

Faith Connection

September 2010

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...

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? – Job 38:4-5

This summer a small group gathered two evenings a month to read and discuss the book of Job. Bob Brown, who led our study, proposed the book since he had written his MA thesis on a portion of the book. At the same time, he wondered if our gathered group remained small because Job doesn't have a lot of appeal...who wants to think about suffering in the summer?

True enough, Job is a challenging book dealing with one of life's most perplexing questions: why do the innocent, righteous suffer? The first 37 chapters of the book are the back-and-forth narrative of Job and his not-so-helpful friends as they grapple with the question. Their only paradigm is a cause-and-effect one: suffering in some way must be related to our actions, our sin. Job holds out that he's innocent and wants a trial before God. His friends advise him to fess up and shut up.

Finally, in chapters 38-41 God speaks. Instead of entering the trifling arguments of Job and his companions, God changes the subject. God interrogates Job, asking if he understands the grandeur and the wildness of creation. Against this voice, Job finds his prior questions meaningless. Environmentalist Bill McKibben, who describes himself as an "orthodox Methodist," considers Job to be the most profound book of the Old Testament. He describes God's discourse in these chapters as an invitation "for humans to make themselves small." The human activity that is causing climate change—melting polar icecaps and raising ocean levels—is a human challenge to God, says McKibben, a refusal to make ourselves small.

I have found that one of the best spiritual exercises in "making myself small" is to go to the wilderness. Sometimes this has been in the Boundary Waters, but two days at a small hermitage in Wisconsin in August, with no electricity or running water, had the same effect. I found myself slowing down, even re-using the same paper towel five or six times!

The explosion of gardens (the produce and the weeds!) in August has the same effect. We plant, we tend, and for awhile we stay ahead of things. But leave for a week of vacation, or even a long week-end, and squash vines travel miles and zucchinis morph into baseball bats. I lose any sense of "ownership" and realize that the mystery of the garden is beyond me.

I hope your summer has afforded you the chance to make yourself small, to experience the grandeur of God in creation, and to gain a renewed perspective on life as we get ready for another shifting of seasons and the return of fall routines.

--Joetta Schlabach

What's happening at FMC...

Church Council Invites Participation on Taskforce to Create Process for Discernment of Marriage Guidelines

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.

As a member of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, within the denomination of Mennonite Church USA, Faith Mennonite also belongs to a larger Christ-centered community.

While we value and strongly affirm these communities and relationships, we also recognize that our diverse cultures, environments, and situations can create ambiguity and tension as we each seek to respond to God's unique calling in the lives of our communities.

Marriage is one area where such ambiguity and tension exist. Faith Mennonite Church "seeks to be a place of welcome and nurture for all"; our members are "gay and straight." Article 19 of our conference's *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life." On the surface these statements seem to be at odds. Perhaps they are; perhaps they are not. For our local community at Faith Mennonite Church, clarity is called for. God calls us to be light in the darkness.

To this end, Faith Mennonite Church Council is establishing a task force to define a process that will assist us in providing clarity and guidance on the topic of marriage. This taskforce is strongly charged to create a process that respects and includes the diverse perspectives of our local and regional communities. The outcome of this process should provide clarity and guidance as to how we are called to live out our missional statements in light of our *Confession of Faith*. This taskforce will define a process. This taskforce is not commissioned to define what it means to be welcoming or married.

We invite you to join us in being a sign of God's healing and hope in our community and world. If you feel that God is calling you or someone you know to participate on this taskforce, Church Council would like to hear from you. Council will seek to create an effective and balanced team from any volunteers, and will have final say as to its size and composition. The Council will establish the taskforce in its September 8 meeting, with work to begin thereafter.

Interested parties can contact Matthew Blackwell Kinney by phone (651.468.8982) or e-mail (mablackw@hotmail.com).

--Matthew Blackwell Kinney, Church Council
Moderator-elect

Car Sabbath – September 5

As one small way to decrease our congregation's carbon footprint, the Missions & Service Commission invites all who are able to make September 5 a Car Sabbath Sunday. Those who live in close proximity may wish to walk or ride a bike to church. Others may use public

transportation or carpool. We celebrate the many and varied ways individuals daily make choices to care for creation.

