

Faith Connection

August 2012

Monthly Newsletter of Faith Mennonite Church
2720 E. 22nd St. Minneapolis, MN 55406
Ph: (612) 375-9483
e-mail: faithmc@faithmennonite.org
web: www.faithmennonite.org

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...

Sometimes we find welcome in unexpected places and communion with unsuspecting characters. In the midst of the heat of July, I decided to spend one of my study days writing a sermon in the cool and quiet of the Central Library in downtown St. Paul. I was immersed in the story of David, Nabal and Abigail (1 Samuel 25) when a man appeared at the table across from me. He left a tattered folder, overflowing with dog-eared sheets of notebook paper, and walked away. Shortly, he returned with a stack of books. The first one he opened was a musical composition and before long he was fingering the notes with his right hand. I couldn't help but ask: "Are you a musician?"

He said he was and that he is composing a musical about Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement. He explained that he is telling Day's story in a way that reflects the lives of people who inhabit the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul today: the homeless, those who suffer from mental illness, people who are discriminated against because of their race and sexual identity. As we talked further I realized that he is writing his own story for not only is he a musician; Richard (not his real name) is gay, homeless, and lives with bi-polar disorder. He hopes that his musical, in which he plans to cast residents from the Dorothy Day shelter, will be performed this fall prior to the election and ballot initiative on the marriage amendment.

Other books that surrounded him on the table were a biography for children about Pope Benedict the XVI, a Robert Coles collection of biographical essays, and a biography of Dorothy Day. He interrupted the silence as he was reading the book on Pope Benedict to ask, "Did you know that he was involved in Vatican II, and considered liberal at that time? I'm glad to know that; it makes him more human. It's important to know the complete story of people."

Before long another man arrived and Richard introduced me to him. As the friend talked about the

breakfast that had been served that morning at Dorothy Day (left-over eggs that were hard and dry, "like tofu"), Richard said he had skipped breakfast to go practice piano. "Where do you play?" I asked. "There's a piano at the center and I also have musician friends who let me come by and play. I keep my keyboard at one of their homes." He said he had lived with friends for awhile but it was too noisy; "Dorothy Day is actually quieter! And it seems right to be staying there while I'm working on this project. There's a big photo of Dorothy and she inspires me."

I realized that, although I had arrived at the table first that morning, I was the guest at Richard's table—the shared table in the public library that is his office. Most of the people at the table were, indeed, homeless. Here they can come for free internet access and a safe, cool environment. There was no food or drink on the table, but we shared our common humanity, our shared desire to follow Jesus, and our commitment to justice. For a brief moment I was able to identify with Jesus' words, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." I was the stranger that morning who experienced extraordinary welcome.

--Joetta Schlabach

"I read in a book that a man called Christ went about doing good. It is very disconcerting to me that I am so easily satisfied with just going about."

--Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960)

What's happening at FMC...

Ministry Staff Update

This past Wednesday evening about 30 people came out for the "Occupy Homes MN" soup group in the FMC fellowship hall. Three fantastic soups were served, and we turned on all available fans in order to stay cool

while we heard from four guest speakers representing Occupy Homes.

First, Nick Shillingford talked about the “natural trajectory” from the original Occupy movement to the current focus in Minnesota on foreclosure prevention. While this involves some “occupy” actions to support families facing eviction (for example, last Thursday when 14 activists were arrested at the Cruz family home on Cedar Ave.), the current focus is on counseling homeowners and building a “community process” to support “working out this whole [foreclosure] mess.”

Then Minneapolis resident Anita Reyes-LeRey, originally from the White Earth Reservation, spoke about her personal experience with foreclosure. After running into medical bills and reduced employment, she fell behind on mortgage payments on the home she had lived in for 17 years. She felt shame and embarrassment at not being able to meet her financial obligations, and was preparing in May to be evicted on five days’ notice.

After Occupy Homes became involved, the bank offered to “rent” the house back to her for two years if she came up with \$2,100—which she did. But she is still hoping for the bank to renegotiate the terms of her original loan, which will allow her to retain equity in the home. Occupy activists Joy Nelson and Iain Wilson then spoke in support of Reyes-LeRey. At one point, Wilson urged us to take out our cell phones and leave messages for the vice president of LeRey’s bank—Cindy Koonce of Woodland National Bank. (Reyes-LeRey was scheduled to meet with Koonce the very next day—Thursday, July 26.)

