

Faith Connection

December 2011

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...

Each year we read from the poetic book of Isaiah during the Sundays of Advent. Like the Psalms, the Prophet Isaiah speaks words of comfort and hope (as well as hard truth, consequences, and judgment) in the midst of overwhelming trouble and despair. In the Gospel readings for Advent, we hear the words of Isaiah repeated by a latter prophet, John the Baptist, who also spoke harsh, yet comforting words as he cried out: "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

The church's celebration of Advent, this season of waiting and longing, is in stark contrast to our consumer society's commercialization of Christmas. Magazines in the grocery check-out lines contain endless suggestions for how to prepare the "perfect" holiday. To which John the Baptist replies: "go to the desert...strip away the frivolous." This fall, billboards around the metro area have announced new store openings in the Mall of America. To which the Prophet Isaiah says: "Oh, that God would tear open the heavens and come down!" Isaiah and John weren't interested in tinsel, in momentary things that make us feel good and forget for awhile. They wanted the real thing: God's presence that would bring about the unexpected...things we can't begin to imagine but that will speak to our deepest needs.

I remember, as a child, spending hours looking at the holiday catalogs—wish books—that came in the mail. Of course, the actual gifts under our Christmas tree never met my expectations. Yet, the lasting memories of Christmas past are not about what I didn't receive, but of warm family times, of singing Christmas carols, of baking cookies, of packing and delivering food baskets for the elderly in our small town, and of enjoying the night-time glow of Christmas lights.

I'd be dishonest if I didn't confess to a bit of holiday wishing at midlife, but now I try to stick to catalogs like *Lehman's of Kidron* that sells "authentic products that

work for life." And that's exactly why I love the church's celebration of Advent. It reminds me that this season isn't just about "getting ready for Christmas." It's about attuning my desires to the deep longings of humanity for freedom from hunger, from oppression and slavery, from violence and war—for the fullness of God's kingdom. It's about becoming attentive to the small, unexpected signs of God's Spirit at work around us, things we will surely miss if we do not deliberately pause, turn off the multi-media, and listen for the voice of God in the ancient words of the prophets, in the voices of the youngest among us, and in voices from the Occupy protests. I pray that during this Advent and Christmas season each of us will receive the gift of "awesome deeds we did not expect" (Isaiah 64:3), and that we will share this gift with someone who cannot fathom hope.

--Joetta Schlabach

"I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

-- E. B. White

What's happening at FMC...

Anticipating Advent

As we look at our calendars, we see the approaching arrival of the 'expected' observations of holidays and festivals and we begin to make plans. But, this Advent season at Faith Mennonite we will invite another experience -- welcoming the unexpected!

The program will bring forward opportunities to contemplate the many ways God surely comes to us-- but often in ways we don't imagine or in places where we are not looking. To define clearly the concept of being watchful for a message coming to us in surprising

ways, the usual order of the Advent services will contain one element which will take place at unannounced and different times in the service-- the lighting of the Advent candles. In this act, we are preparing ourselves to not only be watchful, but to also gladly receive the unexpected and to see it as a messenger of God's word. Watch and open up to the gifts of God, together.

We would like to use as many amaryllis plants as possible. If anyone is interested in buying a plant and having it used in church, there is a sign up sheet at the back of the church for you to indicate your interest. Information regarding price and color options is on the sheet. Please direct any questions to Arlene Geissinger at angeissinger@gmail.com or 952-470-1847. Thanks for your consideration.

We also plan to incorporate some stories from our worship community in the Advent worship season, following the theme "Awesome deeds we did not expect." Our stories will be prepared by an editor for consistent style and length and read by the worship leader. We look forward to the shared stories on the themes of:

- Learning to pay attention
- Changing the landscape
- Transforming our sorrow
- Reordering our world

A contemplation for the Advent season, in support of the theme of the arrival of the Expected in an unexpected way, can be found in the writings of Richard Rohr, who observes, "We do not think ourselves into a new way of living. We live ourselves into a new way of thinking." (*Hidden Treasures*).

--Mary Beth Luing, *Advent Planning Committee*

Outreach Ministry Update...

The outreach ministry staff position is in the process of being started up again. In the past few years Michael Bischoff and Kathleen Remund have assisted FMC in organizing a variety of projects and events in the community, such as our recent focus on immigration and refugee resettlement. I will be working primarily with Missions and Service in helping us to continue to think about, organize, and expand our work.

In the coming months we're looking forward to putting together a neighborhood sustainability event, hosting a Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership fundraising concert (perhaps in conjunction with a series of concerts at Faith throughout the season of

Lent), and offering another Creating a Culture of Peace nonviolence training weekend. Let me know if you have further ideas or passions that could flow into the stream of our congregation's presence and witness in Seward and beyond.

