



**PASTOR PHIL**

## WHY WINTER BIBLE SCHOOL?

In going into Seminary, I desperately wanted to find new ways to read the bible. I had gone through a spell of my 20s where I never cracked the book open. I wasn't sure how to justify the Bible and my ongoing evolving perspectives on human sexuality. I struggled to take science and the Bible seriously.

My faith tradition was really important to me, but I didn't know what to do with the Bible and all of its contradictions, confusing stories, and ethics that are from another millennia.

I think many of us find ourselves there at one point or another, and there are several valid options at that point: 1. Stuff all our questions deep down and try to ignore them (perhaps this feels safest). 2. Disregard the Bible completely (I do not blame people for doing this) 3. Find different ways of engaging the Bible that are life giving (My hopes for our congregation)

In the majority of 20th century American Christianity, fundamentalist readings of the Bible have been the most popularized reading of the Bible. Fundamentalist readings of the Bible consist of believing that there are no contractions or errors in the Bible, and that all of its teachings are to be taken literally today.

This understanding of the Bible can make the Bible very frustrating to engage with. Our passage for this next week is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, It is all about the sinfulness of sexual immorality. Yay... another passage that makes us feel ashamed of our bodies and desires.

At first, I thought I would just choose a different lectionary passage, but I think my own desire to avoid this text comes from not wanting to have to deal with Paul, his ancient ideas about sex, and how that might inform our lives today.

I will refrain from giving my thoughts on the passage here to perhaps build the tension for next week. But the point that I would like to make here is that there are other ways of engaging the Bible than, "Because Paul condemns homosexuality, I don't want to read any of his letters in the New Testament."

**(Continued page 3)**

## MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

From a recent Sunday worship leading experience...  
...Consider the sounds of the streets of Bethlehem during census time. The chatter and calls of people. The sound of hoofs trodding the ground. The cries of toddlers and street vendors. The bleats, grunts and snorts of animals. The murmurs of a mother to her newborn baby.



**PASTOR CARRIE MAST**

Reading this, you may have encountered sights accompanying the sounds you just imagined. We know our individual senses are enhanced when in combination with one another. A person who has experienced some hearing loss understands more fully when a person talking is facing them; seeing the movement of lips and facial expressions expands one's capacity to hear. Taste requires smell and is improved when a chef tends to presentation of our food, and even the texture of food impacts our tasting experience.

Yet, even a single sense is multifaceted. Sound can be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways. When a loved one is talking to us, we might be using focused listening, which demonstrates care and empathy, or we might be using distracted hearing, which is sure to cause some trouble. Onomatopoeia is the term for words that describe the sound they resemble: food sizzles in a pan on the stove, dogs bark at a stranger, a rock splashes when dropped into water.

Our Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany theme of Sensing the Season was an opportunity to reflect and expand our understanding of the world around us and how we experience God in a visceral, bodily way. Each Sunday, we isolated a sense for examination by zeroing in to ways we use the sense or pondering an aspect of life through that sense, which offered new insights into ways we use the sense and revealed brand new other ways we could use the sense.

**(Continued next page)**

### (Phil Continued)

There are different ways of engaging the bible that can be life giving, but it takes time to learn them. Time that many of us don't have, but I hope that over a long period of time, we can slowly find meaningful ways of taking the Bible seriously.

During Seminary, I took 3 classes from Ryan Schellenberg, who will be our guest speaker for the Winter Bible School. Over the course of those classes, my understanding of how to engage Paul's ancient New Testament letters evolved as I understood better what Paul was working towards and the context he was working in. In my brain, Paul went from being a grouchy old man to a revolutionary that we still might be able to learn from today.

My hope for our time together at the Winter Bible School is that we can continue to reimagine how we engage the Bible, which is something that the Christian Tradition has been constantly doing for the last 2000 years, and for our community to deepen our connections with each other and God. *~*

### (Carrie Continued)

As the season went on, it became clear that layering our senses is another inroad to new insights, a way to gain richer, deeper experiences. One meaningful moment was the children's time prayer practice using our whole bodies to pray, when we moved from standing, to kneeling, to lying flat on our bellies, before returning to a sitting position.

While I lay prone, I felt the pressure of my entire body against the floor, including my cheek; my hearing seemed more acute; and my line of vision offered only other forms lying around me. It was a moment that proved children are able to be quiet in a worshipful way when the experience reflects their spirituality.

