



Nurturing the gift of a singing congregation

Singing has long been an important part of worship at First Mennonite Church. From children and youth ensembles to adult choirs and special music groups, many have been involved in singing. However, the most important part of singing in worship comes from the congregation, where all people can lift their voices in unified praise to our great Lord and Savior. Rarely in worship or in life outside the church do we have an opportunity to fully participate together as one united body of believers. Singing gives us that opportunity so that we can praise God, lament, comfort one another or offer words of counsel collectively.

I am grateful for the blessings we have at First Mennonite where the congregation immerses itself in worship and where musicians have continued to nurture the gift of a singing



congregation. I think of people like Steve Jacoby and Earl Lehman, whom I knew personally and who welcomed me to the richness of music that they had nurtured for many years. I know there were others before them who did the same. And much of our singing would not be as rich if it weren't for the gifts of Lucia Unrau, who leads us in ways that only a skilled keyboard player can accomplish. The list of musical leaders can go on and on with the many people who offer their musical gifts to the church, as vocalists and instrumentalists.

Mary Pannabecker Steiner shared a wonderful article with the church staff a few weeks ago. It is titled "Why Would Anyone Sing in Church These Days?" and can be found at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2016/06/06/why-would-anyone-sing-in-church-these-days/>. When I read the article I was reminded of the blessing of music we have at FMC. I was grateful for the ways we continue to nurture each other in music. Take, for example, how Laura

Hartzler has worked with our children and youth. Recently, we had a choir of just six youth sing a hymn in four parts. And each week Laura teaches our children some of the hymns we will be singing the following Sunday, so that they can participate in worship through the singing of the hymns. She is helping to sustain the singing congregation at First Mennonite Church.

There is also a committee researching and discussing what type of flooring is needed for our worship space. After 30 years, we all can see the need for a change to the carpet in the sanctuary. Flooring matters in so many different ways: as a visual aesthetic, as a safe path for walking or as just a functioning underlay for the room. But flooring is a material that can alter how music and speech sound in the space, thus enhancing or detracting from the aural beauty and experience during a Sunday morning service. Acoustics do matter in how we perceive and encounter our worship. Acoustics can offer us a feeling of togetherness in a unified whole or separate us out from each other where we feel like we are worshipping individually and not part of the corporate entity.

As we ponder and plan our future as a congregation and look to see what is the next chapter in our ministry at First Mennonite Church, let us continue to nurture the aspects of worship and faithfulness that will bring God's Kingdom more fully here to Bluffton, Ohio and beyond to the broader world.

-- Mark Suderman, director of music



Photo credit: Fred Steiner



Happy birthday to:

Royce Engle, 98, Nov. 2

Maurice Kaufmann, 87, Nov. 11

Paul Klassen, 92, Nov. 22

Lois Jean Andreas, 91, Nov. 22

Treva Suter, 98, Nov. 27

Harvey Bauman, 96, Nov. 27

Happy 69th!

Happy anniversary to Esther and Keith Brauen, who celebrate their 69th anniversary on November 6.



In our prayers:

Khloe Hostetler, born October 25 to Mark Hostetler and Kami Brenneman. Khloe is hospitalized in the NICU unit at Promedica Toledo Hospital. Khloe's grandparents are Don and Joyce Hostetler.

Ron, Linda, Jake and Luke Headings, as Ron's mother, Estella Headings, died October 16 in Lincoln, NE. A memorial service was held November 5 in Nebraska.

Royce Engle, whose wife, Betty Engle, died October 22 at the Mennonite Memorial Home. A service was held October 27 in Columbus Grove.

The family of Joan Bauman, who died October 12 in Indianapolis, IN. A memorial service was held October 19 at FMC. Joan's children include Michael Bauman, Maureen Noe and Calvin Bauman.

The family of Anna Ruth Balmer, who died October 31 at Maple Crest. A funeral service was held November 3 at FMC. Annie's children include Bradley, Bennett and Brice Balmer; Bretta Smith, Bev Simon, Barbara Watkins and Beth Froning.

Adan Ortiz, who continues facing serious health issues, and needs ongoing transportation to various appointments and treatments. Those able to transport Adan should contact him at 419.358.0955.

Teachable moment for Stewardship Sunday



All of us like to use everyday experiences to teach children. How about a bank visit with Mom or Dad to see how many pennies make a roll of pennies or how paper money can become a roll of coins? Check out this experience before Sunday, Nov. 20 and donate your coins to our Noisy Offering on Stewardship Sunday. We'd love to hear about your bank visit.

-- Stewardship Commission

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.

We're hoping you'll all help with this, so if we don't approach you with these questions and you're willing to be included, please let us know at fmc@bluffton.edu.

Get to know...Ethan Blount

How old are you? What grade are you in?

I am 8 and three quarters, I will be 9 in February. I am in third grade and Mrs. Schulte is my teacher. Braylin Goings, from our church, is in my class.

What kind of chores or jobs do you have at home or at your grandparents' home?

I help with my brothers. I get Evan out of his crib in the morning if I hear him. I help Ryan by comforting him when he is hurt. I help set the table and clean up. Sometimes I switch the laundry and gather the trash. I take the trash and recycle to the road on trash day and bring them back to the garage after school. I pick up toys, shoes, and my room. Mom and Dad also ask me to do other jobs.

