

Faith Connection

September 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...

As we enter the month of September I'm mindful of two important anniversaries. The first will be a somber one: September 11 will mark the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks in the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people from over 70 countries. It was the first war-like catastrophe on US soil since the Civil War. Ten years later, the magnitude of that day's loss is dwarfed by the immense cost of the wars our country has waged in retaliation. During the past eight years since May 1, 2003, when President Bush proclaimed "mission accomplished" about the invasion of Iraq, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, primarily civilians, have died (estimates range from 100,000 to 1 million) and over a million civilians have fled the country as refugees. Over 5,000 US military personnel have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan and over 30,000 have been wounded. Twenty percent of these involve serious brain or spinal injuries. In addition some 30% of US troops develop serious mental health problems within three to four months of returning home.¹ The monetary cost of these wars is over 3 trillion dollars.

The other anniversary is one we will celebrate with much thanksgiving and as much fanfare as good Mennonites can muster: the 50th anniversary of our congregation. We have been celebrating throughout the year through history moments and special songs in worship. While not originally intended as an anniversary activity, the hospitality we have extended to the Edha family, natives of Somalia who are now settling in the US after 20 years of refugee life in Kenya, serves to tie these two anniversaries—September 11 and our FMC 50th—together. The Edha family, mother Kamar and siblings Khadija, Sulieman, Said, and Roda, were victims of the political instability that has led to so much violence in our world. One of the unfortunate outcomes of September 11 was the fear

¹ About.com, based on statistics from the Brookings Institution.

and misunderstanding of Muslims. As a congregation dedicated to following and sharing Jesus' way of peace since our founding, it has been a wonderful experience to develop bonds of friendship with this Muslim family during our anniversary year.

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, instructions were given to the people of Israel that every 50th year was to be a jubilee, a time of forgiving debts and returning land, lost or obtained due to indebtedness, to its original owner. Helping to settle a refugee family has jubilee-like qualities. In a small way we are contributing to their finding a new home and a place of peace and sustainability.

In our solemn remembering and our joyful celebration let us continue to pray and work in faith and hope.

--Joetta Schlabach

"I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves."

--Thoreau, *Walden*

Outreach ministry update...

Dear friends,

I have come to love this congregation dearly over the past year and a half that I've been privileged to journey with you. I've been impressed by your humility, your commitment to service, your shared and competent leadership, your kindness to one another, your clarity

about your faith and values and your willingness to give of your time and talents. I've appreciated sharing with you in worship and prayer, in singing, in planning and organizing, in learning and being together.

As I prepare to move on to a new position at St. Paul's UCC in St. Paul, I will carry you with me. And because we'll still be neighbors, I look forward to seeing you around the neighborhood and attending some of the 50th anniversary festivities.

As I look back over my time here, I feel pretty proud of what we've accomplished together. We helped Donna Minter launch the first STAR Twin Cities training program; began building a partnership with Missio Dei and held a fundraiser for them which raised over \$1,000; co-sponsored two fundraisers for the Seward-Longfellow Restorative Justice Project; hosted a Creating A Culture of Peace workshop; offered a great vacation Bible school last summer; and welcomed and supported five members of the Ehda family who traveled from a refugee camp in Kenya to begin a new life here in Minneapolis. We put together an educational series on immigration and provided leadership for two of the monthly vigils held at the Ramsey County Detention Center. And those are just some of the efforts that the Missions and Service Commission and Children's Education program enabled over the past two years.

This fall, you will complete the supplies drive for Missio Dei, engage in graffiti removal and trash pickup over the anniversary weekend, and some of you will begin planning for a neighborhood sustainability fair to be held during the coming winter. Your mission and outreach work will continue as it has in the past, bearing witness to this congregation's commitment to peacemaking and the Mennonite peace church tradition. I'm grateful for our time together.

With prayers for God's reign of peace,

--*Kathleen Remund*

What's happening at FMC...

Sunday Morning Schedule

After considering the feedback received through a recent survey of our experimental Sunday morning schedule (March-May), the Church Council decided in its August meeting to move forward with the following Sunday morning schedule, beginning Sunday, September 11:

9:30 a.m. Worship

10:30 a.m. (or so) Fellowship time

11:00 a.m. Faith Formation/Discipleship hour

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and provided helpful comments.

--*Christian Education Commission*

Christian Education Resums September 11

Our children's Sunday School program will resume on September 11. Teachers for fall will be:

Pre-K & K: Andi Kuenning and Thaine Dirks, team teachers.

Younger Primary (grade 1): Mike & Paula Okerstrom, partnering.

Older Primary (grades 2-3): Kristi Zabriskie & Chris Jones, team teachers.

Middler (grades 4-6): Kami Blackwell Kinney.

There will be 20-24 children participating in Sunday School this year, using the "Gather Round" curriculum we've used for the past several years. We welcome new teachers Kristi, Kami and Thaine.

