

hosted by EMU

**OCTOBER 12, 7:00 PM-
OCTOBER 14, 12:00PM**

The Promise and Possibility of Mennonite Organizing

a symposium hosted by Eastern Mennonite University

Politics takes many forms and Anabaptist churches have participated in most of them, if sometimes reluctantly. At least since the founding of the Mennonite Central Committee offices in Washington and Ottawa, Mennonites have done advocacy and lobbying. At least since the 1960s, Anabaptist communities have been a regular presence at protests, especially anti-war protests.

But recently increasing energy has been given to organizing: long term efforts to build communities of power to effect change. This has taken two forms. First, in recent years pastors and lay leaders across North America have become leaders in broad-based organizing groups like the Industrial Areas Foundation, DART, Gamaliel, Faith in Action, or the Just Power Alliance.

The second is organizing around a specific issue or set of issues. The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery organizes Anabaptists and others “to address the extinction, enslavement, and extraction done in the name of Christ on Indigenous lands.” Mennonite Action organizes Mennonites to take public action for a free Palestine.

We find these developments to be significant enough to demand conversation.

The Concept

We are calling organizers, pastors, academics, and leaders of church institutions to come together at this event to reflect on questions like these:

- How is organizing different from other modes of political action that Anabaptists are more familiar with?
- What does organizing mean in light of Anabaptist-Mennonite traditions' historic distrust of power? What tensions need to be addressed? Does organizing mean that Anabaptists are overcoming their distrust of power or that organizing creates a specific kind of power with which they are comfortable?
- What are the affinities and points of connection between Anabaptism and organizing? That is to say, what difference does “Mennonite” make for any of this organizing and engagement?
- How might we encourage more pastors and churches to get involved in organizing?

Symposium Goals

The symposium aims to promote the visibility of, investment in, and commitment to organizing as an Anabaptist-Mennonite expression of peacebuilding, raising theological questions about synergies and tensions between organizing and traditional Anabaptist theology, and possibly establishing structures for an ongoing network.

It will also build connections among leaders working in both movement organizing and broad-based organizing who, while aware of others doing similar work, are rarely given the opportunity for mutual enrichment.

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Sunday, October 12, 2025

5:00 pm	Registration Begins	Fellowship Area, Seminary
5:00 – 6:15 pm	Pre-Symposium Dinner	Northlawn
7:00 pm	Welcome Shannon Dycus	Martin Chapel, Seminary
7:15 pm	Keynote Address “Building Power: The What and Why of Organizing” Daniel Hunter	Martin Chapel, Seminary
8:15 pm	Welcome Reception	Old Common Grounds

Monday, October 13, 2025

9:00 am	Plenary Session “Organizing and Mennonite Theology” Andre Gingrich Stoner, Peter Dula responding	Martin Chapel, Seminary
10:15 am	— Break —	
10:45 am	Concurrent Seminars A	(see seminar schedule)
12:00 pm	Lunch	Northlawn
1:30 pm	Plenary Session “The Ecosystem of Social Change” Jay Bergen	Martin Chapel, Seminary
2:15 pm	Plenary Panel Pastor Organizers, Shannon Dycus moderating	Martin Chapel, Seminary
3:15 pm	— Break —	
3:45 pm	Samoan Circle “Organizing Congregations” Tim Seidel moderating	Old Common Grounds
5:00 pm	— Evening Free —	

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Tuesday, October 14, 2025

9:00 am	Concurrent Seminars B	(see seminar schedule)
10:15 am	— <i>Break</i> —	
10:45 am	Closing Plenary Panel Designated Listener Reports “Now What? A Future-Facing Conversation”	Martin Chapel, Seminary
12:00 pm	Post-Symposium Lunch and Departures	Northlawn

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Concurrent Seminars A: Monday at 10:45a

Congregational Life and Organizing
Melissa Florer-Bixler

Seminary 109

Are all pastors organizers? How do we actualize the life of the church within the politics of the community? How do we come to understand these questions without compromising our commitments as Anabaptists and Christians? Participants will work through these questions in relation to the nuts and bolts of their community organizing and church culture.

