



# The Vine

May 2016

*Becoming a community through which God's healing and hope can flow to the world*

## **First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana**

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## **Reporting on Illinois Mennonite Conference (IMC) Annual Assembly 2016, April 8-9**

*From Pastor Michael (delegate)*

Six of us attended this year's two-day Assembly, hosted by the First Mennonite Church of Morton. As you will read below, we experienced a blessed time of worship, fellowship, and discernment. Denominational representatives were on hand to formally install Michael Danner in his role as Conference Executive Minister (he has been serving in the role since August 2015), and we were privileged to hear Michael share his perspective on the state of the Conference. Delegates passed a modest budget (decrease in planned spending) that anticipates an increase in personal and estate donations, a simple but potentially significant shift in IMC's long-term financial strategy.

We celebrated the diversity of Anabaptist faith expressions—of worship, theology, culture—across IMC, but we lamented the barriers that prevent especially people of color from Assembly participation. I left inspired by the vision of a more wholly representative Conference Assembly, yet challenged by Michael Danner's insistence that each congregation shares the burden for realizing this vision by growing relationships across IMC.

*From Keith Springer (delegate)*

“. . . the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." John 14:26

The theme for the IMC annual assembly 2016 was **Lean In, Live Out** and was centered on Jesus' counsel to his disciples found in John 14:25-27. Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, led us in four sessions focused on *discernment*. Discernment, or "leaning in," is experienced both individually and corporately. As individuals we need to make space for quiet moments in the midst of our hectic schedules and agendas. This includes taking adequate time for reflection and prayer. Corporately, we discern as a body, as a community, the church. We have to be ready to relinquish *our* agenda to the Holy Spirit just as Jesus gave up his will to that of the Father's when he prayed in Gethsemane, "Father, Thy will be done" (Luke 22:42). We need to listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit interprets Christ's teachings. The Holy Spirit is an advocate for Jesus *and* the way of Jesus.

In one of the three Discernment Workshops, IMC Executive Minister, Michael Danner, outlined eight principles for leading the congregation in communal discernment. How do we design our time together? How do we create space for the Holy Spirit and for each other? One of Michael's observations was that "Communities are created one room at a time, the one we are in at the moment. Every time we gather there is potential to build relationships, accountability, and commitment."





*From Laura Brenneman (delegate)*

This was my first experience at IMC annual conference and what I appreciated most was the fellowship. The conversations and laughter shared around meals, during small group time, in the hallways between sessions, and in the carpool with FMC folk helped me feel connected and a bit more in the know about IMC and the congregational life of some of the IMC member congregations. I particularly enjoyed getting to know some of the representatives from Bethesda Mennonite Church in St. Louis, who invited FMC people to come for a visit. I hope to take them up on this invitation!

*From Kathy Springer*

I attended this conference as an interested participant. I was inspired by the speakers and enjoyed reconnecting with friends and meeting with people who are passionate about their faith. Some memorable comments from Ervin Stutzman: God is at work in the world. Our job is to show up and align ourselves with God's work. We should ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and help, then make space for listening for an answer. We need to know the scripture so that the Holy Spirit can remind us of the Spirit's will in the middle of our internal conversations. Ervin prays for the day when in the church we can come together and confess our own sins to each other (as opposed to pointing out someone else's sin). Where this has happened the result has been great revival in the church.

Memorable words from Michael Danner: The unstoppable restoration of all things has begun in the Gospel. God is in the midst of everything around us, and has broken the power of sin and death.

*From Mary Krick (delegate)*

My highlights of the Illinois Mennonite Conference Annual Assembly:

Hearing Ervin Stutzman preach. He is a good preacher/teacher. He reminded us with several stories that God is present in all things. He preached: remember to be thankful and look to see "Where is God in this?" That is something I have been trying, and forgetting, to do. It was good to be reminded.

Thinking and talking about IMC as a thriving network of churches. For the churches who send delegates, I think that IMC is a thriving network. But several, if not many, churches, were not represented. I was very glad to see Michael Danner, in his new role as conference minister, bringing fresh eyes to the difficulties of conference non-participation. This not a new problem. I hope his energy will make a change.

I enjoyed being part of the wider Mennonite community and trying to gain a better understanding of "Mennonite".