Members of the audience engaged in dialogue with the presenters for about half an hour. Beth Richardson noted that what is really at stake for Reyes-LeRey is the *theft* of \$60,000 of her equity, and called for structural changes to the industry. Wilson agreed, saying that a long-term solution would be a federal program to reduce principle on foreclosed homes to a level consistent with the current value of the homes. The overall goal, he said, is to “keep our communities whole.”

You can read more about Reyes-LeRey and support her online petition here:
www.change.org/petitions/vice-president-cindy-koonce-negotiate-with-anita-reyes-to-stop-her-foreclosure.

--Phil Stoltzfus

“Living into Community” Fall Retreat 2012

Beautiful Camp St. Croix in Hudson, WI will be the setting October 5-7 for our first full weekend fall retreat in a number of years. For the past few years we’ve experimented with several different options for our traditional fall retreat, including last year’s 50th anniversary gala weekend celebration. But this year we’re returning to a full weekend format, complete with a resource person, evening campfire times, children’s activities and lots of time for relaxation and informal conversation—a perfect time for everyone of all ages to get better acquainted.

The weekend’s theme, “Living into Community,” will invite us to reflect on and to celebrate what it means to be a Christian community. During the month of September our worship and adult education discussions will begin to develop this theme. Then during the retreat weekend, Phil Lindell Detweiler, who together with his family recently settled in south Minneapolis after 21 years of service with Mennonite mission programs in Liberia, Benin, and South Africa, will draw connections between the community-building work their family did in Africa and the challenges of building community in an urban US setting. (His wife Christine will unfortunately not be present due to a professional commitment, but we hope his teen-age daughters will be able to assist with the children’s activities.)

We invite everyone to mark this date on their calendar and watch for a brochure in your church mailbox very soon.

-Retreat Planning Committee: Wendy Brunner, Adam Nafziger, Donna Stucky, Joetta Schlabach

CPMC Annual Meeting Report

The Annual Meeting of Central Plains Mennonite Conference was held June 28-July 1, 2012 in Henderson, Nebraska. Kathleen Harder, Donna Stucky, and Gerald and Joetta Schlabach served as FMC delegates at the meeting and Sophia Harder Kouay participated in the children’s activities. The conference theme, “Guided by the Spirit: To let the world know,” was developed through three sermons that Mennonite Church USA executive director Irvin Stutzman preached in the worship times on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings. Business sessions were held on Friday and Saturday afternoons, followed by workshops each day. Following are some of the conference highlights from those of us who attended:

Kathleen: There were many good things about the annual conference. It was very well organized, the food was excellent, and the participants were engaged, all of which helped to provide a foundation for a good experience.

An atmosphere of mutual support was evident following the story shared during the Saturday morning session about Ashland Christian Fellowship, a Mennonite congregation in Montana. The growing congregation has outgrown its church building. Several past fundraising attempts have been unsuccessful and conference leadership raised questions regarding where they would find the \$46,000 necessary to expand their church building. A short time later an announcement was made that someone had offered to match contributions totaling \$15,000. That of course put the onus on the rest of us to contribute. Immediately someone rose to his feet and said he would give \$1,000. When all was said and done, \$40,400 had been pledged to the building expansion needed to support Ashland Christian Fellowship's growing congregation. This was evidence that conference participants were "guided by the Spirit that the world may know."

Another highlight was the Sunday worship service at Bethesda Mennonite Church. It was wonderful to be present in a large sanctuary with a large pipe organ blasting favorite organ pieces during the prelude. Then during the service the congregational singing, choir, brass section, and organ all facilitated a memorable spirit-filled experience.

Donna: When I think of the greater Mennonite Church USA, I have two images: one is a view of many churches across the USA, and another is the administrators in offices at various far-away places. At the Central Plains Conference in Henderson, Nebraska, July 28-July 1, 2012, the seemingly far away was close at hand. Mennonite Church USA executive director, Ervin Stutzman was at the conference the whole time and challenged participants with a sermon each day.

