

# Faith Connection

October 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...

If you have read the Church Council minutes from this summer's meetings (which appear in each monthly newsletter), you will have followed the conversations, beginning in the April meeting, about how to begin a process here at Faith Mennonite Church that addresses our marriage practices. Our congregation voted in 1995 to fully accept glbt persons into membership and leadership. Since that time glbt persons have served on various commissions, participated in worship and in service projects, and taught in our education program. Their presence and gifts are integral to who we are as a congregation.

Nevertheless, we have not had a same-sex wedding in our church or performed by our pastors. To my knowledge none of the pastors during this time, myself included, has received a request to conduct a same-sex marriage rite. However, we have had conversations with glbt members and participants about the fact that our welcoming practice in this area is limited and imperfect. And along the way our congregational delegates have sought each year to forge a path of understanding, solidarity, and unity amidst diversity at the regional annual meetings and national biennial assemblies of Mennonite Church USA, which does not affirm committed same-sex relationships.

This is slow work that has entailed deep pain for various people at different steps along the way at FMC. One would wish that within the church the work for minority understanding and rights could be done without wounding others, but I am not aware of any denomination that has easily or quickly come to consensus on this matter. A brief survey of Christian denominations that are welcoming at some level, suggests a trajectory of first accepting glbt persons into membership and only later taking steps to bless same-sex marriages and/or ordain ministers who are in committed same-sex relationships.\* In the case of Mennonite Church USA, individual congregations

decide who they will welcome in membership, but decisions about the definition of marriage and ordination are made at the conference level. Ecclesial change, like social change, takes time. We believe that the church is the body of Christ, but we are a deeply flawed, imperfect body.

While it is the responsibility of the Council-appointed taskforce to define the process before us, I would like to share my general hopes and expectations. At a time of ongoing societal change around sexuality and marriage—a continuing divorce rate of between 40-50% and a trend toward young couples living together outside of marriage—this is an opportunity to step back and reaffirm the meaning and value of both singleness and marriage and to consider how we support and bless *all* of our members who are single and those who are in life-long partnerships. At a time of ongoing conflict in our regional conference and restrictions on ordained Mennonite pastors, prohibiting the blessing of same-sex relationships, this is also an opportunity to prayerfully seek the wisdom of the Spirit that we might be led into creative paths of action that balance the needs for advocacy, justice, sanctuary, and reconciliation. None of this is risk-free or painless. But I believe that if we move forward with a deep sense of trust in our gathered community of healing and hope, and in the One who has drawn us together to be salt and light, we will indeed walk in love, not fear (1 John 4:18).

--Joetta Schlabach

\* A useful reference guide of denominations and a grid of their welcoming practices can be found at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christian\\_denominational\\_positions\\_on\\_homosexuality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominational_positions_on_homosexuality)

"It is not yours to finish the task, neither are you free to cease trying."

--Rabbi Tarfon, Talmud

## **What's happening at FMC...**

### **Outreach Ministry Update: The Fall Retreat**

About 50 adults and children gathered on September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Matthews Park Community Center for our fall retreat: "Meeting New Neighbors: Around the corner and around the world." While the kids played nearby, we adults listened to a couple of compelling presentations.

The first presentation came from Kristin Zoellner, who works for the MN Council of Churches Refugee Services. She offered poignant stories about the struggles and resilience of some of the newest members of our Twin Cities community—refugees who have come, often after long years in refugee camps, to settle here.

Kristin talked about the apparently simple details that can be very challenging for newcomers, including grocery shopping and interpreting food labels, moving into an apartment with only two small bags of possessions, and navigating the bus system. She shared some changing demographics in our local refugee population. Fewer refugees are coming to join family members now; more of them are vulnerable families without much in the way of support when they arrive. She also described some of the ways that churches are partnering with Refugee Services to help ease the transition during the first three or four months of resettlement.

