

Faith Connection

July 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...

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We would like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet, it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time. Above all, trust in the slow work of God, our loving vine-dresser."--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, French philosopher, priest, paleontologist and geologist

When my husband Gerald and I were on our vacation in June, we spent part of a day canoeing on the Buffalo River in northwestern Arkansas, which runs along limestone cliffs carved out by water over thousands of years. Today they provide instant beauty and it's hard to imagine a time when they didn't stand in their current towering form. Paleontologists and geologists tell us that our earth is very old and that we humans have come on the scene very late. Spending time in nature helps us remember this fact and keep the urgency of our lives in perspective.

Spending two weeks in nature was probably a very good way to prepare to attend the annual meeting of Central Plains Mennonite Conference, held in Moline, Illinois, from June 16 to 19. We had had a chance to live by a more relaxed rhythm, going to bed when darkness settled and awaking to bird songs instead of an alarm clock. We also spent two nights and a day at an Abbey in southern Missouri where the monks follow a daily pattern of prayer and work. We chanted Psalms before breakfast, before lunch and after dinner.

The setting of annual meeting, in a Ramada Inn where we slept, met and ate, was a sharp contrast to the natural surroundings of our vacation. Nevertheless, the conference proceedings, organized around the theme, "Guided by the Spirit: Brought to Complete Unity," provided various glimpses of the work of God, some slow and some not so slow.

- The conference was hosted by the Spanish-speaking churches of southeast Iowa and Moline, Illinois. While one of these congregations has existed for over 40 years, most are newer churches. Ramiro Hernandez, who is contracted by CPMC to provide consultation to developing Hispanic ministries, also heads the Instituto Bíblico Anabaptista (Anabaptist Bible Institute), which offers training in Spanish to potential church leaders. We heard of new believers enthusiastically wanting to begin studying.
- A delegation from the Mennonite churches of Ecuador and Colombia were present since CPMC has an ongoing partnership with these churches. The commitment and vibrancy of this delegation and the testimony of their work serving Colombian refugees in Ecuador and offering peace workshops for children were inspiring.
- The leadership transition in the conference appears to be going well. The new Executive Conference Minister, David Boshart, brings energy and vision, and a restructuring of staff positions and conference structure is proceeding smoothly. Because the amount of conference minister staff time for resourcing individual pastors and congregations has been reduced, volunteer networks are being formed to carry out some of these responsibilities. Volunteers are being trained to aid churches with pastoral searches, pastor-congregation evaluations, and pastor misconduct or church conflict. Hermann Weinlick from FMC has agreed to be a volunteer for pastor-congregation evaluations.
- Last year at the 2010 annual meeting, an attempt to adopt a Unity Proposal, including the reinstatement of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship as a voting member, was unsuccessful. Work on this need continued, however. At the close of the 2010 annual meeting, conference

moderator Diane Zaerr Brenneman challenged congregations to visit and get to know one another. Many people at this year's meeting shared stories of new relationships that were formed as a result. Conference leaders also prepared a paper on a biblical understanding of unity, responding to confusion for some on what it means to live in unity. A copy of the paper is at centralplains.mennonite.net/Calendar_and_Events/Unity_Conference_2011. Congregations were invited to discuss that paper at a consultation in March and participants at annual meeting spent time, in table groups, discussing concrete ways that congregations and the conference can nurture and maintain unity. (Our guest speaker, Juanita Nuñez reminded us that unity is not something we create: it is a gift of God; we are its caretaker.) Despite this movement, St. Paul Fellowship notified the conference that it is seeking membership in another MCUSA regional conference, Central District, a discernment process that will take a year. Reactions to this news were no doubt mixed, but the most common reaction that I heard was that of pain and sadness that reconciliation was not achieved.

- Conference delegates enthusiastically voted to accept a new parachurch ministry, Peace for the City, as a “partner in mission.” This is a category that the conference adopted several years ago to form relationships with organizations that are not congregations. Peace for the City is being developed by Michael and Molly Lillie in Minneapolis as a ministry of reconciliation and healing for persons who have been incarcerated and/or face challenges with chemical dependency. Michael participated in the recent Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resiliency (STAR) workshop, organized by Donna Minter, as further training for his ministry.

