



**Central
District
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

**KNOWING
CHRIST'S LOVE
– ANSWERING
GOD'S CALL**

SEPTEMBER 2015

Scholarship recipients create relationships and connections with global Mennonites

Several of the seven young people sponsored by Central District Conference to attend the Mennonite World Conference's Global Youth Summit admitted after the conference that they weren't entirely sure what to expect during the three-day experience.

"In the end, all of my fears were unfounded," said Shelby Burge. "There was so much about GYS that I wasn't expecting, and it became so much more than I had hoped for."

Burge and the other attendees mentioned intriguing workshops they went to during the event, but named the conversations they had with young Mennonites from around the world, after workshops and worship sessions, over meals, or while playing games, that held incredible power for them.

Central District Conference awarded \$500 grants to seven young Mennonites from CDC churches to help them attend the Global Youth Summit, July 17 through 19, just prior to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly.

The summit is described as "an oasis for young leaders of the church." This year's theme was "Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts."



"Global Youth Summit provided an opportunity to begin to connect with the global church. I hope that this is only another small step in greater connection for me. GYS further motivated me to foster real, lasting relationships with other brothers and sisters in the global Anabaptist family."

-Mara Weaver

"There is diversity within the Mennonite tradition. There are Mennonites around the world that worship and believe differently. However, this was a joyful opportunity to come together to learn, sing, dance, talk, and worship God. We looked past our languages, beliefs and culture to enjoy community and follow under God."

-Angelo Luis



The seven recipients were Alison Brookins of Madison Mennonite, Angelo Luis of Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, Shelly Burge of Eighth Street Mennonite, SaeJin Lee of Hively Ave Mennonite, Mara Weaver of Mennonite Church of Normal, Emily Hodges Nyce of Shalom Mennonite Congregation, and Aaron Johnson of Eighth Street Mennonite.

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Evening activities included live music from various countries, fellowshiping with new and old friends, and creating a collaborative art project that was then displayed at the MWC Assembly. (Photo by SaeJin Lee)

Praising God in song and silence:

A REFLECTION ON A GYS EXPERIENCE

When I returned from GYS, I wrote this story about the pivotal moment that changed me more than any other:

During the final worship session led by the North American continent, the leader asked all of those from North America to get up and stand around the entire room so that we were surrounding those who



had traveled internationally to be here. Anticipation built inside me because I had gone to my friend in the band earlier to ask about singing a specific song, and she tipped me off about that evening's plan. As we all stood on the perimeter and joined hands, looking out at the majority of us

in the center that were from all other parts of the world, our leader announced that we were singing song "606," "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow" (for all of you not familiar, that is like the Mennonite song in America).

Let me tell you – the last time I sang "606" outside of the church was in the catacombs under Rome, so I have already had a phenomenal life experience involving that song. So when all of the North Americans together began bursting out in four part harmony, I was alive with ecstasy.

And then, it got way better. When we had finished, obviously impressing our foreign guests, everyone was invited to join the circle. We squished together so that the five hundred of us lined the walls as one large group. Without instruction, we joined hands.

Then they turned out the lights. One spotlight remained on the piano as we began to sing a song that had been played several times already that weekend that exclaims Hosanna, in the highest, let our king be lifted up, Hosanna. This song is so incredibly beautiful when we sang it.

About five others and myself were standing in the spotlight in front of the piano, so I couldn't see anyone else, but I felt them all. Each time the chorus repeated, the energy escalated, all directed towards the center of the circle. I was so moved. The lights grew dimmer as the song got louder.

I stood there, my right hand joined with a woman from Zimbabwe in a flowing African dress, and on my left side I held the hand of a Japanese girl adorned in the traditional robes from her country. All of the people sang with all of their heart and

soul. On the final repetition of the song, the last light went out and the accompanying music faded away. All that remained was the strong, resonating force of our voices.

Let me take a moment to say I am not an emotional person. I'm not a crier. I've watched "My Sister's Keeper" and "The Fault In Our Stars" and all of those tear jerking movies without ever doubting I would be dry-eyed at the end.

But as I stood there in that room in the darkness, with all of those people from all over the world, singing one song, in one voice, for one God, tears were just streaming down my face. I will never forget that moment.

Finally the song came to a close. Then in the blackness, we all recited the Lord's Prayer in our own language. A long moment of silence passed before the lights returned.

No one moved. This was the official end of GYS. We didn't want to leave. Now what? Someone shouted, "group hug!" to break the tension.

The circle eventually dissolved as we all went back to a hundred interchanging small groups of new friends saying very long farewells. There was lots of hugging, and exchanging names for Facebook, and our nightly games and dancing followed long into the night. In fact, one of my four roommates never came back that evening – she showed up before breakfast after literally socializing the entire night away.

