

# Faith Connection

June 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...

*O give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose steadfast love endures forever. --Psalms 107:1*

During the past year a member of the congregation gave Gerald and me a copy of the book *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare To Live Fully Right Where You Are*, by Ann Voskamp. Voskamp slowly overcame the effects of a traumatic loss in early life by developing the practice of *eucharisteo*—giving thanks.

As I write this, on May 28, on yet another overcast day when the temperature has struggled to rise above 60 degrees, something tells me that it's time to make a thanksgiving list! Here goes...

1. The generous way that many people, over several months, have contributed meals and visits to members welcoming children into their homes or facing new living situations.
2. The enthusiastic participation of our children on Children's Day. As they recited Bible verses, shared dramatic readings, played instruments, and danced, I was grateful for their gifts and their confident presentations.
3. The Sunday School teachers who made a weekly commitment to bring biblical stories and themes to life for our children this past year.
4. The Wednesday community meals we hosted for 20 weeks this winter/spring beginning in January. Shelly Hendricks, Cleta Gingerich, Donna Minter, Phil Stoltzfus, and Tyler Zabriskie were key organizers from FMC. Mennonite Worker friends Mark Van Steenwyk (and his friend Joshua Bau) prepared the meal each week while Annika and Lydia Lindell-Detweiler and Gemma Jumeirah, led children's activities. Every fourth Wednesday of the month the Peace and Justice Film series brought new folks to the meal and conversation.
5. The sharing by various members during recent months about favorite and formative scriptures.
6. The honest responses that people shared to the April letter from Central Plains Conference leadership and the summary of the fall 2012 regional listening sessions, during our May 5 education hour, as well as positive ideas for continued engagement with the conference.
7. An informative and action-oriented discussion, over two Sundays in May, about responding to homelessness, and a follow-up meeting of David Ries, Karen Peterson, Melissa Hochstetler, and Cindy Bjork who identified concrete next steps.
8. The witness of seven persons who made a commitment of membership with us on May 19.
9. A day-and-a-half conference at St. John's Abbey, May 26-27, on the legacy of 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptist martyr Michael Sattler and the inspiration he provides for both Mennonites and Catholics. I am grateful that Phil Stoltzfus and Dick Westby were also present.
10. The adoption of marriage equality legislation in Minnesota and the tireless work of many to maintain respectful, civil conversation in the deliberation and subsequent celebration,
11. The opportunity to witness the marriage of Atlee Schrock and Libby Richer Smith on June 1. One of the reasons I initially sought to be involved in ministry in a congregational setting, instead of chaplaincy in a hospital or long-term care facility, is the opportunity to be involved in all stages of the life cycle—births, childhood and youth, graduations, vocational exploration, marriages, moves, the wide range of life experiences, and death. To experience several of these events in the life of a single family is a gift.
12. The upcoming trip that Donna Stucky, Kathleen and Sophia Harder, Kristi Zabriskie and I will make

to the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana for the Central Plains Conference Annual Meeting and the opportunity for developing new friendships and understanding.

My list could go on. If you are thankful for something that you've observed or participated in here at Faith Mennonite in recent weeks that's not on this list, I hope you'll write it on yours! The sun still hasn't come out but I feel surrounded by the light Christ and presence of the Holy Spirit moving in our midst.

--Joetta Schlabach

### **Ministry staff report...**

Last week marked our final Wednesday community meal of the spring. Over the summer these weekly 6 o'clock gatherings will continue each Wednesday, but in the form of potlucks in Matthews Park. We were pleasantly surprised at the results of this experiment, which first began five months ago in January. We averaged 41 people (including 8 children) each evening, with additional people coming after the meal at 7:00 for occasional films and special events.

May 8 was a particularly interesting evening in the series—the interfaith meal and discussion which Andrew Jilani helped organize along with several students at Luther seminary. Some 65 children and adults participated, bringing potluck foods representing different ethnicities. In addition, Ghandi Mahal restaurant donated a vegetarian dish.

