

## 23-24 Colorado Springs Service Adventure End of the Year Report

For the 2023-2024 academic year, we had two participants in the Colorado Springs Service Adventure Unit: Sam Pluta from South Bend, Indiana, and Shawna Hurt from Hesston, Kansas, along with leaders Shelby and Travis Clarke from Colorado Springs.

Support Committee: Michelle Main, Cindy Weaver, Adrian Stamer, and Lawrence Martin

Host Families: Fred Martin & the Gillis family; Marika, Nathan, Juliana, and Jack

Participants in Service Adventure engaged in full-time service at various nonprofit organizations in Colorado Springs. Sam served at Our House Bright Futures, a day program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and Shawna worked at Family Promise, helping unhoused families.

In addition to their service placements, they volunteered with live stream and children's ministry at Beth-El, at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp during events such as Pastor's Retreat, Snow Camps, Labor Day and Memorial Day Work & Play Weekend, and the MCC Relief Sale in Rocky Ford.

The adventure aspect of Service Adventure allowed us to indulge in fun activities. We had a great time playing at RMMC throughout the term, embarking on an end-of-year trip to Bisbee, Arizona, building new relationships through supper clubs and small groups, hiking with fellow church members, traveling to Rocky Ford, Washington DC, and Estes Park, and exploring the wonders of Colorado Springs together.

Learning and worship nights were integral components of the Service Adventure experience. Each week, we rotated responsibilities for these activities. We engaged in diverse learning opportunities such as quilting, participating in activities with RAWtools, making peppernuts, learning about robotics competitions, attending art exhibits, learning to play games and other country cultures, and much more. During worship nights, we found the Spirit in nature on meditative hikes, walking the labyrinth, watching movies with faith themes and engaging in discussions, learning about the bible as literature, participating in special worship services, and visiting other Mennonite churches within

the Mountain States Mennonite Conference, including Boulder Mennonite & Albuquerque Mennonite.

Our travels took us to Albuquerque, NM on our way to and from our end of the year trip to Bisbee, Arizona, Rocky Ford, CO for the MCC Relief Sale, Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park, as well as Washington, DC for the Mennonite Action event in January 2024. For our end-of-year trip, we visited Bisbee, Arizona thanks to the generosity of Ken & Amy Linfeild who gave us access to their home.

The Frontier Village Foundation continues its mission of supporting MSMC congregations and partner ministries across the conference. This year we distributed \$28,000 in grants to fund four different projects.

**RAWtools** – A partnership between RAWtools, MSMC, and Beth-El MC is sponsoring a summer intern position to provide administrative and event support for RAWtools. The position is through the Future Anabaptist Leaders program. Supported events include June’s Gun Violence Prevention Month, a Guns to Gardens safe surrender event at Glennon Heights Mennonite Church, and blacksmithing broken gun parts to create items that cultivate life.

**Community Dreamer Fund** – This program, sponsored through Sojourn Mennonite Church, provides emergency financial assistance to local undocumented, DACA, and asylum-seeking high school and post-secondary students. The funds enable these to overcome financial barriers in their post-secondary education goals. Higher education is critical to their journey of making a positive social and economic impact to their community.

**Mindfulness & Positivity Project** – The mission of the MPP is to provide teachers and students training on mindfulness and positive psychology, promoting mental health tools for better social interactions and suicide prevention. Since 2020 the organization has held many workshops, retreats, and courses on mindful, evidence-based psychological intervention methods. Over 1,500 teachers have been given tools to work with their students in the Pikes Peak region on improving social interactions.

**Mobile Clothes Ministry** – This project, through Beth-El Mennonite Church, provides clothes to immigrants and their homes in the Colorado Springs community who are struggling with both transportation and childcare. The program has new and gently-used clothing which is delivered to clients in need, providing dignity which comes through choice. This program has continued to grow and mature, reaching over 1,500 people from 40+ countries

Our grant request package has been simplified for next year. We hope this will encourage more congregations and ministries to apply for funding. The deadline for submission will be March 1, 2025. Please visit our website at <https://mountainstatesmc.org/conference-life/ministries/frontier-village/> to see if your programs would be a good fit for a foundation grant. We typically prioritize programs which directly contribute to the lives of people in our region, are new or recent startup ministries, and have a connection to people or churches within MSMC. FVF has contributed \$846,000 over its 39-year history in our region. It is a privilege to continue serving congregations and local ministries by supporting new dreams and outreach.

