



## Advent 2017

“Past-Present-Future. Living in the present, we can only draw our hope for the future from looking at the repeated themes of the past...from chaos emerges tiny seeds of increasing power to grasp the earth with roots, to stretch toward the sun and sprout leaves, to blossom and give forth fruit. ‘Let it be’ as we participate in God’s miracles of rebirth.” *(Text and design by Carolyn Rich)*



## Preparing for another congregational transition

Well, here we are on the cusp of another congregational transition. At the end of this year, on December 31, 2017, Pastor George will complete his 18-month term as Pastoral Associate at First Mennonite Church. I’ve experienced his arrival, only two weeks after Pastor Steve’s death in June of 2016 as an act of God’s love and care for us. I am deeply grateful for his pastoral care and leadership during this time of grief, adjustment, and transition. Pastor George’s ministry experience and love of God’s people have blessed us as individuals and as a congregation. We will celebrate his ministry among us with a potluck following worship on December 10.

Even as we say good-bye to Pastor George, we are considering a candidate for Pastor of Connections, Theda Good. We will have the opportunity to learn to know her on December 2 and 3 and we’ll vote on extending a call to her on December 10. There really is a lot going on at First Mennonite Church! We’re not done with transition quite yet.

In the midst of all this change, I’m feeling the need to make clear but temporary plans for the first two months of 2018. This brief temporary coverage plan will ensure that important tasks are addressed at a time that will require additional attention to other areas of transition in the life of our congregation. Therefore, in consultation with Staff Relations Committee and with Council, I’ve

developed a temporary coverage plan to be in effect January and February of 2018. In the event that Theda is called by the congregation, the temporary coverage plan will offer time for her to get moved and settled.

God's care has been evident as we journeyed together over the past two years. May God's Spirit continue to be our guide and teacher. The temporary coverage plan is noted below. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me. I'll be happy to talk.

-- *Pastor Wanda Stopher*

## **Temporary Coverage Plan January and February 2018**

### **Pastoral Care**

- Pastor Wanda will place a high priority on pastoral care during this time. She will coordinate and provide care with the assistance of **Ruth Naylor** and **Elizabeth Kelly**.
- **Louise Matthews** will lead the monthly gathering of FMC elders at Mennonite Memorial Home. Pastor Wanda will attend and participate as she is able. She will work with **Mary Pannabecker Steiner** to send invitations.
- **Rich Bucher** and **Gloria Hernandez** will lead the monthly gathering of elders at Maple Crest. Again, Pastor Wanda will work with **Mary** to send invitations and will attend and participate as she is able.

### **Worship**

- The preaching schedule will be developed with Pastor Wanda preaching 2 Sundays per month. She will also invite others to preach and will coordinate the preaching schedule. Although Pastor Wanda typically preaches 2-3 times per month, some additional coverage of her preaching responsibilities will be needed to create space for her to focus increased attention to pastoral care, and administration.
- Coverage for the Pastoral Prayer in worship will be provided by Pastor Wanda and various individuals from the congregation. Judy Diller will coordinate the Pastoral Prayer schedule.

### **Commissions**

- Pastor Wanda will be available to all commissions as needed. She will attend commission meetings during this time as able/needed in consultation with the commission chairs.

### **Administration**

- Pastor Wanda will continue to serve as supervisor and head of staff.

### **Dates to remember**

Dec. 1-3 – Pastoral candidate at FMC

Dec. 3 – Advent One

Dec. 3 – Holiday Collage Concert, Yoder Recital Hall, 2:30 p.m.

Dec. 10 – Farewell potluck, program for George O'Reilly, noon

Dec. 10 – Handel's *Messiah*, Founders Hall, 4 p.m.

Dec. 13 – Pastor visits with MMH residents

Dec. 14 – Red Cross Blood Drive, 1-6 p.m., FH

Dec. 17 – Children's Christmas program, 4 p.m., sanctuary

Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve Service, 6:30 p.m.

Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve Candlelight service, 11 p.m., English Lutheran Church

Dec. 25 – Christmas Day, OFFICE CLOSED

Dec. 28 – Pastor visits with MC residents

Dec. 31 – All-church brunch, 9:15 a.m., FH

**JP Schumacher and the preschoolers did some building as they learned the story of Jacob's ladder. Below, Evan Blount builds a ladder. Digging in the rice are from left, Micah Hartzler, Evan Blount, Milena King, and Everett Miller.**

## Learning about Jacob's ladder in preschool SS



### **And I bid you a fond farewell!**

The past 18 months I have been at First Mennonite as Pastoral Associate, I have experienced so very many meaningful, pleasant and significant encounters and events.

