

A second act: Tijerina says yes to pastoral ministry; takes VBS “on the road”

By Hannah Heinzekehr (Reprinted by permission from *The Mennonite*)

When she dreamed about how she would fill her time after retirement, Grace “Gracie” Tijerina wasn’t planning on pastoral ministry or a move to Hesston, Kan. Although she had often served in church leadership roles—teaching Sunday school, leading singing and planning worship—Tijerina didn’t feel ready to say yes to pastoral ministry. But, as she tells it, during one Tuesday Bible study with members of her church in Los Fresnos, Texas, the group sang the words of a familiar hymn.

“Señor, me has mirado a los ojos, sonriendo has dicho mi nombre; en la arena he dejado mi barca; junto a ti buscaré otro mar.” (O Lord, with your eyes you have searched me, and while smiling have spoken my name; now my boat’s left on the shoreline behind me; by your side I will seek other seas.)

In that moment, Tijerina says, “I felt like he [God] was calling me and saying, ‘This is what I want you to do.’”

Tijerina tested this sense of call with family and church members, as well as with Amzie Yoder, a South Central Conference regional conference minister for South Texas, and Tim Lichti, then the director of Hesston College’s Pastoral Ministries Program.

As she tested the idea, Tijerina says she felt encouragement from every angle. “As soon as I said yes, the road was open. Every obstacle that was there just cleared.”

In 2013, she relocated to Hesston and began study in the Pastoral Ministries Program. However, soon into her time at Hesston, the program went on hiatus, and she became a Bible major. This was Tijerina’s first college experience, and she acknowledges it wasn’t without its ups and downs. Upon arriving at orientation, she had to get used to new norms and ways of doing things. Instead of taking five classes per semester, she took three or four and stretched her program out over three years.

During her time at Hesston, Tijerina found mentors in the Bible faculty, Marion Bontrager and Michele Hershberger, as well as Cheryl Hershberger, a retired pastor who attends Hesston Mennonite Church. Cheryl served as a formal pastoral mentor to walk alongside Tijerina as she tested her own call to ministry. She also found a church home at Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston and a job at the local outdoor retreat, Dyck Arboretum, working in the gift shop.

Tijerina embraced her student experience and participated in a variety of extracurricular activities, including doing makeup for campus theater productions and walking in Hesston’s annual Thanksgiving race, the Howard Hustle.

“Getting to do all these things that I’d never done has been so amazing,” says Tijerina. “The door was open to come and study Bible, but the door was also open to learn other things.” Now Tijerina jokes that she is the poster woman for Hesston College’s tagline, “Start here, go everywhere.” “I believe God had been calling me for years, but as you can see, (continued on page 2)



Grace Tijerina with the VBS on the Road team, (back l to r) Tijerina, Micah Raber, Tanner Daniel, Abraham Mateo, (front l to r) Lilian Trifena and Megan Bartley.



Grace Tijerina. Photo by Eleya Raim/Hesston Horizon.

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Members of South Central Conference prayed for and commissioned the team on June 2 at Hesston Mennonite Church.

Pastor/Congregation News

>Inman (Kansas) Mennonite Church was accepted as a member of South Central Conference at the annual assembly on June 11, transferring membership from Western District Conference.

>Rey de Gloria church in Brownsville, Texas, is again providing a day care program for eighty or more children, now for several years, with financial support from a Schowalter Foundation grant. Many of the participants are children of undocumented parents who are employed but without access to dependable and safe child care.

>Eric Miller, campus pastor at Journey@South Hutchinson, is one of the featured speakers at the annual conference of Anabaptist Renewal Circles on Thursday, July 28. Journey Mennonite Church is hosting this event, scheduled for July 28-30 (see separate article).

VBS on the Road (continued from page 1)

I took a long time to answer," Tijerina says. "I'm 63. I made a joke because I said the calling from God didn't just start, even though I'm here in Hesston and I'm going everywhere."

Although she's not clear yet what her long-term next step will be, this summer Tijerina is leading a group of students traveling from church to church and leading Vacation Bible School for congregations that are too small to run their own program.

