

Faith Connection

August 2014

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...

I have been aware of Rabbi Amy Eilberg for over ten years. I first met her at a Summer Spirituality Institute on "The Three Faces of Mary: Miriam, Mary of Nazareth, and Mary Magdalene" hosted by Wisdom Ways Spirituality Center in 2003 when I was employed there. That experience brought together Christians, Jews and Muslims to explore the lives and connections of these three archetypal women. It was my first truly interfaith encounter and I realized how my Christian understanding of these formative figures was enriched by the perspectives, including artistic representations, of Jewish and Muslim persons of faith.

In early May of this year I attended a presentation Rabbi Eilberg gave, introducing her just-published book *From Enemy to Friend: Jewish Wisdom and the Pursuit of Peace* (Orbis 2014). I was drawn into the honest and compelling way she shared her story of involvement in interfaith dialogue and peace-building work with regard to Israel/Palestine, and how all of her work is deeply embedded and sustained by her relationship with the sacred texts of Judaism: Torah (included in the Old Testament) and Talmud. I couldn't wait to read her book and I wasn't disappointed. In fact, I find myself referring to the book in almost every conversation I have these days.

Despite our rich traditions of peacemaking and peace theology in the Mennonite Church we are currently a deeply divided church. As I read *From Enemy to Friend* I realized that we have much in common with the deep divide within the Jewish community regarding Israel/Palestine. And now this summer as the tensions have again flared between Hamas and Israel, with the exchange of missiles and mortar between Israel and Gaza, I can't help but see similarities in that deeply entrenched conflict and the widening gulf and entrenched positions that have developed within the Mennonite Church. When I venture into the Mennonite blogosphere on occasion, I find much of the

communication, particularly in social media, resembling missile exchanges rather than attempts at true dialogue and understanding.

Rabbi Eilberg's book is part memoir, in which she shares numerous encounters that began with deep pain and fear, based in the historical trauma of the Holocaust, and moved in understanding toward the "other" as she listened to their stories of pain and fear; part theology, in which she witnesses to the rich spiritual tradition within Judaism that upholds diversity as a gift of creation and diversity of voice/interpretation as a manifestation of God; and part peace and conflict education, in which she explores both the nature of conflict and the practices, such as sacred listening and compassion, that draw people together in mutual understanding.

We will soon have a copy of *From Enemy to Friend* in our church library and I hope it will be checked out continuously during the next year! I do not recommend it as *the answer* to our challenges in the Mennonite Church, but it has much to offer us. And while I am not sure of the path through the conflict in our denomination, I invite all of us to grow in our practice of the following virtues that Rabbi Eilberg offers as foundational for building lasting peace: kindness, compassion, generosity, self-awareness, humility, curiosity, equanimity, strength, and prayer for peace. Certainly these are the ways of Jesus.

--Joetta Schlabach

Ministry staff report...

Again this year Faith Mennonite hosted the monthly ecumenical Faith Action Vigil at the Ramsey County Detention Center on the first Sunday of July. Thanks to Dick Westby for arranging this. I worked up a reading for the vigil based upon recent news articles concerning greater numbers of refugee families and children from Central America arriving on the border. It highlighted

the humanitarian crises families are facing in their home countries, the heightened emphasis by US agencies on detention and deportation, and the increase of anti-immigrant incidents such as the blocking of buses in Murrieta, California. There has been renewed energy recently for more coordinated action by congregations in the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration network—stay tuned.

This week the Missions and Service Commission will be sponsoring a presentation on healthcare highlighting the current status of MNsure, Minnesota's health insurance marketplace. A new open enrollment period is coming up in November, and the Minnesota Council of Churches is continuing to offer these sorts of information sessions in the community to help raise awareness for the 4.9% of Minnesotans who are still without insurance.

