

# Faith Connection

October 2013

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 text of the recent interview with Pope Francis, which has garnered much media attention in the past week or so, you will know that his opening words, in response to the question, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" were "I am a sinner." Most of us, when asked the question of who we are, usually begin with something about where we grew up, or where we currently live, or what we do vocationally or for pleasure. The pope's simple response, "I am a sinner," was emblematic of the tone of the wide-ranging conversation that would follow. This highest leader of the Roman Catholic Church was quick to establish that he is first of all human like everyone else and in need of God's grace.

These words came to mind Monday evening as I met with members of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) for our quarterly meeting. This committee serves as a sounding board for me and as a means for sharing concerns they may be hearing from within the congregation. Every healthy organization needs a committee like this and I am grateful to the current members Kristin Green, Shelly Hendricks, Noah Skogerboe, and Hermann Weinlick, who come to these meetings with compassion, honesty and wisdom.

In the course of sharing concerns from the congregation, I heard two things related to the previous day's worship service (September 22) that had been upsetting for some. Both had to do with choice of words and message content in a setting where children were present. Before addressing these I would like to say that receiving feedback about something that has been difficult or upsetting for someone is never easy but it is an important reminder that I (and we) are prone to err. Naming my fallibility helps me move from negative self-blame to trying to become more aware and learn from what went wrong. I want to thank those who raised the concerns and I hope we can be a community in which people feel free to do just that. I'm not talking

about being a community of complaint, but rather a community that offers growth and healing because we trust each other enough to openly share our disagreements and pain.

One of the concerns was about the content of children's time in which I talked about how our bodies change as we grow and how babies begin to grow as a result of parents' love. I used a book that was recommended in the "Body and Soul" resource guide for our September sexuality series. I did not think to consult with parents to seek their judgment on this choice or to let them know in advance so they could decide if they thought this was appropriate for their child(ren). I understand that this caused surprise and discomfort for some. I regret this and accept full responsibility.

The other concern was about the inclusion of the words "rape and incest" in the prayer of lament (which also came from the resource materials). A similar concern had come to the worship commission on an earlier occasion. After discussion, the commission agreed that such words should be used judiciously but that we believe parents can find age-appropriate, non-explicit ways to answer if children ask the meaning of words like these, such as: "hurting someone" or "doing something to someone else that they don't want." On the other hand, because worship is the only time when everyone is present in our community, and because some carry the wounds of such actions (which may have occurred in the context of a church), it seems important, on occasion, to carefully name that pain.

I do not expect that we will all agree on these things. The worship commission would certainly welcome additional input. I do hope that we will listen carefully to one another and grow through uncomfortable moments. I desire your feedback (either directly or via one of the PPRC members) and pray for the grace to receive it as a gift to myself and the community, even when it reminds me that "I am a sinner (human)."

--Joetta Schlabach

## Ministry staff report...

I'm just back from our Wednesday evening (September 25) community meal. Since we started up again at the beginning of September the numbers of people coming out have been down (compared to last spring). We have been trying to assess whether to continue the meals, and if so, how often to hold them. We don't have around the folks to offer childcare that we had last spring, and just maybe, we thought, people are getting tired of volunteering to do the dishes afterwards!

And yet, this evening I was pleasantly surprised to see over forty people here. Some came for the monthly 7 p.m. peace and justice film, focusing on bullying in Minneapolis schools. Others came to hear Mary Parker's voice recital at 7:30 in the sanctuary—a fundraiser for her congregation's building project (Walker Community Church). Kristi and Joy Zabriskie and Sandra Westby came so that they could start planning an International Day of the Girl gathering at the church on October 11. And still others simply came out for some fantastic soup cooked up by Mennonite Worker members Mark and Josh, as well as for some good conversation with neighbors.

So, more energy this evening! It remains to be seen what we'll do in the future. Do you want to see these meals continuing? Should we try to do more outreach—put up fliers and/or distribute them door-to-door? Put up some new signs along our sidewalk advertising the meals? Or do more to connect with Community of St. Martin folks, or other congregations? If you think the meal is something we should continue to focus on, let me know, and give me a sense of how often you'd like to come in the future.

In other news, Missions and Service put together an FMC booth for the annual King's Fair in Matthews Park on September 21. We decided to be a sponsor for St. Paul Interfaith Network (SPIN) events this year (host another interfaith meal here, perhaps, like last spring?). And, we're soon going to be getting an energy audit done for our building. Should we do something dramatic like put up solar panels? (The Community of St. Martin might be interested in collaborating with us on that one.)

Also, I'm working at getting some middle-school youth events ramped up this fall. Some ideas floating around have been to volunteer at Second Harvest Heartland, sleep out at the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative's Cardboard Box City event, help out at the Art Crawl, help Dick Westby put on an FMC kids fair some Saturday, do an environmental leaf clean-up

in the streets around the church, and/or participate in a December Taizé service with youth from two other local congregations. We have a couple kids at Rochester Mennonite Church who may be interested in occasionally coming up for events, and there is a middle school group at Emmanuel which is potentially interested in collaborating with us on occasion.

