

Faith Connection

November 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...

For all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted above all. ~ 1 Chronicles 29:11

November is the month of Thanksgiving. It began as a harvest festival and thus is celebrated in the fall—on the 2nd Monday of October in Canada and the 4th Thursday in the United States. Because late fall was the time when farmers received payment for their crops, this was the primary time they were able to contribute to their churches. Although a minority of Canadians and US citizens order our financial lives around agriculture anymore, many churches still follow a pattern of conducting a stewardship “campaign” in November.

Faith Mennonite Church may be above average for urban churches in the number of farmer/gardener types in our fellowship. Nevertheless, we haven't organized our church finances around a harvest-time giving campaign. In the last number of years, Sunday offerings have not varied significantly throughout the year, although year-end giving usually increases a bit. Overall, we have been a generous congregation in our giving and a frugal congregation in our spending. And the generosity does not end with the Sunday morning offering plate. Last spring the Missions and Service Commission conducted a “Celebration of Giving” survey. About 15-20 of our 80 households responded. Those households alone reported contributing over \$40,000 and 2,900 volunteer hours to just under 200 organizations locally and nationally (beyond their giving and volunteering to FMC) in 2009.

2010 has been a more difficult year. Our monthly offerings dropped significantly during the summer months. Recent newsletters from Central Plains Mennonite Conference and from Christian Peacemaker Teams report that they experienced a similar drop in support during the same period. Although we have not suffered too many job losses, the recession has taken its toll and family circumstances and obligations can shift.

Still, we have much to be thankful for. Our Sunday morning worship is vibrant and many people attend regularly despite demanding work and student life. Musicians and Christian education teachers give generously of their time. More than thirty people stepped forward this fall to volunteer for community collaborations and peacemaking activities that the Missions & Service Commission and Kathleen Remund are coordinating this year. This is in addition to ongoing volunteer ministry through our commissions and committees. Individuals have reached out in care with meals, homemaking chores, visits and accompaniment to doctor's appointments to those who have been beset by accidents and illness. We pray for one another, and our children join in this discipline, as well as in acts of generosity.

We will celebrate this gratitude and our call to be gracious stewards of all that God has given us during our November worship. I invite you to consciously take a moment each day this month to write down one thing that you are thankful for. Let us count our blessings!

--Joetta Schlabach

“The wise person profits more the fool, than the fool from the wise person.”

--Marcus Cato

What's happening at FMC...

Loving Our Neighbors: Adventures in Outreach

The Spirit is at work, and our outreach ministries for 2010-11 are off to an impressive beginning. On September 25, at our fall retreat, over thirty people signed up to participate in one or more of the programs recommended by the Missions and Service Commission—programs that will help us live out our calling to share love and pursue justice.

Refugee Hosting

Seventeen people have committed themselves to welcoming a family of refugees to their new home in the Twin Cities. We met on October 17th with Kristin Zoellner of Refugee Services to clarify our responsibilities. We met again on October 27th to take on specific assignments. Be prepared to hear from our supplies coordinators, Cynthia Miller and Jenny Wandersee; our clothing and food coordinator, Beth Richardson; our housing setup coordinator, Dan Leisen; and our transportation coordinator, Sandy Westby. They'll be asking for everyone's help to donate supplies, set up the apartment, and transport furniture and people. We know that we'll be hosting a Somali family and that they will be coming in November. That's all we know, so far...

Immigration Awareness

A team of four is working to put together a series of forums in January to help us learn about the challenges facing undocumented immigrants in the United States today. We have met once to plan the educational themes and brainstorm possible speakers. The series will be informative and inspiring, and the congregation will be invited to take action together to advocate for more just immigration policies. Stay tuned for more, and make sure to attend this provocative series.

Missio Dei

Nearby in Cedar-Riverside, a small group of Mennonites is living in shared community housing and engaging in radical hospitality with poor and homeless neighbors. Five people have signed up to work with Missio Dei, and our first step is to help our congregations get to know each other better. Our communities will be sharing a potluck meal together on Wednesday evening, November 17th, at 6:30pm in the basement fellowship hall. At that meal, we will hear their stories of faith and discipleship and learn how we may be able to support and join with them in their mission and work.

Creating A Culture of Peace

Planning is underway for FMC to host a "Creating A Culture of Peace" workshop led by Phil Stoltzfus and Candace Lutt. Their proposal has been approved by the Missions and Service Commission. We'll let you know as soon as a date has been set! We hope that this will be an excellent training opportunity for FMC members as well as the wider community.

--Kathleen Remund

Getting to Know...Missio Dei!

