

Faith Connection

March 2009

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...

On Ash Wednesday we repeat the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return." They remind me of a conversation I listened too several years ago when author Karen Armstrong was in the Twin Cities. Krista Tippett, of the radio show *Speaking of Faith*, hosted an inter-faith conversation among Armstrong and three women, one Christian, one Jewish, and one Muslim. During the conversation Stacy Offner, then rabbi of Shir Tikvah, a reform Jewish congregation in Minneapolis, told the story of how her mother always calls a few days before Passover to make sure that she's cleaned out her refrigerator, disposing of all traces of leaven, before this feast of unleavened bread. But, Rabbi Stacy said, cleaning the refrigerator is just part of the story. The real story of pre-Passover cleaning is about the leaven that's within us—our pride, our self-confidence, our tendency to think we're in control, to think that we're a lot more than dust.

As our nation's financial crisis deepens and new stories come to light each day of Ponzi schemes, real estate speculating, and the intricate games that bankers played, we realize that our national refrigerator was long overdue for a cleaning. As painful as the economic constriction is for many, it will no doubt, in the end, be our salvation, the cleaning we need. Scientists have been warning that the US lifestyle, with its oversized cars, houses and appetites for consumer products, are damaging the natural ecosystem and climate. We can hope that this crisis will lead to a more reasonable, within-our-means national lifestyle.

What is our role as Christians in painful times like these? Lent calls us to join in confession, recognizing the allure of the consumer culture even if we haven't bought into it whole-heartedly. From confession we move to profession, or testimony, that our lives are in God's hands (our worship theme this Lent). We

demonstrate this trust and hope as we look to others in our community for help with the everyday needs like childcare and home repair and the emergency needs for a car or meals, rather than going it alone with credit cards. We demonstrate this trust and hope as we pause to rest on the Sabbath and take pleasure in time with our families and friends, rather than toiling endlessly. We demonstrate this trust and hope as we continue to give generously of our time, our talents, and our money to support those who have been thrown out in the current cleaning process, losing homes and jobs.

Our neighbors, colleagues, friends and extended family need this trust and hope. We each have a great gift to share.

--Joetta Schlabach

"Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets [oneself]—by giving [oneself] to a cause to serve another person to love—the more human [one] is, and the more one actualizes [oneself]. "

-- Victor Frankl

What's happening at FMC...

Lent 2009 Observances

Worship: Our Lives Are In Your Hands

The scriptures we will read in our Sunday worship during the six weeks of Lent have two guiding foci: the Old Testament texts of salvation history recite the major

God-initiated covenants; the gospels of Mark and John trace the journey of Jesus from his baptism to his death on the cross, from anointing by God to surrender into the hands of God. These texts call the faithful to continue in their faithfulness, grounded in what God has provided in the covenants and in the example of Jesus' self-giving love.

One of the purposes of Lent is a reorientation of life toward God grounded in confession both public and private. Confession tells the truth about where we have gone wrong as well as what we are learning. Confession helps form and heal community.

Our Lenten Worship Planning Committee this year includes Alisa Bardo-Martinson, Kristin Green, Joan Kreider, Adam Nafziger, and Deedee Stevens Neal. Kristin and Joan developed the visual elements.

Soup & Silence

In addition to Sunday morning worship, we will have a mid-week opportunity during the season of Lent to pause in the midst of our busy schedules, break bread with brothers and sisters, and pray for ourselves, our church, our neighborhood, and our world. The day will change from week to week, to accommodate varying schedules. The schedule will remain constant:

6-6:30 p.m. – Soup & Bread

6:30-7 p.m. - Prayer

The dates are: Wednesday, March 4, Thursday, March 12, Tuesday, March 17, Wednesday, March 25, and Monday, March 30. Soup & Silence will be held in the Chapel of the education wing. The pastor and deacons will provide the meal and facilitate the prayer time.

On Maundy Thursday, April 9, we will have our traditional Maundy Thursday meal and communion service.

