

Commission, Committee, Pastor & Moderator Reports
Faith Mennonite Church
May 2021-April 2022

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**Christian Education Commission Report
December 2021**

Early in the summer we began talking about differences between education as faith formation for all ages and how FMC has been doing Sunday School. As we explored intergenerational Sunday School possibilities, we wondered how Sunday School could be connected to worship. Thom suggested to both commissions to use the month of October to explore intergenerational and experiential worship with Sunday School also being intergenerational and experiential. Thom provided both commissions “design principles” he would use in worship (which could also be used for Sunday School). Later he outlined common theological premises for intergenerational worship; during October these were further developed in his Midweek Musings.

World-Wide Communion Sunday	Praying at home
Music Sunday	Hymn sing
Prayers	n/a
Jonah	A discussion about Jonah in community
Amanda Bleichy, guest preacher	An evaluation of the month

We decided to use similar principles for Advent, preparing worship and Sunday School to be intergenerational and experiential, connected to one another. For the first Sunday we sang Advent hymns. The lesson for the second Sunday, a communal mural of Mary’s Magnificat, was used as the sermon due to Thom being ill. The third Sunday set the Angel’s song to different music. There was no Sunday School the fourth Sunday due to the pageant. The pageant was an intergenerational, no rehearsal pageant. Members were invited to come in costume or to choose when they arrived at church. Pat and Thom used a script that invited all to participate. Sadly, all members of the commission discerned they could not continue after the new year. They each cited being overextended with church commitments and, while faith formation continues to be a high priority, the other commitments are time-related. Gifts discernment will be seeking new commissioners, and Thom will work with them.

Respectfully submitted,
Pat Eliason, Andy Martinson & John Ratigan

**Deacons Commission Report
January 2022**

The deacons’ ongoing commitment this past year during the pandemic has included leading sharing time on Sunday mornings, ensuring two deacons are scheduled every Sunday when there are online and in-person services, or one when there is an online service only. Deacons regularly hosted online fellowship times before and after services on Zoom and greeted those attending in-person services. Deacons also participated in in-person services with serving communion and assisting with a baptism.

The deacons worked with our transitional pastor to minister to and care for the congregation and respond to individual needs. We provided support to people through service, visits, phone calls and emails. In our meetings we attempt to think intentionally regarding a variety of aspects of our spiritual life, such as: worship and fellowship practices and participation, keeping in touch with people we haven’t seen in a while, the membership roll, and inter-generational efforts.

The deacons administer the Deacons Fund and this past year responded to occasional requests from the community for gas and food, which were distributed in person and usually in the form of gift cards.

Several small groups formed in summer of 2020 and one continued to meet this past year. We appreciate the initiative of those in our church who have formed other groups, including Home Alone Together. Small groups are important to the spiritual growth and connections within our congregation.

Deacons are represented on the Retreat Committee and participated with planning and hosting of our inter-generational fall retreat at Baker Park Preserve. Deacons also participated in the regularly scheduled meetings and business of Church Council, Pastor/Parish Relations Committee and Gifts Discernment Committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Wiebe

Fellowship Commission Report April 11, 2022

The Fellowship Commission has been focusing on outdoor activities in light of the COVID pandemic. During warm weather, these have included fellowship outdoors after church, bike rides, and special gatherings in parks (sometimes combined with bike rides).

The gatherings in parks were held approximately monthly during warm weather, and were well-attended. Between May and October 2021 bike rides were scheduled about twice per month, with organizational help from Karla Hovde. As we navigate the tapering of COVID restrictions, we will seek to host indoor fellowship activities as appropriate. We are also open to input from the congregation on any new ideas for gatherings.

Respectfully submitted,
Alisa Bardo-Martinson, Matthew Hendricks

Library Report January 2022

This year renovation of the library space has continued. As the renovation progresses, we have begun to sort through the library books that were packed away. At the recent church workday, volunteers made significant progress sorting books according to the "MUSTY" criteria that can be found posted on the library wall. As reported last year, the collection will be downsized and will focus on the traditions and values of our faith community. A small group met together to plan the smaller library. With the input of the group, we have drafted a mission statement for the library to guide our decision-making about the library collection:

The Faith Mennonite Church library complements the mission of the church by gathering, maintaining, and providing access to a small collection of materials that reflect Anabaptist and Mennonite theology, history, values and experiences.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Miller

Missions & Service 2021-2022 Report March 24, 2022

The members of the Missions and Service Commission have been asked by members of the congregation to provide information that fully describes the charitable giving that Faith Mennonite Church does. This information is given in the first two appendices.

- **See appendix A below** “2021 Faith Mennonite Church Charitable Giving Summary” by Moderator John Hershey. It itemizes the financial support given to the Greater Mennonite Church, a special gift to the Brethren Mennonite Council, and the \$6,500 that the Church Council specifically asked at the November 2021 business meeting that the Missions and Service Commission distribute.
- **See appendix B below** “Summary on contributions to the Migrant Fund” and on total support provided to the two migrant families. This information was provided by Darrell Martin and summarized by Andi Kuenning. Andi also reports on the how Nuria’s family and Pablo and Efi’s family having been doing.