We Walk for Life: Organizing to Lift the Voices of the Dead at the Border
Saulo Padilla, MCC

Seminary 204

Description TBD

Tackling VA's Local and State Housing Shortage Through Organizing
Jessica Sarriot, VOICE

Seminary 003

This session explores how faith-rooted organizing through VOICE and the Commonwealth Housing Coalition (CHC) is driving "Yes in God's Backyard" and other bipartisan statewide zoning reforms to address Virginia's 300,000-home shortage. Jessica will share how VOICE's 17 years of local victories and the organizing practices of one-on-ones, listening sessions, and public actions embody Mennonite values of peace-waging, community-building, and prophetic witness—and can be tools for tackling the #1 issue for Virginians today: the high cost of housing.

*Quiet in the Land No More:
Accounting for Mennonites' Outlier Mobilization in the Gaza Solidarity Movement*
Jonathan Smucker

Seminary 025

In late 2023, a handful of Mennonites put out a call for a mass zoom meeting of "Mennonites for a Ceasefire." Approximately a thousand Mennonites attended, and from there a fascinating movement took off, involving thousands of Mennonites across the United States and Canada. As a result of the movement, Mennonites have been the most organized Christian denomination in the Gaza solidarity movement (in North America). Mennonite Action's use of Anabaptist faith, tradition, and symbols seems to have played a decisive role in penetrating deeper into congregational life and activating Mennonites who had not previously participated in protest. In this session, Jonathan Smucker, a participant and sociologist, will present preliminary findings in his research of the movement.

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Concurrent Seminars B: Tuesday at 9:00a

Congregational Life and Organizing
Melissa Florer-Bixler

Seminary 202

Are all pastors organizers? How do we actualize the life of the church within the politics of the community? How do we come to understand these questions without compromising our commitments as Anabaptists and Christians? Participants will work through these questions in relation to the nuts and bolts of their community organizing and church culture.

Shared Interest Organizing
Mike Ramer, SURJ

Seminary 204

Nobody's free until we are all free, and that means that primarily white communities aren't just organizing to help vulnerable communities deal with injustice- we are fighting for our very lives. Yet, the rich and powerful will continue to intensify their divide and conquer strategies as one of their most tried-and-true means of splitting multiracial solidarity movements. At Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), we subvert this divide and conquer by organizing white folks to understand their "shared stake" in practicing multiracial solidarity to dismantle white supremacy. This model of organizing white people has implications for organizing across all lines of difference. Rooting our work in the shared stake organizing model allows us to subvert the divide-and-conquer strategies of the powers that be and to grow to scale by recruiting people who don't already identify as activists or allies and who will stick around as times get tough. Come practice getting clear about why you are organizing and how your "issue" area intersects with your life and consider ways to help your community to do the same as they step into justice work for the long haul.

Quiet in the Land No More:
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Jonathan Smucker

Seminary 025

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Keynote Speaker



Daniel Hunter

Co-Founder, [Choose Democracy](#)

Daniel has trained pro-democracy movements in Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, India, and many other places. Daniel has written multiple books: *Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow*, *Climate Resistance Handbook*, and *Strategy and Soul* — a thrilling personal story about community organizing and direct action. With over three decades of activist training experience, his training tools are used across the globe for helping people fight for a better, more democratic world.

Speakers and Facilitators



Jay Bergen

Jay Bergen (they/them) is the pastor of Germantown Mennonite Church and has organized for fifteen years in movements for climate justice, immigration justice, and prison abolition.



Peter Dula

Peter Dula is Professor of Religion and Culture. He received a Ph.D from Duke University in theology and ethics in 2004. He is the author of *Cavell, Companionship, and Christian Theology* (Oxford, 2011). Before coming to EMU in 2006 he was the Mennonite Central Committee Iraq Program Coordinator. He has taught at Lancaster Mennonite High School and at the Meserete Kristos College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where he was a Fulbright scholar in 2001-2.

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Shannon Dycus

Interim President, Eastern Mennonite University

Shannon holds a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Public Theology from United Theological Seminary (Minnesota). She is a trained spiritual director and actively contributes to writing and worship development roles within Mennonite Church USA and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Her books, *Every Time I Feel the Spirit* (2019) and *The Holy in the Night* (2023), are published by Herald Press. Prior to stepping into the Interim President role, Shannon served as Vice President of Student Affairs, Equity, and Belonging, prioritizing strategic vision for co-curricular learning communities that foster social accountability, holistic well-being, and academic success for all students. And before joining EMU, she was a co-pastor at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she guided spiritual formation through preaching and teaching.



