

Faith Connection

June 2007

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...

We are entering a season of commitment at Faith Mennonite Church. On June 3 one of our youth, Greta Kreider, will make a commitment to follow Christ through the ritual of baptism. That same day several adults, Cathy Smetana and Cori and Noah Skogerboe, who have been attending our congregation, will take the step of formalizing their participation and becoming members. Later in June and July three couples, Gina Guion and Michael Petscheauer, Kristin Borntrager and David Reis, and Rachel Geissinger and Brian Hoskins, will be joined in the commitment of marriage.

We celebrate with each of these individuals and couples, thankful for the leading of God in their lives and their willingness to prepare for and enter into these commitments in the context of a faith community. Their public acts of commitment offer each of us the opportunity to support them and also to reaffirm the commitments we have made.

All of these commitments are exciting and new even as they are counter-cultural and will likely face myriad future challenges. In the waters of baptism, we are "buried in Christ," and set out on a new life committed to following Jesus without knowing exactly where that might lead us. We take on his call to discipleship and peacemaking in the midst of a world wracked by fear and hatred.

By entering into church membership we expand our circle of support and join in the awesome task of discovering together what it means to be the body of Christ and instruments of peace in a troubled world. At the same time, we agree to "give and receive counsel" among fellow Christians with whom we will not always share the same understanding of God's will in our lives. We commit a portion of our time, talents, and financial resources to the work of God's kingdom even as advertising tries to allure us in more glamorous

directions. And we regularly engage in the religious practice of worship at a time when it is more socially acceptable to be "spiritual but not religious."

Joining in marriage, we embark on a life-time of companionship and love, laying the foundation for a relationship that supports and sustains one another, and also grows in fruitfulness to others. In making a commitment to a single, life-long partner we defy the dominant cultural pattern of "serial monogamy," of staying in relationship as long as it satisfying and fulfilling and then moving to another.

It is not always easy to sustain our commitments—to Christ, the church, and to our marriages/partnerships. Occasionally we meet a person who falls, and stays, madly in love with Jesus, their family of faith, or with their life companion and never seems to waver in those commitments. More often, at some point along the way, we become distracted and burned out by the demands of life or injured by tragedy or those we thought we could trust. With time, fine cracks develop in the once-shiny glaze of our relationships.

How do we nurture our commitments and keep the cracks from becoming fissures? We begin by grounding our commitments in God, acknowledging that they are gifts of God and that God desires to sustain them. Second, we draw on the experience, strength and wisdom of the faith community—we are here to support one another. In her departing words last December as her family was moving to Indiana, Katy Gray Brown commented that when her personal faith was weak, she depended on the "practice of the church."

Third, we sustain our commitments by living in hope and with imagination. Making a commitment does not mean we will not change; we are part of God's dynamic creation. Making a commitment *does* mean that we will seek to grow and change in ways that enhance our relationships, that balance our needs with the needs of

those to whom we are committed, and that contribute to the work of God in the world.

Finally, we place our commitments in God's grace and we extend grace—to ourselves and each other—in times when we have not been able to fulfill the commitments we have made. We are frail humans, bound to stumble. God does not demand perfection. God yearns for us with a persistent, undying love. The prophet Hosea gave expression to this unrelenting love of God at one of the lowest moments in the history of Israel:

*My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger [. . .]
I will heal their disloyalty;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them. [. . .]
They shall again live beneath my shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden.
Hosea 13:8-9a; 14:4 & 7*

--Joetta Schlabach

"I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it... People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back."

--Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

What's happening at FMC...

Summer Worship Will Explore Jesus' Parables

This past year our children's Sunday School program has been using the new *Gather 'Round* curriculum, developed through a collaboration of the Mennonite Church and the Church of the Brethren. The *Gather 'Round* curriculum for Summer 2007 focuses on the Parables of Jesus. Since we do not have Sunday School during the summer at FMC, the Worship Commission and pastors decided to take this theme for our summer worship.

The summer worship planning group consists of Adam Nafziger, Michelle Okerstrom, Jennifer Wandersee, Sandra Westby, and Joetta Schlabach. They are using

some *Gather 'Round* curriculum materials in their planning. The group hopes that the parables will be captivating for children as well as adults and that we will gain new insights into the teachings of Jesus.

Canadian Mennonite biblical scholar Tom Yoder Neufeld summarizes what we can learn from the parables in the following way:

What is a parable? "Parable" is the English pronunciation of the Greek word *parabole*, meaning something thrown alongside another. Good alternatives would be "comparison" or "analogy."