We'll see what transpires! One thing—FMC does not, at the moment, have a bona fide youth sponsor (beyond me, the person who does the organizing for things). Anyone interested in volunteering?

--Phil Stoltzfus

## What's happening at FMC...

### Fall Adult Education Options

We hope you will join one of the two adult Christian education classes offered this fall. One will continue the September series theme on sexuality using the book *Sexuality: God's Gift*, edited by Anne Krabill Hershberger. The other will explore the new book just published by Mark Van Steenwyk, *The UNkingdom of God: Embracing the Subversive Power of Repentance*. The sexuality class will have shared leadership, coordinated by Hermann Weinlick and Donna Minter. Richard Westby will be coordinating the Steenwyk class (Mark himself is planning to come by on one Sunday). Classes begin October 13—the sexuality class in the library, the UNkingdom class in the fellowship hall.

From the preface to *Sexuality: God's Gift*: “The author desires that each reader will perceive healthy sexuality as vital to human wholeness, intimacy, joy, and caring relationships, and as a reflection of God's creative love. The contributors are have professional roles as physician, nurse, theologian, pastor, counselor, dramatist, and musician. We believe it has been worthwhile to bring all these perspectives together for further educating readers about sexuality as God's good gift.”

From the back cover of *The UNkingdom of God*: “Two thousand years of well-intentioned (and sometimes not so well-intentioned) attempts to carry forward the good news of God with us have resulted in some murky understandings of the teachings of Jesus and the culture of God's kingdom. To embrace Christianity, sometimes we have to repent of what we've made of it. The starting place of authentic Christian witness is *repentance*, and while Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, it remains the hope of the world.”

--Candace Lauth

## Men Who Hang Out

Party one, "Men who hangout", of hopefully a three party "Men who..." series was held in Rudy Okerlund's back yard. Party two and three will be "Men who cook" and "Men who drum". Party one was indeed a hangout time of good food, music by Ross Willits (friend of Chris Jones), and a hotly contested ladder golf tournament. Thaine pulled off an amazing upset by sneaking past the tournament favorite, Dick Westby. With darkness came the time to gather round the fire pit and just let the embers say it all, "It was a hot time at the old town tonight."

--Rudy Okerlund

## Women's Gathering

Not to be outdone by the recent gatherings for men of the congregation, organized by Rudy Okerlund, the women took things in hand and had their own "sister time" on Friday, September 20. Fourteen women gathered to get better acquainted, to share dessert and a few stories of our lives, and to talk about meeting on a regular (monthly) basis. Rather than set a fixed framework, we decided to leave the door open for different kinds of gatherings: some with time for sharing/discussion/spiritual reflection; some for games (with no expectation of trophies), etc. We may break into groups that meet at different times; someone expressed interest in meeting on a Saturday morning. The only firm decision was to set a date for Friday, October 11, when Kristi Zabriskie and Sandra Westby will plan "women and girls night" event. Watch for more information!

-- Joetta Schlabach



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 12<sup>th</sup>. (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).

October  
Birthday  
Brunch  
Saturday,  
October 12<sup>th</sup>  
9:30-11  
a.m.

## Wisdom Calling: What is This Place?

"What is This Place," is the first hymn in our hymnal. Its prominent position suggests that the compilers fully intended to remind congregants to never take their church for granted. I'm convinced that it is time for Faith Mennonite Church to ask, "What is this place?" Are we entering a new place, a new reality? If indicators point to the possibility of a changing reality, are we structured as a church in a manner that will effectively help us address the possibility of our changing reality? What do we hold to and what might require a closer examination?

How we currently go about maintaining and building our church relies on a model created decades ago. Those were times of stability where communities experienced little outside influence. Faith Mennonite is an urban church in a world swirling in change and instantly in touch with itself. Our answer to the question, "What is this place?" emerges from a very different context than that of our founders.

Let me be clear, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is an appropriate response. Holding to what our church has been about, how we've successfully gone about creating our lives together as a faith community is foundational to any re-examination of how we view our future. However, there is evidence of our church moving through some challenging times and I am convinced that the current shifts we are experiencing calls us to begin a journey that leads us to an examination of how we carry on with the work of our church. I call this a period of "Wisdom Calling".

What is "Wisdom Calling"? Our church is blessed with members who have demonstrated a deep commitment to the greater good of our church. I'm convinced that these people are longing for an opportunity to explore with like-minded folks the questions "who we are as a church" and "how we move forward?". If we asked members of our church to each identify who these people are, the lists would be very similar. I'd like to see these people come together informally, on a regular basis, to pursue the question, "What is this place?" Invitations would target specific people, but the sessions would be open to anyone with an interest in such a pursuit.

This hints of elder recognition, but without age being the bottom line requirement. I say this because at 68, I recognize that I am an immigrant to the current technology that has become a prominent driver of our culture. I'm biased and not in a position to fully understand technology's impact, positive and negative.