--Joetta Schlabach

New Orleans Bound

On Sunday evening, March 8, five FMCers, Arlene Geissinger, Ruth Gerber, Katie Hochstedler, Joetta Schlabach, and Teresa Wasick, will be arriving in New Orleans and receiving an orientation for their week of work with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). MDS is a volunteer network through which various constituencies of the Anabaptist church can respond to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States. While the main focus of MDS is on clean up, repair and rebuilding homes, this activity becomes a

means of touching lives and helping people regain faith and wholeness. MDS focuses on helping the most vulnerable: the elderly, the handicapped, single parents, the unemployed, the uninsured and the underinsured—those who are not covered by traditional means of recovery.

New Orleans had a population of approximately 450,000 before Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005. The city was damaged not so much by the wind and rain but by the failure of the levees surrounding the city. When the levee system failed, 80% of the city was flooded. Over 1500 people died in Louisiana. A few weeks after Katrina wreaked havoc on the city, the lower ninth ward, home to many of the city's poorest, was flooded again by Hurricane Rita's storm surge. Today, thousands of homes still sit empty; only 65-70% of New Orleans' resident have returned. The city's population is roughly 2/3 African American and 1/3 white, with a small number of Latinos and Native Americans.

Because of the magnitude of the damage, for the first time in its history, MDS bought property to facilitate a long-term recovery response. The camp consists of a large building that accommodates sleeping, bath, kitchen, dining and tool storage facilities. MDS partners with various agencies that provide funding for building materials and casework to identify those most in need. MDS current work includes new and reconstruction work.

Pray for our FMC group as we partner with a congregation from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to work in the spirit of Christ by sharing our time, talents and energies to help to build homes and friendships.

--Joetta Schlabach

Immigration and Food Justice: A Multi-Faith Dialogue

Following up on the 2008 spring forum on the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, a subcommittee of the Missions and Service Commission is planning a spring forum for 2:30-4:30pm on Sunday afternoon, March 29, at FMC. The forum will remain with the theme of sustainable food, but will broaden the discussion to immigration. What impact do immigrants as people and immigration policy have on the production and distribution of food in the U.S.? Who benefits? Who suffers? A panel from different faith perspectives will discuss how the values of justice and respect apply to the connections between immigration and food.

Panelists will include: Rabbi Morris Allen, Beth Jacob Congregation; Tisha Rajendra, University of St. Thomas; Owais Bayunus, Islamic Center of Minnesota.

Co-Sponsors include: Faith Mennonite Church, Islamic Center of Minnesota, Jewish Community Action, Bread for the World Upper Midwest Office, Oxfam Action Corps Minnesota, Community of St. Martin, Pan-African Community Organization, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, The Church of St. Albert the Great, and the Land Stewardship Project.

The forum will be open to the public and free. For more information, contact Michael Bischoff at 612-521-1889. We will once again be looking for volunteers to help set up the fellowship hall and prepare food for a snack potluck following the forum. If you are interested in helping with food, or another aspect of the forum, please talk to Melissa Hochstetler.

-- Michael Bischoff and Melissa Hochstetler

Pan-African Meal And Entertainment To Support The Pan-African Community Organization

In FMC's discernment this past fall about community relationships we were called to expand, connections with East African neighbors in Seward came out as a clear priority. In following up in that area, FMC is developing an ongoing partnership with the Pan-African Community Organization (PACO), which is based in Seward. We are working with PACO to help them establish a new Learning Center in the neighborhood, which will provide ESL for adults and a range of other services for African immigrants.

We would like to encourage everyone at FMC to get to know people and programs at PACO at this fundraising meal, hosted by FMC on Saturday April 25th, 4:00–7:00 pm at FMC. The schedule will be:

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| 4:00 – 5:00 pm | African Cultural Show |
| 5:00 – 5:30 pm | Presentation and Stories from the Pan-African Community Organization |
| 5:30 – 7:00 pm | Pan-African Meal, with dishes from several African cultures |

Suggested donation for the event: \$10 - \$30 per person. Pay as you are able. Contact Michael Bischoff (612-521-1889) with questions.