To put a human face on the names of the various organizations that FMC donates money to, the M&S Commission arranges “Mission Moments” during worship on the first Sunday of each month. Representatives from the organizations tell us about the work they do. These are the Mission Moments we’ve had so far:

- Joan Kreider did an excellent job of telling the history of Ten Thousand Villages.
- Antonia Alvarez Berger presented on Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza.
- Andi Kuenning presented on Migrant ministry/Migrant fund
- Kristi Zabriskie presented on the Doctrine of Discovery / Communities of Repair.
- Ted Lewis presented on the Agape Peace Center.

Future Mission Moments:

- Michele Braley of the Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership will present in March
- Crixell Shell will present on the Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute in April.

In 2021 the Church Council clarified the role of the Missions and Services Commission as the “covering body” for new initiatives that arise from the congregation. This came about in response to the leadership of Kristi Zabriskie in creating a Repair Team that works on both Makoce Ikikcupi, or Dakota Land Recovery, and with the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition.

- **See appendix C below for the report on the newly forming Repair Team**

Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza (People of Struggle and Hope) or “Pueblos”

Faith Mennonite Church has had a close relationship with Pueblos for several years. We have supported them financially, they have used the church building for meetings, and their office is in the church basement.

- **See Appendix D below for the report on Pueblos**

Appendix A

2021 Faith Mennonite Church Charitable Giving Summary December 2021

We continue to gain a clearer understanding of our budget operations, financial management procedures and charitable giving so, in the spirit of transparent communication and in the interest of sharing financial information with the Faith congregation, below appears a summary the 2021 charitable donations made by Faith Mennonite Church as duly approved by Church Council at the November 2021 business meeting.

Itemized Greater Mennonite Church Support: \$18,500

N.B. The sum of the itemized gifts that appear immediately below is made payable in one check to the Central Plains Mennonite Conference of the Mennonite Church USA for distribution to the designated organizations. This amount is slightly larger than past years due to some generous designated giving to both the Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite Disaster Service..

ANABAPTIST MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY (AMBS): \$1,000

3003 Benham Ave
Elkhart IN 46517

- One of two MCUSA-sponsored seminaries in the United States “dedicated to providing theological training from an Anabaptist Mennonite perspective...AMBS serves the church as a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God’s reconciling mission on the world.”

CENTRAL PLAINS MENNONITE CONFERENCE (Central Plains): \$8,500

Box 101
Freeman SD 57029 (Office Manager)
Box 352
Kalona IA 52247 (Staff Office)

- One of 16 conference groupings in the Mennonite Church USA, including Allegheny Mennonite, Atlantic Coast, Central District, Central Plains, Gulf States, Illinois Mennonite, Indiana-Michigan, Mosaic, Mountain States, New York, Ohio, Pacific Northwest, Pacific Southwest, South Central, Virginia and Western District. Central Plains serves 46 churches scattered over eight states— Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin—and its mission is “...to create settings for our congregations and partners to grow in holistic witness to God’s reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship and promoting lifelong discipleship.”

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE U.S. (MCS): \$4,000

21 S 12th St
Box 500
Akron PA 17501

- “...a global, nonprofit organization that strives to share God’s love and compassion for all through relief, development and peace...When responding to disasters we work with local groups to distribute resources in ways that minimize conflict. In our development work we plan with community and church groups to make sure the projects meet their needs. And we advocate for policies that will lead to a more peaceful world.”

MENNONITE CHURCH USA (MCUSA): \$3,000

3145 Benham Ave
Ste #1
Elkhart IN 46517
718 N Main St
Newton KS 67114

- “...an Anabaptist, Christian denomination with roots in the Radical Reformation of 16th-century Europe. It is the largest Mennonite denomination in the United States with 16 conferences, approximately 530 congregations and 62,000 members.”

MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE (MDS): \$1,000

MDS Binational Office
583 Airport Rd
Lititz PA 17543

- “...a volunteer network of Anabaptist churches that responds in Christian love to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States. While the main focus is on clean up, repair and rebuilding homes, this service touches lives and nurtures hope, faith and wholeness.”

MENNONITE MISSION NETWORK: \$1000

3145 Benham Ave
Ste #1
Elkhart IN 46517
718 N Main St
Newton KS 67114

- Mission work accomplished on global and national levels also providing support for individual Mennonite churches in areas such as leadership, discipleship, church planting and worship and peace and prayer resources.

Brethren Mennonite Council Support: \$500

N.B. Donation sent from Faith Mennonite as separate gift.

BRETHREN MENNONITE COUNCIL (BMC): \$500

Box 6300
Minneapolis MN 55406

- “The mission of BMC is to cultivate an inclusive church and society and to care for the Mennonite and Brethren lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied community.”

Faith Mennonite Church Missions & Service Commission Giving: \$6,500

N.B. Donations determined in December 2021 by Faith Mennonite Church Missions & Service Commission as directed by Faith Mennonite Church Council.

Direct Community Service: \$1,100

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY SERVICES (CES): \$400

1900 11TH Ave
Minneapolis MN 55404

- “...a fully independent, expanded nonprofit with the largest Meals on Wheels program in the state. Based in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in Minneapolis, CES staff and volunteers are on the frontlines of providing food, hope, and compassion to our multi-generational, multi-cultural, low-income clientele. We strive to serve our neighbors in need without distinction or test, with dignity and understanding.”

ST. STEPHEN’S, ENDING HOMELESSNESS: \$400

2309 Nicollet Ave
Minneapolis MN 55404

- Serves Hennepin County. Resources include Food Center & Food Shelf, Outreach & Shelter, Chemical & Mental Health Recovery, Housing and Community Resources (birth certificates, holiday drop-ins, handbooks of the streets, representative payee services, public showers and next step assessors).

