

Faith Connection

November 2011

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...

November is a month of remembrance. On November 1 the church celebrates All Saints Day, remembering *all* saints—the well-known martyrs as well as every obscure person who has quietly lived out their faith. (Our observance at FMC will be on November 6.) On November 11, many countries observe Veterans/Armistice/ Remembrance Day, recalling the end of World War 1. The armistice was signed by Germany on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. During the past several years, we have rung our bells 11 times on the Sunday closest to November 11, at the request of the local Veterans for Peace group. This year, Kristi Zabriskie is organizing a gathering on 11-11-11 in order to show a DVD, recently created by a friend of hers, that remembers a life affected by war (see separate article, p. 3).

Remembering is a basic aspect of being human and it is essential for the life of faith. It is in remembering that we maintain relationships with the persons who have passed from us and the events of the past that have created meaning. Since relationships have their moments of delight and of pain, remembering is naturally emotional. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he began by saying, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now" (1:3-5). Paul's memory of his time with the Philippi Christians elicited thanksgiving and joy. Later in the same letter, written from prison, he expresses a deep desire to be able to visit them again. Thanksgiving, joy, and longing were interwoven in Paul's experience of remembering.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who spent the final two years of his life in a Nazi prison, before being executed, wrote these words about the process of loss and remembering:

There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so. One must simply hold out and endure it. At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is also a great comfort. For to the extent the emptiness truly remains unfilled one remains connected to the other person through it. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness. God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve—even in pain—the authentic relationship. Furthermore, the more beautiful and full the remembrances, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into silent joy. One bears what was lovely in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within, a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain."

Bonhoeffer was writing of the loss of someone beloved, of a healthy relationship. Many times, however, our memories carry pain—of injury, of misunderstanding, of betrayal. For these difficult memories we often need the help of a trained professional and we are fortunate to have excellent resources in the wider community. But this never replaces the importance of a community to share in and validate our memories. As a community of faith we seek to embrace the full range of memory. For this we are guided by the Psalms, our ancient prayer book that remembers with exuberant praise and also honest, raw lament. May our connections to one another deepen as we share the memories that have shaped us.

--Joetta Schlabach

"Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you're a mile away *and* you have their shoes"

--Jack Handey

What's happening at FMC...

November Soup Group Schedule

“Soup Group” got started this past spring as an opportunity for our church community to share meals together on a regular basis. The usual schedule is 1st Monday, 2nd Tuesday, 3rd Thursday, and 4th Friday, with occasional exceptions due to holidays, etc., which we will experience in November. Anyone from the congregation is welcome to host (either in one’s home or at the church) or to come (and to bring friends and family). A simple meal of soup and bread is shared. Following is the schedule for November:

- Monday, Nov. 7 @ home of Joan Kreider
- Thursday, Nov. 17 @ home of Dan & Terry Gerber

Care Packages for College Students

This is the time of year when we assemble and send care packages to our college students. We have ten students we will send boxes to this year (Sam Bartell, Melanie Brunner, Moti Endaleu, Greta Kreider Carlson, Tony Johnson, Rachael Okerlund, Michelle Okerstrom, Geneva Martin, Haven Schrock, and Aaron Zeug). We will also prepare a box for the Siggelkow family. Please bring light-weight snack or other fun items to contribute by November 13.

--Aryn Baxter, Deacons Commission

Grocery Bag Food Shelf Drive

For many years, FMC has collected and contributed non-perishable food and toiletry items to Community Emergency Service, located at 1900 11th Avenue. This fall CES contacted our church office to let us know they are experiencing an increased demand for food and that they welcome volunteers as well as food contributions. In conversation with them, we decided to hold a Grocery Bag food drive this fall and to encourage families with children in the 4th-6th grade Sunday School class to plan a group volunteer activity at CES. On Sunday, October 16, Kami Blackwell Kinney led her Sunday school students in stapling item lists on shopping bags, to begin distributing on October 23. We invite people to take, fill, and return bags by Sunday, November 13, when Rev. Lynn Peterson, the CES congregation relations director, will be our guest preacher. During the Sunday School hour that day, the 4th-6th grade class will deliver the groceries we’ve collected and tour the CES building. We will later work on scheduling a family volunteer time. Rev. Peterson was excited to learn about Melissa Hochstetler’s

gardening expertise and has invited her to visit CES and offer ideas on how they might do gardening around their building as part of their programming.

--Joetta Schlabach

Supportive Communities Network Pastors Retreat

I was grateful to participate in a retreat, October 16-19, for pastors who are part of the Supportive Communities Network (SCN) of Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests. SCN offers support, resources and opportunities for dialogue among congregations that welcome (or are working toward welcome of) gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual members. They also encourage meaningful dialogue at the denominational level.

