

Faith Connection

January 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...

One morning in late December as I listened to the radio I heard an interview with someone who was evaluating the predictions made for 2008. Several were right on; others less so. The end of one year and the beginning of another entices some to make predictions and others to make resolutions. I wonder if for Christians the two shouldn't be intimately linked. Might our resolutions be more resolute if they were related to a positive outcome (a prediction) that we truly wanted to see fulfilled and that others might hold us accountable to?

Of course there can be negative predictions. President-elect Obama has repeatedly said that the economy will likely get worse before it takes a turn for the better. The Hebrew prophets also had a penchant for speaking the truth about disaster and not always promising safety from life's woes. But Mr. Obama has had a way of eliciting hope even as he has named the problems that face our country. He has done this, in part, by speaking of the "audacity of hope," by calling citizens to work for and to expect change.

Last September, our moderator Neil Okerlund led an adult education session in which he reviewed the work that the Church Council and commissions have been doing the past two years to take a fresh look at what we do as a church. That process was intended to take stock of areas to which we'd like to give greater attention and also to celebrate all that the church does. The new ministry staff position and this year's focus on community outreach and peacemaking were outcomes of that work. At the end of the session, Neil invited us to share our dreams of what FMC will be like in ten years. I heard words like "a joyful place," "increased visible peacemaking witness," "new people."

These predictions are too good to wait ten years for; I will look for them in 2009. I expect to find joy on Sunday mornings as well as in Council and commission meetings. I know that I'll see joy in our children but I

trust we will also hold one another joyfully even when we face unexpected tragedy and painful moments. The Spirit of God who dwells within us is the source of this joy.

I also expect to see new peacemaking activities—through our music, in joint worship in the park with the Community of St. Martin, or in race dialogs with Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church. We sing "We are People of God's Peace" and I believe we want to make our identity more visible to others.

I also expect that God will draw more people to our community, just as happened to the community in Acts 2. We have been blessed with rich gifts. We are a safe and nurturing place for families with young children and a place of healing, commitment and challenge for those who are seeking to follow the nonviolent way of Jesus.

There, I've ventured the predictions. Now I invite you to make a resolution to help these become reality! Happy New Year!

--Joetta Schlabach

"I made no resolutions for the New Year. The habit of making plans, of criticizing, sanctioning and molding my life, is too much of a daily event for me."

-- Anais Nin

What's happening at FMC...

Community and Faith

In the fall, I collected ideas from people inside and outside of FMC about how the church could expand relationships in the community. During the November 23 Adult Education session, and in discussions after that, we identified which of those ideas had the most

momentum and sense of calling within the congregation. Out of these discussions, several activities have started moving. Here is a summary of projects that are developing:

A community forum that will be held on March 28th. We are planning to host a forum at FMC about the intersection between immigration policy and our food. There will be a panel, discussion, and a potluck. Please put that evening on your calendar. And if you'd like to help with preparing for the forum, let me know.

Brainstorming ways to share the music of FMC with the community. Many people were excited about the idea of a peace choir that could sign at demonstrations, vigils, and other places in the community. Others talked about hosting concerts and sing-alongs. Neil Okerlund is coordinating a meeting to talk about how the church could share the congregation's gifts of music with the wider community. If you'd like to be a part of this meeting, contact Neil.

Partnership with the Pan-African Community Organization (PACO). We are working with PACO to help them start a Learning Center in Seward that will provide English classes, computers, and other tutoring every weekday afternoon. The focus of the Center will be serving African adults who would like to learn English. The Missions and Service Commission has contributed seed money to help start this Center. The Commission is also working with PACO to do a fundraising meal for the Center. Once the Center is up and running, they will welcome volunteers from the church to help at the Center. Contact me if you are interested in volunteering with the fundraising meal or at the Center.

Building relationships with Bethesda Baptist Church. Earlier this year, the pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church, a primarily African-American congregation, approached FMC about the possibility of their congregation sharing FMC's building. In discussions with their pastor since then, we felt that the first step was for people from FMC and Bethesda to get to know each other. In January, there are two times when a group from FMC will be joining activities hosted by Bethesda, at a community dialogue about race on January 8th and for worship on January 18th. The details for these events are listed in the announcements in the newsletter.