SOUP FOR YOU! \$300

Bethany Lutheran Church
2511 E Franklin Ave
Minneapolis MN 55406

- Respectful Seward neighborhood soup kitchen, operating on a shoestring out the basement of a century-old (church) that continues, “with the good support of The Village, to feed, nourish and comfort all that come to us.”

Social Justice Agencies: \$4,800

AGAPE PEACE CENTER: \$300

c/o First Presbyterian Church
300 E 2nd St
Duluth MN 55805
Contact: Ted Lewis

- “The Agape Peace Center grew out of two things that came together for me (Ted Lewis) in 2016: an office space in a church and a peace library that needed a home for the ‘post-digital age’...This has allowed the two main areas of my life work to synthesize together: my restorative justice peacemaking work and my passion for communicating the Bible in creative ways that speak to modern times.”

CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS (CPT): \$500

Box 6508
Chicago IL 60680

- “Christian Peacemaker Teams is an international organization set up to support teams of peace workers in conflict areas around the world. The organization uses these teams to achieve its aims of lower levels of violence, nonviolent direct action, human rights documentation and nonviolence training in direct action. CPT sums up their work as being ‘committed to reducing violence by getting in the way.’”

COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS, MINNESOTA (CAIR): \$300

2511 E Franklin Ave
Ste #100
Minneapolis MN 55406

- “The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), America's largest Islamic civil liberties and advocacy group has 35 offices and chapters nationwide and in Canada. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding. The demand for our services has grown tremendously. From restrictions placed on Muslims to practice their religion, to profiling and discrimination stemming from a lack of understanding of Islam, the need for CAIR in Minnesota is great. The proof is reflected in the dramatic increase in civil rights cases by 250% from 2007 to 2013. CAIR-Minnesota strives to ensure that Muslims in Minnesota enjoy the same protections that all Americans have.”

DISMANTLING THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY COALITION: \$500

c/o Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference
Box 39038
Phoenix, AZ 85069
Contact: Kristi Zabriskie

- “The Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition is a group of Anabaptist leaders who work together to mobilize the church to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. We proclaim an Anabaptist spirit of discipleship rooted in the call to love of neighbor, seeking right relationship and reconciliation through active non-violence.” A part of Faith’s work as a Repair Congregation, the Coalition helps white settlers to examine and repair their legacy of harm toward native people.

FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION, USA (FOR): \$300

c/o Candace Lutt & Phil Stoltzfus
206 Orchard St N
Northfield, MN 55057

Contacts: Candace Lutt & Phil Stoltzfus

- “The United States Fellowship of Reconciliation was founded in 1915 by sixty-eight pacifists, including A. J. Muste, Jane Addams and Bishop Paul Jones, and claims to be the ‘largest, oldest interfaith peace and justice organization in the United States’...Its programs and projects involve domestic as well as international issues, and generally emphasize nonviolent alternatives to conflict and the rights of conscience.”

MAKOCE IKIKCUPI (“Makoce,” Land Recovery): \$1000

Box 21
Granite Falls, MN 56241

Contacts: Kristi Zabriskie & John Stoesz

- “A project of Reparative Justice on Dakota land in *Minisota Makoce* (Minnesota)...(that) seeks to bring some of our relatives home, re-establish our spiritual and physical relationship with our homeland, and ensure the ongoing existence of our People.”

MINNESOTA PEACEBUILDING LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE: \$600

Box 3717
Minneapolis MN 55403
Contact: Donna Minter

- “...instigates, trains, and supports racially, sexually, culturally, ethnically, religiously, and economically diverse individuals and organizations to become trauma-informed, resilience-oriented, and restorative justice-focused empowering communities in Minnesota, the USA, and around the world.”

PUEBLOS DE LUCHA Y ESPERANZA (“Pueblos,” Peoples of Struggle & Hope): \$1,000

c/o Faith Mennonite Church
2720 E 22nd St
Minneapolis MN 55406

Contacts: Karla Arredondo, Roberta Malles

- “A Minnesota faith-based organization that organizes people in struggle to build leadership and collective power to change the structures and policies that oppress migrant peoples.”

SEWARD LONGFELLOW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: \$300

2525 E Franklin Ave
Ste #150
Minneapolis MN 55406

- “...created by residents in the Seward and Longfellow neighborhoods ‘to build community by providing the opportunity to repair harm by involving the victim, offender, and community in solutions that promote healing, accountability, and reconciliation.’

Mennonite Service Work: \$300

CENTRAL STATES CHAPTER, THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE: \$300
 121 E 30th St
 North Newton KS 67117

- The regional chapter for the Mennonite Central Committee.

Environment: \$300

MINNESOTA INTERFAITH POWER & LIGHT (MNIPL): \$300
 4407 E Lake St
 Minneapolis MN 55406

- “...an interfaith community co-creating a just and sustainable world. We work in partnership with faith communities to build transformative *power* and bring the *lights* of people’s unique gifts to addressing the climate crisis. At MNIPL we work to build the interfaith climate movement in Minnesota by empowering faith communities across the state to take action that is authentic, effective, and energizing in their context.”

