

Faith Connection

March 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...

During the season of Lent, the six weeks leading up to the celebration of Easter, our Sunday morning worship theme is *Blessed Hunger, Holy Feast*. We will be drawing on resources developed by a writing team of Mennonites from across the United States and Canada. The theme grows out of the weekly scriptures of the Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scriptures followed by churches in many denominations. This year's scriptures during Lent portray God's people in difficult times, sometimes despairing, sometimes hungry and thirsty, sometimes far from home. They also proclaim a God of abundance who fills our deepest hunger with a satisfying feast.

Lent has traditionally been a time of confession and penitence. During Lent we will offer an extended time in our worship for confession. As we do so we will try to broaden the definition of confession to include "both confession of faith *in* God and confession *to* God of who we are in that relationship as well as in our relationships with others and our world" (Mary Schertz, Editorial, *Vision*, Fall 2002).

In the tradition of penitence, Lent has often been a time of "giving something up." This practice is based in more dualistic ascetic traditions where body and flesh were seen as a hindrance to the spiritual life. Theoretically one would give up a vice or a pleasure in order to focus greater attention on God. But my observation and experience is that we may end up craving the item we have given up more than we crave a deeper encounter with God. Today as we affirm a more holistic view of spirituality and claim body, mind and spirit as interconnected aspects of who we are as God's beloved, it may be more helpful to think of what we can "take on" to deepen our walk with Christ.

There is no doubt that some degree of hunger heightens our appetite and deepens the pleasure of a feast. What might we "take on" to increase the *blessed* hunger and draw us closer to God? Here are a few suggestions to consider.

- Spend some time (or increase the time you now spend) in quiet reflection each day; meditate on a scripture passage and listen for what God might be speaking to you.
- Make a reservation to spend a day, or 24 hours, or a whole weekend, at a retreat center and refresh yourself in silence and nature.
- Invite some FMC people who you don't know very well to your home for a simple meal at least once during Lent. Talk about what it is you hunger for in life and how you have experienced God's abundance.
- Volunteer in a homeless center or soup kitchen or stop and talk with a homeless stranger on the street.
- Embrace the painful situations in your life--things beyond your control--as a gift of unintentional, blessed hunger, and look for the ways that God has been present in the pain.

My walk through grief in recent months has been a time of blessed hunger and holy feast. The loss of my family members has often felt like a gnawing hunger, a yearning for their presence. At the same time I have experienced a depth of love--from my family, friends, coworkers and this congregation--that far exceeds anything I have previously known. Hunger and feast are not opposites; they are inextricably, blessedly linked. Let us hunger for God. Let us feast at the table of God's abundant love.

--Joetta Schlabach

“Every symbol points beyond itself to something else. Every symbol invites thought. The symbol of the cross in the church points to the God who was crucified, not between two candles on the altar, but between two thieves, in the place of the skull, where the outcasts belong, outside the gates of the city. It does not invite thought, but a change of mind. It is a symbol which therefore leads out of the church and out of the religious longing, into the fellowship of the oppressed and abandoned”

--*Jürgen Moltmann*, *The Crucified God*

What's happening at FMC...

Childcare Update

FMC preschool children are preparing to eat simply in season. Beginning January 2007, all snacks in childcare will be provided. Snacks will take into consideration children's allergies and parents' request for healthy food—especially for the times when children fill their stomachs with snacks instead of lunch.

As a part of thanking God for snack, we are taking time to learn the source of the main ingredient. On January 21, we learned that strawberries come from a plant that flowers when the flower dries up and a white berry forms. When the berry turns red, it is ready to pick and eat. Snack was frozen strawberries and strawberry jam on bread. On January 28, we learned that blueberries grow on bushes and that both people and bears like to eat blueberries. We thanked God that there were wise people who found the blueberries before the bears and froze the berries for our snack. Snack was frozen wild blueberries and blueberry muffins. On February 4, we learned about carrots taking sunshine into their lacy leaves and changing it into sugar to store in the big orange root. We thanked God for carrot sticks (or grated carrots for the toothless) and carrot cake. February 11 was review day, and we brought out the leftover strawberry jam, blueberry muffins and carrot cake. February 18 was a celebration of God giving us raspberries, and on February 25, we will thank God for zucchini. March snacks will be announced on the bulletin board across from the childcare room. Volunteers are most welcome to be good role models of being grateful for the awesome food God provides by

telling stories of growing and harvesting food or putting into words the pleasure of taste, smell, and texture of snack food. If an adult volunteer has special food needs, please let me know a week ahead of time so I can adjust the recipe.