Many other long-term ideas are still brewing—such as developing a joint community peace worship at

Matthews Park with the Community of St. Martin, starting gatherings to support parenting for peace and justice, continuing to champion local food and sustainability activities, and supporting the neighborhood restorative justice program as it is growing. If you feel a passion about other ideas, please continue to talk with others about what the next steps should be, and let me know where you are headed.

On January 25th from 5:30 – 6:30 pm, some of us from FMC will lead a discussion at a Community of St. Martin Adult Education session about how FMC and their community might work together on some of these community projects, and some things they have already started. If you are interested, please join us for that conversation.

Thank you for all the wonderful ideas and energy in each of these areas!

-- *Michael Bischoff*

January Adult Education Series on Worship

The Worship Commission has planned a three-Sunday series on worship for January 4, 11, and 18. We will begin on January 4 with a session on the "Role of Singing in Mennonite Worship." Jane Ramseyer Miller, member of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship and the artistic director of One Voice Mixed Choir, will be our guest presenter. On January 11 we will consider the various elements that make up worship and how our personalities and backgrounds influence the importance of these elements for each of us. On January 18 we will discuss the "Meaning of Communion in the Anabaptist Mennonite (and other) traditions."

The winter elective classes for adults will begin on January 25 with two classes: "The Spirituality of Imperfection," facilitated by Glenn Geissinger, and "Our Bodies, Our Souls: The Connections Between Spirituality and Health Care" facilitated by numerous FMC health care providers.

--*Worship Commission and Pat Eliason*

Making Room for Missio Dei

The FMC Trustees and Church Council have approved a request from Mark Van Steenwyk, pastor of Missio Dei Mennonite Church, for office space in the FMC

education/office wing. Mark will occupy room 202, previously used by the Pan African Community Organization. The initial arrangement is rent-free as an in-kind contribution of support for the growing ministry of Missio Dei, until they are in a financial position to pay rent for the space.

FMC will also be the venue for a February 13-14 event **“Common Root 2009: Creating our Future in the Shadow of Empire”** being organized by Missio Dei. This consultation will explore ways of creatively embracing the in-breaking Kingdom of God in the shadow of Empire. The organizers want to foster creative resistance as we seek community practices that bring shalom to a broken world.

Main presenters include Greg Boyd (author of *Myth of a Christian Nation*, respected theologian, and pastor at Woodland Hills), Tom and Christine Sine (directors of the Mustard Seed Associates and internationally respected speakers on spirituality, community, and grassroots church movements), Carol Rose (pastor, poet, and co-director of Christian Peacemaker Teams), and Jin Kim (pastor of Church of All Nations, a Twin Cities multi-ethnic church). In addition to key note presentations there will be workshops on New Monasticism, the Catholic Worker Movement, sustainable living, urban church planting, community-based peacemaking, communal spirituality, and much more.

The consultation will also feature a special planter’s track for those interested in starting new communities. Jeff Wright, president of Shalom Ministries: www.urban-anabaptist.org/sm/staff.php, will lead these sessions.

Registration for the consultation is by donation, with a suggested minimum of \$50. For more information and to register for the consultation visit: www.facebook.com/1.php?u=http://thecommonroot.eventbrite.com

Meet the Nafziger-Fitches

When you enter Adam Nafziger and Nikki Fitch’s South Minneapolis bungalow, the first things you see are a big upright piano and a large dining room table. This is fitting, because along with the needs of their two young children Linus and Freya, food and music are central to their lives. To the right, there is a compact but airy kitchen that is well equipped for all the cooking Adam does with his two-year-old son Linus sitting on

the counter and helping. In the backyard and in a plot across the street, Adam tended thriving vegetable gardens this past summer.