A couple of our regular teachers could use a break later in the year, so please e-mail Minke Sundseth at minkesundseth@gmail.com if you'd consider helping in that capacity. For now, there will not be music time except for at major holidays-- please enjoy fellowship time with your child and bring him/her directly to class at just before 11am. Please make sure your child gets a restroom break before class. We also ask that parents keep their primary-age and younger children in the same room with them during fellowship time. Children wandering the building alone should be returned to their parents.

During the month of September adults will meet together for the following sessions:

September 11: Getting acquainted in our deacon groups

September 18: Updates from the Marriage Guidelines Task Force and the Pastor-Congregation Evaluation Process

September 25: Panel discussion with former and current FMC pastors (anniversary weekend)

Comings and Goings...

During the summer **Mike Heitke-Felbeck** and **Steve Wall** attended worship and fellowship events. Mike has returned to Western Massachusetts to resume college this fall and Steve has returned to Chicago to continue graduate studies.

Andrew Smale, who worshipped with us the past two years while in graduate school at the University of Minnesota, completed his MA in Applied Economics this summer and has accepted a job as a “Feed Ingredient Analyst” at Gold’n Plump feed mill in Sauk Rapids. He anticipates that he’ll be doing economic market analysis to help them schedule their ingredient purchases, pricing and formulations. Over time he’ll also become more involved in the feed mill’s process improvement projects like Six Sigma and Lean Manufacturing. Since he’s not moving too far away, Andrew hopes to return to the cities for church on occasion.

Ry, Marcia, Owen & Aleida Siggelkow moved to Princeton, NJ on September 1 where Ry will begin doctoral studies in theology.

Pierre Gingerich-Boberg has sent updated contact information: 3009 University Ave., Apt. 401, Madison, WI, 53705; gingerichbob@wisc.edu; cell phone: 608-345-8640. Pierre reports that classes are going well; he’s getting along with his apartment mate, a 30-year old Japanese post-doctoral student in pharmacy/toxicology; and that he’s been sailing on Lake Mendota.

FMC Leaders Discuss Marriage Guidelines Process With CPMC Conference Leaders

In the fall of last year, Faith Mennonite Church began a process of discernment regarding same-sex relationships within the context of families, singleness and marriage. In the spring of this year, our congregation spent eight weeks of intense study and prayer in an effort to clarify its understanding of marriage as it applies to same-sex relationships. Since that time, Church Council and the Marriage Taskforce have been very busy in completing and formalizing this important work.

The Taskforce has been compiling the collective wisdom of our spring conversations and discernment into a unifying statement and a set of marriage guidelines and practices. These have been reviewed regularly by Church Council, throughout the summer, and will be brought to the congregation for a final, two week period of review and comment. This review period will begin on Sunday, September 11 and conclude on Sunday, September 25. On Sunday, September 18, we will again spend some time as a congregation to ensure all participants have an opportunity to voice affirmations, questions, and cautions. The Taskforce’s final job will be to compile this feedback, and propose final versions to Council. Council will then make determinations as to how best to integrate these documents into the life of our congregation.

In parallel to the Taskforce work, Church Council has also been engaging with Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC) leadership in an open and honest dialog about this process. On Saturday, August 20, a meeting was held with CPMC leadership to ensure that a high level of communication continues to permeate our relationship with voices outside our congregation. The meeting was attended by David Boshart (Executive Conference Minister), Blaine Friesen (Conference Moderator), Tim Detweiler (Conference Minister for Pastoral Leadership), and Susan Janzen (Chair, Pastoral Leadership Committee), as well as by Joetta Schlabach, Matthew Blackwell Kinney, Joan Kreider, and Matthew Hendricks of Faith Mennonite Church.

The conversation began with a review of the brief history written by Dick Westby, which documents the FMC’s decision in the mid-1990s to become a welcoming congregation. Conference leaders offered additional perspectives on this shared history. From there the discussion covered a range of topics, including historical political practice in the Mennonite Church both before and after the 2001 merger between the Mennonite Church (MC) and General Conference (GC) denominations, the process of decision-making at FMC both in the mid-1990’s and our more recent discernment series, the Central Plains Conference Unity process, and proposals for next steps.

Participants discussed the question: how does the Mennonite Church, at the conference level, work through change? Past shifts towards justice and inclusion have often been catalyzed by individual people and congregations, rather than being lead by a formal conference-level process. As an example, the role of women in leadership was discussed. Nevertheless, the Conference has an important role to play in credentialing pastors and periodically updating Mennonite positions and teachings.

Conference leadership has invested much effort in the Unity Task Force and Unity conferences. The Unity discussions include making distinctions between core Mennonite and Christian principles (on which all congregations should agree) and other questions where new answers are emerging, and a diversity of positions among congregations need not be viewed as inherently problematic. While the Unity discussions have not been easy, those from FMC who have had the chance to participate in them have found them fruitful.

