

# Faith Connection

February 2012

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...**

I am writing from Managua, Nicaragua, having arrived on Saturday, January 21, following a week each in Guatemala and Honduras. Yesterday I attended worship at the Morazan Mennonite Church, where Gerald and I attended when we lived here, working with MCC, in the mid 1980s. The theme of the service was Anabaptist World Fellowship Day, in memory of the first adult baptisms in Zurich Switzerland, on January 21, 1525, that initiated the Anabaptist movement, from which the Mennonite Church was born.

The previous Sunday evening I worshiped at a Mennonite church in rural San Marcos, Ocotepeque, Honduras. In both occasions I was glad to share greetings from our church, and both sent greetings back to Faith Mennonite. In both locations they asked me to share about our congregation and I was glad to be able to relate our experience of hosting the Edha-Mwene family from Somalia. The church in San Marcos had worked closely with MCC, in the 1980s, caring for the Salvadoran refugees that were located in a nearby refugee camp. So we share this experience of hospitality.

This trip has been an opportunity to renew personal friendships, and in addition it is an opportunity to get reacquainted with the churches here in order to share in greater solidarity with them. I have been glad to say that we will pray for them, and have asked for their prayers for us.

Although there are no civil wars in the region as there were when we lived here 25 years ago, violence is ever present, and increasing. This was especially notable in Honduras, where my hosts in San Pedro Sula hardly let me out of their sight and didn't want me to even take a taxi. Each night on the news we heard new reports of as many as 15 to 20 killings. The violence is attributed to gangs involved in narcotrafficking, but the police are

often involved. Today, as I opened the computer to write this article, I received news that one of the latest victims of violence was a Mennonite pastor from the west side of the Honduras where there is unrest due to unjust practices of foreign mining companies. (Another Mennonite pastor took his family to Virginia a couple years ago when he received credible death threats for his work with the miners.)

It isn't hard to understand why people take risks to go to the U.S., but what has impressed me most is how the Mennonite churches here are committed to working for peace in spite of the dangers. One friend, who works with a program for women and children, said, "We take precautions but we don't let ourselves become paralyzed."

Yesterday the worship leader commented that "we worry if we don't have employment to provide for our families, but that we should also be concerned if we don't have spiritual work because that is what helps us to grow." This morning I observed some of this spiritual work in one of the poor neighborhoods outside Managua. A friend who lives there has been concerned for the many children in the neighborhood and has begun holding Saturday morning Bible classes for them in her back yard. This week a number of youth and adults from the Morazan Mennonite Church are holding a vacation bible school there. This morning 55 children came and my friend was disappointed because she has had as many as 80 to 100 on a Saturday morning! With no tables or classrooms, only chairs and a single coloring page for each child, the teachers taught three age groups a lively lesson about Jacob and his dream of angels.

I look forward to being able to share more of this experience upon my return. In the meantime, you are in my thoughts and prayers. Please join me in praying for our sisters and brothers in Central America.

--Joetta Schlabach

"I gave up coffee creamer for Lent one year. By the end of the tenth day, I began to love black coffee. That's the year I learned that it isn't giving up things that counts... I became aware that only internal change really counts."

-- Anonymous

### **Ministry Staff Update...**

#### **Creating a Culture of Peace**

Last March fifteen people, from within FMC and without, came together for a Creating a Culture of Peace nonviolence training weekend at the church. This spring the Missions and Service Commission would like to offer the training again. We've chosen the dates of Friday afternoon, April 13 through Sunday afternoon, April 15. One difference this year will be that joining me as co-facilitator of the workshop will be the executive director of CCP, Janet Chisholm. Is CCP for you?

Well, do you know what you would 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 one cultivate a spirituality of peacemaking?

Over the past several years, groups across the country have been struggling through questions and scenarios such as these in the CCP curriculum. CCP was first 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. Contact the church office to sign up!

--Phil Stoltzfus

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



Creating a Culture of Peace 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 Janet Chisholm 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 life of peacemaking and organizing a like-minded community!

**Date:** April 13-15.

**Place:** Faith Mennonite Church.

**Cost:** \$100/person (some 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 Phil Stoltzfus at the FMC office or email [minstaff@faithmennonite.org](mailto:minstaff@faithmennonite.org). And check out the website: [www.creatingacultureofpeace.org](http://www.creatingacultureofpeace.org).

## Missions and Service Commission Contributions for Partnerships and Community Projects in 2011

One of the tasks of the Missions and Service Commission is to disburse funds to various community organizations. In 2011, \$4,200 was budgeted for this purpose. In recent years the Commission has attempted to focus allocations on organizations with which FMC has a relationship. Following is the list of organizations and the amounts that were disbursed in December 2011:

Brethren Mennonite Council	\$500
Christian Peacemaker Teams	\$600
Families Moving Forward	\$500
Friends for a Non-Violent World	\$150
Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches	\$100
ISALAH	\$300
Minnesota Council of Churches	\$100
Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation	\$200
Peace for the City	\$200
Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership	\$500
Strategies in Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR)	\$500
Twin Cities Peace Campaign	\$50
Wilderness Wind	\$500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4200</b>

The Commission also disbursed \$1000 to support Mennonite Mission Network workers Wayne and Lois Hochstetler (based in London, England) and \$500 to Mennonite Mission Network projects in Riobamba, Ecuador.

