



Annual Reports for 2020

Pastor Thom Bower	2
Moderator	3
Christian Education Commission	4
Deacon Commission	5
Fellowship Commission	6
Trustee Commission	7
Worship Commission	8
Library	9
Missions & Service Commission.....	9

Addenda

- 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes
- 2020 Annual Treasurer's Report
- 2021 Proposed Budget
- 2021 Slate of Officers, Commissions and Committee Members
- 2020 Annual Meeting Agenda

Pastor's Report – Thom Bower, Transitional Pastor

I was called in August. COVID restrictions had begun. George Floyd had been murdered; demonstrations, protests, and looting had already happened. The congregation had just decided to move worship from Facebook Live to Zoom.

I began by spending a week visiting Minneapolis for many small group outdoor gatherings. These were delightful receptions. I moved to MN in September. What none of us knew then is how COVID numbers would increase. Among leadership it was decided I could work remotely from IL until numbers drop. As I write, I anticipate returning to MN around Memorial Day. This is unlike any ministry experience in my life!

COVID-19 has shaped our life together. The relationships built with you have been almost entirely online. This is different than being in person, and so requires different deliberateness. That has been most apparent is in worship services. We have found a weekly liturgical pattern. Music has been live, pre-recorded by members, and through videos selected by “facilitators.” We held an online Christmas Pageant with photos from many people in the church telling the nativity story. We edited videos together so we could pass Christmas candlelight and march in a Palm Sunday processional. The Worship Commission has done a huge amount of work. God has met us through the web.

We have also been met by God through new attention on administrative ministries, particularly those related to finances. A bookkeeper has been hired, the budget was more rigorously engaged by Council, and the congregation is being involved in discerning giving. Instead of “created transitions,” these processes allow Faith to try doing a new thing while Discerning God’s calling.

I am thankful for the amount of time I have been able to spend with the Deacons. They are attuned to the spirituality and emotions of Faith as a community, and help me know the joys and concerns of the community – as individuals, as a congregation, as members of the wider community. Their ministry of prayer is surrounded with ministries of relationships.

I have also worked closely with Moderator Shelly Hendricks, Moderator Elect John Hershey, and Trustee Chair Beth Richardson. None of us expected the leadership roles we filled. Together we discerned, collaborated, assessed, and evaluated leadership tasks. I am a better pastor for their efforts.

A thread running from interviews to this month’s practices has been reducing the pastor’s work. This was a concern for Ry and Joetta. That I have been overextended suggests this is a persistent dynamic for Faith. I have already begun changing practices to differently manage my work. I pray is this will generate opportunities to assess both practices of delegating work to the pastor while clarifying the pastor’s focused roles.

Several transitions will shape our life and work together. We will continue to improve understandings of financial and administrative ministries. We will continue to adjust to COVID restrictions. When we do begin to gather, our worship will balance in-person and online worship. The Worship Commission and a Tech Team are already exploring options. We’ll seek to improve communications, flowing information between commissions and then to the congregation. A group is actively assessing the ministry needs of families.

We are entering a new stage of congregational assessment. We will use group storytelling to explore events in the congregation’s past which continue to influence present discernment and ministry practices. Revisiting these stories, we’ll identify patterns of discernment, decision making, leadership.

This proceeds to naming values and organizing principles that hold Faith together. Then it is time to share visions of God's call to future ministries. That leads to identifying roles of the pastor to join you in pursuing God's call. All this prepares you for the search and call process for a settled pastor.

This year FMC will mark the 60th anniversary of the congregation's first worship. We'll recognize that in June, and we'll have a larger recognition in September (because it is more likely we will be able to gather in person then). We will be able to look back on those who had a vision, trusting the ministry visions from now will inspire future generation of Christ's followers.

- Submitted by Thom Bower, Transitional Pastor

Moderator's Report

This has been an extremely challenging year for Faith Mennonite Church, individually and collectively. We have experienced many changes and disruptions during what remains a time of transition. COVID continues to impact our church community; we have worshiped virtually for over a year now and some of us have experienced personal and professional loss related to COVID. George Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020, and our community - local and beyond - continues to grapple with the aftermath of his death. Ry Siggelkow ended his pastorate with us at the end of May 2020. In June 2020, I moved from Moderator-Elect to Moderator, and John Hershey accepted the call to be Moderator-Elect in the midst of these difficult times. Thom Bower joined us in August 2020 to serve as our transitional pastor.