In summer 2015, Tijerina was invited to visit Argentine Mennonite Church in Kansas City, Kan. The small church was discerning next steps and weighing whether or not to close its doors. Tijerina spent six weeks exploring the community to get a sense of ministry opportunities: visiting the library, interviewing church members, talking with local police and more. The congregation invited her to lead a Vacation Bible School for children in the neighborhood around the church. Tijerina recruited youth from Iglesia Menonita Buenas Nuevas in McAllen, Texas, to stay in Kansas City after attending the Mennonite Church USA convention and help lead the Bible study.

The event was so successful that South Central Mennonite Conference invited Tijerina to consider taking "VBS on the Road" this summer. Tijerina recruited five college students to serve on the team, and the conference bought a van for them to travel in.

Over the course of the summer, the team will lead VBS programs at seven different congregations in Kansas and Texas. Their theme is "Cave Quest: Following Jesus, the Light of the World." At each stop, they'll be fed and hosted by the local congregation, and they'll help coordinate a week-long program for children with church volunteers. The group plans to incorporate Bible stories, singing, games, arts and crafts, and more into their program.

For Tijerina, "VBS on the Road" is a way to connect youth and congregations across the conference with one another as well as to help tell the story of Jesus to children. She also believes each of the team members was specially chosen by God and meant to serve in this summer ministry.

All the team members were commissioned during a June 2 prayer and blessing service at Hesston Mennonite Church.

For Megan Bartley, a member of Journey Mennonite Church in South Hutchinson, Kan., this will be her second time visiting congregations in south Texas. "We'll be visiting places that have limited opportunity to hear the gospel. I'm excited to love the kids and share Jesus with them," she said.

Abraham Mateo, Hesston freshman and a member of Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvacion in Fort Myers, Fla., said he was surprised by this opportunity, but sees God at work. "I said yes to this with no experience," he said. "I know God is working here." And for Lilian Trifena, a Hesston freshman from Indonesia, this trip also represents a chance to explore new cultures and visit Texas, a state she's never had a chance to travel to before.

Other team members include Tanner Daniel, a Hesston freshman from El Dorado, Mo., and Micah Raber, a Hesston sophomore from Millersburg, Ohio.

Tijerina hopes that taking VBS on the road will turn into a tradition for the conference and inspire other congregations and conferences to explore similar ideas. She knows that many churches are small and don't have a lot of financial or people resources to help put on a VBS program.

After "VBS on the Road" ends, Tijerina is not sure what comes next. She is exploring other ideas for pastoring or church planting but isn't sure where God's call will take her. "All I know is that Hesston was the best rollercoaster ride you could have," she says.

You can follow VBS on the Road on Facebook.

[Editor's note: This project is supported in part by a grant from The Schowalter Foundation.]

Pastor/Congregation News

>John Murray, lead pastor of Hesston Mennonite Church, has resigned his position effective September 30.

>Greensburg Mennonite Church (Jeff Blackburn, Pastor) has taken action to withdraw from Mennonite Church USA, but will remain an active member of South Central Conference.

>Isaac Landis, youth and young adult pastor at Whitestone Mennonite Church, will return from a 3-month sabbatical on July 5.

>Jim Ostlund, campus pastor at Journey@McPherson, will begin a 3-month sabbatical leave on July 25th.

>Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Hydro, Oklahoma, has called Gab Pennington as Associate Pastor.

>Kenzie Intemann began as pastor of Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church, Harper, Kansas, on June 19. He and his wife Mallory have moved from northern Indiana.

>Ron Moyo was ordained for ministry as outreach pastor for Whitestone Mennonite Church on May 22.

>John Garland, former pastor of Good News Mennonite Church in San Juan, Texas, has become the pastor of San Antonio Mennonite Church—a Western District Conference congregation.

>Omot and Hannah Aganya will begin an assignment as church planters in Kansas City on July 1. They are moving from Minneapolis, Minnesota.

>Alma Solis is to be commissioned as pastoral leader at Fountain of Living Water church in Los Fresnos, Texas.

>Whitestone Mennonite Church has organized a summer meal program on Wednesday in two neighborhoods, for the second year.

DO YOU KNOW?