And it was good for me to hear about some of the joys and difficulties others individually and as churches are experiencing, and to consider my commitment to IMC.

For me, the best part of the IMC Annual Assembly was the opportunity for fellowship with Jan Sabey, Laura Brenneman, and Pastor Michael in our traveling together.

*From Jan Sabey (delegate)*

I think this was the fourth time I had the pleasure of attending the IMC Annual Assembly, so I was looking forward to connecting with a few familiar attendees and meeting some new people and hearing about some of the things happening in other congregations around the conference. It seems that there are many churches that are in various kinds of transitions – East Peoria Mennonite and Evanston Mennonite are two that come to mind just now – and I was reminded again of the importance of prayer and holding onto hope as good and/or difficult changes challenge a congregation. No one was whining or complaining; rather they were looking to God for guidance and celebrating evidence of God's presence.

Another highlight for me was the opportunity to hear Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of MCUSA, preach three times from John 14:25-27 about the work of the Holy Spirit. Erv is a gifted preacher and opened up this familiar passage for me. I was especially touched by his comments regarding v26, in which he helped us think about how to recognize the Holy Spirit "speaking" among the many voices that fill our lives, especially when we are in the midst of changing our perspectives and beliefs. "But the Advocate the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and *will remind you of everything I*





have said to you.” (NIV, italics mine). The Holy Spirit cannot remind me of things that I never knew or heard. The Holy Spirit spoke to Jesus through Scripture. If I am to be well-prepared to hear the Holy Spirit, among other things, I must be filled with Scripture. I need to continually get away from distractions and make time and space in my life to listen to God/Holy Spirit and spend time to go ever deeper into Scripture so that the Holy Spirit can remind me when I am “stuck” in the challenges of my life.

Another point that Erv made that particularly resonated with my English teacher’s heart was: the Ho-

ly Spirit is the subject of active verbs. The Holy Spirit teaches and reminds. And throughout Scripture, God is the subject of active verbs. God created, loved, sent, spoke, etc. This should go without saying, but God and the Holy Spirit are active in the world today. I think I resist speaking about and sharing the evidences I see of God at work each day. I want to change my language and use more action verbs in my conversations about God.

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## New in the Library

### Children's Library

*Freedom Song: The Story of Henry "Box" Brown*

*Gandhi: A March to the Sea*

*Swords to Plowshares*

*I Am Malala* (young readers edition)

### Adult Library

*Fight Disease, Not Death*, by Lorie and Mark Vincent  
(donated by Cindy Breeze)

*Struggles for Shalom*, ed. Laura Brenneman and Brad Schantz "(donated by Laura Brenneman)

*Race: the Power of an Illusion* (documentary)

*The Other Wes Moore--One Names, Two Fates*, by Wes Moore

*Trouble I've Seen--Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, by Drew Hart

*Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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*Speaking Christian*, by Marcus Borg

*The Year of Living Biblically*, by A.J. Jacobs

*Peace, Progress and the Professor (the Mennonite History of C. Henry Smith)*,  
by Perry Bush

*Living the Anabaptist Story*, by Lisa Weaver and J. Denny Weaver

*Immortal Diamond; Eager to Love; Breathing Under Water*; all 7 by Richard Rohr

*Somewhere Safe with Somebody Good*, by Jan Karon

*1 & 2 Chronicles* (Believers Bible Commentary)

*The Good News Bible*



# Book Review

Michael Crosby

Drew G. I. Hart. *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*. Herald Press (Harrisonburg, VA), 2016.

2,700 years ago a gifted poet fell asleep at his desk. He dreamed of fiery winged creatures, glimpsed the Holy One on a cosmic throne, trembled with awe, and heard his charge:

Go and tell this people:

“Keep listening, but you aren’t going to get it;

Keep looking, but you won’t be able to see.”

Dull their minds, stop their ears, and shut their eyes...

- Isaiah 6:9-10

Such is the task—and fate—of prophetic words through the ages. Drew Hart’s true words in *Trouble I’ve Seen* are no exception.