Christian Education Begins September 12

Following our summer break, Christian education for all ages will resume on September 12. With over 30 children from fifth grade on down, we are excited about this year's children's program. As in the past few years, we will use the Gather 'Round curriculum from the Mennonite Publishing Network. This year we will "go back to the beginning" to the book of Genesis, now that we have completed a four-year cycle exploring the Bible.

This year, our classes will break into the following age groups: second through fifth grade; kindergarten and first grade; preschoolers (ages three through five); and a nursery "class" for children ages 12 to 36 months. Nursery teachers will have available the new Wee Wonder curriculum for two-year-olds, which includes Bible stories, simple prayers and songs, and fun play activities (of course!).

Several people have agreed to help educate and nurture our children's faith formation:

Nursery: Rachel Geissinger, Rhonda Martin, Gregg Richardson, Rachel and Shawn Walding
Preschool: Andi Kuenning and Deedee Stevens Neal

School ages: Paula and Mike Okerstrom, Aine McCarthy, Valerie Ong and Gabe Schlabach, and Arlyn Baxter.

In addition to our classroom teachers, Matthew Blackwell Kinney will lead the children's music time, which will be provided to the school-age children. Thank you to all who have agreed to help. We're looking forward to the coming year!

Adults will meet together in combined sessions during the month of September, before elective options begin in October. The September schedule includes:

September 12th: Getting acquainted. Do you have trouble putting names on faces? Would you like to get to know others better? The deacons will facilitate this session to help us deepen our connections to one another.

September 19th: Report on Central Plains Mennonite Conference annual meeting. FMC delegates to the CPMC annual meeting in June will report on their experiences and take questions you may have about our regional church body.

September 26th: Information session about the Marriage Guidelines Taskforce that is being formed (see related article).

-Shelly Hendricks, children's coordinator, and
Kathleen Harder, adult coordinator

Church Work Day – September 18

It's time for Fall Cleaning! The Trustees have scheduled a church clean up day on Saturday September 18th beginning at 8:00 am—note, this is a change from the 9:00am time previously announced! If you are able, we appreciate many hands making light work for everyone. If you have noticed something in particular around the building that needs attention, please let one of the Trustees (Glenn, Mark, or Nikki) or Joetta know as soon as possible and we'll put it on the list. More details to follow...

--Nikki Fitch Nafziger



*September
Birthday
Brunch*

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

All-Church Fall Retreat – September 25

Based on congregational feedback earlier this spring, the Retreat Committee is designing a half-day morning retreat with several optional afternoon activities on Saturday, September 25. Our theme will be “Meeting New Neighbors...around the corner and around the world.” We'll hear from a new immigrant who came to Minnesota as a refugee and from Aryn Baxter who has returned from two years in Africa. There will be special activities for children and a noon meal prepared and served by members of the Hmong Mennonite Church. We'll meet at Matthews Center and FMC. Mark your calendar and watch for more information coming soon!

--Retreat Committee (Wolf Bartel, Rhonda Martin, Karen Wiebe, Joetta Schlabach)

Outreach Ministry Opportunities

As we move into fall, (which I happen to feel is the finest season in Minnesota!) the Missions and Service Commission has been looking at opportunities for ministry in our community. A number of fine possibilities has emerged, and I hope you'll begin thinking about which of these may be calling to you. Depending on the congregation's energy and interests, we may be able to do one or two of these, or all four.

Each of these ministry opportunities grows out of relationships and offers the possibility of deepening relationships of trust and friendship within and beyond Faith Mennonite.

At our fall retreat on September 25th, you will have an opportunity to sign up to participate in one or more of these ministries--so here's a preview to give you time for prayerful reflection:

Refugee sponsorship: Join with members of FMC and other Christian and Muslim communities, and the MN Council of Churches, to welcome refugees newly arriving in the Twin Cities. Provide practical support such as pulling together clothing and furniture, driving people to appointments, and showing them how to use mass transit and biking to navigate the city. Provide friendship and assistance during the first four or five months of a refugee family's transition to this new and unfamiliar world.

Immigration Advocacy: Participate in a series of four adult education forums on the challenges facing undocumented workers in the U.S. and especially here in Minnesota. Find out how to be an ally to people being victimized by the current immigration system. Help to plan and attend a community forum with music, food, and story-sharing with members of *Asamblea*, a local advocacy organization.