I'm writing these words in downtown San Francisco where I am attending the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. I was delighted to have the opportunity along with Joetta this past Sunday to worship with First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, a congregation whose size, style of worship, and community engagements reflect many similarities to our own.

Also on Sunday I gathered with a number of other Mennonite academics to hear an evening plenary talk by philosopher and activist Judith Butler. She adapted her comments to respond to a number of recent trends she has observed in the Arab Spring and Occupy movements, relating to the new ways people appear to be organizing themselves to work for social change. For example, she interprets the actions of people setting up encampments in public spaces (such as Tahrir Square in Cairo and Zuccotti Park in New York City) as representing something more than a traditional expression of free "speech," something more than the usual mode of political expression via protest and petition directed towards "the powers that be."

Rather, Butler discovers in these actions attempts by young and old to respond holistically—with one's whole body—to the precarious nature of our economic and social life today. People are performing various everyday bodily acts (sleeping, preparing food, making things, caring for one another) that might normally be reserved for spaces outside of the public eye. Through addressing our most basic needs out in open spaces, people begin to demonstrate and embody new ways of creating space—of being in the world—relating to interdependence, democratic organization, and sustainability. (Gandhi's self-help spinning wheel campaign comes to mind, here.) How might we, at FMC, work in new ways such that our ordinary, everyday actions, to care for our own and each other's bodies, serve in some way as a witness and empowering enactment of the reign of God, of the Beloved Community?

--Phil Stoltzfus

December Soup Group Schedule

"Soup Group" got started this past spring as an opportunity for our church community to share meals together on a regular basis. The usual schedule is 1st

Monday, 2nd Tuesday, 3rd Thursday, and 4th Friday, with occasional exceptions due to holidays, etc., which we will experience in December. Anyone from the congregation is welcome to host (either in one's home or at the church) or to come (and to bring friends and family). A simple meal of soup and bread is shared. Following is the schedule for December:

Friday, December 2. Home of Joan Kreider, 2162 Carroll Ave., St. Paul. Phil and Candace will give an update on the CPT Peacemaker Congress that they attended in Chicago on October 13-16. Please RSVP to Joan by Wednesday, November 30, 651-645-2660.

Tuesday, December 13. Hosted by Marybeth Luig and Gregg and Beth Richardson, 963 Bayless Ave., St Paul. RSVP to mb.luig@gmail.com.

--Aryn Baxter, Deacons Commission

Grocery Bag Food Shelf Drive

A preliminary report from Lynn Peterson, the Community Emergency Service representative who worshiped with us on November 13, is that our donation of grocery bags weighed in around 500 pounds. Thanks to everyone who contributed to this food drive!

--Joetta Schlabach

Comings and Goings

We were happy to meet **Jessica and Marcos Stoltzfus** in November. They recently moved to Hudson, WI, from Colorado. Marcos is a grad student at Hamline University and Jessica is making connections with Community Supported Agriculture opportunities in western Wisconsin.

John Hershey began attending worship during the summer and plans to make FMC his church home. As Neighborhood Liaison at the University of St. Thomas, many of his Sunday mornings in the fall are occupied with cleaning the neighborhood following football games!

Brett Godshalk, who moved to the Twin Cities early in the summer and attended worship several times, has relocated to Hawaii.

Thank you...

Thank you to everyone who made and sent me the care package! That was a really kind and generous idea and I appreciate it.

--Dee Fufa (daughter of Pat Eliason)

Spinach Balls Recipe

Neil Okerlund's spinach balls recipe was a hit at the November Nokomis Deacon's group gathering. Here's the recipe:

10 oz. package frozen spinach, thawed and water squeezed out
2 cups Italian-seasoned croutons, crushed
1 cup firmly packed grated parmesan cheese (fresh)
¼ cup melted butter
4 small green onions, finely chopped
3 eggs, beaten
dash ground nutmeg

Thoroughly mix all the above, place in a bowl, cover with saran wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes to one hour.

Shape into mini-balls, place on a cookie sheet with parchment paper and bake at 400 for 13-15 minutes. Balls will be done when slightly brown on top and a little stiff when pressed with finger. If placed too low in the oven, the bottoms will burn.

Serve with a mustard of your choice. I like Inglehoffer stone ground or Maille Old Style.



December
Birthday
Brunch

If you or a family member has a birthday in December, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on December 10. (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.

Saturday,
December 10
9:30-11:00
a.m.

The deadline for January newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, December 28th.

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.