What do you like about those chores/jobs?

I like to help my family.



How have you volunteered at church? Why did you offer to help out? Are there other things you'd like to do at First Mennonite?

Yes I have. I collected the offering from the Sunday school rooms with Pastor Steve. I drew the bulletin cover and look forward to doing more. I put the yellow song sheets in the back of the hymnals. There were a lot! I help mom in the nursery. I like helping others so they aren't too busy. It makes me feel joyful to help. I like to sing in choir. I am excited to sing in church. As I get better I would like to play piano. I have a book of hymns.

What do you like to do that isn't work – hobbies, sports, music, read, cook?

I like to play soccer and basketball. I love singing, riding my bike, and being outside. My grandparents got me a pogo stick for Christmas and I like to do tricks on it. I enjoy reading for AR points in school. I like being with my family, friends, and cousins. I am in Boy Scouts too!

Who are your family members at FMC?

Amy and Phil Blount, parents; Ryan and Evan, brothers; Keith and Esther Brauen, great grandparents; John and Julie Mackey, grandparents; Laura and Greg Hartzler, aunt and uncle; Ben, Ellie, Micah, and Anna Hartzler, cousins.

Mennonite Women: Project month in November

November is project month for Mennonite Women. Comforters for knotting will be set up in the fellowship hall on Monday, Nov. 14, at 7 p.m. and Tuesday, Nov. 15, from 9 a.m.-noon.

On Monday evening the devotional focus will be "Wading in Water" led by Anita Lehman. Wading in water can be both exhilarating and risky. However, we are called to take risks for the sake of the gospel. In this year's devotional book, "Faith Travels: Trusting God in Life's Transitions," author Marlene Kropf writes, "When our families and communities are delivered from hidden sin, inherited prejudice, debilitating blindness, or painful division, we catch a glimpse of God's dream for the whole world: peace, justice, beauty, and freedom for all."

Refreshments that evening will be provided by Ellie Unruh and Heidrun Awad. Following comfort knotting on Tuesday, all are invited to stay for lunch. If you are able, bring a salad or dessert and your table service. Soup, bread and beverages will be provided.

Please consider helping with frame set-up on Sunday, Nov. 13, at 2 p.m. in fellowship hall and on Monday afternoon if necessary.

BUNA harvest dinner November 11 at FMC

The Bluffton University Nutrition Association will hold its annual Harvest Dinner benefiting both the Bluffton Community Assistance Corporation and the Lima-based Churches United Pantry, from 5-7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 11, at First Mennonite. This year's dinner will include homemade soup, bread and dessert. Nonperishable food items will be accepted, as will cash and checks made payable to BUNA. All proceeds will benefit the two food pantries. Bluffton University's ceramics class will also be donating bowls which attendees may keep for an additional donation.

Annual Thanksgiving Day dinner November 24 at FMC

All are invited to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal together at First Mennonite. As has been tradition, the meal will begin at noon on Thursday, Nov. 24 and will be an organized potluck. Please contact Lori Nester (419-358-9650, nesterl@bluffton.edu) to RSVP so that we can plan appropriately for numbers and sign up to bring a dish. We will make sure there are plenty of traditional Thanksgiving menu items, but also welcome nontraditional foods as well. Donations will be taken at the meal to cover general expenses, such as turkey, with surplus funds to be donated to the Deacons Benevolence Fund.

-- Lori Nester

Bluffton community meals held twice each month

Bluffton community meals are scheduled for the first and third Thursdays of each month at 6 p.m. at the Bluffton Senior Citizens Center. The next meal is Thursday, Nov. 17. Each meal is free but donations of canned goods or cash are accepted and benefit the Bluffton food pantry. All are encouraged to attend.

JHYF/SHYF October activity

In October, the youth groups began their respective Bible studies in racism and apocalyptic literature. In JHYF, we discussed how the church might look like if we were more inclusive of worship practices from different cultures and what might happen if we tore down the walls of stereotypes that separate us from fellowshiping with each other.

In SHYF, we learned about the story of Daniel and his friends who refused to submit to the commands of the empire because the laws violated their religious beliefs. We created collages based on healthy versus unhealthy choices that we can make as individuals or as a whole community. By looking to the Bible, we also discovered that God does not always save us from our trials – sometimes God stands besides us in our hardships.

A tradition for the SHYF is to make care packages for last year's graduates. We had a blast decorating the boxes, leaving silly notes, and trying to stuff all of the goodies into the boxes. The three recipients of the packages were Amelia Heslep, Cassidy Bush, and Elizabeth Nisly. We hope they enjoy them!

SHYF is looking forward to a service weekend at Camp Friedenswald November 18-20. Please keep us in your prayers for safety, productivity, and group bonding.

We are still looking for committed sponsors for both SHYF and JHYF. If you can commit 2-4 hours a month, are interested in learning, teaching, and having a ton of fun, and going on trips, please

contact Shannon Thiebeau at fmc.shannon@bluffton.edu.

-- Shannon Thiebeau