By Joyce Zuercher; Conference Resource Advocate

When the annual meeting of South Central Conference was held at Whitestone in mid-June, a number of church agencies and organizations, such as the Mission Network; MC USA; Bethel, Hesston, and Goshen Colleges; Everence; MennoMedia; and Mennonite Women, sent representatives and set up displays. If you were at the conference you may have seen a whiteboard list of organizations with their addresses and web sites-- smaller groups focusing on specific problems -- and here is more about them.

ADNET, Anabaptist Disabilities Network, focuses on resourcing congregations, families, and persons touched by disabilities as they work on full inclusion of those with a wide spectrum of physical, emotional, intellectual, developmental, and mental disabilities. They offer a newsletter and website which call attention to helpful books and articles as well as upcoming events and workshops, and they share personal stories. Some of these stories are collected in Circles of Love, a 96 page book published by MennoMedia, along with two other books in their ADNET series. Email ADNet@ADNetOnline.org, or call 877-217-9838. Their mailing address is Mennonite Disabilities Network, 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 5, Elkhart, IN 46517-1970.

MCCN, Mennonite Creation Care Network's E-News shares current activities of members including prayer requests for current issues, and announces upcoming events, such as a July 10, one-day, church-wide consultation taking place during the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly. The network originates through Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College. Contact the network at mccn@goshen.edu, or at Mennonite Creation Care Network, P.O.Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796.

Building Faith is a ministry of the Mennonite Early Childhood Network, MECN, and bills itself as "a resource for parents and care-givers with ideas of simple, accessible ways to build faith with young children." Faith practices are offered throughout the year, including Advent, Lent, and Pentecost. Although developed especially for the very young, they are applicable to primary children as well. This network also gives advice and support for problems such as various behavior and safety issues. Contact them at buildingfaithmecn@weebly.com or mail them at 3145 Benham Ave., Suite 2, Elkhart, IN 46517-1970.

Seeing Our Common Humanity

Members of Whitestone, Hesston, and Lorraine Avenue Mennonite churches are working with Mel Lehman, a member of Manhattan (New York) Mennonite Fellowship and founder of Common Humanity, to help build bridges of understanding, respect and friendship with people of the Arab and Muslim world through the Building Bridges Art Exhibit and Sale in four venues, Aug.1-Sept. 30.

Bethel College faculty and Wichita sponsors, including People of Faith for Peace, the Islamic Society of Wichita, and faculty of the Wichita State University (WSU) College of Fine Arts, are hosting Building Bridges to (1) offer a unique opportunity for seeing our common humanity in the works of professional art created by refugee artists who have fled Iraq and Syria, and (2) benefit the artists by selling their paintings via silent auction.

The Bethel College show at the Robert Regier Gallery opens to the public on Aug. 26. Final bids are due at a closing reception on Sept. 23. At Bethel, Mel Lehman will share his experience befriending Middle Eastern refugees and helping artists sell their paintings through the non-profit organization he leads. He will speak on Sept. 21 at Life Enrichment and Sept. 23 at Convocation at 11 a.m. and at the closing reception.

Additional activities are being planned to coincide with art shows at three WSU galleries. Follow Wichita Common Humanity on Facebook and look for more information in future news releases.

SCC Mennonite Women

By Carolyn Rychener, President, SCC Mennonite Women

Women's Luncheon

The women's luncheon during the SCC Annual Assembly was enjoyed by forty women. Ten churches were represented. There we discussed and adopted this Mission Statement: Growth in Jesus Christ through discipleship, shared fellowship, worship and service.

Myrna Cherry, our treasurer, reported that we have been able to share over \$2000 to help other women with our **Woman to Woman** grant fund. Information and the grant application will be available online sometime in July.

An activity that the women participated in was called **Table Talk**. Be watching the SCC website for some ideas that might be useful for your women's groups. Some of the questions included: When you meet, what do you use for devotions, and what projects have been successful for you? Be watching future communications for other questions. If your church wasn't represented at the luncheon, we would like to have your ideas added for others to consider in their setting.

Current and new officers were introduced. We are still in need of a Vice-president/President-elect, and a person to chair the Discernment Committee (this group calls persons to leadership positions). Nancy Peachey Bontrager thanked officers for their willingness to serve and challenged others to get involved.

We enjoyed three speakers who shared ways that we can be of service to others.

