

Faith Connection

July 2013

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...

*Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence? - Psalm 139:7*

On Wednesday, June 19, five of us from FMC piled into a car and began a pilgrimage to southeastern Montana for the annual meeting of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. We had no intentions of fleeing from God's presence, but I'm not sure any of us fully anticipated how profound our experience of God's presence would be as we traveled across the plains of South Dakota, through a corner of Wyoming and into Montana and back, and as we participated in the various aspects of annual meeting (see separate article, page 3).

The entire I-90 corridor that we traveled has received ample rainfall this spring/summer so the scenery was lush and verdant. As city dwellers who are generally surrounded by houses and highways (along with our lovely lakes and parks), we were swept away by the beauty of the miles of open, uninhabited land, and of rock and cloud formations.

The daily morning worship services at annual meeting featured Dr. Terry LeBlanc, a Mi'kmaq/ Acadian from New Brunswick who studied theology at a Mennonite Brethren seminary in Manitoba. He now directs two organizations: My People International, a holistic, training-focused ministry program with and for Native North Americans, and the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies. Dr. LeBlanc introduced us to a native worldview, which assumes the presence of God's spirit in all things. He reminded us that God was present among the aboriginal communities in the US and Canada before European explorers and settlers arrived. He critiqued the notion, of some early Christian missionaries, that they were meeting "Godless, sinful creatures" as they first encountered the native population. "If there is nowhere we can flee from God's presence," he said, "then that presence was most surely here from the beginning."

The existence of the Northern Cheyenne reservation today is a testament to the presence of God empowering a remnant of the tribe, which had been forcibly relocated to Oklahoma in 1876, to break free and return two years later. They returned on foot, in winter, against all odds and the resistance of the US army. Today the reservation continues to battle poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, and domestic violence as a result of the generational trauma from measures by the US government to strip away native culture—their language, spiritual practices, and nomadic lifestyle.

Two women shared stories of how God's presence in their lives, through Jesus, has brought them healing from alcoholism and abuse. One woman, whose life was crippled by alcohol, experienced a miraculous healing while she was in Paraguay for Mennonite World conference in 2009. Since that time she has remained sober and a vibrant participant in one of the three Cheyenne Mennonite churches. The other, who grew up in a violent home, later escaped the violence of a succession of abusive relationships by moving with her four children to Seattle. When her children were grown she decided to return to the reservation as a way to be present with young women who face similar situations. She has become the manager of a new thrift store, All Things Beautiful, that opened this past year as a joint project of the churches on the reservation. Many people who wouldn't venture near a church come to the store. There Suzette listens to their stories and offers compassion and hope.

I was moved by the stories of these two women and by the power of the presence of Christ in their lives. I am moved by the presence of God in the more-than-100-year history of the Mennonite Church on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. There is no where we can flee from God's spirit.

--Joetta Schlabach

Ministry staff report...

Four special FMC-related events are coming up in July. On Sunday, July 28, there will be a short service to celebrate the “covenant” that FMC and several other Central Plains congregations are entering into to support the new pastor, Adam Nussbaum, at Shalom Mennonite Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. (See letter of thanks from Shalom later in the newsletter.) Herman Weinlick will be representing us in this ongoing relationship with Shalom, which will include periodic conference calls among covenant participants and visits/pulpit exchanges with Shalom. The July 28 event is scheduled to take place at 2:00 p.m. at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 725 E. 25th St., Minneapolis.

On July 14, we will be having a special concert at Faith. The Summer Singers, a community choir directed by Adrian Russell of Emmanuel Mennonite, has been rehearsing this summer at our church. One of their programs coming up in July will be a free concert for families/children which is scheduled to take place on Sunday, July 14, at 3:00 p.m. in the FMC sanctuary. Adrian writes: “We plan to make a special publicity campaign for the family concert and will provide posters that could be spread around your community. This is something new for our choir and they are very excited about promoting it. My hope is that your church will be packed for the event!” See you there! Additional concerts will be coming up July 21, 25, and 28.

