

# Faith Connection

April 2008

Monthly Newsletter of Faith Mennonite Church  
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*Faith Mennonite Church is a Christ-centered community which seeks to be a place of welcome and nurture for all. Our lives are guided by the life of Jesus and the historic peace position of the Mennonite Church. Our members are people from varied religious backgrounds, and diverse cultures, gay and straight, young and old. We invite you to join us in being a sign of God's healing and hope in our community and world.*

## **Pastoral Musings...**

We have family friends who grew up Mennonite but have spent most of their adult life, and raised their children, in the Catholic Church. When the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue began several years ago (organized by the Vatican and Mennonite World Conference) our friend Ivan became an unofficial advisor to the Catholic bishop of Philadelphia who was chosen to chair the Catholic delegation to the dialogue. Although the bishop lived in close proximity to Mennonites, he really didn't know them, so Ivan helped interpret Mennonites to him. Along the way, Ivan became convinced that more than our Anabaptist theology and more than our service ethic, the real gift that Mennonites have to give the broader church with regard to the peace witness is the example of our family life in passing down a culture of peace. He particularly highlights the role of fathers who do not need to fight in order to demonstrate their manhood.

I wouldn't be so quick to elevate Mennonite parenting above our theology or service. I'd rather think of them as co-equal legs of a three-legged stool, each informing and reinforcing the other. But I do agree that articulating the role of parents (and aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends) in instilling and nurturing our commitment to peace and service among our children is extremely important. One way we can do this is through classes like the "Faith and Human Development" class that Beth Richardson organized and led this past quarter.

Another way is to reclaim the language of God as a loving Father, even as we're growing more

comfortable also using the language of God as Mother. In our struggle to use more inclusive language we sometimes shy away from the traditional, patriarchal formulations of God as He, Father, Master, Shepherd. But these are important images, when balanced with others, in reminding us of the relational character of God.

This past month, as our congregation has been touched by the death of four fathers, Dellis and Mike Schrock, Leon Martin (Darrell's father), and John Janzen (Jerry's father), I've been thinking about the impact of their lives and the ways in which they revealed the character of a loving Father God. The first thing I think about is care and loyalty. Although most of us never met Darrell's or Jerry's fathers, it's not hard to imagine that they, like Dellis and Mike, were men who protected, cared for and loved their families, and that they instilled those same attitudes toward the church, for Mike, Darrell, and Jerry have been among our most loyal and dependable servants. All four fathers were men of many talents and creativity, who used those gifts not just to prosper themselves, but their families and their communities. They were men who expressed emotion and artistry. They were generative. They cared about peace.

No father is perfect. No parent is perfect. Not all of our memories of our fathers are consoling. But as I observe the tender—and wrestling—care of our FMC fathers toward their young and young adult children, I have no reservations in saying "God is like a father" or in joining Jesus, who addressed God as father in the prayer he taught his disciples.

--Joetta Schlabach

“Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding. For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial "doubt". This doubt is by no means opposed to genuine faith, but it mercilessly examines and questions the spurious "faith" of everyday life, the human faith which is nothing but the passive acceptance of conventional opinion.”

--Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

### ***What's happening at FMC...***

#### **Church Membership Sunday, May 11**

We are planning to have a service of baptism for Leslie Minkler on Pentecost Sunday, May 11. If there are other persons interested in joining Faith Mennonite Church at this time, please speak with pastor Joetta or one of the deacons.

#### **Comings and Goings**

**Silas Crews** recently moved to the Netherlands where his girlfriend will be doing a professional business internship. They moved their things to the East Coast since Karen anticipates going to graduate school when they return. Silas regretted not being able to give his farewell in person. He can be contacted through email: silascrews@gmail.com

#### **OutFront Minnesota Event**

The OutFront Minnesota justFair Lobby Day is coming up on Thursday, April 17th at the State Capital. I'm planning to be there for most of the day as a volunteer and I want to invite anyone from Faith who can make it to join us for the event. Minnesota's faith communities are critical to the effort for GLBT equality. OutFront Minnesota's justFair Lobby Day will be an important opportunity to engage with lawmakers who are considering whether to support GLBT people and our families as full members of our state, but they need to see that the risks in voting their conscience will be supported by their constituents. It will be a great chance to stand up for equality and to represent Faith Mennonite Church as an open and welcoming

community (I'll make sure our church banner is on hand). Join other fair-minded Minnesotans in letting our leaders know that Minnesota cares about equality for GLBT people and their families. Educational sessions will be held in the morning, a large rally will be held from noon to 1pm in front of the state capitol, and appointments will be scheduled throughout the day so people from the same district can visit with their lawmakers (training provided). For more information or to register for a visit with your lawmakers, go to: [www.outfront.org](http://www.outfront.org), or call Jo Haberman at 612-822-0127, ext. 103.