Dayle Toews of McPherson, shared how she and some friends from church started a Sister Care group. Their group takes turns leading the lessons and they are hoping to use Sister Care II when they finish this series.

Elaine Horst shared about her recent trip to Honduras. There she shared her skills as a nurse with the people she served. She shared about her fear of going to another country but challenged each of us to face our fear and serve others.

Michelle Armster, Executive Director, MCC Central States, North Newton, shared how we can all work together with assembling school kits, health kits, infant kits, kits for persons in jail or coming out of jail, and making comforter tops.

Upcoming Events

PREP August 12-13, Peace Mennonite Church, Aurora, CO

Women and Girls Retreat September 9 & 10; Camp Mennoscah

Comforter Blitz March 6, 7 & 8, 2017; Journey@Yoder, KS

SCC Mennonite Women 2016-2017 Officers

President: Carolyn Rychener
Hesston Mennonite
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Vice President: OPEN

Secretary: Kimberly Kropf
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Treasurer: Myrna Cherry
Whitestone Mennonite
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**SCCMW Representative on
SCC Executive Committee:**
Myrna Cherry



Confessing Our Faith in a Complicated World

By Susan Miller, free lance writer from Hesston, Kansas

Our struggles with faith and praxis, creeds and polity, unity and purity, are nothing new, South Central Mennonite Conference speaker John D. Roth said as he developed the theme, "Confessing Our Faith in a Complicated World," in three teaching/preaching presentations. Roth teaches history at Goshen College, edits *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, and directs the Mennonite Historical Library. His books include *Practices: Mennonite Worship and Witness*. Roth participated in a Mennonite World Conference dialog with Lutheran World Federation that led to reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites.

Roth spoke gently, with the authority of a scholar, complemented by his love for Jesus, and for the Church – both local and worldwide, Mennonite and ecumenical. He said that Christians have negotiated between prioritizing correct beliefs and maintaining a spiritual and/or structural unity since the early church.

And it doesn't help much to go back to the Bible to sort things out. Martin Luther's insistence on the authority of Scripture alone included the expectation that everyone would read and interpret the Bible in the same way he did. Going back further in time, religious leaders differed on which spiritual writings should be included or excluded in the biblical canon.

The early church, which is idealized as the best manifestation of Christianity, also struggled with many sharp disagreements. Nevertheless the church grew in the hostile environment of the Roman Empire as Christians proclaimed their faith, finding joy in worship and in fellowship with each other, God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Since sin left its mark on God's creation – separating Adam and Eve from their intimate relationships with God, each other, and creation – God has repeatedly offered forgiveness, healing and restoration of relationships.

Anabaptists believe that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God, and the Holy Spirit can guide ordinary people to interpret the Bible for faithful living. Christ's body, the church, is the "prolongation of the Incarnation," Roth said.

At numerous times throughout the centuries, Anabaptist Mennonites have written confessions of faith in order to state what they believed together, and sometimes also to exclude those in the Anabaptist movement who they thought misunderstood the Bible and acted irresponsibly.

"If our model is Jesus – the one who bore the sins of the world – then we will come to recognize holiness not as an escape from what is wrong but a deep, reconciling embrace of all that is broken..."

"We are called to risky and sacrificial action on behalf of others not because we think we can fix the world's problem, but because we want to bear witness to the deep movement of God's spirit who is at work healing creation . . . Beauty emerges in the awareness that it is God – not us – who determines the outcome of history," Roth said.

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, adopted in 1995, is the most recent Confession of Mennonites in North America. A source of conflict today is whether the Confession is descriptive or prescriptive; and Mennonites are divided more over the practice than the theology in this confession, Roth said. He also asked what kind of authority a written Confession should have in a church that believes in voluntary membership.

Despite our differences, we *can* unite in our Christian task "to astonish the world with the beauty of the Gospel," Roth said on Sunday, quoting scripture from Psalm 96:9a (KJV), "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Annual Assembly Hosted By Whitestone Mennonite Church

About 80 delegates and friends gathered at Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston on June 10-12 for the annual assembly. The weekend sessions were organized around the theme, "Declaring what we have seen and heard," based on I John 1:1-4. Three timely and relevant messages were delivered by principal speaker John D. Roth, Professor of History at Goshen College. His messages were entitled "Confessing our Faith in a Complicated World: Seeing Ourselves Clearly (I John 1:1-4); Professing Our Faith in a Complicated World: The Journey Toward Unity (Matt. 16:13-20); and Expressing Our Faith in a Complicated World: The Beauty of Holiness (Psalm 96). See separate article for a review of his messages.