Hospitality and Homelessness: Develop a partnership with Mennonite-based *Missio Dei*, a neighbor community committed to living and engaging in ministry in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. *Missio Dei* has been hosting homeless folks in their homes and are looking for practical and financial assistance from neighboring congregations. This partnership may include helping with hospitality in *Missio Dei*'s homes and raising funds for their work.

Culture of Peace Training: FMC members Phil Stolfus and Candace Lutt are trainers in a program called “Creating A Culture of Peace.” They have offered to provide a weekend-long training for people of

Faith Mennonite and other neighbors to help us all deepen our peacemaking practice.

Thank you to all who have worked to cultivate these relationships and open up these doors.

--*Kathleen Remund*

Worship Commission Update

As summer draws to a close and we begin to get back into our "full church" routine complete with Christian Education, the worship commission would like to revisit some of our ideas about our worship experience together. Although "going to church" means different things to different people, the one act we all participate in is our communal Sunday morning service. Certain parts of worship hold more value to us individually, but the entire rhythm of the service is what brings us together and helps define who we are as a faith community.

To that end, we hope that when you gather to worship, you feel a quieting and centering presence, that you are able to clear out some the busyness in your head and prepare yourself to experience an encounter with. We recognize and appreciate that our congregation places a high value on community and we naturally seek to connect with fellow congregants from the moment we enter the building. At the same time, we realize that we can easily lose track of time and some of us continue in conversation as the musical prelude begins.

As a commission, we encourage each of us to consider what each of us can do to create a positive worship environment and experience for all. This request is more than a plea to "please show up on time, sit down, and save the fellowship for, well, fellowship time!" We hope everyone feels connected to our worship experience, from the musicians and leaders who prepare and lead, to long-time members for whom our worship service is predictable and comfortable, to first-time visitors who walk through our door.

This year we will be working with music ensembles to present finished pieces as part of our services. We will be organizing a worship leading and scripture reading workshop to train people to present scripture more dynamically. We ask for everyone's help to make our worship experience a positive, exciting and contemplative encounter with the holy that we look forward to each Sunday morning.

--*Adam Nafziger, Worship Commission chair*

Biblical Encounters

The group that met to study the book of Job this summer has decided to continue meeting on the first and third Tuesdays of September and October. We will engage the stories of four encounters that people had with Jesus, recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The series, "Known to us in Breaking of Bread" will examine the following texts:

September 7: Luke 5:1-11

September 21: Luke 7:36-50

October 5: Luke 22:14-30

October 19: Luke 24:36-53

We will use a "confessional reading" method in which we personally engage with the text asking questions such as: what puzzles us and what would we like to know more about? What draws our attention? What do we want to argue with? Who in the story do we feel drawn to and who do we want to push away? Where does it feel that God may be speaking to us?

Everyone is welcome to join us in the chapel from 7-8 p.m. on these Tuesday evenings.

Faith Mennonite Church Council Meeting July 14th, 2010 @ FMC

Present: Scott Neal, Moderator; Joetta Schlabach, Pastor; Glenn Geissinger, Trustees; Hermann Weinlick, Deacons; Jerry Janzen, Treasurer; Katie Hochstedler, Missions & Service; Kathleen Harder, Education; Arlene Holdeman, Secretary.

Absent: Worship representative, Moderator-elect; Fellowship commission representative.

Old Business.

Marriage guidelines: Joetta, Scott, Matthew K. and Katie met with CPMC leaders at the conference held June 24-27 in Mountain Lake to discuss FMC having a marriage guidelines that addresses same-sex marriage. The leadership expressed appreciation for the conversation but warned that there are implications beyond our church. The conference would have to deal with MCUSA about pastoral credentials. One of those in the meeting, Susan Janzen of the Cedar Falls IA church, said it is a live issue for them, particularly since Iowa has made same-sex marriage legal. FMC representatives said we will begin talking about a process and then bring that back to the conference for feedback. Joetta reported there was tension at the conference about discussion of the resolution from the Unity Task Force. A vote on it was not taken, but Joetta said she hopes it will be revived again.