Summary:

Greater Mennonite Church Giving:	\$18,500
Brethren Mennonite Council Gift:	\$500
<u>Missions & Service Directed Giving:</u>	<u>\$6,500</u>
 Total:	 \$25,500

Respectfully submitted by John Hershey, Moderator, Faith Mennonite Church, December 9, 2021

Appendix B

Migrant fund report (members: Andi Kuenning, Roberta Malles & John Ratigan)

The migrant fund was established to help support the families that Faith Mennonite has sponsored from Mexico and Honduras. The Migrant Fund Committee is tasked with overseeing the migrant fund. The objective is for the families to become financially independent, but due to the pandemic, and the difficulties faced by the undocumented, it is not possible to plan a date for that to happen.

Financial report:

Here is a financial report from what came into the migrant fund and what was given out during 2021. The donations were mostly from Faith Mennonite members/attenders, with about 6 per cent coming from outside of FMC.

Faith Mennonite Church Migrant Fund Running Balance, 1.2.2021-12.31.2021

Beginning Balance	\$11,090.98
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Receipts, checks	\$18,035.00
Receipts, online	\$8,161.16

This combination of reports is respectfully submitted by,
Melissa Hochstetler, Andi Kuenning & Roberta Malles

Trustee Commission Organizational & Administrative Report January 2022

The administrative and organizational work in the Trustee group has been extensive. Most importantly, the final quarter of the year has seen the on-boarding of a new administrative assistant the church office.

Of no less importance, have been the discussions around the significant loss of members in the last five years (25 families) and what that means to the future of our church, especially in a COVID world. The problem of why people left (other than moving away), along with the problem of no one joining us and remaining with us, continues to be discussed. In the meantime, we are left with a two-thirds senior citizen church. That realization prompts conversation about flattening our committee and organizational structure as we have many fewer people to do the “work” of the church.

Additionally, after reviewing thom bower’s time logs, we have verified what previous pastors have told us: that the pastor’s job requires more than a 60 hour-a-week time commitment. That data—along with the fact that based on the paragraph above, we need someone to spend significant time doing outreach—it seems evident that in order for our church to survive the decade, we need to hire more than one person as we go forward.

Finally, getting the search team set up and working was accomplished in the final quarter of the year.

Respectfully submitted for the Trustees,
Beth Richardson

Trustee Commission Building Report January 2022

2021 was a good year to take stock of various “to do” items that needed updating. John Hershey, Aimee Weigle and I evaluated and organized keys and locks for all exterior doors and all interior doors. Mike Okerstrom, former trustee had a locksmith company change some locks, rekeyed 95% of them and made sure that FMC members and renters who required access to our buildings and offices had up-to-date keys. You may have noticed that the lockbox by the east sanctuary door is gone; if you need access to the building, contact me or our office manager. The trustees now have an organized key system in a very secure location in the building.

The “Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza” organization asked if they could rent office space in our building and after discussions, the trustees offered the former Nursery space between the Men’s and Women’s restrooms adjacent to the Fellowship Hall. They requested a few upgrades which were accommodated with volunteer help, and they moved in August.

Last winter, the trustees discussed and planned a new vision for the library space adjacent to the Fellowship Hall and in January, building supplies were delivered and work began with a huge amount of volunteer labor supplied willingly by FMC members. Cynthia Miller and others boxed all the books and stored them while the bookshelves were moved out and donated to FMC members and other organizations. Partition wall construction commenced and progressed slowly for the remainder of the year with numerous FMC volunteers assisting in various aspects of the construction. The old asbestos floor tiles were removed safely by a qualified local company and new carpet tiles were installed. To date, the walls are ready for priming and painting, the new wiring is in place and other prep work is in the works. Several new elements are awaiting completion and when all is complete, the women's sewing group will enjoy a secure storage space for their materials and the tables and chairs which have been "stored" in the Fellowship Hall will have their own storage space decluttering the Fellowship Hall.

One September Sunday morning, the trustees spearheaded a church cleaning worship experience and much sprucing up was accomplished in two hours. Enormous THANK YOU to the children and adults who tackled numerous cleaning projects led by "organizers" who assumed leadership and kept volunteers focused and busy!

During the past two years as we've worshipped online, the technology aspect of our services has worked reasonably well. When we moved to in-person worship, the technology committee with John Ratigan's skill temporarily made the technology/computer/sound system work for us. With John's assistance the trustees are in the process of upgrading and moving the technology center to the sanctuary balcony to a permanent, locked cabinet so worship can continue to be both on-line and in-person, COVID willing!

Autumn 2021 reminded the trustees that the heating systems in both buildings needed attention. We discovered that the furnace that heats the west half of the sanctuary was not working at all and the repairs were done post-haste. The thermostats in the education wing also required tinkering to keep out long term tenants happy. Looking ahead, the trustees are planning significant renovations to the restrooms on the lower level of the education wing; planning is under way and a local contractor is being hired to do much of the work.

Respectfully submitted,
Glenn Geissinger, Trustee

Worship Commission Report April 2022

Over the last year, worship commission facilitated a transition back to in-person worship services, as well as continuing to offer an online option. The new hybrid model was made possible through a lot of work by the tech team. Worship commission continued to collaborate with Rev. Thom Bower in planning services—for both long term needs and specific services. We created Advent boxes, and agreed to host an ecumenical Taizé service. One struggle we continue to face is filling the Children's Time leader position for each Sunday, but we continue to try and to do so, as we value keeping it as a part of the service.

