



First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 64, No. 2 • February 2017

Lynn Miller assists Peter DeMeo with communion during the January 29 worship service. (Photo by Fred Steiner)



Congregational Discernment Team hosts and invites conversations

As we discern together during January and February, the Congregational Discernment Team has identified a process based on a methodology rooted in the belief that the community of faith is an interpretive community when it comes to interpretation of scripture, and also as we seek to understand who we are and how God's Spirit is moving/calling us into the future. Therefore, we are intentionally hosting and inviting conversations, around tables, through testimonies in worship, and in the many informal conversations that take place among us.

Another implication of this belief in the community of faith as interpretive body is that we want to continue both listening and responding, creating a conversation loop through which we continue to find our way. This isn't a linear process and sometimes makes us feel uncertain, but it can also help us focus on and be especially attentive to the Spirit who guides us.

This doesn't mean we are meandering without any outcome in mind! The intense schedule of three congregational discernment gatherings within two months was designed to lay the groundwork for a search committee that we hope will begin their work sometime in March. In addition to the

discernment process, there are several other things being done in parallel. Our Conference Minister has been alerted that we hope to begin a search in March. Council is working at identifying a group of individuals to serve that is representative of the congregation. Staff Relations Committee is updating our Congregational Information Form. All this is in motion, in an attempt to initiate our search in a timely way, at a time of year when many pastors who are open to a new call are also searching. It is also important timing, because we've engaged Pastor George as a Pastoral Associate for 18 months, which will end in December of 2017.

When you read the summary (bright orange page) of the first discernment event you saw that the list of core values that will carry us forward is a raw list. Deacons since spent some time synthesizing that list, and came up with four main values:

1. Following Jesus: This is first, and the value out of which all the others flow. At the core as FMC, we value *following Jesus*. We might call it discipleship. It is a particular way of following Jesus in an Anabaptist understanding, with a deep commitment to mission, service, and peace and justice.
2. Nurturing faith: We at FMC are committed to *nurturing faith within the fabric of our relationships*. In particular, we long for community and nurturing relationships over the entire life span and range of life experiences, and in ways that are intergenerational.
3. Connections: As mentioned above, we are committed to lives of mission, peace and justice, and service, reflecting Christ's broad invitation to all people, our neighbors across the street and around the world. (Note that about half items on the list have an outward focus.)
4. Worship: Finally, FMC places a high value on corporate worship and we recognize that for us, worship and music are of the same cloth. Our worship each week purposefully grows out of scripture and engages us with scripture.

Although they were not developed with a direct link to our vision statement, "Vision: Healing and Hope" these four values align with and support this vision. "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." May God's Spirit continue to lead us, breathing new life into our community of faith as we seek to be faithful in this time and into the future.

-- Wanda Stopher

A suggestion for today and tomorrow and the days to come...

Re: Women's March

How do we keep the impact alive? After 9/11 we heard "We will never forget." My suggestion is that when we write or email an elected official -- especially a representative or senator -- that we add at the end, "Don't forget 1-21-17."

-- Dwight Kauffman

Happy birthday to:

Ernie Porzelius, 88, Feb. 1

Ruth Unrau, 95, Feb. 28

Treva Stratton, 86, Feb. 19

Events/dates to remember

February 9 -- American Red Cross Blood Drive, 1-6 p.m.

February 11 -- SHYF babysitting fundraiser, 5-9 p.m.

February 13 -- Mennonite Women, 7 p.m.

February 17 -- Menno-Life deadline

February 26 -- SHYF soup fundraiser, 5:30 p.m.

February 26 -- Congregational Discernment all-church event, 6 p.m.

February 28 -- FIRST Night, 6 p.m.



New communion ware

We thank Dwight and Trella Kauffman, who crafted the lovely communion ware we used for the first time on January 29 as we celebrated the Lord's Supper. (Photo by Fred Steiner)

Mennonite Women to meet February 13

Mennonite Women will meet Monday, Feb. 13, at 7 p.m. in the fellowship hall for a program on "Shrinking from Challenge." Devotional author Marlene Kropf writes, "Some transitions seem too overwhelming to consider because they are too costly, too dangerous, too frightening, or simply unthinkable. Yet, in God's mysterious ways, we are sometimes called to risk everything for a future only God can see." In preparation, we might ask ourselves, "What is our experience with daunting challenges?" The presenter will be Pastor Wanda Stopher, with devotions led by Monica Harnish. Rhonda Winstead and Linda Miller will provide refreshments.

Central District MW encourage support of six organizations

We have received a letter of invitation from CDC Mennonite Women informing FMC women about six organizations they feel "encourages all women on their spiritual journey towards wholeness and joy in Jesus Christ." These organizations "step away from complacency and speak out as Jesus did for those who have been marginalized and silenced." These include:

- Women's Scholarship of AMBS
- Camp Friedenswald (location of annual Women's Retreat)
- Women in Leadership Project
<http://mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/peacebuilding/women-in-leadership-project/>
- *Timbrel* magazine <https://mennonitewomenusa.org/timbrel/>
- Dove's Nest <http://dovesnest.net/>
- Our Stories Untold <http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/>

For further details of these projects, see the letter posted on the MW pillar in the fellowship hall or check the website links. You are encouraged to consider donating to and supporting these organizations. Donations may be made by checks through our MW organization or directly to the organizations.