On July 7, Richard Westby and I have volunteered FMC to lead the monthly Interfaith Coalition on Immigration vigil that takes place outside of Ramsey County Detention Center. The focus is on support for detainees who are presently being held on immigration charges, and on being aware of current legislative efforts related to immigration. We could use some FMC volunteers to help with readings and singing—contact Phil at minstaff@faithmennonite.org. And please come to the vigil, Sunday, July 7, 2:30-3:00 p.m., at Ramsey County Adult Detention Center, 425 Grove Street, St. Paul.

Candace and I are working on a visit to the Twin Cities of the international coordinator of International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Francesco Candelari. The event will be Tuesday, July 2, at 7 p.m. at Dave Gagne's house, 3517 E. 26th St., Minneapolis. RSVP to Dave at 612-325-8860 or dgagne52@earthlink.net. FMC Missions and Service Commission is supporting the work of Fellowship of Reconciliation out of our 2013 Partner and Community fund.

One other thing—last Thursday we welcomed to our building a youth group from Faith Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas. They stayed in our church building overnight on their way up to a Wilderness Wind canoe trip.

--Phil Stoltzfus

What's happening at FMC...

Mennonites Gather in Phoenix

From July 1-6 the biennial gathering of Mennonite Church USA will take place in Phoenix, Arizona. Katie Hochstedler and Donna Minter will attend as delegates from Faith Mennonite Church. The theme of the convention is "Citizens of God's Kingdom: Healed in Hope," and the event will include numerous opportunities for learning and witness about the theme of immigration and the need for immigration reform in the US.

The decision to locate the convention in Phoenix has been controversial, due to anti-immigrant legislation passed in Arizona several years ago. The Hispanic Mennonite Church voted to boycott, and other churches and individuals have taken the same action in solidarity with them. Consequently, registration for this convention is considerably lower than at previous conventions. Incoming moderator, Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, has chosen to not arrive at the convention until the final day, when she will be commissioned as the new moderator and address the convention on the final evening. She has been spending the month leading up to convention, traveling across the US, visiting Hispanic and other Mennonite communities and gathering stories as a way of getting to know the church she will serve. She is blogging about her travels at: journeywithelizabeth.com.

Persons can hear her address and follow others aspects of the convention live by using the link that is available on the convention website: convention.mennoniteusa.org/.

You can also find the two resolutions that will be voted upon.

Katie Hochstedler has been active in helping plan a series of events organized by Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests and Pink Menno that will be offered throughout the week. A schedule of these events can be found at: www.pinkmenno.org/events/. Katie and Donna will give a report on convention during worship on July 7.

Central Plains Conference in Montana

Since I first began attending the annual meetings of Central Plains Mennonite Conference in 2005, I have always been impressed by the delegation that travels each year from the far western edge of our conference—the Northern Cheyenne churches of southeastern Montana. Some 17 hours of driving separate the western and eastern edges of our conference, but distance has never been a deterrent to the Montana delegation. They typically would arrive in a large van, a mix of elders and youth, guided by Willis Busenitz, who with his wife Nadine, moved to the reservation from Kansas in 1966 and have remained in ministry there ever since.

It was a moving moment at the close of the 2012 annual meeting in Henderson, Nebraska when Willis and lay pastor Joe Walks Along, Jr. extended the invitation for the 2013 annual meeting to be hosted by the Montana churches. Hosting an annual meeting of some 250 people is a large undertaking and the three small Cheyenne churches bravely rose to the occasion. The rest of the conference reciprocated; attendance was as strong as usual.

The setting for the 2013 annual meeting was the campus of St. Labre Catholic School, located just outside the eastern boundary of the reservation in Ashland. The school offers commuting and residential education for pre-school through high school. Many of us stayed in the lovely, newly constructed dormitory on campus. Other lodging options were camping, one local motel, and motels 40 and 60 miles away. Most of our sessions took place in the gym and auditorium of the Soaring Eagle Center.

The planning committee took the liberty to reconfigure the usual organization of annual meeting. Business sessions were shortened (no protests ensued!) and workshops were eliminated to allow time for two full-afternoon learning tours. On Friday and Saturday afternoons half of the participants (including children) loaded two coach buses that traveled to Little Bighorn Battlefield, a sacred, commemorative site that recalls the battle where a combined gathering of several Indian tribes defeated General Custer and the US cavalry in June 1876. The rest of the group boarded two school buses and traveled to the Deer Medicine Rocks. This is a sacred site where a petroglyph preserves the vision that Chief Sitting Bull received of the fall of Custer and his army.

