

Faith Connection

December 2009

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...

December is the final month of the calendar year, but the first month of the Christian liturgical year. In the Christian observance of Advent we not only remember and retell the ancient story of God's breaking into history at a particular moment in the birth of Jesus in a small Galilean village. We also proclaim our hope and faith that God's Spirit continues to break into our world reaffirming and reigniting the "kingdom-is-now" message of Jesus. We continue to long for the new heaven and new earth where all people and all of creation live in *shalom*, God's peace and wellbeing.

But as the waiting drags on we wonder: is our waiting in vain? And as we look around at so many aberrations of the Christian message—the prosperity and the “left behind” gospel, the gospel of American imperial culture—we question: is something true that can be so easily corrupted?

I recently listened to the audio book of author Ann Rice's memoir *Called Out of Darkness*, in which she recounts her early days of growing up in Catholic New Orleans, leaving the church as a young adult in the 1960s, becoming nationally-known for her vampire books, and then finding her way back to faith and to a very different post-Vatican II Catholic Church. Central to Rice's return to faith from decades of atheism was her historical research of the Jewish people. The fact that a minority people not only survived but retained a vibrant religious heritage through millennia of struggle, opposition and persecution, rekindled Rice's belief in God.

Several weeks ago I attended one day of the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches that met in Minneapolis. Seeing Christians from Greek Orthodox to African Methodist Episcopal, with lots of Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans in between, all joining together to worship and to work together to reduce gun violence and nuclear proliferation, improve

women's health in developing countries, and continue rebuilding post-Katrina New Orleans, filled me with hope. In a closing worship service held at St. Mark's Cathedral, Rev. James Forbes, minister emeritus of Riverside Church in New York, reminded us of Jesus' inaugural message in Luke 4:16-30 and inspired us to keep working toward the goals of bringing release to captives and sight to the blind.

My Advent prayer for our faith community is that God's Spirit will release us from the captivity of busyness, cynicism and despair and release us to see with new eyes the light of Christ breaking through the cracks of a broken world.

--Joetta Schlabach

"During Advent, opportunities for works of charity abound, calling out for Christians from every side: a sack of food for a needy family, money dropped in a Salvation Army kettle, a donation to an Indian school, a toy for 'Toys-for-Tots,' etc. Unfortunately, these works of charity so easily can assuage the Christian conscience, while doing nothing to being about a solution to the root causes of the problem.

Works of justice, on the other hand, follow 'the road less traveled' of Advent's hope to pursue solutions for difficult problems. Hope comes through works of justice rather than simply performing works of charity."

--Fr. Brian Cavanaugh

What's happening at FMC...

Entering Advent

The Advent worship theme this year is "Bursting In and Breaking Out!" This theme explores and celebrates the unexpected ways God "bursts in" and "breaks out" in our experience and in the world. We will be invited to

maintain a kind of “bifocal” vision: to see both the big picture of God’s purpose and action and the immediacy and locality of the path just ahead of us. Both the macro and micro contexts are filled with cosmic significance. We remember God embodied in the baby Jesus, and look forward to the power of the risen Christ who is setting the world right.

Arlene Geissinger has created the visual elements around this theme and Adam Nafziger and Neil Okerlund are coordinating special music. We will quiet ourselves as we enter worship each Sunday in order to create an atmosphere of expectancy and waiting for the bursting in and breaking out.

In our culture the Christmas season has become a very busy time with holiday parties and shopping. Advent invites us to step out of the busy mode and into a time of quiet waiting. Following are a few suggestions for ways to quiet ourselves:

- Download a PDF of a family devotion guide, written by Elise Rempel of Winnipeg, Manitoba, that is based on the 2009 Advent theme (centralplains.mennonite.net:/CMC/Advent2009standard.pdf)
- Borrow a book of daily Advent reflections from the church library (see display, created by librarian Cynthia Miller, on the table in the fellowship area at the back of the sanctuary)
- Attend Advent Evening Prayer with the Franciscan Sisters at Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Avenue South, Mondays, Dec 7, 14, 21 from 7-8 p.m. Seasonal readings, quiet, and music on the theme of “Waiting in Joyful Hope.”
- Follow online Advent meditations from Goshen College (www.goshen.edu/devotions/Home)
- Come to church early on Sunday and enjoy a time of quiet prayer, meditation, bible reading etc., 9-9:30am in the chapel, followed by time for discussion. Group consensus on whether to extend the process. For more information contact Rich Deming, 612-722-7675.

