

Faith Connection

August 2007

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...

It has been one month since Patrick and I announced our resignation. It has been a month of grieving for us and trying to get everyone caught up with our discernment process. We wish we could have processed our longings for with everyone earlier. I kind of feel like our friend who left his marriage and friendships suddenly without telling anyone what he was going through.

We have been struggling with our 5 part-time jobs between us since I left half-time ministry at Faith in January. This transition is what I have wanted and has freed up time to pursue my writing and I love talking about birds all day at Wild Birds Unlimited. But with Patrick working weekends, we have not seen each other very much. We began to talk about full-time ministry for Patrick and inquired with the conference minister in Saskatoon where Patrick was on sabbatical last fall. Patrick likes the prairies and I like living in a city but the options for large urban Mennonite churches on the prairies were quite few. The call to Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan happened so fast that it has left us with our heads spinning. These past weeks have begun the process of trying to make sense of all of this and to begin to say good-bye.

Ed Kauffman, our conference minister sent us a helpful book called *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors*. It has been hard to say, "it is a time of growth" when it just feels painful at this point. Goodbyes include the grief stages of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' work – denial, anger, bargaining, resignation and acceptance. I have been in denial that this move is actually happening. It still shocks me to say it aloud. I am so angry to pack up my house that I have worked so hard on. I put my back out last week and I'm sure it is all related to the move trauma. Occasionally Patrick and I bargain, thinking, "OK,

maybe we can keep working our crappy part-time jobs to make it work here." But we are resigned that this Saskatoon opportunity is a positively providential one for us even though our roots are tearing as we make the transplant.

We have been able to process our move with a number of people in the congregation but may not get to everyone personally before our farewell party Saturday, September 8 or our sending Sunday, September 9. We pray for Faith in this time of transition and hope you all pray for us and are able to forgive us where we have screwed up and are able to send us on our way with acceptance and blessing. We know Saskatoon is not anyone's #1 vacation destination but you are all welcome to come and visit anytime.

--Patty Friesen

"Just remember, there's a right way and a wrong way to do everything and the wrong way is to keep trying to make everybody else do it the right way."

--Colonel Henry Potter, M*A*S*H

What's happening at FMC...

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting June 11, 2007 @ FMC

Present: Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Katie Hochstetler, Missions & Service; Beth Richardson, Deacons; Darrell Martin, Trustees; Patrick Preheim, Pastor; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Jenny Wandersee, Worship; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Shelly Hendricks, Education; Paula Okerstrom, Fellowship.

Absent: Patty Friesen, Pastor.

Pastoral transition—personal reflections. Council members have been informed during the previous week of Patrick and Patty's decision to leave their pastoral positions at the end of the summer. Patrick reads a draft resignation statement to Council. Their reasons include fragmentation of their lives due to multiple part-time jobs, loss of income due to loss of hours in one such job. They have been discussing this with Pastor/Parish Committee for several months. Neil asks for Council to spend some time offering personal reflections. Council members express both gratitude for Patrick and Patty's ten year ministry and sympathy for their decision, as well as questions about whether situation could have worked out differently.

How to communicate? Pastors and Council discuss the best way to announce the decision to the congregation. Consensus is a letter mailed to the congregation this week, as pastors will be in Saskatchewan interviewing for a position this coming weekend. Neil will also be out of town as a delegate to the conference in San Jose. Joan will speak to congregation briefly on Sunday to update them on Council's approach to the transition. Want to make clear to the congregation that Council will be discussing ways to approach the transition, and will be actively seeking involvement of the congregation in this discernment. Joetta is open to increasing her hours during this transition if the congregation discerns this as a useful option.

What questions might inform our process? Council brainstorms a list of potential questions.

Where do we go from here? Joetta says Conference Minister Ed Kauffman and the Pastor/Parish Committee are already in communication. He is willing to come talk with us to help us plan a transition process. Darrell asks whether this fits into Pastor/Parish Committee's job? Joetta says this is really a Church Council process. Gregg asks whether Kauffman should meet only with Church Council or with the whole church? Darrell describes nature of Conference Minister's job. Decide to invite Council and any other interested members to meet with Kauffman on June 24. Paula suggests that Pastor/Parish plan the affirmation and closure of Patrick and Patty's ministry, and that Church Council plan the search process.

