

Faith Connection

March 2016

Monthly Newsletter of Faith Mennonite Church
2720 E. 22nd St. Minneapolis, MN 55406
Ph: (612) 375-9483
e-mail: faithmc@faithmennonite.org
web: www.faithmennonite.org

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...

I have been struck by the abrupt arrival of Lent this year. Perhaps it is simply because Lent has come earlier this calendar year. Before Joetta even left for Europe in January we had already met once with the Lent planning committee. Think about it: we were preparing for Lent in January, almost immediately after Christmas! But what has really struck me this year is the *darkness* of the Lenten journey, which stands in sharp contrast with the light-hearted, joyful time of Christmas. In our culture we spend months preparing for the Christmas season, and in church we sing joyful songs that proclaim the birth of the long awaited Messiah. The Lenten journey, however, begins with the solemn words, “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” and follows the path of Jesus towards his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate on Good Friday.

As I wrote in my sermon on the First Sunday of the Lenten season, the journey of Lent is one that moves us into the wilderness, alongside Jesus, the suffering servant of God. It is a journey that drives us out of our comfort zones, pushing us out of our Christmas joy and holiday cheer and plunging us into the darkness of the dead of winter, into the harsh cold cries of agony and pain, of severe hunger and thirst, of loneliness and abandonment. In sharp contrast to Christmas joy, we are thrown back onto the actual lived history of Jesus, the Messiah, who faced the very human struggles of temptation, betrayal, abandonment, and rejection. We come to know the true “meaning” of Christmas in the wilderness, only as we are exposed and confronted by the shape and character of Jesus’s life in our world.

If the Gospel readings are clear about anything, they are clear on this point: the ministry of Jesus, his preaching and teaching, was often met with the greatest resistance by the world around him, even by his closest friends. Even those who were most sympathetic to him, even those who literally dropped everything they had to follow him, found themselves resisting his call at almost

every turn. The Gospel narratives of Jesus are, we might say, one long story of how the long-awaited Messiah of Israel was finally rejected by all the powers of the world, even by the good and the pious people of the world. The great New Testament theologian Martin Kähler famously said that the Passion narratives form the center of the Jesus story in the Gospel accounts—the rest is only a prologue.

As Christians we confess that this Rejected One is Lord of the *cosmos*. We confess, in short, that this narrative of rejection is the shape of God’s life in a world of violence. In his wonderful little book, *God Matters*, the late Dominican theologian and socialist, Herbert McCabe, suggests that the story of Jesus is nothing other than the life of God—as Father, Son, and Spirit—“projected” onto our history. McCabe uses the word “projected” in the sense of a film being projected onto a screen. As McCabe describes, “If it is a smooth silver screen you see the film simply in itself. If the screen is twisted in some way, you get a systematically distorted image of the film.”¹ McCabe would have us imagine the narrative of Jesus in this way: Jesus is God’s life “projected” onto the screen of our history—a history that looks less like a “silver screen” and more like a “rubbish dump.” As he puts it, “The story of Jesus—which in its full extent is the entire Bible—is the projection of the trinitarian life of God onto the rubbish dump that we have made of the world.”² The story of God in the world is a dark story of betrayal, rejection, and abandonment, because it is the story of God’s reaching out to the world in love—a story of God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption. Jesus is what God’s love looks like in a world structured by hate and exclusion. Jesus is what God’s justice looks like in a world determined by injustice. Jesus is what God’s peace looks like in a world that knows only war and violence. To follow the Rejected One in this world is

1 Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (New York: Continuum Press) 48.

2 McCabe, *God Matters*, 48.

not to seek to become “like God” – it is to become more *human*. And to become human is to love the other in our midst, especially those who are hated, excluded, and scapegoated; to become human is to proclaim justice in the face of injustice, peace in a world of war and violence.

--Ry Siggelkow

What's happening at FMC...

From Lent to Easter at FMC

The season of Lent began early this year—in mid-February—so as we begin March we are at the mid-point of our Lent journey. Several events are planned for fellowship and reflection in the coming weeks in addition to our Sunday worship. Please watch for sign-up sheets and participate as you are able:

March 3, 6:30 p.m. meal and reflection at Kristin Green's home

March 13, midday meal and reflection at Glenn Geissinger's home

March 16, 5:30 p.m., meal and reflection at Heather Wengerd's home

March 24, Maundy Thursday Meal, communion, footwashing service in the church fellowship hall.

We look forward to our annual Easter breakfast on March 27, followed by worship. There are no Sunday School classes that day. The worship planning group during Lent has been Shawn Englund-Helmeke, Dan Liesen (sanctuary visuals and bulletin covers), Joetta Schlabach and Ry Siggelkow.

--Deacons and Worship Commissions

Co-Pastors Division of Labor

After the congregation's approval of calling Ry Siggelkow to join Joetta Schlabach as co-pastor of our congregation, the Pastor Parish Relations Committee worked with the two in clarifying a division of labor that honored the job description to which Ry was called and their gifts in ministry. Following is a rough outline of their respective and shared areas of ministry. They are happy to answer any questions that anyone might have.

