

Menno-Life



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Our walk

I recently had coffee with Sister Carol of St. Mary's Catholic Church. I have appreciated learning to know her and value her friendship. As we sat down she asked, "So what's happening at First Mennonite?" My first thought was, "Not that much." Then I responded with a list that grew and unfolded with a great deal of energy and excitement! Here it is.

- Obviously we're in the middle of a small, but disproportionately disruptive renovation process! The progress is evident with every whiff as you enter the fellowship hall and visible every time you peek into the sanctuary. The painting is complete, the book racks have arrived and await installation, and the carpenters have begun tearing out the steps and measuring and fitting for the new ones. This change is physical and we experience it viscerally.
- We have worshipped, as a result, at the Bluffton Middle School for a month now! We planned and prepared and we are still experiencing the law of unintended consequences. For the first couple of weeks the bus parked on FMC side and the residents of Mennonite Home Communities had to walk across the street. To remedy this situation, a cone was placed allowing space for the bus to park on the school side of the road. But then one resident who doesn't ride the bus and uses a wheel chair, and others using walkers were forced to go all the way to the corner and back to the Middle School. We are not at home. But we are together. We are doing our best and trying to be our best for one another.
- That brings us to the plans and preparations already in the works for our year of walking! We have distributed nearly 100 copies of *We Make the Road by Walking* by Brian D. McLaren. Worship planning has begun. An organizational meeting has been set for those interested in creating a walking circle (aka small group using the book.) Conversations often include questions and excitement as people become familiar with the book. We are already making our road by walking.



- Governance Task Force is rolling out the first steps of a plan for broad congregational input and participation as we discover new ways of organizing our work to accomplish the mission and priorities we believe God has called us to as a congregation. We need one another. This change is not physical but it will and must engage us wholly: mind, body, soul, relationships.
- What is a season of change without a staff transition? Shannon shared her resignation just as Staff Relations was beginning my review. They completed the review in May and brought to Council a recommendation to hire an interim to provide coverage for youth ministry while also taking our time to invite broad participation in an assessment of what's working, and identification of what is yet needed. This general direction was affirmed by Council in May. A job description for Interim Children and Youth Ministry Director was approved in June. Carrie Mast was approved for hire by Council on July 19. You are my people. I am so grateful to be traveling with you at this time.
- Stories of the inhumane separation of families at our southern border have renewed for us the questions, "How will we be sanctuary now? What can we do? How can we extend God's radical invitation and welcome in this time?" Our summer worship is built on the premise that it is God's mission that we are invited to join. As we practice faith, we are ever renewing our connection to our Source. We are making room for our life with God individually and corporately. We make the road by following in Jesus' footsteps and as we journey with him and with one another, we only love him and one another more.

~ Pastor Wanda

Important dates to remember

August 19 – Congregational meeting

August 24 – September Menno-Life deadline

August 26 – Church picnic, Bluffton Village Park

September 2 – First Sunday of "We Make the Road by Walking" (Sign up for a book now!)

September 3 – Labor Day, church office closed

From flooring to flourishing

Changing colors, changing views

Once upon a time, a woman stopped at the edge of a field of weeds. Or were they flowers? Whatever – they were green. Or wait! Were there different shades of green? Were there hints of yellow and brown in the midst of the greens? And some fuchsia?

Shaking her head, the woman pulled out her phone and began taking photos from different angles, as the rising sun shifted again and again, causing even further changes in the landscape. Reluctantly, she headed home, carrying with her the vision of a changing field of colors.

Later in the day, she stood in the middle of the nearly empty room at her workplace, studying the newly-painted walls and ceiling. What was that color? Was it white? Cream? Yellow? Gold? Had the painters used different colors in different places? How many colors had they used? Two? Three? Four?

As the sunlight streamed through the lovely old stained glass windows, the shifting reflections caused the woman to stare in wonder at the walls, the ceiling and way on up to the center top. So many colors, so much beauty, so much change.