Joetta asked if we should invite representatives from Missio Dei to be involved in the conversation with us, perhaps also from Third Way. Missio Dei has been part of the conference longer. Kathleen asked if it would be good to have as a partner church in conversation an older, more established church in the conference to examine the questions, rather than Missio Dei. Perhaps that would be perceived by the conference as a more robust process. Matthew K has expressed hope that whatever we do, we go forward in light of the vision for our congregation.

These questions were raised: How much are we willing to sacrifice to keep an issue of justice moving forward? How much to take a slower more cautious path? Jerry said he would hate to jeopardize our conference status again. Conference people went to bat for us to re-instate us to full membership in the conference. There is a difference between supporting Joetta if she is asked to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony and having an official FMC marriage policy. Shalom Mennonite in Newton KS was asked to have a same-sex marriage ceremony this summer. They dealt with it in their deacon group, not in the whole church. They said yes to the ceremony being held in the church, but neither pastor will officiate.

Scott said he is not the moderator to lead the congregation into a variance position with the conference. Katie said this is a question of integrity of the congregation and of pastoral care. It's a chance to offer the conference the opportunity to do the right thing. Kathleen said a marriage policy allowing same-sex marriage would be like a stick in the eye to the conference. There should be a more creative way to move the conference. A shorter term goal should be not to get the conference to agree with where we are but to agree to have more diversity within the conference. Hermann suggested a way to begin is to represent the congregation to the conference through stories that members have been sharing Sunday mornings this summer.

Action: At the Aug. 11 council meeting appoint four people to a task force to further pursue this issue, to find creative ways to move the congregation and conference toward pushing the envelope respectfully toward same-sex marriage. To creatively keep the issue moving forward while staying in relationship with the conference.

New Business.

The FMC 50th anniversary will be in 2011.

Action: At the next meeting to appoint a group to begin planning for it.

Treasurer's report. Giving continues to be 25% under budget, half way through the year. Glenn asked, should we put off painting the sanctuary this fall until we are in better financial shape?

Action: Decide by next meeting if we should do it now or put it in next year's budget.

Pastor's report. The fellowship commission asked for another member, and Cleta Gingerich agreed to join it. At a pastors' cluster meeting Chue Vang, pastor of the Hmong Mennonite Church, asked for prayer as he has lost his home through a short sale and has moved in with his son in Blaine. Seth McCoy of Third Way requested prayer as they face the challenge of starting a new household community. Joetta heard Josh DuBois, national director of faith-based and neighborhood partnerships, speak at a meeting called by Ellison. We continue to have new people visiting this summer. The challenges are to connect and to keep our vision clear. Joetta passed out copies of Outfront Minnesota resolutions in support of the legalization of same-sex marriage in MN, one intended for clergy to sign and one for congregations. Glenn moved and Kathleen seconded that we sign the congregational resolution. It passed unanimously.

Commission reports.

Trustees. Glenn reported they will be calling a work day in Aug or Sept. The second fire inspection has occurred. From the list, 3 items have been completed; there are 7 more to complete. Glenn asked if we should go ahead with upgrading the kitchen stove exhaust hood at a cost of \$2300 or get a new stove. It was decided to upgrade the hood. It was also suggested to add a valve on the stove to cut off the pilot lights when the stove is not in use.

Deacons. Hermann said they haven't met since the last council meeting, but Joetta keeps them updated on pastoral concerns.

Education. Kathleen said things are going well. Teachers are being recruited for the new education year.

Missions and Service. Katie said STAR was a raging success, with 25 people attending. Strawberry picking also was a success with 25-30 people involved. M and S is trying to figure out how to support Missio Dei in their efforts to provide short-term housing for people in need.

They are considering several possibilities: adding a budget item, holding a fund raiser, providing time in adult ed to present the program. M and S is considering addressing the refugee settlement issue at church retreat.

Worship. Joetta reported that summer worship is going well.

--Arlene Holdeman, Secretary

	May	June	July
Total expenses	\$9,718	\$9,073	\$8,928
Total income	\$10,703	\$8,071	\$7,897
Monthly budget	\$12,775	\$12,775	\$12,775

Year-to-date offerings at the end of July were \$21,000 below budgeted needs for this point in the year.

What's happening here and there...