The FMC representatives emphasized an interest in working directly with other congregations, rather than asking the conference to play the role of intermediary in these conversations. By way of next steps, Joetta was

encouraged by Conference leadership to continue her work of nurturing relationships with other Mennonite Congregations within our regional cluster group. These include the Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship, Missio Dei, Hmong Mennonite, Third Way, and Emmanuel Mennonite communities. Faith Mennonite was also urged to keep lines of communication with CPMC open as we continue the work of discernment.

The delegation from CPMC affirmed and thanked the group from FMC for making the time to have a longer discussion about our congregation's experience and discernment process on same-sex relationships & marriage. For our part, we were grateful for the effort the CPMC participants made to travel to Minneapolis, and for the open, inquisitive tone of the discussions.

--Matthew Blackwell Kinney, Congregational Moderator

--Matthew Hendricks, Congregational Moderator-elect



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 10. (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,
September 10
10:00-11:30
a.m.

Spirituality journal...

Sustaining the Spirit

I have been thinking about the word “sustain” lately. One reason is that recently I find myself interested and curious about sustainable living. “Sustainability” is the popular word for living in such a way as to “not deplete or permanently damage a resource,” in other words, living in a way that cares for the earth. I was most strongly drawn into this subject by an interview I heard on “The Story,” an NPR program, one evening on my way home from working at the hospital. The interview

was with a woman named Shannon Hayes. She grew up living and working on a farm out east. She left home, went to school, gained her Ph. D. from Cornell, found her partner, but eventually realized what she really wanted for her life was to be back on the farm. On top of living a frugal and sustainable life working the family farm with her parents, she and her husband home-school their two daughters, and she writes. After hearing her interview I found myself reading the book she wrote and published called *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture*.

Over the past six months or so, I have been experimenting with more sustainable practices in our home. Because I have cut back on how much I am working outside the home, I have more time, opportunity, and energy to make thoughtful decisions about how we live. And all the while I have been feeling like this mysterious attraction to sustainable practices is growing up out of my connection with God. But why? What does it mean? Yes, this way of living may lengthen our time out on this planet, but you do not need a spiritual call to understand that. It occurred to me that there are other meanings to the question of living sustainably. I have begun to ask not only what I can do to sustain the earth, but what it is that sustains me, and what kind of life I can sustain over the long run. I see these questions in Hayes' story, as well as my own. What kind of life do I want to live? For Hayes the question came into high relief one evening when her partner, tired of her stuckness, put the question to her bluntly, “what is it you want to do?” and she suddenly admitted she wanted a life on the farm, surprising both of them. For me the question I finally put to myself was similar. After years of restlessness in my workplace, of feeling like I was living on auto-pilot, I came to a point when I was unable to ignore the voices calling me out. Where is God drawing me to/from? What is of meaning and value to me? What energizes me? What can I sustain and what will sustain me?

The origin of the word sustain comes from Latin and means “to hold up.” What holds me up every day is God's voice calling, my love for nature, animals, and the earth, caring for my child, growing a garden, making things by hand, getting to know my neighbors, praying, petting my cat, communicating with my sisters, brother, and mom, talking with Shuji as well as friends and colleagues. That is just my short list. And I wonder, for each person reading this, what it is that constitutes “sustainable living” for you—what is holding you up?

--Ruth Johnston

What's happening here and there...

Need Financial Sponsors for MCC Sale

11th Annual MCC Festival and Sale for World Relief, Oct. 29, Hennepin Technical College, 9000 Brooklyn Blvd., Brooklyn Park. 200+ volunteers & contributors play a significant role generating funds for world relief projects. Would you consider being a partner in this worthy cause by providing a cash sponsorship (\$100, \$200 or \$300) to defray the expenses of bringing quilts, wood products and traditional foods offered? All contributions are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made out to: Twin Cities MCC Relief Sale and sent to Teresa Wasick, Treasurer. (2425 33rd Ave S., Mpls. MN 55406)

--Gene Friesen

September 11 Remembrance

The Minnesota Council of Churches and a coalition of faith organizations are planning a gathering at the state capitol, Minnesotans Standing Together, to mark the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. In observance of that day this gathering will honor the ideals of freedom and democracy, lament loss, offer healing, and create hope and inspiration for great cooperation in our diverse state and nation. The public ceremony will take place on Sunday, September 11, 2011, 2:00 to 4:00pm., on the Capitol Mall in St. Paul. The ceremony will feature a coalition of religious, civic and public officials, musicians and artists from across Minnesota. Persons who are interested in volunteering to help offer hospitality at the event may visit: minnesotansstandingtogether.com

--Minnesota Council of Churches

CROP Walk for World Hunger, October 9

The annual CROP Walk that raises awareness about and money to help alleviate world hunger is scheduled for Sunday afternoon, October 9. The walk will begin and end at Augsburg College. Everyone is invited to consider participating, either as a walker or by contributing to one of our FMC walkers. More information to come. CROP is sponsored by Church World Service and a portion of the proceeds aid local ministries to end hunger. Persons can designate their pledges to support the international work of Mennonite Central Committee.

The deadline for October newsletter items is noon, Wednesday, September 28th.

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.