

Faith Connection

February 2008

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...

Lent begins this year in the heart of winter, with no visible hints of spring. While it may seem like we haven't had enough breathing space between Advent and Lent, there may be a hidden gift in entering Lent, a season of introspection and penitence, in the dead of winter. Being trapped inside by negative wind chills may help us to slow down and give more attention to our spiritual journey.

In the early church the devotional disciplines that arose around Lent were intended to shake believers out of spiritual complacency. Over time, such disciplines have themselves become complacent—often boiled down to the simple notion of “giving up” a vice or a pleasure for a time, without the accompanying action of filling up that space with Godward actions. In addition, Lenten disciplines are often undertaken in a solitary, individual way, without the support of others. But the ministry of Jesus that we remember during this season, leading up to his passion week, was a ministry lived in community with others – his circle of disciples and the crowds who followed.

I see numerous signs that folks at Faith Mennonite don't put the important questions on hold until Lent arrives. Several weeks ago Minke shared in worship that she and Joel have decided to join the “Compact,” making a commitment to not purchase any new items (besides food, medicine, and toiletries) for a year and instead to barter and borrow for necessary items. The Compact is a movement of people motivated by a desire “1) to go beyond recycling in trying to counteract the negative global environmental and socioeconomic impacts of U.S. consumer culture; 2) to reduce clutter and waste in our homes; and 3) to simplify our lives.” The healthy giving picture in Jerry's 2007 financial report suggests that most people at FMC have already made a similar pledge in less formal ways, and make sharing with others through the ministry of FMC an important part of their spiritual discipline.

Members of the food and spirituality adult education class are exploring the connections between the foods we eat and our relationship to the land and global systems of food production and distribution, including the people who work in those systems. Similarly those in the human development class are sharing stories of encouragement and advice across generations to support families who are seeking to raise physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy children against the currents of mainstream culture.

As I've listened to the economic forecasts this week of an impending depression and the threat of inflation, it occurs to me that we, and the community service agencies that we support, may see increasing needs among the most vulnerable people in our community in coming months if the job market should contract. I would invite us to use the coming weeks of Lent to consider how God has drawn us “out of the depths” (our Lenten worship theme) so that we can be a church of open arms to those who find themselves sinking down.

--Joetta Schlabach

“It's easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.”

--Alfred Adler (1870-1937), psychologist

What's happening at FMC...

Out of the Depths: Worship Theme for Lent at FMC

The season of Lent and Easter are early this year. The season begins with Ash Wednesday on February 6 and culminates on Easter Sunday, March 23. If Advent is a season of waiting, Lent is a season of pilgrimage from the places of exile, dissatisfaction, blindness and pain in our lives to a place of renewal and grace.

The theme that we will follow in our Lenten worship this year is "Out of the depths." The scriptures will remind us of the various ways we are carried downward, by weariness, self-deception, or distraction, and call us to be renewed through a Godward walk, up out of the depths.

In addition to Sunday worship, there will be weekly occasions for spiritual reflection beginning with a Taizé prayer service with ashes on Ash Wednesday. Then on each successive Wednesday evening there will be a gathering for group *lectio divina* or reflective reading of the scriptures for the upcoming Sunday. *Lectio divina* is not so much Bible study as it is an exercise in "listening with the heart," letting the scriptures speak to us individually and as a group. On Maundy Thursday we will have a simple meal and communion service.

Mark the following dates on your calendar:

Wednesday, February 6

7:30 pm Ash Wednesday Taizé service with ashes, FMC sanctuary

Wednesday, February 13, 20, 27, March 5, 12

7:30pm *Lectio Divina*, FMC chapel

Thursday, March 20

6:30pm Maundy Thursday meal and service, FMC fellowship hall

Easter Sunday, March 23

Easter breakfast and celebration of the Resurrection

--*The Worship Commission*

Annual Faith Mennonite Women's Retreat

Mark your calendar! A restful, inspiring retreat is being planned by and for Faith women, and it is hoped that many of you will attend. We will begin with an evening of fun and relaxation starting at 7 p.m. Games will be played, and body work will be available. Bring your own craft projects if you like, as well as a snack or two to share. We will have an album exchange (bring your best or worst to pass around!)