After a break to visit and have refreshments, we heard from Aryn Baxter, newly returned to from two years of living and working in Kigali, Rwanda. She introduced us to some of the current economic realities of a surprisingly vital Rwanda, talked about the ways people are attempting to move forward beyond the divisions between Hutu and Tutsi, and shared photos and stories of her Rwandan colleagues and friends.

During our morning break and over lunch, people were invited to sign up for an outreach ministry area they would like to participate in during the coming year. There were four options: "Refugee Resettlement," "Immigration Awareness," "Missio Dei Support," and "Creating A Culture of Peace." Each area had a body of interested participants. The bulletin board with sign-up sheets will be up in the fellowship area of the sanctuary for the next couple of Sundays. Please look over the brief program descriptions and sign up if you can!

-- Kathleen Remund

### **Marriage Guidelines Task Force**

Church Council has called seven individuals into service on the Marriage Guidelines Task Force. This task force is a representative body reflecting the many perspectives of our congregation. They are charged with defining a discernment process that will bring clarity and guidance on how our church responds to requests for marriage. The task force members are: Kathleen Harder, Katie Hochstetler, Matthew Kinney, Donna Minter, Jacob Schlabach, Ry Siggelkow, Dick Westby.

As the task force moves through process definition, we will seek to provide as much transparency and communication as possible. We also seek to maintain a sanctuary for ideas, concerns, and passions in order to shelter those who may feel vulnerable by engaging in this process.

It is important to understand that this is a two step process of discernment: Step 1) define the discernment process; and Step 2) execute the discernment process. Only after Step 2 will we have achieved the desired ends. While this may seem unnecessarily process heavy to some, Council felt it was important to formally structure our discernment in a way that provided maximum input, transparency, and sanctuary.

We hope to have our process design work (Step 1) complete in October, and to present process options to Council in the November council meeting. From there, Council will affirm a process option and implement the process to bring the desired clarity (Step 2). We ask for your continual prayer as we move through these steps.

--Matthew Blackwell Kinney, Moderator-elect

### **CPMC Conference Staff to Visit FMC on October 31**

The Central Plains Mennonite Conference has a newly reorganized staff team. David Boshart is the new Executive Conference Minister with responsibilities for administration, witness and partnerships. Tim Detweiler is Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, and Shana Peachy Boshart is Conference Minister for Faith Formation. As David begins his responsibilities this fall he is eager to learn to know all of the congregations of Central Plains Mennonite Conference. To help do this, the conference ministry staff is planning a series of road trips this fall to meet with pastors and other representatives of each congregation. The purpose of these trips is to build connections between the

congregations of Central Plains Mennonite Conference and conference ministry staff, to learn the story of your congregations, and to think together about how we can strengthen our relationships and enhance our common mission.

The visit to FMC will occur on Sunday, October 31. That morning Dave Boshart will preach in our worship service. Following the adult education hour there will be a potluck meal for anyone who would like to remain for a conversation (from approximately 1-2:30 p.m.). The conversation will be structured around three questions:

1. What would you like conference staff to know about your congregation?
2. What are the challenges you need to be prepared to meet in the next five years?
3. What do you want conference to care about most?

These conversations will provide the basis for developing the strategic plan that will guide the Conference staff's work for the next several years. The staff encourages us to "feel free to bring to these conversations anything that you think might be helpful in developing our understanding of your congregation and context."

### Menno'Faith Warm Up for Fall Performances

Menno'Faith, the men's choir, will begin rehearsals today, October 3 (12-12:30 p.m.) for a performance at the November 13 MCC Relief Sale. The choir will also sing in worship at FMC on November 7 and 21. Menno'Faith is a group of men who have been singing for two years and with every performance we are always looking for new voices to join with us. Following is the rehearsal schedule leading up to three performances. Even if you cannot sing at the November 13 performance, I encourage you to come to rehearsals to learn the new music and to help others learn their parts during the rehearsals. There's a good chance that you might be able to sing on one of the Sundays at Faith.