--Katie Hochstedler

#### **Library Resources on Grief**

In times of grief and mourning we seek and receive support in many forms. Sometimes the written word can provide solace and guidance in a special way. As our community grieves the loss of Mike Schrock, we have two new resources for young people that Joetta has ordered for our library. The first is a book entitled *You Are Not Alone: Teens Talk About Life After the Loss of a Parent* and is for teens and those who care for them. The author, Lynne Hughes, lost both her parents at an early age and founded Comfort Zone Camp as a "safe and fun place for grieving children." The book includes her story and those of other teenagers coping with loss and grief. The second new book is called *Help Me Say Goodbye* and is geared toward younger children. It is an art therapy book that encourages children to draw and write as a way of expressing their feelings as they work through grief. Look for both of these books on display in the church library and feel free to check one out by signing the card and placing it in the card box on the shelf closest to the library door.

#### **Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting February 11, 2008 @ FMC**

**Present:** Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Melissa Hochstedler, Missions & Service; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Jenny Wandersee, Worship; Rachel Geissinger, Education.

**Absent:** None.

**Minutes.** Minutes of January 14 meeting approved with corrections. Minutes of February 3 congregational meeting provisionally approved for publication in the newsletter.

**Affirmations.** Joetta thanks musicians who played on Ash Wednesday in cold building temperatures. Neil

thanks Darrell Martin for work on the lease. Joan thanks Sunday school teachers doing adult education, which is going very well this year.

**Annual meeting debriefing.** Jerry asks whether the roundtable discussion notes got turned in? Joetta says yes, not yet transcribed. The notes will be circulated to the commissions. Neil thinks communication was better in the basement, and he likes using Robert's Rules in this kind of setting. Hermann says that having no major controversial issues to cover helped. Joetta feels the meeting went long, Rachel agrees it was late in the afternoon and suggests perhaps next year, cancel Sunday school, have a potluck and then the meeting. Melissa says the discussion of the constitution issue seemed perhaps too quick to her. Barb says commission feedback was good, but it added significantly to the time. Joan says she was afraid it would, but she really enjoyed that part of the meeting the most. Neil says we have discussed in the past having two annual congregational meetings. Jerry says we used to do that, Joan adds one was for the budget only and the other was other issues. Joetta says a lot of people are interested in a game night—perhaps after the annual meeting?

**Treasurer's report.** Glenn Geissinger and Wolf Bartel have completed an audit, and caught the error that was noted at the annual meeting. This far we have expended \$3000 more than our income. Paid out \$3000 from the tuition support fund, and \$1300 bill for last fall's water line repair.

**Fellowship Commission brainstorming.** Neil explains that in April we will explore the questions that each commission has reviewed with all the commissions during Sunday school hour, with a goal of creating a new church handbook with descriptions of the Commissions by this fall. Council spends some time brainstorming questions for the Fellowship Commission.

**Peace and justice discussion.** Neil wants to briefly discuss the meaning of FMC's focus on peace and justice. Joetta notes that the Missions & Service Commission does use the term "peace" in its description. Joan wonders why this would be a separate discussion from the M & S Commission discussion, or a distinct topic different from others like "spirituality," for example? Neil replies that it's a way to consider topics that may fall through the cracks in planning. Hermann suggests two similar terms, "service" and "advocacy." Joetta asks what specifically makes us the "peace church?" Joan says we're blessed to be in a community

with many progressive churches, so it may be difficult to identify our "niche." What is our internal vs. our external work? Can we use our large group of young children to turn outward, like "parenting for peace and justice" seminars for the community? Hermann suggests support for members doing peace and justice work. Joetta describes the process of "appreciative inquiry," rather than a problem focus, to help identify congregational strengths to decide on directions. Community of St. Martin currently has no coordinator for Peace Village, but young people who are motivated to attend, are we interested? Joan says Peace Village has been a primary contact for FMC with families in this community.

**Falling through the cracks?** Joan notes that we are missing Patty Friesen's organizing of the cross-country skiing weekend. When we lose people who organize things, we need to more intentionally pick up the responsibility. Joetta says this is currently happening with bike-riding and maybe a camping weekend. Jenny says she hasn't heard anything about new 4x4s? Joetta replies that the groups were having a hard time settling on dates, so the Deacons decided to try quarterly "neighborhood meetings" on set dates.