Just like that early morning field landscape, the colors surrounding us at First Mennonite are changing every day, and our place of worship takes on new life. We take turns observing the activity, from the day the Sunbelt lift arrived in multiple pieces to the day the painter stood on top of the lift, painting the tip-top of the ceiling. There have been endless hours of pew cleaning and restoration and reattachment of hymnal racks. The day the

contractor began measuring the chancel in preparation for rebuilding the steps certain staff members were compelled to make repeated trips from the office to the sanctuary.

We hope you're all as excited as we are and encourage you to stop by on occasion to see what's going on. To test your knowledge, consider taking this simple quiz:

1. How many pews were removed from the sanctuary?
2. How many different colors of paint are in the sanctuary?
3. What are the names of the paint colors in the sanctuary?
4. What is the name of the painting company?
5. How many painters did we have?
6. How did the hydraulic lift get inside the church?
7. How many persons helped bring in the lift?
8. What was the original color of the carpet in the sanctuary?
9. What is the name of the new carpet color?
10. What two images of Jesus appear on the stained glass windows in the sanctuary?
11. Which staff member has been most excited to watch every step along the way?

~ Mary Pannabecker Steiner

Larry Diller, Dave Moser and Dennis Sheidler helped the painters and Sunbelt employees move the lift into the sanctuary.



Carrie Mast to serve as interim children and youth ministry director

Staff Relations is pleased to report that Carrie Mast will serve as Interim Children and Youth Ministry Director beginning August 1. Carrie has past experience as FMC Christian Education Coordinator, leading program development in various settings, and a creative passion for testing new ways of providing Christian education and nurture to people of all ages. We appreciate her willingness to take on this interim challenge.

~ Staff Relations

Looking over our shoulders at Central District Conference

I was asked to write a First Mennonite Church delegate report reflecting on this year's Central District Conference sessions which were held a few weeks ago in Goshen. Knowing that each delegate would have viewed the experience through the lens of his or her own life and interests, I compiled a short list of questions and invited responses. The questions that elicited answers were: What felt most important, most interesting, or most surprising to you? Not everyone responded but. . .

Wanda Stopher: "I was struck by the intersection between the theme of CDC, 'Come Walk with us: Tell us your story' and the book that will provide direction for us at FMC in the coming year, 'We Make the Road by Walking.' The book tells God's story as it unfolds in the Bible and invites us to find our place in that story. The stories that were shared at the CDC annual meeting in worship, in delegate sessions and in the story-telling sessions recounted God's story continuing to unfold as individuals and congregations seek to follow Jesus in various places. Every story began with God's eye-view of the world and need for change. And every

story included a unique call to a specific individual or congregation to respond in ways that they are uniquely gifted to respond. So instead of maps to follow and duplicate, the stories provided testimony to God's activity and living engagement in the world. Each story recounted a unique response to God's Spirit. I think this is, at least in part what it means to 'make the road by walking.' We make the road as we look and listen, 'have eyes to see and ears to hear' what God is doing and how God invites us to enter the story.

"Along the same line, I was delighted when, in worship Lois Kaufmann told the scripture stories to the children. Her use of 'Godly Play' to tell the stories took me back to the story figures and emphasis on story in the Jubilee materials of several years back. The story is powerful. It is God's story that invites us to wonder and beckons us to enter and join the story. As a denomination and as a congregation we have been celebrating the story in worship as we have sung from the hymnal supplements, 'Sing the Journey' and 'Sing the Story.' All this reminds me of the words of Diana Butler Bass found in her book, 'Christianity for the Rest of Us,' 'Worship is much more than something Christians attend on Sunday morning—it is something pilgrims make together.' Worship and life with God seen this way are integrally linked to walking, journeying together as we seek to follow in the steps of Jesus."

Theda Good: "I really appreciate the family reunion feel of getting together with our adult siblings/cousins to worship and hear stories of what God is doing in other churches. It's also a great bunch of people with which to also do the business of CDC.

"I am quite fascinated with the draw of CDC. There are more and more congregations who want to be a part of CDC. I'm thankful to be part of a Conference who values relationships over a top down polity.