Rich imagery and multisensory, whole body experiences are a way for our minds to encounter the holy. As our primary Advent worship leader Emily Hilty prompted us each week, "How else might God be drawing on our senses? How can we explore our senses, and use them to guide us through this Advent and Christmas season?" With some intentionality, we might extend these questions into a habit of tuning into our senses as we move into ordinary time, the mundane tasks we tend to in our daily lives. With some practice, we just might learn to recognize the complexity in the view from the floor and appreciate the simplicity of finding it by just lying down where we are. *~*

## COMMUNITY MARKET RECEIPTS FUNDRAISE FOR FMC SH Youth

Over the last two months, \$511,399.72 in Community Markets receipts have been processed and submitted. Community Markets gives 1% of the qualifying receipt amounts to eligible organizations. Here at FMC, this money goes to our Senior High Youth Group as a fundraiser. This means the youth will be receiving \$5,113.99! They have already received a check for the first half of this amount. The half million dollars of processed receipts represents about four years of receipts that had accumulated. (Covid put a monkey wrench into the processing effort.) We are now caught up and have a process in place to keep up with the task of keeping track of the new receipts coming in.

This gives you an opportunity to help your community and our youth by supporting our local Community Market and then turning the receipt into the church to earn money for the youth. There is a collection box on top of the mailboxes for these receipts. Please do not cut off the bottoms of the receipts...this is where the information is located that we must use. The youth thank you for helping with this fundraising endeavor.

If you haven't saved receipts before, now is a good time to start a new habit!



## TRANSITIONS CLASS

A small group of adults, representing the decades of the 30's, 60's, 70's and 90's, met for six sessions to discuss and process current transitions in our specific phases of life. The study was created by Pastor Joel Miller of Columbus Mennonite Church and effectively facilitated by Pastor Phil. This discussion-based study included readings, weekly assignments for each to consider our individual experiences, as well as visuals and rituals to guide the particular focus of each session.

During the final session, we shared a soup/bread/salad meal prepared by Chaska and Phil. Following the meal, we transitioned to a different room and table for each to describe our experience with selected mementos to represent what we are leaving behind. To complete the Ritual of Passage, we moved to a final room and each shared mementos to reflect how we are moving forward to embrace something new.

The study, extending from November 2 through December 14, 2023, was a pilot program with the intention of providing similar small group experiences for FMC adults in the future. If you are curious about the benefits of engaging with others during life transitions, ask a participant about their experience, and watch for information about the next Transition Study.



Around the table:  
Phil Yoder  
Chaska Yoder  
George Lehman  
Mary Amstutz  
Anita Lehman  
Lawrence Matthews  
Louise Matthews

## TRANSITIONS REFLECTIONS IN OUR OWN WORDS

“Being the oldest member in this group (in my 90's) and having the most years to think about with so many transitions, it was hard to keep our tasks within the time frame allotted--but I appreciated that when we did speak, you knew that they listened and what was said was kept confidential. It was a bonding study.” **Mary Amstutz**

“The Transitions Class provided a chance for me to reflect on the paths I have taken and to gain strength to journey on.” **Anita Lehman**

“Even though transitions may be connected to a specific date, this experience helped me confirm that we may experience a sense of transition for a long time. For me it was helpful to reflect on my retirement from Bluffton University during COVID without any of the usual ending rituals.” **George Lehman**

“Transitions are happening for all of us. The transition class experience has been a safe place to identify, explore, and understand my own transitions while learning from and being supportive of the others in their experiences. We don't need to experience transition by ourselves. We are in this together.” **Lawrence Matthews**

“The opportunity to participate with this group of people was timely for me as I continue to navigate and process a combination of health challenges and work/home changes. I've felt seen, heard and held by these trusted journeying companions, knowing I'm not alone. I'm convinced that the world still needs what we have to offer.” **Louise Matthews**

“In one of the first sessions together, we individually completed an activity called a "mirror walk." This was an opportunity to use our surroundings to reflect on our interior world a bit, and to begin to name the transitions we are/were processing. For me, this activity was really eye-opening, helping me to name the obvious transition into early motherhood, as well as a less obvious transition into FMC and my engagement here. Having an intentional space to reflect and share together has been a helpful, meaningful, and connection-filled part of the last few months.” **Chaska Yoder**