In the second hour, several speakers reflected upon the significance of their experience growing up and living among people of different faiths. Muhammad Ahmed, a Muslim from Pakistan and now a part-time student at Luther Seminary, reflected on his desire to get to know Christian theology better. He explained how he was inspired to do this by a talk he attended by a Catholic priest who was so joyful when he shared his faith. Ahmed also takes time to learn about Sufism, and hopes that he will be able to get a degree in theology from Luther Seminary.

Festus, our second speaker, grew up with a Muslim mother and Christian father in Nigeria. He explained that his mother once told him that before these religions, we were all one people. He plans to get his Ph.D. in interfaith work and to focus on his personal background as a platform to promote interfaith harmony and understanding.

Andrew then shared about his own growing up as a Christian minority in majority Muslim Pakistan. Each

day, he said, he would hear the Muslim Adhan, “Alah o Akabar” (“God is Great”) chanted from the mosque a half a block from his home. He finds that morning call to prayer relevant as he lives with other faiths as an immigrant in the United States. God is great, indeed.

After the remarks, we divided up into several groups around tables and carried out individual sharing through a circle process. Participants were invited to reflect upon: 1) Describe a time you encountered someone of a different faith; and 2) What could we do to promote interfaith work in our neighborhood? Lively discussion ensued, particularly in one circle with a participant who was a native of Iran.

--Phil Stoltzfus, with Andrew Jilani

### **What's happening at FMC...**

#### **Summer Worship: God's Good Creation**

In recent summers, we have taken our worship theme from the 'Gather Round Sunday School summer curriculum. Enough other congregations do the same that the denomination provides complementary worship resources. This summer's planning committee is small but energetic: Gregg Richardson, Casey Englund-Helmeke and Joetta Schlabach. In addition, Maggie Page, a friend of Casey, has agreed to coordinate children's activities for primary-age children that will happen during the sermon portion of each Sunday. We tested this idea last summer with excellent results. Arlene Geissinger will provide fresh flowers and Dan Leisen photographic prints for visual elements.

“God's Good Creation” invites us to take note of and give thanks for all aspects of creation, not just on Sunday morning, but throughout our summer days, at home in the neighborhood and during vacation travel. Watch for opportunities to share your observations through written reflections and/or photography.

--The Worship Commission

#### **FMCers Journey to Montana**

Ashland, Montana, will be the host site for this year's Annual Meeting of Central Plains Mennonite Conference, June 20-23. Kathleen Harder and Sophia Kouay-Harder, Donna Stucky, Joetta Schlabach, and Kristi Zabriski will make the 12-hour trip by car to attend this first ever annual meeting hosted by the Northern Cheyenne churches. Members of the Montana

churches have always been faithful in making the long trek to annual meeting and this is our opportunity to reciprocate.

The theme of the meeting is "Guided by the Spirit: Knowing God's Love." The keynote speaker will be Terry LeBlanc, Executive Director with My People International – a holistic, training-focused ministry program with and for Native North Americans. In lieu of workshops, there will be daily educational tours to historical and sacred sites on the reservation. We will give a report about our time during worship on July 7.

### January-April Financial Statement

<b>Income</b>	<b>Year to Date</b>
Offerings	\$35,094
Rent	12,375
Investments	1,908
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$49,377</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Conference support	\$3,500
Deacons	2,488
Education	2,482
FICA	635
Fellowship	166
Missions and Service	476
Office	2,116
Pastor/Ministry Staff	26,254
Trustees/bldg expenses	16,467
Worship	390
Mortgage	1,963
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$56,937</b>
<b>Income minus expenses</b>	<b>(-\$7,560)</b>
<b>YTD budgeted offerings</b>	<b>\$47,500</b>
<b>Actual offerings</b>	<b>\$35,094</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>(-\$12,406)</b>

### Exchange with Woodland Hills Church

On May 15 six members of the leadership team from Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul came to share in our community meal and take part in a discussion with members of our church and the Mennonite Worker. The visit was initiated by Steve Wall who had noted that Woodland Hills pastor Greg Boyd has spoken in various Mennonite venues and thought it would be good for us to get better acquainted. During the evening we learned that Woodland Hills has been drawn to Anabaptist theology and the 500-year history of a church

committed to nonviolent discipleship as followers of Jesus. The following Sunday, May 19, Central Plains Conference ministers David and Shana Boshart and Tim Detweiler, attended Woodland Hills Church to answer questions that the congregation has about Mennonites and what it would mean to formally affiliate with the conference and denomination. Whether a formal relationship emerges, there seems to be interest in ongoing conversations and possible collaboration in service opportunities.