Our relationship with other churches in our regional conference have sometimes caused pain, but sticking together and seeking unity is part of the task of trusting in the slow work of God. As Aryn Baxter shared in her reflections on annual meeting last Sunday (June 26), talking together around tables across lines of age, geography, and theological understanding is a powerful witness to the Spirit of God.

--Joetta Schlabach

Outreach ministry update...

Welcome, Khadija and Suleiman!

On Friday afternoon, June 17th, Khadija and Suleiman Ehda landed at the Twin Cities airport and entered the life of this congregation. One week earlier, Kristin Zoellner from Refugee Services called and told us that there was finally a family for us to welcome—and that they would be arriving in one week!

Fortunately, Cynthia Miller and Jenny Wandersee had gathered most of the necessary furniture and supplies last fall. Dan Leisen was ready to coordinate picking up and hauling stuff to the apartment, Bruce Brunner loaned his truck and muscle on two different evenings and Karen Wiebe quickly began lining up transportation for their first week of appointments. Casey Englund made a traditional Somali meal before she left town, which were served to Khadija and Suleiman when they arrived at their apartment, tired and hungry from their travels.

Khadija and Suleiman—who are brother and sister—left Somalia as children and have spent the last twenty years living in a refugee camp in Kenya. They are the first of 9-11 family members who will arrive over the coming months and years, so it's important that they get well established here in the Twin Cities so that they can welcome the others. Because they grew up in Kenya, they speak more Swahili than Somali. Swahili-speakers Aryn Baxter and Tyler Zabriskie have been able to talk with them and explain things like how to run the laundry machines and how to read a bus map.

Special thanks go to the refugee hosting team, especially: Cynthia Miller, Jenny Wandersee, Andi Kuenning and Dan Liesen, Karen Wiebe, Casey Englund, Shawn Helmuke, Sandy Westby, Joan Wing, Shelly and Matthew Hendricks and Hermann Weinlick, along with Ella Remund Wiger and Diane Light (non-Faith Mennonite members who stepped forward to help) and many others who have donated time and materials to this effort.

In the weeks to come, we will be lining up ESL classes for them, transporting them to free stores and employment orientations, and walking them through getting on and off the bus along Lake Street. Khadija, especially, needs support because she speaks no English and is pretty overwhelmed by this new situation. We'll also want to share meals with them when possible, and invite them to join in some of our gatherings. Stay tuned!

--Kathleen Remund

What's happening at FMC...

July Worship Highlights

We will continue our summer worship theme “Taste and See: God is Good” during the month of July, with the following schedule:

July 3: The Passover

July 10: Manna, bread from heaven

July 17: Report on the Pittsburgh Convention

July 24: The Land of Milk and Honey

July 31: Technology, God’s Creation and Preserving the Sacredness of life in the 21st Century.

We will have guest speakers on two Sundays. On July 10, Wayne and Lois Hochstetler (parents of Melissa) who serve with Mennonite Mission Network will preach and give an update of their work. FMC provides financial support for their ministry. On July 31, Peter and Meg Lumsdaine of northeast Washington State will preach. Peter and Meg will be in town for the 9th annual Jesus Radicals conference (see related article).

On July 10 we will have a second hour of intergenerational activities on the day’s theme. On July 31 we will have a picnic following worship to allow for additional conversation with the Lumsdaines, who have been involved in peacemaking work in Iraq and Mexico.

Reflections on Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Thanks for this invitation to share a few reflections on my experience as a delegate at the Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual Meeting, and for the support that you provided for Leslie and I to travel to Moline. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent Faith Mennonite Church, and also to learn in a more in-depth way about how the broader Mennonite Church strives to unite congregations in our region in shared faithfulness and mission through its organizational structures.