For those who haven't already heard, Missio Dei is a young, Mennonite affiliated resident and worshiping community located in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. These near neighbors of ours are actively engaged in neighbor-to-neighbor ministry and hospitality for those without homes. **On Wednesday evening, November 17th, at 6:30pm, FMC is hosting a joint potluck with Missio Dei** so that we can get a chance to know each other. Following the meal, Missio Dei members will share some of their stories of discipleship and ministry with us.

Come and join in the fun: food, fellowship, and stories. Questions? Call the office or email Kathleen Remund at minstaff@faithmennonite.org.

--Kathleen Remund

Spirituality Journal

The summer of 2010 has been a time of spiritual discernment for me. I have felt a strong inner urging to make changes in my life. I decided to "step out" of my routine in a couple of ways to see what would happen.

With Shuji's agreement, I rented garden space and planted a garden. Every weekend I had to spend at least a couple of hours gardening—readying the soil, planting, weeding, watering, a lot more weeding and eventually harvesting. We ate lettuce, spinach, peas, carrots, tomatoes, basil and more. It was hard work but it was work that produced something I strongly valued—food for my family. It was elemental and gave me something essential—a connection back to the earth, the season, and the miracle of life.

The other way that I stepped out of my routine was in requesting to take off four consecutive weeks from work (all of my Paid Time Off in one fell swoop). I wanted to see how it felt not to be so tied in to work. Would I miss the daily connection to my colleagues? Would I miss the work? And I wanted time to pray, write and reflect on what was going on within me. From the beginning, the restlessness I felt seemed to have spiritual origins. And I found this to be true as I spent time allowing that restlessness to have its voice rather than trying to constantly shut it down. I prayed for insight and direction and I shared my struggle with others. At the end of my time off I knew that I wanted to pull back from work for a while and see what new may come.

I am now working as a chaplain two evenings/overnights a week at the hospital—Mondays

and Tuesdays. The rest of the week I am free to be a less stressed mom, to care for our home, to write, read, walk, to let my inner life once again become more vital. I see myself as partly on sabbatical, partly exploring my increased desire to create, and partly doing more organizing/upkeep on our house. Along with these I have noticed in myself an increased interest and energy for connecting with others from my community (going to neighborhood get-togethers, taking food to a new mom, inviting an international visitor for dinner) and a greater ability to enjoy my time with Micah.

Recently I read about how the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is calculated as a primary indicator of a nation's wealth. Wealth is measured in terms of goods and services bought and sold, only actions involving money "count." Therefore, ironically, a violent action which causes a great exchange of money—burying the dead, rebuilding destroyed buildings, patrolling an area, use of emergency personnel, etc, is seen as "good" in the sense that it provides a boost to the economy. On the other hand a person who cares for her children, works in her garden, and visits the sick in her neighborhood, according to the official measurement, has provided nothing at all. "Actions performed in love are dismissed, while actions performed with money are honored and rewarded." (From the chapter, "Why Time is Not Money" in the book, *Sabbath*, by Wayne Muller.)

I am not against making money. We must do it to survive. But this essay by Muller further undergirded the sense I've had recently that what is most important in my life has been getting "dismissed." I will probably need to find more lucrative employment again in time. But for right now, I am living life more fully and adding very little to the GDP. And I am happy.

--Ruth Johnston

Comings and Goings...

We are always pleased to meet new persons who visit and become part of our faith community. We hope you've had a chance to meet and welcome *Anna Dadabo*.

It is harder to see people leave. However, the leaving is sometimes vital to our call of being salt and light in the world. In late summer we blessed *Bob and Lauren Brown* as they moved to Pennsylvania so Bob could begin a pastorate there. Two are people are feeling similar calls closer to home. Following are brief reports of where the Spirit is leading *Greg Renstrom* and *Charity Kroeker*.

From Greg Renstrom: Wesley (United Methodist) Church will soon begin its reorganized, re-started life and work in downtown Minneapolis. A "Service of Remembrance and Recommitment for World AIDS Day" will initiate the congregation's ministry on December 1st (7:30 PM).

The church, located in the magnificent nineteenth century facility at 101 East Grant, will be a new neighborhood congregation, concentrating on the Loring Park, Steven's Square, Loring Heights, and Downtown West neighborhoods. An "embracing congregation" welcoming all people, Wesley will focus particularly on neighbors in twelve-step recovery programs, neighbors in the GLBT community, and anyone else seeking a fully inclusive congregation with no conditions for full involvement and participation.

