

# Faith Connection

December 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's hard to enter the Christian season of Advent – of waiting – when the post-Thanksgiving advertising frenzy blares a constant message of Buy Now! Very little of how North American society celebrates Christmas reflects the original Christmas account that we find in the Gospels and other writings from the period. Even in the church we've domesticated the story to a large degree. Mary is meek and mild. Joseph is a comfortable carpenter. Jesus coos sweetly from his bed in the hay, sleeping in heavenly peace.

Biblical scholar Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, in her book *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture*, describes first century Galilee as a triple-taxed region where “peasants worked intensely hard just to stay afloat, but the power of the governing class to extract payment ground them down. ... many lost their land and became truly impoverished. The poverty and hunger of Galilee acted as a spawning ground for first-century revolts against the repressive Roman occupation and the taxation it engendered.”

One of those revolts, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, happened just several years before Jesus' birth. In response, the Romans responded with brutal efficiency. They crucified two thousand Jewish men outside the city walls of Jerusalem. In Galilee they recaptured Sepphoris, a city just four miles from Nazareth, and, according to Josephus “burned the city and enslaved its inhabitants.”

Mary and Joseph could well have carried the scars of trauma from that brutal experience even as they awaited the birth of their son. This context explains the language of reversed fortunes in Mary's song, the Magnificat, recorded in Luke. And it also sheds light on Mary's later fears, recorded in Mark, that Jesus' radical behavior was attracting too much attention.

So how do 21st-century people of faith living in the most affluent country on earth observe Advent and Christmas?

We can base our cheer, which we all need as the darkness lengthens, on God's unconditional love that allows us to love our family, friends, and the strangers we encounter each day. The candles we light can be reminders of and prayers for people in places like Iraq and Palestine, as insecure today as first-century Palestine was when Jesus was born. We can find ways to include people beyond our immediate circle of family and friends in our gift-giving. And we can focus our waiting on new ways Christ may wish to enter our lives and draw us into his work of his shalom.

I know FMC folks have many creative Advent and Christmas traditions that embody these goals. I invite everyone to share these with one another on a bulletin board in the fellowship area as a way to learn from each other. I'm ready for some new ideas!

--Joetta Schlabach

“It is not you who shapes God,  
it is God who shapes you.  
If then you are the work of God,  
await the hand of the artist  
who does all things in due season.  
Offer God your heart,  
soft and tractable,  
And keep the form in which  
the artist has fashioned you.  
Let your clay be moist,  
lest you grow hard  
and lose the imprint of God's fingers.”

-- Irenaeus, 2<sup>nd</sup> century bishop

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

### **Advent Worship: "The World is About to Turn"**

The theme that we will follow in our Sunday worship during the Advent and Christmas season is taken from a song, "Canticle of the Turning." Its refrain proclaims:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.

Let the fires of your justice burn.

Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,  
and the world is about to turn!

During the four Sundays of Advent, followed by Christmas and Epiphany, our worship will focus not only on the coming of Christ, but the dream that Christ's coming awakened and awakens—the reign that is already manifest and still awaits completion. The season encourages us to be vigilant, to guard against the lure of complacency and to embrace the challenge of living God's dream. During the successive weeks we will be called to Get ready! Take heart! Rejoice! Be restored! Praise the Lord! Arise and shine! These commands encourage us to act confidently because we know that God's power is breaking into the darkness.

The Advent worship planning team this year is: Arlene Geissinger, Adam Nafziger, Michelle Okerstrom, Joetta Schlabach, Jenny Wandersee, Heather Wengerd and Sandra Westby. They have used denominational resources from the *Leader* magazine. Thank you to Rachel, Stacy and the youth who made the luminarias for our Advent wreath, Neil Okerlund and the Advent Choir, Barbara Beers and her dance troupe, and the weekly Advent visitors who will drop in for Children's time.