The 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Saint Thomas Aquinas called this phenomenon “affected ignorance,” which happens when the comforts of the status quo blind us to systemic injustice. Aquinas chose his terminology well; quite literally, we fall in love with (i.e., grow *affectionate* towards) the way things are and cannot imagine that the world can or should be anything else. This is especially true for those who benefit most from the way things are—possessors of power, privilege, wealth, status, luxury, etc. An uncontrollable affection for these things dulls my mind, stops my ears, and shuts my eyes to their true consequences.

Though he does not employ the term, affected ignorance is the starting point for Hart’s reflections on racism in the North American church. He describes an “epistemological divide,” a chasm separating how whites and blacks frame the conversation about race: “Churches operating out of dominant cultural intuitions, perceptions, assumptions, and experiences define the problem one way, while most black people and other oppressed groups bear witness to an alternative and diverging reality” (20). If you read Hart’s book—and you most definitely should!—you will need to

check yourself against the premise that different social locations present qualitatively different views of the world. In other words, some perspectives are better than others because they are more likely to see injustice for what it is. Key to Hart’s work is the assertion that whiteness breeds narrow-mindedness, while “black people and other oppressed groups” (read: those not so affectionate towards a status quo that privileges whiteness) are granted a wider perspective by their social location.

Hart elaborates this in Chapter 4, appropriately titled “Don’t Go with Your Gut” (as Aquinas might have said: beware your affections). “Just as with physical location, some social locations offer better vantage points on reality than others,” (85) what Liberation Theology has long called the “epistemological advantage” of the poor. Hart cites José Míguez Bonino:

A social location determines a perspective. It conceals some things and reveals others. We have sometimes referred to this in terms of the ‘epistemological privilege of the poor.’ The poor are not morally or spiritually superior to others, but they do see reality from a different angle.

“Therefore,” Hart says, “I am suggesting that people on the bottom are better situated to know what is real, and that what they know to be reality is closer to the real thing than the perceptions of those in a dominant social position” (85). If you are white, like me, reading Hart’s book is like being hooked up to an IV pumping a steady dose of humbling reality; it has the power to heal, but don’t expect a magic button for self-administered morphine to dull the pain. If reading Hart’s story or the stories of other black Americans doesn’t affect humility that hurts, you haven’t read it right.

Indeed, Hart’s personal story is a central part of *Trouble I’ve Seen*. His philosophical approach does not allow us to read his story—or any marginalized person’s story—as one more anecdote in the conversation on race, but instead as a glimpse into reality unobscured by the narrow blinders of privilege. But it’s not for me to tell Hart’s story; for that, you need to read his





book.

*Trouble I've Seen* is also an excellent introduction to the terminology of race. "Race is a social construct," Hart explains. "Despite its common usage, race is not a natural biological category for human beings... It is smoke and mirrors... a lie white people invented that divides humanity into categories used to oppress nonwhite people..." (48). Furthermore, ours is a "racialized society," a term that highlights how, as a black person, it is a constant struggle to be seen for more than one's (socially constructed by whites) racial identity. At one point Hart describes the church as a "racialized organism" (73), a poignant allusion to the body of Christ metaphor (is racism a cancerous growth?).

Throughout the book, Hart jarringly refers to himself as "my black body." In *Between the World and Me* (6459), Ta-Nehisi Coates describes what it means to be a black body in a racialized society: "On the outside black people controlled nothing, least of all the fate of their bodies, which could be commandeered by the police; which could be erased by the guns, which were so profligate; which could be raped, beaten, jailed." Hart's word choice is a sharp two-edged sword: it reveals the continued injustice of a racialized society—whose body is it!?—while demanding to be known as simultaneously *black* and a human *body*, a deliberate rejection of the twisted logic of white superiority.

The chapter on Jesus was the least satisfying for me (Chapter 3, "Leaving Behind the Whiteness of Jesus"). In describing the subversive nature of Jesus' life and death, Hart paints in broad strokes Jesus' own marginal social position and Jesus' risky critique of the dominant socio-political, religious, and economic institutions of his day. The haphazard method here resembles a melting pot of Mennonite tropes about Jesus rather than a sustained case for Jesus' identity as one of those whom he blessed: the poor, the mourners, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the persecuted. I found myself wanting more of James Cone's (or even Dietrich Bonhoeffer's) Black Christ and less of the spiritualized, domesticated Jesus of white American Christianity. Jesus' insistence that his disciples "deny themselves," for instance, is Hart's opportunity to drive home the point about epistemological privilege: for whites, faithful discipleship demands leaving behind our whiteness. It felt like, after challenging me to the core, Hart was holding back with all-too-vague notions of the "kingdom of God" and Spirit-led social transformation

that let me off the hook for my white privilege. I wish he hadn't.