Usually Jesus' parables put familiar things next to each other in surprising ways. Some parables are longer stories and some are short sayings, perhaps little more than a turn of phrase. Some are allegories, meaning the elements in the story stand for particular things, events, or people.

Parables invite the hearer to make connections, to figure out the puzzle, to 'catch on.' If you 'get it,' you have learned, for example, not that the kingdom of God's is a mustard seed, which would be absurd, but that God's powerful reign can come in apparently small, insignificant events and people. God's presence will surprise you.

The parable is like a joke in that it requires a good teller, and Jesus was most certainly that. He was a master at telling stories with a twist and a hidden meaning. But a parable is different than a joke, in that a parable requires hearers who are ready to understand and live into a deeper meaning. They are ready not to laugh but to look for God in unlikely places, to orient their lives in light of God's kingdom, to follow Jesus. These parables had the effect of sifting the audience, of sorting out those with an openness to the kingdom of God and those closed to it and to Jesus as its messenger.

There is something new, startling, and even disturbing about Jesus' parables. Sometimes these parables are difficult to hear because they are so straightforward about injustice, the lack of love and concern toward sinners, and callousness toward people who are poor and oppressed. With the parables, Jesus wished to alert people to the presence of God's kingdom in the midst of a world full of hurting and needy people." ("Introduction to the Parables of Jesus," in *Parables of Jesus*, Multiage Teacher's Guide, Summer 2007, *Gather Round*.)

Welcome to summer worship!

--Joetta Schlabach

Adult Education Wrap-Up

The Adult Education Old Testament survey is complete! 39 books in 14 sessions. Here are some statistics for those interested:

The average number of visits by an individual to a class was 4 times over the season. The most frequent number of times an individual would attend class was once (meaning, most people came only once – partially due to people visiting the church). The highest number of visits (other than the facilitator) was 10, by two individuals. 34 different people attended over the season.

The average number of people in class per Sunday was 10. The highest was 17 (the Sunday after the Snow Day), the lowest was 5 (partially due to New Member classes held at the same time). The most frequent number of people on class was 8 (more classes with 8 attendants than any other number).

Thank you to all who attended and participated in the Old Testament overview. A similar survey will be held in the Fall for the New Testament.