It's funny, isn't it? Three days together can change a person. Connections were built that spanned the globe. Cultural barriers were broken. It didn't matter if we didn't always speak the same language. In fact, one night I was the only one on my soccer team that was speaking English. We were from different backgrounds and past experiences, and at different places in life, but we were all unified in our same belief in God.

Before I left for GYS, I was asked to speak about my expectations at church and I mentioned that lately I feel I have to do something with my faith. Actually, maybe that was wrong.

For those three days, I lived my faith. GYS may be over, but the feelings I gained from it will never end.

-Shelby Burge

CDC grant recipients attend Global Youth Summit, *from page 1*



Participants from Africa led an exuberant worship service during GYS. (Photo by SaeJin Lee)

Not only did the grant recipients acknowledge the excitement of conversing with young Anabaptists from other backgrounds and traditions, but several also noted how comfortable and easy it was to come into those conversations.

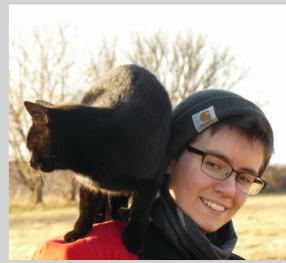


-Aaron Johnson

“It was wonderful to be with a group of young people from so many different parts of the world and the church, all of whom were excited to have the opportunity to be together and worship together,” said Mara Weaver. “The openness of everyone with whom I came into contact was an immense blessing, and it was amazing to see how people navigated language and cultural barriers to get to know each other.”

“I observed that more and more young Mennonites/Anabaptists are of more than one ethnic/cultural origin (bi/multicultural), and that makes our collective identity as global Anabaptists more complex, dynamic, and rich in meaning. Those who bridge between these cultural/linguistic/national boundaries are also those who will lead the next generation of the global Anabaptists/Mennonite church.

-SaeJin Lee



“I saw a lot of young energy around being church together — everyone there was excited and hopeful about the future. It was very inspiring.”

-Alison Brookins



A group of GYS attendees enjoy a time of line dancing. (Photo by SaeJin Lee)

“As someone new to the Mennonite faith, I have found inspiration from the many wonderful people and organizations striving to bring healing and hope to intense conflict situations around the world. Yet with each passing day and more education, it seems that one conflict leads to another. I think I speak for most of us when I confess how difficult it is to know which dire situation my efforts should focus on, while knowingly ignoring one another. Part of growing up is definitely learning my own human limitations. I personally am not designed to solve it all, but I do need to be present.

-Emily Hodges Nyce



Hively, Southside Mennonite churches use Reign of God grant to attend training at U.S.-Mexico border

By Lloyd Miller,
Southside Mennonite Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind.

Thanks to a Reign of God grant from CDC coupled with a Lily Foundation sabbatical grant to Pastor Charles Geiser, 11 members of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church and Southside Fellowship visited the border communities of Aqua Prieta, Mexico and Douglas, AZ August 10 – 15, 2015. We were led by Jorge Vielman, MCC Great Lakes Peace and Justice Coordinator, and Jack and Linda Knox, retired Mennonite ministers who live in Douglas.

A poignant moment occurred the first day. We joined local residents at a “Healing Our Borders” vigil.

We prayerfully laid crosses beside the street in the two blocks leading to the border with the names of some of the 6,000 immigrants who have died in the desert since 2000. As we read each name, we exclaimed: “PRESENTE!” and laid each cross against the curb. These were persons driven to risk everything out of economic necessity for a better life for their families.

The desert is an inhospitable place for humans without enough water and proper footwear. With Border Patrol surveillance and an increasingly impenetrable fence, the chance for apprehension and death are extremely high. In addition, the border fence keeps the flow of working immigrants from smoothly flowing back and forth across our borders.

Christian ministries are doing what they can. Frontera de Cristo is a Presbyterian Bi-National Border Ministry that focuses on economic development through business loans, new church development, family and health ministries and mission education. CREDDA is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center.



The Migrant Resource Center is located just inside the Mexican border and is the first place where repatriated immigrants receive attention to medical, food, housing and clothing needs. Dougl Prieta Cooperative demonstrates what can happen when a neighborhood works together in gardening, small animal husbandry, and hand work like embroidery



Front Row: Winifred Saner (Hively); Lois Dyck (Southside); Kendra Yoder (Southside); Amanda Fast (Hively); Second Row: Leroy Saner (Hively); Jorge Vielman (Hively); Mark Claassen (Hively); Charles Geiser (Hively); Third Row: Jamie Pitts (Hively); Lloyd Miller (Southside); Sueann VonGunten (Hively)



and knitting. Café Justo is a coffee collective owned by growers in Chiapas State with distribution and sales in Aqua Prieta and which eliminates the middle man. All these minister in the name of Christ. All these provide economic incentives that keep im-

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Swiss Mennonites of Bluffton and Pandora celebrate 175th anniversary

By Ron and Alice Lora,

Nearly 800 people gathered in a wheat field between Bluffton and Pandora, Ohio, on Sunday, August 30, 2015, to celebrate the establishment of the first Mennonite church in what came to be known as the Swiss Settlement. The worshippers in that original log building grew in number, later dividing into four churches that flourish today: Ebenezer Mennonite and First Mennonite of Bluffton, Grace Mennonite and St. John Mennonite of Pandora.

