

Faith Connection

February 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...

As President Obama has been preparing his State of the Union address, our leaders at Faith Mennonite Church have been writing annual reports and preparing an agenda for our annual Congregational Meeting. Our FMC Annual Meeting doesn't get as much media buzz as does the president's annual speech on Capitol Hill. But whenever God's people meet to remember the past and to look to the future we take part in the holy task of discernment: where has the Spirit been directing us this past year? What will be the shape of our path in the coming year?

It's always tempting, in our productivity- and achievement-based culture, to take pride in the quantity of activities we've done and the numbers of people involved. It's sometimes harder, but ultimately very important, to ask: have we done the things that reflect our deepest values and gifts—our calling? Do we find energy from what we do or are we burned out at the end of the day?

As Joan Kreider has begun to share "History Moments" about the beginning of Faith Mennonite Church 50 years ago, I've been impressed by the way our founders sought the leading of God's Spirit as they decided to begin this congregation and as they settled on a physical location and space in the Seward neighborhood. Fifty years later this neighborhood has changed, and the building we own presents a variety of (sometimes costly) challenges, making the need for discernment and Spirit-led decision making an ever essential part of our congregational life.

In the past six months we've opened ourselves to discussions and discernment around complex issues that divide our country: the meaning of marriage and the need for immigration reform. Our work on both of these topics is on-going. While our country struggles to hold respectful, non-anxious dialogue and it is newsworthy

when elected officials "cross the aisle" to sit or collaborate, I'm thankful that our conversations been proceeded in a spirit of trust and a desire for deeper understanding.

As we prepare for our Annual Meeting and continue to discern the way of the Spirit for our congregational life and ministry, I invite each of us to hold one another and the issues we discuss in prayer and in love.

--*Joetta Schlabach*

"Talking about one's self can also be a means to conceal one's self"

--*Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil*

Outreach ministry update...

Creating a Culture of Peace Training

Faith Mennonite Church is graced with the gifts of Phil Stoltzfus and Candace Lutt, who are trainers in the practice of nonviolence. This spring, we have the chance to learn from and with them when they lead us in the training, "Creating A Culture of Peace," from March 18-20th. Phil offers the following description of Creating A Culture of Peace:

What would you do if someone in your neighborhood threatened you with a gun? Is spray-painting a building an expression of violence? How should you act toward a family member who's really difficult to get along with? Why isn't anybody doing anything about structural oppression and social justice? Isn't the movement to end the wars in the Middle East a lost cause? How can I cultivate a spirituality of peacemaking?

Over the past several years, groups across the Upper Midwest have been struggling through questions and scenarios such as these through an interactive program

called “Creating a Culture of Peace” (CCP). CCP was developed by Janet Chisholm, the former nonviolence coordinator at Fellowship of Reconciliation, USA who is now living in Minnesota. The 20-hour curriculum employs popular education methods to broaden and deepen our understanding of—and commitment to—the use of transformative nonviolent power.

The intensive weekend retreats make use of interactive learning approaches that draw upon the wisdom and experience of the participants. Through small group discussion, journaling, and ritual expression, individuals are encouraged to explore their own experiences with violence, personal security, and active nonviolence. Through brainstorming, role-playing, and simulation exercises, the group explores approaches for developing nonviolent communication and community-sustaining skills, analyzing social change movements, and planning strategically-informed action campaigns.

CCP welcomes participants with only limited exposure to pacifist or social-activist perspectives, yet who are searching for a safe environment in which to learn more. The trainings are also very useful for those who want to build upon and deepen their existing understanding of and expertise in social change leadership. Expect to be provoked and prodded, nurtured and empowered. Sign up now!

--Kathleen Remund

What's happening at FMC...