It has been a challenge to organize a new congregation, especially in a setting where traditional models and conventional "church start" principles may not apply. We are adapting and modifying as we move ahead. But the time is right. The opportunities are huge. Providence appears at every point, including many things we never imagined possible! Our purpose is basic; but it is also crucial in this time: "Offering hope and encouragement to all people."

I am excited to be the new pastor of this wonderful new church. And I greatly appreciate the hope and encouragement, spiritual support and faithful prayers offered by people of Faith Mennonite Church as we begin this new phase of ministry at Wesley.

From Charity Kroeker: Several months ago I did some babysitting for a family in North Minneapolis. As I left my home in St Paul, I felt an apprehension that was more than just nerves over spending an evening with children who I had recently met. I entered the predominantly African American neighborhood and restrained myself from locking my doors. *What is this fear?* I thought.

I grew up in a small town in which I could count the non-white students in my school, then attended a nearly all white college. I have traveled enough to know the fear of a new place and new people: the fear of the unfamiliar. Stereotypes, generalizations and misinterpreted interactions are dispelled when we take the time to speak to each other, to look deeper into one another's lives. Even though I live in city of ethnic and cultural diversity, I currently know almost no one who is not white, middle-class, and college educated. In other words, I know virtually no one who is not exactly like me. This is a problem.

Not only does this type of insularity lead to unfounded distrust, but by staying in the realm of the familiar, I miss out on the treasure that is diversity. Only by forming relationships with those who are different from us can we begin to know the multi-faceted, multi-ethnic, all-encompassing Person of God. I might even say that only through knowing those who are different from us can we know a God who is different from us.

I have decided to seek out this diversity in a church group. I hope to maintain the bonds I have created at Faith Mennonite and also to venture out to another church body. I'll see what relationships I can form and, with any luck, I'll dispel my unwarranted fears by celebrating both commonalities and differences with fellow believers.



*November
Birthday
Brunch*

If you or a family member has a birthday in November, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on November 20. (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,
November 20
9:30-11:30
a.m.*

Thank You from Hmong Mennonite Church

Dear Pastor Joetta and Faith Mennonite Church: Thank you very much for the contributions for the meal we served at your church retreat, which help support our ministry. We appreciate that you enjoyed the meal and we look forward to serving again.

--Blessing, Pastor Chue Vang

Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership Update

We are grateful for the financial support we received from Faith Mennonite in 2010. It has not been an easy year financially to run a small organization and the generosity of our neighbors in Seward and Longfellow has been vital to our program this year.

The work continues to feel important. A recent referral was for a theft by one student of another student's property. I have spoken to the parents of both of the students and they are grateful to this alternative to court and they are eager to be involved in the program to seek positive resolution to this event. The students continue in school and classes together so the healing of relationships is an important aspect of our work.

Comments from program participants demonstrate the impact of our program on teens, their parents and the community. A teen told us: "I appreciate being able to resolve this in the least damaging way possible. And, I'm sorry for what I did"

Thank you for partnering with us as we work to create more positive and restorative ways to respond to negative behavior by youth in our community. In gratitude, Michele Braley, Program Manager and members of the Executive Committee.

Note: The Missions & Service Commission has agreed to collaborate in another fund-raising concert for the SLRJP. It is scheduled for Sunday, February 27, 2011.

Update from Bob & Lauren Brown

Life out here (in Johnstown, Pennsylvania) is a major adjustment – don't know if you saw the pictures that we put up on Facebook—but we are enjoying it. We can't just go to one place to do all our "local" shopping—we have had to find people down the street who sell eggs, and another one who sells honey, etc. It helps in building relationships too. We are getting to know the congregation –what is important to them, what they are up to, and how we can serve them. It is coming quickly enough as I near the end of my first month. We just had the installation service on Sunday and had a good deal of family in town for that. We are learning our way around town –the roads here are all steep and curvy. So saying: "there is a curve up ahead," doesn't convey as much information here as it does in Minnesota. I am getting to know the local pastors –there are two monthly events that help us get to know each other. There is a strong sense of what it means to be Mennonite and that is very reassuring.

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--Bob Brown

FMC Monthly Budget Summary

[In October, FMC Church Council decided to begin distributing monthly Council minutes to the congregation via email, rather than the FMC newsletter, in order to reduce unnecessary use of paper. —your editor]

	July	August	September
Total expenses	\$8,854	\$8,499	\$7,854
Total income	\$7,897	\$11,561	\$16,363
Monthly budget	\$12,775	\$12,775	\$12,775

What's happening here and there...

