

And so over a summer sabbatical, Joel designed a program that would help a cohort of 10 people of a variety of adult ages, to reflect and ritually mark whatever transition that a person is going through in their life.

I was instantly drawn to this idea. As a 31 year old, I would love a space to hear from older adults reflecting on the transitions that they are experiencing. I also can imagine it could be meaningful for older adults to hear about the transitions us younger adults are going through, and reflect on their own lives.

The program Joel created consists of 5 Sunday school classes, and two, 2 hr evening retreats on either end of those 5 weeks. The final retreat consisted of a ritual that marks the ending of one aspect of your life, and then blesses the start of what is next.

Here are some possibilities of transitions that might be meaningful to bring to this practice:

entering a new decade | disability/physical limitation | job change or searching for meaningful vocation | letting go of a life dream | end of schooling | retirement | antiracism awakening | middle age | leaving toxic religion or theology | miscarriage/stillbirth | embracing singleness | end of an important relationship through death, divorce, geographic move | end of child-bearing years | coming out | embracing childlessness | empty nest | elderhood | spiritual crisis or reorientation | grandparenthood |

I would love to walk with a cohort through this practice and see what we can learn from each other. If there is enough interest from a variety of ages, perhaps this could be something we explore together this fall. Let me know!

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

What do the members of the **Caring Connections Committee** have in common? They love connecting with others! These connections are primarily with FMC members 80 and older and may be in the form of personal visits, by phone or by mail. Friendships grow through these connections and are enjoyed by all involved. An average of 30 to 40 connections are made each month.

Members of the committee are Gloria Hernandez Bucher, Ann Kingsley, Dottie & Gene Long, Carolyn Rich, Pat Sheidler, Jane Weaver, Ruth Graber, Janet Schroeder and Pastor Phil. If you would like to be on either side of these connections let anyone on the committee know!



**MCC School Kit Drive** – “Back to School” sales are starting up again. School kit supplies are much cheaper, and easier to find, at this time. MCC is hoping to collect 10,000 school kits during the month of August. We will collect kits starting now through the end of August.

Lists are on the bulletin board by the library or on the MCC website. One change this year is 4 pens, instead of just 2. We will have metal sharpeners available in the supply bin for you to add to your kits, if you want to use them. (If you have extra metal sharpeners that you purchase, you feel free to add them to our supply.) \*If donating money, please write “MCC KITS” on the memo line.

## BLUFFTON SENIOR CITIZENS COMMUNITY MEAL



First Mennonite Church provided the community meal at the Senior Citizens Center on June 15. On the menu was Jollof rice, beef stew, sauteed kale and cornbread. Thanks to all our volunteers; JP Schumacher, Mona Reichenbach, Diane Reichenbach, Isaac Schumacher, Gloria Bucher, Cassidy Bush, Heidrun Awad, Carrie Mast, Sally Roth, and Tim Schumacher.

## MARKING TRANSITIONS AS ADULTS



**PASTOR PHIL YODER**

This year has been a year full of transitions for me: I have moved to a new town, started a new job, and became a parent in about 6 months. I am sure I will be processing all that has happened in these last 6 months for the next 60 years!

I know that this has been a year of transition for many in the congregation. Without even thinking very hard, I can think of those in this congregation

that have retired, those who have moved to retirement centers, those who have experienced major injuries or disabilities, those who have experienced the death of a spouse, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and even those simply entering a new decade.

Some of these transitions we have rituals that mark them naturally - Weddings, funerals, birthday parties- however sometimes these transitions can feel unprocessed and can linger with us for sometime.

At FMC we have rituals that mark transitions for our children. Babies are dedicated, 6th graders get bibles, some choose to get baptized, 16 year olds get key chains when they start driving, and when you graduate from high school, you receive an academic study bible. But beyond weddings and funerals, we really do not mark the transition of adults, and there are a lot of transitions that we go through in adulthood.

While attending the Central District Conference Annual meeting, I attended a seminar by Joel Miller, the pastor at Columbus Mennonite, who proposes that "Congregations are ideal places for adults of all ages to process, name, and ritually mark life transitions, of which there are many."