Report From Deacons Commission

The deacon commission held their first meeting of the new year on January 12, 2011. The meeting included those who are completing a term of service and those who will be affirmed to serve at the upcoming Annual Meeting. The good service and gifts contributed by Hermann Weinlick and Kami Blackwell Kinney were acknowledged as they completed their term. Donna Minter and Shelly Hendricks were welcomed as new deacons. New deacon duties were assigned: Shelly Hendricks will serve on the Pastor-Parish Committee, Donna Minter will serve on the Church Council, Beth Richardson will serve on the Gifts Discernment Committee, and Aryn Baxter will serve on the Retreat Committee. Neil Okerlund will continue to facilitate the deacon commission meetings, and Aryn will record minutes and submit a summary for the newsletter.

The purpose of the deacon’s fund was discussed, and the need to raise awareness within the congregation

about the fund was identified. The deacon’s fund provides financial assistance when special needs arise within our community. This fund is separate from the annual budget and depends on designated gifts. Anyone can contribute to this fund at any time. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 16th.

--Aryn Baxter, secretary for Deacon Commission

Creating a Culture of Peace:

***Nonviolence training
for personal and
social change***



CCP is a holistic approach to training that empowers participants in the spirituality and practice of active peacemaking in their daily lives.

Facilitators Phil Stoltzfus and Candace Lantt utilize a highly participatory, popular education approach that respects and builds upon the wisdom, knowledge and experience of all participants.

Facilitators vary the activities to include small group sharing, exercises and games, brainstorming, presentations, discussions, role plays, music, movement, meditation, and journaling.

In relationships, churches, schools and job settings; in war-torn regions of the world and US communities; whether in poverty or privilege— all of us are affected daily by violence, injustice and oppression. This training is the first step to living a peace-making life and organizing a like-minded community!

Date: March 18-20.

Place: Faith Mennonite Church.

Cost: \$100/person, with scholarships available

Registration: Registration form can be downloaded from the FMC website or picked up at church near the display in the back of the sanctuary.

Questions: Call Kathleen Remund at the office or email her at minstaff@faithmennonite.org.



February Birthday Brunch

If you or a family member has a birthday in February, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on February 12. (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,
February 12
10:00-11:30
a.m.

Notes of Thanks

Following are excerpts from a number of acknowledgements we've received from organizations that we supported through financial contributions at the end of 2010:

From Wilderness Wind: As we look back on this year it seems right to be filled with gratitude. Your church has been a faithful supporter of our work, and we can only say once again, with heartfelt appreciation: THANK YOU. As we gear up for next summer it's clear how much we depend on the gifts—big and small, acts of friendship—from so many folks. I have particularly appreciated Joetta's kindness, in many little ways, such as finding transport to Indiana for our display board, suggesting local churches, etc. It helps tremendously. The Lord bless your congregation in the coming New Year.

--Gratefully, Brooke Wyssmann, admn. asst, on behalf of Wilderness Wind staff and board.

From Christian Peacemaker Teams: A CPTer in Iraq recently got a letter from a dear supporter who described our call... "To throw open our hearts, our minds, and to embrace what lies ahead..." Let's do it! Let's throw our hearts open this year:

- to the very real possibility that the Colombian community of Las Pavas will return to their land,
- to the possibility that the USA, having recently joined almost all other nations signing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, will honor our treaties with first nations peoples,

- to the possibility that Shuhada Street will again be a thriving Palestinian market place,
- to the possibility that the Kurdish border communities will return to their villages in peace after an end to the bombing collusion by the USA, Turkey and Iran.

Thank you for your contribution to this!

--Carol Rose, Co-Director

From Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation: We deeply appreciate your support and your partnership in building the community of active nonviolence in Minnesota!

--Peace, Don Christensen

From the Aliveness Project (our children's Christmas giving project): Thank you for your recent gifts gathered during your Teen Gift Drive for our Holiday Basket Program. Your support makes a difference for those we serve. Last year, over 1,500 individuals living with HIV/AIDS used our services, which include a hot meal program, a food shelf program, an integrative therapy program, and the holiday basket program. Thanks to people like you, miracles are happening each day here at the Aliveness Project.