Both tours included stops at the three Mennonite Churches on the reservation, each in a separate community, and a recently opened thrift store. Each bus

had a local person on board to share history, answer questions, and point out things of interest. One of our guides, Erica Littlewolf, is a direct descendent of Chiefs Dull Knife and Little Wolf, who signed the Treaty of Laramie in 1868 and later led a remnant of Cheyenne from Oklahoma to Montana in 1878. She currently works with Mennonite Central Committee-Central States as coordinator of the Indigenous Vision Center.

Each day began with a worship service that opened and closed with Cheyenne songs. In between we sang four-part hymns and listened to the engaging teaching of Dr. Terry LeBlanc (see *Musings* article for biographical information). Dr LeBlanc combined a native world view, theological and biblical understanding, and humor that both challenged and inspired. Some of the gifts of native culture for our understanding of God, he said, include:

- awareness of the deep interconnections of the spiritual and physical world,
- a focus on our essence/being, rather than behavior, as the center of spirituality,
- a view that the past, rather than the future, lies before us since this is all we can see and know,
- respect for all people and cultures—there is no one, right way to follow Jesus, and
- faith as a journey, not a destination.

Two of Dr. LeBlanc's presentations will be posted on the Central Plains Conference website. Photos of the meeting are also posted there: www.centralplainsmc.org/annual-meeting-2013.html. Our church library recently purchased two books on the history of the Cheyenne people.

On Friday evening we enjoyed a mini Powwow, with costumed dancers of all ages, accompanied by a drumming and singing circle of men. At the close of the evening the dancers invited all of the guests to take the floor, and, miraculously, nearly everyone present did so. At worship the next morning, the worship leader suggested that the offering might be designated for dancing lessons!

Saturday evening featured personal stories from two Cheyenne women who have found healing from addiction and abuse (see "Musings," p. 1), followed by a panel discussion and question-answer time.

Kathleen Harder, Joetta Schlabach, Donna Stucky, and Kristi Zabriskie were the FMC delegates at the annual meeting. Sophia Harder Kouay participated in the youth activities. We look forward to sharing from our experience during worship on July 7 and welcome questions you may have. This was a profound

experience for each of us and we value the congregation's support of our travel and participation.

-- *Joetta Schlabach*

Save the Date

All Church Fall Retreat, October 4-7
Camp St. Croix, Hudson, Wisconsin



Watch for details in subsequent newsletters.

Encore! Sings In Praise Of Creation

"God's Good Creation" provided the theme and focus for Sunday worship on June 23. The sermon was provided by ENCORE!, a small, auditioned group of Twin Cities Women's Choir (TCWC) members described as a diverse women's choir that sings, performs and affirms the voices of women. Their rendition of "What a Wonderful World" provided a poignant focus for the worship theme.

When ENCORE! director Randi Rexroth, called me at home before 9 a.m. to ask how they could get into the church to warm up, I scrambled to get there ASAP, and found them singing on the steps in front of the church, evidence of their versatility, flexibility and sense of humor.

Their program provided a wonderful opportunity to enjoy and celebrate the beauty of music. Randi also named the local composers who composed or arranged several of the pieces, a reminder of the wealth of creativity in our larger community. The congregation, although small in number, interacted with the choir through applause, clapping and singing along with one or two songs.

Their program ended with the invitational, "The Road Home" by Stephen Paulus:

*Rise up, follow me,
Come away, is the call,
With the love in your heart
As the only song;
There is no such beauty
As where you belong;
Rise up, follow me,
I will lead you home.*

Several of the choir members expressed appreciation for FMC's worship experience and felt that the congregation had responded well to their music. I deem it a success because Randi suggested that I buy Encore! at the auction again next year. That requires an explanation, of course! Darrell Martin and Cynthia Miller invited Cleta and me to the TCWC fund raiser, *Divas and Desserts*, in March. In an impulsive act, I bid on live auction for a 30-minute performance by Encore! to be scheduled in June. When Plan A for their performance didn't materialize, a conversation with Joetta led to Plan B, an invitation for the group to sing in FMC worship. Anyone want to bid for a repeat performance next year?