Submitted by Bryan Miller, President FVF

Dear MSMC Friends,

The TiLT House in downtown Taos emerged last year from the ashes of an arson fire to open its doors again in June 2023. In the past year, TiLT Executive Director Todd Wynward and his wife Peg Bartlett have made creative choices to position their personal home as TiLT's HQ but also as a co-housing community of six adults, a community center and a retreat lodge.

**TiLT's mission is to be an incubator for personal life change and systemic change. Here are some of the ways we intend to live into this mission in this coming year:**

### **Offer Sabbaticals & Curated Residencies**

Responding to individuals seeking one-on-one spiritual direction, professional discernment, life-coaching, Todd Wynward now offers customized residencies and guided sabbaticals. Most recently Todd customized a month-long guided sabbatical focusing on desert spirituality for a pastor from Saskatchewan, as well as a twelve-day residency for a burned-out church planter from the Boston area who sought renewal, deep dialogue and life discernment.

### **Grow a County-Wide Repurposing Plastic Consortium in Taos**

**Here in Taos we've incubated an innovative solution to plastic pollution: TiLT's Repurposing Plastic Project [RPP].** Over the last four years RPP has been repurposing our community's plastic as a building material, rather than dumping it in our landfill or pretending to recycle. Repurposing is by no means a complete solution to our worldwide plastic pollution pandemic, but it's part of it.

**TiLT has developed a marketable product: the Redi-Wall,** an 8' x 50" x 16" modular wall panel priced at \$350, that is made of almost 200 pounds of clean post-consumer plastic stuffed into a sturdy wire framework. This 8-foot-long Redi-Wall is easy to install and ready to stucco, already prepped with stucco wire and a moisture barrier. The can be rapidly attached together with a pneumatic hog ring gun, and then stuccoed to create a cement anaerobic barrier that prevents decomposition and outgassing.

**We demonstrated proof of concept in 2023:** we have constructed sheds, windbreaks, privacy patios, perimeter walls, a studio/barn and a carport/workshop. These last two structures were designed by an architect and in 2023 were approved by Taos County P&Z.

**We've produced some educational and promotional resources.** With the support of the LOR Foundation and a crew from UNM-Taos, two 10-minute videos are now available on Youtube: *Repurposing Plastic: Turning Waste into Walls in Taos, NM* which shares our story to inspire others, as well as *Repurposing Plastic Project: How We Turn Waste Into Walls*, which shares a bit more of the practical aspects of how we do what we do. Check them out!

**We're partnering in 2024 on two inspiring high-profile projects.** We made the front page of the Taos News last month due to an innovative collaboration with Taos County Solid Waste—together we constructed a recycling collection shed at one of the County's many recycling centers *out of* repurposed plastic! And we just landed a contract to build a 120' parking lot perimeter wall in 2024 for Hotel Willa, an upscale eco-hotel located across from Smith's in downtown Taos. This high-profile project for a corporate client may do a great deal to showcase the value of repurposing plastic in the public's eye.

**A team of us believe we're onto something.** LOR Foundation, TiLT, Taos Hive, Taos County Solid Waste, UNM-Taos and other allies believe the practice of using repurposing plastic as a building material is promising enough to be scaled up and replicated. If we can learn ways to repurpose our own plastic waste here, it can be a game changer for Taos, for other rural mountain communities, and for the world.

**We want to ramp up a region-wide repurposing plastic economy, and grow a Repurposing Plastic Consortium of entities to run it.** Right now repurposing plastic is just an innovative idea started by a

tiny non-profit incubator. In coming months, how can we create a warm hand-off to take this concept county-wide, growing a Repurposing Plastic Consortium of collaborative entities to run a regional, sustainable economic engine? Starting in June 2024, a small cohort will begin putting the right pieces together, to build a local repurposing plastic economy so irresistible that a cohort of higher-capacity organizations will take on the mantle of repurposing plastic and bring it to a county-wide scale.

### **Incubate The Center for Spiritual Resiliency**

Through deep partnership with a small cohort of MSMC leaders and interfaith allies, a new statewide initiative is beginning to bubble up: The Center for Spiritual Resiliency [CSR]. Our vision is to be a **bioregional hub of adult spiritual formation** and a **community of contrast** that fosters adult discipleship, prophetic imagination, life-giving practices, deep soul connections, and transformative lifeways. We want to nurture and strengthen our spiritual roots as emerging sacred activists, learning to creatively resist Empire and embody the good news of Christ, led by Spirit to wade hip-deep together into the deeply challenging crises of our time.