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam Augsburg, Karla Hovde, Jenny Wandersee, Hermann Weinlick

Pastor's Report #1
January 12, 2022

1. **Thanks** to all who helped prepare and lead Advent activities. I remain inspired by the ways collaboration is embraced, especially between commissions. Special thanks to Christmas Eve leaders: your willingness allowed me an additional (unexpected) week at home in IL.

2. **Remote Working:** My Covenant of Understanding permits me to work remotely one week in six. That has been a guide with many variations. I returned to MN on 6 Jan, departing on the 10th. I will work remotely through 13 Feb; I will be taking vacation 14-20 Feb (see below). My intent is to be in MN for Lent, independent of worship being hybrid or online. I do not anticipate working remotely again until after 27 April.

I remain to be available for online meetings; for pastoral conversations by email, phone, or zoom; and am considering ways to meet with small groups.

3. **Meetings** have moved off from Monday nights: thank you. The regularly occurring meetings typically follow these schedules (adjusted as needed):

Trustees	First Wednesday of the month (afternoon)
Deacons	First Wednesday of the month (evening)
Church Council	Second Wednesday of the month (evening)
Worship	Third Wednesday of the month (evening)
Missions & Service	
PPRC	First Tuesday, odd number months (evening)

4. **Association of United Church Educators (AUCE)** networks, resources, and advocates for faith formation workers, predominantly in the UCC. I will be attending the board of directors meeting 18-20 January. At the conclusion, I will become the Chair of the Board.

5. **Consultant Work:** I have begun consulting a congregation. I previously served Lyonsville (IL) Congregational and transitional pastor. They are now without a pastor and discerning if it is time to disband. I am providing support to leadership as they prepare to present this proposal to the congregation, and then I will facilitate some "discernment forums." The total project is 50 hours; the week of those forums is expected to use 25.

In order to assure this consultancy does not interrupt my work with FMC, I am taking a week of vacation 14-20 February. This is a way for me to keep healthy boundaries. There are also some Sundays when I will need to depart our Fellowship early so that I may join Lyonsville.

6. **Lent** plans include communion on Ash Wednesday (2 March) and Maundy Thursday (14 April). The gospel lessons frequently show up in pop-culture; in worship we'll explore those "shorthand" interpretations in order to seek something more aligned with our faith understandings. I am hopeful for developing faith formation activities connected to this theme.

Beginning January 30, and continuing through Lent, Greg Renstrom will be leading a bible study in the Adult CE time on Sundays. The focus is psalms of ascent.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. thom bower, Transitional Pastor

2021-2022 Pastor's Report #2

April 2022

I am focusing my report on the significant changes of the past year. I do not intend to make it seem as though I instigated or managed these transitions. Instead, as pastor I am marking important dynamics of the past year through which God has called us and through we have grown.

COVID Restrictions April concludes my 21st month with you; for 9 of them I worked remotely in IL. That's probably the least impactful of COVID practices we have navigated, but it is representative of the many different ways we have learned to gather for worship and meetings, to study and discern, to build and be community.

Summer Discussion Conversations spanning June, July, and Aug covered three topics, each with three sessions. You began identifying patterns of life together, areas to improve, God's call expressed as hopes. The summary of those conversations has been shared with the congregation. Three workshops, each with two identical sessions, explored different ways to look at how congregations hold themselves together, move through transition, and think creatively.

These birthed more conversations about the church split, vicarious harm, restructuring, budgeting processes, strategic planning. They have created a foundation for discussing congregational dynamics, shared values, and visions for the congregation.

Worship Practices Returning to in-person worship in July coincided with new hybrid practices for worship (which we're still learning and improving). In addition to the Worship Commission, the team of Karla Hovde, Dick Christoph, and John Ratigan considered options, discerned the best for this time, created an incremental strategy. John R's hands, physically and metaphorically, are all over the hardware which has been integrated into our hybrid worship.

Congregational Values The Congregational Information Form (CIF) has a Pastoral Priorities section. We adapted that list as congregational values. Each value was listed on a single sheet of paper and hung in the sanctuary. Members were invited to place 8 stickers on what they identified as essential to the congregation.

Calling Pastoral Search Team While this team set their own work, their first major task has to complete the CIF. Sharing their work has engaged the congregation in significant conversations related to congregational identity.

Increased Collaboration Commissions are more readily deliberately asking one another to collaborate on events / projects / tasks. This has increased creativity, communication, and cooperation.

Christian Education: Intergenerational, and then something different Preparing for the program year, the Christian Education Commission developed a plan for intergenerational faith formation. These events were very different than previous year's activities. They also intentionally connected to worship activities. The shift on emphasizing whole-congregation faith formation opened up new possibilities.

Unfortunately at the beginning of the year all the members of the commission asked to step away in order to better attend to additional church duties. Without a commission to develop specific programs, each commission was encouraged to consider how their work demonstrated faith formation. This continues to be a growing edge for the congregation.

