

Menno-Life



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Anna Biesecker Mast (left) and Elizabeth Nisly participate in worship at Camp Friedenswald winter camp. Thirteen of our senior high students attended, along with Shannon Thiebeau and Ray Person. Parables, a worship ensemble at Goshen College, and Jo-ann Brandt, a Goshen professor, led the worship experiences.



Listen...

Back in December my four siblings and spouses, my mother, Janet and I spent an overnight in Holmes County. It was a belated birthday celebration for my 60th birthday in October. We stayed up after our meal together and talked about our lives and the things we have experienced in the past year that have been difficult. It was a time of discovery as I was not aware of all the things that my siblings have gone through in terms of relationships and health concerns. We gathered after breakfast again and this time we spent time praying for each other. This was the first time I can remember that we shared together so openly and deeply from our lives. Afterward, it felt good to know what others in my family are dealing with and to remember them this year in more specific ways.

Recently a group of 300 clergy met in Charleston, South Carolina, to discuss how we can learn to know each other better within the faith community. Dr. James Forbes, former pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, was one of the main speakers. In light of the tragic shooting during a bible study in Charleston last summer, Dr. Forbes made a case for coming together in bible studies, eating in small groups together. He suggested that these groups be multiracial in order to bring more awareness and understanding across racial lines.

Which got me to thinking....Lent is coming in February this year. This would be an ideal time for groups of four to six to get together in someone's home for reading and reflecting on the lectionary scriptures for the coming Sunday. You will be receiving a Lenten brochure in your church box before Lent begins. The scriptures will be printed in that brochure along with the themes for each Sunday. Also, the scriptures are listed in the bulletin each week for the following Sunday. Meeting with a bowl of soup, bread and fruit will be a simple way of increasing our awareness of each as well as deepening our faith experience during Lent. You can certainly adapt this plan. If a weekly meeting is too much then go with every two weeks. As your Associate Pastor of Spiritual Development, I want to offer support to other ideas you may have for increasing your faith and development of relationships within First Mennonite Church. May the Lenten experience be a rich time of growing in faith as you contemplate the meaning of this time of year.

-- Steven Yoder, Associate Pastor

Among our neighbors and friends

Happy birthday to:

Ernie Porzelius, 87, Feb. 1

Elaine Rich, 90, Feb. 8

Barbara Bauman, 85, Feb. 16

Treva Stratton, 85, Feb. 19

Alice Gellert, 101, Feb. 28

Ruth Unrau, 94, Feb. 28

In our prayers...

Margaret Tiessen and her family -- Isaac died Jan. 23 at Hilty Home, Pandora. A funeral service was held on Friday in Leamington, Ontario. Isaac is also survived by a son, Robert, and daughter-in-law, Ingrid, and their two children, who live in Calgary, Alberta.

Joyce and Don Hostetler and their family-- Joyce's sister, Christina Detwiler, 90, passed away at Betty House on Dec. 25. A memorial service was held Jan. 5 Betty House and funeral services and burial were held in Columbiana, Ohio.

Bob and Alice Ruth Ramseyer and their family -- Their son-in-law, Bob Konicek, Bloomington, IN., died Jan. 4 in Sturgis, MI. Bob is survived by his wife, Sue Ramseyer, their children, Tim, Elizabeth and Matthew, as well as Sue's siblings, Mark (Norma Wyse) Ramseyer, Joy (John) Betts, and Jeanne (Tom) Stenson. A funeral was held Jan. 11.

Ron, Linda, Jacob and Luke Headings and their family -- Ron's dad, Phillip Headings, died Jan. 15 in Kansas. A memorial service was held Jan. 18.

Gayle Trollinger and her family -- Her mother, Barbara Alice Marston Norris died on Jan. 18 in Winona Lake, Indiana. Services were held on Jan. 21.

Congratulations...