-- *Orv Gingerich*

January-May Financial Statement

Income	Year to Date
Offerings	\$52,172
Rent	13,505
Investments	1,908
Total Income	\$67,585
Expenses	
Conference support	\$3,500
Deacons	2,489
Education	3,093
FICA	788
Fellowship	1,686
Missions and Service	599
Office	2,594
Pastor/Ministry Staff	34,754
Trustees/bldg expenses	19,020
Worship	390
Mortgage	2,471
Total Expenses	\$71,384
Income minus expenses	(-\$3,799)
YTD budgeted offerings	\$59,375
Actual offerings	\$52,172
Shortfall	(-\$7,203)

Comings and Goings...

Welcome to **Maggie Page**, who is our summer coordinator of children's activities during worship. If you haven't yet had a chance to meet her, please say hello!

During our worship service on Sunday, July 14, we will have a time of appreciation and blessing for **Orv** and **Cleta Roth Gingerich** and for **Annette, Chris, Sam,**

and **Maggie Semanchin-Jones**, who will be moving away this summer. Both families have been active participants for over a decade and have contributed much to our faith community. We will miss them dearly, but we also celebrate the new opportunities they have for serving in other locations: Orv and Clea will be volunteer directors of the International Mennonite Guest House in Washington, DC for a year and the Semanchin-Jones family will settle in Buffalo, New York, Annette's hometown, where she will begin a teaching position at the University at Buffalo (SUNY). We will share a potluck meal following the service for an extended time of sharing with them.

We have received notice from **Meagan O'Brien** that she will conclude her time of service as our nursery staff person on August 11 (her final Sunday). Meagan completed her degree in education at the University of Minnesota this spring and will begin a full-time teaching position this fall. We will plan a time of appreciation for her six years of service and the Worship and Education commissions are determining next steps for staffing our nursery on Sunday mornings.



If you or a family member has a birthday in July, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on July 20th. (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 20th
9:30-11
a.m.*

What's happening here and there...

Courageous Conversations for Nice Minnesotans

Surfacing difficult topics can be a challenge. And it's especially hard when you know doing so will result in strong feelings or reactions. Whether you're at home, at work, in a family business or a part of a religious community, knowing how to speak in a constructive manner is essential. If you feel like your approach is too

"nice" and you wish there was a way to be honest and direct with communication, then you've come to the right place.

"Courageous Conversations for Nice Minnesotans" led by Tom Esch and Melissa DeLay, is based on personal awareness, and develops interpersonal skills and having an understanding of how situational power impacts conflict. We'll show you the precise tools you need to address difficult topics and maintain favorable relationships. You'll learn how to work with the inner and outer conflicts that make certain topics almost impossible to discuss and how precisely to address any controversial topic with power and ease, including marriage, abortion, gun legislation, the statute of limitations on child abuse and more.

Cost: \$15/individual or non-profit, or \$25/business or corporate for each event. Pre-registration is required. The next "Courageous Conversation" event will be held Saturday, August 10th from 9-11 am. Registration info will be out in a few weeks. See more about Tom at www.creatingresolution.com and Melissa at: www.truperception.com.

Thank you, thank you...

We'd like to thank you for all your contribution donations to our little feast. We [collected] a generous [sum of about] \$1680. We thank you all. With help from everyone we have funded enough money to make our trip possible. Thirteen congregation members will be attending this trip. Thank you again brothers and sisters,

--Hmong Mennonite Church of St Paul

We thank you for the generous financial support you have given our congregation. We are so excited to have called our first pastor, Adam Nussbaum, after meeting for many years. We trust in God's plans for our small congregation and are thankful for the opportunity to be a witness to the message of Jesus and the Anabaptist tradition.

--With gratitude, on behalf of Shalom Mennonite Church (Eau Claire, Wisconsin), Meg Nord

The deadline for August newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, July 31st.

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.