



The Harry Potter mystery dinner drew a multi-generational crowd. At left, Lori Nester, who helped with cooking, assists Tig Intagliata with the sorting hat. In costume at right is Rhonda Winstead, SHYF sponsor.

Observation: Exploring what God is doing in our world

Lent is not typically known as the time of waiting in the church year. Yet, both personally, awaiting the birth of our second grandchild, and as part of First Mennonite Church, waiting in discernment for the Spirit's leading, this Lent is full of it!

There's a way of exploring what God is doing in the world that I've found to be energizing and hopeful, especially when the waiting is long. You might call it the practice of observation. Specifically, it's the practice of observing how things are already changing – noticing the places, great or small, where the change we seek is already beginning to take hold.

Briefly here's a review of the five priorities for the next chapter of our life together that were identified in the discernment process:

1. Following Jesus in Anabaptist tradition
2. Nurturing faith in relationships inter-generationally and over the life span
3. Connecting in ways that express Christ's broad invitation to all people
4. Worship that grows out of scripture and reflects the diversity of the congregation
5. Joyful expression of our gifts in service to God and others, in congregational life and in the world

Here are some observations. First, during our four months of temporary coverage while Steve was in Cleveland Clinic one year ago, I was overwhelmed with the congregation's eagerness to use their

gifts! In fact, there were a number of times when people volunteered to help before I even asked. And others often expressed appreciation for the ways people led. It's a sign that God was already moving us in this direction a year ago, before the discernment process had even begun.

Second, in various conversations with individuals, in Sunday school classes and in informal group discussion, I've been hearing the desire to know one another better. Perhaps the best observation and example of this already in action is the youth "*Sit with a stranger Sunday*" in which they scattered around the sanctuary in worship, and interacted with people they didn't know well. The youth are already leading us in the priority of connecting with one another across generations.

Another sighting has been the joy of people of all ages expressing their gifts in reading scripture in worship. Over and over I've been surprised by the joy of the hearers as well as the joy of those who have led worship in this way. I think this joy is both a preview and a confirmation of the priority of identifying and expressing our gifts!

God's work in the world is done over time. We are often called to patience as we wait for direction or as God's work is completed. I wonder what signs others have observed, great or small, of the changes we seek, already taking hold in our life together.

-- Wanda Stopher

Events/dates to remember

April 3 – Lent Practice, 7 p.m., FH

April 13 – Maundy Thursday service, faith statements, 7 p.m., FH

April 14 – Procession of the Cross, 11:30 a.m.; Good Friday worship service, noon, FMC

April 16 – Easter Sunday

April 21 – Menno-Life deadline

April 23 – Church-College Relations Sunday

April 30 – Music Sunday

April 30 – Youth Auction, 7 p.m., FH

Final Lent Practice is April 3

The final Lent Practice will be held at 7 p.m. Monday, April 3 in the fellowship hall. The theme is "Restore us, O God! We live" and the texts are Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 and Matthew 28:1-10. To prepare, consider the text and apply the ideas, words, images and feelings to create something that reflects these themes. All creations are welcome. Entering this space of awe and beauty with us is an act of creativity in itself. Get creative! (Please come even if you do not have something to share.)

- Write a song, piece of music, story or poem
- Draw, sculpt, whittle, paint, sew, knit, crochet or weld
- Use wood, yarn, cloth, clay, marbles, metal, paper or string

Children are welcome and childcare will be provided. See Victoria Woods-Yee or Wanda Stopher if you have questions.

Pastoral search committee formed

Church Council is pleased to announce the formation of the new pastoral search committee. The committee's members are: Shelby Cluts (Chair), Isaac Andreas, Jean Miller, Brent Schroeder, Mary Anne Moser, Kevin King and Melissa Friesen. Remember them often in your prayers as they begin the work of calling our new associate pastor.

Isaac Andreas reflects on joining the Women's Walk on Washington

Note: Isaac is a senior at Bluffton High School.

My reasons for marching were to be with an enormous group of like-minded people, hang out with friends, explore DC, and show solidarity and support for minorities and other peoples that are

hurting from the Trump Presidency. I really didn't have any hopes or fears going into the march as it was almost entirely new to me. I didn't know what to expect. I have only been in one other "social change" type march that I can remember, and that was when I was in like first grade. That said, it was obviously going to be a unique experience for me.