The retreat was held at Camp Friedenswald, in southern Michigan, and was attended by nearly equal numbers of Mennonite and Church of the Brethren pastors (about 25 in all). Each day began and ended with worship, led by participants. In between were morning input sessions and workshops and afternoon panel discussions and time for denominational caucus time.

Guest presenters were Keith Graber-Miller, professor of theology at Goshen College, and John Linscheid, a former Mennonite pastor who lost his ministerial credentials when he came out as a gay man and entered a committed relationship. Graber-Miller teaches a popular sexuality class at Goshen College. He offers resources for churches to expand the conversation about sexuality away from a narrow focus on homosexuality and toward creating a “faithful sexual counter-culture” that interweaves spirituality and sexuality, and recognizes the many harmful sexual practices, such as rampant use of pornography, in our culture. Linscheid described the church as being in a “betwixt and between” time when “we are not who we were and not yet what we shall be.”

He observed that strong authority has given way to greater room for ambiguity; that community and spirituality have increased in importance; that worship has become more participatory with an emphasis on ritual; that ethics are compassion/relationship-centered with a concern for “how we stand with each other in making decisions when we don’t fully agree,” and that spirituality is incarnational with an emphasis on joyfully unifying spirit and flesh. He ended with a challenge that perhaps we need to be less prophetic (despairing and denouncing what is wrong) and more apocalyptic (anticipating the new reality we are moving toward).

In our Mennonite caucus time we discussed the challenge of finding ways for LGBT persons who are gifted for ministry to receive and maintain credentials and pastoral appointments in Mennonite congregations. The group and individual discussion time that the retreat offered helped me get better acquainted with other SCN pastors and to hear about the joys and challenges of welcome in other settings. It also provided the chance to learn more about the Church of the Brethren.

--Joetta Schlabach

Celebration With the Edha/Mwenye Family

The group that has been working most closely with the Edha/Mwenye family from Somalia/Kenya is planning a closing celebration with the family on Thursday, November 3, from 5:30 to 7:00 pm, with a half-hour service starting at 6:00 pm and some appetizers/refreshments afterwards. This will be held in the basement fellowship hall and anyone from the congregation is invited to attend and meet the family.

--Karen Wiebe, communication coordinator for the refugee hosting committee

Souvenirs: Healing After War Potluck and DVD Screening, November 11, 2011

Kristi Zabriskie invites FMC participants and friends/neighbors to view a documentary produced by her friend, Twin Cities filmmaker Mara Pelecis, about her experience as the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran who took his own life in 2002. Andy's death drove his daughter, Mara, to ask: "How could my father survive the war, but not the peace?" *Souvenirs: Healing After War* is a documentary film journey into surviving the peace. Seeking to understand her father, Mara meets with veterans from all walks of life: Rolling Thunder bikers, Vets for Peace, National Guard members and Native Americans. On this journey, she unearths the elusive layers of her father's post-war inner world and discovers a kaleidoscope of paths to healing after war.

Souvenirs strives to spur a conversation about coming home from war over time, through the witnessing of Veteran's stories. In a time when Veterans Affairs estimates that eighteen veterans take their lives every day, this conversation seems more vital than ever. Mara and her colleagues are inviting people across the country to screen *Souvenirs* this Veteran's Day, November 11 (11-11-11).

Kristi will be hosting this event on November 11, 2011 at 6 pm at Faith Mennonite Church. Please bring a dish

to share, plus your own table service (coffee/tea will be provided). This Veteran's Day gathering gives us an opportunity to learn more about the affects of war and to consider our relationship as people of peace with those who have suffered the trauma of war.

FMC Hosts Every Church a Peace Church

On Monday, November 14, the FMC fellowship hall will be the venue for a bi-monthly potluck supper meeting of the organization Every Church a Peace Church. Everyone is welcome to bring a dish to share for the 6:30 meal, or to come for the 7 pm presentation, "Building a Social Movement, One Resolution at a Time," by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. Our nation desperately needs to better balance its approach to security to go beyond military expenditures and to include economic, social and environmental needs of our communities, state and nation. Jack, An FMC neighbor and University of St. Thomas Justice and Peace Studies professor, will speak about using a simple resolution process to build political support to shift federal spending priorities from war to meeting essential needs. If you come for the potluck, please bring your own table service. Beverages will be provided.



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 12. (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 12
9:30-11:00
a.m.

The deadline for December newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, November 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.