I certainly do commend this fellowship for engaging your life together in such committed ways. The vast majority of folks here exhibit deep commitment to each other, to the congregation and its program, and to the faith history and faith expressions of Anabaptists and of this fellowship.

Coming to know a good many of you to some extent at least has been a great joy. First Mennonite does seem to encourage all and each one to feel free to "be themselves." While extending such freedom can in some places prompt an uneasy reluctance to make oneself too well known, at FMC the belief in hospitality and a commitment to doing any work required to build cohesiveness has encouraged authenticity and openness in expression and welcome and appreciation in relating. This is a great good in your midst.

I personally appreciate the readiness to receive and celebrate the gifts I possess for pastoral office and even my idiosyncrasies of personality and style. I commend the continuance of such acceptance in the future, both for pastors and staff, but even more for each other. Again, this is a great good in your midst.

Most fellowships in this time are prone to becoming somewhat politically centered. The focus of an Anabaptist group should certainly by nature be somewhat more resistant to being pulled into partisan political thinking. And the desire to emphasize how the biblical message of the "upside-down-kingdom" speaks to all political or governmental entities is a good emphasis to embrace in seeking to resist "being conformed to this world." For this world does include both conservative and progressive voices speaking to influence the lifestyle of the masses. Most of all, I commend FMC for recalling and re-emphasizing a core commitment to remaining centered in the word of God.

This emphasis is of course only truly effective when the “Word is interpreted in the gathered community.” The discernment conversations early in 2017 were truly good practice for “speaking well together.” I commend this as a practice to intentionally repeat often, and with a similar level of participation as in those interactions. Expect conversation to be varied and at times challenging. But be ready to expend the effort to make conversations complete and sufficiently deep. Only as the community continues to truly know one another can the expectation of flourishing be realistic.

I simply do wish to say thank you for all the kindness and grace I have received. Thank you for the many sincere expressions of care and gratitude. Thank you for simply making some space for me to be among you as myself. Continue to do such things in the new pastoral and staff relationships of your future and you will continue to be a place which those called to lead here will find hospitable and fulfilling.

The Lord bless you and keep you by the Spirit’s ministries in your midst.

*--Pastor George O’Reilly*

## **Getting to know....Tracey Harris**

**MPS: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up and why?**

From the time that I was a very young child up until I was in high school, I always wanted to be a vet. I am an animal lover and wanted to be able to help them. That was until I went to an information day at Ohio State and learned more about what the profession entailed and I decided it would be better not to go in that direction.

**MPS: What is one accomplishment people might not know about that makes you proud?**

I ran a half marathon a few years ago. I love to run 5K and 10K, but that was a distance that I had never run up until that point. It was a goal that I set for myself and it meant a lot when I was actually able to accomplish it. What made it even more special was running that race with a person who had been my best friend since we were 9 years old...having her support meant the world to me!

**MPS: What church/denomination did you grow up in? What initially drew you to FMC?**

I grew up in the Lutheran Church from the time that I was born until I graduated from high school. When I went to Bluffton College, I learned more about the Mennonite faith and always wanted to learn more. Our neighbors go to FMC so knowing people here made it easier for us to try something new. Also, my youngest daughter, Gabby, goes to Release Time at school here so she also asked to try coming on a Sunday as well.

**MPS: What is one thing you are passionate about?**

I have always been passionate about helping people who are less fortunate, can’t advocate for themselves, or people who just need a helping hand or a smile. Obviously this is what led me to social work in the first place, but as I have gotten older, I feel this has only blossomed. I want my



**The Harris family includes from left, Brook, Veronica, Presley, Tracey, and Gabby (center front.)**

children to understand how important empathy is and to learn to act on it as well. It is one thing to be empathetic toward others, but taking the steps to help them is just as important.

**MPS: Tell us about the most inspirational thing you have experienced.**

About a year ago I donated a kidney to a woman who grew up with kidney disease and also experiences developmental delays. As I saw her go through the kidney transplant process, which was extremely difficult for her and took her over 6 months to fully recover from, I was inspired by her strength, determination and innate ability to look at the positive side of things. While it would have been easy for her to fall into depression, stop fighting or become angry, she never did. She always saw the positives in the process and inspired me to do the same.

