

# Faith Connection

June 2014

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...**

When I attended the funeral for Dick Westby's 100-year-old father several years ago, I was struck by a photo that was part of a display of his life that the family had prepared. The photo was of Henry Westby's large confirmation class at Bethany Lutheran Church, at a time when that church spilled over with confirmation-age youth. Ebenezer Lutheran Church, which built the building which is now our home, at one time had a congregation that filled our sanctuary (and perhaps balcony) every Sunday.

We know well that the religious scene in the United States has changed much in the past century. Much attention has been focused on the decline of the mainline denominations, including the Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopal churches, which once wielded great influence in American society. Yet in recent years, Mennonites have often found engaging conversation partners in some of these denominations as some have experienced a growing interest in the theology of peace.

Several years ago Central Plains Mennonite Conference became a formal member of the Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC), which has a history of strong collaborative work among Christian churches in Minnesota. MCC has a thriving refugee resettlement program, helps coordinate Minnesota FoodShare, supports the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, has pioneered interfaith dialogue programs, and has recently been assisting churches and communities in having discussions around conflictive topics and in facing end-of-life quality of life and care decisions. No one denomination could do all of this work, but collaboratively the member churches are working to share good news and be salt and light in Minnesota.

I attend the semi-annual board meetings of MCC as the representative for Central Plains Conference, since our

conference office and personnel are not located in Minnesota. The two days a year that I spend in these meetings, the most recent of which was Thursday, May 22, are always energizing. Instead of representatives of decline, I engage with persons (mostly bishops) of vision, whose deep spirituality and love for the church and its mission express hope for the future.

The gift of this time of religious decline is a growing engagement across denominational lines and the sense that God is calling us to work together in collaboration rather than in isolation. On May 22 the Episcopal bishop of Minnesota, Brian Prior, invited us to think of "Missional Innovative Partnerships." He defined missional as having a sense of engagement with the world, being responsive to the needs around our homes and our churches. By innovative, he was speaking of the capacity to "imagine that the Holy Spirit is working in your midst." Partnerships are the way churches join together to build capacity to implement "beyond fear" their desire for engagement.

Bishop Bruce Ough of the United Methodist encouraged us to tap into "Spirit energy" as we ask "where is God leading us?" And out-going Lutheran bishop of St. Paul commented that we are "called to tend the church that exists into a future that we don't know. We're not sure what to let live and what to let die. But as we seek to follow the pulsating presence of the living God we will find our way into the difference-making mission in the world."

As a youth task force has formed this spring to chart a path for the further development of a youth program for our church, we have discussed ways to partner with other Mennonite churches in the Twin Cities. Our neighborhood sustainability fair is another fine example of collaboration. I want to be attentive to other ways that God might lead us into shared witness and ministry with others in our neighborhood.

--Joetta Schlabach

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

Back at the end of April we put on our Neighborhood Sustainability Fair, and this being our third year, it has proven to be a sustainable event! Every single bit of table space was used this year for exhibits, and we had a good turnout on this first Saturday after Earth Day.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who had a hand in planning the fair, distributing 1,500 flyers, working on displays, setting up and tearing down, and assisting in many unseen ways to pull this off. Sam Reinert fixed bikes in the library, and Kristin Green, Karen Wiebe, Joan Kreider, Melissa Hochstetler, Donna Minter, and Patricia Mack had special do-it-yourself displays that they set up. Free Geek collected recyclables while Brotherhood Brew served coffee, and outside, Sisters' Camelot served an amazing rice and beans meal from their kitchen bus.

We have opened our church building in the past month to an overnight stay of a theater group from Ontario, Theatre of the Beat. A local company, Ghostbridge Theater, has been using our sanctuary on weekend evenings for rehearsals. American Friends Service Committee has been hosting monthly films in our chapel room. And the Summer Singers choir is back again in our building this year for Thursday evening rehearsals and a family concert on a Saturday morning in late July.

In the future, Missions and Service Commission is looking into hosting a presentation on MNSure, and a Respectful Conversations event on guns with MN Council of Churches.

--*Phil Stoltzfus*

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

### **Planning for Pastoral Leadership**

The months ahead will be exciting ones for Faith Mennonite Church as we consider how we best can be God's people in Seward and what sort of pastoral leadership that requires.

After seven years as pastor, Joetta Schlabach has expressed her desire to cut back to half time in 2015, in order to work in a ministry team here at Faith and to pursue some other areas calling her, such as leading conference learning tours to Ecuador and developing more ethnically diverse church relationships.

Joetta has proposed a possible schedule for considering the future leadership need of Faith. During May, three adult Christian education sessions considered who we are and who we would like to be. A pastoral transition team of four has agreed to shape this process of considering our pastoral needs: Wendy Brunner, Shelly Hendricks, Noah Skogerboe, and Tyler Zabriskie.

The church council meeting for June, on Wednesday, June 11, 7:00 pm, in the chapel, will have as its sole agenda item our looking at this process. Members or attenders who would like to give input are invited to attend that meeting. The pastoral transition team will meet Sunday, June 15, with Diane Zehr Brenneman, who has served the denomination in conference and seminary positions, further to discuss the process and different possible models of team ministry.