To Gayle Trollinger -- Gayle's daughter, Abby Trollinger and her husband, Dan Hatch who welcomed a daughter, Eloise Rebekah Trollinger Hatch on January 20 in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Red Cross Bloodmobile

The Red Cross Bloodmobile will be at First Mennonite on Thursday, Feb. 4, from noon-6 p.m. *Volunteers are needed in various capacities before, after and during the event.* There is a sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall. If you wish to donate blood, please call 1-800-RED Cross or go to redcrossblood.org, sponsor code "fmenncbl." Walk-ins are also welcome. *Remember to bring your donor card, driver's license or two other forms of ID.*

Mennonite Women

"Scripture is a God-Breathed Work of Creativity," is the theme for Mennonite Women, Monday, Feb. 8, at 7 p.m. in the fellowship hall. Joanne Niswander will share her experiences of writing in the evening's program, tying it into the devotional, which she will also lead. Refreshments will be provided and served by Ginger Theis and Kay Huber. Please check our Mennonite Women pillar bulletin board for the report and photos of our January, Creativity Fair. Each month minutes and photos are posted there from the past month's program.

First Night returning with a new look

First Night returns Feb. 17- March 16 with a meal and program to follow. If you are interested in presenting a 30-minute program please contact Steve Yoder. The weekly schedule will be as follows:

5:30 p.m. Supper begins

6-6:30 p.m. After meal program

6 p.m. Children in Cherub Choir will be dismissed for choir until 6:30

6:30 p.m. Jubilate Choir

6:20-7:15 p.m. Adult Bells

7:15-8:15 p.m. Youth Bells

7:15 -8:15 p.m. Chancel Choir



Steve Harnish and Mary Ann and Clarence Kooker enjoying one of last year's First Nights.

SHYF/JHYF updates



Taking a break during the JHYF winter retreat at Camp Friedenswald are (from left) Sophia Smucker, Elizabeth Nisly, Jacob Biesecker Mast, Jacob Suter, Patrick Estell, Grace Paquin, Ellie Nickel and Sophia Gott. They were accompanied by Shannon Thiebeau, Carrie Mast and Walt Paquin.

For the youth groups, January was about the Friedenswald winter retreats! The SHYF learned about how we can worship God by taking care of creation and learning to find God in nature. Despite the rain and consequently, the lack of sledding, we still had fun playing games indoors, drinking gallons of hot chocolate, and getting muddy for the Friedenswald Winter Olympics, in which First Mennonite reigned victorious. We were awarded the coveted "Silver Leaf Plaque," which now proudly hangs in the youth room.

The JHYF also had a great time at their retreat. Unfortunately, the speakers for the retreat were unable to make it, so our topic changed from “#BlackLivesMatter and the Gospel” to how we can include and appreciate people with disabilities in the church. There was snow this time and many hours of sledding were jammed into the weekend.

Coming up next month, the SHYF will host a “Parents’ Night Out” fundraiser on Saturday, Feb. 20. Parents are invited to drop off their children at the church for childcare from 5-9 p.m. In addition, the SHYF and the JHYF along with their mentors will have an afternoon of games with the residents of Maple Crest on February 28.

MCC Peace Gathering in Kidron

All are invited to join MCC Great Lakes for a day of workshops, worship and dialogue on Saturday, April 16. The day will begin at 9 a.m. with worship and end at 5 p.m. MCC U.S. staff will join other presenters in leading workshops on immigration, gun violence/incarceration, Iran, school bullying and anti-oppression. Following the seminars, there will be a Q&A time Lunch will be provided. The Peace Gathering will take place at Kidron Mennonite Church, 3987 Co Hwy 52, Kidron, OH 44636. Please RSVP to Jorge Vielman, Peace & Justice Coordinator, at JorgeVielman@mcc.org or 574-534-4133.

Get acquainted with Bret Stopher

Many at FMC have met Bret Stopher, who is married to our new pastor, Wanda Stopher. We thought it would be interesting to learn more about Bret, so Mary Steiner interviewed him.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born in Mount Vernon, Ohio but raised in Centerburg, Ohio, which is known as the geographic center of the state. This is about 32 miles northeast of Columbus.