# Camp Friedenswald

SUMMER 2023

**June 11-16**  
High School Camp  
GRADES 9-12

**June 18-23**  
Primary & Pre-Jr Camp  
GRADES 2-4

**June 25-30**  
Junior High Camp  
GRADES 7-8

**July 2-7**  
Junior Camp  
GRADES 5-6

**July 10-14**  
Family Camp 1

**July 17-21**  
Family Camp 2

**July 24-28**  
Family Camp 3

CAMP FRIEDENSWALD

MENNO-LIFE JULY 2023



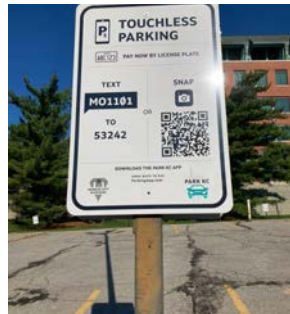
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# MENNO-LIFE

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH NEWSLETTER



## MORE FROM MENNO-CON



## NURSERY UPDATES

Mary Edmiston has taken up the role of Nursery Coordinator. She will be responsible for scheduling volunteers for both the Sunday School and Worship hours and providing a safe space for our littles in the church. Thank you to Mary Edmiston, Sue Schaaf, Lisa Shelly, & Pat Sheidler for their work organizing the nursery and cleaning the toys.



Shelving was moved around for new storage for toys.

Maybe it's a metaphor for being oneself even when that means you're different in the place where you are – we know there are other dandelions who have come before in this yard, and there are other dandelions in other yards in the world, but none right here, right now, except this one. Possibly, it's a sign of hope in a world where sameness is valued over people's safety, where maintaining alike-ness is a reason to not only turn away but act out in anger against people who stand up and out in all their difference.

I recall a framed sketch that hung in the conference room at the Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities. I spent many hours in meetings in that space when I worked there, and subsequently, many hours staring at that drawing of a forest with the face of a young girl with Down syndrome superimposed over the trees standing straight with the statement below: "If you stand at all, stand tall." Like that dandelion maybe. In spite of the odds. Regardless of the obstacles all around.

I'm not sure what it is I'm supposed to be noticing. Where my mind did meander, though, was thinking about the high school youth as we prepare to head out to MennoCon23 in KC, Missouri. I thought about them in the context of our community where the values and love we are teaching at First Mennonite and in our conference and denomination might make them feel like a single dandelion in their yard.

Yet, I am reminded of all the ways teenagers among our church family are standing tall. We heard it in 10 unique faith statements just a month ago, the hour before 10 youth were baptized into the Church. We saw it in action when Kaleigh Coffman facilitated a Women's Bible Study for anyone and everyone in the church to explore the issues women face in a patriarchy in biblical times and now, and how we can respond to others who use Scripture to control and demean others. At the last Social Justice potluck, Phyllis Bixler shared that she has shifted her mindset and encouraged us all to think about the youth who exit our faith community to stand tall in other places not as something to be mourned but something to be celebrated as they are marking the landscape wherever they land.

All of this surfaced as I considered a lone dandelion standing tall in the church lawn. One certainly can reduce this event to the everyday occurrence of a weed appearing where it's not wanted. One cannot dismiss so easily the bold courage of young people leading us to deepen our own faith through their stories and questions. In the Gospels, Jesus leads people to faith with his stories (parables) and questions. It should not be surprising then to think that God, who uses the youth among us to remind and encourage us in the path of discipleship, might also use a single dandelion to carry on God's creative work in our world. Let us pay attention and create together.

## MEET SHAWNA, OUR NEW CUSTODIAN



**SHAWNA YODER**

I am a part of the Bluffton Community and a member at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora. I am excited to support the FMC community by caring for your meeting space.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
JULY 18, 2023

**CARING CONNECTIONS**  
JULY 25, 2023

**WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY**  
JULY 26, 2023

**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
AUGUST 15, 2023

**WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY**  
AUGUST 23, 2023

**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2023

## TENDING TRANSFORMATION THROUGH REPENTANCE

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE CONNECTOR: STORIES AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE CONFERENCE

The second resolution discussed in the delegate session was “A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation,” passed in 2022. As part of CDC’s commitment to live out this resolution, members of the ministerial committee participated in a Litany of Lament to repent of past harms to LGBTQ people seeking leadership in the conference.

Several empty chairs were placed around the edges of the room and other chairs were shrouded with fabric to represent those whose gifts were not welcomed by the church and those who obscured their identity to avoid being cast out. During a song, participants were invited to light a candle to symbolize someone they know who were not welcomed in church or who were forced to keep part of themselves hidden.