**MPS: What is a hard-learned lesson from your life?**

A hard-learned lesson from my life is that life does not always take the path that you anticipate. You may have a plan, but you never fully know where God wants you to go. I didn't expect to be divorced at a young age with two very young daughters. While that is not what how I thought my life would turn out, I learned that it doesn't help to be bitter or angry. I took the other path and found out that what lies at the end of it may be better than you ever expected.

**MPS: Tell us about your work. What do you most enjoy/least enjoy about it?**

I am the Student Disability Coordinator at ONU, so I work with students who need accommodations due to a medical, physical, learning, or emotional disability. I enjoy helping students find their own path in college and figure out what works for them to address their own unique circumstances. I also enjoy seeing the students who have always struggled and have to work hard earn their diploma and experience that joy with them. The least favorite part of my job is having to see people struggle with their disabilities and question their ability to be successful in college.

**MPS: What has been your favorite road trip or vacation?**

I have two...1.) My husband and I went to London and Paris last summer for our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I have wanted to go to Paris for about 20 years and getting to visit the art museums and experience that culture was amazing. It was also very humbling. As Americans, I think we often take for granted the fact that everyone speaks English and removing myself from that comfort was very challenging and helps me realize what other nationalities face on a regular basis.

**MPS: How would you describe your favorite meal?**

Something grilled (chicken or fish) with a fresh vegetable and shared with my family.

**MPS: Best book you've ever read? Best movie? Why to both?**

It's hard for me to pick just one book because I love reading, but the first one that comes to my mind is "Room" by Emma Donoghue. While this book is extremely disturbing, I enjoyed seeing the strength and determination of this little boy and his mother. Getting to read about their bond and the way they learned to survive in horrible conditions was captivating.

**MPS: What have you learned from your daughters?**

I would say that they have taught me how to see the good in people. There are times that I have only been able to focus on the negative attributes that someone has, due to something that has happened and one of my daughters will unintentionally mention something about that person that makes them special and unique. They have taught me that instead of being cynical and focusing on the negative, I should try to find something positive and respectful about that person. They have

also taught me to enjoy the little things and cherish every moment with them because they will grow up too quickly. Having two daughters who are 7-8 years older than Gabby has helped me realize just how fast they grow, so I should cherish the moments when she is little.

### **Everyone is encouraged to participate in Christmas caroling event**

All youth, families, and friends are invited to sing Christmas carols at Mennonite Memorial Home on Sunday, Dec. 3 at 6 p.m., with snacks in the fellowship hall afterwards. We would like to extend a special invitation to mentors for this joint youth group-mentoring activity. Help us spread Christmas cheer!  
– Shannon Thiebeau, Amber Shelly, Lisa Shelly

### **Youth groups busy in December**

*The SHYF thanks the congregation for their generosity on Sunday for their pasta bar fundraiser. With your help, they were able to raise \$954 to put towards the summer service trip and the 2019 MCUSA Youth Convention. Thanks to all!*

- Sunday, Dec. 3: Caroling at Mennonite Memorial Home, 6-8 p.m. Everyone (friends, family, neighbors, etc.) is invited to participate in this time of fellowship and singing. We will meet at MMH to spread some Christmas cheer to our neighbors at MMH and afterwards gather in the Fellowship Hall at church for a cookie potluck and hot chocolate (bring a treat to share.)
- Sunday, Dec. 17: Pizza and Christmas Decorating, 12 p.m. In this service project to the church, we will decorate the sanctuary for Christmas Eve. We will enjoy pizza for lunch and then transform the sanctuary for the holCovenant Mennonite Fellowship in Sarasota, Florida iday.
- Sunday, Dec. 31: Christmas teardown, noon. Sadly, Christmas must come to an end. To prepare the church for Epiphany (the season to celebrate Christ being revealed to the Magi), we will take the decorations down.

If you have questions, contact Shannon Thiebeau at [fmc.shannon@bluffton.edu](mailto:fmc.shannon@bluffton.edu) or 419-773-9446.



**Taking a breather during painting duties at Camp Friedenswald work camp are from left, Laurel Neufeld Weaver, Seth Andreas, Anna Biesecker-Mast, and Ana Neufeld Weaver. SHYF and JHYF and their adult leaders completed jobs inside and outside during the November 10-12 weekend.**