--Sincerely, Joe A. Larson, Executive Director

FMC Monthly Budget Summary

	October	November	December
Total expenses	\$13,858	\$12,300	\$14,774
Total income	\$15,238	\$24,096	\$36,918
Monthly budget	\$12,775	\$12,775	\$12,775

What's happening here and there...

Gene Stoltzfus, 1940-2010, Peace Team Pioneer (Part II)

In Part I (April 2010) I talked about how my uncle Gene, who passed away last year on March 10, became the first International Voluntary Services worker in Vietnam to resign in protest over the war, and mentioned his work with MCC in the Philippines and at the Urban Life Center in Chicago.

In 1987 Gene conceived of a “research project” for me to do after college. We proposed to the recently formed Christian Peacemaker Teams steering committee that I serve as the first CPT volunteer, traveling around the country and collecting first-person narratives of nonviolent direct action carried out by people with ties to the Historic Peace Churches. Although the term “nonviolent direct action” had been established in the CPT mission statement, the project nevertheless represented a controversial move because the members of the steering committee did not yet have a unified commitment to the activist ethos of what would later become CPT.

During my seven-month CPT project, I traveled to Central America with Witness for Peace, was arrested for blocking a weapons train in California, and was detained along with Gene and his wife Dorothy Friesen and dozens of others at a “Faith and Resistance Retreat” at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita to protest the arrival of the B-1 Bomber. As our Mennonite affinity group knelt on the line marking the entrance to the base, the B-1 Bomber made a ceremonial bombing pass directly over our heads.

Later that year, Gene was chosen to be the founding director of CPT. He started out with just a half-time arrangement, and getting trained, full-time teams into the field took several years to materialize. But already by 1990 some ideas were bearing fruit. At Mennonite World Conference in Winnipeg in 1990, CPT organized a bus caravan of 300 of us to cross the border to a missile silo installation in North Dakota for a protest vigil. And as the Gulf War was gearing up later that year, CPT organized “Oil Free Sunday” actions by churches across the country, and Gene co-led a delegation to Iraq which, along with similar efforts by Muhammad Ali, resulted in the release of 14 Western hostages.

Over the next three years, Gene developed a rigorous training program, established a volunteer pool made up of corps members and reservists, organized more exploratory delegations, and sought out local partnering organizations. Candace and I first met each other at a CPT Peacemaker Congress meeting in Chicago in 1993. At a Peacemaker Congress a few years later in Washington, DC we participated in a blockade action at the entrance to the Pentagon, and in 1999 I served as a team member in a week-long CPT/Jubilee 2000 presence at the International Monetary Fund, in conjunction with yet another Peacemaker Congress, to advocate for Third World debt relief.

Under Gene’s leadership CPT established long-term projects in Haiti during the time of the US-backed coup over Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in the West Bank city of Hebron beginning in 1995 after the Ibrahimi Mosque Massacre, in Chiapas after the Acteal Massacre of 1997, in Colombia accompanying displaced peoples, and in Iraq prior to the 2003 US invasion. Several urban and indigenous projects were undertaken in North America, the longest-running one being at Grassy Narrows / Kenora, Ontario, where CPT has worked with First Nations communities on issues of logging practices. In a trip to Iraq in 2003, Gene interviewed family members of Iraqi detainees outside of the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. CPT was then in the process of carrying out critical background and deposition work, cited by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*, to expose the Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse.

We particularly remember the humor Gene brought to this work, as when people would receive a phone call from “God” or some other biblical character—in fact Gene’s deep voice on the other end of the line intoning a dramatic invitation to volunteer for a CPT project. And he liked playing Santa Claus! In one action, he and a band of “elves” went into a Chicago Toys ‘R Us store and began removing war toys from the shelves, explaining to the store manager, “the bad toys must be permanently removed for the safety of children.”