Saturday will focus on "Spiritual Care through the Seasons of Life," with time for biblical reflection, small and larger group conversations, worship/singing, and even a nap or a walk if you so desire. We will also take

some time for individual silence. The Center has good food and a very cozy and welcoming atmosphere, as well as a walking labyrinth. Consider taking this time to retreat and connect with other Faith women.

Date: Friday evening, April 25, Saturday, April 26.

Begin at 7 p.m. Friday evening and conclude with dinner on Saturday.

Topic: "Spiritual Care through the Seasons of Life"

Place: Carondelet Center, College of St. Catherine, St. Paul.

Cost: \$55 single room; \$50 shared room (same price for Saturday only).

In all cases this will be "pay as you are able"

--*Minke Sundseth*

The Omnivore's Dilemma

Save the date and invite your friends and neighbors to a community potluck and discussion of "Perspectives On the Omnivore's Dilemma" at Faith Church on Saturday, March 8. A panel discussion with Q & A will begin at 6 p.m; meal will follow. Please bring a main dish, salad, or dessert as well as an ingredient list. This event is being sponsored by the Missions and Service Commission as an outreach to the community. For more information contact Minke Sundseth.

Caucus Resources for February 5

The Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) has a list of suggested caucus resolutions on the subject of children and poverty. These resolutions are available at church on the back table as well as in an attachment to the January 30 e-mail Mid-Week Update from the FMC office. If you plan to attend your precinct caucus, consider introducing one or more of these resolutions.

Also, the JRLC, along with numerous other religious organizations, will be sponsoring its annual "Day on the Hill" on March 13, beginning at the RiverCentre in St. Paul. This is an opportunity to meet your state legislators, and advocate for issues of social justice. It includes a morning of speakers and briefings on issues, and then proceeds to the capitol building for meetings with legislators. For registration and more information, go to: www.jrlc.org.

MCC Central States Listening/Visioning Session

Rosie Epp, MCC representative for the Northern Tier (Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Montana) invites all interested persons to a Listening/Visioning meeting on Monday, February 18, 7 p.m. in the chapel at FMC. MCC currently has one program sight in the Northern Tier: on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. They are assessing the needs in the Northern Tier to determine if there might be need for MCC presence in other areas. Come give input into developing the future of Central States MCC and the Regional Associate position in the Northern Tier area. The question "What more could MCC be doing in the Northern Tier?" will be addressed.

Comings and Goings

We welcome those who have joined us recently:

Terry Peterson
Donna Stucky

We say farewell to:

Deborah and Leigh Gilburn and Broedy who moved to International Falls.

They sent the following email after their move:
"The move to International Falls went just fine, and Fynn Reilly decided to come early Sunday morning (1/13/08), weighing 8lb 14oz. It was a very fast labor, and we had him at home like we had planned. We connected with some folks from the Mennonite congregation up here to help with unloading and childcare...pretty cool of them to help us out. Nice meeting all of you down there, too....very tired right now. Sorry for the disjointed message."

Deborah and Leigh Gilburn
3817 Town Rd 198
International Falls, MN 56649
218-377-4492
email: imdeborah@yahoo.com

Christmas Offering

A special offering was taken at the evening Christmas program on December 16. \$1,006 was received and divided between two needs: MCC's Bangladesh Cyclone Disaster Response and roof repair for Central Plains Pastor Felipe Cantu. We received the following note of thanks from MCC:

"Thank you for entrusting MCC with your gift. The worst storm in more than a decade affected millions of people in Bangladesh when Cyclone Sidr hit the country's southwestern coast on November 15, 2007. Hundreds of thousands of people are homeless, left with nothing but what they could carry as they fled to the safety of shelters. Crops were destroyed and livestock swept away. Your gift is providing food assistance and helping to build up to 1,500 bamboo slat houses for families who lost their homes."