Below, Kami Blackwell Kinney and Cleta Roth Gingerich share additional ideas from their families’ Advent experiences.

--Joetta Schlabach

Journey to Christmas. For the past three years our family has used the *Advent Storybook* by Antonie Schneider (author) and Maja Dusíková (illustrator) to structure and enrich our Advent experience. My kids

look forward to reading the 24 nightly installments that chronicle little bear’s arduous trip to Bethlehem in search of the Christ child. Led by the star, he encounters a series of fellow travelers who teach him lessons in love, giving, courage, kindness, patience, etc. Reading this book has become a wonderful family tradition. Each step of the journey has a symbol to go with it. I’ve collected the symbols on my own, and each night the kids take turns opening the door of our Advent house to uncover the next symbol. Unfortunately, this might be the year when they finally realize that mom is the one who actually puts the symbols behind each door! We also have a burlap Advent calendar from Ten Thousand Villages that we’ve used for many years. The use of both the book and the Advent calendar has forced us to clear our calendar during the month of December so we can be home each evening to share the story. I treasure this time together with the kids. Establishing this family ritual has enabled us to consciously say “no” to the busyness and demands of the season, while simultaneously creating a space wherein we can instill in our children the deeper meaning of Christmas. I encourage you all to find your own Advent ritual—for use for yourself and/or your children—so you can quiet and prepare yourself for the light that is to come.

--Kami Blackwell Kinney

Sunday Advent Gatherings. The excitement of Christmas for our family started before December arrived. Over Thanksgiving we would sit down and make a list of guests we wanted to invite into our home to light the Advent candle each Sunday evening. We also prepared special foods the week before and talked about what songs and which part of the Christmas story we wanted to share. Welcoming the guests that evening was like welcoming the Christ child into our home. The mood was set with lights low or off, depending on how many candles we had collected that year! Christmas music was playing and the table was set with special breads, cheeses and a tree made out of veggies. (The same styrofoam shape was used year after year and finally was discarded before we moved here!) Following the sharing of food and Christmas memories, we then blew out all the candles. Someone then lit the Advent candles and another person read part of the Christmas story while the children moved the figures of the crèche. We closed with a prayer of blessing and sang “Away in the Manger.” The evening was magical. Our family was blessed by friends and enriched with the awareness of the greatest gift, the gift of the Christ child.

--Cleta Roth Gingerich

**Mark your Calendar:
Advent/Christmas Activities at FMC**

December 6 – Carol sing-along at Joan Kreider's, 7 p.m., 2162 Carroll Ave, St. Paul

December 13 – Christmas program and cookie social, 4:45 p.m. Our children will present songs, dancing, and recitations. Invite your friends and bring a plate of cookies to share!

December 24 – Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols, 6:30 p.m.

Birthday Brunch Coming in January!

Beginning in January, pastor Joetta will host a monthly Saturday birthday brunch in her home and invites anyone (or families) with a birthday in that month to attend. Time will be from 10 am-noon. Watch for a sign-up sheet for the first birthday brunch on Saturday, January 2, 2010.

Comings and Goings

We extend a warm welcome to those who have recently begun attending our worship:

*Anne Kerby
Charity Kroeker
Aine McCarthy
Andrew Smale
Sean Sueker
Sara Yoder*

You will find photos of some of the newer folks on the bulletin board in the foyer. A more complete photo display is in process on the basement hallway bulletin board across from the infant/parent room. Thank you to Dan Leisen, Minke Sundseth and Kami Blackwell Kinney who have been collecting, taking and displaying the photos.