-- Michael Bischoff

Forum on Affordable, Supportive Affordable Housing Project in Seward

FMC is collaborating with the Community of St. Martin to offer an Adult Education session about a new affordable housing project that is proposed in the Seward neighborhood. The developers of this project have asked Faith Mennonite for our moral and public support as they work with the neighborhood, the city, and funders. Please come join this discussion to learn more about this project. MICAH, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council for Affordable Housing, will be presenting a program on the impact of the housing crisis on our neighborhoods along with a brief legislative update on housing and foreclosure bills. This presentation will be tied to the Bystrom site Franklin LRT Redevelopment planned by Seward Redesign. Currently, a partnership of Project for Pride in Living and Touchstone are proposing 40 units of permanent supportive housing in the first phase of this four-acre parcel redevelopment. The forum will be held on Sunday, March 15, 5:30-6:25pm in the Faith Mennonite Church Sanctuary. Come to discuss current housing issues and the great potential in this critical transit oriented development right in the Seward neighborhood. Contact Michael Bischoff with questions.

-- Michael Bischoff

Women: Save the Date for a Spring Retreat!

**May 8-9
Carondelet Center**

Details coming soon!

Men's Retreat

Men's retreat returned this February after missing a year. We made our back to Snowshoe Lodge after meeting up there four years ago for retreat. Ron runs a very simple lodge in a very, very quiet part of the state. About 30 miles south of Ely, Ron's land allowed us to snowshoe in the knee deep snow and do some back country skiing. We also made the semi-regular pilgrimage into Ely Saturday night to take a steam at the 1920's Finnish Sauna and have a steak dinner.

Sunday morning was filled with more snowshoeing, a hymn-sing, and a simple time of prayer and reflection in our group cabin. Thanks to everyone at the church who helped make this retreat happen again this year, especially the many spouses and children who supported our time of fellowship and reflection.

--Andy Martinson

Deacons Report

The Deacons Commission met on February 18, 2009. Cleta shared a devotional from the book *Don't Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior*, by Arthur Paul Boers. Hermann reported on the men's retreat, which was attended by 10 men February 13-15. They enjoyed great weather, show-shoeing, excellent food and fellowship. We thank Andy Martinson for organizing the retreat. Joetta is meeting with Erin Geiser, Rhonda Martin, and Leslie Minkler to begin planning a women's retreat for May 8-9. Joetta and the deacons will offer a weekly "Soup & Silence" evening during the weeks of Lent.

We discussed ways we as a congregation can respond to the worsening economic situation. Ideas included: car sharing; examining how we use our money (Cleta referred to an article "Money Formula: Live Gratefully, Spend Less, Buy Justly, Give More" in a recent issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review*); continuation of parts of Simply in Season project; FMC Craigslist of items people are willing to share, which could be posted on a member page of the FMC website; increased awareness of resources available through Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA).

We are planning a greeter & usher breakfast in March to review together our Sunday morning roles. We concluded the meeting with a time of prayer for personal needs within the church.

--Kami Blackwell Kinney, recorder

All Good Things Come to an End

For the past year we have been blessed with flowering plants delivered every two weeks by Carol Stoltzfus, owner of Flowers by Design in St. Paul. She chose to share them with us because of her friendship with Mike Schrock. Last week she notified us that the business contract that purchased the plants has ended, due to the financial situation. We will miss the beauty, brightness,

and hope that the plants have provided during this year. They helped sustain us during our grieving process and they also brought joy to many people in care centers where various members delivered them. Thanks to everyone who helped display them at church and delivered them to care centers.

--Joetta Schlabach

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting January 12th, 2009 @ FMC

Present: Neil Okerlund, Moderator; Jenny Wandersee, Worship; Gregg Richardson, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Barb Beers, Fellowship; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Joan Kreider, Moderator-elect; Pat Eliason, Education; Thaine Dirks, Pastor-Parish.

Absent: Deacons representative, Missions & Service representative.

Affirmations. Joan affirms all who contributed to worship during Advent. Glenn agrees that the Advent theme meant a lot to him. Joetta affirms Matthew Blackwell-Kinney, Neil and Michael Bischoff for their presence. Joetta also affirms all the snow shovelers during a very snowy winter. Glenn affirms Darrell Martin for wrapping up the heating project.