Since Thom's arrival, we - as individuals, informal groups, Church Council, and the congregation as a whole - have been reflecting and working on numerous topics, hard work that will continue into the coming year. Much of that work is perhaps best described currently in the form of questions - from the practical to the spiritual, from the short term to the long term. For example, how will our church use technology to make hybrid worship accessible in person and remotely? How will our church adjust its decision making around budget priorities to be a more accessible and inclusive process? How will our church better support children, youth, and families so that more families stay at Faith Mennonite Church? How will our church become a welcoming place of worship for younger adults in their 20s and 30s? How will we adjust our church organization (e.g. commission structure) to better reflect 21st century needs? How can our next permanent pastor best support our church? How can we prevent burnout among our lay persons and our pastor? How can we address the loneliness many people feel in our congregation? How will we be more engaged with our community? How will we prioritize our many social justice oriented goals? How can we grow our church body? How can we have honest conversation that doesn't damage relationships while still allowing us to address different opinions and desires around church priorities? How do we embrace and demonstrate our Mennonite and Anabaptist beliefs as a congregation that is combined of individuals with Mennonite roots and individuals who have recently learned about the Mennonite faith? These and so many, many other questions have sparked valuable dialogue that I trust will lead to positive outcomes for the future of Faith Mennonite Church.

I want to express my immense gratitude to all of you who help make Faith Mennonite Church the community that it is. During my term, I have gained a better understanding of the love, passion, and support that so many in our congregation have for our church family, our community, our denomination, and our world. While unfortunately I cannot name everyone that I have had the pleasure of working closely with this past year, I do want to specifically acknowledge how grateful I am for the work of Bruce Brunner, Karla Hovde, Dan Leisen, and Beth Richardson. They - like so many others at Faith - have invested considerable time and energy toward supporting our church community. I am very appreciative

of Thom's transitional pastoral leadership, especially his willingness to ask hard questions, to make observations that may be invisible from the inside, and to help our congregation clarify its communication, organization, and priorities. Finally, I am tremendously grateful for all of John Hershey's encouragement, support, time, and energy during my term as Moderator. He has been an amazing Moderator-Elect, and our church is very blessed to have him now serve as Moderator.

As we move forward this coming year, I know we will be in great hands with John's leadership, Thom's transitional pastoral wisdom, the collective energy of all of us who make up Faith Mennonite Church, and God's presence and love.

- Respectfully submitted by Shelly Hendricks, Moderator

Christian Education Commission Reports

Kristin Borntrager, John Ratigan, and Shirley Leckie-Reed

Christian Education--Children (Kristin Borntrager)

Christian Ed for the youngest children has not been active since moving our services on-line in March 2020. In the fall of 2020 parents were offered a Sunday School curriculum they could do at home with their children but there was no interest. There was not interest in having an on-line version of Sunday School either. Later this spring/early summer we will have a picnic for the children to allow them to become reacquainted and spend an afternoon together. We will hand out bibles to the children transitioning to 4th (?) grade during the picnic.

- Respectfully submitted by Kristin Borntrager

Christian Education--Youth (John Ratigan)

The Youth portion of Christian Education has been fortunate to have carried over the strong investment of Shelly Hendricks, Rachel Geissinger and Kristin Green. They organized and facilitated many events for the 2020-2021 school year and were excited to continue to do so even once Covid hit. Invitations were sent to all teen and pre-teen children and attendance was between three and seven kids for each event. Activities were all outdoors and included bike rides, picnics, river walks and campfires. Some children expressed excitement about looking forward to the youth events and that the events were a highlight of their current FMC experience.

We also had great participation in our virtual events. In May 2020, our virtual Children's Sunday was a compilation of videos contributed from FMC children of all ages which included music, skits and thank yous to Sunday School teachers. FMC's virtual Christmas pageant was a similar format and made for a successful shared experience, even while distant from each other during the Christmas season.