This summer I will be offering opportunities to families with preschoolers and childcare volunteers to pick fruits and vegetables that we will be preserving for FMC childcare snacks next winter. Natura Farms uses sustainable practices and is held accountable for environmentally and socially responsible produce by Food Alliance Midwest. They have clean restrooms and a nice playground for children. After picking fruit, we can preserve it by freezing, drying it into leather, and making applesauce. I have equipment, and we can use the church kitchen as a workspace. When we eat the food next winter, we will pull out photos of the harvesting and preparing of food for storage. We will thank God for smart minds that can save food for future need. If anyone from the congregation has fruit growing in their backyard or shops at the farmers' market, you are welcome to join the outings and learn how to store produce for your Minnesota grown winter snacks.

American nutrition experts are warning that if there is no change in the diet of American children, those born in the year 2000 will have a one in two chance of being diabetic. After many years of employment in childcare centers, I am impressed with the openness to healthy food displayed by FMC children. The children eagerly ate the no-sugar-added frozen fruit. Whole grain breads, muffins and cakes were welcomed! FMC parents are doing a wonderful job of keeping your children out of the diabetic statistics. Thank you for blessing your children's future. Each child at snack is given a sample-size bite to try. After a sample, they can request more until hunger is satisfied or food is gone. After one bite of a blueberry muffin, Sam Semanchin-Jones requested a "whole muffin please." Sam knows a good thing when he tastes it.

--*Carol Harder*

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting January 8, 2007 @ FMC

Present: Alisa Bardo, Moderator; Neil Okerlund, Moderator-elect; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Sandra Westby, Worship; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Darrell Martin, Trustees; Erin Geiser, Deacons; Minke Sundseth, Missions & Service; Joan Kreider, Fellowship Commission; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Patrick Preheim, Pastor.

Absent: Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Patty Friesen, Pastor; Christian Education representative.

Minutes. Minutes of December 4, 2006, approved with corrections.

Treasurer's report. Jerry Janzen is absent. But Patrick reports that \$3500 came in from a bequest in December, and giving in general has been up. Darrell suggests we should have a bulletin announcement about progress on the budget. Trustees will handle this.

Pastors. Patrick says that the pastors are grateful that the pastoral reconfiguration has worked out. Space in the offices has been rearranged. Alisa asks what they are going to do about computers? Patrick says they are still figuring that out. Minke asks if pastors will have individual emails, to avoid confusion and protect confidentiality. Patrick says yes. They will put individual signatures on emails, and put this in upcoming mid-week announcements.

Commission Reports

Trustees. Glenn says the two new water fountains have been installed. In regard to a break-in in a tenants office, the locksmith had no security devices that would work for our doors. Trustees continuing to work on the issue. Joetta asks whether the outside doors are breakable? Not really sure. Darrell says Trustees hope to replace those doors soon. He distributes the Trustees' walk-through assessment of building needs. Some needs have been deferred due to focus on the elevator. Tenants' area needs improvements. Double doors into education wing need to be replaced. Need separate doorbells for each tenant. Also need to update old heating system. Interested in Council's input regarding priorities. Joetta suggests signage for education wing. Discussion of some custodial issues. Joan suggests importance of cleaning pigeon residue. Minke says the parent resource room needs vacuumed regularly. Joetta suggests a congregational "adopt a room" program. Clutter makes cleaning more difficult for a custodian. Joan suggests doing a "deep clean" in a different room each week. Sandy says there is no good place to store worship supplies. There are a lot of things stored in the building of unknown origin—how much is ours, or tenants? The old nursery is now empty; could it be used? Joetta says we need to think about it for future Sunday school needs as kids grow older. Neil suggests that committees discuss these issues and come back with some specific proposals. We also need to notify tenants when we schedule a project that affects them. Also need to add a line to the proposed 2007 budget for office computers.

Childcare committee. Patrick says the committee is

currently doing a background check on a potential new childcare coordinator. She is fairly young, an undergraduate student. Minke met with Carol Harder to discuss basic policies and guidelines for the coordinator. Patrick has talked to Andi Kuenning about extending the "Gather Round" curriculum for the worship nursery.

Deacons. Deacons haven't met. Alisa asks whether there is now a designated Sunday 4X4 time? Erin says yes, that is the general idea, for the first Sunday of the month during Sunday school. Darrell suggests looking at logistics of this in relation to Sunday school. It is difficult to get a SS teacher to prepare a class if only a few people show up.