Treasurer's report. Jerry says December 2008 was the highest congregational giving ever at \$16,000. The checking account now has \$55,000. He will put cash into Calvert money market soon, and will pay conference support early in January this time. He will also go ahead and make FMC's contribution to World Conference fund since other local Mennonite congregations didn't respond to our proposal to make a pooled contribution. Changes to the draft 2009 budget since last month: no youth are going to conference, so zeroed that; increased budget for improvement in the library; moved the Meserete Kristos contribution to M&S, divided M&S into three separate line items. Glenn says people will probably ask why line 43 didn't go up? Jerry says he set it too high last year, because we didn't know the outcome of the pastor situation yet, and it's been reduced based on actual current situation. Joan asks how we are making up the loss of rent from the parsonage? Jerry says we scattered reductions through pastor medical coverage (since Joetta has coverage through Gerald), trustees (heat should be cheaper with the new furnaces), and the housing allowance. Joetta asks if the draft includes the ISAIAH rent increase? Jerry left it out, will correct it.

2009 Gifts discernment slate. Positions have been finalized and are distributed to Council. No mentor coordinator, because we have no youth of mentoring age, but we may add someone to coordinate “sponsoring families” for child dedications. Neil says we’ve done well in incorporating younger members. Barb says the retreat committee now shows under Fellowship, was previously under Deacons. It’s noted that the list of offices appears to be a bit random. Gregg suggests that it would be good to organize it before we print a new church handbook.

Annual meeting. Neil passes out proposed agenda. Neil and Joetta decided that perhaps we’ve done enough visioning for now, and should instead have commissions submit written reports and turn the meeting into a celebration/affirmation of commissions, and use post-it note affirmations for the commissions and individuals. We can do this meeting during education hour, then have a potluck. Joan says this can be an opportunity for each commission to say “this is our vision,” based on the focusing we’ve done over the past year. Joetta will check into childcare. Also a special recognition for Bernie Waibel, a Seward neighborhood contractor, for his work on the building this year.

Michael Bischoff report. Michael says he’s spent October and November listening to congregational interests, and made a presentation at a November adult ed hour. His handout highlights the areas with the most congregational energy. M&S is planning a community forum; M&S is also working with Pan-African Community Organization on a fundraising meal for their learning center (and made a contribution). Pat suggests that M&S might want to look at what other ESL classes are available, so we don’t duplicate what others are doing. Michael says he has discussed it with them, and they have a relationship with an Oromo population, who are not comfortable with some other locations. Some visitors from FMC attended a service at Bethesda Missionary Baptist, and their monthly discussion groups on race. They are still discussing a new building. Barb says it may be useful to clarify to FMC members what the nature of our relationship with them is. We will be meeting with Community of St Martin to discuss our relationship with them on January 25th.

Commission reports.

Trustees. Reviewed their job description. Glenn met with the interior redecoration committee, hopeful to have an idea by February 8, and to present one proposal rather than several.

Fellowship. Met to plan their annual report. Still need to plan upcoming baby shower.

Deacons. Joetta says several will be joining on February 8th. Greg Renstrom can’t become an official member due to Methodist church policy on retired pastors, but he will be acknowledged as a committed participant.

Missions and Service. Gregg reports that M&S has clarified its policy on contributions, and identified community organizations to contribute to, based on ongoing relationships with them. Michael covered most of their other activities.

Worship. Currently planning for Lent.

Education. Pat says they’ve also discussed their revision of the commission job description. The new SS format is going forward, with the January series by the Worship Commission, then new adult ed classes.

Other business. Council and Commissions will have an annual retreat on March 14th.

Joetta shares a letter to the conference that she and other pastors were asked to sign, in support of LGBT inclusion in the church. She asks for feedback. She feels and Council members tend to agree that we support it in principle, but would like to suggest some more constructive edits of language.

--Gregg Richardson

What's happening here and there...

Community of St Martin Event at FMC

On Sunday, March 8, Community of St Martin member Deb Wuerffel will be sharing stories from her work with the Minnesota Home Ownership Center. The Center is a statewide nonprofit that promotes successful home ownership through education and counseling. She will be presenting information about their overall work, as well as a focus on foreclosure trends and the work the Center is doing with foreclosure intervention counseling statewide.

We will meet in the upstairs chapel space in the Sunday School building at Faith Mennonite from 5:30 pm to 6:25 pm.

--Carol Witte, Community of St Martin

Iraq Peace Action Coalition

March 19 marks the sixth anniversary of the war on Iraq. On March 21 The Iraq Peace Action Coalition comprised of local peace and justice groups, is organizing a rally and march, “Troops Out Now: Money for Human Needs” calling for an end to the occupations