"I appreciate conversation around what God is doing in our midst. There is energy and enthusiasm to belong to this conference."

George Lehman: "I was struck by the ongoing interest of the Mennonite churches and even conferences in joining or affiliating with CDC. I think our corporate life has been greatly enriched by these new members and perspectives. I wonder what the future holds for us.

"I also found the congregational reporting to be inspiring. I was particularly pleased to see the ways in which local congregations have found ways to give concrete aid to people who are caught up in national immigration hysteria."

Louise Matthews: "Here are several of my thoughts on CDC:

"Most important: Welcoming new congregations to CDC, recognizing Theda among new pastors, recognizing death of former FMC pastor Marilyn Kern, resolution of recognition for President Jim Harder's service to BU.

"Most interesting: Conversations and discussions with table groups, hearing congregational stories of kingdom work, and workshop speakers."

Ruth Naylor reflections: These are changing times for the district and wider denomination, and I'm happy to see what God is doing among us. Now in my 80s, I cannot help but reflect upon change in the Central District from when I was the first woman to be elected as what is now called the "President" but was then often addressed as "Chairman." I remember a serious though playful public discussion about whether I would be referred to as "Chairwoman" or "Chairperson." Both titles sounded incredibly strange at that time. Yes, the district was living on the cusp of change back in the 1970s and 80s. Several years later, I was asked to serve as "Interim Conference Minister" for the district—another first for women in our conference. It gives me joy to see that there is nothing unusual about seeing more women in leadership these days.

Now CDC is helping to lead the way for MCUSA by being inclusive of all people, churches, and districts who want to be faithful followers of Christ regardless of sexual orientation. It feels so right to again be on the cusp of important change in the church. While I am very pleased that CDC (as well as FMC) is on this "growing edge," I do understand that change comes more slowly for some than for others. The Love of God, as the hymn says, "is broader far," and I've come to believe that it's much more inclusive than our different understandings.

As usual, reporting at our annual meeting this year was creative and interesting while still being informative. For example, the Ministerial Committee reported by using the Jeopardy TV show format. It wrapped this conference with joy, fellowship, and holy laughter. Hmm. Do you suppose that word “fellowship” could be more inclusive? Somehow “personship” doesn’t connote the same feeling of brothers and sisters in the faith.

It seems right to let Doug Luginbill, FMC member and current Conference Minister, have the parting word. He chose to respond to the question about surprises.

Doug Luginbill: “What surprised me? I don’t know the exact numbers, but I was pleasantly surprised by the number of first-time participants at the CDC Annual Meeting. Some were there representing new congregations that either just joined CDC or will be joining next June. But there were many others from congregations that have been long-term members of CDC. I was also pleased that we had nearly as many non-delegates participating as delegates. This speaks well of the spirit of the gathering and indicates that participants find meaning and purpose in gathering together as friends in Christ for worship, discernment, fellowship, and prayer.”

~ Ruth Naylor

Governance Task Force finds ministry and governance intersect, inform

Governance Task Force continues to have lively discussions about the role of governance and ministry as we meet and discern our task. In this process we have concluded that there are strong alignments between the “logistical” process of our work and the emerging congregational pilgrimage through “We Make the Road by Walking” (Brian D. McLaren.) In other words, ministry and governance intersect with one another – each informs the other. The metaphor of the road/journey seems very applicable to GTF work.

We asked Marathana Prothro to help us organize our thoughts, ask clarifying questions, and reflect back to us what she is hearing. Her companionship has been invaluable and helped us establish some specific goals.

We’ll report more at the Congregational Meeting but here are two dates to put on your calendar:

- **August 19:** Congregational Meeting – hear more about our timeline and goals we plan to accomplish with commissions.
- **September 8** [tentative date so don’t carve it in stone]: Governance Workshop at Commissions Retreat. **Anyone is welcome to attend!** This is an opportunity for emerging and established leaders, the idle curious, and persnickety people to gather for education, thoughtful conversation, creative organizing/planning, and (gasp!) laughter as we make this road together.