If it wasn’t for Nikki and Adam’s shared connections to food, this particular family wouldn’t exist, because the couple met in Denver when Adam was working as a candy maker and Nikki was selling flavors. Story has it, Adam wooed Nikki by e-mail, sharing his talent for writing in long e-mails describing his take on the world. Soon, they were flying to see each other every other weekend, and it wasn’t long before they married and settled in the Twin Cities.

Adam comes from an ethnic Mennonite background, growing up in Evergreen, Colorado. He went to Goshen College, majoring in English literature, and went back to Colorado after college to settle in Denver. He greatly values the strong community and family connections of his Mennonite roots. Nikki grew up in a Catholic and Lutheran family in St. Peter, Minnesota, and admits to knowing exactly nothing about Mennonites until she met Adam. After Adam and Nikki were married, Adam took a two year hiatus from church before coming to Faith Mennonite with Nikki. In Colorado, he’d been involved with everything from music to youth ministry, and he says that he was a bit burned out by it all. Over the years, he’s learned to say “no,” and at Faith, he feels a better balance. He is a common presence in the front of our church, leading music and occasionally wowing us with a rousing rendition of a hymn or spiritual that can tease actual *applause* out of our usually-more-reserved congregation. Nikki was happy to become a part of Faith Mennonite as well, and has especially enjoyed making connections with our church’s young families. (I have chuckled to see a shirt on Linus’ back that came to him by way of my boys, which first came to my boys by way of Anthony Beerswing.) Adam and Nikki both feel that our church is a healthy blend of “ethnic” Mennonites and those who are new to our denominations, and is a welcoming place for all who want to be here. The church’s strong stand for peace is an important value for them as well.

As we were sitting around the Nafziger-Fitch dining room table, drinking tea during a blizzard while both of their children napped, I thought to myself that they made life with a newborn and a two-year-old seem easy. When I asked about how things were going for them at the moment, Nikki remarked that this is the kid-centric time in their lives, and that this is as it should be—movies and dinners out and all of the other pre-kid stuff will come again when the kids are older. So far, Freya is

proving to be a fairly easygoing baby, and they are enjoying getting to know her own unique personality. Nikki will go back to work full-time in February at her sales job, which requires quite a bit of travel. Adam will be primary caregiver for two little cooks-in-training when they're not all traveling the country together. For them, this winter is a special time to adjust to being a family of four. Listening to them talk about their family, I found their cheerful optimism as refreshing as the tea.

—*Minke Sundseth*

Comings and Goings

We welcome those who have recently visited or begun attending worship. If you haven't yet met these folks, please say hello and look for an opportunity to get better acquainted.

- **Sarah Claasen**
- **Rachel Combs and Shawn Walding**
- **Charlie Parish-Siggelkow**
- **Phillip & Abra Staffin Wiebe**

We extend our blessing to **Carol Harder**, who has informed us that she is looking for a new place of worship and fellowship.

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting November 10th, 2008 @ FMC

Present: Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Mike Okerstrom, Deacons; Katie Hochstedler, Missions & Service; Jenny Wandersee, Worship; Thaine Dirks, Pastor-Parish; Shelly Hendricks, Education.

Absent: Fellowship representative.

Guest: Michael Bischoff (first part of meeting).

Affirmations. Glenn affirms Thaine for leading the board of the MCC relief sale. Neil affirms nearly all FMC members for their volunteer work for the sale. Thaine affirms the Whistlepigs for their performance at the sale. Joan affirms Pierre Gingrich-Boberg for leading the Spirituality and Politics class. Joetta affirms the ushers for greeting visitors, saying Tom has a gift for chatting with visitors, and also both Tom and Theresa for involving the young children in taking the collection. Mike affirms Hermann for his work on the young children's Sunday school class. Joetta mentions that Minke Sundseth has affirmed the FMC community

for helping look out for her twins. Joan affirms Katie for work on the Global Youth Summit fundraiser.

Treasurer's report. Spent \$92,000 last month, much of it on the heating project. Also has now paid all conference support, and the pastor's pension. The fundraiser raised \$1052, minus expenses of \$184. The checking account still has \$85,000 left. Mike asks whether building heating bill is on budget, Jerry says yes. Neil asks whether giving is okay? Jerry says it is a little low—it should be about \$10,000 a month to meet budget.