Cedric Singletary has communicated that he is attending worship at Emmanuel Mennonite Church and Missio Dei.

Faith Mennonite Church Mennonite Disaster Service Trip March 28-April 2

Serving for a week with MDS is a great opportunity to meet new and interesting people, do some good work,

and get out of the end-of-winter Minnesota cold. FMC will be sending a group the week of March 28-April 2, probably to New Orleans but possibly to some other location where workers are needed (Gulf Coast, Kentucky, Georgia are also possibilities). MDS covers food and lodging while at the site. Participants cover travel costs but FMC can help with some of these costs. Carpooling is a great option for getting to the site. If you are interested or even tentatively interested, or if you have questions, contact Katie Hochstedler at katie.hochstedler@gmail.com or 612-816-0687. We will have 10-12 spots available, please be in touch by December 20 to reserve your spot as we will be opening up the invitation after that.

-- *Katie Hochstedler*

Practices to Support Faith Mennonite in Being a Safe and Welcoming Church

Responding to disruptions during a worship service.

After we had a visitor who sought to interrupt a worship service in July 2009, a small group from FMC met to consider how to respond if there were disruptions at future services. The overall message we seek to convey is that all are welcome, but disrespectful behaviors are not welcome. We want to respond to disruptions that honor the congregation's need for safety and protection, as well as honor the needs to be open, respectful and nonviolent.

If there are disrespectful interruptions of a service, there are many roles to be played, based on the gifts, skills, and callings that we each have. For example, some might be called to prayer, others to care for children, others to assist the ushers, etc. The following is a list of actions to draw on, based upon the situation.

- If someone is outside of the church protesting or providing a challenging presence, at least one person from the congregation is encouraged to stay outside with the protester to engage and understand their message and intentions. Any invitation to "come and see" should include an explicit message that we expect respectful, non-disruptive behavior; that we are willing to engage in dialogue but it will happen outside of the worship service. One option would be to invite the person to go and have coffee, in which case another FMC person should be invited to go along. If the protester wishes to enter the church and worship, the person who has been in

conversation with him/her can help the ushers and others in the congregation understand how to respond, if a disruption does occur.

- If a person enters and begins to cause a disruption, other people from the congregation (who feel so called) should go to the back of the church and join the ushers in preventing the person from advancing into the sanctuary, in a respectful, firm, and persistent manner.
- The worship leader, pastor, or ushers can call out “118,” to ask the congregation to sing the hymn “Praise God from Whom (#118 HWB) as a way to diffuse the energy and attention in the congregation.
- The ushers will be the ones to decide if and when to call 911. If there is an indication that the person causing a disruption has a weapon, the ushers will call 911 immediately. In other cases, the ushers will discern if and when to call 911.
- If there is a disruption in the congregation, people leading worship can choose to adjust the worship plans to limit disruptions. For example, the open sharing of joys and concerns could be skipped, and the person leading the prayer could just say the prayer.
- If something unexpected and unsettling has happened during the service, many of us might have the need to talk through what happened and hear the reactions of others. During announcement time, the pastor or worship leader should designate a place (such as a corner of the fellowship hall or the chapel) where people who would like to process their responses are encouraged to gather to provide a quiet space and opportunity for people to talk through what happened.

We will hold an annual meeting of ushers to review these guidelines and to bring additional perspectives from nonviolence practitioners in our church and a mental health professional from the community.

Creating a Safe Sanctuary.

While public disruptions capture our attention and create fear for some, as a congregation we may be more vulnerable to other, less visible risks to the safety of our children and more vulnerable members. The layout of our building with multiple entrances, levels, and wings makes it difficult to control who enters and has access to various areas of the church. We are also sadly aware that sexual misconduct occurs in churches

and that most victims of sexual abuse know (and believe they can trust) their abuser.