~ GTF: Greg Hartzler, Gerald Mast, Elizabeth Kelly, and Wanda Stopher

Mennonite Women seeking memories of past MW projects, events

Mennonite Women of First Mennonite will celebrate 100 years of meeting together as a congregational group this fall, starting with a birthday party on September 10. We have combed through the archives at Bluffton University for historical records of interest and found many things, but are looking for more. If anyone has memories of projects, pictures, or other items from events of the past 100 years, we’d love to hear about them and think about ways we could use them as we celebrate throughout the year. Contact Lori Nester, Mennonite Women president, nesterl@bluffton.edu or 419-358-9650.

Two FMC young adults begin VS in August

Jonatan Moser and Julian Harnish, 2018 graduates of Eastern Mennonite University and Goshen College, respectively, will soon begin voluntary service.

Jonatan will serve with MVS in Alamosa, CO, as an immigrant assistant case worker and English teacher at the Immigrant Resource Center. More info at:

<https://www.mennonitemission.net/Serve/units/mennonite%20voluntary%20service/Alamosa>.

Julian will serve at the Shalom Project in Lancaster, PA., where participants serve the community through full-time, professional internships and participate in seminars focused on Christian spiritual formation and personal growth. More info at: <http://shalomlancaster.org/>.

SHYF completes short-term service project in South Dakota

The senior high youth fellowship ventured to Pine Ridge, SD, in June for a service trip with the Mennonite Disaster Service Summer Youth Program, a short-term program designed for youth groups. MDS became involved in Pine Ridge after major storms devastated the area in 2015.

Those from First Mennonite included Jake Suter, Patrick Estell, Ana Neufeld Weaver, Jan Christoph Shultze, Anna and Jacob Biesecker-Mast, Christopher Harnish, and Sophia Gott, as well as adult sponsors, Paul and Laurel Neufeld Weaver, Gary Wetherill, and Shannon Thiebeau.

Pine Ridge is a Lakota Sioux Indian reservation located in southwest South Dakota. The reservation has a beautiful landscape and dark history. The group learned about the tragedy of Wounded Knee, the Black Hills, and how the US government has created destitute living conditions for the inhabitants of the reservation throughout history.



At left, JC Shultze prepares to begin painting. Above, from left: Laurel Neufeld Weaver, Shannon Thiebeau, Gary Wetherill, Sophia Gott, Jacob Biesecker-Mast, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Christopher Harnish, Paul Neufeld Weaver, Jacob Suter, and JC Schultze. FMC youth and chaperones.



FMC youth and chaperones exploring some rock formations in the Badlands of South Dakota.

MCC kit collection underway at FMC

Just as back-to-school sales have begun, MCC school kit collection has begun. Please note that kit requirements have changed this year:

- 4 spiral or perforated-pages notebooks (8.5 in x 10.5 in and 70 sheets)
- 8 new unsharpened pencils
- 1 ruler (flat, good quality; must indicate 30 cm; inch markings optional)
- 12 colored pencils (in packaging)
- 1 large eraser
- 2 new black or blue ballpoint pens
- 1 small metal pencil sharpener (one or two holes) (The sharpeners are most likely to be found in the office section of stores)

We always need bag fabric and people to sew bags. Heavier fabric is ideal for school kits. Sewing directions are on the kit card in the kit collection area of Fellowship Hall. Some precut bags and cords are also there.

Relief kits: MCC also notes an extreme need for relief kits. Kit lists are posted on the bulletin board in the kit collection area or you may write a check to FMC listing “relief kits” on the memo line.

~ Sue Schaaf and Jean Miller

Building bridges: Conversations on disability and theology

This article was written by Kathy Dickson and was originally published in the Summer 2018 issue of Connections, the newsletter of the Anabaptist Disabilities Network. Dickson has served ADN as a volunteer Field Associate since 2010. She is Director of Vocational Discernment and Community Engagement at Methodist Theological School in Ohio and attends First Mennonite Church.