TiLT has held several planning retreats and brainstorming sessions so far in 2024. Developers of this initiative will be in dialogue with the NM Conference of Churches, MSMC, and other entities to see if they might house the Center under their umbrella, as we are seeking to be a resource under an umbrella organization with statewide or bioregional scope. We also will seek to write two significant grants in August that may provide multi-year startup funding to assist the incubation of this initiative.

We expect to launch the Center for Spiritual Resiliency with a kickoff event in Taos in mid-September that is sponsored by the NM Conference of Churches. We are envisioning a launch event September 13-15 in Taos that will kick off our Fall curriculum of perhaps three Learning Journeys selected from the menu below.

### **Learning Journeys the Center might offer**

Below is a list of possible content the Center for Spiritual Resiliency might offer. Most offerings will be multi-week online courses of 6-12 weeks duration that start and end with physical overnight retreats in Taos. We're calling our offerings *Learning Journeys*, because they will be adventures of the mind, spirit, and body, and because we want them to be not only *informative* but *transformative*, helping participants to travel ever further on their path as sacred activists and transformative change agents in this world so in need of healing.

**Spiritual Resiliency 101: 20 Pillars to Strengthen Your Soul for the Long Haul**

**Entrapped in Empire: *Just How Captive Are You? An Audit of Self & Society***

**Sabbath Circles: Experiences in Soul Tending at the Well** with Anita Amstutz

**Ancient Scriptural Disciplines for Transformative Living Today** with Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev

**A Series of Courageous Conversations: Restoring Right Relationships,**

**Cultivating Covenanted Kinship in a Culture of Colonization**

with Kevin Whitefeather, Margaret Garcia and Megan White

**Land Stewardship Through An Indigenous Lens: Service, Sharing & Learning**

With Kevin Whitefeather of Taos Pueblo

**How Then Shall We Live?:** Exploring Earthships, Veterans Off Grid, Tiny House Homesteading, and Taos Pueblo. With Angie Fernandez, Ryan Timmermans, Kevin Whitefeather and Todd Wynward

**Rewilding the Way: Immersions into Wilderness Spirituality** with Todd Wynward

If you have a desire to come alongside TiLT's work and join a small group of us who are making TiLT's vision a reality, contact me at [toddwynward@gmail.com](mailto:toddwynward@gmail.com) or 575-770-8681. Thanks in advance for your support & your risk taking!

Peace and good, Todd Wynward, Taos, NM July 2024

## **Alamosa MVS report: June 2024**

During the 2023-2024 placement year, Alamosa MVS has had three full-time volunteers, two who newly arrived in August 2023 and one who was in a second year of service. We will remain one of three active MVS sites across the US this coming year, as we say good-bye to our current volunteers and prepare to welcome three confirmed volunteers again in August 2024. For the current cycle, volunteers have been involved in the VEGI community gardening program, EL student supports at Ortega Middle School, and various assignments at Rio Grande Hospital and Clinics by a volunteer preparing to enter Physician Assistant training. For the coming cycle, we will again have a volunteer providing student supports at Ortega Middle School, along with two volunteers at Center for Restorative Programs – one focused on interventions to deflect adults with substance misuse away from the legal criminal system, and the other on restorative justice diversion for youth/young adults. A fourth applicant is considering a placement at the Rio Grande Farm Park, so we may have a full house coming up! 2023 marked the 40<sup>th</sup> year of MVS in Alamosa and surrounding communities. We were especially fortunate, shortly after last Summer's MSMC Assembly, to host an MDS project in Alamosa to help with significant exterior maintenance on our volunteer residence. This included a mighty roofing crew of Herm Weaver's extended family, along with MDS folks from around Colorado and New Mexico who joined local community volunteers to prep and repaint the house exterior. It was an amazing display of the web of support that has kept MVS a vital presence in this region for many years.

Alice M. Price, Alamosa MVS Local Program Coordinator

## Dialogue Resource Team - 2024 Annual Report

Though much of the work contributed by the Dialogue Resource Team (DRT) is behind-the-scenes, confidential, and periodic in nature, it has been a steady resource for many years for both Conference leadership and at times individual congregations navigating more difficult situations. DRT currently has two Conference-based members - Alice M. Price (Alamosa) and Jill Schmidt (Denver). Two former Conference-based folks, as well as other regional expertise beyond Conference-specific ties, have also been available to handle referrals at times. Alice serves as a liaison from DRT for Conference pastor, Amy Zimbelman, to access DRT consultation and discuss specific resources and referrals that may be needed for more in-depth work. DRT's work spans education, assessment, and assistance with dynamics related to decision-making, change, conflict, and harm. This past year, DRT's core members have also continued to provide short articles for DRT's "With Care" columns in ZING! These long-standing columns provide on-going reflections and practical tips on handling differences, change, conflict, and harm in church and other organizational settings, as well as in everyday life. More details about DRT resources, referrals, and suggested fees are on the Conference website.