Tell us some facts about your childhood -- family members (i.e. parents/siblings), during and after school activities (sports, music, etc.), first job.

I have one older sister by two years. We were normal for the times, fought most of the time and never really did much together. My mom is still living and has remarried as my father suffered a heart attack and passed away 27 years ago. Growing up as a kid, it was out the door, on my bike, and to the next pick-up game of whatever. If it had a “ball” I was there! Later in my teenage years we got into the boating and skiing scene and anything else related to water sports. Then motorcycles came into the scene (dirt bikes) and high school sports. I played football, basketball, and baseball, which solidified my decision to become a teacher and coach. I mowed lawns as a kid and loved working outside, which I still do!

How did you learn about Bluffton College? Why did you choose to attend Bluffton? What was your major? Activities?

When it became time to start searching for a college, I knew I wanted to go someplace where I could play football right away. I visited about a dozen or so colleges but when I was here in Bluffton, I sensed it was different. It was the only campus that as I toured, people would actually look at me and made me feel welcome. When we drove home, my decision was made. I still feel the same about the community! Wanting to teach and coach, I majored in health, physical education, and recreation and picked up a minor in science. I played football for four years and had fun with many different intramural sports. I met many lifelong friends and made lasting relationships.

You worked for Paul Diller at the funeral home, correct? What were your responsibilities? Did you ever consider becoming a funeral director?

One day I was looking at the job’s posting board in Marbeck Center and I saw that the Diller Funeral Home was advertising for needing help. I called, went up and talked with them, and then the next thing I knew I was employed. My first trip there to work was a test for squeamishness I guess! I won’t mention what I helped with, but I guess I passed as I ended up working for them for 3 years. I did just about everything that was needed to be done, helping with funerals, driving the hearse, washing cars, house sitting, lawn work, snow removal (especially during the blizzard of 78), and I

was the flower delivery guy. Just ask Wanda about all of the nice bouquets that she received! No, I never once thought about this as a profession.

How did you meet Wanda?

We met one time in the lunch line, so she says. I remember too! Next we ended up having two different classes together, one of Gene Caskey's and the other of Linda Suter's. I guess this must have been fate since we were on different educational tracks.

What did you do after graduation? Did you have a job right away?

I graduated in 80 and Wanda in 81 so the first year after my graduation, we were married and both served as Head Residents of Lincoln Hall. During this time, she finished up, I took a few classes, and I also typed 100 cover letters trying to find us teaching jobs throughout the state that were in near proximity of each other. We found two possibilities and ended up moving to London, Ohio. I taught there and she taught at Fairbanks, a consolidated school about 20 miles to the north.



Bret and a 12-pound walleye that he caught on Lake Erie near Huron, OH.

You were a teacher for 30 years. What did you teach? Did you coach? Over the years, how did teaching and students change?

I taught science classes for my first 5 years of teaching in London, Ohio and when we moved to Archbold, I taught a few science classes along with computer classes in Wauseon. Eventually I just taught the technology courses for my remaining years. I retired with 30 years of teaching to my credit. I coached 3 sports while in London and then just football at Wauseon. In 93 we won the state championship! In teaching technology classes, I was continually changing curriculum to update to the newer software. It was pretty dynamic, and sometimes draining. Students are students! The times changed but many of the antics didn't. I did have one advantage though; I was in high school once too so many of the tricks were already mastered so I was able to "nip" many of those in the "bud." There were good students too that made teaching equally fulfilling.

When you retired from teaching, did you have specific plans for a new career or other ways to fill your days?

Being a teacher I had many different summer jobs. For 6 years I worked on a fishing boat on Lake Erie on a walleye charter boat. This job enabled me to sell our boat that we had used to fish the Great Lakes with for salmon and walleye and buy a motorcycle (actually two). I quit the fishing gig and applied for and worked at becoming a Motorcycle Safety Instructor for the State of Ohio. I taught for one summer and I thought this was going to be my retirement job. It wasn't!

