

Faith Connection

March 2010

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...

Then [Jesus] told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" - Luke 13:6-9

I lived this parable this week as I spent a few days visiting my mother in her south Texas winter home. As we walked around the yard on my first day there, I asked about the tree that was totally leafless, bare save for a few dried up seed pods. "It's a pecan tree," my mother said, "and it's very slow in leafing out this year but it looks like a few buds are starting to form." Curious, I reached for one of the opened pods still clinging tenaciously to a branch and found a pecan inside. Its shell was a dull gray-brown, not the usual shiny, brown that one associates with pecans. I took it to the house and opened it and to my surprise the nutmeat was tasty. My mother was also surprised; she had given up on that tree and hadn't even considered that it might have edible fruit on it.

Later that day we went to a farm store to buy fertilizer for the citrus trees my father had planted on their lot. I noticed that one bag said "for pecan and citrus trees." It wasn't what my mother had intended to purchase, since the chemical mix was slightly different from the usual citrus fertilizer, but I talked her into one bag. Later as we dug away the grass from around the pecan tree to open the soil to receive the fertilizer she admitted that she'd given up on the tree. She had instructed her summer gardener to let the grass grow since she didn't intend to fertilize it any longer.

That pecan tree was a good Lenten lesson for me. Even the most desolate, barren times in our lives can be times of fruitfulness, if we peel back the dry, dead, outer shell and look for the kernel of life that is within. Jesus' time in the wilderness of temptation exemplifies this paradox. His time alone, hungry and beleaguered by the Tempter to orient his life toward comfort, notoriety and power, produced the fruit of resolve to remain true to a very different calling. His was the call to find life by losing it, to turn people toward God not to himself.

Lent invites us to claim the barren areas and dead branches in our lives as places of potential growth. We can prune and fertilize with the variety of spiritual disciplines that are available to us: prayer, meditative reading of scripture and other books, spending time in silence, looking for something small to celebrate and give thanks for each day, taking part in some form of service.

I like to think of God as the gardener in the parable Jesus told. God longs for new life and growth in each of us. God will fertilize all of our actions with the grace, energy and love of the Holy Spirit.

--Joetta Schlabach

"All of humanity's problems stem from our inability to sit quietly in a room alone"

--Blaise Pascal

What's happening at FMC...

Meet Kathleen Remund

To those of you I haven't yet met--greetings! To all those who I *have* met in my first three weeks here with Faith Mennonite--thank you for your warm welcome. If you haven't already read my bio on the website or the e-

news, know that I'm a 25-year resident of Seward neighborhood and a longtime member of the Community of St. Martin (CSM). I've been worshipping in your basement for years, and I knew of your congregation before I ever moved into the neighborhood. I've known some of you through neighborhood activities, others through St. Martin's Table, and still others through the Peace Village summer camp that Faith Mennonite and CSM cosponsored for many years. I also worked for Mike Schrock's architectural firm in the late 90s, and I share your awareness of this anniversary of his untimely death. I had tremendous respect for Mike, and I'm very sorry he's gone.

My commitment to nonviolence has its roots in my experiences in Israel/Palestine and Central America during college. I have a long history of feminist activism and community-based peace work. In 2006, I completed a Masters of Divinity degree from United Theological Seminary, and I am seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ.

I'm grateful and privileged to serve as your ministry staff person for community outreach. During the past three weeks, Joetta has been immersing me in the stories and activities of the congregation. Michael Bischoff has graciously begun orienting me to the recent history of your collective efforts to reach out, build relationships, and engage with the wider community. I've met with the Missions and Service and Christian Education commissions and I attended the Council retreat last Saturday. I've had informal conversations with many of you, and I'd like to set up coffee dates with any who may have particular insights or energy related to outreach in the greater Seward neighborhood. My most immediate focus is helping with the fundraiser this Sunday, working with Donna Minter to promote and raise funds for the STAR training in June, and supporting the CE committee as they put together a vacation Bible school program for this summer.