Strategic Planning COVID disrupted so many familiar practices; long-range plans had to be set aside in order to address shifting restrictions. While the pandemic is not yet over, we have been able to move from immediate need to longer-range visioning. This has encouraged strategic planning to guide faithfully living together.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Dr. Thom Bower, Transitional Pastor

Moderator's Report, "State of Our Church" reflection January 2, 2022

When I discovered we needed a fill-in speaker for today's service, I put my name in the hat as a last resort. And here I am. I'm your last resort. I think you know I'm uncomfortable in the pulpit, so to speak, even if in this case, the pulpit is in my home. I didn't volunteer because I felt I could share an insightful biblically-based message. As I've said a couple of times, even though I possess a Masters of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, I am theologically naïve and will not presume to preach to a congregation full of trained ministers. But I thought I could use this time—the first service in 2022—to give you an update on the state of the church, as I see it from the moderator's seat. I want you to know what our church is doing. I think you should know. And I think it's part of my responsibility to keep you informed. But to do that, I need about 15-to-20 minutes of your time. I hope what follows makes sense to you and that you don't "Zoom Out."

When I agreed to speak, I didn't worry too much about what to say. I did have a basic idea in mind. Then I had my first surprise. This past Wednesday, I discovered I needed to select the scriptures for the day, an idea that initially daunted me. Precisely what scripture goes along with a state-of-the-church address given in lieu of a homily? I'm sure some of you might know (and maybe you can tell me afterward) but I sure don't!

My second surprise was my selections fell together pretty quickly. My mind went to Psalm 139 and to that part where God knows what I'm going to say before I say it. Or, as it was read today. "Even before a word is on my tongue, you, Lord, know it altogether." Since I wasn't exactly sure of what I was going to say, I figured if God already knew, maybe I'd get some hints...I'm not sure that happened but it seemed a good idea at the time. And the Psalm stands on its own regardless.

The second selection came to me pretty quickly, too. I considered my insecurity about preaching to a bunch of preachers. Despite three years of theological training and a double major in both English and Religion in college, my faith is pretty simple. If you add that popular verse on our Sunday bulletin cover, from Micah, a guy who prophesied in the Southern Kingdom maybe about 720 BCE—something about doing justice and loving kindness and walking humbly with your God—to the Colossians verses I read this morning about clothing "yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" and forgiving "as the Lord forgave you," I basically have a creed. So I won't get more theological than that. What I want to do here is fulfill my rightful obligation to report to you: to rehash where we've been as a church, and as a people of God, beginning with last May when we installed new officers, commissioners, committee members, deacons, returning ones—and me, your moderator.

As our officers attended to their assigned tasks in June, I knew I needed leadership advice. I began to rely on our trustees and moderator-elect: a group of wise advisors I could trust, and needed to trust. Beth Richardson and Darrell Martin and Glenn Geissinger and Donna Minter all have deep roots in the life of this church—as well as deep roots in the Mennonite tradition—and that's a valuable asset. They have

done an enormous amount of work for us, essentially serving not only as trustees but as church elders. And Rev. Thom Bower has kept tabs on us and has provided sage advice. He's kept us on track and asked tough questions. But he's also been kind of a nuisance. And I say this in a loving way.

Because Thom is our Transitional Pastor, he points out the positives and negatives but then leaves the final decisions to us. I must confess there have been a few times this year when I've felt frustrated or unsure of what to do—and I just wanted someone else to make decisions for us. Like a pastor. But learning to decide is a part of our transitional work so we proceed and trust God to guide us.

And Thom? Thank you for the work you are doing with us. I don't think we say that enough. And I extend that thanks to our trustees and Donna Minter. I can't do the work of moderator without you. I have truly come to depend on your wisdom and appreciate the team-approach to leadership that we have established, a relationship based both on frankness and trust. The work we are doing—clarifying and streamlining our administrative policies and procedures; thinking and planning for our future as a church; overseeing financial and payroll and insurance matters; and addressing physical plant needs—will ultimately put us, I think, in a better place when a new pastor arrives in our midst. In the meantime, we keep meeting monthly (and more often if necessary) and depend absolutely on Church Council to ask clarifying questions and to modify the recommendations we bring forward to them. And let me be clear. It is our Church Council that makes the final decisions.

As these tasks began to unfold, remember we conducted a series of church-wide summer conversations? Nine separate opportunities for church members to talk about our strengths and weaknesses and hopes for the future. I thank all of you who took the time to invest in those valuable and strategic conversations that lent momentum to our transitional process. That project took time—three months—but it was time worth spending.

What else happened? You may not remember that we bought a bunch of new electronic gadgets—that's as specific as I, hardly a technological expert, can get—when, in July, we returned to in-person worship in hybrid form? What an effort that was (and continues to be) by a committed group of people—our minister, the Worship Commission, the technology group, the deacons, musicians, ushers, worship and music leaders—who have managed to create a dual platform worship experience that appears to seamlessly fall into place each week. Bottom line? It was, and is, no easy task and sometimes we let the behind-the-scenes work go unappreciated.

I feel compelled here to give special thanks to John Ratigan. He continues to shoulder the technological load of producing and delivering the online portion of our worship services. Since we are meeting via Zoom today, I think this is his first Sunday off since mid-July. John? Thank you.

How many of you remember that in September, after years of faithful service, Aimee Weigel, our office coordinator, resigned to take a higher paying job? Her departure produced an administrative void that needed immediate filling. We've done that. Brianna Hendrickson is now doing that job on a part time basis. She is streamlining our administrative practices that the Trustees have envisioned and requested. That work also includes figuring a way to more easily edit and manage the new church website that Karla Hovde designed last year. We have plans to update the site in January. And, I'm no expert here, but I think that updating process will be easier since we bought Brianna a new office computer to replace the 15-year-old one Aimee had been using.