- Respectfully submitted by John Ratigan

Christian Education--Adult (Shirley Leckie Reed)

Donna Minter and Kristi Zabriskie began Adult Education by bringing their eight-week- program "Coming to the Table," to the members of Faith Mennonite on Sunday morning. This program gives adults the opportunity to discuss race and racism, in an open and safe environment. Simultaneously, at the request of Interim Pastor Thom Bower, Adult Ed offered two courses of four to five meetings, which met at 6:30

p.m. on Mondays. The first series dealt with how we perceived ourselves as Mennonites and what was most important to us in our faith and practice. The second series concerned our definition of ourselves as members of a “progressive congregation.”

In mid-October AE began a class devoted to reading and discussing Isabelle Wilkerson’s *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*. Class members responded to this work as one of the most significant books about racism in the United States and a meaningful and ultimately hopeful interpretation. If the United States had given Nazi Germany the fundamental ideas for persecuting a people, perhaps we could learn from that country how to recover our humanity and atone for what we are now doing to people of color in the United States, and most especially the African Americans.

Following *Caste*, Patricia Eliason brought her niece, Leena Fufa, a founder, and director of Dream Academy, in Washington, D.C., into the Zoom account we were using. Together we examined Ibram X Kendi’s book, *How to be an Antiracist*. We finished that work on Sunday, Mar. 28th, and members of the class ended with ways they could strive individually and collectively to continue to advance in antiracism work.

Apr. 11th, we will meet to discuss Dennis R. Edwards’ *Might from the Margins: The Gospel’s Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice*. Six members of the Congregation have consented to take turns leading the discussion on April and May Sundays. I am grateful to the Faith members who participated in Adult Education throughout this past year in these unusual times. I may have selected the books, but they, in turn, deepened my understanding of what we were reading, most especially when it comes to seeking justice.

- Respectfully submitted by Shirley Leckie Reed

Deacon Commission Report

Donna Stucky, Dan Leisen, Phil Stoltzfus, Karen Wiebe, Patricia Eliason.

With the transition from a full-time pastor to a transitional pastor, the deacons met frequently in order to keep up with some of the pastoral issues of our church. The pandemic created several barriers for helping our church attenders. When possible, we made outdoor visits to several attenders dealing with challenges. As our church services evolved from in-person to online, deacons participated with parts of the service as an occasional worship leader or with our time of communal prayer.

The transitional pastor has been a regular participant at the deacon meetings and an important part of our time has been to help the pastor get to know the congregation. We have also served as a sounding board for the pastor’s ideas. Our regular meetings have been important for the deacons as we seek to assist him in his work. Deacons have served on the Pastor Parish Relations Committee, Gifts Discernment Committee, Church Council, and Retreat Planning Committee.

Over the past year one of the main focuses of the deacon commission has been to keep up with increasing pastoral care issues, mainly by periodic phone calls and encouraging others to keep up our interconnections with each other via phone. As a way of building better connectedness, we encouraged the formation of small groups that began in the summer of 2021. Two groups were established which continue to meet monthly and attempts to establish additional groups were initiated. Following that initiative two more groups were established as Zoom meetings by other church members. In the summer a few picnics in Powderhorn Park were sponsored by the deacons giving church members an opportunity to gather in a pandemic safe way. Because deacons were not able to follow our tradition of personally

greeting church attenders at the door on Sunday, we began a Welcome Time on zoom a half-hour before our Sunday worship and helped begin the fellowship time following the service. The pandemic has made it difficult for the deacons to make personal visits to congregants but we have been able to maintain some visitations.

Attendance of church services has been reduced from our approximately 70 to 90 attenders in church to approximately 50 to 60 attenders on zoom. Though we have lost some regular attenders we have gained a few attenders from both local and distant locations that join our service online.

Added to our membership in the past year, Roberta Malles has become a member of Faith Church. She has stepped right into things, serving on the Missions and Services Commission and as a member of the Migrant Committee. We had one birth at Faith in the past year. Dae was born to Amy and Eden Bradshaw Kaiser.

In the past year we know we have previous attenders that have not been joining us for our worship services, either because of technical internet limitations and issues, or because online services haven't fit their need as a worship experience. This is an area we will want to consider as we continue with services outside our church building. Going forward the deacons will continue to assist the pastor with his work with our church. We will continue our efforts to build a sense of connectedness among our attenders.