--*Hermann Weinlick, Moderator*

### **Summer Worship**

For the past six years our summer worship has followed the theme of the Gather 'Round curriculum, which we have been using in our children's Sunday School program the since 2007. This summer's theme is "Stories of God's People," focusing on people in the New Testament. The Worship Commission is planning less-formal, intergenerational worship experiences, which will be held in the basement fellowship hall during July and August since this provides a more flexible worship space.

Before we launch the summer series, we will celebrate Pentecost, on June 8, with a music Sunday. Bret Hesla, who continues to use office space in our education wing for music writing, will join Phil Stoltzfus in leading singing that day.

On June 15, Diane Zaerr Brenneman, a farmer-pastor from Iowa who led our all-church retreat last fall, will preach, using the story of Lydia from Acts 16, to help us reflect on our leadership reconfiguration process.

June 29 will be a day of celebration as four families take part in a parent-child dedication service. The participating families are Candace and Daryn Dockter (Lydia), Laurie and Pierre Gingerich Boberg (Josette), Marcia and Ry Siggelkow (Wendy), and Abra and Phil Staffin-Wiebe (Theia). We will share a potluck meal, following worship that day, in celebration with these families.

-- *Worship Commission*

## Youth Program Task Force

To build on the work that ministry staff person Phil Stoltzfus did in the past eighteen months to begin developing a middle-school youth group, the Church Council appointed a Youth Programming Task Force, which met for the first time in early May. Kristin Green convened the group comprising Phil Stoltzfus, Paula Okerstrom, Andy Martinson, and Joetta Schlabach. Casey Englund-Helmeke, who has been the middle school teacher this year and Aine McCarthy who recently began a term of youth sponsor, were unable to be present.

The group established three preliminary goals for youth programming at FMC:

- 1) Mentoring for leadership development
- 2) Relationship-building: giving youth a sense of being part of something
- 3) Faith development.

Over the summer months when Aine is doing dissertation research in Tanzania, we hope that the families of youth will plan one or two youth activities. During this time Phil, Joetta, and Andy will try to meet with representatives from the other Mennonite Churches to explore opportunities for collaboration. Andy has volunteered to contribute his past experience in youth leadership development programs in the public schools to help shape our program.

-- Youth Program Task Force

## Comings and Goings

Welcome to **Josh Miller**, formerly from the Mennonite Worker, who has recently been attending FMC.

Note from **Gerald Schlabach**: As many of you know, this last academic year has allowed me the privilege of a sabbatical, most of which I have spent at the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Studies. A sabbatical offers an opportunity not only to dedicate time to scholarly projects, but for taking stock, recalibrating priorities and catching up with oneself. Amid this setting, one matter for my reflection has been my participation in two different church communities – Faith Mennonite, and my Catholic parish, St. Peter Claver. As of Pentecost, I will have been a Roman Catholic for ten years, while maintaining associate membership here at FMC. This has been an important way for me to express my commitment to bridging traditions rather than burning my bridges. Since Joetta entered ministry seven years ago, it has also been important for me to make my support of her clear. Still, stepping back this year I have come to the conclusion

that it is time to rebalance. Spreading my church involvement across two communities has prevented me from getting to know folks at St. Peter Claver well, or doing much to participate in its ministries in our neighborhood in St. Paul. I have decided, therefore, to pull back from regular church attendance at FMC. I am sure I will continue to socialize with many of you. And I have promised Joetta to be generous in response to special requests when FMC needs a guitarist, or someone to relieve parents of childcare duties during important church meetings, and so on. But if you don't see me around quite as much, this is why.

 <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 28<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 28th 9:30-11 a.m.</i></p>
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## FMC Parenting Partner and Mentor-Mentee

I am in the process of updating Faith Mennonite's Parenting Partner and Mentor-Mentee Programs. The overall point of both programs is to build relationships between children and adults within the church community. In the parenting partner program, we pair parents of young children (typically those in the infant/toddler/preschooler years) with an older couple, individual, family with older children (the "parenting partner") to provide support during those challenging early childhood years. The level of support ranges, depending on how the matched families want to develop their relationship. The mentor/mentee program is designed to connect older children (ideally starting around fifth or sixth grade but an older age start is fine too) with an adult with whom they can develop a significant relationship through doing activities together and/or to visit with who is not a parent. I will schedule some group activities for both programs.

If you are interested in participating in one or both of these programs (as a mentor-mentee, parenting partner

or family with young children), please contact me before the end of June with your interest level. Also, please let me know if you have any questions concerning the programs. Thanks!

-- Shelly Hendricks

## Save the Date for Fall Retreat – September 26-28

Camp St. Croix, just across the river in Wisconsin and an easy drive from the Twin Cities, will once again be the setting for our all-church fall retreat. The planning committee—Katie Cuffey, Matthew Hendricks, Adam Nafziger and Joetta Schlabach—are excited to announce the theme of “Living Fully at Every Age.” We will not have a speaker this year, but rather plan a variety of activities that everyone can participate in, regardless of age (think Legos, soccer, table games, folk dancing, hiking, singing, story-telling...). We will share more details in late summer, but we hope you’ll begin planning now by putting this on your calendar.