And remember how those summer conversations led into our fall retreat? A time when we started to identify common practices, shared values and core beliefs? We continue to follow through on that essential activity and will pick it up in January.

Remember too, in September that we did not have a Christian Education program as we continued to balance the needs of many as we learned to return to live worship in different ways? The commission used that time to work with them to develop an Intergenerational Style for Conducting Worship and Christian Education, which we put into practice in October. Essentially, we participated in “communal activities as a community of faith” and began to understand how we are shaped by how we gather, pray, celebrate and sing together.

That experiment continued into Advent, culminating with the Christmas Pageant which was more than just a kids’ event. Even I put on a costume and paraded across the altar in an all-congregation-participation event.

Fall is also the time we started to say that two-word phrase out loud: The Split. Donna Minter has conducted three different talking circles on the hurts we’ve experienced from the event that divided our church all those years ago. The circles also served as vehicles to address various other congregational hurts and is helping with a healing process. She will continue that work in February.

Other projects also continue. We sorted and distributed all the new hymnals and returned and replaced the misprints. We struggled with how to deal with a homeless couple that literally camped in front of our door for a while this summer—as well as with the drug-user who set up camp in our north alley. There was a church and grounds community clean-up event in November; Cynthia Miller is spearheading the downsizing of our library. Glenn Geissinger has rounded up a handful of people to build a new storage and meeting area in the Fellowship Hall. The COVID committee is a group of committed and knowledgeable people. I remain grateful to them for their thoughtful and valuable guidance.

And then? Then there’s money.

Let’s say this upfront: my worries about not meeting our budgetary goals were unfounded. We are very healthy financially. Church giving has been generous.

I can also tell you that we are moving away from placing the unrealistic expectation on the shoulders of one person to pay our bills, manage our finances and develop a budget and are now relying on a group of church members who effectively serve as a team to clarify policies, manage bank and investment accounts, deposit checks, pay bills, etc. Darrell Martin guides this project in a very patient and thoughtful way. And he has several willing helpers to share the load. Among them are Bob Mack, Gregg Richardson, Rachel Geissinger and Thaine Dirks. Many hands make light work. We will have a 2022 budget proposal to present to Church Council at our January meeting.

One project we haven’t gotten to yet is a church-wide conversation about giving. And by this I name the charitable contributions we make in Faith’s name to a variety of local, national and international organizations including those within the Mennonite Church. This is a conversation that started last winter when Shelly was moderator. As we looked at creating a 2021 budget, a question arose about why we give and to whom and what for.

I want to be clear here. This question wasn’t posed in a critical way. There is absolutely nothing wrong with what and how we have been giving. That wasn’t the issue. What we realized is that our church was giving by a rote process, effectively rubber-stamping an annual giving pattern without really discussing or understanding the whys and wherefores. So we agreed to have a church-wide conversation, or series of conversations, about whom we give to, the purpose of each organization, etc.—to try to gain a clearer

understanding of the identities and missions of the organizations we support. That conversation seemed to be a natural part of our transitional process. Something we should talk about. It made sense.

But...with all the other work we have been doing, we haven't yet gotten to that "giving talk." The values and visioning work we are doing must precede that conversation since we expect that work will shed light on our giving and perhaps on our pastor search process. After all, it makes sense to me that our expressed core values should be reflected in our giving. So we will have that conversation. It is a project that Donna Minter will lead this spring.

Because we planned to have that giving conversation in 2021, we left a lot of blanks in approving our 2021 giving budget. Instead of apportioning out specific donations to specific groups as we had done in previous budget years, we merely allocated two lump sums for annual giving: one for gifts to our larger Mennonite Church USA and one meant to be used at the behest of the Missions & Service Commission.

So when October 2021 arrived and we hadn't yet conducted our giving conversations, we realized we still wanted to make our annual gifts which we do each December—and we were delighted that we were in a position to do so!

Basically we had allocated \$19,000 in the 2021 budget for gifts to Mennonite Church USA-related groups. So, with the lack of new guidance, Church Council approved a basic "Mennonite Church Giving Package" that mirrored the 2020 budget. Those groups include: the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, the Brethren Mennonite Council, the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, the Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Church USA, the Mennonite Disaster Service and the Mennonite Mission Network.

Then there's the Missions & Service Commission. All year long we told Missions & Service to be prepared "not to give this year" but rather to do other work, to make local connections and to do local outreach, which they did. Then in October we reversed course on them. When we realized that we were financially stable and had the capacity to give, our Church Council commissioned Missions & Service to use its budget line of \$6,500. And oh, by the way, please get that work done and submit it to Council by the November meeting.

So thanks to that intrepid group—Melissa Hochstetler, Andi Kuenning and Roberta Malles—for doing that work. Accordingly, we as a church parceled out the \$6,500 budgeted for commission use in the 2021 budget to: Community Emergency Services; the St. Stephens Ending Homelessness Project; Soup for You; Agape Peace Center; Christian Peacemaker Teams; the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Minnesota; the Dismantling of the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition; the Fellowship of Reconciliation; the *Makoce Ikikcupi* (Dakota Land Recovery) Project; Minnesota Peacebuilding Leadership Institute; *Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza* (Peoples of Struggle and Hope); the Seward-Longfellow Restorative Justice Project; the Central States Chapter of the Mennonite Central Committee; and Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light. That's great and generous work and thanks to Missions & Service for doing it so thoughtfully.