For this fall I'm also working on another Minnesota Council of Churches initiative. We're looking into holding a neighborhood event in conjunction of the "Respectful Conversations about Guns in Minnesota" series. The Respectful Conversations Project began two years ago around the same-sex marriage issue. The model involves identifying an emotional controversy in the community and inviting people into small group conversations about it using trained table facilitators. This past year the series has focused on gun violence. I am talking with community partners about setting up a time, perhaps in September, for holding such an event in Seward. It would involve a one-time event three hours long, plus a training event one week before for table facilitators. The central purpose of the meeting is not primarily to generate consensus or develop solutions, but rather to nurture skills for listening to and understanding passionate differences of opinion. Watch for an announcement in the future calling for volunteers to serve as table facilitators—that means you!

--Phil Stoltzfus

What's happening at FMC...

Ministry Leadership Transition Update: Visioning Process in September

As announced in the May issue of the newsletter, FMC is beginning a process of transition in our ministry leadership. In April, the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee presented to the Church Council Joetta's proposal that her position be reduced to half-time next year. In her newsletter article, Joetta used the metaphor of gardening to describe the steps in the transition

process, starting with taking stock of the soil (community), determining what we would like to be planting and nurturing (mission), and praying for sun and rain (wisdom and God's guidance) as we move toward harvest (a new leadership configuration).

We began the process of taking stock during a series of adult education sessions in May. Now, a leadership transition committee made up of Noah Skogerboe, Tyler Zabriskie, Shelly Hendricks and Wendy Brunner is in the midst of planning for the next stage of the visioning process, which will begin in September. In June, they and others met with Diane Zaerr-Brenneman to get her input and recommendations based on her experience as a pastor and with conference. Currently, the committee is developing a timeline and questions that will be used to guide the visioning process. They will be using different methods to assess the vision of the congregation, including focus groups and surveys, with plenty of opportunities for input. Once a common vision and direction for the congregation is discerned, the next step will be to determine what leadership model fits the needs of the congregation and then moving ahead to put that in place.

Look for regular updates on the process in the newsletter and in Sunday morning announcements. We encourage anyone with questions or concerns to contact any of the members of the committee.

--*Leadership Transition Committee*

Songfest a Success!

About fifty persons gathered at Bethany Lutheran Church on Franklin Avenue on Sunday afternoon, July 20, for a hymn/song fest jointly planned and led by Bethany Lutheran Church, the Community of St. Martin and Faith Mennonite Church. Persons also came from several other neighboring churches. After about seventy-five minutes of lively singing, and an organ solo by Jim Kuebelbeck, people got better acquainted during an ice cream social. The general consensus seemed to be that this is something we ought to do on a regular basis.

MNsure Free Presentation on Healthcare

This presentation will be hosted by FMC on Wednesday, August 6, 7p.m. in the fellowship hall. Judy Jones, a trained Minnesota Council of Churches MNsure Faith Ambassador, will be the resource person. Posters available at the church. Please help us advertise, and invite friends who want to learn more about getting insured during the next open enrollment period beginning November 15.

Save the Date!

All Church Fall Retreat, September 26-28

“Living Fully at Every Age”

Camp St. Croix, Hudson, Wisconsin



This year’s retreat will be a time of intergenerational play and relationship-building: lego-building, soccer, bocce ball, table games, square dancing, and a few Olympic challenges in honor of Dick Westby’s 80th birthday. We are inviting our partner church, Shalom Mennonite from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, to join us. Watch for full details in early September. Until then, direct any questions or ideas to the planning committee: Katie Cuffey, Matthew Hendricks, Adam Nafziger or Joetta Schlabach

Thank you...

Dear Faith Mennonite Church, thank you for the Bible books for Lydia we received after the parent/child dedication service. The service was a memorable celebration of our precious gift from God. We felt very warmly surrounded and encouraged. Thank you for your support.

--Love, Candace and Daryn Dockter



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 9th. (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 9th
9:30-11
a.m.

What's happening here and there...

More Reflections on Central Plains Conference Annual Meeting

The July newsletter included reflections from Sophia Harder Kouay, Hannah Dirks and Joetta Schlabach. We include this further report from Thaine Dirks.

