

Faith Connection

April 2011

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...

Having been deserted by most of his family, the crucified Jesus, in a last, wild act of desperate inclusion, invited a thief to join him in paradise—a stunningly defiant rebuke to the ways the world gathers people. Only a Savior like Jesus would parade into Paradise arm-in-arm with a criminal, some great trophy for his painful rescue operation for humanity. Today, every time the family of God gathers for ... the Lord's Supper, a covered-dish fellowship supper, or serves soup to the homeless ..., the world looks at this odd family and says, "Jesus is hanging out with the same reprobates who got him crucified." Thank God.
– William Willimon, from "Home Wrecker," in *Why Jesus?* (Abingdon Press, 2010)

I had the privilege of beginning my Lent and Holy Week reflections the weekend before Lent began, when I participated in a retreat, sponsored by the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Ind.). The purpose of the retreat, held at the Hermitage, a Mennonite retreat center in southwest Michigan, was to give pastors a Holy Week experience outside of Holy Week, which for many pastors is one of the busiest work weeks of the year. The hope was that we might gain a richer understanding of the meaning of Jesus' passion—his suffering and submission to death. While the events of Holy Week are at the heart of Christianity, Mennonite churches have not always had a very rich observance. If people only participate in Sunday worship, it is easy to jump from the palm waving of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter without walking the painful path of betrayal, struggle and death that comes in between.

Our retreat group was made up of a dozen pastors and five leaders (a New Testament professor, an artist, 2 worship leaders, and a spiritual director). The retreat combined group times of hearing and discussing the passion texts from Luke 21:37-24:35 (freshly translated from Greek by one of the leaders) and an exercise in

"writing the text"—letting words and phrases come to life with the aid of art supplies. We also worshiped with the texts, led in songs and prayers that were shaped by the story. We were encouraged toward "orthopathy," a heart encounter with the story.

On Saturday morning as we read the trial and crucifixion story (Luke 23:1-56), the account of Jesus' interaction with the two criminals who were killed with him brought to mind the quote from William Willimon (above), which I had read as we were preparing for our series on Family, Singleness and Marriage. I began to think in a new way about how God experienced the death of Jesus. Certain atonement theologies create a picture of an angry God requiring the death of Jesus to satisfy a penalty for sin. But the picture that came to my mind was of a loving God whose heart was once again broken by the world, which rejected Jesus. Yet, as I wrote in my journal, "God must have smiled with pride when Jesus came bursting through the doors of Paradise with a thief in hand. 'You didn't let them break you!' God exclaims. 'You loved to the end!' The beloved son lived into his high calling of being human."

Later as we worshiped with this text, we sang the hymn "How Firm a Foundation." Verse three of the hymn says "When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow..." (an allusion to Isaiah 43). This immediately brought to mind the deaths of my own father, brother and sister-in-law in 2006, in a boat accident on Lake Superior. The most painful part of that memory for me has always been the knowledge that my father watched my brother drown (before my father succumbed to hypothermia and died). I have always assumed that my father died with a broken heart. But envisioning God's delight in Jesus enduring the cross and modeling forgiving love at the height of his pain, helped me imagine a new scenario: perhaps my father died with a heart filled with gratitude because his son died attempting to save his wife. Is not this the ultimate act of being human—offering oneself for another?

As we continue our journey through Lent and into Holy Week, may the story of God's love and the mystery of the cross touch the stories of each of our lives and deepen our experiences of being human.

--*Joetta Schlabach*

"We Americans are involved in two bloody wars, have a rapacious petroleum habit and are near Depression levels of unemployment, but prayers of confession often bemoan banal, relatively low-cost, middle-class transgressions such as "busyness" or "letting our minds wander from You." Reportedly, Martin Luther's confessor became so frustrated when Luther was confessing "puppy sins" that he shouted at Luther, "Go kill your father or something. Then we'll have a sin to talk about!"

--*Thomas G Long, Christian Century*

Outreach ministry update...

Creating A Culture of Peace

From March 18-20, Phil Stoltzfus and Candace Lault led a diverse group of 15 participants through a participatory learning experience in peacemaking. This Creating A Culture of Peace (CCP) workshop—held in the basement of Faith Mennonite—attracted three individuals from Vets for Peace, a professional mediator, two seminary students, an animal rights and nonviolence advocate, and a school teacher as well as a number of Faith Mennonite folks from various backgrounds. Marybeth Luing, Cindy Bjork, Rich Deming, Donna Minter, Donna Stucky, Melissa Hochstetler, Leslie Minkler, and Kathleen Remund attended from FMC.