Pastor of Worship, Pastoral Care, and Administration – Joetta

Worship: Joetta will be the primary contact with the Worship Commission. Joetta and Ry will share preaching responsibilities and take turns serving on the seasonal worship planning groups. Each will lead worship one Sunday a month when not preaching, and each will have one Sunday off each month.

Pastoral Care: Both Joetta and Ry will attend Deacon Commission meetings and be involved in new-member contacts and responding to congregation needs. Joetta will be the primary contact for crisis concerns, but congregation members may contact either pastor for care concerns and for marriage preparation, etc.

Administration: Joetta will be the primary contact for day-to-day administrative concerns and work with the Trustees, custodian, and Fellowship commissions. Ry will be the pastoral representative on the Retreat Planning and Gifts Discernment Committees. Joetta will be the primary contact with Central Plains Mennonite Conference but both will participate in conference-related activities. Ry and Joetta will take turns writing the “Pastoral Musings” column in the monthly *Faith Connections* newsletter.

Pastor of Proclamation, Witness, and Formation – Ry

Christian Education: Ry will be the primary contact with the Christian Education commission and the youth sponsors. Ry will give special attention to youth Sunday school and Ry and Joetta will share the facilitation of new member classes.

Missions and Service: Ry will be the primary contact for the Missions and Service Commission and develop relationships with community organizations and partners.

Church Council: Both Ry and Joetta will meet with the moderator and moderator-elect to plan the agenda for upcoming church council meetings.

Pastor Parish Relations Committee: Both pastors will participate in the quarterly meetings of this committee, which will also meet with each pastor individually from time to time.

--Pastor Parish Relations Committee (Mike Okerstrom, Noah Skogerboe, Donna Stucky, Hermann Weinlick-Deacon representative)

Council and Commissions Retreat – March 12

Since 2009 we have held a (nearly) annual Church Council and Commissions Retreat early in the year as a way to orient new commission members and to jointly review our church vision and the specific work of the coming year. This year's retreat is set for Saturday, March 12, from 9 a.m. to noon. We look forward to a time of community building and clarity as we together lead the various activities of our congregation.

--Kathleen Harder, Moderator and Joetta Schlabach, Co-Pastor

Mennonite Creation Care Network

The FMC Eco-Justice Committee is making connections with faith-based environmental organizations, including the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN), which is affiliated with Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. The primary purpose of MCCN is to provide congregations and others a place to share information about their work in caring for creation. MCCN encourages congregations to develop a creation care plan for reducing their ecological and carbon footprint in all aspects of congregational life. To help in doing this, MCCN provides ideas and resources for integrating creation care into our worship, daily living, mission activities and other areas. By connecting with MCCN, FMC is now listed as a “Shades of Green” congregation. I have agreed to serve in the role of creation care liaison with MCCN and will keep you updated with news from the network. You can learn more about the Mennonite Creation Care Network at www.mennonitecreationcare.org.

--Wendy Brunner

Deacons' Fund

The deacons' fund is used to help meet emergency expenses that may arise in the Faith family—a medical bill, travel for a family crisis, unexpected loss of some kind. In 2015 The deacons' fund gave \$4750 to individuals or families. In some cases, funds were able to be matched by Everence, the Mennonite insurance. Only the deacons know who receives help from the fund. The money in the deacons' fund comes from contributions during the year designated for the fund. However, to be a tax-free contribution, gifts may not be designated for specific individuals. Gifts to the fund may be placed in Sunday's offering with a note on the check.

--Hermann Weinlick

Cleta Gingerich Instigates “Reverse Learning Tour”

FMC members Orv and Cleta Gingerich are serving with Mennonite Central Committee as interim country directors in Nigeria. Their primary role is to ensure a smooth transition to Nigerian leadership for the MCC program in that country. One of the MCC partners that Cleta has worked with most closely is Margaret Ahmed, founder and director of Homemakers, a ministry that works at income generation for Muslim and Christian women and with young men addicted to drugs.

Cleta was immediately inspired by Margaret's vision and the work she has done to help the women and especially the young men. Knowing that MCC often takes people from North America on learning tours to different parts of the world, Cleta began to dream of sending Margaret on a learning tour to Pennsylvania to MCC's Material Resource Center (MRC) and the offices of Ten Thousand Villages and their product development department. Since there was no money in the MCC-Nigeria budget for this project, Cleta began her own fund-raising campaign, contacting family and friends, including FMC. On February 14 we took a special offering and contributed the final \$560 of the \$1,965 needed for Margaret's travel and two weeks of food during her visit. On February 24, Margaret set off on her reverse learning tour; she will be in Pennsylvania from Feb 26 to March 11.