This experience was particularly insightful for me having NOT grown up in a Mennonite congregation. Growing up in rural upstate New York, I attended a small, independent Baptist church. To my knowledge (although I can’t say I paid considerable attention to such things at the time) we had few relationships with other congregations or denominational bodies – Baptist or otherwise. Although there were several other congregations in town, and even other Baptist churches nearby, I don’t have many memories of efforts to foster an ecumenical spirit. Neither do I have memories of

there being opportunities for youth to observe and participate in church leadership, which I was impressed to see at the Annual Meeting. Since I began attending Faith Mennonite Church in 2005, I have gradually been learning how our church functions as a community, within the broader denomination of Mennonite churches. I have been attentive to the differences, and particularly the ways in which I see core values reflected in church processes and relationships.

Overall, I have been encouraged by what I have observed. Without, I hope, giving the impression of glossing over the challenges of maintaining relationships across a broad spectrum of congregations, or the room for improvement that exists within any organization, I’d like to share a few reflections of some of the observations that I have found particularly encouraging.

One of the early things that stood out to me about Faith Mennonite Church as a new attendee was the space that exists for ALL members of the congregation to participate in various aspects of church life. Admittedly, I was even a little intimidated by the speed at which I was given a mailbox with my name and encouraged to share my gifts in different ways. Every time I have agreed to participate in different ways, I have been rewarded with enriched relationships and impactful learning experiences. Several years ago I spent a couple of months working in the church office as an administrative assistant, and during that time in particular I was struck by the number of people who passed through the church during the week because they were involved in so many different ways. I think this adds to our vibrancy.

I saw this value of community participation and non-hierarchical leadership reflected in the practice of including delegates from all congregations in discernment and decision-making processes. The most exciting aspect of the conference was certainly not the delegate sessions where we reviewed minutes, financial details, and voted on various changes within the Conference organization, but I was nevertheless impressed with this aspect of inclusion.

The thing that really stood out to me and overall has impressed me with what I have observed within the Conference is the recent focus on unity. I realize that this focus has come about in response to decisions and conversations that have challenged unity, and that tensions continue to exist. However, the response of the conference to make their annual theme “hosting unity,” and to encourage discernment among congregations I see as having contributed in positive ways to trust-

building, learning, and creating spaces for the spirit to move and draw people and congregations toward faithfulness.

This has been a particularly meaningful thing to observe, having witnessed some of the discouraging outcomes of disunity and broken relationships in prior church experiences, as I imagine many of you can relate to. Unity, whether it is in family or church community relationships, is incredibly difficult maintain, particularly across generational and geographical space. The Conference has chosen to take on the challenge of unity, and the focus on the prayer in John 17 when Jesus prays for all believers to be one was for me a powerful reminder of the significance of practicing unity.

One final aspect of Conference that encouraged me was the different ways I saw the leadership encouraging relationship. It was beautiful to hear people at my round table share stories of their visits to different congregations in response to the challenge given last year to intentionally interact with other congregations in the conference. It was also beautiful to hear stories of an older Iowan farmer teaching English to immigrants who hold other faith commitments, and stories of the ways in which different congregations are challenging their congregations and communities to become more welcoming and compassionate in their response to immigrants in our country.

We spent time brainstorming together how our congregations can actively practice unity and shared mission. These were rich conversations, emphasizing the importance of spending time together story telling, engaging questions, and serving.

I spent more time in Illinois getting to know others from the Mennonite congregations here in the Twin Cities – Emmanuel, Missio Dei – than I have during my years in the Twin Cities, and was reminded of how important it is both belong to a community, and to interact with and learn from others.

As a closing thought, the conference left me reflecting on what a powerful witness unity can be. The phenomenon of many faithful people from non-Mennonite backgrounds - such as Missio Dei, Third Way, and Peace in the City - being drawn to the Mennonite church because of the way in which the life and teachings of Jesus are understood and practiced is a beautiful example of the powerful testimony that communities organized around shared values and mission can be. I hope that these thoughts will

encourage you to further reflection on how we, as a church within the Central Plains Conference, participate in the testimony of unity.

--Aryn Baxter

[Aryn shared these reflections during the July 26th worship at FMC.—ed.]