--*Worship Commission*

### **FMC Evening Christmas Program**

Enthusiasm is growing for an FMC evening Christmas program this year. The Christian Education primary department is planning the program, to begin at 5 p.m. on Sunday, December 16. It will include participation by the children and youth, scripture readings, congregational carols, selections by the Advent Choir, and will conclude with a candle-light singing of "Silent Night." A cookie social will follow from 5:45 to 6:15 p.m. At 6:15 all who would like to go Christmas caroling are invited to walk to the Seward Towers where a Christmas potluck for residents will be in progress and we will lead a carol sing-along for 15 minutes or so, before setting off to sing for a few residents in the

Seward neighborhood. We'll end with hot chocolate at the Westby's. Start baking those cookies and tuning your voices!

### **Caroling at the Kreider's**

Joan Kreider is again opening her home for a Christmas carol sing-along on Sunday evening, December 9, at 7pm. Come sing your favorite (and not so favorite), familiar (and not so familiar) carols of the season. We have invited our friends from the St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship to join us. Joan's address is 2162 Carroll Avenue St. Paul.

### **Nurturing Our Development as Human Beings**

January marks the beginning of our new Sunday school class "Nurturing Our Development as Human Beings." This will be a combination discussion/interview style class. We are looking at bringing together those among us who have raised children (We will call them the AGED WISDOM!), those who are raising children (We will call them THOSE IN THE MIDST!), and everyone else interested in the discussion (We will call them the OPINIONATED 3<sup>RD</sup> PARTIES).

Following are the topics that we have brainstormed so far and are looking for ideas:

- The stages of human development
- Human development, in relation to parental discipline, the culture, material goods and money, life focus and direction, sexuality, personal health, emotional health, the environment, social justice, the peace witness, and the church and religious institutions.
- Developing ourselves and children as spiritual beings
- Parental relationships with adult children
- Definitions of family in a mobile society

What we need from people at this point to make this class work are these things:

1. Let us know if you will be there. (RSVP to office@fmc.org). We need to know who and how many so we can tap on shoulders for fun and direction.
2. Rank the ideas above and add more so we know where the most interest lies.
3. Start helping us come up with songs (less than five minutes) that expresses the pervading culture's attitudes on the topic. (ideas to office@fmc.org) We are looking for amusing songs, if possible.

In each class we will lay out the societal assumptions and obvious issues, ask the current questions of THOSE IN THE MIDST, interview those from the AGED WISDOM side of the room regarding the questions, and generate observations from the INTERESTED 3RD PARTIES. A summary will end each class or a vote to continue the topic for the following Sunday. Bring your hot drink.

--Beth Richardson

## **New Names and Faces**

We extend a warm welcome to those who have recently joined us in worship:

Ian Canary-King  
Adrienne Coleman and Henry Johnson  
Rachel Weaver

## **Christmas Letter from Patty and Patrick**

After our raucous farewell party on September 9 and touching sending Sunday morning, we hit the road to look for housing in Saskatoon. That turned out to be a drama because immigration didn't give Patrick his work permit on the first visit because he was not expected to begin at Nutana until November 1. Unbeknownst to us we could not get pre-approved for a mortgage without the work permit. So we drove back south five hours across the prairie to the nearest border to secure the proper permit.

We finally could look at houses and there were not many to look at as everyone suddenly wants to live in Saskatchewan! Patrick found an ad by chance in the newspaper in the library and it turned out to be the one for us. It is a hobbit house, low to the ground and surrounded with shrubbery and flowers. The upstairs was in perfect shape and just the right size for us. We needed to finish out the basement rental suite but that was painless after our major house renovation in Minneapolis. Best of all, it has a huge garden, apple tree, rhubarb and raspberry stands. God knew what we needed to feel at home in a place.

Ironically, we lost money as the US dollar fell over our purchase weekend, but it felt great to finally land in our house and feel the hospitality of Saskatoon. We have spent the bright fall days in Saskatoon walking the South Saskatchewan River and buying new furniture and going to the library. We feel settled now and we have had interesting local cultural experiences. Patrick was invited back for a cattle-drive at the country church he served last fall. We drove the Jetta over the pastures to the cowboys' fire and ate supper with them with the

horses whinnying and the cattle lowing and the coyotes yipping in the background. The cowboys make up their own poetry and recite it around the fire under the full moon. It was "So Saskatchewan" as they say here.