Michael Bischoff reports. Michael says he has been talking to people in the congregation about dreams for engaging the community and peacemaking, as well as their passions and gifts. Also has been talking to the neighborhood groups. Shelly says the relief sale has been a great outreach. Glenn says one volunteer who lives in Hastings suggests that we're missing an opportunity to list sponsoring churches in the PR booklet. Neil asks whether there are Missions and Service-type committees in other churches that FMC may potentially cooperate with? Mike says we should use our building more, and get to know what assets others have. Joetta says a small African-American church has a neighborhood after-school program. How about partnering with suburban churches? What about a literacy program? Joan saw an NPR program about interfaith youth movements—how about Muslim-Christian connections in the high-rise? Gregg wonders whether FMC could offer community education classes on topics like conflict resolution? Thaine suggests mediation training. Jenny would like more events like the *Omnivore's Dilemma* seminar. Neil recommends music—a presence of street singers at the sites of traumatic events. Katie suggest using the building for classes on practical skills, like bike repair, rain barrels, etc.

Michael has heard suggestions of community forums on Mennonite values (co-sponsored by others); a school of leadership development; sharing music; continuing the Simply in Season project; the Seward Peace Garden; facilitating urban-rural connections, expanding the relationship with the east African community; working with the Pan-African organization; and collaborative worship services focused on peace.

Neil asks how to process this? Michael says M&S commission will help refine this before the November 23 class forum, then discuss result of forum to help

clarify further. Joan says we have many parents interested in raising their young children with these values, the same interest is widely shared in the Seward community. What about a Saturday morning information and support group? Gregg suggests a neighborhood pub, along the lines of the Riverview Café. Michael asks how to decide? Gregg suggests M&S will aggregate this information after November 23, to bring back to the congregation at the annual meeting. Joan suggests leaving an opening for smaller groups who are interested to take an idea and go ahead with it. Michael could provide support. Joetta mentions that Mark Van Steenwyk at Missio Dei is working on a February 13-15 event on the Anabaptist revival, which will include Tom Sine, Greg Boyd and others who are not Mennonite.

Annual meeting. Discussion of best timing for the annual congregational meeting, in order to make sure the annual financial statement is ready. Decided on February 8. Joetta suggests using the adult ed hour, followed by a meal. Suggestion to discuss visioning, then a potluck, then the business meeting.

Commission reports.

Trustees. The interior decorating committee is making plans to paint the sanctuary and library and try to improve the fellowship hall. A local paint manufacturer is willing to donate paints to non-profits. Perhaps we could contact rural churches for volunteers to paint, and entertain them while they're here.

Education. Christmas program the third or fourth Sunday evening of December. Youth leaders met with the conference youth minister. Discussing other ways to serve youth than a youth group.

Deacons. Quarterly geographical small groups were canceled, next one in January. New small groups are forming. Joetta says they've discussed geographical groups becoming core groups (then new deacons could come out of geographical groups).

Worship. Planning Advent, also an Adult Education series in January exploring different aspects of worship.

Missions and Service. Working on a rationale for donating money. Also organized the fundraiser. There is interest in a Mennonite Disaster Service trip to the gulf March 8-13. Might coordinate with other churches, including the Woodland Hills church.

Other Business.

Healthcare issue. Michelle, the custodian, now has another three-quarter time job and she can apply for Minnesota Care, so she will have coverage.

What's happening here and there...

Two Local Events

Race Forum: Join a community dialogue about race, hosted by Bethesda Baptist Church on January 8th. The forum is held at the Elliot Park Fieldhouse (1000 14th St. E, Minneapolis). A light supper will be provided at 6:30 pm and the discussion will be from 7:00 - 9:00 pm. Rev. Agnew, the pastor at Bethesda Baptist Church has invited members of Faith Mennonite to join this forum, as a part of our congregation getting to know members of their congregation.