*--Joetta Schlabach*

### FMC Homelessness Initiative

The topic for the May 12 and 19 adult education class was homelessness. During the second session, Mark Kaufman, who is a social worker, led a discussion about what FMC can do in this area. The group discussed Micro, Mezzo, and Macro efforts that might be taken by our congregation.

As the group talked about homelessness within our own FMC family, it became apparent that we must try to address some of these issues immediately. It was agreed that a committee would be formed, to look at possible responses.

The committee, which currently includes Joetta Schlabach (Pastor), Melissa Hochstetler (Deacon), Karen Linn Peterson (Missions and Service), Mark Kaufman, Cindy Bjork, and David Ries, met on Sunday, May 26. At this time, the primary focus will be on identifying our congregation's resources and possible areas of support. A survey will be made available to FMC members and attenders to assess what each household may have to offer. Resources which might be helpful for persons in our FMC family who are between homes could include donation of useful items, short-term storage space, shopping, pet fostering, a place to shower, a meal, a bed offered for a few days or a week, etc.

In the longer term, the committee will be looking at connections we might make with other groups, such as the Mennonite Worker, who are already providing services. We will also try to create a means of supporting advocacy campaigns through individual and group letters to our elected officials since Wendy Wiegmann, our guest from Simpson Housing Services on May 12, stated that advocacy is the single most important response to ending homelessness.

*--Karen Linn Peterson*

## Comings and Goings...

We welcome persons who have recently visited and/or begun attending worship. Please take the opportunity to say hello and get acquainted with:

**Cathy Higgins**

**Aryn Baxter** has departed for a final two months of field work for her dissertation. She plans to be back in the Twin Cities during the coming school year for dissertation writing and teaching at the University of Minnesota.

We were pleased that **Tom and Jesse Johnson** were present on May 26. Tom has relocated from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Minot, North Dakota so we hope to see him more frequently. Jesse has returned from South Korea for several weeks and will return in early June to continue teaching English there.

Update from **Aine McCarthy** who is doing dissertation research in Tanzania: "I'm currently staying at a NGO office in a remote little town right outside of the Serengeti. It's very quiet and a little boring for my taste, but it is certainly beautiful. However, I was in Arusha (a big city) last month and attended a really unique church. It's a community Christian church that is lay-led. They have a different pastor each week from the various Christian churches in the city and a very international theme. The service is in English, but when I attended, the pastor was a German lady and the choir was a mix of Ugandan, South African, Tanzanian and Korean! They have a really unique community. I'm sure I'll be back there when I'm in Arusha at the end of this month."

We await the arrival of **Emory Richardson**, who just completed a year of teaching English in Ulyanovsk, Russia. He hopes to return to Russia by June 10 and begin teaching at a different school.

## Congratulations to 2013 Graduates

We celebrate with the following persons who are graduating this spring.

**Noah Kreider Carlson** is completing his senior year at Central High School in St. Paul.

**Vicente Leisen** will receive his high school diploma at a June 4 commencement ceremony. He is graduating from the South St. Paul Community Learning Center.

**Darrell Martin** graduated from Normandale Community College with an Associate in Science, Nursing degree. He will begin work at United Hospital in mid July on a general medical unit. Prior to beginning work he must pass the RN board exam.

**Geneva Martin** graduated with a Bachelor's of Science, Environmental Studies and Sustainability degree and minor in Anthropology from Northern Michigan University. Starting in August, she will be participating in a 9-month naturalist training and environmental education program at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in Finland, Minnesota. Geneva will be trained in many areas from rock climbing, beaver life, and voyageur history. She will then teach students from the Twin Cities who stay at the camp for a week during the school year.