#### **Commission reports.**

**Trustees.** Wolf and Glenn finished an audit. They suggested pushing the annual meeting further into February, so we could have complete financial reports. Also suggested that M&S Commission budget itemize contributions in their report, and describe rationale. There are now two new trustees, Mike Schrock and David Mayou, for a total of four. Also plans to repair the front corner of the sanctuary.

**Education.** Last met in November.

**Deacons.** Deacons reviewed the neighborhood groups, and young adult fellowship. Bulk of their time has been spent in personal care issues. Also met with new members for a social.

**Worship.** Have planned Lent, and also having a planning retreat February 23 to plan goals for the year.

**Missions & Service.** Highest current priority is the *Omnivore's Dilemma* event. Also trying to work around city ordinances to plan the church/community information kiosk. Also looking for ways to be more directly involved with organizations we contribute to. Fellowship. Has been discussing how to move beyond traditional social gatherings to build community.

**Pastor.** We have a new church secretary and custodian. US and Canada Mennonites are meeting this summer in Winnipeg for discuss living as a faithful community. We should see if we can get GLBT welcoming congregations on the agenda/ Joan notes that in the

Conference there is currently no structure for contacting other welcoming congregations.

#### **Other business.**

**Pastoral discernment.** Joan says the committee is currently looking at candidates to interview, and hope to have a proposal to the congregation by March.

--*Gregg Richardson, Secretary*

### ***What's happening here and there...***

#### **Bethel College Choir Concert, April 2**

The Concert Choir from Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, will give a benefit concert for the Twin Cities Mennonite Central Committee Relief Sale Wednesday, April 2, at 7:30 p.m. in the Chapel of the Incarnation at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. The seminary's address is 2481 Como Ave. and the chapel is located in the Olsen Student Center at 1490 Fulham (corner of Fulham and Hendon Ave.). The 45-voice choir sings a repertoire of mostly sacred music under the direction of Dr. William Eash. Contact: 612-669-7552.

#### **Muslim-Christian Cooperation in Peacemaking, April 10.**

Two peacemakers will speak at the University of St. Thomas, Thursday evening April 10, Sami Rasouli of Muslim Peacemaker Teams, Iraq and Ahmed Haile, Peace Studies instructor at Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya. A U.S. citizen born in Iraq, Sami Rasouli returned to the nation of his birth in 2003 soon after the US invasion. After working with Christian Peacemaker Teams, he helped found Muslim Peacemaker Teams in 2005. Ahmed Haile, a graduate of Goshen College, is a Somali Christian who worked at great personal cost in the early 1990s to help draft a peace accord between warring factions in his largely Muslim homeland. He brings his respect for Muslim tribal culture to both his teaching and his ongoing work for reconciliation in Somalia. Free and open to the public. April 10, at 7p.m., 3M Auditorium, Owens Science Center, 2115 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. For more information contact Gerald Schlabach at gwschlabach@stthomas.edu or 651 962-5332

#### **Peace Village 2008, June 23-July 3**

Since 1994 Peace Village has offered programs in peace-making and conflict resolution for children and families. It is part of the outreach of the Community of

St. Martin and FMC has also been involved in various ways over the years. Its goal is to help children and families learn the importance of peacemaking and conflict resolution in an increasingly troubled world.

This summer we will be learning about living in peace with the earth and with each other. The Whole World Village will be together during the opening, lunchtime, and closing of each day. The children will be in smaller groups for age appropriate instruction and activities each day. In addition to the thematic activities, we will have a daily focus on one aspect of conflict resolution. This year's program is for children who have completed kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

The cost of the program is \$275 (scholarships are available). Registration forms are available on the back table at church. For more information, contact Beka Hamlett-Leisen 612 724-4339.

#### **Project Homeless Connect**

Volunteers are needed for Project Homeless Connect, a one-stop shop model to help people experiencing homelessness connect with services they choose or need. On Monday, April 28, Hennepin County and the city of Minneapolis are partnering with service providers, businesses, citizens, and faith communities to bring multiple resources to the Minneapolis Convention Center. These services include: housing providers, employment specialists, medical care, mental health care, veterans benefits specialists, eye doctors, haircuts, transportation assistance, food and clothing. The last Project Homeless Connect on October 1, 2007, was a tremendous success, involving 800 volunteers and service providers, and serving over 1800 men, women, children, and youth experiencing homelessness. We need 1000 volunteers and we do provide training. To find out how you can volunteer or contribute, please go to their website: [www.homelessconnectminneapolis.org](http://www.homelessconnectminneapolis.org).