This past spring, I worked with Bill Gaventa, a leading voice in disability theology and justice, to craft a conference about disability, theology, and faith communities. Hosted at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Ohio, the conference drew in scholars, students, families, advocates, and individuals. Together, we discussed how to make our congregations more inclusive, how to form partnerships with service and governmental agencies, and how Biblical interpretations on disability have shaped our thinking. At the helm of the conversations was Bill, doing what he does best: making connections, sharing insights, working to bridge his own work as a chaplain, advocate, writer, and consultant with the needs and desires of those in the room.

I became interested in disability theology and ministry during a pastoral care and counseling class in my first year of seminary. In this class, we explored how to provide pastoral care to distinct groups of people: the elderly, youth, people with terminal illness, and so on. At this time, I was swimming through personal waves of grief as my beloved aunt Debbie had recently passed away. Aunt Debbie had Down syndrome, and the themes we studied in class drew out questions, concerns, and frustrations about the end of life care she had received.

As it came time to select a final research project, I decided to study pastoral care for persons with intellectual disabilities. My professor was doubtful that I'd find resources and encouraged me to explore a different topic. But, fueled by a passion grown from loving someone deeply, I was not interested in exploring a different topic. I wanted to know how pastors could support people with intellectual disabilities. I began by reaching out to Paul Leichty, the executive director of ADN at the time, who put me in touch with Bill. I sent off an email to him without much expectation of a response. What I got in return, however, was not only a slew of resources, books to read, and people to talk to, but also an opening into a wide world of disability ministry. Disability ministry has since shaped my life. Through this connection I gained remarkable experiences with the Summer Institute in Theology and Disability, I became a field associate with ADN, and 10 years later I planned this conference on disability and theology.



A key presenter was John Martin, director of the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. John presented on the state of affairs in Ohio in terms of disability support and access. This presentation sparked rich conversations and questions around the roles of faith communities in conjunction with governmental policy.

Overall, the conference wasn't about prescribing how to do something special for those with disabilities. **The intention was to flip the conversation from what we can do to be more inclusive, to how we CREATE space to empower all people to be their whole selves.**

Since the conference, there have been more conversations about disability on our campus and in area churches. One pastor who attended the conference told me that while preaching the Sunday afterward, a child with Autism cried out loudly. His father rushed to remove him from the sanctuary. However, the pastor stopped his sermon and addressed the church saying; **“Can we decide right here and now that we are going to be a church where our friend can be himself? Can we be that church where crying out is okay?”**

This pastor embodied the message from our conference: *we resemble the kingdom of God when all who are gathered have the space to express their whole selves and share their unique gifts.*

Villegas describes worship, congregational life at Chapel Hill Mennonite

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship in Chapel Hill, N.C. He is a member of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches and has served on on the denominational board of Mennonite Church USA, as well as non-profit organizations, including School for Conversion and Open Table Ministries.

At the 2017 CDC annual meeting I was asked to introduce our congregation to the delegates. I had forgotten to prepare for that responsibility, so I scrambled to jot down some notes at my table while representatives from the other churches described their worship and context and congregational life. The notes I scribbled turned into a theme I decided to explore through writing, which (a year later) turned into a reflection published this month in *The Christian Century* (as one of the magazine's cover stories). I thought I would share it with you since it originated as the brief introductory remarks I offered at the CDC assembly in Bluffton last year.

~ Isaac Villegas

Read the full article at: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/gods-love-our-bodies>.

Opportunities to learn about immigration and respond with MCC

MCC works with the issue of migration around the world and walks with people who migrate, people who struggle not to migrate and people who provide hospitality to migrants in many places.

Learn: Consider participating in the MCC Migration Learning Tour to Guatemala and Honduras on November 7-17.

Pray: Pray for the migrants who made the difficult choice to leave their home communities in the hope of a better life, for the detained immigrants as they wait in detention and for the border portal agents to execute their job justly and humanely.

Advocate: Contact your elected officials to express your desire for more humane immigration policies.

Serve: Become an immigration court watcher through the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants.

Give: Donate money to MCC for ongoing work with issues surrounding immigration.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit mcc.org/immigration.