**Annette Semanchin Jones** received a doctoral degree in Social Work from the University of Minnesota. Her dissertation explores the effects of child welfare policies on racial disparities. Annette will begin a tenure-track position in the School of Social Work at the University at Buffalo (SUNY), New York, in the fall.

**Matthew Thomas** graduated with a Ph.D. in Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota. His dissertation (still in process) explores critically the process of developing research capacity for scholars of the global South through examination of an education research collaboration between the University of Minnesota, Columbia University, and Mwenge University College of Education (in Tanzania). He recently accepted a tenure-track position in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse where he will be preparing future teachers. He just bought a house in La Crosse, Wisconsin and is expecting friends to come visit. :-)

**Aaron Zeug** graduated from the University of Minnesota-Morris with a degree in psychology.

## Welcome New Members!

We were blessed to welcome and receive seven persons into membership on May 19: Wendy Brunner, Joel and Katie Cuffey, John Hershey, Travis Lusk, David Ott (associate), and Steve Wall. Following are several of their statements.

**Wendy Brunner:** I am transferring my membership from St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship. I started attending there in 1993 after moving to Minnesota from Colorado where I had just finished a term of Voluntary Service. I was with SPMF during their struggles with the conference over their welcoming and inclusion of GLBT members over the years and as they shrunk in size from a relatively large group that filled the fellowship hall of the church we met in, down to a small group sitting in a circle of chairs; from a church with a pastor to a lay-led congregation. I appreciated the opportunity to get know people really well that comes

with being a member of a very small congregation. We had many rituals I appreciated, including signing our names to a statement of membership that hung on the wall in our worship space.

But by 2005, I had become weary and feeling distant from church, and that was physically represented to me by my drive every Sunday afternoon from south Minneapolis where I live to the west side of St. Paul where SPMF is located. I parted with SPMF and took a break from church completely. Several years later I thought it would be a good time to reconnect with the Mennonite church – I am an ethnic Mennonite and missed those connections. And it was important to me to find a place to attend that was closer to where I live, so that I would be more able to be involved in activities and see people from church outside of Sunday worship. I had visited Faith a number of times while going to SPMF and so I started coming here regularly. What I found is that in many ways, Faith has been reminiscent of the church I grew up in, in Ontario, in terms of size and space.

I recently came to the understanding that retaining my membership at SPMF perhaps was more about making me feel less guilty about leaving a very small congregation than it actually helped them since, in reality, I was no longer an active member there. And so while my heart is with SPMF, my friends there, and the stories we share, including the stories we told yesterday at the funeral for our friend and former member Colleen Molina, I have requested that my membership be transferred to Faith so that I can be more involved here.

I grew up Mennonite, and what keeps me in the Mennonite faith is the church's call to peace and social justice, a message I don't often hear during the week. So I come to church because it keeps me grounded in beliefs about how we are to live in this world and care for others.

**Joel Cuffey:** As a pastor's kid in New Jersey and a seminary professor's kid in Urbana, Illinois, church was a large part of my early life. My father was a Baptist minister and then a professor of a non-denominational seminary. Given this background, church and religion in general has been an alternating source of comfort and revulsion for me (and my siblings). The community of a church is important for me, and is likely the only way I remain a Christian. This sense of community and belonging has been a major reason I was involved in my family's home church in Urbana and a very evangelical student group in college. Perhaps due to my family

background, perhaps just due to personality, I appreciate when theology and worship are thoughtful and there is not a premium on manipulating emotions to feel "close" to God. So reading and thinking about theology became (and is still) a pastime, and being thoughtful about faith is something I value highly in a church.

This process of thinking through theology has led me to a number of different churches. As I served as a short-term missionary with the evangelical student group – and afterwards – I started questioning much of the evangelical faith expression. This questioning led me to rebel against my upbringing and become a long-term attendee of an Antiochian Orthodox church in Urbana, and later a Ugandan Orthodox church in Gulu. My parents probably would have understood better had I become an atheist.