I'd dwell on the negative. We cannot look ahead without the wisdom of those born into this technology.

This is not a call for a task force or a workshop, the conventional approach to efforts like this. I am proposing home gatherings because homes provide the intimacy that fosters a pursuit like this. This is not a group driven by a specific charge from the Church Council. It is primarily a "dialogue first" group, open to the possibility of moving into a discussion format that might possibly lead to new directions. Four monthly gatherings would be scheduled with specific topics guiding the way. At the conclusion of the fourth gathering, an evaluation will take place to determine if the group continues on.

I presented these thoughts at the September Church Council meeting and the Council saw merit in moving on it. A dialogue guide is yet to be created. Once this is in place, a notice and invitation will be made announcing the details. It will be important for the group to understand that we will not be seeking immediate answers. Rather we will come together to see what there is to see. This is why the theme is "What is this place?"

-- Rudy Okerlund

## January-August Financial Statement

<b>Income</b>	<b>Year to Date</b>
Offerings	\$85,296
Rent	25,470
Investments	6,810
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$117,576</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Conference support	\$4,000
Deacons	2,665
Education	4,091
FICA	1,253
Fellowship	1,686
Missions and Service	1,639
Office	3,575
Pastor/Ministry Staff	55,543
Trustees/bldg expenses	24,762
Worship	1,004
Mortgage	3,973
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$104,191</b>
<b>Income minus expenses</b>	<b>\$13,385</b>
<b>YTD budgeted offerings</b>	<b>\$95,000</b>
<b>Actual offerings</b>	<b>\$85,296</b>
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>(-\$9,704)</b>

## What's happening here and there...

### Fellowship and Learning Tour to Ecuador

Central Plains Mennonite Conference is part of a partnership with the Colombia and Ecuador Mennonite Churches. Some years ago as Colombian refugees fled the violence of their country and settled in Ecuador, the Colombian Mennonite Church decided to send a couple, Cesar Moya and Patricia Uruena, to assess ways that the church could be of assistance. Over time their activity grew into the formation of two congregations that are deeply committed to peace. Central Plains Conference has provided financial support for the Mennonite Church in Ecuador and has annually sponsored a fellowship and learning tour that brings together persons from the U.S., Colombia and Ecuador. Members of the Ecuador Mennonite Church have also visited the Central Plains region and Cesar and Patricia spent a year studying and teaching at the Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

The 2014 tour is set for January 16-28 and will include seven days in Quito and five days in Riobamba, a rural community. The approximate cost of the trip is \$1500 per person which includes international airfare. During the tour participants will lodge in a combination of hotels and homes of church members. Activities will include worship and interaction with various churches, workshops about mission in the context of Ecuador taught by Cesar and Patricia; visiting partner organizations such as the organization of indigenous churches, the seminary where Cesar and Patricia teach, a school for poor children in an Inca neighborhood that supports peace workshops, and a "Young Life" program; visiting a refugee house maintained by the Quito Mennonite Church, assisting with peace workshops and visiting markets and tourist attractions. The group will include two persons from Colombia and eight from Central Plains Conference. Organizers for the trip emphasize that "participants must be able to adapt to a cross-cultural experience and a very flexible schedule."

Joetta Schlabach is tentatively planning to participate in the tour as part of the sabbatical time she will take in January and February. She welcomes other FMCers to join her for a brief reprieve from winter and a wonderful opportunity to get to know another part of the global church (including folks from Central Plains Conference!).

--Joetta Schlabach

### Upon Ten Years of Marriage

Some of these days are frail, and hot,  
And full of silent words,  
Days which the night pulls underground.  
The heat, it rests there, under the sod,  
Sliced through by our weight upon shovels, and waits  
To hold seeds that break open and lengthen toward light,  
And most of them do.

But, mercy – this heat, this distance!  
Mercy—the sweat, the respiration of  
Older trees and green cover that stand in  
The way of neat rows and furrows!  
We said: we will take this mess, this tangle of roots—  
We'll fell it and turn it over, page by page.

The house will be built then, written,  
The roof, the trees bisected, nailed, and bound,  
The book closed, the door left unlocked—  
We'll watch the fields from the doorway at dusk,  
And we'll know what will grow.

Because water, it collects in furrows.  
Seeds find their neatly spaced places in them.  
We've made way for broad flushes of green  
To sweep the fields in the hours after rain,  
When the sun wrings everything out just enough  
To decide between growing and drowning.

We decided we'd watch for the birds, for the right  
Or wrong kinds of sky, for thistle and pigweed  
That hop the row and bleed the growth  
From the careful lines arching around the hill.  
We'll watch for the naked earth to heat  
And split soil in jagged cracks.

It happens again, year after year—the drought, the flood, the heat—  
If it didn't, the corn might be a mile high,  
The squash would cover the barn,  
The piles of books on the table would be neat and true and lean,  
But we don't know for sure if there would be marrow  
In any of what grew, winding wildly or straight like arrows.

*--Minke Sundseth*

**The deadline for November newsletter items is noon, Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>.**

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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.