- Respectfully submitted by Dan Leisen

Fellowship Commission Report

Alisa Bardo-Martinson, Melissa Hochstetler

Fellowship Commission this year consisted of Melissa Hochstetler (completing a term Apr. 2021) and Alisa Bardo-Martinson (term started May 2020 when Clea Gingerich's ended). Arlene Geissinger is completing a term as Meal Coordinator this spring.

Fellowship activities, like most of the church's life during the pandemic year, looked different this year. For the first part of the church year, the main activity for Fellowship Commission involved removing stains from the church tablecloths in hopes of using them again soon!

In August, our interim pastor, Thom Bower, visited Minneapolis prior to moving here in the fall. We used Thom's visit as an opportunity to plan small, informal, outdoor gatherings in backyards and parks, to meet Thom and to reconnect with others in the congregation. While these August outdoor gatherings were important times for people to reconnect, a follow-up set of gatherings in the fall was less well-attended.

During Thom's August visit, individuals in the congregation provided Thom with some meals apart from the group gatherings. During the year Arlene also coordinated meal delivery for other households in the congregation during times of transition.

In the fall, Fellowship Commission joined the Deacons in hosting the online fellowship time after church, to spread out those duties among more people.

Fellowship Commission hosted a series of Zoom gatherings connected with holidays: we gathered online

before Thanksgiving to bake pies, in December to bake Christmas cookies, and at Valentines Day to make cards. On Easter we held our first in-person fellowship event of 2021 with a bring-your-own-picnic in Matthews Park, followed by a walk on the River Road.

The Fellowship Commission worked closely with the COVID committee when we decided to stop serving snacks and coffee in March 2020, ahead of discontinuing in-person worship. We anticipate working with the COVID committee again, to determine how we can safely resume more in-person fellowship activities. Alisa has represented Fellowship Commission on the COVID Committee.

Looking ahead, the fellowship commission is planning an online game night for Saturday, Apr. 24th. We are also working with Karla Hovde to schedule twice-monthly church bike rides and walks on the first and third Sundays of the month (April through September). On one of those Sundays each month, we will also organize a congregational picnic. Hopefully by the time you are reading this report, you will have seen or heard more detailed announcements about these events.

- Respectfully submitted by Alisa Bardo-Martinson and Melissa Hochstetler

Trustee Commission Report

Beth Richardson, Bob Mack, Mike Okerstrom

Despite severe limits on the use of our building, the Trustees had an unexpectedly busy year. Here are some of the highlights:

- With Aimee's help we took care of routine things such as fire alarm inspections.
- Before the pandemic hit, the partition between the Library and the Fellowship Hall was removed, and members of the congregation agreed that they would like to keep the opening while still allowing the Library to function separately. Sliding doors with glass proved too expensive, so alternatives remain under investigation.
- Along with modifications to the Library, Glenn Geisinger is creating a storage area for the folding tables and chairs, and a storage area for the sewing group.
- The office of the Seward-Longfellow Restorative Justice program was destroyed during the unrest on Lake Street. As a result, FMC has been serving as a postal address until they have a new home.
- Various repairs were completed by Wonder Woman and Brushed Monkey.
- Financial changes include hiring a professional bookkeeper, and we are in the process of changing banks from Wells Fargo to Bremmer Bank.
- We had to deal with issues of homelessness as there was a homeless man staying between the main building and the home to the north, and a homeless couple set up a tent in the courtyard area.

- The pandemic led to services going remote. Initially these were done by live-streaming. Recognizing the benefits to continuing the ability to participate remotely, we investigated ways to improve our technology and solicited proposals for upgrades. Unfortunately, they were too expensive for this year. We continue to investigate this possibility, but in the meantime, services have used Zoom with relative success.
 - The Trustees have been thinking of ways to best utilize the building not only for ourselves but also for the greater community. To that end, we realized that the Parent Resource Room is redundant with the Nursery. As a result, we decided to combine those functions in the Nursery, which will now be rented to Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza.
 - Office improvements include improved lighting and portable heaters to improve comfort.
 - The entire building was re-keyed with a new master-key system and better key control. This was partly in response to a break-in although little was taken.
 - The building has seen little use. Aimee and Thom spend some time in the office and some time working remotely. Representatives of ILSR, BMC, and CSM visit occasionally to check for mail, etc.
- Respectfully submitted by Beth Richardson, Mike Okerstrom, and Bob Mack