We have designed the following precautionary guidelines in a spirit of care for the most vulnerable among us. We recognize that the care of children rests not just with parents but the entire church community and we encourage everyone to be diligent about the care of our children.

- All children through junior high age should be in the sanctuary (or nursery) during worship and in class rooms during the education hour, unless the family chooses a responsible, known adult to be with them. These children should be accompanied by a parent if they go the basement restrooms during worship.
- The 28th Avenue door will be locked at the beginning of children’s time, decreasing the number of available entrances. A sign will be placed on the door saying: “During worship, enter by the front door.”
- Children should not leave the building alone, and children and youth should not leave the building with an adult other than their parents (i.e. teacher, youth leader, etc.) without prior notice to parents.
- Anyone who sees a child leaving the building alone or finds a child alone without a parent should assist the child in finding his/her parent.
- Children should not be in the kitchen without an adult supervisor present. Cutting knives should be stored in one of the elevated cupboards, out of reach of children.
- Every person who takes on a role in which they will be alone with children, (i.e. children’s Sunday school teacher, youth leader, or youth mentor) will undergo a background check.
- Parents of nursery-aged children are instructed to take their children to the bathroom at the beginning of nursery care and between worship and education hour. A portable potty chair will be kept in the back of the nursery for emergency needs so that nursery volunteers do not need to take children to the bathroom.

--Drafted by: Michael Bischoff, Kristin Green, Tom Johnson, Joan Kreider, Neil Okerlund, Michael Okerstrom, Joetta Schlabach, Teresa Wasick, Joan Wing. Approved by Council November 9, 2009.

Dear Faith Friends,

Greetings from Penang Malaysia! It's a balmy 87 degrees outside (the temperature only varies by a couple degrees each day, all year round), and Gabe is missing snow. (Valerie just rolled her eyes.) It's hard to believe it's already November.

We've been settling into life here. Valerie is working on a domestic violence project at a women's development research center at a local university, and Gabe has been building websites for friends, family and MCC. We live within walking distance of a market, food courts, restaurants, and the beach, all of which we're taking advantage of. Tropical fruits and local street food are tasty, abundant, and cheap.

Nevertheless, we look forward to returning to the States soon. (Valerie's emphasis) and seeing you again. We would also like to officially thank all of you who were able to celebrate with us at our pre-wedding reception in July, as well as for your well-wishes and generous gifts. Thank you. Thank you!

Please keep in touch, and please pray for a smooth immigration process for Valerie.

--Gabe and Valerie
November 1, 2009

P.S. Look for updates, photos & videos of our adventures on our blog:
www.blizzardsinmalaysia.wordpress.com

The Aliveness Project

This winter, we are hosting a gift drive for kids as a benefit for The Aliveness Project. The mission statement of The Aliveness Project is "to encourage self-empowerment and provide direct services for persons living with HIV/AIDS." You can check the organization out at www.aliveness.org.

One of their projects is the holiday gift program. They collect and deliver holiday gifts and cookies to people in the Twin Cities and outstate Minnesota. One in four people with HIV/AIDS in MN receives services from the Aliveness Project. You can bring unwrapped gifts for kids to church between now and December 13. Put them in the gigantic gift box. The gifts will be delivered to The Aliveness Project on December 14, and staff there will decide which gift baskets to put them in and will deliver the gifts closer to the holiday.

I asked what sorts of gifts would be best, and this is what I was told: toys, hats and mittens, hoodies and

Target or Best Buy gift cards in small amounts for teens, clothes. I think any gift you would buy your own kid or grandkid or young friend would be fine.

Another opportunity to share is with cookies! The Aliveness Project is collecting cookies to include in their holiday gift baskets, 1 dozen per ziplock bag. If you're interested in donating cookies, bring them to Kristin Green any time before December 18. I promise I will not eat them! I'll keep them in my freezer until Dec. 18 when I can deliver them. You can also deliver them directly to The Aliveness Project at 730 East 38th Street in South Minneapolis on December 18th or 21st.