-- Retreat Planning Committee

## Congratulations, Graduates!

A number of our current and former FMCers are completing degree programs this spring. Congratulations to one and all!

**Aryn Baxter** successfully defended her dissertation on May 14 and participated in the graduation ceremony at the University of Minnesota on May 15. She is completing a PhD in Educational Policy and Administration: Comparative and International Development Education. Her dissertation research has direct applications to her position as director of the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program at Arizona State University.

**Moti Endalew** graduated from Goshen College in April with a degree in business. He is planning to return to the Twin Cities and seek employment.

**Shawn Englund-Helmeke** successfully presented the results of his clinical research project on “Mindfulness and Wellbeing” on May 19 and graduated with a Master of Social Work degree from the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University on May 24.

**Dee Fufa**, daughter of Pat Eliason, is finishing her AA degree at MCTC this spring and is hoping to continue her studies at Metro State in the fall.

**Tony Johnson** graduated from the University of Minnesota May 17 with a Bachelor degree in Urban Studies and Landscape, Architecture, and Geography.

**Michelle Okerstrom** graduated on May 17 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She writes: “I am extremely ecstatic to announce that I will be moving to Nashville Tennessee to be working at the prestigious Vanderbilt University Medical Center as a Registered Nurse. I am nervous but also extremely excited! I will be working on a post-surgical unit, but will not know the specifics until I arrive and orient on all of the surgical units. The job starts on July 21, and I plan to move there a week before then. Please feel free to visit me in Nashville or stop by if you’re ever in the area!”

**Heather Wengerd** completed a Master of Social Work degree at the University of Minnesota in April. She works as a social worker with Volunteers of America, Minnesota in Minneapolis Public Housing.

*Note: If we have missed anyone, please share your news by contacting the church office.*

## January-April Financial Statement

Income	Year to Date
Offerings	\$41,827
Rent	12,270
Investments	590
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$54,687</b>
Expenses	
Conference support	\$0
Deacons	(-40)
Education	2,534
FICA	671
Fellowship	92
Missions and Service	590
Office	2,176
Pastor/Ministry Staff	27,759
Trustees/bldg expenses	14,183
Worship	258
Mortgage	2,087
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$50,210</b>
<b>Income minus expenses</b>	<b>\$4,477</b>
<b>YTD budgeted offerings</b>	<b>\$47,500</b>
<b>Actual offerings</b>	<b>\$41,827</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>(-\$5,673)</b>

## Trustee Commission

The roofing project has been completed. Three of the four flat sections of the church roof have been replaced. Additionally, three sections of shingles were replaced that had blown off over the past several years. Three

spots on the education wing flat roof membrane have been repaired that had holes which were causing leaks when the roof received a lot of rain and it pooled at the top.

Our next step is tuck pointing. The person who we were arranging with backed out so we are looking for another person to take the project. As they need to use a 40 foot boom to get up and work from, not all masons feel comfortable doing that.

--Bruce Brunner

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

#### **The Latest from Quito**

It's been a quick few first months of 2014 and it's hard to believe we are already in May. Until we leave Quito in summer 2015, I will continue working through Mennonite Mission Network with the refugee project and other church activities. Virginia Mennonite Missions and Mennonite Central Committee have also generously committed to continue supporting me both in my work and financially, which is a huge blessing. MCC is currently in the process of looking for a person to replace me as coordinator of the refugee project, a transition that will likely happen in November. It will be nice to have adequate time to train my replacement and continue to help the refugee project in a supporting role.

Recently, there have been lots of activities happening at church and in the refugee project. As usual, we've been very busy at the refugee project. We continue to have lots of interview each week, home visits, follow-up with families, inter-organizational meetings, small business start-ups and difficult situations that continually throw us curve-balls and challenges. Currently, there are two refugee families whose fathers are in jail, leaving the mothers alone with several children to fend for themselves. One of the families has been attending our church regularly for quite some time and is greatly struggling.

Rocio, the mother, is unable to provide for her four children as an undocumented and unemployed refugee. I was able to visit her husband, Jair, in jail with our new pastor Luis. It was an impacting experience to be inside a noisy, dirty, over-crowded, chaotic Ecuadorian all-male jail. To my surprise, once inside the jail I ran into 2 other Colombian refugee men that I have worked with, whom I had no idea were imprisoned. They were happy to see a familiar face and receive a visit since no

one visits them. It appears that two of the three men are currently struggling to wade through a racist, discriminatory and corrupt justice system that has kept them from having a fair and timely trial.

On a more positive note, I was invited to represent the refugee project in a diverse space with representatives from different NGOs, gov't officials and members of civil society in order to redact a city ordinance about social inclusion of refugees and other migrant groups. It was exciting to be a part of the first stage of brainstorming. In the coming months we will be meeting again in order to hopefully have a draft written by October. It's wonderful to see the provincial gov't interested in these kinds of legislative processes.

--David Shenk

**The deadline for July newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, June 25<sup>th</sup>.**

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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.