Book Discussion Group

If you enjoy discussing good books with other readers, you may wish to try out a book group that a number of Faith folks belong to. The group has been going for many years, with participants coming and going over time. All the current members have at one time been a part of Faith or have some connection to it. We have both men and women attendees and meet once a month at one of our homes.

We read and discuss a variety of books: fiction, memoir, political writing, social concerns, theology, science, etc. Here are some of the books we've read in the past year:

Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*
Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*
Peter Forbes' *The Gecko's Foot* (science)
Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*
Nicole Kraus's *The History of Love* (a novel)
Richard Russo's Pulitzer Prize winner *Empire Falls* (a novel)

We are currently reading Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father* for our next meeting on February 17 at my house. We'd be happy to have you come. The only requirement is a desire to read and discuss books with others. I'd be happy to answer any of your questions, as would Dick Westby and Herman Weinlick, who are also part of the group.

--Arlene Holdeman

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting December 12, 2007 @ FMC

Present: Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Adam Nafziger, Worship; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Shelly Hendricks, Education; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer.
Absent: Missions & Service representative; Fellowship representative.

Affirmations. Neil thanks Joetta for care and attention of church during the pastoral transition. Joetta thanks worship leaders, Neil's work with the choir, Joan for hosting caroling. Glenn thanks Joetta for snowstorm contingency plans. Joan thanks Noah Skogerboe for being the middle-school Sunday school teacher for one child. Joetta thanks Jerry for faithful monthly work, paying bills.

Gifts Discernment Committee. Gifts discernment slate is passed out. Everybody asked to serve this time said yes! A proposed statement about holding over current moderator and moderator-elect another year was discussed and approved by Council to go to the congregation for feedback.

Pastoral Discernment Committee. Joan passes out a draft pastoral job description. The committee got responses from practically everyone. One area in which there was no consensus was single pastor vs. a pastoral team, and for a team, a couple was preferred to two unrelated individuals. Most significant point was that personal qualities are more important than particular skills. Congregation also clearly wanted a "traditional" pastor—i.e., Mennonite, seminary-educated. Will advertise through Central Plains conference and Supportive Congregations Network. Council by consensus approves the statement with minor suggestions. Neil asks how the committee relates to Joetta through this process? Joan says she and Joetta are communicating regularly. Neil asks if there is discussion about configuring FTE configuration before or after seeing candidates? Joan says the committee is really focusing on qualities and not dividing configuration Shelly asks what happens if Joetta wants to work 50%? Joan states that the committee is open to a variety of configurations, but if a non-related team pastorate is considered (with Joetta as part of the team) then Joetta would be a significant part of choosing the rest of the team.

Annual meeting. Discussion of distributing Council questions for commissions from this year's visioning, along with the commission reports. Neil, Joan and Joetta will prepare the agenda.

Treasurer's report. Jerry has disbursed the final conference support money for the year. Giving for November was strong. He is keeping an eye on the gas bills. Joan asks why giving is so strong this year. Jerry says he thinks more people are giving—he sees new names every week.

2008 Budget. Jerry summarizes the proposed 2008 budget. Decreasing contribution to the Hmong church as they become more independent, moving that money to MCC. Glenn asks about dedicating money to MCC relief sale expenses? Hermann questions whether we should be reducing support to the Hmong church by that much? Jerry says that was on Patrick's recommendation. Joetta and Hermann believe there may have been a misunderstanding of the situation—conference was going to reduce support and ask congregations to increase support.. Joetta offers to seek clarification of Conference expectations for congregational support for Hmong church. She says they had 50-60 members at their new year celebration, but the offering was low, and the pastor had no health insurance last year. Shelly questions the figure on estimated giving for FMC? Jerry says we never meet our estimated giving, but we never entirely spend our budget either. Joetta asks whether we need to be encouraging more giving to our tuition support fund? Jerry says a portion of the Calvert investment is tuition support fund, and we do get designated offerings. Joan says we are in a time of a substantial number of college students—perhaps we should encourage more designated offerings. A discussion about whether to add the MCC sale to our budgeted support. Also, should we continue supporting Meserete Kristos church? We have no real connection there. Joan asks Missions and Service to explore how best to give to organizations we relate to or explore ways to relate more intentionally to an international mission

Commission reports.