I like this project because it is a way for our community to share what we have with others who don't have as much. I like that kids can participate by choosing gifts and putting them in the box at church. I like that it's a way for kids to think about sharing during the holiday season. I like that people who receive these gifts that we bring will know that they are remembered and cared for by the wider community they live in.

Bring your gifts until December 13. Call or email Kristin if you have any questions at (612) 721-8786 or ratigangreen@yahoo.com. I'll be delivering the gifts on December 14, and cookies on December 18.

--Kristin Green

Meet Your Fellow FMCers

Paula and Mike Okerstrom share a love of the active outdoor life. Strangely, it was that interest that played a major role in bringing them to FMC seventeen years ago. As residents of the Seward neighborhood and readers of Seward Profile, they encountered an article by Dick Westby introducing the new pastoral couple at Faith, Tim and Paula Lehman. He described them as involved with the natural world, camping and canoeing. Paula and Mike were looking for a church in the neighborhood and were intrigued by the idea of a couple sharing the pastorate and attracted by their shared love of the outdoors. They came to visit and were befriended by Paula and Tim, who gave them reading material about the Mennonites. The emphasis on peace and justice and concern for the environment appealed to Mike and Paula. They have been active participants at Faith ever since.

Both grew up in the Twin Cities, each starting out in south Minneapolis before their families moved to first ring suburbs, Paula's to Richfield and Mike's to Crystal. Both chose St. Cloud State for college, and that is where their paths finally crossed. They were married soon

after graduation and moved into a rented duplex in Seward. Biking around the neighborhood, they found a house they wanted, and bought it despite family pressures to move to the suburbs. Mike, whose college major had been marketing, worked in his field, at first selling solar panels while President Carter was encouraging alternative energy. When President Reagan removed the solar panels from the White House, turned up the heat, and cut off funding for alternative energy, markets dried up, and Mike began working for American Hoist and Derrick. Paula, a geography major in college, began her career working with city planning for Richfield, focusing on recycling. After four years, she decided to go back to school to earn credentials for elementary teaching. She began her new career at Blake Schools. In 1992, Mike quit his job when his employer wanted to move him to Atlanta. He saw that as his chance to establish the business that has allowed him to pursue his interest in art full time, doing decorative painting and wall murals in homes and businesses. Over the years, Paula moved from Blake to St. Paul Academy to Sullivan in Minneapolis, the school she herself attended, where she teaches many immigrant children who are there because of the school's large ELL program. In 1997 Paula and Mike and daughter Michelle spent a year in Costa Rica, where Paula taught school, Michelle attended kindergarten, and Mike worked on his paintings.

Although Mike and Paula have found common ground at Faith, their religious backgrounds were quite different. Paula's Catholic mother made sure that she was raised Catholic, but there was always tension with her father's Lutheran side of the family. Mike was raised in the Evangelical Free Church. Both dropped out of church during high school and college but were ready to resume after marriage. For five or six years they attended a large Evangelical Free Church in Crystal before deciding to search for a church home in Seward when they had a young daughter, Michelle.

Michelle has now left the nest to begin college at the University of Wisconsin. But their active parenting days are far from over because Hannah joined the family when Michelle was ten.

The Okerstroms may live in the city, but they have not abandoned their love of the outdoor life. With friends, they own a cabin near the BWCA. They have taken many canoe trips in Canada and in the BWCA, and this past summer Mike fulfilled a dream he's nursed since he was 18—to canoe to Hudson Bay. Along with three friends he spent 26 days paddling 428 miles of the Winisk River in Northern Ontario and visiting two

native Cree villages. Paula was invited to go too, but decided 26 nights in a tent were about 19 too many. She chose instead a one-week trip with Donna Minter and others, biking and camping across Minnesota from Fargo to Stillwater.

For their 25th anniversary a few weeks ago, they elected to forgo camping to explore the fascinating New Orleans. Who needs swarms of black flies and mosquitoes on an anniversary trip?