I'll also add here two notes about that commission's work. First, in case you don't know it, the *Pueblos* group, which addresses issues of immigrant rights, is now officed in our church basement. Second, Missions & Service is engaged in an effort of trying to find more direct ways to involve our church and church members with the local Native American land restoration effort. You should be hearing more about that from Kristie Zabriskie via Missions & Service in the near future.

For your information, I have written a summary of all the giving I have just described. It includes names and addresses of the organizations, brief statements of purpose and amounts given. I plan to make that

document available for our annual financial business meeting, held online after church on February 6, 2022. But if you'd like a copy, just ask. I think you'll find it instructive.

Before we leave the financial piece of this address, you should also know that the Migrant Fund exists as a separate entity from our budget. It remains healthy and stable and we are able to support the two families to whom we have made that commitment. I think that is truly an extraordinary effort.

Okay. One more thing. And it's important. I am absolutely delighted and pleased to report that Church Council has approved the formation of a new pastor search team. The Search Team is an independent group, an *ad hoc* committee of the Church Council to which it will report at least monthly; it is also expected to report at least monthly, in writing via the Midweek Update, and in person via worship announcements, to the congregation. I am grateful that Rachel Geissinger, Matthew Hendricks, Melissa Hochstetler, Andy Martinson and Minke Sundseth have accepted that charge. Theirs is important work. You should be hearing from them soon.

The Search Team's work begins under the guidance and supervision of Rev. Susan Janzen, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference, and then will proceed with identifying potential candidates. Once the initial work with Central Plains is completed, it is estimated that a search could last anywhere from eight-to-twelve months. I hope you hear this as good news. If you're like me, you're ready to be done with transition and wish to hire a sitting pastor. I have had to learn to be patient with our transitional chores but I believe we are doing valuable work together. I believe we will be a stronger church as a result of it. And I thank Rev. Thom Bower for leading us in that communal work.

Finally, I hope you understand that I'm doing my very best in a sincere effort to serve this church and its people. I absolutely value a host of relationships I have formed as a result of being a member of this congregation. I also respect you for your commitments to social justice and racial equality. You keep me humble. But I think I have found a way to best serve you. Thank you for that opportunity. Amen.

Respectfully submitted,
John Hershey

Moderator's Second Half Report April 2022

As I look back on a year of serving as your moderator, I encourage you to refer to the address I delivered in place of a homily on the first Sunday in January 2022. I think it does a good job of summarizing the first half of our year together and it is included as an attachment to the April annual meeting documents. I'm more interested here in highlighting how we are now proceeding. As our year together has progressed, I have had much less "hands-on" work to do as, in spite of the difficulties presented to us by COVID-19, we have picked up and carried on. We are a church on the move. Consider these bulleted items:

- We've approved a Search Team and they are working diligently and have now completed the lengthy Congregational Information Form required by our Central Plains Conference. That is a crucial first step toward hiring a new sitting pastor and the group's energy is palpable.
- Leslie led a committee to discern Faith's response to four resolutions on the table at the MC USA Special Delegate Assembly in May 2022. They created a statement to present in the sessions which expresses our support for becoming a more inclusive national church. Our delegates represent a church with over 25 years of being an inclusive church for the LGBTQIA community.

- We are now consciously discerning how we conduct our church business, how we make decisions and how we are organized to do it. This remains a work in progress and will likely continue for the next couple of years but the goal is to develop a structure that energizes church officers as opposed to enervating them.
- If you've paid any attention to our after-church activities, you will know that we have been doing a Bible study. That's a long overdue and positive step.
- After a brief winter hiatus, we're back to worshipping in person and we've gradually upgraded our technology to continue to offer an online worship option.
- If you happen to be in church, take a look down in the Fellowship Hall; you'll note a dramatic new look to our library area. We couldn't have done this without the dogged persistence of Glenn Geissinger and his crew of volunteers too long to mention here, to get that work done. Then stroll over to the lower level of the Education Building where Glenn and Darrell Martin and Rudy Okerlund. The bathrooms are undergoing dramatic remodeling that has long been needed.
- Our work with the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition is gathering momentum as we have formed a Repair Team within the congregation and have partnered with the Twin Cities Repair Community for Makoce Ikikcupi. Our church gathers on the traditional lands of the Dakota people and we are learning how to address the devastation caused by church-sponsored colonization. The Repair Team is taking steps beyond education to make public land acknowledgements and put restitution in the church budget.
- On March 22 we had our initial "church giving" conversation. That's an important step. We need to continue to engage one another and come to a clearer understanding of "how we give" and "to whom we give and why." Our church giving goes a long way to saying who we are and what we believe in.
- We're in the process of revamping our money management processes in an attempt to take the burden off the shoulders a single designated treasurer. That's a huge responsibility that is now shared by a group of people is represents a more equitable division of labor.

These are important small steps we've taken together as a congregation and they are beginning to add up. But we still have work to do. I'll close this here by borrowing some words used in the celebration of the 20th anniversary celebration of Rev. thom bower's ordination.

"Let's keep our eyes and ears oriented to God and keep our feet on the ground. Let's keep moving forward, discerning and acting as each of the many parts of the body of Christ. Let's commit to leading when asked and following when others lead. Let's work for good in the world and for the good of our congregation."

For my part, I can only thank you for trusting me to do the work of moderator for the 2021-2022 church year. It has been my privilege to serve.

Respectfully submitted,
John Hershey

