

Faith Connection

July 2016

Monthly Newsletter of Faith Mennonite Church
2720 E. 22nd St. Minneapolis, MN 55406
Ph: (612) 375-9483
e-mail: faithmc@faithmennonite.org
web: www.faithmennonite.org

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...

In mid-June Marcia and I gathered up our three children for the long drive south to Des Moines, Iowa for the Annual Meeting of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. While I have had a fair bit of contact with other ministers and conference leadership over the past year, this was my first time attending an annual conference meeting. I enjoyed getting to know some of the delegates and pastors from the different churches in our conference, especially the delegates that sat at my table. As someone who is not a “cradle” Mennonite, I came to the meeting with a good deal of trepidation, but I was warmly welcomed and it didn't take long for me to feel at home.

The conference theme this year was “Joyfully Following Jesus: Sharing God's Love.” One of the highlights for me was listening to the compelling sermons of Pastor Leonard Dow of Oxford Mennonite Circle in Philadelphia. Vibrant and captivating, Pastor Leonard's preaching combined Anabaptist theology with the black church tradition. I left his sermons feeling rejuvenated and challenged. To my surprise, he managed to draw quite a few “Amen!” out of a crowd of mostly soft-spoken rural white folks who I can only assume were unaccustomed to the exuberance of the black preaching tradition.

While the agendas at each of the delegate sessions were business driven, time was always taken for prayer together, round-table conversation, and hymn-singing. The conference budget conversations were at times anxiety-ridden as two major financially supporting congregations have recently left the conference out of fears about where the conference and the denomination appears to be heading in its discernment over the welcoming of LGBTQ people in our church. Before the conference leadership presented the proposed covenant for a vote, the delegates from FMC huddled together for lunch to discuss many of the concerns about the document raised by the Church Council earlier in the

month. While the delegates from FMC ultimately voted against the approved covenant, we had a chance to voice our minority position and to share some of our central concerns about key flaws in the document. In my sermon on Sunday, June 26 I shared some of critical reflections about the way power tends to rear its ugly head in Mennonite discernment processes. But, overall, I honestly left feeling encouraged by the response of conference leadership to our concerns and criticisms. My sense is that conference leadership may be as open as ever to hearing from the voices of our congregation and even learning from our experiences as a welcoming and affirming church.

One way I think our congregation can contribute concretely to the life of the conference is by submitting proposals to lead conference workshops. Donna Minter has already been touch with Conference Minister David Boshart about leading a workshop in the coming years. While I was unable to attend the Palestinian Christian Alex Awad's workshop, “The Challenge of Christian Zionism,” I heard nothing but positive words from the delegates that did attend. A particular highlight for me and others was the chance to participate in the interactive workshop, “The Loss of Turtle Island,” led by Erica Littlewolf and Karin Kaufman Wall of Mennonite Central Committee. Overall I was pleased with the workshop offerings, but I also sensed a strong need for our folks from our congregation to step forward to offer more challenging and substantive workshops that would bring together Anabaptist theology and social justice education.

Along with so many conferences in Mennonite Church USA, our conference has witnessed the departure of conservative churches and with that has come sadness, anxiety, and serious financial burdens. I feel privileged to be a part of a church that has stayed with the conference even while it has prophetically departed from the *Confession* when it has been deemed necessary. I am confident that voices from our congregation will increasingly be allowed a more

prominent role in helping to shape the future of CPMC and even our denomination. This excites me. We may always be a somewhat marginal voice, but we nonetheless remain a *very* important voice for life of our conference.

-- Ry Siggelkow

What's happening at FMC...

Summer Worship at FMC

The past few summers we have had a worship theme based on stories from the Bible or a topic such as peace. This summer we are mixing things up a bit. In June our preachers focused on the lectionary texts from Galatians, one of the letters written by the Apostle Paul. From July 3 through August 7, we will have six Sundays when regular participants in our congregation share their faith stories. The final three Sundays in August will focus on the Lord's Prayer. On September 4, Labor Day weekend, we will have another music Sunday.

As always, the Worship Commission welcomes feedback about things that have been particularly meaningful in worship. And if your summer travels take you to a worship experience in another setting, we'd be glad to learn from those experiences.

--The Worship Commission

FMC Sewing Group – July 23

Anyone who enjoys sewing (or being with people who sew!) is welcome to the July 23 meeting of the FMC sewing group. This group meets on an occasional basis to sew items for Mennonite Central Committee such as school kit bags and comforters. At our next meeting we will begin piecing lap quilts for Dan Gerber and Ruth Gerber, made from some of Terry Gerber's clothing. The group meets from 9:30-11:30 a.m. in the library. Bring a portable sewing machine and/or cutting instruments as you are able.