In an unusual action, the delegates approved a budget for next fiscal year (September 2016 through August 2017) with a projected deficit of \$123,450. This is possible because of accumulated surpluses from past years' operations that are now being drawn on to support two or more church planting initiatives now in concrete implementation or planning stages. Admittedly, this cannot be a multi-year decision, but with anticipated partnerships with established congregations, the needed long-term support is a reasonable expectation. The budget includes support for some or all of the year for three prospective church planters, plus a half time staff position for a church planting and congregational development coach.

Prospective church planters Omot and Hannah Aganya were introduced at the Assembly, coming from their current home in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Kansas City is being targeted as the location for them to begin some home Bible studies, beginning with fellow Ethiopians who have immigrated to the U.S. Regional Conference Minister James Wenger is serving as the conference liaison, and is assisting with the search for suitable housing for the Aganyas, who have three children at home and two college-age sons. While in the Hesston area, the Aganyas spoke at Bethel Mennonite Church near Inman, and Spring Valley Mennonite Church near Canton. The hope is that several established congregations will develop some partnership arrangements with this new effort.

A second church plant possibility is being explored in Corpus Christi, Texas, involving Grace Tijerina who is spending the summer leading a traveling Bible School troupe (see separate article). If preliminary plans develop more fully, she will locate in Corpus Christi after completing the Bible School schedule.

The delegates heard from Greensburg Mennonite Church about their decision in late April to withdraw from Mennonite Church USA, but with a desire to remain a member of South Central Conference. The constitution does not specifically address this arrangement, but the Executive Committee is recommending that they continue to be regarded as a member in good standing with the conference, with the expectation of amending the constitution at the 2017 assembly, which requires a 60-day advance notice which we did not have this year, given the timing of Greensburg's request.

Delegates approved the request of Inman Mennonite Church to become a member of South Central Conference, following their decision earlier in the year to withdraw from Western District Conference while desiring to remain a member of Mennonite Church USA, which requires membership in an area conference.

Delegates were invited to give counsel about the current pattern of staffing with part-time regional conference ministers, recognizing that one or more additional such persons would enable all congregations to have a designated RCM. The primary need currently is for such coverage for our Oklahoma churches.

An important delegate action was the affirmation of Tim Sweigart as moderator-elect. Tim is a member of Whitestone Mennonite Church, currently serving as an elder. He is the owner of Kansas Electric, in the process of transferring the management of the company to others. Tim has a passion for church growth and outreach, serving on the conference's team for Church Growth and Visioning.

While not an item of discussion by the delegates, the timing of the annual assembly, scheduled for the second weekend in June for the past several years, is being raised as a possible matter for reconsideration. The timing frequently conflicts with the wheat harvest which still affects a number of potential participants, and it is also a prime date for weddings which presents a schedule conflict for others. This issue will be taken under advisement by the Executive Committee.

Pastoral Financial Assistance Grant Matching

Your congregation could assist its pastor in decreasing his/her debt by up to \$5,000!!

The Lilly Endowment believes that pastors' work is sometimes negatively impacted because of the strain of the debt load they are carrying. Because of that, they are offering to match any money that conferences, churches or other individuals contribute, up to a total of \$5,000, to decrease the burden of debt a pastor is under. In addition to helping pay down debt, Lilly is offering funds to help pastors with financial counseling and retirement planning education. SCC will make a dollar for dollar match of congregational or individual gifts up to \$1,500 and the Lilly Endowment, through Everence Financial, Mennonite Foundation and an oversight team, will match the combination of those amounts up to a combined total of \$5,000 (plus an additional 20% of the total amount of the gift to address the tax implications). This means a congregation or individual gift of up to \$1,500 on behalf of a pastor could be quadrupled!