Families Moving Forward Merging with Plymouth Church Neighborhood Foundation

Families Moving Forward plans to merge with Plymouth Church Neighborhood Foundation, a faith-based non-profit housing organization. Created by Plymouth Congregational Church ten years ago, PCNF now partners with many congregations to create and maintain affordable housing for very low income and/or homeless families and individuals. PCNF currently has nearly 400 beautiful, safe, and affordable housing units in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

This merger will not only allow FMF congregations and volunteers to continue their phenomenal work caring for homeless families in need, it will bring more support, resources, and housing opportunities for the homeless families we serve. Under the planned merger, Families Moving Forward will keep its name and separate program and fundraising identity.

In these tight economic times, it's more important than ever for nonprofits to partner in order to have the greatest community impact. FMF and PCNF donors can know that their donations are helping homeless and low-income families have all the resources and opportunities available to them to truly be successful; and to end the destructive cycles of poverty and homelessness forever.

Thank you so much for your support during this transition process. We are truly grateful for your understanding, as we sought out what was best for serving our community. We hope that you are now as excited as we are about our new partnership and the opportunities it brings for ending homelessness throughout the Twin Cities!

September Conference Explores How “the Theological Conservatives Were the Radical Feminists”

In his review of the book *Women, Ministry and the Gospel*, Timothy Paul Erdel wrote that it is almost impossible today to “imagine a world where the theological conservatives were the radical feminists.” Yet Christians for Biblical Equality’s first ever one-day conference, “Women in Christian History: Building on a Legacy,” will examine a world in which those most dedicated to the gospel were also those who broke cultural norms regarding gender. On September 25, 2010, Christian evangelicals will gather in Lombard, IL to explore the biblical and historical evidence for women in ministry since the beginning of the church. Five speakers will challenge attendees with topics such as female leadership within the nation of Israel, the early evangelicals as first-wave feminists, protocols of first-century marriage, archeological evidence for women in ministry, and methods of leadership in the church today. Speakers include Gilbert Bilezikian, Lynn Cohick, Mimi Haddad, Dorothy Irvin, and Alan F. Johnson.

Is it possible to be theologically conservative and also to challenge widely accepted views on gender? “Women in Christian History: Building on a Legacy” will seek to find the answer.

This conference is hosted in partnership by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) and the Greater Chicago CBE chapter. CBE is the largest evangelical organization providing biblical resources on the shared authority and service of men and women. CBE sponsors annual conferences, hosts local chapters, runs an online book service; and publishes two award-winning journals. CBE’s journals were acknowledged by two Evangelical Press Association awards this year. For more information or to register for the conference, visit www.cbeinternational.org.

--Charity Kroeker

Language Limitations

A great challenge to mission workers is that of communication in a language that has been learned through language lessons after age 12, rather than through conversations and play with childhood playmates. It should be much easier to serve in an English speaking country, right?

Ha, ha! Ask those who serve in England, India, Kenya and Australia. True, the language structure is the same, and much of the vocabulary is similar, but it ends there. Much of the vocabulary is different, very different. Idioms are a puzzle, inflections are impossible, and the accents hide the sentence behind an opaque curtain. The humor is also different. Australians watch the movie "The Castle" and find it hilarious; Americans wonder what is so funny.

We had dinner with several Australian neighbors who entertained us with local colloquialisms, and stories of expats who had difficulty making themselves understood.

Again, we see how mission workers who stay in their communities of service for many years become so very much more effective in communicating with the people they serve. They know their people, they "speak their language."

[Lois and Wayne Hochstetler, parents of Melissa Hochstetler, are currently serving Mennonite Mission Network, and are partially supported by the FMC Missions and Service Commission. Their blog, from which this was excerpted, is available at loisandwayne.blogspot.com. —editor]

--Lois and Wayne Hochstetler

A Celebration of Faith and Writing

Spend the day with Azar Nafisi (author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and *Things I've Been Silent About*), Billy Collins (U.S. Poet Laureate, 2001-2003), Clyde Edgerton (*The Bible Salesman* and *Walking Across Egypt*), and others, for a day of readings and presentations on fiction, poetry and memoir. Browse the bookstore and get your books signed, at House of Hope Presbyterian Church, Saturday, October 2nd. Cost is \$75 for the day, including lunch (\$35 for students). For more information, go to: www.hohchurch.org.

The deadline for October newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, September 29^h.

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.