--Arlene Holdeman

Musical Peacemaking

My 9-year-old daughter, Sophia, sings in Cantabile, one of the wonderful children's choirs of Angelica Cantanti based in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. The choir sings a number of concerts for various audiences throughout the year. I noted with concern, however, that they were scheduled to perform a Veterans' Day concert at the local Veterans' Administration Hospital. My concern turned to dismay when we received an email from Sophia's choir director asking us to think about family members (or close friends) who had previously served, or were currently serving, in the military. We were asked to provide the information regarding the relative's name, branch of service, rank, dates of service or conflict (e.g., Vietnam, WWII, etc.), as well as location of service. We were told that the information choir members provided would be placed on name tags they would wear at the concert; afterwards they would mingle with the veterans and talk with them.

In considering how we would tactfully decline the request, I consulted with our pastor, Joetta Schlabach. She asked whether my father had served in Civilian Public Service during WWII and when I answered that he had, she suggested that I provide that information to the choir director. She suggested that this might be a constructive way to inform others—who might not be aware—that there are alternate peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. I discussed the idea with Sophia and she agreed that this was something she wanted to do.

I then emailed Sophia's choir director and informed her that we are Mennonites and that we do not participate in the military. I told her that I did not have an issue with bringing joy via singing to those who have served in the military and that it seemed like a good idea for Sophia to participate in the concert. I told Sophia's choir director that we Mennonites are proponents of peaceful service (without weapons) around the world. I told her that during WWII my father served in Civilian Public Service (CPS) here in the US where he was engaged in

a number of projects focused on helping others. For example, he fought forest fires in California. I also told her that during the Vietnam War my brother served in alternative service with Mennonite Central Committee in Bolivia where he worked with agricultural development. I told her that Sophia would not have a badge with the names and destinations of relatives who had been in the military and that I did not want her to be singled out for that. Then I asked Sophia's choir director if it would be acceptable for Sophia to rather wear a nametag with the names of her grandfather and uncle and the places where they served in peace-building activities. I suggested that this might be a helpful way for others to learn about alternative problem-solving approaches. I was not sure what her response would be because of the pronounced glorification of veterans conveyed in a number of emails we received before the concert.

I was pleasantly surprised and pleased when, in less than one hour, I received an email from Sophia's choir director sharing how pleased she was to know of the long history my family has had in working to build peace. She said that she was ABSOLUTELY in favor of having Sophia submit her grandpa's name and that he served in CPS during WWII. She also offered to assist in helping to educate the other children in the many ways that peace and service can be realized. She ended her email by stating that our greatest strength as a country lies NOT in might, but in service. I was taken aback by the cordial and supportive response. Sophia performed in the concert and wore the nametag with her grandpa's name and CPS-affiliation. Sophia was happy to explain to those who asked what the information on her nametag meant. The experience underscored for Sophia, her dad, and me that this turned into a great opportunity to be a peaceful witness in what would otherwise have been a potentially uncomfortable situation for Sophia.

--Kathleen Harder

Deacons' Report for November 18, 2009

Neil Okerlund set the mood by opening our time together with two beautiful Celtic tunes played on his pipe. We then continued our ongoing discussion of Arthur Boers book, *Never Call Them Jerks*. It was Joetta's turn to share her observations on the next chapter, which addresses a problem that many churches face: "the sabotage of rumors." Joetta affirmed that we don't have a problem with rumors at FMC. Boers goes on to discuss the use of Matthew 18 in addressing conflict. He says that sometimes when there are

differences, you need to release people and let them go, only after many attempts to resolve the conflict. You have to trust that both parties will benefit from the release, and that the person(s) leaving will find a home in another congregation or denomination. Joetta's work on the conference's unity task force coupled with her reflection on the split at FMC in the 1990s, illustrates the truth of Boer's point. Release can, indeed, allow each group to grow separately and then be able to reconnect and collaborate in many ways.