Treasurer's report. Jerry says nothing specific for this month. Finances are back to normal, we're in a strong position, and giving is going okay. Paula asks whether summer giving typically drops off? Jerry says not a large dropoff.

New business. Joan asks what FMC is paying delegates for San Jose conference? Not sure about hotel bills. Other things mostly paid. Joetta and Jerry will review costs to make sure things are covered correctly.

Minutes. Minutes of May 14th, 2007 approved with corrections.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

FALL RETREAT Faith Mennonite

Bible Study, Swimming, Hiking, and More!

Saturday, OCTOBER 20, 2007
(Friday night stay optional)
Villa Maria Center
Frontenac, MN

Pre-Retreat Reading Suggestion:
Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children
from Nature-Deficit Disorder
by Richard Louv

Retreat Presentation on Ecology by
Prof. PERRY YODER
Including Small-Group Study of Genesis

More details to follow
Registrations due by Oct. 1

Memento Mori

[This talk was shared during June 17th worship, and is appearing in the newsletter in response to several requests]

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

—Matthew 13:45-46

When Patrick asked me earlier this week whether I'd be willing to share for a few minutes my reflections on this parable, especially in relation to my decision five years ago to leave my job at the University of Minnesota Libraries, I agreed somewhat reluctantly, and then fell into a state of perplexity. The parable seemed clearly to me to be a radical demand to recognize that the kingdom of heaven is of such superlative value, that one must be willing to give up everything else in one's life in order to obtain it. I certainly hadn't left my 17 year career behind in order to find the kingdom of heaven. I had, rather, left almost unwillingly, even unexpectedly, as I finally was forced to admit that I was mentally exhausted, and increasingly ineffective. And far from making a radical choice, as a naturally conservative, cautious person, I had in fact hedged my bets, as I usually do, believing that I could take a year or two off, rediscover some emotional and intellectual energy, and eventually return to my career in some capacity that was perhaps more on my own terms. I really was more like the rich young ruler who went away sadly, than the merchant who sold all he had.

But my caution was perhaps more self-delusion, for I indeed seem to have left my old career. More accurately, one might even say that my old career has left me, while I was mulling over my life. In fact, much of my previous life has left me behind in the past five years. Two years ago, I lost my last illusions of youthfulness, as I turned 50, my daughter graduated from college and moved out of state, my son graduated from high school and left for college, even my dog and my cat died. We often hear people relate how unprepared they are to watch their first child get on the school bus to head off to their first day of school. What I was totally unprepared for, was the day I suddenly realized that I was watching my last child get off the school bus on his last day of school, and I was no longer Daddy raising two children, as I had been for the past 22 years. By that fall my house had emptied itself of children and pets.

And so this week, as I reflected on this somewhat unwitting transition, I realized the real significance of this parable. Selling all that one has in order to buy the one pearl of great price, is not so voluntary as we believe. We don't so much contingently give up our life, as rather acknowledge that we can't ultimately hold on to it. We don't so much choose the path to the kingdom of heaven, as it chooses us. This story is repeated throughout the scriptures: God calls the Israelites out of Egypt, to leave their hard but familiar lives behind. Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to leave their lives as fishermen to follow him, but he turns away

the rich young ruler who hopes to follow him without first giving up his life. Christ strikes down Saul, who has no intention of following him, and chooses him for a life of utter self-denial. The merchant sells all he has because he realizes that he can't ultimately hold onto it anyway. Our greatest wisdom is to realize that we are in fact pilgrims, on a road that leads to a promised land that is truly unknown to us, possessing only the necessities that we can carry on our backs.