If you'd like to share your thoughts with me, please feel free to make the first move and send me an email at: minstaff@faithmennonite.org. You can also call the office and leave a message for me, but be aware that because this job is part-time and I have other demanding work commitments, it may take a while for me to get back to you by phone. I do, however, check the minstaff email daily.

--Kathleen Remund

Vacation Bible School at FMC, June 14-18

Plans are getting underway for a one-week Vacation Bible School for children age 4 through grade 4, June 14-18, 9-11:30 a.m. Please mark your calendar and contact Shelly Hendricks if you would like to get involved: we'll need teachers, helpers, snack providers, etc. Help one morning or all five! The planning group consists of Shelly Hendricks, Kami Blackwell Kinney, Marcia Siggelkow, Minke Sundseth, Andi Kuenning, and Kathleen Remund.

FMC Council and Commission Planning Retreat

The FMC Church Council and commission members began the new church year with a retreat held Saturday morning, February 20 in the church basement. After worship and introductions, the attendees divided into two groups to discuss questions important to the congregation. One group examined the annual reports and discussed how well we accomplished the church's goals set for this past year. The other group examined church documents, such as the constitution, mission statement, and informational literature, asking the questions "what do our documents say about who we are?" and "is anything missing?" In whole group discussion after the break-out sessions, it was concluded that we are a dynamic church, moving forward, with more of an outward reach than our documents actually reflect.

The treasurer's report for January showed income of \$10,306.64 and disbursements of \$12,048.44. In the pastor's report, Joetta said she has been asked to participate in two activities of Mennonite Church USA. The Interchurch Relations Office has asked her to serve in the Church Association Group, which meets by conference call every year and in person every two years to reflect on Mennonite Church relations with interchurch bodies, such as The National Council of Churches. The other request is for Joetta to conduct a workshop on church security at the next MC USA convention, to be held in Pittsburg. She has agreed to both of these.

Neil Okerlund gave a brief presentation on tools to use to help facilitate meetings. Finally, Kathleen Remund, the new ministry staff person told us about herself and her immediate plans for her work with FMC. You will find her introduction of herself elsewhere in this newsletter.

--Arlene Holdeman, Secretary

News from the Fellowship Commission

The Fellowship Commission recently placed a set of guidelines for hosting our fellowship time in church mailboxes. We hope these will help everyone feel comfortable taking a turn hosting our fellowship time on Sunday morning. We have about 70 households in our church, so if everyone participates no one should have to host more than once a year! We try to have two people assigned each week so that it is not an onerous task. Home baked treats are not required – pretzels, fresh fruit, store-bought cookies are just fine! If you've never hosted before, feel free to ask someone to join you – or sign up wherever there's an empty slot.

The Fellowship Commission has decided to serve fair trade coffee during fellowship time. Kitchen coordinator Cori Skogerboe will keep a supply of coffee in the kitchen freezer for use each Sunday morning. To help support the cost of purchasing the coffee we will start putting out a collection box for donations each Sunday. Like/need coffee? Please help us pay for it!

--Arlene Geissinger & Minke Sundseth

Deacons' Report

We started off our first meeting of the year by bidding farewell to Cleta Roth Gingerich, who finished her term as deacon. We spent time sharing what we learned during our last year together on the deacons' commission. Then we welcomed new deacon Greg Renstrom into our midst.

In the effort to bring Greg up to speed on some of our deacon responsibilities, we reviewed the Greeter/Usher Duty sheet that Cleta and Joetta have compiled. We also assigned deacons' commission roles. We will all continue in the same roles as the prior year, with Greg assuming Cleta's roles on the retreat and discernment committees.

With Lent fast approaching (pun intended!), we discussed at length what sort of spiritually nurturing activities we might offer outside of Sunday morning worship. The deacons will be involved in the adult education class on prayer that will begin during Lent. This class will introduce different forms of prayer and encourage practice of those forms during the week. At our next meeting we will plan holy week activities and observances, such as Maundy Thursday or Seder meals in people's homes. We will also be involved in a church membership class that will be offered February 14, 21 and 28 during the adult education hour.