Central Plains Conference Annual Meeting Reflections

The 16th Annual Meeting of Central Plains Mennonite Conference was held June 16-19 in Des Moines, Iowa with the theme of "Joyfully Following Jesus: Sharing God's Love." Faith Mennonite Church was represented by four delegates: Donna Minter, Shirley Leckie Reed,

Ry Siggelkow, and Dick Westby. (Sophia Kouay had intended to be our youth delegate but had to cancel at the last minute.) Joetta Schlabach also attended a portion of the meeting. Following are reflections from our participants:

Shirley Leckie Reed: I greatly appreciate the opportunity to have served as a delegate to this year's Annual Meeting of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference. In our June meeting of the Church Council we had discussed the proposed Covenant of Spiritual Practices and Discernment Process that the meeting voted on. I felt some trepidation since Faith Mennonite Church has long been in discernment, and we know where we stand on important issues. At the Delegates' Meeting on Friday, June 17, the Covenant was discussed and passed overwhelmingly. Although the Faith delegates did not vote in favor of the Covenant Discernment Process, we left the Conference believing that its adoption will not negatively affect us. It represents a way of asking churches, which decide to leave their Conference over disagreements with other churches, to adopt this agreed-upon Discernment Process before leaving.

The two workshops, "The Loss of Turtle Island" and "The Challenge of Christian Zionism," which I attended, proved extremely informative and worthwhile. I commend the CPMC for offering them and hope that we might, as a congregation, have both workshops here if the facilitators of the first or Alex Awad, the presenter for the second, ever come to the Twin Cities.

Dick Westby: This was a typical Mennonite Conference where delegates heard reports of church business within the context of worship and inspiring sermons. This is an opportunity to communicate with district staff and lay-leadership and members from other congregations in order to build trust and confidence in each other. I sensed there was strong support for staff and the mission of the district. For one weekend each year it is good for people to worship, discuss, and eat together even when there are some disagreements.

The Hispanic churches and the Cheyenne churches had robust presence. The district leadership has worked hard to return Pastor Villatoro to the United States and to his family. The Cheyenne churches are building a new thrift store which will also be used by the community. Deep concern was offered for the economic crisis in Venezuela.

Two churches have withdrawn from the district over changes that are happening in Mennonite Church USA.

The budget was reduced and staff salaries will remain unchanged unless donations are increased by 5 percent during the coming year. At our annual meeting in February, FMC increased our conference giving by \$1,000. Some delegates are becoming more aware of how churches and people are changing and for the need to address this situation.

The Faith Mennonite delegates were active in the table discussions concerning the Covenant of Spiritual Practice and raised questions about the practical application. As Faith Mennonite Church works with other district churches and shows patience and a prophetic voice, we and all churches, will move closer to the life of Jesus.

Joetta Schlabach: I attended the meeting on Friday and Saturday, primarily as a way to promote the re-scheduled Ecuador Partnership Learning and Fellowship Trip which will be January 7-19, 2017. (Talk to me if you'd like to learn more!) As a non-delegate I was assigned to a table and able to take part in the delegate discussions although I did not vote. I personally found the table discussion satisfying as a diverse group of people, including two Latino men and several farmers, from Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska all shared opening and listened attentively to one another.

I have been attending CPMC annual meetings for over ten years now and it is rewarding to see persons who have become friends over this period of time. I was only present in one worship service, but I enjoyed the congregational singing and the preaching by Leonard Dow, pastor of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church and Community Development Association in Philadelphia. He emphasized that joyfully following Jesus often takes us to places of vulnerability and brokenness and that staying in the heat (as the Hebrew youth in Babylon did when they were thrown into the fiery furnace) is the way we emerge stronger.

FMC Participant Feature—Alison Reist

“Keep the water out,” says Alison Reist. This is her tip for homeowners, based on expertise gleaned from having worked on dozens of homes for Habitat for Humanity, and another home maintenance program in West Virginia.

Alison moved to the Twin Cities in the early summer of 2015. A sociology major at Goshen College, she spent three months working for the Mennonite Central

Committee's Sharing with Appalachian People (SWAP) program. Shortly after, she moved to Denver to work with the homeless population. Eventually, she caught the eye of Habitat for Humanity. She now works as a site supervisor with its “A Brush with Kindness” program, and is based here in the Twin Cities.