Our commission accepted the task of planning the adult education sessions for the month of January. We will begin with New Year with an extended fellowship time during the Sunday school hour on January 3. The topic on January 10 will be "Faith Formation in the Family," which the deacons have been discussing at length in recent meetings. As a follow up to the Mennonite Mutual Aid class in November, we will take the opportunity on January 17 to fill out advance directives and funeral planning forms. January 24 is World Fellowship Sunday. In honor of this, we will hear about Patricia Mack's experience at Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay. Finally, on the last Sunday of January, the Pastor Parish Committee will lead a discussion on the topic of "Healthy Approaches to Dealing with Conflict."

We turned our conversation to the wonderful "problem" we are having at FMC: the flood of new people! The deacons realize the need to collaborate with and clarify the division of labor with the fellowship commission, when it comes to welcoming and integrating new attenders. To that end, we are planning to have a joint meeting with them in the upcoming weeks. We went on to share ways that we have and can make connections with those in our deacons' groups.

We spent the remainder of our meeting sharing insights gained from our October retreat. We distilled the following three priorities that we want to focus on in our commission: cultivating our faith, fostering church community, and responding to urgent needs. In subsequent meetings, we will talk about how to implement these priorities. Hermann closed our time together with prayer.

--Kami Blackwell Kinney, recorder

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting October 12th, 2009 @ FMC

Present: Joan Kreider, Moderator; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Scott Neal, Moderator-elect; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Glenn

Geissinger, Trustees; Melissa Hochstetler, Missions & Service; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Michael Bischoff (first part of meeting).

Absent: Worship representative; Pastor-Parish representative; Fellowship representative; Education representative.

Affirmations. Glenn affirms Greg Renstrom's sermon. Joan affirms everybody who's welcoming new visitors. Melissa affirms Joetta's prayers after sharing—"it's the heart of the service to me." Joetta affirms Erin, Clea and Orv as worship leaders.

Treasurer's report. Jerry opened a savings account in order to get some interest. Calvert is still gaining well. Everything else is normal. Joan notes that giving is still not quite up to budget

Michael Bischoff debriefing. Michael will be thanked at the November 22nd pie social. Michael says it's been a good year, and seemed the right thing to be doing. A year is not a long time to develop programs, but to plant seeds. Would be good to continue the position to focus outward. More supporting leadership of members, than letting staff members do it. Mainly provide logistical support. How to discern whether individual initiatives fit in with direction of the whole congregation? Would suggest that the next staff person be supervised by one person instead of a commission—perhaps Joetta? Joan says this was an experiment for us, and Michael was a good "guinea pig." Hermann asks whether Michael worked more hours than hired for? Michael says probably averaged to 8-9 hours per week overall—some weeks 20-25, others very few. Joan asks for suggestions on a supervisor? Michael says one or two people, perhaps the moderator and someone from M&S. Joetta says many visitors have come after hearing good things about FMC—how much may be due to Michael's role? M&S talked about a regular monthly event. Joan asks what seed you would like to see grow? Michael says cross-cultural connections, especially east-African. Also events that are inclusive of the neighborhood.

Melissa hopes we can continue M&S involvement with the next person in the position. She's not sure how many things they're currently working on will continue—the commission has been very busy, but initiatives are good. Joetta says Michael did help us focus and discern. Hermann says it's good to have someone who lives in the neighborhood. Glenn notes that we've never been this successful in reaching out to the neighborhood. Michael would like to see outward activities more connected to inner spiritual growth. Joetta doesn't want to lose this position, and doesn't

hear other commissions asking for the position. Joan would like to see Peace Village revived. Melissa asks whether eight hours is enough? Depends on the budget. Melissa asks whether it will be one year again? Glenn says yes, with option to renew.

Commission reports.

Trustees. Bob Mack has two re-worked bids for the landscaping contracting.