Tell us about your job with Share and Care. What did you enjoy about that job?

Needing something else to do, I began working for the Care and Share Thrift Store in Archbold as the Furniture Coordinator, a new position that was created. It was pretty amazing to see all of the different donations that we received, but equally if not more amazing to see what customers would actually buy from the store. Often times we would have some items that we either didn't or couldn't

sell. I had worked an agreement with a person in town that had a free weekly give-away program for the needy. Just about all of the furniture items found a new home in one way or another. I made new friendships with not only the two managers, but with the many volunteers as well. I also got to know many of the clients that we served as we offered a pick-up and delivery service. Even though it was a part-time job, I would always try to work around the customers to meet their needs.

Tell us about your current job.

Now in Bluffton and mostly settled in, it became time for me to seek part-time employment here. I saw on the Bluffton Icon that one of the local banks was advertising for the need of a courier. I applied, got checked out, and was hired. I have been filling in for now as needed, but will be on regular schedule come springtime. It is a lot of driving and meeting new people and learning new procedures, but I have enjoyed it, not to mention it is a good way to become familiar with the different communities that we serve.

When you aren't working, what do you enjoy doing?

I still very much enjoy being outside and doing whatever. We put in some raised vegetable beds this fall once we moved so those will occupy some of my time this spring and summer as well as still doing yard work. We still have a few projects to work at inside our house that I will eventually get to. I plan on getting back on my bicycle and putting a few road miles on too when the weather breaks.

Okay, one more question. I know this one might take awhile. How did you discover disc golf? For those who are unfamiliar with it, what exactly is disc golf?

I am very involved in playing disc golf. Our son introduced me to it a few years ago. It is a game, it is a challenge, and there is competition, so it has my interest! Basically if you don't know what disc golf is, it is just like ball golf, but instead you throw a modified Frisbee (disc) which is smaller and more dense than a regular Frisbee into a metal basket that is surrounded by chains. Same objective, the fewest number of throws wins, but there are a lot of variables involved which includes; trees, hills, water, wind, length of courses, weeds and other forms of rough areas, you name it. West Virginia has snakes that I am not particularly fond of!

Disc golf is a game that anyone can play; all ages, all levels of skill, with a group, in leagues, in tournaments or other events, or even just by yourself! It is an opportunity to get out and enjoy nature as no two courses are the same. It is a game that offers a chance to get some good exercise as you walk and throw the courses. Some courses are flat, some are short, some long, some very hilly, some over 5 miles worth of walking to complete 18 holes. Some come with so many trees that you can't even see the basket that you are throwing to! Some are set up to be played under the stars during "Glow" rounds. You always see something different, from deer, bald eagles, squirrel, rabbits, rocks, rivers, and many "other" characters, just depending on where you are playing for the round. For me, it is a challenge to throw the best shot possible and to always try to better my score, especially when playing with our kids!

In the area there are several courses to choose from. Findlay has two courses; Ada (ONU) has a course, Lima, Ottawa, Bowling Green, St. Mary's and others as you venture a little further away have available courses. I helped a little with the construction on the course in McComb. Ohio presently has around 186 courses now with a few that are under construction. Michigan has around 316. Two other guys and I are planning to propose a course here in Bluffton out at Village Park. If this happens, we will have a nice local course to play at!

Does Wanda play disc golf?

Good question! She goes with me sometimes, sometimes to just walk for the exercise and enjoy the outside, sometimes to be used as my spotter on some of the "blind" holes that some courses offer, and yes, sometimes to play, especially when some or all of the kids are home. As mentioned, it is a game for all and all skill levels! If any of you would like to give it a try, let me know and I am sure we can find time to take you out and introduce you to the game. Warning though, it may become addictive!