My questioning also spurred me to take theology courses at my father's seminary, and through these I was introduced to some Mennonite-leaning theologians (and one Anglican) who thought differently than how I was taught growing up. These theologians seemed to know much better what to do with the life of Jesus, instead of just focusing on vague atonement theology. So when my wife Katie and I moved to St Paul, finding a Mennonite church was high on the list of church options, and we were glad to come upon a Mennonite church with a great sense of community and also one that is very thoughtful about its faith.

**Katie Cuffey:** I grew up nominally Catholic with two parents who are pretty much anti-religion. I'm also a military brat, so I moved around a lot. I was skeptical of religion and knew Christians to be judgmental.

I went to a very liberal and secular college in the Northeast. While there, I became friends with some Christians and went to church with them. They were fun and surprised me by not being at all judgmental. After college I moved to the Czech Republic—a very atheist country. I worked with and lived next door to a group of American Christian missionaries. Going into the situation, I again dreaded how judgmental they would be. They weren't. The next year a new batch of missionaries came—surely these would be typical judgmental Christians. Again I was pleasantly surprised.

Later that year I fell seriously ill and when I woke up in the ICU, I knew that God had saved me. But I still wasn't sold on the whole "Jesus thing." Months later I was praying with a friend and I appealed to Jesus in the

prayer. The next morning another friend offered to pray with me to help me decide whether I believed in Jesus. We sat at a picnic table down by the nearby river. After a long while of each of us praying silently, me begging God for a sign that I should believe in Jesus and become a Christian, I decided to give up. I opened my eyes, about to tell my friend that it was no use—just then rays of the sun broke through the leaves on the trees and all the church bells starting ringing. So God gave me a Hollywood-style sign—clearly the only kind I was ready to recognize at the time.

Over the next year I was rebaptized and joined a church—a charismatic Evangelical international church. They were really good at getting an emotional response during worship. I stayed at that church for a few years, despite disagreeing with many points of the theology (and political implications thereof). After Joel and I got married, we started looking for a new church. We've been to a number of different churches (Lutheran, Episcopal,...), but when we found Faith last fall, we knew that we had finally found a church that we could call our home. We are so grateful that you are our family.

**John Hershey:** I have Swiss Anabaptist roots on my father's side. Our forebears were persecuted for their religious beliefs and lived off the grid in Switzerland and Germany until they accepted William Penn's invitation to persons of all monotheistic stripes. In the early 1700s, they shipped to America and settled in Penn's Woods in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

I also own Scots-Irish blood from my mother's side. As Irish Presbyterians my forbears could not own land, nor could they vote. So in the 1720s, they sailed to Lewes, Delaware and ultimately settled in a frontier town, in what is now Charlotte, North Carolina.

This is a long way of saying I am the child of a Pennsylvania teacher and a North Carolina debutante—born to them on Long Island where I was reared in a conservative, private Christian boarding school where my father taught. I was baptized by a non-denominational minister and attended church and Sunday school in the school chapel until the early 1960s.

In the late 1950s, my mother left my dad and me. Three years later, Dad remarried and we moved one town and lifetime away. Our new family attended a Presbyterian church where I was confirmed before we established a

long-standing membership with second oldest Episcopal Church in the United States.

After college, I entered an eastern Presbyterian seminary with the intent of entering the pastoral ministry. I completed a Master of Divinity degree but declined a call to the pulpit. I felt I was too young, too immature to accept that responsibility. So I ended up working for five different colleges and universities over the next 39 years.

In the 1980s, I met a first-generation American with Irish heritage. We married in an Episcopal Church and then we stood on a St. Paul altar to witness the baptism of our two sons and vowed to rear them in the Catholic Church. We did that and the boys are young men now, free to make their own faith decisions.

As you can see, I never found a church home in all those years and am mostly to blame for the same as I am a private person. But I am here now and hope that I have found that home with this congregation and within its larger faith tradition.

 <p>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 June 15<sup>th</sup>. (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: <a href="mailto:jschlabach@faithmennonite.org">jschlabach@faithmennonite.org</a>.</p>	<p><i>June Birthday Brunch</i></p> <p><i>Saturday, June 15<sup>th</sup> 9:30-11 a.m.</i></p>
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**The deadline for July newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, June 26<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.