#### **Bethel University (Twin Cities) Community Hymn Sing, April 6**

Join with hundreds of voices singing your favorite hymns. Featuring special musical guests Ruby Ann Poulson and Pam Sohriakof of Bethel's music department. The hymn-sing will be held on April 6 at 3pm at Bethel University. Refreshments will follow the event. The event is free, an offering will be taken. Bethel University is located at 3900 Bethel Drive in St. Paul.

## ***In review...***

### **Plows, Plagues & Petroleum**

The good news is that there at last appears to be a gathering public consensus that anthropogenic (human-caused) global climate change is not an ideological fantasy of the “Left” (even though there still appears to be little political will to address the crisis). The bad news is that, as is true of many other public issues that require some understanding of science (such as health and nutrition, wetland preservation, loss of species diversity, and “creationism,” to name a few), few ordinary citizens really have much grasp of the context and implications of global warming. *Plows, Plagues & Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate* (Princeton University Press, 2005), was written by William Ruddiman, Professor Emeritus of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia, to address this shortcoming. It’s the best overall introduction to human impact on the earth’s climate I have yet read. It’s also not really what ideologically driven parties on either side of the debate want to hear. Central to Dr. Ruddiman’s thesis (which he frankly admits is not yet fully accepted by the scientific community, although it is the subject of lively debate), is the long term natural climate cycles and the factors that drive them. In this book he examines not just the period since the last glacial maximum of 20,000 years ago, but the past 2.75 million years, dating to the beginning of the glacial-interglacial cycles. The natural engines of climate change he identifies are three separate concurrent cycles of eccentricities in the earth’s orbit, reinforced by corresponding cycles of feedback stemming from lagging changes in “greenhouse” gases, chiefly carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>).

This much is relatively uncontroversial, and part of the standard theory employed by all climate modelers. (Despite the claims of many global warming deniers, sunspot cycles play a relatively small role in these natural cycles, according to Ruddiman). The more controversial and disturbing claim of Dr. Ruddiman, is that anthropogenic climate change did not begin recently with the industrial age, but instead dates to the beginnings of agriculture, 5000-8000 years ago. Analysis of the long term data reveals that the earth would be well on its way to the next glacial cycle, were it not for anomalous *leading* increases in CO<sub>2</sub>, beginning 8000 years ago, mainly as a result of humans clearing forests for agriculture. The beginnings of rice culture in Asia 5000 years ago subsequently led to later increases in CH<sub>4</sub>, the secondary greenhouse gas (rotting vegetation in these artificial wetlands releases globally significant amounts of CH<sub>4</sub>). Thus, according to Dr.

Ruddiman, the subsistence agriculture practiced by a prehistoric human population one-twentieth the size of our current global population, had already not just slowed, but actually reversed naturally falling CO<sub>2</sub> and CH<sub>4</sub> levels, 3000 years before Christ! Nearly half of today’s anomalous, anthropogenic greenhouse gases had entered the atmosphere before the (more accelerated) increases resulting from the industrial revolution 200 years ago. To summarize (too briefly), Dr. Ruddiman believes that on the one hand, while our efforts to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are commendable, only the impending depletion of fossil fuels is likely to ameliorate our current industrial-driven impact on climate, and that on the other, the effects of this warming are not likely to be as catastrophic as predicted (he specifically views irreversible depletion of groundwater and topsoil to be a greater threat to our civilization).

As it so often happens in my reading of science, this book seems to me to present a profound theological challenge. On the one hand, I find no more moral integrity in the apocalyptic temptation to accept global environmental disaster as an inevitable symptom of the “end-times,” than I see in the fundamentalist denial of our biological evolution. But unlike many, I also find little comfort in soft theological assurances that if we simply defer to a vague divine guidance of our evolution, we can somehow live in spiritual harmony with our environment and one another “as we were meant to live.” God has always seemed to me to be a little harder-edged than that, and our spiritual and biological selves not that easy to reconcile. We are big, destructive animals in this biosphere. We were substantially re-engineering this planet even as stone-age subsistence farmers. Yet we are also spiritual beings. In our quest for integrity, we have to work to understand ourselves and our place in this world realistically. As it turned out, my Lenten discipline this year comprised reading lots of science and struggling through very little prayer. I don’t think that makes me a poor backslider, it’s just a phase of my natural interior climate cycle. After reading Dr. Ruddiman’s book, I still intend to strive to minimize my environmentally destructive American ways, but I feel perhaps a little less holy about it.

—Gregg Richardson

**Deadline for May newsletter items is noon, April 24<sup>th</sup>.**

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*Faith Mennonite Church publishes our official monthly newsletter Faith Connection. The purpose of this publication is to enhance communication about the various types of the ministry of our congregation among the members and also with the community. Due to the space limitation, the editor may edit, modify, and change the submitted documents.*