We have been praying at Saturday evening vespers with a Ukrainian Orthodox church down the street where we stand for an hour and sing the scriptures. We are looking forward to cross-country skiing in the winter and curling with our friends north of the city. Patrick is going to play trombone in a community band. Patty is a yoga class, a writing class and women's newcomers group. With a renter, Patty should be able to goof off until she finds a part-time job she likes. Through all the sadness and drama of our move, it has felt like the right thing to do. The change, though difficult, has prompted new areas of growth in each of our lives. We are grateful to God and to our friends and family through this year of the big move and will try to keep everyone posted on our new adventures.

Patty's favorite books this year: everything written by Kaye Gibbons and Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea*. Favorite Canadian TV shows: "Corner Gas" and "The Tutors." Favorite movies: "Before Sunset," "The War Tapes." We're at 1515 Coy Ave, Saskatoon, SK S7M 0H5, 305-955-2928, pattyandpatrick@sasktel.net.

Love,

--Patty and Patrick

## **Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting October 8, 2007 @ FMC**

**Present:** Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Minke Sundseth, Missions & Service; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Adam Nafziger, Worship; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Shelly Hendricks, Education.

**Absent:** Treasurer, Fellowship representative.

**Conversation on needs of under-40 adults.** Meeting begins with a conversation with four under-40 adults, about their needs and perceptions at FMC. Represented by Shelly Hendricks, Minke Sundseth, Adam Nafziger and Alisa Bardo. Conversation summarized separately.

**Affirmations.** Neil thanks Mission & Service and Dan Leisen for the new FMC brochure, which looks really good, others agree. Joetta thanks Darrell Martin and Tom Johnson for the new coathooks for the nursery kids.

**Pastoral Discernment Committee.** Joan reports that the committee met with conference minister Ed Kauffman, and a congregational discussion will happen the last Sunday in October, during Sunday school, during which people will break into smaller groups. Joetta will teach one SS class to allow teachers to participate. Shelly will check into someone to relieve children's music leaders. One question will concern "non-traditional" candidates—Joan points out that the conference would need to credential them. Also the committee wants clarification from the Council on what Joetta's role is. Council agrees that Joetta is in a strictly interim role currently. Joetta says she is still open to eventually applying for a regular position, along with any other candidates.

**Treasurer's report.** Glenn says Jerry has already paid our annual conference support, which is not usually paid until the end of the year. Giving was unusually strong in September. Neil would like to see a simpler printed report. Will discuss with Jerry.

#### **Commission reports.**

**Trustees.** Glenn says trustees discussed a proposed "building manager" position, which would combine secretary and janitor, who would also do general building scheduling and other "landlord" duties. It could morph into a more important position. Hermann asks whether this could ever become a "live-in" position, as some churches have? Several people are familiar with similar situations. Education wing doors should be installed in about a week.

**Education.** Shelly says that Pat Eliason has agreed to be the adult education coordinator.

**Deacons.** Deacons discussed catechism program, and neighborhood-based small groups. Also the reactions to the new Sunday morning schedule. Reactions have been mostly positive. Brief discussion of starting times, also appropriate time to introduce guests. Hermann says individual care issues take up the majority of deacons' meeting time, but they've decided to spend less time on this in their meetings.

**Worship.** Adam says commission will begin advent planning soon. Joan asks whether they are intentionally using fewer songs during worship? Adam says this is to keep from running over into fellowship time.

**Missions & Service.** Minke recapped FMC's participation in King's Fair. At their next meeting, they will discuss a possible FMC event to which to invite the community. Also still looking at a possible outdoor kiosk. There may be city code issues around placement. They will also be talking about criteria for funding organizations.

**Old business.** Glenn talked to Patrick about a possible FMC delegation for his installation in Saskatoon. Patrick considered why churches don't do that more often? He is concerned that the new church has the potential to misinterpret that participation. He did say that Council might want to send a letter of introduction and support. Hermann says that the Presbyterian church does not permit a pastor to communicate with a previous congregation for a year after leaving.

**New business.** Joetta says that Noah Skogerboe wants to analyze what FMC has archived for his Masters of Library and Information Science class at St. Kate's. Council supports this project.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

### **Trinity Believers' Assembly Moving**

We wanted to let you know that we have found another place of worship in St. Paul, which is more convenient for our congregation. We would like to thank Pastors Patty, Patrick, Joetta, and the entire congregation so very much for allowing us to use the chapel all these years. May God our Father richly bless you and your congregation.