On any given day, Alison may be anywhere within the seven-county metro area. She works closely with homeowners, helping organize Habitat for Humanity volunteers, resources and equipment to repair and maintain homes for people in need.

Alison grew up just outside of South Bend, Indiana. She lived in the country on five acres and was involved in 4H. Steers and goats were the focus of her work. “It's ridiculous that small children lead 1200 pound animals by a leash” she muses. She says she was glad she was able to do it. She remembers a time when she was showing her animals at the fair. Thunderstorms rolled in, but the animals behaved. Although they were tied in beneath nothing more than pop-up tents, the animals made no move to stampede.

Alison has a special tie to Faith Mennonite Church. As students at Notre Dame, Joetta Schlabach and Alison's parents attended church together.

Alison rents space in a home in the southeast Como neighborhood. She claims she is a walker more than a biker, but likes to spend time outdoors. She likes puzzles, sewing, crochet and baking -- the sweeter, the better. She has an older sister in South Bend, and although Alison doesn't often get back to South Bend, a Notre Dame football game could sway her to return.

--Leah Otto

Update from Aryn Baxter

Aryn Baxter attended FMC for a number of years before moving to Arizona.

Dear Faith Mennonite church family, Greetings from Arizona! I enjoyed receiving a note recently and apologize for taking a few months to send an update. It's hard to believe I'm approaching my 3-year anniversary of moving to Arizona. The process of transplanting myself and taking root in this place has taken time, but I am finally beginning to feel like I've established some deep and meaningful connections here in the desert and come to peace with sticking around for a while. After all, there are so many friends from MN who haven't yet had a chance to visit. ☺

In June I will be moving to a new house that's closer to the Arizona State University campus where I work. I will also be traveling to Ghana in West Africa to launch a new partnership with two universities there. I am excited to begin this new chapter and embrace the joys and challenges that it will entail. In August I hope to visit Minneapolis.

Over the past year, I've enjoyed getting more involved with an Episcopal church here that has a lot of wonderful people who are deeply committed to similar core values and faith practices. This community has also helped me feel more grounded here.

When I think of how much learning, growth, and unanticipated blessings have filled the past three years of life, I am amazed and grateful. I'm especially thankful to remain connected and intertwined with the FMC root system. Thank you for continuing to remember your transplants!

--Peace, *Aryn*

Notes from Nigeria

Recently I did a search to find statistics regarding the challenges facing Nigeria. What I found paints a dismal picture for the country:

- The world's deadliest terrorist organization is Nigeria's homegrown Boko Haram. The *2015 Global Terrorism Index* identified that Boko Haram, the Nigerian jihadist group, was responsible for 6,644 deaths in 2014, compared with 6,073 at the hands of ISIS.
- Nigeria is home to the city (Onitsha) with the world's worst PM10 (annual mean concentrations of particulate matter) pollution level. Three other Nigerian cities are among the worst in the world for air pollution.
- President Buhari just published the details of recovered assets looted from the Federal Government of Nigeria. The numbers are astounding: cash recovery of US\$185 million, UK£3.5 million; plus cash and assets of US\$9 million, UK£2.4 million, EU€300 thousand. He is yet to provide the names of the government officials who did the looting.
- Over 100 million Nigerians (55% of the population) are living below the poverty line, as announced by Vice President Osinbajo.
- Jos and Plateau State, once known as "The Place of Peace and Tourism," has experienced more than fifteen outbreaks of communal violence since 1994. The cycles of violence

result from unresolved land issues and political tensions between Hausa-Fulani (mostly Muslim) and indigenous ethnic groups (mostly Christian). Political and religious elites use religion for a variety of purposes, and many of their purposes are not religious!

In addition to these five challenges we witness daily infrastructure failures: daily power outages that require businesses and homes to own generators; intermittent public water supply (people of means dig or drill a well but others have to beg and search for water during the dry season); and roads in great disrepair resulting in damage to vehicles.

Needless to say, we have our times of discouragement working in a country with these challenges. We see evidence of these problems every day, but we also see evidence of hope in the face of these seemingly insurmountable challenges. The people we work with give us hope. They are committed to the nonviolent way of Jesus and are actively working to develop a cadre of peacebuilders across the state. The NGO partners of MCC have adopted a peace lens for their work whether medical, health, women's empowerment or community development, all use a peace lens to ensure that their work contributes to peacebuilding efforts across the state and beyond. All of the MCC partners include both Christians and Muslims in their programs.