Living in Bluffton, I don't get much radical liberal ideology most of the time, (except at Rudi Kaufman's) so it was refreshing to see so many people putting their core issues on signs and waving them around. They didn't care if it was controversial either. In fact, for some it seemed as though the more graphic or controversial the idea, the better. Again, very different from Bluffton. Not necessarily good or bad, but different.

Other things that surprised me were the sheer amount of people and how hard it was to move. It was estimated at 500,000 for the DC march alone. I didn't know what to expect, but I never questioned the reliability of mobility for some reason. Now I know. What did I learn or get from the march? I definitely got a lot of great inspirational quotes and chants that are fun to use. I might even choose one as my senior quote. I also got the memory of doing all this with my friends and brother. Lastly, I got a pink pussy hat and a rejuvenated and more intrepid attitude towards confronting big and small injustices that happen every day. This is a small way that we can resist (President) Trump's influence. Oh, and also calling district representatives.

Mennonite Women plan comforter knotting April 10-11

April is project month for Mennonite Women. Comforters will be set up for knotting in the fellowship hall on Monday, April 10, at 7 p.m. and Tuesday, April 11, from 9 a.m. to noon. On Monday evening the devotional focus will be "Receiving Guidance" led by Alice Lora.

For the Israelites the Ten Commandments provided guidance, both in the wilderness and for ages to come. Marlene Kropf writes in this year's devotional, "The law can go only so far in bringing us to maturity in Christ. It can keep our actions in order but may not transform our hearts. To be transformed from the inside out requires a relationship of unconditional love. Though such love was always the foundation of the Ten Words, it became visible in Jesus Christ the living Word."

Refreshments on Monday evening will be provided by Dottie Long and Julie Mackey. Following comforter knotting on Tuesday, all are invited to stay for lunch. If you are able, bring a salad or dessert and table service. Sandwiches and beverages will be provided. Please consider helping with frame loading on Sunday, April 9 at 2 p.m.

Getting to know the congregation

Editor's note: In September, we began a series in which we briefly profile those among us, focusing on the work they do now or have done in the past. We'll touch all ages and all areas of work. Jesus told us that all work is honorable if done honestly and well; it's important to recognize that all of us work in different ways.

This month we're connecting with Rhonda Winstead.

Where do you work?

I am employed by ADP RPO in Findlay as a Senior Recruiting Specialist. I support campus recruiting for one of our clients in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Most of my work takes place over the internet or by phone.

What do you like most about your job?

I like being part of a team of international professionals that work very hard to find the right candidates for the client.



Even though I work virtually, I'm involved in every aspect of recruiting, from resume screening to event management. I've been in my role long enough now to see students we've recruited progress from attending a recruiting event, to undertaking a two-week spring break internship, to a summer internship, to being hired into a full-time job upon graduation, and then being called on to interview new candidates themselves. Seeing that progression helps make all the planning, details and data that fill my days rewarding.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not at work (i.e. hobby, volunteer)?

I enjoy reading, gardening, and cooking. I have been a Girl Scout leader for 8 years. I have had the privilege of serving in lay leadership roles in congregations we've been a part of over the years and found that service meaningful.

Who are your family members at FMC?

My family members at FMC are my husband, Walt Paquin, and our daughter, Grace Winstead Paquin.

FMC participants in the youth choir festival included front from left, Ethan Blount, Ellie Hartzler, Grace Paquin, Ana Neufeld-Weaver, Ellie Nickel, Rebecca Estelle, John-Paul Yoder and Ethan Nickel. Back from left, Patrick Estell, Theo Andreas, Benjamin Hartzler and Kaleigh Coffman.



FMC youth sing in annual choir festival

Twelve First Mennonite youth participated in the Mennonite Youth Choir Festival March 11-12 at Goshen College, under the direction of Hal Hess. Open to all students in grades 3 through 9 from any faith community, the festival culminates in a Sunday afternoon concert. The children prepare for the festival by listening to music and learning the sheet music sent to them. Our youth also prepared by rehearsing the music together during sessions with Laura Hartzler, director of FMC's children's choirs.

