



**New York
Mennonite
Conference**

An area conference of
Mennonite Church USA

LIFE

In New York Mennonite Conference

Dreams and Visions: 2010—2017

A Seven-Year Strategic Plan

New York Mennonite Conference — A multiplying community of new and renewed Anabaptist congregations reaching across the state of New York.

1. Renewed Churches

- Recognize that God is working in new ways (“Behold I will do a new thing...” Isaiah 43:19)
- Align the church with God’s mission. This calls for a radical transformation of the way we function since the church exists especially for those who are not yet part of it.
- Witness to the Reign of God; inviting others to reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and reconciliation with other people.
- Utilize the constructive energy of conflict so the church functions in more healthy ways.
- Are sent out in the power of the Spirit living and proclaiming the Kingdom.

2. New Churches

- Establish a new church in the Buffalo area that will become a church planting center.
- Plant many (7) new churches starting in Buffalo and reaching across the thruway to Albany and throughout the state. We envision a variety of expressions of church.
- Embrace many ethnicities and peoples, choosing to learn from our global family of faith.

These two priorities call us to train missional leaders who serve effectively in this new context. We will recognize, equip, empower and release gifts of people from across the conference.

The gospel compels us to boldly live into the Great Commission. Therefore we are called to pray and extend the reign of God by building communities of reconciliation in this post modern time. We dream of the empire state’s transformation into his King-

dom state. As Anabaptists, we believe that this is the time for the message of radical discipleship, peacemaking, and community building to form new and renewed communities of faith across New York State.

Smucker at Minister’s Retreat

Marcus Smucker, key resource person for Minister’s Retreat this August at Beaver Camp, is professor emeritus of AMBS and adjunct faculty of EMS-Lancaster in the area of spiritual formation and guidance.

Retreat sessions will focus on three aspects of God’s actions to:

- *Lead* us to confession: To be self aware.
- *Give* us family: To be at home.
- *Form* us to become leaders: To be a faithful guide.

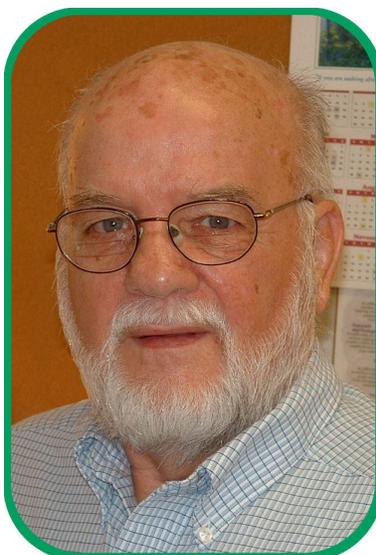


Photo courtesy Marcus Smucker

Prayers for Buffalo Church Plant

Gene Miller

The Planning Team for the Buffalo church plant continues to work, pray and plan for new church located on the lower West Side/Allentown area of Buffalo. This vibrant, new ministry will be thoroughly Anabaptist/Mennonite in its theology and practice.

In the years to come, we believe that many ministries and expressions of “church” will grow out of this new work. A part of the initial “DNA” of the vision for this new work is that it will become a place where church planters can be mentored and trained for ministry across the state and nation.

We have identified needs that we could potentially meet in Buffalo. A core group is starting to emerge. We’re identifying core values of the new work. There is a sense of excitement and enthusiasm that God is at work in this new venture.

The Planning Team members are Rebecca Ballard, Tim Chen, Sonya Stauffer Kurtz, Paul Lehman, Luann Martin, Tadelech Matewos, Chuck Massey, Gene Miller, John Powell, Nate Schlabach, Will Schrock. Steve Shank from Eastern Mennonite Missions is serving as a resource person/consultant. We invite your continued prayers for this new opportunity.

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We're Still Here: An Interview with Julio Rodriguez

Sue Klassen

Finding a time to interview Julio was a challenge. Julio juggles his job at ARC with people with mental handicaps, part time ministry and family responsibilities. And right now, Bethel Christian Church (BCC), where he is pastor, is renovating the church and fundraising for the renovations. Crises and long hours go with the territory. But when we were finally able to meet by phone on May 25, I heard a man of quiet passion serving God with his life.

Julio grew up in Puerto Rico. During college in 1986, he came to visit his mother in Amsterdam, New York and decided to stay. He started working part time in a factory that summer. By 1990, he was working there full time, but had a more important focus—Millie, the “beautiful Spanish girl” who became his wife in 1991.