October 3	12-12:30pm
October 10	11:15-noon
October 17	12-12:30pm
October 24	12-12:30pm
November 7	11:15-noon (sing in worship)
November 13	Concert with a short rehearsal before (time has not been announced yet)
November 21	Sing in worship

--Neil Okerlund

### Deacons' Report for September 15, 2010

We began our meeting by welcoming Aryn Baxter onto the deacons' commission. We spent an extended time checking in, as a way to share about ourselves with Aryn and her with us.

Kathleen Remund, ministry staff person, joined us for an exploratory conversation regarding ways to provide opportunities for service that also meaningfully connect people within the congregation and allow them to grow spiritually. Several opportunities have surfaced. Based on feedback from sign-up sheets that will be posted at the September 25 church retreat, Kathleen will draft a plan as to how to proceed.

We debriefed each other regarding the Sunday, September 12 geographical deacon group meetings. There seemed to be wide-spread support on the part of those who attended to get to know each other better, as well as have opportunities to gather and provide care and mutual support for those in our geographic groups. Several groups have scheduled gatherings and set up email lists as ways to start building those connections.

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

--Kami Blackwell Kinney, recorder



October  
Birthday  
Brunch

Saturday,  
October 9  
9:30-11:30  
a.m.

If you or a family member has a birthday in October, pastor Joetta invites you to her home, 248 Aurora Ave., St. Paul, for brunch on October 9. (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](mailto:jschlabach@faithmennonite.org).

## Comings and Goings...

Please take time to meet and welcome these persons who have recently visited and begun attending worship. We are glad for their presence!

*Becky Brandon*

*Alicia Frank*

*Mandy Janssen*

*Sher, John, and Evan Unruh-Friesen*

Faith Mennonite Church took me in when I moved to the Twin Cities area two and a half years ago and I feel blessed to be part of this community. That is why I am a little saddened because for the duration of the school year, I will miss being an active part of the Faith community. The situation is not all sadness. I have been adopted by Good Samaritan United Methodist Church, Edina, as an intern doing pastoral care. I will be helping with some worship services and doing a lot of pastoral visiting. The seminary requires an internship for all seeking a Master of Divinity, which is my path, and requires that the internship not be done in your own church. So, I will miss seeing you but will be back in church in June. I wish you all God's blessings!

--Donna Stucky

Things are going very well here (at LCC International University in Lithuania). I had a big learning curve with the start of classes. I haven't taught at this level before, plus I was jumping right in, teaching and planning out the courses all at the same time. But everything is stabilized now, and I'm having a good time with it. I've taken up floor hockey. The faculty play against students every Wednesday night. Last week was my first hockey game ever, and I scored a goal! I guess I picked up the skills by just living in Minnesota for a few years. Thanks for the thoughts and prayers!

--Eric Kasper

## Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 @ FMC

**Present:** Arlene Holdeman, Secretary; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer, Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Matthew Blackwell Kinney, Moderator-elect; Katie Hochstedler, Missions & Service; Kathleen Remund, Arlene Geissinger, Fellowship, Marcia Siggelkow, Education.

**Absent:** Moderator, Worship Commission representative.

### New Business.

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee.** Appoint members to

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration planning committee. Council decided to ask Sandra Westby, Joan Kreider, and Matthew Hendricks to form a committee, to invite additional people to join, and to choose their own chair.

Karen Peterson and Noah or Cori Skogerboe will be backups. The committee will be asked to bring a preliminary report to council at the October meeting.

**Action: Marcia Siggelkow will contact the listed people.**

**Marriage Guidelines Task Force.** Appoint members to marriage guidelines task force. The task force will define a process that will assist the church in finding clarity and guidance on the topic of marriage. It will be a process that respects and includes the diverse perspectives of our local and regional communities. Council decided to advertise for volunteers and nominations for the group and then decide on its makeup at the September meeting. A balance of age, experience, and perspectives will be looked for in forming the task force. Church participants will be invited to give their ideas to the task force. On September 26, the task force and the process will be discussed during the adult education class.

