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MENNO-LIFE

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH NEWSLETTER



IN AND THROUGH THE BODY

How did Jesus Smell?

With his nose!

PASTOR PHIL YODER

Scent is an important part of our experience as humans. Certain scents take us back to places of our past. This last week, we had new carpet installed in the bedrooms of our new house. When I went into the house to take a look, I was immediately taken back to when my family moved when I was 10. The smell of the freshly laid carpet reminded me of a new beginning, a new house, and the anticipation and excitement of living there.

Our tradition claims that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. If Jesus was fully human, wouldn't Jesus have used his nose? Wouldn't have Jesus used his eyes? We can often think of God as some spirit up in the sky - distant and abstract. However, if we think of Jesus as God incarnated, becoming human, having a human body, we must also consider the human experiences that Jesus experienced: that Jesus smelled, tasted, heard, saw, felt, and touched.

God choosing to have a body demonstrates that God values bodies and their experiences, which are mainly understood through one's senses.

Then as followers of Jesus, we too can value the experiences of our bodies. Our bodies are the host of all of the senses. We smell, taste, hear, see, feel, and touch. These are ways we interact in the world. It is in and through the body that we engage creation. It is in and through the body that we engage each other. It is in and through the body that we engage the divine. Because of this, our senses are important tools for learning about God.

When we enter the season of Advent in the coming weeks, the season where we celebrate and explore the incarnation (God becoming human), we will be exploring the importance of our senses in knowing God. We will "Sensing the Season."

How do we learn more about God through smell?

During the Christmas season, things like chocolate or candy canes can smell divine. At the same time, I am also challenged by Jesus' care for those who were considered most detestable in society - including those who did not have access to hygiene. Does God smell irresistible like chocolate, or nearly intolerable like body odor? Both? If so, what does this mean for our faith?

Our senses can challenge our understanding of God, and challenge us to live faithfully into a world with pleasant and not so pleasant smells.

Sometimes our lives are really smelly. So smelly, that it can feel like people are avoiding us. However, Jesus, who also had a smelly body, is not afraid to be there, with us in the stench of life. May we also be challenged to be with others in stench. This does not mean we don't celebrate the beauty of scents like chocolate too!

As we enter this season of Advent, a season of celebrating the incarnation of God (God having a body and senses), may we use our blessed body's senses to live faithfully.



BOOK REVIEW:

Caldwell, Elizabeth F. *I Wonder: Engaging a Child's Curiosity about the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016

Elizabeth Caldwell's mission in writing *I Wonder:*

PASTOR CARRIE MAST *Engaging a Child's Curiosity about the Bible* seems to be a response to the question many of us are asking today: why aren't people coming to church? Her answer is reshaping how children encounter the Bible, to lead children into adulthood with ongoing spiritual growth and a lifelong habit of turning to the Bible as a support in their faith development. Her approach is twofold: helping children explore faith through their questions about the Bible, and helping children build a faith vocabulary by reading the Bible. In her work of equipping the adults in a child's life to take up the mantle of mentor in reading and interpreting the Bible alongside the child, Caldwell uses various versions of Bible story books and Bible translations to compare and provide detailed examples and comparisons among the sources. Information and recommendations regarding content and methods for sharing it are categorized by age.

Caldwell's approach to cultivating a faith in children that will both grow and sustain them throughout their lives places the onus on the adults who surround children: parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers, etc. She provides a sort of instruction manual for increasing a child's engagement through the expertise of the adult in the room. While adults are more broadly at the locus of control in determining how a child spends their time, a child's agency should not be underestimated in their own spiritual development and faith

formation. Caldwell's vision for applying the tools she shares in this book does include visions of adults sitting beside children, or a family gathered, entertaining questions and discussing wonderings about Bible stories and Scripture together, yet the child's role seems to be downplayed in the midst of her analysis of Bible story books and suggested teaching methods.

What Caldwell does well is openly advocate for the "soft eyes" approach and then allow it to infiltrate her analysis and suggestions (xv). An expression from Japanese Akaido, this soft eyes approach refers to a wide way of seeing the world without fear, making it possible to see God's work all around us, as well as before us, in the past. Through her use of soft eyes, Caldwell encourages adults to embrace children's questions, particularly when they do not know the answers, and to read the Bible with a wide lens, leaving space for wondering and applying Scripture to the child's current context. In doing so, Caldwell creates an open-ended approach to the interpretation of biblical stories that leaves space for children to continue to question, shift, and adjust their understandings as their faith grows with them.