- Report by Alice M. Price, DRT liaison

## Fostering New Communities

The Fostering New Communities task force (Shelva Leep, Vern Rempel, Ken Linfield, Erin Wentorf, and Amy Zimbelman) worked hard earlier this year to create an application process for groups interested in seeking support of various kinds for their newly planted or re-planted communities. We are happy to say that, as of this writing one week before Assembly, we just received an application with a second one promised to be on the way. We will be processing those in the next few weeks.

If you are part of a newer community and would like to learn more, please reach out to Amy Zimbelman [amyz@mountainstatesmc.org](mailto:amyz@mountainstatesmc.org) to see if this type of support would be a good fit for you. We're hoping to hear from all interested groups by the end of 2024, while making determinations on a rolling basis.



# Mountain States Mennonite Conference: Ministerial Council Report

August 2023 - July 2024

The Ministerial Council is the body that handles credentialing interviews within the Mountain States Mennonite Church Conference for our member churches. We work closely with the Conference Minister who works directly with churches in the search process and officiates at licensing and ordination services. The Ministerial Council also advises the Conference Minister on setting up mentoring partnerships for new pastors and the ongoing needs around credentialing.

The Ministerial Council consists of four active members:

- Jenelle Roynon, chair, (Divide) *term ended January 2024*
- Barry Bartel, Glennon Heights (Lakewood) *term began February 2024*
- Jordan Farrell, Beth-El Mennonite Church (Colorado Springs) *term began February 2024*
- Zack Martinez (Fort Collins)
- May Moua, Hmong Mennonite Church (Lakewood)
- Randy Spaulding, Boulder Mennonite Church (Boulder) *term ended January 2024*

## ***The year in review:***

As far as credentialing, Ministerial Council held an interview with Dwight Scull at Living Light of Peace to begin his License Toward Ordination. We also recently met with Mike Martin of RAWtools to work on changing his Licensed for Specific Ministry credential to a Licensed Toward Ordination credential.

In September, Amy Zimbelman received a formal complaint of alleged ministerial misconduct of Glenn Balzer (First Mennonite Denver) which she brought to the Ministerial Council for review. Because of the stated allegations all leaders agreed that it was necessary to begin a formal investigation. An investigative team of three people was assembled with experience in restorative justice and the U.S. justice system and with no close ties to the congregation, complainant, or respondent. They began their investigation in October and gathered evidence primarily by interviewing 11 people and reviewing written documents.

In November, the investigative team submitted their findings with two charges of ministerial misconduct. Glenn Balzer disputed the charges which led to the next step in the MC USA misconduct process of hearings with Glenn, his witnesses, and the investigators. After the hearings, Ministerial Council reviewed the evidence and upheld the first charge and amended the second charge due to lack of sufficient evidence. The charges were: *Not holding to professional boundaries, including in relating with youth in the congregation in which he pastors, specifically women and girls; along with engaging in unsolicited unprofessional conversations.* As well as a second amended charge: *Lack of attention to congregants' specific expressed needs.*

In January, as a result of the investigation process, Glenn Balzer's credentials were suspended (ministry credential is laid aside for a specified period). Suspending his credentials took into account the seriousness of the charges while leaving room for repentance and reform. Ministerial Council believed that suspension could provide the path of accountability if Glenn chose to try to change harmful behaviors, along with grace to hopefully restore his credentials. Glenn Balzer chose to resign from his position, resulting in his credentials being terminated in March due to lack of responsiveness to the suspension requirements.

It was extremely difficult for Ministerial Council to navigate the intense feelings of all involved (complainants, pastor, congregation, and council members) while sorting through the information to find a path through this process. As a Council, we take seriously the complaints of congregants, value the ethical standards established by the conference and denomination, and strive to be a conference that works towards restoration

when standards are violated. It is our prayer that those serving our congregations are ministering as servants of God and as followers of the way of Jesus, and from that they accept their responsibility for ethical integrity and accountability to people entrusted to their care.