Pastor/Parish Committee. Committee is meeting next week to review the past year's process and plan for this year.

Missions and Service. Minke explains M&S's decisions on year-end giving to local social service and religious organizations. Committee decided that if the budget fell short, they would give equal percentages to all organizations. Also discussed making Mennonite organizations a regular line item, rather than a part of M&S giving. Joan asks what is the rationale for treating specifically Mennonite organizations per se differently? Suggests M&S should have specific criteria for giving. Erin asks whether doing this way would create too many budget lines? Joan suggests that this should be a more open process. Gregg says M&S will develop criteria and discuss with the congregation in Sunday school, or present in a "kingdom report."

Worship Commission. Commission has not met. Sandy thanks Neil for leading men's chorus during Lent. Dan Leisen did the decorations for the Christmas tree. Their goal for the year was to better incorporate children and youth into the worship. Also they need storage, and techniques for storing different worship materials. Alisa asks whether we need to replace some hymnals. Sandy says there are currently enough hymnals.

Old business

Gifts discernment Do we need to vet the gifts discernment slate any further? No.

Constitution. Gregg will send the final draft of the new Constitution to Council to read once more and offer feedback before the congregational meeting.

Policy on compensation. Erin asks what our current policy is on financial compensation for work done by members of the congregation? There seems to be a consensus that we don't pay members for work. Darrell says that at the least, any decision to pay in a specific instance should be a decision of the Council.

--Gregg Richardson, Secretary

Faith Mennonite Church Annual Meeting

January 28, 2007 @ FMC

Draft minutes approved by Church Council, pending approval by full congregation at next congregational meeting.

Present: Alisa Bardo-Martinson (Moderator), Gregg Richardson (Secretary), Jerry Janzen, Chris Semanchin-Jones, Mike Okerstrom, Barbara Beers, Joan Wing, Dan Leisen, Richard Westby, Sandra Westby, Phil Stoltzfus, Candace Lutt, Carol Harder, Darrell Martin, Gerald Schlabach, Joetta Schlabach, Gabe Schlabach, Joan Kreider, Orv Gingerich, Kathleen Harder, Terry Gerber, Dan Gerber, Thaine Dirks, Matthew Hendricks, Shelly Hendricks, Rachel Geissinger, Leslie Geissinger, Glenn Geissinger, Arlene Holdeman, Cleta Roth Gingerich, Beth Richardson, Patty Friesen, Patrick Preheim, Wolf Bartel, Lois Warfield, Tom Johnson, Pat Eliason, Neil Okerlund, John Ratigan, Martha Mayou, Michael Schrock, Erin Geiser, Melissa Falb, Minke Sundseth, Arlene Geissinger, Hermann Weinlick.

Alisa Bardo-Martinson **opens the meeting with prayer at 1:09pm**

Minutes of November 19, 2006 special congregational meeting: Minutes accepted as written. (Wolf Bartel moves, Glenn Geissinger seconds). Secretary Gregg Richardson announces that he has forgotten to bring the February 5, 2006 annual meeting minutes, which were provisionally approved by Council for publication in the newsletter in April of 2006. These will need to be officially approved at the next congregational meeting

Reports. Erin Geiser on behalf of the deacons thanks the ad hoc Nursery Committee of Glenn Geissinger, Patty Friesen, Beth Richardson, Carol Harder and Minke Sundseth, for their work in reorganizing nursery space and hiring a nursery caregiver this fall. Alisa asks the congregation for questions about any of the submitted annual reports. No questions. Alisa notes that the Pastor/Parish Committee report was not submitted in time for inclusion in the packet, and is available separately.

Treasurer's Report. Jerry Janzen presents the report for 2006. Two significant events for last year: \$20,000 for the final payment on building improvements of 2005, created a strain on cash flow for the entire year, which he covered by withdrawing \$11,000 from the Calvert fund. Due to an appeal for contributions after Thanksgiving, the local budget giving ended the year in a healthy state. Mike Schrock moves and Glenn Geissinger seconds a motion to accept the treasurer's report. Passes unanimously.