*Trouble I've Seen* is exceptional for its insistence that how we *feel* about injustice matters. If we want to change our attitudes and behaviors and systems, we have to change our affections about them or risk persisting in "affected ignorance" towards an unjust status quo that benefits white people at the expense of black people and other oppressed groups. What Hart insists on philosophical grounds he models in plain view: stories matter, especially the stories of black lives in America. He risks something of himself by sharing his own story. We should listen carefully.

(Editor's Note: This book was recently added to our FMC library, check it out!)





## Seeing Jesus' face in San Antonio

Kathy Springer

The large white van pulls into the parking lot of La Casa. From it emerge a mother and two small boys. Besides her purse, the mother is clutching a thin plastic garbage bag with a few personal items. The biggest boy is carrying a small backpack, and his small brother follows. As they enter the large house, they are assigned a room to spend the night, and I help Yanira, the cook, serve a hot meal at the big kitchen table. This scenario might be repeated several times a day. Yanira, a Guatemalan who herself went through this experience last year, knows how to make everyone feel welcome and what kind of food to prepare.

Through this home pass mothers and children who have just been released from one of two large immigration detention centers in Texas. All of them have a similar story: they fled their home, most commonly in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, and traveling through treacherous territory somehow arrived at the U.S. border where they applied for asylum. From there they were transported to and incarcerated at either Karnes (679 beds) or Dilley (2,400 beds), detention centers run by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. While awaiting an interview, many women told of first being put in "la nevera," or "refrigerator," named because of its cold temperature, where they were given only a metallic blanket for warmth. This was followed by a stay in "la perrera," which resembled a dog cage. The reason for this treatment is supposedly to discourage family or friends from following in their footsteps. This makes no sense to me; no one wants to leave their home with only the clothes on their back unless they are escaping an impossible situation. Before arriving in the U.S., Yanira's teenage son was ordered to run drugs by the local gang. Noncompliance would have meant death to the entire family.

Each of these mothers was released from detention because she passed the "credible fear" interview, she has somewhere to go in the U.S., usually the home of a relative, and she has a bus or plane ticket to arrive at her destination. Some of them wear ankle monitors, and each of them has to periodically check in with immigration authorities until their final status is decided.

RAICES, (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services) is a nonprofit agency that provides free and low-cost legal services to underserved immigrant children, families, and refugees in Central and South Texas. It rents La Casa from San Antonio Mennonite Church. Through an interfaith effort individuals from a variety of churches in San Antonio partner to help the refugees that pass through La Casa.

As the mothers and children would leave La Casa, taken by a volunteer to the bus station or airport, they carried their documents in a 9" x 13" plastic sleeve upon which was often clipped this note: "I do not speak English. Please help me." I pray that they will each find an "angel" along the way, and that the home at which they will arrive will be a safe and welcoming place.

Keith and I spent the month of February volunteering in cooperation with San Antonio Mennonite Church. It was our second year to work as volunteers through SOOP (Service Opportunities with Our Partners) under Mennonite Mission Network. Keith spent his time fixing, painting and refurbishing both the church building and two other buildings owned by the church.

Would YOU consider volunteering with SOOP? There are many locations and jobs from which to choose, and length of time can vary from two weeks through several months. Check it out at [MennoniteMission.net/SOOP](http://MennoniteMission.net/SOOP).





# The Peace Garden

Mary Krick

Begun in a spirit of cooperation and friendship with the Mosque.  
 Begun to provide food to those who needed it.  
 A success and a struggle.  
 Until... No time anymore - not enough energy - nobody wants just 5 tomatoes - gardened out! Finished.

How to re-envision the effort? Perennials - "Supposed" to be less work.

How about a butterfly attracting garden? Gardens need pollinators and Faith in Place supports this.

