



---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 16, 2007

### Journey meets need for ministry training

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - The church needs training options for people who are called to be pastors from within the congregation. Virgil Vogt, interim associate conference minister for Illinois Mennonite Conference, is one of many conference ministers who sees this need.

Anne Munley and Chuck Swan of North Suburban Mennonite Church, Libertyville, Ill., are examples, Virgil said. "They are both very gifted and very committed to ministry, but are not able to leave their situations to attend seminary the way people did earlier."

Journey: A Conference-based Leadership Development Program is the answer they have found. Journey is coordinated by Indiana-Michigan and Central District Conferences along with the Church Leadership Center at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Munley and Swan are the first participants in the program from outside the two sponsoring conferences.

This program took shape in 2003, building on the curriculum of Pastoral Studies Distance Education, an undergraduate, distance-education program. To the PSDE program of study, which already includes working with a mentor, Journey adds semi-annual weekend learning events in which all participants gather for focused study of specific areas of ministry.

Indiana-Michigan and Central District conference leaders and staff at AMBS direct the program. In fall 2005, this oversight group made a decision to open the program to all conferences across the U.S. and Canada. This makes the benefits of Journey available to other conferences without them needing to be involved in administering it, Rafael Barahona, AMBS director of leadership programs, explained.

Although beginners usually enter the program in fall, Munley and Swan began recently, entering midway between the 2006 and 2007 years. That demonstrates some of the flexibility built into the program design.

"It's completely tailorable for the direction we want to go, to the gifts we have and the way we learn," Munley said. "The appeal is the independent learning and learning that is individualized, added to working with a mentor in actual ministry in a congregation."

Munley and Swan were called to team leadership of North Suburban Mennonite Church along with Mark Vincent, who is a more experienced and trained pastor. Together the

three share a less-than-full-time pastoral role, so they are challenged to work creatively at the leadership tasks in the congregation.

Munley has a master's degree in cross-cultural communication and works in the public school, but felt called to ministry. Swan, who has an associate degree, had considered ministry early in his life, but pursued other business-related work. For the last five years he has had a home-based woodworking business.

"Anne and I discovered we had similar faith backgrounds," Swan said, "and we both had continuing, annoying nudges about ministry," He added, "We both felt inadequate to the task."

When the congregation called them into the team ministry arrangement, they asked that Munley and Swan pursue ministry training. "Journey is a model that works with the way we minister now," Munley said.

Swan also said, "The educational material has an instant application in our congregation."

Vincent, who serves as the mentor to the two Journey students, has long been committed to this model of calling people to leadership within the congregation. He assisted the Indiana-Michigan conference in setting up earlier leadership development programs and sees significant benefits in the Journey approach.

"We can prepare people for ministry without losing them to the congregation," Vincent said. "They are doing ministry while they are learning about it."

"Congregations have every bit as much responsibility to develop leaders as the seminary does," Vincent added.

AMBS sees the Journey program as an enhancement of its distance offerings. Previous to 2002, Conference-Based Theological Education programs were active in several regions of the U.S. and Canada. These have been replaced by accredited extension sites in Kansas, Iowa and Winnipeg, Manitoba. A Spanish-language program, Seminario Bíblico Anabautista, has begun in Dallas, Texas.

Journey fits a broader range of situations than these graduate-level programs. Journey provides ministry training for people who have not completed a bachelor's degree, people who are beginning to explore ministry, or—as in Munley's case—people who are looking for ministry preparation that allows them to continue their current ministries and vocations.

More information is available on the web site for Journey: [www.journeyprogram.net](http://www.journeyprogram.net).