--John Ratigan

FMC FALL RETREAT

October 20
at Villa Maria Center in Frontenac, MN
~~~save~the~date!~~~

new **one-day** format  
(with optional Friday night stay)

Prof. PERRY YODER will speak on  
“Biblical Perspectives and Current Issues in  
Ecology”  
(child care provided during sessions)

LEISURE ACTIVITIES  
\*indoor pool\* \*soccer\* \*hiking\*  
\*labyrinth walking\* \*games\*

and don't miss the **surprise** activity!

More details to follow  
Registrations due by Oct. 1

## FMC Workday on June 10

The FMC Trustees have designated June 10 as an FMC spring work day. Following worship (9:30-10:30) everyone is invited to spend an hour or so on an outdoor or indoor project to clean, organize, trim grass, pull weeds, and generally spruce up our building and grounds. Please come in your work clothes and bring a snack or sack lunch. (An ice cream social will follow, from 2-4 p.m., at the Martin/Miller home, in honor of our graduating high school seniors).

--The Trustees

## Graduation Ice Cream Social

The families of Callie Martin, Haven Schrock, and Jacob Schlabach invite everyone to an ice cream social in honor of the graduates on Sunday, June 10, 2-4 p.m. at the home of Darrell Martin & Cynthia Miller, 6839 4th Avenue S., in Richfield. Come celebrate our graduates!

## June FMC Calendar

### Sunday, June 3

9:30am Baptism and Church Membership Sunday

### Wednesday, June 6

7pm Missions and Service Commission meeting

### Saturday, June 9

Gina Guion and Michael Petscheauer wedding

### Sunday, June 10

9:30am High School graduate recognition @ FMC morning worship  
FMC workday following worship

### Monday, June 11

7:00pm Church Council meeting @FMC

### June 14-17

Central Plains Mennonite Conference Annual Meeting, Kalona, Iowa (Joetta Schlabach and Richard Westby, delegates)

### Sunday, June 24

10:45am Discussion of San José Mennonite Convention agenda/issues with delegates (Katie Hochstedler & Neil Okerlund) in the Library

### Saturday, June 30

Kristin Borntrager and David Reis wedding

## Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting

April 2, 2007 @ FMC

**Present:** Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Katie Hochstetler, Missions & Service; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Patrick Preheim, Pastor; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor.

**Absent:** Patty Friesen, Pastor; Treasurer; Worship Commission representative; Education representative; Fellowship representative.

**Minutes.** Minutes of March 5, 2007 approved with corrections.

**Affirmations and recognitions.** Neil's work with the choir during Lent, Glenn and Darrell Martin for installing the water fountain, and Glenn and Tom Johnson for framing in the new classroom, Worship Commission for planning Lenten worship and the participation of individuals, Patrick's recent sermons, Dick Westby for delivering food to foodshelf, changes in the pastoral configuration without any major snags.

**Framing a vision.** Neil outlines idea of a process for identifying 1) a congregational self-vision, and 2) a congregational presence in the world. Wants to involve many people as possible in the discussion. This could be perhaps a 2-3 year process. He is inviting the commissions one at a time to a Council meeting. The Council will brainstorm ideas for the commission, then they will go back and brainstorm their own response and return to the next Council meeting to report. We will use the following four questions (from a handout): 1) What do we want to be (The picture of the future we seek to create); 2) What is our purpose? (The fundamental purpose that defines the reason why we exist); 3) How do we get there? (The strategy that sets the guidelines and direction to reach the vision); 4) Getting there? (The goals and objectives stated in concrete terms that define the action required). Group then spends a period brainstorming questions for the Missions and Service Commission.

**Treasurer's report.** Jerry is not present. Glenn says for the first quarter of the year, giving is running 15% behind, which is not unusual for this time of year. Gregg asks whether this is taking into account the needs of the increased gas bill or just the official approved budget? Glenn says only the approved budget. Trustees are currently reworking all the tenants' leases. Discussion of ways to list giving in regard to the budget in the monthly newsletter or the bulletins. Glenn will add updates to the bulletin on second Sunday of each month.

## Commission Reports

**Trustees.** Glenn says Sunday June 10 will be a workday after church, and members will be encouraged to bring sack lunches. Are working on the dividing wall in the old nursery, still ahead is the replacement of the education wing outer door, but still need the money.

**Worship.** Joetta says the Lenten worship survey in the bulletin got 18 responses. Worship Commission will be using denominational resources in the Easter season. The theme for summer will be the parables, with perhaps an intergenerational approach. Joan asks whether we will continue to use the denomination's bulletin covers? Perhaps we might ask members to draw or photo for covers.

**Christian Education.** Teachers of children are enjoying the current curriculum, but small classes are a challenge.

**Missions and Service.** Katie reports that M&S is working on a new publicity brochure, and will bring a draft to the congregation. Probably a two-sided half-sheet. The commission recommends that FMC participate in the Seward/Longfellow Restorative Justice Project twice a year. They are also thinking ahead to King's Fair in September, and starting work on an outdoor information kiosk on the property.

**Deacons.** Hermann says deacons discussed needs of groups in the congregation, and decided to offer three sessions on church membership for prospective members. Discussed the retreat which will be a one-day retreat on October 20 at Villa Maria, near Frontenac.

**Constitution task force.** Hermann says the task force is not finished yet.

## Old business

**MennoNeighbors Conference resolution** Katie says delegates from each congregation do not need to sign on to the resolution encouraging tolerance on sexuality issues, because the Executive Committee decided that instead of a resolution they want a discussion. Should FMC discuss possible other conference resolutions to help inform our delegates at the upcoming conference? Patrick suggests a discussion at a congregational potluck right before the conference on June 24, and publish key resolutions in the July FMC newsletter. Joan says it sounds like MCUSA is getting more hierarchical. Joetta says that there was previously a moratorium, and so discussing is at least a step forward.

**Central Plains Mennonite Conference delegates.** Patrick says Council should approve delegates. Patty and Joetta will be the delegates. *[Ed. Note—This was later changed to Dick Westby and Joetta]*

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

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