Submitted by Jenelle Roynon , former MC Chair

## **Prayerstream**

Prayerstream is a Passion Ministry of Mountain States Mennonite Conference. Our mission is to bring comfort, care, prayer, and action to individuals and communities in crisis.

The gifts of this ministry emerge through deep relationships and soulful collaborations and connections to communities in the midst of challenging circumstances. Our integral partners include Boulder Mennonite Church, Mennonite Disaster Service, the Poudre Canyon Chapel, TiLT along with vibrant and engaged community members in Taos. We enjoy the invitations to learn, listen and co-create experiences that reflect the healing and vibrant kin-dom of God.

We continue to explore and wait for the Spirit's leading on how we might deepen and develop our programmatic response to natural and human caused disasters. Given the state of environmental, political, and social upheavals, our prayerful priority is to listen, discern and respond in new ways with God's guidance and wisdom at the fore.

Some initiatives in the past year included putting together comfort kits for children and mothers fleeing domestic violence, helping to host the Region 3 MDS gathering at Boulder Mennonite, and partnering with MDS on a number of projects.

We also planned and financially supported a service/learning trip for the Boulder Mennonite community to Taos, part of our mission of creation care and connecting with our native kin.

Our team is invited each summer to lead Sunday Worship with the community at the Poudre Canyon Chapel. This relationship has grown since our 2021 Prayerstream/MDS response to the Cameron Peak Fire. Poudre Canyon Chapel is a generous donor and foundational part of our Prayerstream ministry.

### **Current and future offerings:**

- \* Beginning in February, the Prayerstream Team has been a part of sacred conversations and visioning related to the development of a "Center for Spiritual Resiliency" with a core group of collaborators in Taos, NM.

- \* We have continued to nurture the relationship with key leaders and protectors of the Water and Buffalo for the Taos Pueblo. Serving some of the immediate needs

related to water conservation, fire mitigation in tandem with the healing that comes from listening across culture and historical devastation.

\* In 2024/2025 we would like to extend invitations to visit MSMC churches with the Prayerstream purpose of praying alongside the concerns and challenges being experienced within the congregations in order to build a conference wide circle of support and care.

\* With the November elections in mind, we are praying and preparing to establish an intention weekly prayer time to increase our peacemaking and heart opening capacities to act boldly for the values and vision given to us through Jesus and our longstanding Anabaptist tradition. Stay tuned as we discern how this can be offered both in person and on zoom.

We invite you to stop by our table at the assembly to visit and pick up our newsletter, which contains images from the past year.

Thanks so much for all your support and prayers! We look forward to connecting with many more of you as we “pray without ceasing” in a world of such trouble, pain and bloodshed.

## RAWtools 2024 Mountain States Mennonite Conference Report

RAWtools recognized its 11<sup>th</sup> year on Feb 11, 2024. We had recently finished an exhibit that ran from Dec 1 through Feb 28 at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, titled “Another Way is Possible.” Work in the exhibit came from our blacksmith and maker network across the country, including some pieces displayed here at Assembly made by folks from our conference. Most of the items were a part of our first “forging marathon,” working 1 minute for every life lost to gun violence in 2022 – over 44,000. We recently wrapped up our second marathon, again forging one minute for every life lost to gun violence in 2023, -over 45,000.

Our national Disarming Network of volunteers that help destroy unwanted firearms was renamed as the Guns to Gardens Network. After 2 years of collaborative work with other organizations like Swords to Plowshares Northeast, New Mexicans to Prevent Gun Violence, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and others, RAWtools’ leadership of the national Guns to Gardens network became official and combined with our own network. With the help of our partners, there are now regularly occurring events where people can have their firearms destroyed, as well as make private appointments with our volunteers.

Glennon Heights Mennonite Church recently hosted a Guns to Gardens event where 45 firearms were turned in and destroyed. It was a part of 6 annual events RAWtools organizes with our Guns to Gardens Metro Denver team each year. In 2023, we handled and destroyed over 300 firearms with the help of over 150 unique volunteers and over 20 congregations, including interfaith. We received grant funding from the city of Denver and Denver Health for several of these events.

We’re grateful to have had the opportunity to partner with MSMC’s Young Anabaptist Leaders program to share an intern this summer, Abenezer Dejene, from AMBS. It’s our second summer with an intern and we plan to hire an additional staff person before the end of 2024. We’re also beginning to explore possibilities to move into a public space. We are currently operating our blacksmith shop out of a donated 2 car garage and have an immediate need to expand.

You can support our work at [rawtools.org/donation](https://rawtools.org/donation) by making a one-time or recurring donation.