The Conference theme was "Guided by the Spirit: To Let the World Know" and Stutzman admonished: "Let's not be shy about the Holy Spirit." He commented that the book of Acts in the New Testament is called the Acts of the Apostles, but it could be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The whole book is a story of what the Holy Spirit has done, Stutzman said, citing the example of Cornelius, a Gentile and Roman centurion at Caesarea, who heard about the gospel, was filled by the Holy Spirit and was baptized by Peter (Acts 10). Stutzman noted that this was a case of the Holy Spirit working across cultural lines, a working of the Spirit

that is desperately needed today. "The Holy Spirit helps bridge cultural barriers in ways that humans cannot," he said. He also pointed out that early Anabaptists were guided by the Holy Spirit and the world around them knew. Today, however, we sometimes underestimate the work of the Spirit. Stutzman reported on a recent survey of churches which asked: "What has God been doing in your congregation?" Hardly anyone used God as the subject of an active verb. Instead, the churches' responded with what *they* had been doing.

In another sermon Stutzman talked about the Kingdom of God and asked: "What does Jesus mean when he sent his disciples into the world as he came into the world?" The disciples were sent, as we are sent, to announce that the Kingdom of God is now. As Kingdom people, Stutzman said, we will most likely suffer. Our task is to act and talk so that others can understand Jesus and we will have to go through the narrow gate. He compared entering the narrow gate to going through airport security during which you have to hand over your bags, your cell phone, computer, keys, and take off your shoes. If you pass, you get these things back. Giving ourselves to Jesus is like giving up ownership of these and other things. We can have them back but we need to remember that in the Kingdom of God, we no longer *own* them. We can *use* them to further the Kingdom of God.

Stutzman preached a powerful, final sermon on forgiveness, in which he invited all of us to be agents of forgiveness. Listen to others who want to confess, and say out loud to them, "By God's grace, your sins are forgiven." Responding in this way offers mercy and love to someone seeking grace and acceptance.

During a business session, Stutzman introduced the *Purposeful Plan*, which outlines a vision and steps to carry out the vision throughout Mennonite Church USA. The current vision statement is: "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." In light of this vision, the *Purposeful Plan* addresses six questions: "Who is God calling us to become as a people? Where is God calling us to go? What are the signposts to show we are on God's chosen path for us? Where are we now on this journey? What circumstances might cause us to make adjustments to our goals along the way? and What are the next steps on the path?"

You can read the text of the *Purposeful Plan* at www.mennoniteusa.org/purposeful-plan/, and I would encourage you to look at it. Those of you who receive

The Mennonite, might have noticed that Stutzman has been writing a series of articles related to seven priorities that guide ministry across the church. When people ask about what the Kingdom of God looks like, Stutzman said, we ought to be able to point at our own church as an example.

Gerald: One of the most hopeful signs we are observing in the conference is a number of young pastors, trained in Anabaptist-Mennonite schools, who are serving in rural and small town congregations. A workshop I attended on “The Rural Church as Community Leader,” led by Will Ortman of Marion, South Dakota, underscored the demographic and economic challenges facing these congregations. Smaller families and the draw of city life have been emptying out the plains states for decades, and a current land-price bubble can actually make things worse for community life by distorting rural economy. In this context, to hear young pastors say that they didn’t just “accept” a call to rural ministry (as though it were their second choice) but “felt” a call to rural ministry was encouraging indeed.

Joetta: There were no major agenda items or resolutions requiring lengthy discussion at this year’s meeting. There was a brief update and discussion of the structural changes that are underway within conference and a vote to change the wording of the articles of incorporation in order to be legally aligned with Mennonite Church USA for tax-exempt purposes. We officially welcomed three new congregations into the conference. All three are Spanish-speaking fellowships, two in southeast Iowa and one in Mt. Lake, Minnesota. We also held a graduation ceremony for eight persons from these churches who are enrolled in the Anabaptist Bible Institute, a Spanish-language Bible study program. These students received certificates following two years of study. They will receive a diploma if they complete four years. At the close of the business session, during an open mic time, Ramiro Hernandez, CPMC coordinator for Hispanic ministries, spoke of the change he has felt in the conference during the past five years. He did not initially find CPMC a very welcoming place, but today the Hispanic churches feel at home and valued within the conference.