Julio had gone to church with his mother when he was young, but he didn't show interest in church from ages 10 to 20 when he lived with his father in Puerto Rico nor when he came to America. God was still important to him in these years, though. In the summer of 1989, he gave his life to the Lord in a Pentecostal church. When Millie and Julio were married in the summer of 1991, they immediately started attending BCC where Julio's mother attended. They liked the pastor and the church, and appreciated that the church wasn't legalistic.

At BCC, Julio loved playing the guitar and praising God, and would lead Sunday School when asked. Julio felt God calling him to be a pastor, but felt the need to be wiser and older. Finally, in 1999, he became an associate pastor.

A year later, Pastor Gene Diaz asked Julio to be pastor. Pastor Diaz was transitioning away from BCC due to health reasons. “I prayed about it, and thought about it for two to three weeks,” Julio said. “My wife was not happy about it.”



Photo courtesy Bethel Church

But God kept persisting in his call. On October 14—a date he'll never forget—Julio was ordained at BCC. Julio loves spending time with the people of the church, having a relationship with them. “Knowing you are doing a work that goes beyond you or me—serving a greater purpose” energizes Julio. “It's a good challenge,” he said. “When you teach, you learn more than the students” through the preparation, he continued. “It makes you stronger if it doesn't break you.” And now, Julio is delighted that his wife has been a great strength in the work, even though initially she wasn't happy about him being pastor.

Julio brings patience to the work. He sometimes wants to give up, but sticks with it. His musical gifts contribute as well. “Sometimes I consider myself more of a worship leader than a preacher or teacher,” he said. Julio appreciates the unity at BCC. It's small—35 to 40 people including 7-10 kids, but has a good atmosphere.

It's been a tough journey at times. Shortly after Julio was ordained, BCC left the Mennonite conference due to the pressure of some members concerned over same sex marriages issues. “I was the new kid on the block,” Julio said. “I went along with it.”

In recent years, Julio has explored reconnection with NYMC. He wants to “make things right” with the conference. “I don't want to be a lone ranger anymore,” he said.

Julio brings to NYMC his love of God and the joy of serving. He has a desire to reach people, to have that passion rekindled. He wants to bring truth through a deep relationship with God.

Pastor Gene Miller recently sent a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) team from the Lowville area to BCC to help with their renovations. Paint has been chipping away, and the roof has been caving in. “They did 60 to 70% of the work,” Julio said.

Julio hopes to “keep plugging in with the conference” as much as he can. “Jesus fellowshiped with others,” he said. “I won't be so much by myself.”

I asked Julio for his final thoughts in our interview. “After nine years,” he said, “even though it's been tough at times, by the grace of God, and by the little but good effort I have put in, we are still here, and we have growth—a little bit.”

Congregational News

Edited by Kirk House

Lowville, Croghan: Quilt Tying Blitz

Lowville and Croghan Mennonite joined forces with other community folks for a Quilt Tying Blitz on behalf of MCC's Haiti relief. Their goal was a hundred comforters toward MCC's call for ten thousand. Ninety were tied on the spot and ten others brought in finished, meeting the goal exactly. The group also put together 94 relief kits.

Lowville congregation itself did an additional 71 kits... besides accounting for 56 of the ninety quilts sent in for tying. Lowville's Faithful Workers Sewing Circle also completed 19 baby layettes and six quilts at their February meeting, besides taking in 53 towels and \$345 for relief kits.

Pleasant Valley supports MCC Canner

The MCC canner will be in the Penn Yan-Dundee area April 12 through 15, with plans to process 36,000 pounds of turkey. Pleasant Valley congregation is donating a thousand dollars for support of the week's work.

Discernment for Buffalo Area

NYMC members and leadership met on April 9 at the former Harris Hill Church building to pray for God's discernment concerning one or more church plants in the Buffalo area.

Alden hosts EMHS Choir

Alden: Eastern Mennonite High School Choir presented a concert on April 13, following a joint meal with choir members and Alden's youth.

Alden Women's Prayer Breakfast

The 23rd Alden Women's Prayer Breakfast will be held on Sat., April 24, 9:00-11:30am, at the Millgrove Bible Church.

Save the Dates:

Stephen Richard ordination, June 27, 3pm, Chenunda Creek

Minister's Retreat with Marcus Smucker, Aug. 9-11, Beaver Camp

Celebration 2010 with Ervin Stutzman, September 17-19, Penn-York Camp

“Bridges to the Cross,” MC-USA Bi-annual Convention, July 4-9, 2011, Pittsburgh