### Deacons Report

The deacons met on Wednesday, January 12, 2012. We welcomed Donna Stuckey and new deacon Adam Nafziger by sharing what being a deacon has meant to each of us, and said goodbye to Beth Richardson by appreciating the gifts she shared during her term as a deacon. We discussed the distribution of liaison roles, and determined that Adam will take on the role of overseeing the retreat planning. We also discussed care concerns and asking a former deacon to substitute for Aryn while she travels for graduate school projects June to December 2012. Several deacons plan to attend the upcoming leadership workshop in Iowa. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012.

Soup group is a weekly opportunity to build community over a simple meal of soup and bread. Anyone is

welcome to host and attend. Meals can be at someone's home, or at church. You can find info about upcoming times in the weekly bulletin, the Midweek Update, and the FMC online events calendar, along with information on how to RSVP.

Upcoming Soup Group: Monday, February 6, at Joan Kreider's, 2162 Carroll Ave. St Paul. RSVP by Sunday, February 5 to Joan at: 651-645-2660, or email: joan.e.kreider@gmail.com.

The open dates for hosting are: 2/14, 2/16, 3/15, 3/23, 4/10, 4/19, 4/27, 5/1, 5/17, 5/25. If you are interested in hosting on one of these dates, either by preparing the food and/or providing the location, please sign the sheet in the foyer or contact Aryn Baxter at: aryn.baxter@gmail.com.

--Aryn Baxter

### Mennonite Disaster Service Opportunity

Missions and Service is planning a spring trip for folks to volunteer with Mennonite Disaster Service! Our neighbors in Minot, North Dakota are continuing to recover from last spring's floods, and MDS has set up a base of operations there. We will volunteer in Minot March 18-24. We are hoping that a closer work site will enable some additional people to participate, and we're looking forward to strengthening our connections in Minot. 1,400 homes were significantly damaged; MDS (Minot unit) is currently working on four homes that have been gutted down to the framing. Next steps will be to rewire, insulate, sheet rock, mud and tape, and either replace or refinish floors in each house. There may also be interior trim work. All work during the remaining winter months will be interior and each house has a temporary heat source so working conditions are not cold; they may be cool. By the time the Faith group (6-8 will be accommodated) arrives March 18, volunteers will be billeted in the local Mennonite Brethren church facility which MDS is rehabbing right now. Firm commitments needed by February 19. Questions?? Talk to Glenn Geissinger, local MDS coordinator, glenn.geissinger@gmail.com.

### Missio Dei Benefit Dinner

Missio Dei Benefit Dinner, Saturday, March 3, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., FMC fellowship hall. Please join us for Missio Dei's second annual benefit dinner. Proceeds will help us with our goal of raising \$100,000 for a new

hospitality house. Dinner will include appetizer, dinner and dessert. Please let us know if you are vegan or have other dietary concerns. Dinner will be accompanied by live music. Childcare will be provided, please let us know if you will be bringing children and their ages. \$15 suggested donation. All are welcome, regardless of donation. Please RSVP by February 27. If you have any questions, email: [info@missio-dei.com](mailto:info@missio-dei.com).

--*Missio Dei*

## **Thank You...**

Thank you for your congregation's gift to the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. This gift supports programs which enlist 25,000 volunteers, 700 congregations, and hundreds of corporate and civic groups to work together to build a more just and supportive community. Preventing hunger, maximizing the self-reliance of seniors, nurturing healthy families, reducing crime, empowering urban American Indians, erasing educational disparities, halting homelessness, and partnering with the community by training volunteers and helping faith-based organization build their capacities to serve...these and other initiatives are all made possible because of those who care about our mission. Please express our sincere appreciation to all at Faith Mennonite Church who supported this gift. Sincerely,

--*Gary B. Reiersen, President, GMCC*

Thank you for your recent contribution to Families Moving Forward. We grow in our ability to offer stability and hope to families in crisis with each gift from supporters like Faith Mennonite Church. Your contribution provides critical support to continuing and expanding our emergency shelter and day center program. We are honored by your commitment to our work. Sincerely,

--*Felicia Mason-Edwards, Director, FMF*

I am writing to thank your faith community for sponsoring the Candlelight Service for the Children of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and Other Child Victims of War held at St. Joan of Arc Church on December 28, and for your generous donation. It was a good event. Peace,

--*Marie Braun, Twin Cities Peace Campaign*

Your generous donation to Community Emergency Service will help families and single adults living in our immediate service area, and beyond, to have a roof over their heads, food in their refrigerator and hope in their

hearts. We, the staff of CES, want to say thank you on behalf of the hundreds of people you have helped with this contribution. We look forward to working with you in the future, and hope you'll stay in touch by visiting us on the web at [www.cesmn.org](http://www.cesmn.org). May God bless and keep you. Sincerely,