Proposed 2007 budget. Jerry presents the proposed 2007 budget. Under Conference Support category, our contribution to the Hmong congregation is being reduced by half, as the conference is encouraging them to become self-sufficient soon. Changes in budget for pastors: Anticipated health insurance costs are down by \$5500, as Joetta is covered by Gerald's policy, and Patty and Patrick will be covered under Patrick's other new half-time position. \$2500 budgeted for a new computer for the office (line 33). Decided not to allocate money to the sabbatical fund or the world conference fund this year, as both are fairly far in the future. Will replace money in the Calvert fund instead. Questions: Candace Lutt asks whether money is allocated for the tuition support fund. Jerry says that designated offerings and growth in the Calvert fund keep that fund healthy, There is currently about \$26,000 in the fund. Joan Kreider says the 2006 report should say that \$3000 was budgeted for tuition support and \$6000 paid out Candace asks whether it will be a budgeted item this year. Jerry says no, it will not need a budget line this year. Candace asks whether it had a budget line last year, Jerry says \$5000 was budgeted. Candace moves and Neil Okerlund seconds, that the proposed 2007 budget be accepted. Passes unanimously.

Gifts Discernment slate. Alisa asks the congregation to look at the lists of candidates recommended for congregational offices. Joan Wing notes that she is shown as a carryover on the Retreat Planning Committee for 2008, but she was not on the committee this year. Patty Friesen says that the Gifts Discernment committee will fill that position as well. Darrell Martin moves and Patty Friesen seconds the motion to accept the gifts slate. Slate accepted by acclamation.

Proposed new Constitution. Hermann Weinlick presents the proposed Constitution, saying that the draft of the constitution that the congregation received incorporates all comments made on previous drafts. The committee has not started to address the appendices, which will comprise a church handbook of procedures and practices that are non-constitutional, and has not started to address the idea of a process for consensus decision-making, therefore references to voting remain intact. Joetta Schlabach says that the description of the Pastor/Parish Committee seems to presuppose a pastoral couple, shouldn't it be changed to reflect pastors who are not a couple? Joan Kreider suggests changing the language to say that pastors may select "one or two" members of the committee. Barb Beers adds that the wording would then also have to say the total committee had "four or five" members. Kathleen Harder says that this would leave the situation

too ambiguous. Hermann moves that the congregation accept the Constitution without section 4.A.3.a. Barb seconds. Discussion: But this leaves no way to select new members to the Pastor/Parish Committee until a new section is approved. Discussion of how to amend the text without leaving the Constitution hanging. Hermann withdraws his motion. Darrell Martin moves and Joan Kreider seconds the motion to approve the full draft of the new Constitution. Motion passes unanimously. Gerald Schlabach then moves, and Candace Lutt seconds a motion to ask the committee to come back to the congregation with an alternative proposal for section 4.A.3.a. Motion passes unanimously.

Moderator elect. Neil Okerlund says that his year on Council as moderator-elect has prepared him to see the big picture, and presents Alisa a congregational gift and applause for her year as moderator.

Thanksgivings. Members of the congregation share their thanksgivings for the past year.

Patrick Preheim moves and Phil Stoltzfus seconds the motion to adjourn. Meeting is adjourned at 1:45pm.

-- Gregg Richardson, Secretary

What's happening here and there...

Are We Dismissed Too Easily?

On February 1, a group of peace activists gathered in the undersized Hennepin County Courtroom in Edina, to once again face charges of “criminal trespass” for entering the property of Alliant Techsystems, our local war profiteer and notorious manufacturer and seller of indiscriminate and illegal weapons such as cluster bombs, depleted uranium munitions, and land mines, as well as rocket motors for delivery of nuclear bombs via missiles. 78 defendants were on the court docket and most had showed up for trial, claiming their innocence even though the Edina City Prosecutor offered a deal of only a \$5.00 fine for those choosing to plead guilty. Many defendants were anxious to have the opportunity to speak in court about their convictions which led them to this collective act of resistance to this present war (where some of these weapons have been used) and to corporations profiting from war and offensive weapons which masquerade as “national defense”.

AlliantAction has faithfully voiced opposition to the weapons made by ATK for more than ten years, with several hundred having been arrested for nonviolent

protest over the years. Four times in that 10 year period juries have found defendants “not guilty” of criminal trespass charges after they have carefully listened to testimony about ATK as a war profiteer and maker of illegal, indiscriminate weapons. When defendants have been allowed to submit copies of international law outlawing indiscriminate weapons to the juries, they have been acquitted. After two consecutive juries returned with “not guilty” verdicts within a week of each other in December 2004, the City Council of Edina passed a new trespass ordinance which removed our right to a jury trial by making the trespass charge a petty misdemeanor. Now we could only receive bench trials before a judge.