Caldwell's work is remarkable in terms of breadth in assessing Bible story books and comparing each to curate a recommended collection that spans faith traditions and ages. She further provides concrete examples of when to use each of the story books depending on one's focus and preferred emphasis. The final chapter provides specific ideas which churches can offer parents and adults in supporting the spiritual formation of children in the home.

Caldwell hails from a Presbyterian background including a 30-year stint as professor at McCormick Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian seminary in Chicago. She continues her life's work today at Vanderbilt Divinity School, an interdenominational seminary in Nashville. According to McCormick's professor emerita bio, Caldwell's

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“research interests include: faith and family in a world of diversity; an ecology of educational formation for faith and practice; and teaching and learning in multifaith, multicultural settings.” Even as Caldwell was entrenched in the Presbyterian world, it seems the wide lens of her research may have revealed the gifts of other faith traditions, leading to the somewhat diverse representation of Bible story books and Bible translations in this book. This diversity encourages exposure to a variety of theological ideas for children, though controlled by the adult spiritual formation mentor.

Children may be spiritual from the moment they enter the world, but intentional tending of that spirituality through daily habits and practices of reading the Bible is essential in developing a faith that endures change and growth. Caldwell’s book assumes innate spirituality in each of us and offers insights into ways adults can re-enter that space of child spirituality by participating in conversation with children to nurture further spiritual development, particularly through engagement with Bible stories. Continued growth depends on the child’s ability to develop a language of faith. As Caldwell encourages children’s questions, she simultaneously invites adults to ask theirs, acknowledging that many adults feel unprepared, unequipped, and so unable to participate in the ongoing spiritual formation of children due to their own shortcomings in developing their faith over the years. She affirms the mutual gifts of children and adults shaping and re-shaping one another’s faith when they read the Bible together, and reminds us of the responsibility of the church: “Let’s stop giving out Bibles to children unless we also start helping parents learn ways to be involved in reading with their child” (112).

Advent

AN ADVENT PRAYER FROM 2016

Eternal Spirit,
For all the ways we experience you
we are grateful
for the days
when our faith and hope are strong
we are grateful
For the days when our questions and fears
are even stronger
we struggle to be grateful
Your presence
cannot be commanded
But we believe it can be found
stumbled upon perhaps
in the midst of uncertainty, terror, despair
for that we are truly grateful.
Amen

~ written by Anita Lehman

“I wrote this prayer for the first Advent Planning Meeting in 2016.
It still seems relevant.”

NEW

WINTER BIBLE SCHOOL FOR ALL AGES

READING PAUL IN THE AGE OF MASS INCARCERATION
JANUARY 27, 2024 10 A.M. - 3 P.M. &
JANUARY 28, 2024 ELECTIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL + WORSHIP



We are glad to be welcoming Dr. Ryan Schellenberg, a Mennonite scholar specializing in Paul the Apostle, for a Winter Bible School in January.

Dr. Schellenberg is Associate Professor of New Testament at Methodist Theological School in Ohio. Ryan will be sharing his expertise on Paul's experience in prison and how that may relate to issues of mass incarceration in today's society.

Saturday will feature discussion, music, a meal, and children's programming. Children's activities will include a morning in the Lion & Lamb Peace Arts Center, a skit and presentation following lunch at the church, and free play for the afternoon. Sunday will include an adult elective Sunday School class and a sermon from Ryan. Watch for more information.

**SAVE
-THE-
DATE!**

SATURDAY

Sunday



FMC FALL FESTIVAL
PHOTOS BY SUE SCHAAF



CHILES-LAMAN ANNUAL CLERGY APPRECIATION GOLF OUTING



STAFF RETREAT



ANNUAL TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

FMC hosted a Candlelight Transgender Day of Remembrance Service on Monday, Nov. 20 to honor all trans and nonbinary people whose lives were lost to anti-trans violence in the past year. The service included a brief history of the day, a litany, prayer, and a slide show with pictures, names, home countries, dates of death, and how people lost their lives. To view the slide show, go to: <https://bit.ly/3Raf8M5>.



Read Jess's story and donate here: <https://givebutter.com/a9FGN7>! In addition to raising funds, Jess and her wife are using their own savings and a reasonable amount of loan for this surgery. Jess's congregation and pastors are active in SCN. Donate generously and support trans life for The Transgender Day of Remembrance.