Worship at Bethesda Baptist Church: A group from Faith Mennonite will be participating in worship at Bethesda Baptist Church on January 18th at 11:30 am. Please join us! The church is at 1118 S 8th St, on the east side of downtown Minneapolis. For more information about either event with Bethesda Church, contact Michael Bischoff at 612-521-1889.

Spirit of Service Day: January 19th, 2009

Every year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January, about a dozen White Bear Lake High School students choose to make "a day off a day on." They start the day by attending the rally and march at St Paul Central High School, then after lunch, conduct a service project somewhere in either St Paul or Minneapolis. The objective of the day is to celebrate and reflect on the messages of MLK and to reach out to the greater city in contrast to the service they typically do in the immediate White Bear Lake community.

This year, I have opted to bring my 9th and 10th grade volunteers to FMC. With the nursery and library in need of a paint job and a good cleaning, I saw this as an opportunity to introduce suburban high school students to a peace church.

Over lunch, I hope to have some of FMC youth join the WBL students to reflect on the life and mission of Dr King by sharing what it means to be a member of a peace church. After lunch, they will paint and clean the nursery and the library. This is a great opportunity for FMC youth to reflect on what it means to be a member at FMC, but also for both groups to connect with students from other parts of the metro area.

We are in need of a meal that day at lunch. If anyone would like to contribute to the lunch (and certainly join

us for the meal!), please e-mail or call me. I will have a better idea as to how many students we will be feeding and any special dietary needs by the end of the week prior (Friday, January 16th).

--Andy Martinson

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Kentucky Holy Land

Because northern Kentucky, near the Indiana border, has long been home to a variety of religious communities—some since the early 1800's—this region is known as “Kentucky Holy Land.” This spring Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary will sponsor a pilgrimage to several of these places, with a focus on the distinctive spirituality of each of the communities.

The May 24-31 pilgrimage will include stops at:

- **Saint Meinrad Archabbey**, in southern Indiana, where we will stay in the beautiful new Benedictine guest house and join a Sunday afternoon walking pilgrimage to Monte Cassino Shrine.
- **Knobs Haven**, a retreat center hosted by the Sisters of Loretto, near Nerinx, Kentucky; we will also visit Cedars of Peace, a retreat center in the woods on the same grounds, which is hosted by Susan Classen, former Mennonite Central Committee worker in Central America;
- **Gethsesmani Abbey**, where we will participate in the Daily Office with Cistercian monks and hike in the forests and meadows of the monastic community;
- **Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill**, near Harrodsburg, Kentucky, where we will stay in the restored historic village and sleep in homes where the Shakers once lived; this stop includes a riverboat ride on the Kentucky River and a music festival at Shaker Village.

Leader of the pilgrimage is Marlene Kropf, AMBS Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation and Worship. She has previously co-led four Celtic Pilgrimages to the British Isles. Information about cost, registration, and more can be found at <http://ambs.edu/Kentucky>. Deadline for registration is February 10, 2009.

Warroad Eagle Scout Collects 470 Health Kits for MCC

Last spring a young man, Anthony Quinn, from Warroad, MN, contacted our church because he saw that we were a depository for relief items for Mennonite Central Committee. He explained that he had chosen to assemble health kits for MCC for his Eagle Scout project. He planned to contact the five churches in Warroad to ask for donations and then to enlist his scout troop to assemble the kits. He hoped to collect and assemble at least 400, a goal that he surpassed when his scout master delivered 470 kits to the church on a snowy December 2 evening. Anthony is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints. He learned of MCC when his church had done a similar project a year ago.

A week after the relief kits were delivered the church received a call from a Red Wing family who wanted to deliver 8-10 bags of soap. Each year their extended family takes on a Thanksgiving project and this year they collected soap for MCC. Tom Johnson transported all of the soap and part of the health kits when he drove to Goshen to bring Tony, Haven, and John home. His van no doubt smelled like Irish Spring! Thanks to Tom and to Bruce Brunner and Donna Minter, who transported the remaining kits when they traveled to Goshen at Christmas.

--Joetta Schlabach

Deadline for January newsletter items is noon, Thursday, January 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.