During the Friday morning business session delegates read a litany of release of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship, which has transferred its membership to Central District Conference, following eight years of being placed in provisional (non-voting) status and never finding reconciliation with the conference. The litany expressed lament for the failure to find resolution and unity. On Saturday, at the close of the morning

session, conference moderator Blaine Friesen and executive conference minister David Boshart, made an announcement (included in the July edition of *Faith Connection*) about the marriage guidelines that we have adopted at FMC and about regional opportunities for conversation and discernment that the conference board is planning for this fall. There was no formal discussion about the matter in the delegate session, but individuals were invited to speak with FMC delegates and with conference board members during the remaining time of the annual meeting. Each of us had the opportunity to do so and most of the conversations were respectful; a number of people expressed support for our process and witness for the inclusion of LGBT persons.

The meeting ended with an invitation from the Northern Cheyenne Churches of eastern Montana to hold next year’s annual meeting in Ashland, Montana, June 20-23, 2013. Several of this year’s delegates have already expressed their desire to serve in that capacity next year. However, annual meeting is open to anyone who wishes to attend. You might consider combining this with a longer vacation trip next summer!

FMC Monthly Budget Summary

	May	June	YTD
Total Giving	\$7,782	\$9,499	\$62,288
Total Budgeted Income*	\$10,102	\$11,889	\$81,705
Budget Target	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$84,000
All Expenses	\$11,217	\$10,178	\$85,950

*Includes rental and investment income

What's happening here and there...

Resources and More Resources

Could you use a DVD, a bibliography on a certain topic, some resources for a special children’s story or children’s curriculum? Check out the Western District Conference (WDC) Resource Library.

The Library has an entire online catalog of 11,000 resources available through their web-site at

www.mennowdc.org. Click on the “Resource Library” tab and then search by title, subject or author. You can email your request or call the Library at 316-283-6300 to request materials, or call to talk to a resource person about specific information you are seeking. Central Plains Conference pays a small fee so that any church or individual within the Central Plains Conference can check out materials.

“Box of Books” is a special Library feature which Faith Mennonite has utilized before. Any church can request a box of 25 books that can be available to church members for two months. A Traveling Peace Trunk, discussion guides and resources for Sunday school teachers are available online and from the Library.

The Library’s resources include an adult collection of 6,000 volumes of non-fiction resources; 550 videos that focus on specific subject matter; periodicals; over 4,000 children’s books; and, a music lending library which includes multiple copies of 450 anthems. Each month the WDC Library publishes a newsletter called *Check It Out* featuring new resources. This newsletter is also available on their website. There is also more information about the WDC Library at www.centralplainsmc.org/.

This is the 76th year this Library has been offering materials and resources to support Mennonite Churches. Check it out!

--Donna Stucky



If you or a family member has a birthday in August, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on August 25th. (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.

*August
Birthday
Brunch*

*Saturday,
August 25
9:30-11:00
a.m.*

New Ministries Fund

The Central Plains Conference has established a New Ministries Fund to receive gifts to the conference and to channel these gifts into projects and opportunities for ministry instead of simply putting these gifts into the general fund for operating purposes. The Stewardship Task Group outlined four major areas of emphasis for New Ministries Fund use: facilitate relationships, assist witness, leadership development and nurture Christian formation.

Strengthening relationships among congregations and conferences with Mennonite Church USA as well as with the larger church is a way to break down perceived barriers, to learn from and nourish each other and to join churches with old and new traditions. Witnessing involves demonstrating our theology and core values to others and being able to articulate why we feel called to serve Jesus.

Nurturing Christian formation activities will focus on curriculum and program development to enhance our understanding of ways to live out our faith. And, to continue the work of our churches, we need good leaders, leaders that listen and serve the diversity of people among our congregations and the future gatherings of church.

Committees and individuals who have developed a program that furthers the church’s work in the areas described above are welcome to apply to the Conference Board for grant monies. An application process is currently being created.

The Conference will honor stipulations regarding designated and undesignated gifts the conference receives. The entire document presented at the annual conference from June 28 through July 1, 2012 is at www.centralplainsmc.org/Home/New_Ministries_Fund

--Donna Stucky

The deadline for September newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, August 29th.

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.