The men's retreat is taking shape. They have selected a date (March 13-14) and a location (Snowshoe Lodge). The women's retreat is in the very formative stages of planning. Our commission will discuss this further at our next meeting.

Joetta received a letter from St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship, asking for support during their period of discernment. We agreed that the letter should be given to Leadership Council, and we will follow their lead on how best to respond.

After discussing congregational care concerns, Greg closed our time together in prayer.

--Kami Blackwell Kinney, recorder



March
Birthday
Brunch

If you or a family member has a birthday in February, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on March 6. (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:

jschlabach@faithmennonite.org.

Saturday,
March 6
9:30-11:30
a.m.

Seward Market Memorial Fund

Thanks to the generous contributions of many people, FMC made a contribution of \$1605.00 to the Seward Market Memorial Fund. This fund will benefit the survivors of the three men who were killed at the Seward Market in January.

Remember to visit the FMC Website!

The FMC website is a primary communication hub for our church. Remember to bookmark our site (www.faithmennonite.org) and visit often! You can find the monthly newsletter and recent bulletins and sermons if you've been unable to attend Sunday worship. If you log in as "member" (password: 2720e22) you can access an up-to-date directory and the FMC Handbook under the "Members" drop-down menu. We post upcoming events on the homepage and have a photo album from recent events.

--The church office

Meet Your Fellow FMCers

Like many members of Faith over the years, Heather Wengard and Mark Kauffman have ties to Goshen College, where they met as undergrads in the 1990's. Heather was a social work major, and Mark was a Bible and religion major. The couple lived in Phoenix after graduating, and attended a Quaker meeting there. They attended a Quaker meeting when they moved to the cities a decade ago, but started coming to Faith when their daughter Laurel, now five, was born. Laurel was followed by her brother Elias a few years later.

Mark is a part-time graduate student at St. Thomas, going for his Masters in social work. He also works as part of a team of people helping to keep clients with mental illness stable in the community. Heather has been working as a social worker with Lutheran Social Services for eight years, currently with the "It's All About The Kids" program, which provides supportive services to families receiving a housing subsidy through the state.

Heather and Mark live a couple of miles from church, within walking distance of the Derrickson family, the Kuenning-Leisen family, and the Semanchin-Jones family.

Like several other kids at church, Laurel will be starting kindergarten in the fall. Her tow-headed little brother is a joyful part of the little pack of 2-4 year old boys that fills much of our church nursery these days. Heather teaches the older elementary kids in Sunday School, and has a new appreciation for the role and how much time and effort it takes to do it well. In addition to teaching the weekly scripture lesson, she encourages the kids to think about the larger questions of how they relate to their families, friends and community. Mark is a trustee.

Heather grew up in Elkhart, Indiana, in an intentional community with Mennonite roots. That was mostly a positive experience, and she values the strong sense of community she grew up with. Mark also grew up Mennonite, in the more rural setting of Plain City, Ohio. Coming back to a Mennonite church after some time away was part of longing for a more spiritually supportive community within which to raise a family. For Mark and Heather, Faith is a place to nurture children, invest, learn from, and be challenged by.

--Minke Sundseth

	November	December	January
Total expenses	\$13,101	\$10,250	\$8701.64*
Total income	\$13,176	\$30,544	\$12,048.44

**plus designated offering of \$1605*

What's happening here and there...

JRLC Day on the Hill

The theme for the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition's 2010 Day on the Hill is "Justice We Pursue!" (Deut. 16:18-20). This is a wonderful text to reflect upon and brings direct inspiration and guidance to our work on poverty, health care, judicial fairness, housing, and taxation. Day on the Hill this year will be March 25th, beginning in the morning at RiverCentre and then boarding a fleet of buses for the late morning trip to the Capitol. Shuttle service between the Capitol and RiverCentre ends at 4 pm. You may register online at www.jrlc.org.