**CDC Minister Doug Luginbill  
with Keith Schrag**

The liturgy also included an apology to Keith Schrag, who was the pastor of Ames Mennonite Church from 1977-1987. In 1987 he relinquished his credential during a ministerial committee meeting at Camp Friedenswald when he was questioned for being a gay man, but continued to serve Ames MC as a lay leader until retiring to Goshen in January of this year. At the end of the litany, Keith was asked to come and join the ministerial committee at the front of the room, where Conference Minister Doug Luginbill offered a tearful and heartfelt apology on behalf of the conference and gave Keith a certificate of ordination.

The whole service was a powerful experience for those gathered, and many were overcome with emotion afterward. Brenda North Martin of Raleigh Mennonite Church shared, “Our words aren’t empty when someone says, Thank you’ back to us.” An apology becomes more than words on a page when we work to restore relationships with individual people who have been harmed and resolve to do better.

*Tending Transformation Through Repentance.* Central District **Connector** Volume 2, Number 5, July 2023

## STAND TALL, O DANDELION



**PASTOR CARRIE MAST**

Turning my bike into the church parking lot, a splash of yellow caught my eye in the green lawn against the dark background of mulch. A dandelion! I parked my bike and took a photo after surveying the rest of the lawn and seeing no sign of other blossoms. Remarkable really, that this dandelion stood tall in all its yellow glory. It was up against Ev Collier’s mowing, and the Freudige SS class men and friends who spent hours weeding, edging, and mulching just a week ago. I thought of the devotional I shared at our church staff meeting earlier in the week. I read a chapter from a book called *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* by Rick Rubin. The book is a

collection of Rubin’s ponderings about creativity, and the underlying assumption in the book is that we are all creative and creators in our own particular ways. Each time we cook a meal, we are creating something that wasn’t there before. Every solution we carry out was dreamed up somewhere. Even this article I’m writing is something that didn’t exist until I sat down to write it. Rubin suggests that our creativity is something we need to practice, not perfect, and if we’re waiting for we’re missing out. We cannot possibly run out of creative ideas, and nothing we create now will be better or worse than anything we create in the future, but it will be different.

If we think we lack a muse, we’re mistaken; sparks for ideas, themes, repeated images and words, they surround us all the time to spark the next creative act, if only we’ll pay attention. We need to be tuned in to catch those “moments of grace” Pastor Phil described when events, big or small, don’t seem easily reduced to a coincidence. Something that feels a little bit holy. Noticing is just the first step. Then we have to ask, what am I supposed to be noticing? What is the meaning here? Perhaps it’s my reminder that nature will win against our best efforts to control the earth.



# TECH

More than 60 people attended the FMC Watch Party on June 25, to view *The Wereth Eleven*, hosted by Ev Collier. We would love to make this a semi-regular event. If anyone has ideas for future viewings please contact the church office.



RAY RAEBURN



NEW

## TECH ASSISTANCE MINISTRY

**Calling All Techies!** With the ever changing landscape of technology in our world, there is an increasing need for assistance with a variety of these technology issues within our congregation. If you are willing to be part of a list of people that would be willing to help congregational members with their problems, please contact Ray or Trusty in the church office. Some possible issues that members may need assistance with, internet/WiFi, computer problems, Zoom/video conferencing help, cell phone or tablet assistance, etc... Additionally, if you find yourself in **need** of such assistance, do not hesitate to contact Ray or Trusty.

Ray - 419.230.2769 or [ray@fmcbluffton.org](mailto:ray@fmcbluffton.org)  
Trusty - 419.358.5766 or [fmc@fmcbluffton.org](mailto:fmc@fmcbluffton.org)

## WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY



The Women's Bible Study led by Kaleigh Coffman brought people of all ages together to study women's issues. Join Kaleigh for the next sessions in the Fellowship Hall at 6:30 p.m. on July 26 and August 23. The Bible study is open to all.



# FMC BAPTISM 2023



It was a beautiful day for a baptism at the DeMarco pond, after their very powerful and moving Faith Statements during the Sunday morning Worship Service **Kaleigh Coffman, Ellie Hartzler, Rebecca Estell, Theo Andreas, John-Paul Yoder, Jax Gott, Ben Hartzler, Ethan Nickel, Claire Phillips, Makayla Suter.**