Guatemala Diary

Greetings from Guatemala! I'm currently working on an asset mapping project for Oxlajuj B'atz'. I'm still living in Panajachel, but I've been traveling to Xeabaj II every week to work on this project, which is part of OB's integrative development strategy for this group. So far I've interviewed seven of the fourteen women in the group, using a survey that I developed that includes questions about their hopes and goals for the future, their assessment of their own skills and interests, and thoughts about the community in general. The goal, eventually, is to bolster their sense of empowerment as a group, clarify their priorities, and help them find the path toward economic independence.

It hasn't been an easy project. Working through a translator takes some adjustment, and I miss the immediacy and understanding of subtleties that comes from speaking a common language. It's difficult to establish a real sense of connection and trust. Though the women have graciously set aside time to answer my questions, what they really want is a project that will bring in some income.

And I sometimes have my doubts. Who am I to enter this community, a stranger, and ask people about their lives, their dreams and goals? I hope I'm not just part of a long list of people and aid organizations who have come, dumped goods or money or ideas, and left, often leaving a sense of dependency in their wake. I hope I'm part of a more far-sighted, integrative project that will leave the women feeling newly energized and confident.

Despite my uncertainties, I know I am so lucky to be learning about a place that sometimes feels like a completely different world. *Poco a poco*, I think I'm beginning to understand the psyche that permeates Xeabaj II, which in many ways is foreign to the individualistic Western perspective that, I've discovered, is very much a part of me. True to the asset mapping project, I can see both the strengths and the challenges embedded in this psyche. Among all the women, the individual sense of identity, abilities, and goals is subsumed by a concern for the communal—primarily the family, then the group and the town. The majority of the women are mothers, and even those in their twenties speak of their personal goals in terms of their children, rather than themselves.

The identity of wife and mother dominates all other conceptions of self. I've become so accustomed to identifying myself by my own individual skills, abilities, and interests, but in Xeabaj II those factors are of secondary importance. When I ask the women, "What would you change about your community?" the uniform response is, *Sola, no puedo hacer nada*. "Alone, I can do nothing."



This sense of individual powerlessness is balanced by an amazing commitment to communal effort, unity and cooperation. Several of my questions invite the women to use their imagination or think in terms of ideals. In the U.S., these kinds of exercises in imagining are ubiquitous: What do you want to be when you grow up? What would you do if you could change the world? A couple of the women in Xeabaj II looked at me like I was crazy when I asked them questions like these. Their responses were bounded by the reality of daily lives, in which subsistence is always the most pressing concern. Some of the women's responses hit like a *golpe* to the *corazón*, making me so sharply aware of my privileges and opportunities. I asked Manuela, who has never been to school, what she would most like to learn. To sign

her name, she replied. To be able to write her name, instead of using her fingerprint. I hope I never take for granted the incredible education I've had.

Given my interest in weaving, I was fascinated to hear many of the women say that their primary form of cultural expression is the wearing of the *traje*, their beautiful handmade *huipiles*. The men of Xeabaj II have abandoned traditional dress— but *orgullosamente*, proudly, said Pascuala, we women will continue to preserve our heritage by weaving and wearing the *traje*.



It's hard to sum up how I feel about the whole experience. The word that comes to mind most frequently is humbled. It's been humbling, and thought provoking. For women who are scared to leave their little community, I wonder how I appear, the young, single American woman traveling alone. Am I threatening? Am I a source of inspiration? Am I just unbelievably foreign? Lots of big thoughts, but ones I am happy to be pondering.

Sigh... sorry I seem to be capable of writing only novel-length blog posts. Thanks for reading, amigos!

--Madeline Kreider Carlson

Madeline Kreider Carlson, daughter of Joan Kreider, who grew up at FMC, blogs about her Watson Fellowship year in Guatemala at madabroad.wordpress.com.

The deadline for December newsletter items is noon, Tuesday, November 23rd.

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.

They Said My Grandfather Would Lose His Speech

But they did not say
how the vultures
would pick the syllables
from his tongue
one by one

leaving him only sterile seeds
he had swallowed to the pit of his stomach:
words wholly divorced from sound.

And they did not say
how these words
would expand until the
Unutterable
consumed his world.

His hands twitch and drift aimlessly.
He reaches to secure his helmet
and steps into the water toward Omaha Beach.
From the first rung to the second,
the first to the second
He has been stepping all day.

When the family comes
we look inside his mouth.
“Grandpa? Grandpa?” we say.
“Do you know who this is?”

His throat is an
empty stone water jug,
set forth before the guests.

The nurses do not fill it.

But sometimes they clean out the mucus—
the mess of fluid
from the bottom of his lungs
that he coughs up,
but cannot spit out.

--Charity Kroeker