The six degrees of separation formula does not work for Central Plains Mennonite Church. It actually seems to be two or three degrees. That was the first impression of the conference, as it seemed that people were meeting old friends and quickly making connections to new friends. For each meal, sitting at a new table with different people, it was not hard to find something in common with them. And this made for a family atmosphere.

The conference was Thursday evening through Sunday morning, June 19th-22nd. Each day started and ended with a worship service in the chapel at Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. The college setting added to the family atmosphere. Iowa Wesleyan has a small campus where we used only three buildings, and between them, a beautiful college green with huge old kickory, white pine, tulip and other trees, a great setting for children activities, conversing under the trees or doing a little reading on a summer’s day.

There were delegate sessions each morning and afternoon, with non-controversial topics. For example, a new church was accepted into the conference; there were reports from MCC, MCUSA, some colleges, Mennonite Media and others; and a strategic plan for the next few years was discussed and approved; and acknowledgements for leaders and workers in the conference. To facilitate conversation, each delegate was assigned a table with seven other people and various topics were discussed in that smaller setting and at time reported to the whole group of the 22 or so other tables.

The keynote speaker was Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Her talks/sermons about the importance of scripture and how to read and how not to read it, would have fit right into one of our spring Adult Education classes on reading scripture. A small part of the strategic plan was to develop “TED talk” type videos and her talks/sermons would be great candidates for those.

While the conference seems quite distant for many of us, the packed Sunday morning worship at Sugar Creek Mennonite Church brought those connections closer.

Next year we will have chances to make those connections, as the conference will be held in the Twin Cities, with our local churches, including Rochester and Eau Claire, hosting.

-Thaine Dirks

Ecuador Fellowship & Learning Tour Report - Part 4

Following an inadvertent two-month lapse, the following is the final installment of the report that I wrote following Gerald's and my January 17-28 trip to Ecuador as part of a Central Plains Mennonite Conference-Ecuador Partnership Fellowship and Learning Tour. The report had three sections: Learnings, Fellowship, and Recommendations.

Fellowship (Part 2 – Quito) The emergence and growth of the Mennonite Church in Quito, now extending itself in two new congregations in the neighborhoods of Calderón and Jardines del Inca, was very impressive. It is clear that César Moya and Patricia Urueña have made an indelible mark on the formation and character of these congregations with their passion for Anabaptist theology and peacemaking. The presence of additional workers, some from other countries, some home-grown leaders, has also strengthened the church. I was impressed by the deep sense of shared ministry and respect regardless if one is Ecuadoran, Colombian, North American, or Chilean.

We quickly fell in love with our Quito host family, Gladys Montaluisa, Estuardo, and Zisa. Gladys overcame a significant physical disability and the loss of two of six children—one of them murdered for her involvement in political protests—to become a lawyer who wrote the disability and employment law for Ecuador. She now serves as a consultant for the UN, traveling to other Latin American countries that are working on disability legislation. She is one of two lawyers in the Quito Mennonite Church who have helped write the articles of incorporation for gaining legal recognition by the government. Estuardo works for the Ecuadoran Special Olympics program and is the main cook for the family. He and 12-year-old Zisa have an endearing, playful relationship. (The three older sons are all doctors and live in other parts of the country.) Gladys expressed concerns for her early adolescent daughter similar to the concerns we hear from families in our setting—bullying, use of technology, sexual pressures. She was particularly interested in hearing from pastoral candidate Luis Tapia about his commitments and ideas for youth programming.

The family lives in a humble house, for which they do not have title, with a million-dollar view of the city. They built their home as part of a land take-over by some 250 poor families next to a municipal park. They were the only ones who built a permanent home of cement block; others built make-shift homes of cardboard and tin. When the city offered land in another area, farther from the city, all of the other families moved. Gladys and her family refused to leave, in part due to her disability which makes travel difficult.