The 2010 Keynote Speaker will be Rabbi Harold J. Kravitz, senior rabbi at Adath Jeshurun Congregation in Minnetonka. Rabbi Kravitz joined the rabbinic staff of the Adath Jeshurun Congregation (Conservative) in 1987. In 1996 he was appointed Senior Rabbi- Max Newman Family Chair in Rabbinics. A native of Philadelphia, Rabbi Kravitz completed his BA in History at Temple University (Philadelphia, 1981). He did graduate studies at the University of Judaism (Los Angeles, now the American Jewish University), Hebrew University (Jerusalem 84-85), and was ordained and received an MA in Jewish Studies at

the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (New York City, 1987). He has trained in general and family mediation at the Mediation Center for Dispute Resolution of the Hamline Law School (St. Paul). You can read JRLC's legislative goals for 2010 at www.jrlc.org/advocacy/2010-legislative-goals.

Sex Offender Strategies Event

Minnesota Circles of Support & Accountability (MnCoSA) project-- an innovative, new strategy, with proven results to reduce rates of sexual reoffending, is underway. Learn about MnCoSA and issues related to sex offenders in Minnesota at a free, informational evening on March 9. This event is hosted by the Minnesota Department of Corrections, which is committed to improving public safety by offering opportunities for offenders to make positive changes in their lives. The event is Tuesday, March 9, 6-8:00 p.m., Department of Corrections (West entrance) lower level, Itasca Room, 1450 Energy Park Drive, St. Paul.

Call for Volunteers

Project Homeless Connect needs your help! Project Homeless Connect is a one-stop shop for delivering services to people experiencing homelessness. Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis are partnering with service providers, businesses, citizens, and faith communities to bring multiple resources to one location where people can come to find the services they need. These services include: housing providers, employment specialists, medical care, mental health care, benefits specialists, eye care, haircuts, transportation assistance, food and clothing.

1300 volunteers needed for a Monday, March 29 event. The Convention Center space will be set up with many tables, rooms, and areas for the various services available and volunteers will assist the guests in connecting with the assistance they need or request. With about 1800 participants expected for this event, at least 1300 volunteers are needed to make the day successful. Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age. The March event will start at 10 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. with two shifts for volunteers: (1) 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and (2) 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. All volunteers are asked to arrive by 9:00 a.m.

A 90 minute fun and informative training for Project Homeless Connect is required for everyone except those who trained and volunteered for a previous event. At this training, Cathy ten Broeke, the project director, will orient the volunteers and answer questions about the

event. Attendance at one of the training sessions is strongly recommended for all volunteers in order to make the volunteer experience more satisfying and to offer the best service to the guests.

To volunteer for March 29, please go the web site: www.homelessconnectminneapolis.org. Click on the bar in the heading that says, "Please join us as a volunteer." To make a donation to Project Homeless Connect, email us at : projectconnectmpls@gmail.com, or visit our web site to donate securely online through Network for Good. The only donations being accepted for the March 29 Homeless Connect are cash contributions. Neither clothing nor any other goods will be accepted for the March 29 Homeless Connect

--*Patricia McHugh, Volunteer Coordinator, Project Homeless Connect*

Spirit of Place: Great Blue Heron

Out of their loneliness for each other
two reeds, or maybe two shadows, lurch
forward and become suddenly a life
lifted from dawn or the rain. It is
the wilderness come back again, a lagoon
with our city reflected in its eye.
We live by faith in such presences.

It is a test for us, that thin
but real, undulating figure that promises,
"If you keep faith I will exist
at the edge, where your vision joins
the sunlight and the rain: heads in the light,
feet that go down in the mud where the truth is."

William Stafford

The deadline for April newsletter items is noon, Thursday, March 25^h.

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.