yoon) Yoder, Aaron (Mary Byram) Yoder, and Jeff Yoder; and two grandchildren, Henry and Elmer Yoder, in addition to his mother, Lydia Yoder, and siblings.



## Central District Conference Annual Meeting June 23-25

Hosted by Columbus Mennonite Church  
Columbus, Ohio

Reports will be included in the  
July issue of *Reporter*

## Three graduate from seminary

**T**hree 2016 graduates of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., are part of Central District Conference congregations.

**Austin Roberts** (Master of Arts: Peace Studies) will work in northern Ireland with Youth with a Mission in a partner arrangement with Mennonite Mission Network. He attends Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind.



**Gabriel Ray Beliele Pennington**, (Master of Divinity with an emphasis in Theological Studies) will be associate pastor at Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Hydro, Okla. He is a member of Memorial Road Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmond, Okla., and has been attending Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart.



**Naomi Ruder Wenger** (Master of Arts: Theological Studies) will continue to serve as codirector of The Hermitage Community, a contemplative prayer retreat community in Three Rivers, Mich. She is a member of Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite, Centreville, Mich.



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