## TRANSITIONS

- T** - Times of expected natural changes or unexpected events
- R** - Range of experiences and emotions are individual as well as universal
- A** - All experiences of a lifetime remain part of our living story
- N** - Necessary adapting to change is critical for healthy growth and development
- S** - Spanning an entire lifetime of living, learning and adjusting to change
- I** - Identifying a change from one thing to another validates the challenge
- T** - Tempted to feel in limbo between what was, what is and what will be
- I** - Important to maximize liminal time and space to heal and/or to prepare
- O** - Occur during birth, death and every point of change in between
- N** - Navigating mental, emotional, spiritual, physical and social implications
- S** - Sharing experiences nurtures trust, community and solidarity, confirming  
WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS!

~Louise Matthews 12/2023

**OVER 14%**

giving that goes to people  
& organizations outside of  
FMC

**MORE THAN A TITHE**

The final numbers aren't all said and done, but one thing we do know about our financial giving this past year is that we are a generous congregation. Although we don't have a Mission, Peace, and Service Commission anymore, we do have that designation in our financial plan. Both in the Spending Plan portion and in the Non-spending Plan portion of our financial plan there are many groups and individuals that we have supported in the past year. We have received thank you notes from many of them that were posted on the pillar in Fellowship Hall. If you missed that, here is a listing of some of the places our money has gone:

From the Spending Plan:

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ·MCUSA-\$3,739.00                       | ·Crime Victim Services-\$500.00      |
| ·Mennonite Mission Network-\$12,339.00  | ·MDS-\$500.00                        |
| ·AMBS-\$2617.00                         | ·Corinthian Plan-\$2,100.00          |
| ·Bluffton U. Dare to Dream-\$1,000.00   | ·Family Promise-\$500.00             |
| ·CDC-\$21,000.00                        | ·Community Peacemaker Teams-\$500.00 |
| ·Camp Friedenswald-\$2796.00            | ·Community Meal-\$550.90             |
| ·Mennonite Memorial Home-\$1,500.00     | ·The Wheel House-\$300.00            |
| ·Colonia Lopez, Sister Church-\$1000.00 | ·MCC-\$2,000.00                      |
| ·Braço en Braço do Lima-\$2,000.00      | ·Red Cross Blood Drive-\$94.29       |
|   | ·Our Daily Bread Kitchen-\$500.00    |

Places supported by the Non-spending Plan (these are primarily donations made by individuals that are paid via FMC)

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| ·International Student Assistance Fund | ·Mennonite Mission Network |
| ·Khloe Hostetler                       | ·Nataly Chavez             |
| ·MCC                                   | ·MCC Kits                  |
|  | ·Mutual Aid Fund           |

Of course, you all are directly giving to a variety of places on your own! If you want to find out more about our finances or want to ask questions or give input, look for the annual financial report for 2023 meeting coming up in February.

## MENNONITE ACTION PROTEST FOR A CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

On Tuesday, December 19, over 20 from FMC traveled to Columbus to join over 60 Mennonites from across the state to offer a letter to Senator Sherrod Brown. That letter expressed our deep concern for the loss of life of both Israelis and Palestinians during the recent war following the October 7 Hamas attacks.

Given the deep polarization and harsh rhetoric surrounding this war, and the way that calls for ceasefire have been labeled by some as expressions of antisemitism, none of us could predict what exactly would happen that day. Would there be counter protests to our symbolic action for peace? How far could we enter the building and offices? Would our presence at the office and on the public sidewalk in front be viewed as aggressive or even illegal by security or local law enforcement? Based on events from across the country there was even concern that simple musical instrument (like a recorder) could be viewed as a weapon stick in a tense protest/counter protests setting.

Despite such uncertainties, we went, to stand for peace in a time of war, to prayerfully offer songs, stories and calls for ceasefire. And I did tuck away an alto recorder, inside my jacket so as not to provoke, and to keep it warm that chilly day. While the cold and wind made it harder to play, I did offer it at the to accompany a special song in our hymnal, *Between Darkness and Light*.

That simple, prayerful call to peace, and planting seeds of love helped to focus my own experience of that day. I sense that our gestures of peace, mixing a sense of deep sorrow, good will, sprinkled with holy anger and prophetic conviction, was heard and appreciated by Sherrod Brown's aide that day.