FMC Monthly Budget Summary

	March	April	May
Total expenses	\$15,371	\$16,474	\$17,763
Total income	\$23,122	\$19,902	\$18,306
Monthly budget	\$14,850	\$14,850	\$14,850

STAR Conference a Success

It is with great pleasure and moderate exhaustion that I share with you that last week’s STAR workshop in Minneapolis was an incredible experience for all! Our amazing group of 18 included 33% persons of color from the African, Native American, African American, and Latina communities, and someone from the LGBT community and a recent European immigrant were among us. Several participants described STAR’s rich and rewarding experience as a “lifesaving” educational opportunity. They shared that the experience provided new insights, direction, and practical strategies about how to walk an intentional path toward healing from difficulties of life and discover ways of interacting with others to live better and more peacefully in our world together.

The STAR mission is to strengthen the capacity of caregivers, leaders, and organizations to address trauma, break cycles of violence, and build resilience. It was developed after 9/11 as a joint venture of Church World Service and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) at Eastern Mennonite University. STAR integrates concepts from neurobiology, psychology, restorative justice, conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and broadly defined spirituality that can lead to healing, resilience resourcing, and the potential for personal, family, and community and larger collective reconciliation. STAR takes Anabaptist values and practice “to the streets” and gives those not familiar with the concepts of restorative justice, nonviolent peacebuilding, and conflict transformation

common sense strategies to make positive changes in their lives, their families, and their communities. STAR-Minneapolis provides the hosting and fundraising organizational structure for CJP's STAR workshops and is committed to providing scholarship assistance to ensure economic and cultural diversity at each workshop.

I offer deep gratitude to the many individuals and families at Faith Mennonite Church (FMC) and in the greater Twin Cities community who have offered STAR-Minneapolis their interpersonal and financial support and guidance as it moves from being launched and off the ground to becoming established as a sustained nonprofit organization in its own right. FMC has served as STAR-Minneapolis' fiscal agent for the past year and this "incubation period" relationship will likely continue for at least the next six months as I discern with the STAR Advisory Committee the next indicated steps for STAR in Minneapolis. I believe in God's rich abundance, and I trust that some at FMC will engage our wider community in this grassroots effort by attending and/or sponsoring someone else to attend the STAR workshop September 12-16, 2011 (www.starmpls2.eventbrite.com). If you want to live deeper and with more intention as a Mennonite or other peacemaker, you do not want to miss the STAR experience. For more information, please contact me at STAR.Mpls@gmail.com or call 612-377-4660.

--- toward healing and wholeness for all, Donna Minter



If you or a family member has a birthday in June, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on July 16. (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.

July
Birthday
Brunch

Saturday,
July 16
10:00-11:30
a.m.

What's happening here and there...

Missio Dei Co-Hosts 9th Annual Jesus Radicals Conference, July 29-30

"Beyond a Brave New World: Anarchism and Christianity for the Coming Age" is the title of a conference that will be held at Faith Mennonite Church on July 29 and 30 (Missio Dei is a co-host of the conference and has reserved the use of our space). The conference theme is loosely inspired by themes from Aldous Huxley's work, *Brave New World* and will be organized into three core areas, including:

1. Understanding the emerging technologies and forms of social control that will affect our futures.
2. Identifying the practices and social structures that condition us so that we are either unwilling or unable to resist these forces of oppression (or, to reference Huxley, naming our "somas").
3. Exploring concrete ways we can live as anarchists and radical followers of Jesus in this unfolding reality.

More information about the conference can be found at: <http://www.jesusradicals.com/conference/>.

Pedal For Peace Minneapolis July 23

Pedal for Peace Saturday July 23, 2011 at Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis to support Nonviolent Peaceforce with a bike ride, live music, speakers and lunch in the park! The ride starts at the bandstand at Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis. You can ride 8, 20 or 40 miles.

Please ask family and friends to support your efforts by making a donation. Please try to collect \$150 in donations. This is not a minimum—just do what you can. Can't ride and just want to make a donation? Go to www.razoo.com/team/Pedalforpeace and make a donation to one of our riders! For more information go to www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/pedalforpeace

The deadline for August newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, July 27th.

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.