Gene retired up North to Fort Frances, Ontario in 2004, learning to make twig furniture and natural jewelry, and writing regularly for his online blog, Peace Probe (peaceprobe.wordpress.com). He went on numerous speaking tours, including trips to Japan and Europe, and a Wheels of Justice bus tour throughout the Midwest. He helped design a series of “Shine the Light” protests at US government facilities in Washington, DC after the CPT hostage crisis in Baghdad, advocated for rights for First Nations communities through participation in the Right Relations Circle in Ft. Frances, and traveled to West Virginia to support groups protesting mountaintop removal mining. In connection with a fact-finding trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009, he became increasingly interested in researching the use of Predator drone warfare. He was arrested in September 2009 at Creech Air Force Base in a civil disobedience protest over recent drone attacks in Pakistan.

Gene was only 70 when he died—I would have loved to sit down and ask him more about what happened in Vietnam, or explore more his long-term interest in interpreting dreams, or have him cook some Vietnamese food for us. But many times, particularly in the last few

years, we would sit at our table in Northfield and strategize about the future of international peace teams. And he brought his motor-assisted bike down to Northfield and let us ride it!

The thing I'll remember most about Gene, though, is the way he refused to demonize people or groups whom one would assume would be his "enemies." He had a genuine interest in what CIA agents did in Vietnam—in what made them tick. He was always interested in the discipline of the military, and in how to emulate that discipline among peace people. And he recently went on a "red state" speaking tour, specifically including evangelical/Pentecostal groups in the itinerary.

I'll always remember Gene back at that Faith and Resistance Retreat in Wichita. After crossing the line with my Mennonite affinity group and while being led away to be searched and receive my "ban and bar" letter, I overheard Gene saying to his security guard, in a voice a little louder than necessary, "Come over later for ice cream!"

—*Phil Stoltzfus*

ISALAH's Jeanne Ayers Appointed Assistant Commissioner at Minnesota Department of Health

We are thrilled to announce that Jeanne Ayers, ISALAH leader for the last seven years, will be serving as Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Health. Jeanne Ayers has chaired ISALAH's Health Equity and Healthy Communities work in ISALAH for the last five years. She has been the architect of ISALAH's work to connect health to creating healthy communities.

Some manifestations of this vanguard work has been the writing of the Minnesota Healthy Communities Act, the Healthy Corridor for All Project which is a community-driven Health Impact Assessment on the Central Corridor and the launch of Healthy Heartland, a 5-state collaborative to explore the intersections of health equity and community organizing.

Jeanne has been an integral leader in ISALAH at all levels, from serving on the Board of Directors, to moving her own congregation into a deeper commitment to living out their call to do justice in the world. A person of deep faith and commitment to her values, Jeanne will be powerful and visionary leader in her new role at the Department of Health.

Jeanne Ayers will be leading the Community and Family Health Promotion Bureau where much of the work to promote community health and eliminating health disparities across race is housed. We will look forward to a continued partnership with Ms. Ayers as we work to build a Minnesota that is whole, healthy and just.

Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer to Direct Minnesota FoodShare

With the new year comes new leadership at Minnesota FoodShare, a program of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. For the past 10 years, Barbara Thell has been the director of Minnesota FoodShare, leading a successful team in producing remarkable results for hungry people in Minnesota. In January, Thell will be transitioning to a new role as FoodShare's Director of Advocacy.

FoodShare's new director will be Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer, executive director of GMCC's Center for Families since it opened in 2006. With FoodShare's March Campaign just around the corner, Nelson-Pallmeyer will hit the ground running. Food shelf usage continues to rise in many areas and Minnesota FoodShare has set another ambitious goal-- to raise a combination of 12 million dollars and pounds during the 2011 March Campaign.

This year's theme for the campaign, which annually accounts for more than half the food distributed through food shelves in Minnesota, is "Fill 300 food shelves. Mission impossible? Not if you help." For more information about the March Campaign and how you can get involved, contact:

Sue Kainz at skainz@gmcc.org or 612-721-8687 x326
Sarah O'Brien at sobrien@gmcc.org or 612-721-8687 x331.

[For some of you who may be new to FMC, ISALAH's offices are in FMC's building, and Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer is a longtime member of the Community of St. Martin, which also meets in our building. —The editor]

The deadline for March newsletter items is noon, Tuesday, February 22nd.

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.