When we had the ability to present our case to a jury, the groups of defendants often cooperated with the prosecutor prior to the trial by stipulating much of the case against us, thus negating the need for police officers coming to court to identify us and give testimony about the “fact” that we were on ATK’s property and refused (nonviolently) to leave until arrested. This allowed us to focus our trials solely on the questions we had about the weapons ATK made and sold and its legality under international law. As a form of protest to our right to a jury trial being removed by the new Edina City ordinance, our trial group chose not to stipulate the evidence against us, putting the burden back on the state to prove we were guilty of the crime of criminal trespass.

In our conversation with the Prosecutor, we stated that if we were able to testify in front of a jury of our peers, we were likely to resume our previous tactic of cooperating and stipulating to the evidence and thus speed up the process of the trial. To better place this discussion in its rightful context, it must be mentioned that there is at present an active appeal which disputes the legality of the new Edina trespass ordinance and the oral arguments will be heard on February 7, with a decision by the Appeals Court required within 90 days. If the ordinance is overturned because it is more restrictive than the state statute or because it was passed by the City Council in a defective and illegal manner, the trespass charges against us would be thrown out. In light of that context, the Prosecutor stated that he would move to dismiss the charges against us. Tom Bottolene and Char Madigan agreed to plead "guilty" in an attempt to preserve our legal position with the appeal.

Part of the conversation with the Prosecutor also centered on the relationship between the police and the protestors. The representative group of defendants agreed that we wish to continue to make it clear that our

protest is against the war profiteer rather than the city or its law enforcement personnel. However, the question that still remains: Who will hold ATK accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity?

--Steve Clemens

Connecting Families Weekend: Journey Toward Wholeness

Connecting Families is committed to providing mutual support for families with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or intersex members. As a part of the Christian/Anabaptist tradition, we respect the various places people are in their spiritual journeys and in their pilgrimages of understanding gay and lesbian concerns. Through listening and sharing our stories, we seek to provide support for families whose children are coming out to them and/or to their church. We are committed to maintaining confidentiality within the group, to providing a place to speak in safety or to remain silent, and to sharing in a non-judgmental atmosphere. As a group, we work to find ways to educate and engage our churches in dialogue and to help them understand and accept our families.

We welcome families, friends, and supporters of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as well as GLBT persons themselves. Connecting Families Weekend is intended to be a safe, relaxing time to share our common thoughts regarding sexual minority issues as they affect our families, our friends, our churches, and ourselves.

The weekend, at the Antiochian Village in Bolivar, Pennsylvania, from April 20th to 22nd, features Ann Showalter, who served six years in AIDS ministry in Chicago followed by nearly five years on the pastoral staff of First Mennonite Church in Denver, Colorado. Ann is the author of *Touched by Grace*, a book published in 2006. Books will be available at the conference. Presently, Ann is retired and offers individual and group spiritual direction.

Registration forms and information are available on the BMC website at: <http://www.bmclgbt.org>.

Fr. Richard Rohr in Rochester

Richard Rohr, O.F.M., a Franciscan priest, spiritual leader, and world-renowned lecturer will be in Rochester Minnesota for four lectures, the weekend of March 29-31. "Spirituality and Healing," a noon lecture on Thursday, March 29, at the Mayo Clinic, asks how health care professionals can help people to frame their situation in a broader, deeper, bigger context. "Jesus

Misunderstood," Thursday evening at Christ United Methodist Church, examines how the church has made much more of Jesus' divinity than of his humanity, or even most of his teaching.. It is the unity of the two, humanity and divinity, that changes everything. "Spirituality, the Hope in the Darkness," also at Christ UMC on Friday and Saturday evenings, March 30th and 31st, examines the components of a healthy spirituality, which enables our inner state and stance toward the outer world to resist the victory of darkness and negativity.

A brochure with registration form and more details is available at:

integrativetherapies.homestead.com/calendar.html.

A Prayer in Winter

We come to you, O God, in the stillness, the quiet
winter beauty
of snow falling on pine trees, gently covering stubbly
harvested fields,
softly, slowly transforming grey city streets.

Help us to live fully in these cold days and nights,
brilliant and subdued by turn.
As the earth prepares for summer's growth,
help us also to receive you,
the fount of creativity and hope.

Prepare our hearts and minds for surprising grace.
Grant us, O God, the gifts of silence and reflection,
sacrament in the space of secularity,
holiness at the hearth of home.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

--Mary Schertz

*Professor of New Testament,
Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary*

Deadline for April newsletter items is noon, March 29th.

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.