### **The Journey From Fear To Relationships:**

At first there is discomfort, fear of offending. Then there is tentative sharing of food, conversations, tasks. Eventually there is relationship between people who might not have had the opportunity to know each other in any other venue. In the end there is less fear and distrust and more understanding and compassion in the world. This is the process of *Taking Heart*.

A recent national survey showed that 75% of Christian respondents have little or no personal contact with Muslims. At least one of every five respondents favored making it illegal for Muslim groups to meet in the U.S., and 38% favored "making it harder for Muslims to settle in the U.S."

It is within this atmosphere that Hesham Hussein, president of the Muslim American Society in Minnesota (MAS) proposed a program to Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC), where people would get to know each other as people rather than as Christian and Muslim, where participants would concentrate on the similarities of being human rather than the differences of religious practice.

This unique venture is a partnership between the Unity and Relationships program of the MCC and the MAS and has been funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation. Together we work with churches and mosques to create partnerships in geographic areas. Meetings rotate between venues so Christians who have never been in a mosque have that opportunity, and Muslims feel comfortable entering a church.

As participants in partnerships become increasingly familiar with one another, they are encouraged to choose a way of serving their community together. In September 2006, the Lake Street Partnership in Minneapolis wrote and submitted a letter to the editor about their partnership between Muslims and Christians. Those same participants then selected overcoming poverty as something that they would like to work on together. Other partnerships have organized a march commemorating 9/11, and visited the offices of former Rep. Martin Sabo to voice their opposition to the renewal of the Patriot Act.

*Taking Heart* is organizing efforts in the Twin Cities, Rochester, Duluth and St. Cloud. If you are interested in

learning more about *Taking Heart*, or think you would like to help begin such a group in your church, school, workplace or neighborhood, please contact Gail Anderson, Unity and Relationships Organizer, at 612-230-3210 or andersong@mchurches.org.

### **Interfaith New Sanctuary Movement Is Launched**

Religious leaders, confronting the unjust treatment of immigrant families, announced the launching of the New Sanctuary Movement. Supported by congregations from across the country, it is a multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalition that spans the political spectrum and pledges to open their doors, hearts and collective actions to the "moral imperative" of immigrant rights.

At a moment when large scale immigration with its attending social and economic consequences demand reform, the faith community has united to call for policies that are both effective and humane. They are embracing sanctuary seekers threatened by imminent deportations, detentions and the severing of family ties. In most cases the undocumented immigrants have American citizen spouses and children. The movement considers the sanctuary seekers the human face of a cause committed to arousing the voice of people of faith and awakening the moral imagination of the nation.

The New Sanctuary Movement was inaugurated on May 9<sup>th</sup> with events organized by interdenominational congregations representing a rainbow of racial, ethnic and faith communities. Activities took place in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, San Diego and Seattle. A number of other cities held prayer vigils in solidarity. The movement began as an echo of the 1980's sanctuary campaign, but has gained momentum as stepped up raids, detentions and deportations spotlight what religious leaders call a "cruel and broken system."

The inaugural New Sanctuary Movement events will be followed by a rolling series of launches in other cities across the country. Congregations will collect signatures for the New Sanctuary Pledge and have committed to material, spiritual and physical support in their sanctuaries and among congregants. The New Sanctuary Movement pledge outlines three goals including:

- Taking a public, moral stand on behalf of immigrant families and workers;
- Opening the American people's eyes to the suffering of immigrant workers and families

under current policies;

- Protecting immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation.

They aim to enlist millions of people of faith through signing of the New Sanctuary Movement pledge and other moral and material support.

Coordinated by networks in California, New York and Chicago, participating congregations will provide the sanctuary seekers with a range of support services including expert immigration lawyers, transportation to the work place, shelter, and financial assistance. Sanctuary will be offered to families where at least one parent has a deportation order that would separate them from their children and homes.

It is estimated that more than 222,000 immigrants have been subjected to deportation over the past year in the stepped up campaign by Immigration Customs and Enforcement. According to recent data, nearly one in 10 American families is of mixed immigration status in which at least one parent is a non-citizen, and one child a citizen. An estimated 3.1 million US citizen children have at least one parent who is undocumented.

### ***In review...***

### **Patty's Picks**

*Eat, Pray, Love*, by Elizabeth Gilbert is spreading like wildfire by word of mouth. I've only been to Italy with her and I'm already hooked.

"Waiting List" is the only Cuban movie I have ever seen. Typically low budget Cuban but beautifully filmed and highly metaphorical about this amazing country and its people.

*Songs from the Labyrinth*, by Sting and Edin Karamazov, is a fascinating new CD as featured on PBS. A rock star doing early English music with a lutenist is a surprising and beautiful combination. I hit the repeat button on my stereo and listened all day long.

--Patty Friesen

### **The Rhodora**

#### ***On being asked, Whence is the flower?***

In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,  
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,  
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,  
To please the desert and the sluggish brook.  
The purple petals, fallen in the pool,  
Made the black water with their beauty gay;  
Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,  
And court the flower that cheapens his array.  
Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why  
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,  
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,  
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being:  
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!  
I never thought to ask, I never knew:  
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose  
The self-same Power that brought me there brought  
you.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Deadline for July newsletter items is noon, June 28<sup>th</sup>.**

*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.*