Missions and Service. Has handed the signage project off to the trustees. Discussed Michael's and Joetta's relationship to the commission—sometimes just the commission can handle initiatives. Planning "Pink Menno Sunday," CROP Walk, "Who are the Mennos?" and Donna Minter's idea for a STAR program—trauma awareness, through EMU. She'll want support from the church. Joan asks if there will be a winter program? Melissa says yes, but they haven't discussed yet. Also will be adding a fourth commission member.

Education. Both adult classes had good participation.

Deacons. Retreat will be this month.

Pastor. Many visitors recently, especially 20-30 age. Joetta will be traveling considerably this fall, including representing FMC on the Central Plains Unity Task Group in November. Studying the "variance" policies of the conference represents a huge step forward.

Old business.

Ministry staff position. Should this position continue? Consensus is yes. Melissa says M&S is not finished with the need for a staff position. Scott cautions against measuring a new staff person against Michael—look for their own talents, perhaps slightly change the job description. A committee of Melissa, Joan and Scott will make a recommendation for the next Council meeting

New business.

Canadian Mennonite University. Choir will be in town April 27th, 2010. Will need lodging, meal, lunches and weeknight audience. Council agreed FMC will host.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

What's happening here and there...

Letter from Patty and Patrick

Dear Joetta and Everyone,

The sun is finally shining and it is dry enough to finish harvest in November – which is a big deal around here in an agricultural economy.

We can't believe we are starting our third year here already. We finally went to a cabin in the north woods which gave us fond memories of northern Minnesota. We're afraid we're becoming more prairie people in our spiritual geography and felt more comfortable watching sunrises and sunsets on the flatland than being surrounded by trees and lakes – heresy, I know! It was still great to go for walks in the woods, and we saw an elk and a wolverine by the side of the road. Northern wilderness is still very wild here and we sang hymns as we walked to scare away the bears!

We both still enjoy our work – lots of funerals for these aging Mennos. Patty is finally published in a Bible Study called *For the Beauty of the Earth*, and hopes to write about aging and death next. We also hope to be in Minneapolis next May for a visit and a ball game.

--love and prayers, Patty and Patrick

Families Moving Forward Home for the Holidays Concert

Treat your whole family to a delightful, free evening of holiday music with the Lake Wobegon Brass Band. This free-will offering event benefits Families Moving Forward's emergency shelter program for homeless children and their families. The Lake Wobegon Brass Band will be performing a myriad of holiday classics during this two-hour musical delight. The evening begins at 7pm on Friday, December 4, at the beautiful Colonial Church of Edina, located at 6200 Colonial Way in Edina (off Hwy 100 at Tracy).

Please visit www.familiesmovingforward.org for details. Interested in singing with the choir? Contact Tracey at 612-529-2185 or traceyrichardson@familiesmovingforward.org.

Light in a Time of Darkness

On December 6 (and every first Sunday of the month) from 2:30-3:00 p.m. the Interfaith Coalition on Immigration and others will hold a vigil in support of immigrant detainees, their families, elected officials, jail officials and workers and comprehensive immigration reform. Ramsey County Adult Detention Center, 425 Grove Street, St. Paul. For more information: interfaithonimmigration@gmail.com. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." –*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Star of Bethlehem: A Holiday Presentation. St. Catherine University professor Terry Flower will discuss scripture passages, historical data and records of astronomical observations to help understand the Star of Bethlehem on Monday, December 14, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Jeanne d'Arc Auditorium, Whitby Hall, St. Paul campus. Free. RSVP: 651-6819 or ce@stkate.edu

In a Word

Like no other
gathers all the pieces along the road and
then sings like a driven hammer
Without preparation one should
not look
but get in line like everyone else
perhaps
to be given favor in the table scraps of moonlight
Dangers of peril and insanity lace
syllables of ruin
the bargain of a life
no regrets in a face caressed
Oblivious to the obvious and
set in the East to watch for atmospheric disturbances

-- *Steve Mandell*

Due to the winter holidays, the deadline for January newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, December 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.