Trustees. Aryn Baxter is setting up a new church website host, which will be hosted by Mennonet.net. A twelve-step group wants to rent space one Saturday evening a month. There are candidates for the advertised secretary/custodian position(s). One candidate that has applied for both looks good. The Ethiopian congregation has moved on. Darrell Martin is working on a building use agreement form, including a clause holding FMC not liable and that groups renting are responsible for damage.

Education. Commission worked on the Council questions and Christmas program. There will be three new adult classes in January. Hermann Weinlick will lead a New Testament survey, Carol harder will lead a class on food and spirituality, and Beth Richardson will lead a class on human development.

Deacons. The next quarterly neighborhood groups will meet January 13th.

Worship. Commission will soon begin planning for Lent. Hermann asks whether there is any feedback on

the new Sunday morning schedule? Not really.

Missions & Service. Commission is planning a community book discussion and potluck around *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Also responding to several proposals from Carol Harder regarding working with local foodshelves on special diet needs, supplying Native American funeral foods, etc. Commission decided to have a special offering at the evening Christmas program for Bangladesh relief, and a roof for a Hispanic Mennonite pastor.

Other business.

World Conference in Paraguay, July 2009. World Conference wants to know soon whether we are sending delegates to the 2009 conference? Will we contribute to the travel fund? The average cost is \$2500. Joetta asks whether Minnesota churches could combine to support one international delegate? She will talk to other pastors. Jerry says we have a fund for that, and we have given some support for a congregation member in the past.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

What's happening here and there...

Spirituality Corner

The next Women Spirit will present Krista Tippett, Sunday, February 17, 2:00 p.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nicollet Mall & 12th Street, in downtown Minneapolis. Krista Tippett, creator and host of public radio's Speaking of Faith, will speak on: "Why Religion Matters and How to Talk About It." Tickets (\$12) are available at the door or through www.ticketworks.com (no service fee) For more information visit www.womenspirit-twincities.org.

Are There Closets in Heaven?

On February 21 at 7 pm there will be a presentation by Carol Curoe and her father, Bob Curoe, at St. Mark's Cathedral. Carol and her father co-authored the book, "Are There Closets in Heaven?: A Catholic Father and Lesbian Daughter Share Their Story." This is a profound and heart-warming story about the spiritual tumult within a deeply religious family that was caused by Carol's coming out in 1991. She and her life partner have two sons. Carol's father is a retired farmer. Bob is now 82 years old and vital as ever. He continues his activism on behalf of his daughter, his grandsons, and the GLBT community.

Please join us for this important event, and bring others. We anticipate a very large crowd. Come early to guarantee a good seat in the Cathedral and a close parking spot. There will be a wine and cheese reception after the presentation.

Thursday, February 21, at 7:00 pm, in St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, 519 Oak Grove Street in Minneapolis (612) 870-7800

Central Plains Conference Offers Scholarships for CPT Participants

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) offers on-going training opportunities for individuals who would like to participate in one of their delegations to the Philippines, Palestine/Israel, and Colombia. They seek participants who are interested in human rights work, committed to nonviolence, and willing to join in team worship and reflection. Upcoming delegations to Palestine/Israel are scheduled for March 4-17, May 27-June 9, July 22-August 4, October 14-27 and November 19-December 2, 2008. Delegations to Colombia are scheduled for May 14-27, July 16-29, and September 24-October 7, 2008. The cost of participation is \$2100 for Israel Palestine and \$1800 for Colombia. The Outreach and Service Committee of Central Plains Mennonite Conference will assist individuals in their fund-raising efforts with a grant of \$400. For contact information, check with the church office.