A MUTUAL AID REQUEST

FMC is a member of Brethren Mennonite Council's (BMC) Supportive Communities Network (SCN), which shared this opportunity to donate to an Anabaptist Transition Surgery Fund. www.bmclgbt.org

Jess, a church member within SCN is raising necessary funds for her gender transition surgery, denied by insurance after many attempts.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sweet Song! Join the Cinnamon Roll Potluck and FMC Music Discussion next Sunday, Dec. 3 after worship. Pastor Phil and Pastor Carrie will be hosting a time in the Fellowship Hall for folks to share their thoughts and dreams for music at FMC. As we all know, Mark Suderman will be retiring in the next year. As we begin the process of finding new music leadership, we would like to receive feedback from the congregation on what they love about FMC music, and what they would love to have happen at FMC in the future. As a part of this discussion, we would like to invite all cinnamon roll enthusiast to bring a pan of cinnamon rolls to share. (This may seem random, but it will all make sense next Sunday.) You do not need to bring cinnamon rolls to be part of the discussion!



Christmas decorating in the sanctuary and the Christmas trees in the Fellowship Hall is slated for Wednesday, Nov. 29 during Noodle Night. Share some noodles and some holiday fun! Come and go as you can between 4:30 and 6:30 p.m.



The children & youth Christmas Program will take place during worship on Dec. 10. Rehearsals will take place during the SS hour Nov. 26, Dec. 3, & Dec. 10. Children and youth from 0-19 are invited to be a part of the program, and do not need to be present for rehearsals to be part of the program. Parents are welcome to join the rehearsals to help with costuming and stage movement. Contact Pastor Carrie if you have questions.

MCC SCHOOL KIT PACKING PARTY



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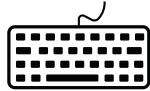
NEW TECH BRINGS MORE OPPORTUNITIES



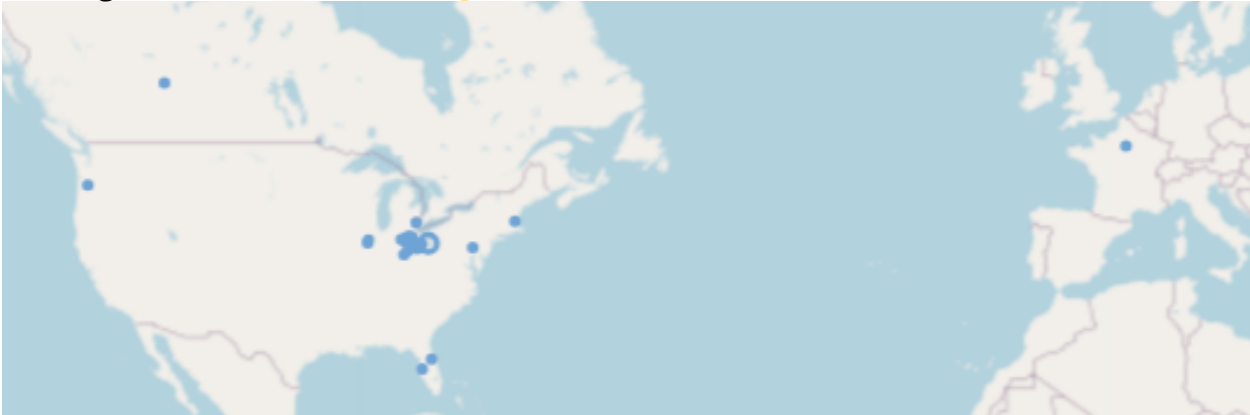
RAY RAEBURN

The church recently purchased a 65" television, as well as a micro computer that is mounted to the TV, which allows persons or groups to have a completely self-contained, mobile large screen computer that can be used anywhere in the church. Over the last couple of months it has been used for a Bluffton High School 60th class reunion, a Sunday School presentation from MDS, staff meetings, a funeral meal slideshow, and the Transgender Day of Remembrance Service.

Let the church office know if you or your group could benefit from using this TV/computer for an event.



The FMC worship service has quite an extended reach. This picture is a typical representation of our weekly viewing locations. We can't forget to add Rhonda Winstead in London though; she is in Bluffton visiting for several weeks. 😊



FMC FALL CELEBRATION



FMC's Caring Connections hosted a Fall Celebration on Saturday, Oct. 14 in the Patio Room at Maple Crest. This event was for FMC members and friends "of a certain age" and older. The gathering included a hymn sing led by a men's quartet, tasty snacks, and good conversation.



READY OR NOT! HERE HE COMES!

Keagan Schumacher welcomed his little brother, Skyler Ayanda, to the world on October 14. Trusty and Isaac were there as well!



THANK YOU 😊

As the Schumachers adjust to life with their addition, a big thank you is extended to Sue Schaaf & Shelby Cluts for their help with office coverage while Trusty tries to get some sleep at home with Skyler!