In her fund-appeal letter, Cleta wrote: “Yesterday I came away re-energized by my weekly visit with Margaret and the former drug-addicted youth she works with in developing skills of jewelry making, weaving, sewing purses, shopping bags and rug mats from recycled plastic bags. The bags are gathered from the streets and gutters of Jos by the Internally Displaced People (IDP) women who fled the terror of Boko Haram in the northeast. The women get a small fee which helps them buy food for their children. The vision of Margaret has positively affected so many! Margaret lives out my belief: ‘Never let reality get in the way of your dreams!’”

Margaret will spend two weeks in Ephrata, Pennsylvania learning from and volunteering at the MRC and Ten Thousand Villages. In anticipation of her journey Margaret wrote: “As a partner with MCC I want to increase my capacity and that of Homemakers by learning how MRC acquires recycled products and how they do production, packaging and sales. At Ten Thousand Villages I want to seek advice on products, marketing and new-product creation for items made from recycled materials. This will help Homemakers to engage and rehabilitate more youth and reduce unemployment in youth that do drugs in Jos as well as benefit women and children who live in IDP camps. If we get ideas on how to better our skills and our production and market, we will become self-sustaining.”

Cleta recently emailed: “Yesterday, I visited Margaret and ‘the boys.’ They are excited about Mama Margaret's opportunity to volunteer, tell their story and gather new ideas for them to implement which will improve their lives. Margaret's spirit of generosity, mercy and deep love for the young adults fighting

addiction, who are part of the larger Homemakers project, is truly a life living the Sermon on the Mount. She is a role model, a St Francis of Assisi, and a woman who has been profoundly imprinted on my heart. Thank you for being part of her project to bring life and hope to others less privileged than you and me.” You will find information and pictures about Homemakers and other activities that Cleta and Orv are involved in in Nigeria by visiting their blog: www.heartsonpilgrimage.blogspot.com.

--*Joetta Schlabach*

FMC Participant Feature

Stew Thornley’s joining Faith Mennonite Church last year is rooted in a friendship of more than two decades with Jerry Janzen, a friendship related to a common intense interest in baseball and love of travel. In contrast to many other high school class clowns (his own claim, not mine), Stew has had a rich and interesting life. In his day job Stew works in communications for the state Department of Health, especially dealing with issues about ensuring safe drinking water. (His wife of twenty years, Brenda Himrich, also is employed in work for the public welfare, as safety manager for the Metro Transit Authority, dealing with matters like bus exhaust.)

Speaking of safety, his love for sports has led him to be “all for safety,” even when it may mean changing how we play the game to minimize harm to players. (After a skydiving spinal injury, he has given up skydiving for cribbage.) Last year Stew had major surgery on a large cancer in one hip and realized he will always walk a little more slowly. But it does not seem to slow him down a great deal.

On the side, Stew is the official scorekeeper for the Minnesota Twins and the Minnesota Timberwolves. (This has the constant potential of making somebody angry. Calling an error rather than a hit may make the pitcher’s earned run average look better and the batter’s batting average look worse—and vice versa.) He is the author of several books. While he has had stints as a radio DJ and sportscaster elsewhere, most his life has been in the Twin Cities area.

Stew’s father, in the army in World War II, spent fifteen months in Stalag 17. The older Stew gets, the more he asks questions and says, “I don’t know.” In fact, one of the things that attracted him to Faith Mennonite Church is the openness to ask questions and say, “I don’t know.” He has seen too many Christians who are too full of certainty, hesitant to keep learning, and not

appreciative enough of the mystery of life. Stew has never been comfortable with people who view the world in us-versus-them terms. The social witness of the congregation has also appealed to Stew, and some members have inspired him by their faithful words and actions.

Another appeal of Faith Church has been the Anabaptist appreciation of minorities and opposition to a majority imposing their way on minorities, as sometimes happens now as Christians seek to limit participation of Muslims in community life.

One of Stew’s books, *Six Feet Under*, is about cemeteries—or, more precisely, about some people buried in them. You might ask him about it.

--*Hermann Weinlick*

What's happening here and there...

Fall 2015 TC MCC Event Raised \$35,000

Last November the board of the Twin Cities Festival and Sale for World Relief tried a new fund-raising format. Since the early 2000s, they raised money for the international development and peacemaking work of Mennonite Central Committee through a traditional all-day sale and auction of quilts and other items. Following the financial collapse of 2008 and subsequent recession, the sale proceeds had been in decline but the work to put on a sale continued to require many volunteer hours in planning and in successfully putting on the event. Last November the board sponsored an evening event that combined catered food, special music by Canadian vocal artists, stories from Mennonite Central Committee told by the director of MCC-Alberta, a bake sale, and a mini-auction. The proceeds from the evening that were forwarded to MCC were \$35,000—an increase of \$2,000 from the amount forwarded after the 2014 all-day sale. \$1,275 of this total was contributed by FMC, from a special offering and the sale of CDs by the Canadian musicians.

-- *Joetta Schlabach (with information provided by David Klaassen, chair of the TCMCC board)*

The deadline for April newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, March 30th.

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.