International Service Opportunity

Expand your world; teach in Lithuania! LCC International University, supported by the Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Mission Network, seeks EFL teachers to teach adults and high school students. Applicants should have ESL/ English teaching experience and a BA or MA degree in education, applied linguistics, or English. We provide curriculum materials, resources, orientation and a supportive Christian environment. For more information, visit: www.lcc.lt.

Mountain Lake Lecture Series

Bethel Mennonite Church and First Mennonite Church would be pleased to have you announce to churches in the conference/district that Dr. Mary Schertz, author and professor of New Testament studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, will be with us for the 2008 Bible Study Series in Mountain Lake. She will deal with six of "Luke's Quest Stories"

in a series of presentations to be given Sunday, February 3, through Tuesday, February 5.

This lecture series begins with Sunday worship on February 3, at 10:30 a.m. at Bethel Mennonite Church, 301 North Ninth Street, in Mountain Lake, where Mary will bring the morning message, “Stand Up and Walk.” Further sessions are on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. at First Mennonite Church, 305 North Seventh Street. Morning sessions on Monday and Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. will also be at First Mennonite Church.

All are cordially invited to join us for any or all of these sessions. The series is free of charge; donations are accepted. For more information, contact First Mennonite Church at 507-427-2237, or Bethel Mennonite Church at 507-427-3075. For those who come from out of town and would like to have lodging in a local home, please call one of these numbers. Motels are also an option with the nearest motels being in Windom and St James.

--E. Elaine Kauffman, pastor

In review...

Whistlepigs String Band

In case you haven't heard the news yet, the Whistlepigs (featuring our own Chris Jones) have just released their second CD, “Fenceline.” The band's style has evolved since their first CD of 2004, and is a delightful blending of traditional bluegrass songs like “Walkin” Cane,” original songs by some members of the band, and others by songwriters such as the controversial country/blues/rocker Steve Earle. The songs, like most bluegrass, have an upbeat sound, but as Bluegrass Saturday Morning disc-jockey Phil Nussbaum never tires of reminding us, “this is not happy music, folks.” Particularly moving is “That Water,” an original spiritual by Chris, lamenting the suicide of a mentally ill co-worker found dead in the Mississippi several years ago.

Two songs by mandolin player Fred Keller, “Engineer Best,” and “You Can Get There From Here,” celebrate life in Minnesota, demonstrating that bluegrass is not just a regional genre of the south. “Miss Molly” by the late country songwriter Cindy Walker, shades over into Texas Swing, a genre that Chris' lead vocal is perfectly suited to. And there are delightful original

instrumentals, like “Fred Digs Up a Hornet's Nest,” and “Rum River Mill.”

You can buy Whistlepig CDs or find a list of their upcoming gigs on their homepage at: homepage.mac.com/willits/whistlepigs/index.html

And if the music were not enough reason to go see the Whistlepigs, in the words of one delighted fan, quoted on their website: “To top it all off, these pigs wear some fine hats!”

--Gregg Richardson

On Thy Wondrous Works I Will Meditate (Psalm 145)

I would be good—oh, I would be upright and good.
To what purpose? To be shining not
sinful, not wringing out of the hours
petulance, heaviness, ashes. To what
purpose?
Hope of heaven? Not that. But to enter
the other kingdom: grace, and imagination,
and the multiple sympathies: to be as a leaf, a rose,
a dolphin, a wave rising
slowly then briskly out of the darkness to touch
the limpid air, to be God's mind's
servant, loving with the body's sweet mouth—its
kisses, its
words—
everything.

--Mary Oliver

Deadline for March newsletter items is noon, February 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.