Melissa Florer-Bixler

Melissa Florer-Bixler is a doctoral student in homiletics at Duke Divinity School, where she studies preaching traditions in working-class communities. A Duke and Princeton Theological Seminary alumna, she writes for *Christian Century* and has contributed to *Sojourners*, *Geez*, and more. Author of *Fire By Night* and *How to Have an Enemy*, Melissa has worked in her community to organize memorials for lynching victims, preach in the Raleigh women's prison, and advocate for a just peace in Palestine. She serves on Mennonite Action's pastoral committee and the boards of Anabaptist World and Central District Conference of Mennonite Church.



Saulo Padilla

Saulo Padilla is Coordinator of Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) U.S. Immigration Education National Program since 2008. He develops and provides learning opportunities about the need for better and safer mechanisms for people facing migration, and advocating to reform the immigration system. For MCC he coordinates immigration law trainings for non-profits offering immigration legal services to immigrant communities and leads learning tours to the U.S./Mexico and Guatemala/Mexico borders.

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Jessica Sarriot

Jessica Sarriot is Co-Executive Director of VOICE, and is currently leading a statewide campaign for housing justice. A graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs, she has organized on issues from divestment and LGBTQ inclusion at EMU to affordable housing and reentry justice at local and state levels. Her past roles include overseeing workforce development programs for system-impacted people and coordinating LA County's interagency LA Free the Vote initiative. She lives in Washington DC in a community house with her husband.



Jonathan Matthew Smucker

Jonathan Smucker is a sociology PhD candidate at UC Berkeley and a senior research fellow at the Othering & Belonging Institute. His research focuses on political sociology, social movements, populism, and vulnerabilities of liberal democracy. His dissertation examines Mennonite Action, whose novel experiments in "worshipful" protest styles illuminate dynamics and popular perceptions of broader protest movements. With over 25 years of experience as a political organizer and strategist, he co-founded Popular Comms Institute, PA Stands Up, and others. He's advised groups like Working Families Party and Sunrise Movement. His writings appear in *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and more. He authored *Hegemony How-To* (2017) and has a forthcoming book in 2027.



Andre Gingerich Stoner

Andre Gingerich Stoner is lead organizer with We Make Indiana, a multi-racial and multi-faith network of thirty congregations in northern Indiana. He organized a three year campaign to win \$3.3 million for a mental health crisis response system in St Joseph County and helped lead a successful statewide campaign for mental health funding. Previously Andre served on the pastoral team at Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend for 17 years and as director of holistic witness for Mennonite Church USA. His guiding question during seminary studies was "What's the relationship between the church, this thing Jesus called 'the kingdom,' and social change movements?"

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Panelists

Pastors Panel

Lori Friesen, Zion Mennonite Church and VIA
Joel Miller, Columbus Mennonite Church and BREAD
Mandy North, Manassas Church of the Brethren and VOICE
Fernando Ziata, Redemption Rehoboth Tabernacle and VIA

Samoan Circle: Organizing Congregations

Nadia Dames, Valley Muslim Community Foundation
Nick Martin, Mennonite Action
Jennifer Keeney Scarr, Valley Interfaith Action
John Stoesz, Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery

Symposium Listeners

Jonny Rashid, Mennonite Action
Janna Hunter-Bowman, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

Planning Committee

Jacob Alan Cook
Peter Dula
Melissa Florer-Bixler
Jessica Sarriot
Tim Seidel
Jonathan Smucker
Andre Gingerich Stoner

