

Learning Sessions at District Conference

- (1) ***Pre-conference Workshop***, Thursday July 25, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., Friday July 26, 8:30 – noon - 0.5 CEU's Minister's Ethics Training. Leader: Gail Erisman Valeta, pastor of Prince of Peace congregation in Denver and one of eight denominationally certified trainers for pastoral ethics. This is primarily for ordained pastors' preparation for the 2025 ordination and credentialing cycle. Western Plains District hosted the training for ordained and commissioned ministers. A few others attended just to learn what the ethics parameters are for ordained clergy.



Insight Sessions, Saturday morning July 27

- (2) ***Meet the Moderator***—Leader: Dava Hensley, 2025 Annual Conference Moderator and Pastor of First Church of the Brethren, Roanoke, VA.
- (3) ***Small Churches: Bridging Gaps through Creatively Leveraging Technology***—Leader: Enten Eller, Interim Pastor at Ridgeway Community CoB, Harrisburg, PA and also pastoral staff at Living Stream CoB, a totally online church streaming from Pacific Northwest District. Small churches often face difficulties in filling pastoral leadership positions. In addition to calling and encouraging the gifts of those in the congregation, how might congregations think in new and creative ways, leveraging technology to help bridge some of the gaps they face? Included some brainstorming and discussion of simple strategies that might help.
- (4) ***Starting a Safe Parking Program at your Church*** — Leader: Rochelle Brogan, member at Prince of Peace, Denver, and lead coordinator of PoP's homeless outreach program. People experiencing homelessness living in their car/vehicle are a growing and invisible population that can be helped to find a more stable housing situation by setting up a "Safe Parking" easily and cheaply in our underused parking lots at our congregations. This is a way to embody Jesus in the (local) Neighborhood.
- (5) ***Sponsors to Advocates to Friends: Our Ukrainian Resettlement Journey***—Leader: Nancy Magnall and the McPherson church Welcomers group. We felt shock and dismay when Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. A news article alerted us to a U.S. government program called Uniting for Ukraine which allowed individuals and groups to sponsor Ukrainian refugees who were seeking safety in our country. In this session, members of the McPherson Welcomers group shared the journey our church and community embarked upon as we welcomed Ukrainian individuals and family groups to central Kansas. Also shared what they have learned and the joy and blessings they have experienced, along with the challenges, as we try to be Jesus in the (international) Neighborhood.

(6) ***Jesus in the Neighborhood through Child Disaster Services***—Leader: Tina Burkholder, member at McPherson CoB and extensively active with Children’s Disaster Services. With loads of personal stories and pictures, Tina shared her experiences with the Paradise, California fire, with a Catholic Charities partnership helping immigrants on the southern border, with Afghan refugees brought to Fort Bliss, and with the Lahaina Maui fire.

(7) ***From Your Call to Theirs: Developing a Culture of Calling***—Leader: Nancy Sollenberger Heishman, Director of Ministry, CoB Offices in Elgin, IL. Creating a culture of calling persons to ministry flows from the vibrancy of our own life of Christian discipleship. How have we heard Christ calling us to follow Him in our lives as laity or ministers? From the passion and meaning of our own call within the concept of the priesthood of all believers we extend Christ’s call to others. This session explored the meaning of discipleship as the basis for the call to the set-apart ministry and considered ways that our congregations can be incubators for extending the call to others today.

Sunday Morning Study, July 28

(8) ***Who Are We Brethren?*** Leader: Enten Eller. The early part of the session was devoted to an impromptu request for Enten to tell his story of being a non-registrant for the draft in the early 1980’s. An interesting story indeed. Then to the main “planned” morning session -- the genius of the Brethren movement—combining the Anabaptist commitment with the Pietist relationship with God, all wrapped into a community-centered understanding of the Christian Life--can be explored by using the seal of Alexander Mack as a window into what makes Brethren tick (with grateful credit given to the teachings of Vernard Eller). In all, was a light-hearted, yet seriously deep, discussion of our core Brethren values. Many of us likely learned more about who we as Brethren are, and the things for which we stand.