The other CPMC participants with whom we traveled (coincidentally all from Nebraska, but from three different churches) were an integral part of our experience. Don and Shirley Kempf were excellent leaders, providing information before and along the way that helped us anticipate and interpret what we experienced. They were never anxious and invited our input on a regular basis, modeling collaboration in the very best way. Mark Epp and Cathy Wismer had a quiet gravitas in their manner, raising wise questions and observations based on their previous experience in Bolivia. Dennis and Carolyn Peters, while unable to speak Spanish, more than made up for it with their warm and out-going personalities. They were the first to greet persons whenever we arrived and the last to be doling out farewell hugs as we departed.

Recommendations. While we had no regrets about our experience we offered the following suggestions in the final evaluation meeting, things we think might strengthen future trips:

1. Provide reminders throughout the trip of anticipated changes in altitude/temperature in order to dress appropriately each day.
2. Provide indigenous voices, including a visit to an indigenous community and worship service.
3. Provide a session that recounts the history of the country from conquest to independence.
4. Provide a session on the Catholic Church in Latin America, given by a Catholic.

We are deeply grateful to have had this experience and commit ourselves to pray for the church in Ecuador and the Colombia/Mennonite Mission Network/CPMC partnership that enables this work.

--Joetta Schlabach

Ecuador Partners

One of the exciting things that has happened in Central Plains Mennonite Conference in the last few years is the influx of young pastors who are leading our churches. In Ecuador, God has also miraculously raised up a

young pastor by the name of Luis Tapia. As many of you know, Cesar and Patricia, who had been pastoring the church in Quito, returned to Colombia. In anticipation of their return, the congregation formed a search committee. They made a long list of requirements among which were a seminary degree, a strong Anabaptist theology, and experience. Luis began as pastor of Quito Mennonite Church at the end of January, with all of the qualification desired by the congregation.

Central Plains has been involved in this process because the church in Quito has asked us to help support Luis financially on a declining scale. This means that we are contributing \$11,598 (70%) of his support in this fiscal year. In the following years this will decline to 60%, 30% and 0%. We have included this in the Central Plains Budget but we would like to give you the opportunity to partner with us by making contributions or offerings for Luis and Jennifer. These should be sent to:

Central Plains Mennonite Conference
PO Box 101
Freeman, SD 57029

These gifts should be designated for the item 6513 Quito Support. If we receive more money than is needed for the project, it will be used for the other needs of the Ecuador Partnership Mission.

--Don Kempf, Coordinator, Ecuador Partnership

Now Accepting New Residents

The Mennonite Worker has residential openings starting in September. Please spread word: we're moving into some exciting new directions as a community and would love to be joined with folks who not only want to live in an intentional Christian community, but would like to help give shape to our next season of ministry. In the next several months, we'll be launching the Center for Creative Peacemaking, starting a community business, and releasing a radical discipleship intensive.

Living in an intentional community is a wonderful challenge. Many folks struggle to live into their deepest values without a community of likeminded folks to experiment with. If you'd like to center your life on Jesus' way of hospitality, simplicity, prayer, peacemaking, and resistance, then consider applying for residency at the Mennonite Worker. For more information, go to:

www.mennoniteworker.com/residency/.

Listen

Listen!

If the stars are lit

that means - someone must need them!

it means - someone wants them to be there!

it means - someone has called these specks of spit
pearls!

And, in anguish,

among clouds of midday dust,

breaks into God's rooms,

afraid that he's too late!

He sheds supplicant tears,

kisses that sinewy hand,

and begs,

asking for an assurance of a star -

swears,

he couldn't bear this starless torment.

And afterwards,

walks around in a fever,

but calm on the outside.

He says to one person,

"It's really nothing, now,

is it? Nothing to be frightened of!"

Listen!

If the stars are lit,

that means - someone must need them!

it means that it's essential

that every evening

above the rooftops

at least one star burns.

-- Vladimir Mayakovsky

(translated: Emory Richardson)

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