**Action: Matthew to work on wording for the charter for the task force and circulate to council members his results. The announcement will be sent out in the midweek update and published in the bulletin next Sunday.**

**Sanctuary painting project.** Glenn reported that the trustees are recommending postponement until next year's budget. In the meantime, they will finish soliciting bids for various aspects and get a firm number for the cost. Perhaps a capital campaign will be needed. Council consensus was not to go ahead with the painting this fall.

**Fire alarm system.** Glenn reported that the fire inspectors said the church must repair our non-functional current system or replace it. The proposal to replace the circuit board in the existing system is for \$2000, and it may not be all that is necessary. The alternative is to install a new fire alarm system, which would mean we would need to bring the whole system up to code (such things as installing more smoke alarms and emergency light and sound devices) The price would be \$14,398. The current system is at least 20 years old. The question of the impact of the decision on insurance was raised. Glenn said he would ask Darrell Martin about that. Council consensus was to repair the current system for the present.

**Council's responsibility for adult education classes for September.** Classes resume on Sept. 12, when the

deacon groups will meet to become better acquainted. On Sept. 19 there will be reports from the annual CPMC conference. On Sept. 26, the marriage guidelines task force and process will be discussed.

#### **Treasurer's Report.**

Jerry reported that local budget giving for July was only \$6,131.20, putting us more than \$20,000 below budget. He will need to liquidate the savings account in order to pay bills.

**Action: Scott to communicate the problem to the church. An item for the newsletter will be submitted.**

#### **Pastor's Report.**

Joetta reported that she did not preach during July due to travel, the joint service with Bethany Lutheran, and Donna Stucky's preaching one Sunday. She gave a positive report on the worship and picnic with Bethany and said both churches are interested in future collaborations. During July she attended the Catholic-Mennonite Bridgefolk conference at St. John's Abbey and spent a good bit of time in pastoral care visits. Plans for the fall worship schedule are underway, with September's focus on "Heart talks with Mother God," October's on the Lectionary, November's on stewardship, and December's on Advent and Christmas. She reported on the many transitions taking place among Faith people this summer and fall. The fall retreat will probably be a half day, maybe in late September, perhaps at Matthews Center.

#### **Commission Reports.**

**Trustees.** Glenn reported that the ceiling in the storage closet used by the Community of St. Martin caved in and he will repair it. There will be a work day in September. The church has a new refrigerator donated by someone from within the church. There has been a third flood this summer in the education wing basement, as the storm sewer backed up. This one was mostly in the janitor's closet.

**Deacons.** Hermann said the deacons discussed the highlights of the last year and what is coming up. Greg Renstrom from the deacons commission may be helping with establishing a new church to meet in the former Wesley United Methodist Church building, and if so will need to step down from the commission.

**Education.** Marcia reported they have not met since the last council meeting, but said Kathleen Remund will be contacting families of children who attended VBS to hear their reactions. There will be a Shalom Readers Group this fall for children ages 4—junior high. Shelly is recruiting SS teachers for the fall and organizing music.

**Worship.** Joetta reported they will not make any more sound system purchases this year because of the budget problems

--Arlene Holdeman, Secretary

#### **On Viewing "Resonant Presence, 2003 Pastel and Mortar on Wood"**

The satchel flew open the other day  
as she was walking home  
and a million white scraps floated out.

They filled the air with  
fluttering and twisting,  
blinding her with windy movements.

She spits hair and spins to catch the quickly  
dispersing traces.

Tonight on the dim floor of the apartment  
She—knock on wood—  
will arrange them into a worthy testimony.

Tags of a blue sky mobile  
drape down into the gusts  
—and the shaking of the world slows.

Firmly, she guides each stray scrap  
back into the satchel  
and secures the latch.

Now, she thinks, at least,  
I am all here,  
And not there,  
so wandering in the swirling world.

--Charity Kroeker

#### **The deadline for November newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, October 27<sup>h</sup>.**

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.