

# KC2015 Currents

Saturday, July 4, 2015  
Kansas City, Missouri

Produced for Mennonite Church USA convention by  
Bluffton University students, faculty and alumni



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Photo Credit: Brianna R. Luginbuhl  
Rick Nelson (left) and Bobby Sherard (right), portray Abraham and Isaac,  
Friday, July 3, 2015, in Kansas City, MO

## Theater group draws hundreds

By Brianna R. Luginbuhl

A popular theater group found it difficult to accommodate the crush of people who attempted to see their show Friday afternoon. Launch Theatre Productions, a drama team consisting of nine members from North Carolina, first performed for over 200 convention attendees and then held an impromptu second performance for a separate overflowing crowd of approximately 200. The performance space filled to capacity 15 minutes before scheduled show time prompting the theater staff to hold an emergency meeting before closing the door of room 2215B in the convention hall.

“It’s probably the largest audience we’ve received not having any advertising months or weeks in advance,” said Ricki Nelson, a stagehand for the production. “It was a bit of a surprise to have it be so popular and so powerful.” This convention marks the troupe’s first appearance outside of North Carolina.

The production, “If it Was Me,” illustrated five dramatic renditions of Bible stories in a contemporary contexts. Barbara Nelson, creative director and playwright, facilitated the event backstage as six company actors rapped, sang, and performed comedic scenes of Abraham and Isaac, Moses, Joseph, and David.

“When I read the Word of God, I see the characters and scenes in my head, and I think that is just my gift,” Barbara Nelson said. “I see myself as a storyteller that has been gifted to bring the Word of God and life on stage and Jesus did the same thing, in parables, stories that brought the Word to life.” Nelson began participating in

Christian theater at Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Virginia in 1993 and later became drama minister for that church. “You use what God gave has placed in your hands to minister,” said Nelson, “and ours just happened to be theater.”

Terri Nelson, managing director of Launch Theatre Productions and Barbara’s daughter, said the troupe’s goal was to spread biblical principles mixed with comedy. “There are so many scenes where we can put ourselves in it,” said Nelson. “What we are thinking when reading them but no one will say out loud in church.”

Christian Shenk, an attendee from Warwick River Mennonite Church, Newport News, Virginia, said the production reminded him of God’s eternal presence. “I think it really brings out these verses they are trying to teach. It brings them alive, it really does,” said Shenk, “They really have a way of making it entertaining while giving a lesson.”

Vicki Brawner, Lauren Appelhans and five other attendees from Greeley Mennonite Church, Colorado, talked with actors following the second performance. “It made the Bible stories more relatable to our time,” said Brawner, “We are living the same story.” The youth said they felt encouraged and reassured by the performance. “I liked it that they explained really well how the disciples and Bible stories were not that different,” added Appelhans. “They are just regular people like us,” she said.

Bobby Sherard, a company actor portraying protagonist “Lou,” used quips and questions directed to the audience to connect biblical truths to contemporary attitudes. He said being a disciple wasn’t extraordinary. “But the difference is when the Spirit of God comes upon you like Peter at the day of Pentecost, that’s when you become more than just a regular dude,” Sherard said



Photo Credit: Brianna R. Luginbuhl  
Launch Theater Productions raps the story of David and Saul,  
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