CAMPUS MAP



CAMPUS DIRECTORY

Anderson House	20
Art Center, Esther K. Augsburger	35
Bomberger House	23
Brunk House	14
Campus Center	1
Advancement	3rd Floor
Alumni/Parent Engagement	3rd Floor
Business & Leadership Department	2nd Floor
Business Office	1st Floor
Career Services	1st Floor
Center for Justice and Peacebuilding: STAR/SPI/ZI	2nd Floor
Church Relations	3rd Floor
CoachLink	1st Floor
Computer Lab	2nd Floor
Development	3rd Floor
Education Department	2nd Floor
First Year Advising	1st Floor
Financial Assistance	1st Floor
Human Resources	1st Floor
Information Systems	1st Floor
Institutional Research	3rd Floor
Intercultural Programs	1st Floor
MA in Education	2nd Floor
Mail Room	1st Floor
MBA	2nd Floor
MS in Nursing	3rd Floor
Nursing Department	3rd Floor
Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	3rd Floor
President's Office	3rd Floor
Provost's Office	3rd Floor
Registrar	1st Floor
Student Success	1st Floor
Strite Conference Suite	1st Floor
Cedarwood	27
Discipleship Center	39
Dorothy Heatwole House	30
Elmwood	29
Ernest Martin House	22
Eshleman House	32
Facilities Management	26
Gnagey House	31
Guild	36

Hartzler (Sadie) Library	5
Academic Success Center	3rd Floor
Computer Lab	1st Floor
Help Desk/User Services	1st Floor
Heatwole House	9
Heatwole II (Ammon) House	8
LOM Program	1st Floor
SFI Market	Lower Level
Hillside Suites	33
Horst House	44
Lehman Auditorium	6
Bach Festival	Lower Level
Music Department	Lower Level
Preparatory Music	Lower Level
MS in Biomedicine/Rutt Annex D	41
MS in Biomedicine/Rutt Annex E	42
MS in Biomedicine/Rutt House	19
Maplewood	28
Weather Vane	Lower Level
Mt. Clinton Apartments	10
Music Studios/Lehman House	11
Northlawn	2
Dining Hall	Lower Level
Observatory	38
Park Cabin	25
Parkwood Apartments	24
President's Residence/1919 Park Road	40
Redmond House	17
Roselawn Academic	34
Applied Social Sciences Department	2nd Floor
Bible & Religion Department	3rd Floor
CJP Academic Offices	2nd Floor
History Department	3rd Floor
Intensive English Program	1st Floor
Language & Literature Department	2nd Floor
Psychology Department	3rd Floor
Safety & Security	1
Seminary	7
Admissions, Graduate and Prof. Programs	1st Floor
Admissions, Seminary	1st Floor
MA in Counseling	Lower Level
Marketing & Communications	1st Floor

Martin Chapel	2nd Floor
Seminary Department	1st & 2nd Floors
Suter House	13
Suter II House	21
Suter Science Center	4
Biology Department	Lower Level
Chemistry Department	Lower Level
Engineering Department	Lower Level
Mathematical Sciences Department	Lower Level
Museum (D.R. Hostetter)	Upper Level
Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir/ Blosser House	12
Toliver House	43
University Commons	3
Admissions, Undergrad	1st Floor
Art Gallery, Margaret Gehman	1st Floor
Athletics	1st Floor
Auxiliary Services	1st Floor
Barbershop	2nd Floor
Box Office	1st Floor
Common Grounds Coffeehouse	2nd Floor
Counseling Services	2nd Floor
Fitness Center	2nd Floor
Health Services	2nd Floor
Housing/Residence Life	2nd Floor
International Student Services	2nd Floor
MainStage Theater	1st Floor
Multicultural Programs	2nd Floor
Office of Faith and Spiritual Life	2nd Floor
Physical Education & Recreation Dept.	1st Floor
Recreational Sports	2nd Floor
Royal's Den (Snack Shop)	2nd Floor
Sports Information Office	1st Floor
Student Life	2nd Floor
Student Union	2nd Floor
Studio Theater	1st Floor
Theater Department	2nd Floor
Visual & Communications Arts Dept.	2nd Floor
Weaver Wellness Suite	2nd Floor
Yoder Arena (gymnasium)	1st Floor
Village Apartments	18
WEMC/Astral Hall	37

PARKING KEY

R	Residential
V	Visitor
F/S	Faculty/staff
C	Commuter
	Handicapped
X	Restricted
	Electric/hybrid

BUILDING KEY

	Information
	Public restrooms
	Food
	Academic
	Residential
	Rentals



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