And we'll want mostly, if not entirely, native plants. And we must have SOME food. Surely at least one tomato plant.

Oh, and lets make it a story garden.

WHAT!!

You know, tell our story in a garden. ????

What is our story?

PEACE: Peace with ourselves, peace with others, peace with the earth, peace with God.

So we need a native plant, perennial, butterfly attracting, story garden about peace, with food?

Hmmm.

Peace with self. A place to sit, think, watch butterflies, pray, walk the paths, eat a pea. (We will have some food.)

Peace with others. Especially the Mosque. Our garden sign. They work side by side in a "sister" garden. We share plans and plants.  
 Peace with the earth. It is a garden and it's mostly native (nearly native) plants.

Peace with God. We are all on our faith journey. Some on the same path, some not.

And there should be mystery. Maybe if you can't see all of the garden at a glance; maybe if you have to go into it. So we'll put some tall plants in the middle!

Done. Well not quite.

Done except for planting a few more perennials, may be some annuals, planting a few more vegetables, weeding pretty much all the time, and occasionally even watering the vegetables. (The perennials won't need as much watering.)

You are invited! This garden represents community. Come into it, not necessarily to work. You are part of this community. Every time you visit it, for any reason, please put a black dot on the back of the peace sign. (You'll see other dots and there is a marker velcro-ed high on the sign's post.) I would love to have this visible sign of our garden community.

Thank you all for your ideas, your work, your plants,

**You are invited to a retirement celebration honoring Pastor Janet**

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**Saturday June 18, 2016**

**2:30 pm**

**at Faith United Methodist Church**

**1719 S. Prospect Avenue in Champaign**

*Join us for a program and light refreshments.*

RSVP by June 1 to Rhonda at [office@fmc-cu.org](mailto:office@fmc-cu.org) or 367-5353



## Announcements

You can mark your calendars now for next year’s **Menno Nite**. We have again reserved space at Hawthorne Suites for **February 11, 2017**. I am happy to have this set after the disappointment this year of again conflicting with the Cincinnati Mennonite Arts Weekend and being in the impossible position of wanting to please those who had made plans with one assumption and others who had made plans with a different assumption.

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### From the Archives: “Commercials” by John Otto

And now for a word from another one of our sponsors, Potluck Frozen Entrees. Have you quit going to the Mennonite church, but miss the potluck dinners? Do the hors d’oeuvres they serve after the Great Books discussion at the Unitarian Church leave your stomach growling?

Stock up on our new Potluck Frozen Entrees. Yes, it’s just like eating at church, but you never have to leave the comfort of your own home. Each Potluck Frozen Entrée comes with a spoonful of baked beans, a spoonful of potato salad, a spoonful of tuna casserole, a spoonful of unidentifiable amorphous what-is-it casserole, half a deviled egg, three potato chips, two carrot sticks, six or seven Kentucky Fried Chicken crust crumbs, a spoonful of jello salad, a chocolate chip cookie, a brownie, some angle food cake, all piled on a thin paper plate and topped with a piece of bread and a hard patty of margarine.

Mmmmmmmm, are they ever good! Just pop one of our delicious Potluck Frozen Entrees into the microwave (or if you don’t have a microwave, don’t bother, it will taste just the same).

Potluck Frozen Entrees. The comforts of church in your own home!

Getting a little bored by your reading material? Are Victoria Holt’s romance novels getting a little too predictable; a little too tame?

THEN RUN; DON’T WALK, or better yet, take your car, to the nearest book store, and pick up a copy of *The Martyr’s Mirror* — now available in paperback. Each one of the 7,000 pages is packed with action.

Yes, this sixteenth-century tale of international derring-do will keep you on the edge of your seat for hours. It’s a story about a wacky gang of Swiss and Dutch adventurers who keep teasing the authorities by pouring water on each other’s heads, and then are tossed into dungeons, boiled alive in oil and drowned in sacks when the authorities lose their tempers. And James Bond thought he had it tough!

Don’t wait for the movie. Be the first in your office to be able to say, “I read the whole darned thing *before* it became a bestseller.” *The Martyr’s Mirror*. Only \$49.95 at most major book stores n Lancaster, Goshen and Newton.