The MCC program can't solve most of the challenges facing the country, but has chosen a strategic focus on peace-building in an effort to foster a sustainable peace at the grassroots community level. When communal violence can be reduced or hopefully eliminated, people will feel safe and development can begin again. The peace training efforts have not only provided skills, they have also brought Muslims and Christians together in the training, developing a network of relationships that cross the religious divide. Out of peace training events, Muslims and Christians have testified to forming their first friendship with someone of the other faith. This is reason for hope. When people receive peace training, they become advocates for alternatives to violence and their voices join together to speak for political change and accountability. The voice of civil society is weak but growing.

A group of 40+ peacebuilders, trained through MCC sponsorship to the APC (African Peace Institute in South Africa) and WAPI (West African Peace Institute in Ghana), have taken the initiative to start the Jos Peace Institute (JPI). The program will provide three

consecutive weeks of local training courses to provide affordable access for a larger number of people. It's been great to watch this group develop a program that will provide greater opportunity for growing the peace in an effort to return Jos to its identity as a "Place of Peace."

Please consider designating your next donation to the MCC peace fund. Your gift will support people of courage as they work for peace. You will give people skills to resolve community conflicts and address injustices that could lead to violence. You will help build resilience through trauma healing, and you will give people the tools needed to choose peace over violence.

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.... (Hebrews 10:24)

--Orv and Clea Gingerich

January-May Financial Statement

Income	Year to Date
Offerings	\$ 51,556
Rent	16,535
Investments	900
Miscellaneous	0
Designated offering	3,486
Total Income	\$ 72,477
Expenses	
Church Council	\$0
Conference support	0
Deacons	256
Education	2,234
FICA	458
Fellowship/Retreat	132
Missions and Service	450
Office	5,264
Pastor/Ministry Staff	29,776
Trustees/bldg expenses	18,398
Worship	848
Mortgage	2,956
Total Expenses	\$ 60,772
Income minus expenses	\$11,705
YTD budgeted offerings	\$63,750
Actual offerings	\$51,556
Shortfall	(-\$12,194)

What's happening here and there...

News from the Supportive Congregations Network

The Reconciling Minister Project, a joint effort of Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests and Inclusive Mennonite Pastors launched this past April. This project will provide a much needed service to Mennonite Church USA: It will help gifted and called LGBTQ Christians seek ministry positions within the denomination; and it will help welcoming and affirming congregations have access to ministerial information from a broader range of qualified pastoral candidates. Lloyd Miller, a longtime member of Southside Mennonite Fellowship in Elkhart, Indiana, will serve as the volunteer minister.

Invitation to Eau Claire

Once a quarter, representatives of the congregations in covenant with the new Mennonite congregation, Shalom in Eau Claire, gather for worship, potluck lunch, and a time of discussion of the life of the congregation. As Faith's representative, I am going to Eau Claire on Sunday, July 17. I plan to leave about 7:30 am and be home between 3:00 and 4:00. If you would like to come along, please get in touch with me.

--Hermann Weinlick

In review...

America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America By Jim Wallis

"Jim Wallis is the founder and leader of Sojourners, a publishing platform, organization and global network whose missions is to put faith into action for social justice." --From the authors bio.

Wallis starts off looking at why even the mention of white privilege and the word racist can put many white people into a defensive stance. He discusses what and how white privilege has benefited many while keeping many others at disadvantage. If you've already read Michelle Alexander's, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness," you will already have a good grounding in some of this information.

I believe the most beneficial material in this book, for people of faith, will be Wallis' insight into how we begin the process of healing ourselves and our communities. From personal experience with the Sojourner Community in Chicago and then Washington and multiracial worship communities he's participated in, Wallis has many insights and do-able steps that offer us ways to build relationships across races. I would recommend this book highly, as a hopeful way forward.

--Dan Liesen

**All-Church Fall Retreat
YMCA Camp St. Croix, Hudson, WI**

Sept 23-25, 2016



This is a time to relax, get better acquainted across generations, and experience the beauty of God's creation. Whether you are new to FMC or a long-time participant, we hope you'll consider coming. More details coming soon!

The deadline for August newsletter items is noon, Tuesday, July 26th.

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.

The Goddess Who Created This Passing World

Said Let there be lightbulbs & liquefaction
Life spilled out onto the street, colors whirled
Cars & the variously shod feet were born
And the past & future & I born too
Light as airmail paper away she flew
To Annapurna or Mt. McKinley
Or both but instantly
Clarified, composed, forever was I
Meant by her to recognize a painting
As beautiful or a movie stunning
And to adore the finitude of words
And understand as surfaces my dreams
Know the eye the organ of affection
And depths to be inflections
Of her voice & wrist & smile

--Alice Notley