Dr. Myron Augsburg, noted pastor, former president of Eastern Mennonite College (1965-1980) and of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (1988-1994), and author of more than two dozen books and many articles, opened the afternoon sessions by recalling the history of early Protestant Christians who called themselves Swiss Brethren.

History professor Perry Bush discussed the differing trajectories of the four Mennonite congregations that branched out from the original Swiss Mennonite Church. Since the first group meeting in 1840, questions to do with members' relations to the world, travel distance, education, and differences on pacifism during World War I, and the impact of communications and transportation during the 1920s divided the four churches.

Ebenezer and St. John were on one trajectory, Grace and First Mennonite on another – the first two more fundamentalist and evangelistic, the other two more mainstream Protestant and progressive.

Nevertheless, Bush ended on a hopeful note. With both traditions reaching back to the large Swiss Mennonite congregation at mid-nineteenth century, and given the number of projects on which the four congregations cooperate today, there are reasons to

underscore our underlying unity in attempting “to make disciples of all nations, to teach all the things that Christ commanded, to baptize those who accept the good news, and to remember that Christ is with us always.”

In his presentation, Gerald Mast (Bluffton University professor of communication) turned to a (German) Mennonite prayer book that early in life helped him to focus less on himself and more on the Kingdom of God. It was *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht* (Devoted Christian's Prayer Book), published first in 1708 and handed down to him by his Amish great-grandmother. The early Mennonite settlers faced tremendous challenges in clearing the forest, draining semi-swampy land, and battling animals that threatened their crops, but one would not know that, Mast said, by reading their piety prayers.

Carrie Phillips, archives and special collections librarian at Bluffton University, offered a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Frogs in the Meadow: The Froschauer Bible and Swiss Mennonite Ancestors.” Even as Martin Luther was translating the Bible into German, Swiss reformers, including Ulrich Zwingli and Hans Denck (a German theologian and Anabaptist leader), were at work translating the Bible into the literary German understood in Switzerland.

From the printing press of Christoph Froschauer came the first folio edition (1531), using the grammatical and stylistic forms of German preferred by the Swiss. This particular edition of the Froschauer Bible was so popular that in 1744 a Strassburg printer reprinted it.

Bluffton University now has a 1531 folio edition, a 1536/1539 hybrid edition, and a 1545 edition disguised as a Luther Bible, as well as eleven copies of the 1744 edition, the largest collection of these bibles in the world.

Hymn singing has long been a tradition of the Mennonites, but through the years the style of hymns has changed. Dr. Jackie Wyse-Rhodes, assistant professor of religion at Bluffton University, gathered a group of 16 vocalists from the Grace Mennonite and First Mennonite churches to form the 175th Anniversary Chorus, singing songs in German and English in early and more modern styles.

Following the afternoon program, attendees had several options: historical displays from each of the four churches; books and



Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship hosts J. Ron Byler

On July 7, J Ron Byler, Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., spoke to a small group gathered at the home of Atlanta (Ga.) Mennonite Fellowship Pastor James Rissler. A wide-ranging discussion considered MCC's work and the ways in which AMF and its members can share in it.

Silverwood spends summer series considering questions

Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., spent eight Sundays during the summer exploring questions and faith. The series included services focused on:

- Can I have doubts and still have faith?
- Does the Bible really matter?
- If God loves everyone, why is there only one God?
- Is God more Republican or Democrat?

Swiss Mennonite Reunion, continued from page 5

information from the Swiss Community Historical Society; genealogists' resources; a children's area to learn about early schools and play games familiar to children in the early settlement. Prior to the evening's program was a traditional Swiss dinner of sauerkraut, sausage, potatoes, biscuits, and pies baked by 80 local women and men.

The culminating event of the day was the evening worship service, with Dr. Augsburg, bringing the message.

Hively, Southside visit borderlands, continued from page 4

migration from becoming a necessity.

We also met with four Border Patrol agents at the local headquarters. We discovered that the agents are just as caught in an unjust and unrealistic job situation as immigrants. We came away feeling sorry for their choices and wonder what this job is doing to their humanity. The Border Patrol has jurisdiction completely around the United States. That includes 100 miles inland from the Atlantic and Pacific

Oceans and the Gulf of Mexico. That also includes the Canadian and Mexican borders. With all the large cities located on each coast, from Boston to Miami and San Diego to Seattle, that encompasses 2/3 of the US population.

Border politics are complicated and confusing. Current political conversations obscure rather than clarify. We understand a bit more and hope we can add to the conversation during a very difficult moment in our country's history. God have mercy!



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