This spring, as I began my period of Lenten reflection, I was keenly aware that what I was giving up this year for Lent was my mother. Not only was I being confronted once again with the impermanence of good things that I so longed to hold on to, but also with an experience of what earlier generations of Christians referred to as *memento mori*, roughly translated as "mindfulness of one's own death." This is an outlook that has lost favor among both liberal and conservative Christians alike over the past few decades. Secular people often deride the idea of looking beyond life to God's ultimate destiny as "pie in the sky by and by." "Marketing" the Christian life to residents of the popular culture increasingly requires immediate gratification, if not constant entertainment. Yet it is *memento mori* that distinguishes our attitudes as Christians from those of competing secular philosophies.

During Lent I read two books by the German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann says that "the gospels intentionally direct the gaze of Christians away from the experiences of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit back to the earthly Jesus and his way to the cross. They represent faith as a call to follow Jesus." (p. 54) This faith arises, he says, not from our longing for personal immortality, but from our desire that God's ultimate righteous purpose for creation be fulfilled. Still, we learn, sometimes painfully, that this destiny is clearly not to be fulfilled in our brief, uncertain lives on earth. So, in the words of St. Paul, if death is the end of existence, we are "of all people most to be pitied." In *A Theology of Hope*, Moltmann justifies this outlook by describing Christian hope as essentially a belief in history. Both academic and popular philosophies have long defined the ever-elusive "happiness" for which they search as a settled state in which all is "right with the world," a kind of serene Platonic stasis. But the genius of Christian hope lies in its belief in change and action, in history moving toward a promise—for one can only truly hope in a promise. Searching for happiness in some contingent state of good health, prosperity, family or work, none of which are ultimately under our control, is "wish," not "hope."

And so, during the middle of Lent, I sat with my mother as she gave up her life. The day before she died she ate a last piece of pineapple upside-down cake, and sat for a while in front of her picture window for one final look at her beloved flower gardens. I don't know what she was thinking. She betrayed no emotion, said few words, offered no farewell. As the hospice nurse told us, dying people usually withdraw into themselves near the end. It doesn't mean they don't love us, it simply means they know that they are giving up what they love. As Christians, we are all learning to die. And only when we have learned to die, can we learn to hope.

--Gregg Richardson

What's happening here and there...

Manna Fest

Led again by Dean J. Seal—who was the Executive Director of the Minnesota Fringe Festival, and who last year organized the Spiritual Fringe—Manna Fest will offer 23 different shows, exploring ethical and spiritual matters; from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and non-denominational perspectives; through drama, storytelling and the performing arts. Full information, listings and times and places available as indicated below.

Saturday, August 2, through Sunday, August 12.
Augsburg College in various settings, 2211 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis.

For more information, go to:
www.augsburg.edu/mannafest
email: sealtotal@aol.com
phone: 612-823-6005

Tickets from the Augsburg Atrium Lobby or go to:
www.CommunityTix.com.

In review...

Patty's Picks

Read of the Summer: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by Khaled Hoessini. An amazing storyteller, Hoessini does not disappoint. This story is about Afghani women surviving the horrors of civil war and domestic violence. It is not an easy read but it is an engaging one and it helped me understand a country that we are at war with.

“The Secret Lives of Others” is a movie about East Germany, their Secret Police and their informants.

Twenty years since the wall came down and East German still have difficulties talking about those years and making movies about them. Watch and find out why movies can be cathartic for nations past and prophetic for nations present.

--Patty Friesen

Fasting

There's hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness.

We are lutes, no more, no less. If the soundbox
is stuffed full of anything, no music.

If the brain and belly are burning clean
with fasting, every moment a new song comes out of
the fire.

The fog clears, and new energy makes you
run up the steps in front of you.

Be emptier and cry like reed instruments cry.

Emptier, write secrets with the reed pen.

When you're full of food and drink, Satan sits
where your spirit should, an ugly metal statue
in place of the Kaaba. When you fast,
good habits gather like friends who want to help.

Fasting is Solomon's ring. Don't give it
to some illusion and lose your power,
but even if you have, if you've lost all will and
control,

they come back when you fast, like soldiers appearing
out of the ground, pennants flying above them.

A table descends to your tents,
Jesus' table.

Expect to see it, when you fast, this table
spread with other food, better than the broth of
cabbages.

--Jelaluddin Rumi

Deadline for September newsletter items is noon, August 30th.

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.