"...God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister." (ASV Hebrews 6:10)

--Nathan Regassa, Trinity Believers' Assembly

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

#### **Candlelight Service for the Children of Iraq**

On Friday, December 28<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30pm, the Twin Cities Peace Campaign is organizing the tenth annual Candlelight Service for the Children of Iraq and Other Child Victims of War. It will be held at St. Joan of Arc Church at 4537 Third Avenue South in Minneapolis. The Campaign encourages you to join with others in this service to remember the children who have died as a result of sanctions and war and to say "war no more."

The FMC Missions & Service Commission has made a monetary contribution as a listed sponsor of the service. We encourage FMC members to attend.

--Missions & Service Commission

## Spirituality Corner

Here are several opportunities for spiritual reflection and quiet during December:

**Advent Evening Prayer**, Mondays, Dec. 3<sup>d</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 7-8 p.m., Sabbath House, 3328 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis. Pause for an hour in this busy time with the Franciscan sisters who live at Sabbath House. Look for Signs and Wonders: God Is with Us. Season readings, silence, music with local musicians. (612-822-8623)

Two retreats are available at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery, 2675 Larpenteur Avenue E., St. Paul. To register, or for more information call 651-777-7251, email [benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org](mailto:benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org), or visit their website at [www.stpaulsmonastery.org](http://www.stpaulsmonastery.org).

**Word Made Flesh: A Meditation on the Incarnation with Fr. Michael Byron**. Saturday, Dec. 16, 9-11:30 a.m. What does it mean that God's very being came into our world and remains present to us still? God is closer to us than we sometimes dare to imagine, walking with us through the joys and messiness of our journey through history. This is the great assurance of Advent: that our God is named Emmanuel which means "to be with us." What better way to gain perspective on the madness surrounding holiday preparation than to reflect upon this astonishing face? Cost is \$25.

**Spirituality of the Seasons: Winter**. The liturgical year has long witnessed how the change of seasons can be a time of reflection and renewal. These seasonal retreats are an ideal way to make the passing of a year a time of spiritual journey. The retreat is led by Jackie Witter on Saturday, December 9, from 9am to noon. The cost is \$40.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 1935 St. Clair Avenue, St. Paul, hosts monthly Sunday evening services at 6:51pm. **Celtic Contemplative Communion** is offered the second Sunday of each month, and **Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer** is offered on the fourth Sunday. The evening services are preceded by Pilgrim Veritas Project forums, "**Meaning, Truth and the World's Religions**," starting at 5:30pm.

For more information call 651-699-6886, email [pilgrim@pilgrimstpaul.org](mailto:pilgrim@pilgrimstpaul.org), or go to [www.pilgrimstpaul.org](http://www.pilgrimstpaul.org).

## Messiah Sing-Along

Join the Minnesota Orchestra and the Minnesota Chorale on Sunday, December 23, at 2:00pm, for the greatest sing-along event of the year—Handel's beloved

*Messiah!* Bring your singing voice and sit with audience choristers and Chorale members of the same part (soprano, alto, tenor or bass)—or, if you prefer, sit with a mixed part section or with family and friends. With holiday spirit galore, this concert will leave you brimming over with joy and humming all the way home. Bring your own score, purchase one in the lobby prior to the concert for \$10, or download a free copy from the Minnesota Orchestra website. The concert lasts approximately 90 minutes, with no intermission. Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$10 for kids, with group discounts available. Call 612-371-5656 or go to [minnesotaorchestra.org/holiday](http://minnesotaorchestra.org/holiday).

### Advent Calendar

He will come like last fall's leaf fall.  
One night when the November wind  
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth  
wakes choking on the mould,  
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.  
One morning when the shrinking earth  
opens on mist, to find itself  
arrested in the net  
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.  
One evening when the bursting red  
December sun draws up the sheet  
and penny-masks its eye to yield  
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,  
will come like crying in the night,  
like blood, like breaking,  
as the earth writhes to toss him free.  
He will come like child.

--Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

**Deadline for January newsletter items is noon, December 27<sup>th</sup>.**

*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.*