Harry Potter mystery supper full of magical surprises



On March 19, the SHYF held a Harry Potter Mystery Supper fundraiser to raise money for the 2017 Youth Convention. It was a magical night! Youth dressed up as their favorite characters and transformed the fellowship hall into the Great Hall of Hogwarts to create a wizardly experience.

When guests arrived, they were “sorted” into one of the four Hogwarts houses where they would sit and enjoy their meal. The guests were surprised by their mystery meal as they did not know what they were ordering.

Many of the menu items came out of “The Unofficial Harry Potter Cookbook” by Dinah Bucholz which features treats from the Harry Potter series, as well as traditional British dishes such as butterbeer, polyjuice potion, shepherd’s pie, cheese broomsticks, pumpkin pasties,

and many other delicacies.

Thank you to all who came to support us! We would also like to give a special shout out to Carrie Mast for planning and preparing the menu and food, Lori Nester for preparing food, Sally Roth for donating food, Mary Steiner for crafting our very own Sorting Hat, youth sponsors Walt Paquin, Rhonda Winstead, and Tig Intagliata, parents, and youth for their help. We had a lot of fun creating the night, and we hope you enjoyed it!

-- Shannon Thiebeau

Isaac Andreas (below); Danielle Novak and Grace Paquin prepare for the mystery dinner.



Sunita Hooley receives “I love my community” award

Congratulations to Sunita Hooley on being named the 2017 winner of the John Wilt “I Love My Community” award by the Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Sunita, daughter of Mary Ina and Don Hooley, is a member of First Mennonite, attends Faithbuilders Sunday school class and volunteers in the nursery and with vacation Bible school.

Sunita is employed by McDonald’s and Marimor Industries and volunteers in the Mennonite Memorial Home therapy department. She is a member of a Special Olympics basketball team and plays Ultimate Frisbee several times a week.

Elsewhere in the Mennonite world...

MCC

According to the United Nations, the world is facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. More than 20 million people across Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and northeast Nigeria are facing or are at risk of famine. Mennonite Central Committee is working in the area to provide emergency food assistance and increase its response to the crisis. Because of serious conflicts and concerns for safe, unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance, this process is slow and challenging. To donate to MCC’s relief fund, visit mcc.org/learn/what/relief, call 1-888-563-4676 or send a check to MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

Herald Press releases new adult coloring book

Last fall, Herald Press took its first step into the world of adult devotional coloring books with *Beloved Amish and Mennonite Quilts*. Its latest addition to the field, *Amish Prayers*, offers fraktur drawings and thoughtful, contemplative prayers from Anabaptist history. The collection will be released April 4. The 43 prayers are translated and adapted from *Die ernsthafte Christenpflicht (Prayer Book for Earnest Christians)*, a traditional Amish prayer book which grew from prayers of Anabaptists in the 1500s and 1600s.

In the coloring book, each prayer is accompanied by a Bible verse and room for journaling. On the facing page is an illustration to color, incorporating a key phrase from the prayer using fraktur, a type of Pennsylvania Dutch folk art. Lynn Sommer, an artist and member of Community Mennonite Church in Lancaster, PA, created each coloring page.

Amish Prayers is available for \$12.99 from Herald Press at 800-245-7894 or www.MennoMedia.org.

From our mission partners Bruce Yoder and Nancy Frey

“The university students at the Mennonite hostel are into the regular, somewhat hectic rhythm of classes, labs and exams. Jeremiah and Deborah are busy with school, and Bruce and Nancy are meaningfully occupied with teaching assignments this semester. Pray with us that our busy schedules are fruitful for us and for those among whom we minister. Please pray for peace in Burkina Faso. Pray that God touches the hearts of those who have resorted to violence or are planning violence, that they may instead align themselves with God’s will of peace and well-being for all.

“During the last few months, we’ve seen an increase in requests for our services as teachers. We both taught at the Ouagadougou Evangelical Bible Institute during the January-March trimester, and in February, Bruce taught at the Benin Bible Institute in Cotonou. Pray for guidance as we discern how best to train church leaders, those who are young and others who have much ministry experience. Pray for stamina for the students as many participate in these training programs alongside full-time ministry or other employment.

“We are planning to be in North America this summer for about six weeks and expect to see some of you as we make stops in Ontario, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. We anticipate renewing old friendships and acquaintances and meeting new people.”