--*Pastor Mark Peterson, Executive Director, CES*

Thank you for your generous contribution to the Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation. FOR is the largest and oldest interfaith peace and justice organization in the US, and your gift will be put to work right here in Minnesota to support active nonviolence. We are currently sponsoring a number of Creating a Culture of Peace nonviolence trainings, including an upcoming weekend training for young people at Hamline University in March. Sincerely,

--*Candace Lautt, for the MN FOR Board*

Thank you so much for your kind contribution to Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests. We realize that we live in challenging economic times with many demands, and we appreciate your support and participation in the work of BMC. Our significant gains would not be possible without the support and the often unheralded work of countless individuals over the decades. Thank you for your contributions in the struggle to create a kinder and more just church, and for your support and leadership within the conference. We look forward to the New Year! Appreciatively,

--*Carol Wise, Executive Director, BMC*

*Thank you for your contribution toward transforming our communities peace by peace. We wait and work expectantly to see what God has in store for our peacebuilding efforts in the Twin Cities and beyond! Staying warm, working for peace,*

--*Donna Minter, for STAR and the Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute*

## **Arrival of the Unexpected**

*This is the third of three stories of the "arrival of the unexpected," shared by (anonymous) FMC members during Advent, concluding the series from last month's newsletter.*

### **Transforming Sorrow with Courage and Faith**

K and her two youngest children, her 19-year-old daughter, and her 21-year-old developmentally disabled son, flew to the United States a few months ago. Her eldest daughter and middle son had come just six weeks before. They were all born in Somalia, but had lived the last 19 years in a refugee camp in Kenya, so although

they dress and identify as Somali, they speak and understand Swahili best. K's oldest son remains in Somalia with his wife and their 3 young children, one born in May, just two months before K and her other four children came to Minnesota.

Sorrow looks like this: leaving the place you've lived for 19 years, and a newborn grandchild, to come to the unknown as an immigrant.

K is a widow and has had no formal schooling. Only her middle son had any education, and that was in Swahili, in the refugee camp. For months now, they have been adjusting to life in Minnesota, without literacy in any language. It is hard to learn English, and even basic math skills like the ability to remember their phone number is challenging. Nonetheless, they attend school as English Language Learners every day, struggling to understand and make sense of all the differences in life here.

What would it be like to move out of a refugee camp after 19 years? What would it be like to live where little dots and lines mean things to everyone but me and my children? The presence of sorrow becomes a constant background noise, familiar and unsettling at once. K has a strong faith, and prays five times a day, like most Muslims. How do the prayers answer the practical questions: Who do you trust? Where do you buy food? How do you cook in an American kitchen? What is the money worth? Sixty-five sounds like a lot more than one; yet sixty five cents is less than one dollar—so confusing! Why do we have to wear socks? They feel awful. It's so cold outside; why do we go to school when it's snowing and so cold? Sorrow blends into confusion, becoming a pungent stew difficult to digest. Trust in God. See you again, if God is willing. In-sha-Allah.

Listener, hear of a week for K and her brave family: This week, the taxi was late for an appointment to have K's son's heart checked at the hospital. It was rescheduled for the next day, but she went with her daughter instead to have a second tooth pulled. She missed her English class because she had an appointment to apply for subsidized housing in St. Paul; the Minneapolis waiting list for public housing is closed because the wait is over seven years!

Another letter arrives. What does this letter mean? Oh, it's a "Notice of Continuance" from the lawyer because the court had no Swahili interpreter, only Somali. How can a 26-year-old man with the reading level of a first

grader be legally responsible for his 21-year-old special-needs brother? But he is and to make money for the household, he works at a menial job while he learns English, math and basic computer skills; he cares for his mother, two sisters, and his special needs brother. He is warned he should be wary of which mosque he attends (and who he trusts there) because there are allegations of recruiting healthy young Somali men to return to the homeland as warriors.

Freedom and choices and decision-making are so different than they must have been in the refugee camp near the equator where the sun rises and sets at the same time every day! How do you navigate with new pressures of alcohol and glorified media images of violence and alluring images of women? K and her son are resilient and faithful. They stand together. Be prayerful and true and meet God halfway. Transform our sorrow. If God wishes... In-sha-Allah.

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

#### **"Not About Bombs"**

Missions and Service Commission is a (non-financial) co-sponsor of the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP) exhibit, "Not About Bombs," beginning with an opening reception at Intermedia Arts, Friday, February 3, 7:00–9 p.m. and running through March 3. The exhibit will feature photo-based works by five contemporary, Iraqi female artists. "Not About Bombs" addresses how a female perspective can fit into the modern context of turmoil and conflict through art and avoid falling into the typical ways that women are represented... and misrepresented. The women in this exhibit contribute art that is visually and conceptually accomplished, but unpredictable and emotionally engaging. Please help promote the exhibit! See: [reconciliationproject.org/iraqi-art/not-about-bombs/](http://reconciliationproject.org/iraqi-art/not-about-bombs/)

**The deadline for March newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

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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.