I'll end with the below Facebook post and additional links offering more details about the event and this special hymn.

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## Steve Harnish Facebook Post

Dec. 21, 2023 at 9:22 PM

During this shortest day it seems fitting to reflect on the words of "Between Darkness and Light" (VT 808).

I first heard this moving piece at the Peace Club prayer vigil in the early days after the October 7 attack. Alex Sider read in Hebrew and our Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center grad assistant Tareq Abu Halima read in Arabic:

"Between darkness and light I will always walk and every place that I go I will open a window of light and plant a seed of love"

This song originated during escalations of conflicts in 2006 and was co-written by two women from Israel/Palestine—Palestinian-Israeli poet Dr. Manal Hreib and Jewish-Israeli musician Daphna Rosenberg.

Julian was home at the time and attended that vigil. The song's depth of meaning left an impression, and he later wrote this piano arrangement

[https://youtu.be/17cuZ91\\_Nrw?si=6yQ4jUZ3WlalsaHn](https://youtu.be/17cuZ91_Nrw?si=6yQ4jUZ3WlalsaHn)



Since then Tareq has lost three sisters among numerous other friends and family in Gaza.

For all the pain and suffering of our sisters and brothers in Israel and Palestine, I offer this song as a prayer for peace during this longest night...



## What in the World?

These 2 disks were found under a layer of dust and on top of the hearing assist cupboard in the Fellowship Hall. **Does anyone recall a use for these?** The aqua color seems to be an intentional design choice...



## WELCOME TO THE WORLD!

Courtney & Justin Paul welcomed baby boy Arthur Malcolm on Sunday, December 17. Arthur's family at FMC include grandparents Janine & Chad Paul, aunt & uncle Lauren & Joe Roberts, and 1 year-old cousin Cooper Roberts.





# INFORMATION ABOUNDS & ORGANIZATION ENSUES

A new year brings the opportunity to do some reorganizing! What has been reorganized?.....the literature racks by the main entrance to Fellowship Hall and the bulletin board pillars in Fellowship Hall!

## Seek & Find on the Pillars

The pillars in Fellowship Hall each have a heading at the top to help you determine what you may find on that particular pillar. See if you can find the pillar that has a **letter from a gentleman in California who found an old postcard of our church** and sent the card back to us. Or the pillar that has information on a variety of service opportunities, especially for youth. Did you know that the most recent **monthly financial report** is posted on one of the pillars for you to be able to peruse? And a new category is the **Anabaptism at Five Hundred** pillar where information and announcements concerning this anniversary next year can be found!

The **Events and Activities** pillar is a place where we can post things like **concert schedules, play schedules, and sports schedules** because others in the congregation might want to attend an event of another congregation. For example, there is information about a bike ride that Everett Collier is participating in this year...check it out! If you have something that you would like to add to this pillar just bring it to the church office or email it to Trusty!

## Literature Racks

The three sets of literature racks that are hanging on the wall have 3 headings: World, Community, and First Mennonite Church.

In the **World column** you will find magazines and information that have a global scope to them. Some examples are: a pamphlet on **Mennonite World Conference**; bookmarks with MCUSA Vision of Healing and Hope on it; Behind the Hammer a magazine about **Mennonite Disaster Service**; Interactions, a magazine on **MCC Theory and Practice**; **Leader**, a magazine for the Practical Effective Anabaptist; **CDC Connector Magazine**; and Toolkit pamphlets.

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The **Community** column has a place for information about **Camp Friedenswald**; The Vine magazine about **Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio**; pamphlets about **Brazo en Brazo, West Ohio Food Bank, Crime Victim Services**, and others. There is also information from **AMBS** and **Bluffton University** as well as resources on end of life from **Everence**.

The First Mennonite Church section contains copies of the **Congregational Care Resource List, our Constitution, Annual Reports, our 5 Priorities, our Governance Structure, the Menno-Life, Jubilee Request forms, and New Ministry Request forms.**

There is also a literature rack at the doors to the **library**. This rack contains pamphlets with information and resources on a variety of issues such as **bullying, grief, self-harm, electronic addiction, how to report sexual misconduct in a church setting, alcoholism**, etc. These are good resources for yourself or to help others.

These are all good places to start when seeking information on a variety of topics!



# CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

photos by kathy dickson



# CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

photos by kathy dickson