Through small-group conversations, role-playing, short video clips, selected readings and some very entertaining presentations by Phil and Candace (who, if you didn't already know this, are great hams!), we each had opportunities to deepen our thinking and experience new ways of being in relation to nonviolence.

Rich Deming shared the following thoughts about participating in Creating A Culture of Peace: "I had a marvelous experience. The community we built was not surprising, but it is always special and exciting. The workshop, itself, was full of good ideas, good activities, and good feelings. I look forward to, perhaps, becoming a facilitator of CCP, and then helping to introduce more people to it."

Many thanks to Cleta Gingrich, Katie Hochstetler, and Joetta Schlabach, who planned, purchased, and prepared food that nourished participants throughout the weekend. And thank you, too, to Veterans for Peace, Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Missions and Service commission for providing scholarship support.

Feel free to ask participants to share their experiences with you. And don't be surprised if you hear about actions that some FMC members are planning as a follow-up to their work in Creating A Culture of Peace.

--*Kathleen Remund*

What's happening at FMC...

Lent Gatherings and Easter Celebration

You are welcome to join in the following events:

April 12, 6 p.m. – Second Tuesday Soup Group, followed at 7 p.m. by a time of fellowship and exploration of a Lent biblical text with friends from Cabrini Catholic Church (fellowship hall)

April 21, 6 p.m. – Maundy Thursday meal and service. We will gather in the fellowship hall for a simple soup/bread/fruit supper, woven around a worship service including communion and foot (or hand) washing.

April 22-23 – Good Friday & Holy Saturday. Many churches offer services on these days/evenings. Please consider inviting other FMC friends to attend a service together. Cabrini Catholic Church, 1500 Franklin Ave SE, invites us to their lay-led Good Friday service at 7:30 p.m. and their Saturday Easter Vigil, which will include an adult baptism. This 2.5-hour service begins at 9 p.m. (plan to arrive by 8:40 for lighting of outside bonfire).

April 24 – Easter. We will begin our celebration with a carry-in breakfast, beginning at 8:30 a.m. Worship, which will include the reception of new members, will begin at 9:45. (There will be no Christian education.)

Report From Deacons Commission

The deacons held their monthly meeting on March 9th. Plans were discussed for reviewing FMC marriage guidelines in deacon groups, organizing small groups for those interested, and the launching of a "Soup Group" event at the end of March to provide an opportunity for anyone interested to share a meal

together on a regular basis. Social Worker Harry Greenberg gave a presentation to the group on caring for those who struggle with mental illness, and advised on developing a set of guidelines for community values that apply to all who worship at FMC and serve as a protocol for responding to difficult situations when they arise. The next meeting will be held on April 20th

--Aryn Baxter, secretary for Deacon Commission

Christian Education Commission Update:

The Commission decided that organizing a full Vacation Bible School was not feasible this year, but we are exploring using the same curriculum for some after-church sessions this summer, perhaps tying in with summer Children's Time. The theme this year is "Taste and See". Hosting a full VBS program in future years is a strong possibility.

Meagan, our nursery coordinator, is working with the nursery-age kids in the downstairs nursery during the Sunday School time. The nursery will now be closed from right after church until 10:55 to give Meagan and the teacher time to clean up and prep. Parents are asked to pick their nursery-age kids up promptly after the service.

Other details: There will be no Sunday School on Easter. The Children's Garden will be planted again this year – watch for more details. The Children's Day service will be May 22 this year. Planning is underway.

--Minke Sundseth

FMC Monthly Budget Summary

	December	January	February
Total expenses	\$14,774	\$11,698	\$11,656
Total income	\$36,918	\$13,872	\$21,640*
Monthly budget	\$12,775	\$14,850	\$14,850

*Includes \$7,763 insurance payment for interior water damage



April
Birthday
Brunch

If you or a family member has a birthday in April, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on April 16. (This invitation is for whole families and significant others, not just the birthday person.) Please RSVP on the sign-up sheet in the fellowship area or email: jschlabach@faithmennonite.org.

Saturday,
April 16
10:00-11:30
a.m.

What's happening here and there...

Thank you from Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership

Dear members of Faith Mennonite Church,

We are grateful for your partnership with us to sustain and expand restorative justice in our community. Thank you for all the ways the congregation contributed to create a fun and successful event on March 13—from help with set up and clean up, to preparing treats and spreading the word about the event. Thank you! We raised over \$2600 and spread the word about restorative justice!

--In gratitude, Michele Braley

The deadline for May newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, April 27th.

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.