Worship Commission Report

Jenny Wandersee, Pierre Gingerich-Boberg, Miriam Augsburg, Greg Renstrom, Tona Ratigan Green

A recap of our work from the past year:

Our most recent permanent pastor, Ry Siggelkow, resigned from his position at FMC to accept a position at St. Thomas University, effective at the end of May. From then until mid-August, when our interim pastor Thom Bower started, Worship planned all services and found speakers to provide a sermon each Sunday. We also found volunteers to lead worship, do children's time, and provide music for the entire year.

One of our biggest tasks was finding a way to conduct worship services remotely during the pandemic. From March to July 2020, we live-streamed services to Facebook Live from the church building, including Maundy Thursday and Easter services. Two members of Worship took turns doing the live-streaming, using a smartphone on a tripod and a laptop. In July, Phil Stoltzfus and the Hendricks's led a Zoom worship service successfully. Afterwards, a survey on worship was sent to FMC attenders, and most responders indicated they preferred Zoom over Facebook Live as our medium for worship. This, and the fact that Zoom allows for worship leadership from multiple locales, led to the decision to use Zoom going forward. At this point, we also started paying two of our youth to alternate providing tech support for services.

Other projects this past year included:

- Meeting with a vendor to receive a price quote for high-quality live-streaming equipment for when we transition back to in-person worship;

- Doing research to select an electronic piano to purchase (currently on hold because of budget concerns);
- For Advent, working with John Ratigan on the Christmas pageant and planning and leading Blue Christmas and Christmas Eve services;
- For Lent, working with other FMC members to plan Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter services; the Lego build challenge; and a virtual procession for Palm Sunday.

Our hopes and goals for 2021:

- Continue planning themes for worship for the seasons of the church year.
- Continue to find volunteer guest speakers, worship leaders, children's time leaders, and music facilitators.
- Work with the ad hoc Technology taskforce to prepare for live-streaming from church with upgraded equipment.

- Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Wandersee

Library Report

Cynthia Miller, Noelle Hendricks

Last year work began on renovation of the library space. Library books were packed up and stored in the kitchen annex and have remained there. Recently a small group met together to start planning for a smaller library space. The collection will be downsized and will focus on the traditions and values of our faith community. Children's books are borrowed most frequently and will continue to be an important feature of the library.

- Respectfully submitted by Cynthia Miller

Missions and Service Report

Andi Kuenning, Minke Sundseth, Roberta Malles, Rudy Okerlund

Despite the challenges living with COVID, Missions & Service found a way to "zoom" through the year. Our original expectations included networking with other social justice churches in and around our neighborhood, playing a more active role in Seward-wide community activities, supporting the work of Pueblos, exploring organizations involved in climate change, and making informed decisions regarding what service and social justice organizations Faith Mennonite might reach out to with small grants.

And then George Floyd was murdered and our attention shifted to looking into how our church could best reach out to support both actions and recovery. We significantly drew on the fund the church set aside in its budget by offering financial assistance to a broad spectrum of responses to the crises. At that time we sent out a special email informing everyone of the groups we reached out to and also suggestions how individuals might get involved. Close to half of what the church set aside was drawn on to support the cause. After the George Floyd crises, we turned our focus to what other organizations can we reach out to.

How we decide on and make use of our resources as a church is currently undergoing a re-examination with the expectation of greater transparency along with opportunities for members to be more involved.

Missions & Service is currently undergoing an assessment of how it can best serve the needs of the church. Do we become more intentional in our efforts to network? Does Missions & Service act as a resource to its members by providing opportunities for individual involvement in service work and social justice activities. Does Missions & Service take on special action projects? The challenge here is to be realistic about what can be achieved. How do we get the best return on our time invested?

This is a transformational time for the church. What success we experience will have a lot to do with how intentional we become. We have to seek that place where we are talking and walking at the same time.

- Respectfully submitted by Rudy Okerlund, Andi Kuenning, Minke Sundseth, & Roberta Malles