Red Cross blood drive February 9 at FMC

The next First Mennonite blood drive will be held Thursday, Feb. 9 from 1-6 p.m. Volunteers are needed for this event: If you can provide cookies, help with registration, make sandwiches, help serve food, or unload and load the truck with their equipment, add your name to the sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall. *To schedule your blood donation appointment, call 1-800-RED-CROSS or go to redcrossblood.org, sponsor code "fmenncbl."*

JHYF and SHYF attend Camp Friedenswald winter retreats

The focus of the youth groups in January were the Camp Friedenswald Winter Retreats. Those attending junior high retreat were Ellie Nickel, Jacob and Elam Suter, Perry Bush and Shannon Thiebeau. We learned about true friendship from Bluffton University students and campus pastor Tig Intagliata.



Above, Sophia Gott, Ana Neufeld Weaver, Annalise Nisly and Douglas Nester read a story to Bruce Steingass. At left, Christopher Nisly, Isaac Strahan and Anna Biesecker-Mast play a competitive round of Dutch Blitz.

The high school campers were Annalise Nisly, Sophia Smucker, Isaac and Seth Andreas, Sophia Gott, Christopher Harnish, Douglas Nester, Laura and Isaac Strahan, Ana Neufeld Weaver, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Patrick Estell, Eli Bourassa, and Grace Paquin. Bruce Steingass, Rhonda Winstead, Walt Paquin, and Shannon Thiebeau served as sponsors. We learned about mission and service from various speakers who have been involved in MVS and MCC operations. Please ask us about our time at camp!

-- Shannon Thiebeau, youth ministry director

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 getting reacquainted with Logan Steingass, who is engaged in voluntary service with AmeriCorps in Athens County, OH. Logan graduated from Miami (OH) University in 2016. Logan's parents are Amy Freeman and Bruce Steingass.

My year of service so far has been a mix of struggle and success. I continue to lead and coordinate before and after school programming at West Elementary school. I have formed great relationships with many of the kids but have found the position to be draining at times; I'm held responsible for the well-being of 40+ kids and arrive on site by 6:45 a.m. each day.

Through AmeriCorps, I have enjoyed teaching nutrition-based cooking classes to second graders as well as doing lice and vision screenings across the county. I feel confident that my effort is making a tangible difference and that is rewarding in itself. I have learned that I have a lot of fun interacting with groups of kids and serving as a role model for them.

I have also learned about the type of work environment I need to be in to feel fulfilled and happy. I'm most enjoying the vibrant community that values local food, health, and environmental sustainability. I spend my free time exercising at the local community center, going on hikes, and exploring Athens with friends.

Renovations progressing at Camp Friedenswald

Jenna Liechty Martin, executive director of Camp Friedenswald, shared some updates from the Peaceful Woods, where much-needed renovations are underway.

- 1) Thanks to the generosity of Camp Friedenswald's community of friends, over \$150,000 was given in the final two months of the year, helping us reach our goal for annual giving, as well as make continued progress in the Campaign to Renew Friedenswald. Thank you for your support!
- 2) Six new cabins are taking shape! Thanks to a relatively mild winter so far, progress continues to be made on renovations to the new cabins, guest house lodge, and chapel/activity center. It's exciting to see the renewed facilities as we continue to work towards a May completion date, just in time to welcome the first summer campers. You can follow our progress on Facebook.
- 3) While conditions have been decent for construction this winter, they have been less ideal for winter retreats. Despite the weather, youth and sponsors alike are having a great time in the peaceful woods, reconnecting and spending time in nature.





4) We hope to see you at camp in 2017! Be on the lookout for more info on youth and family summer camps. (Registration is now open.) You might also consider bringing your family to Friedenswald for a weekend getaway.

5) At the first of the New Year, the camp staff gathered to offer prayers for the year ahead. Together we prayed that it may be a renewing year for all...campers, families, staff, land, buildings, energy, ideas, and faith....May it be so!

-- Jenna Liechty Martin



Happening elsewhere...

MCUSA: This summer's Mennonite Church USA Convention will feature a new way to involve high school youth representatives in the delegate sessions. Called "Step Up," the goal is to prepare young people who have an interest in being involved with the broader church for future involvement as denominational delegates and leaders. The program will include two interactive seminar sessions and attendance at and participation in delegate sessions. Conferences and constituency groups will be invited to nominate youth who are rising high school sophomores or older. For questions, contact Brook Musselman at brookm@atlanticcoastconference.net.

SEMILLA: Join Jerry and Leonor Kennell, SEMILLA Latin American Anabaptist Seminary volunteers, on an educational tour of Guatemala, March 30-April 11. The tour includes lectures on Guatemalan church, political and social history by SEMILLA professors and tours to scenic and educational sites throughout the country. This is an opportunity to learn about the impact of Christianity from an Anabaptist perspective in Latin America. Fee of \$1,400 includes all transportation, food and lodging in Guatemala. Participants are responsible for their own airfare. For more information contact the Kennells at ambassadors@semillalaas.org or (970) 217-6078. To be certain of inclusion, contact the Kennells by March 1.