Promote this initiative in your congregation by showing/sharing a short video clip, found at www.tinyurl.com/SCCgrantpromo. More information about the grants is also available at www.tinyurl.com/SCCmatchinggrant or from your Regional Conference Minister or the conference office at scc@sccmenno.org. Please also contact us if you are interested in assisting pastors with these same needs at other congregations within the conference.

Executive Committee Activity

The Executive Committee has met three times since the last issue of the Messenger. Principal items for discussion and decision include the following:

- >Heard with appreciation the detailed planning for the summer traveling Vacation Bible School troupe
- >Processed inquiries from congregations with interest in learning about the possibility of affiliating with our conference
- >Heard a report from the Mennonite Church USA Constituency Leaders Council meeting in March, attended by Gary Wolfer, Kurt Horst and Lupe Aguilar
- >Received updates from regional conference ministers related to significant events in their congregations
- >Arranged for representation at the April 23 dedication of the new building now occupied by the Fountain of Living Water congregation in Los Fresno, Texas
- >Received progress reports on the plans for a church plant in Kansas City, involving Omot and Hannah Aganya
- >Received a request from Greensburg Mennonite Church to remain a member of the conference following its late April decision to withdraw from Mennonite Church USA
- >Explored possibilities of promoting more interaction between churches in the north and those in south Texas
- >Approved a subsidy to support the enrollment of several south Texas students in the Spanish language Bible curriculum offered through Mennonite Education Agency's Hispanic Leadership Education Program
- >Considered possible variations of congregational and conference relationship with the emerging Evana network
- >Developed a detailed agenda for the annual assembly delegate sessions
- >Discussed the proposed budget for FY 2016-17 and approved the presentation of a budget with a substantial deficit, to be covered by accumulated annual surpluses

Anabaptist Renewal Circles: Annual Conference to be hosted by Journey Mennonite Church

A fellowship of Anabaptist churches known as Anabaptist Renewal Circles (ARC) has been developing an organizational structure in recent years that now includes an annual conference of interested congregations and individuals. This year, the conference is being hosted by Journey Mennonite Church at its South Hutchinson campus, July 28-30.

The theme for the event is "Beyond Borders," It is designed to be a time for fellowship and inspiration, and is not a decision-making meeting. Featured speakers include Eric Miller, campus pastor at Journey@South Hutchinson on July 28; Hugh Halter, the U.S. Director of Forge America which is an apprenticeship network committed to train men and women to live as missionaries where they already do life, on July 29 (three sessions); and Richard Showalter, global consultant with Rosedale Mennonite Missions and former president of Eastern Mennonite Missions, on July 30.

Registration is \$40 with childcare available; go online to anabaptistrenewal.org.

Kansas Leadership Center Grants

SCC still has remaining scholarship slots for the Kansas Leadership Center's You.Lead.Now program in 2016. Contact the conference office at scc@sccmenno.org if you are interested in this free training. For more information about the Kansas Leadership Center program visit kansasleadershipcenter.org/programs/programs-for-individuals/you-lead-now or talk to someone who attended a training in 2015. The scholarship covers all enrollment costs. Individuals will be responsible for buying the program materials as well as providing their own lodging (if needed) and travel.

The mission of South Central Conference is to produce healthy missional congregations by resourcing, connecting and empowering them to be Christ in the world.

2016 Calendar

July

- 11 Executive Committee Meeting
Whitestone
Mennonite Church
- 28-30 Anabaptist Renewal Circles 2016 Annual Conference
Journey@SouthHutch
South Hutchinson, KS

August

- 12-13 PREP
Peace Mennonite Church
Aurora, CO
- 26- Sept. 23 Building Bridges Art Exhibit
Robert Regier Gallery
Bethel College
North Newton, KS

September

- 9-10 Women and Girls' Retreat
Camp Mennoscah
- 20 SCC Pastor Peer

October

- 27-28 SCC Pastor Retreat Day
Spiritual Life Center
Bel Aire, KS
- 28-29 Pastor/Leader/ Spouse Retreat
Spiritual Life Center
Bel Aire, KS

November

- 4-5 SCC Southern Region (UCIM) Annual Meeting

2017 Calendar

January

- 28-29 Know Jesus 2017
Hesston College
Hesston, KS

March

- 6-8 Comforter Blitz
Journey@Yoder
Yoder, KS