



Menno Focus

Monthly Newsletter of
First Mennonite Church of Denver

January / February 2015

Editor's Note

Hello dear *Focus* readers,

We at First Mennonite are in the business of making religion happen together. Religion has been much in the news lately, with the question hovering all around: Does religion make for violence or non-violence?

It is a powerful and complex question. All religions seem to reflect enormous violence in their ancient texts. And all religions have powerful statements about finding peace, making peace, refusing violence, care for the victim and weak. It is all deeply paradoxical. How can we find a strong sense of our own place, and feel confident that we are on a good path that is based not in wishful thinking but rather thoughtful reflection on what is most true and real about the relationship between human and divine?

Maajid Nawaz was 16 when he joined a radical Islamist group. Now he leads the counter-extremism think tank "Quilliam," and is a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate.

In the Fresh Air podcast "How Orwell's 'Animal Farm' Led a Radical Muslim to Moderation," Nawaz answers the question about violence and Islam by saying that in his view religions are not one way or the other. Rather, they always have been and always will be whatever their followers make of them.

I think this is exactly right. It is a secular way of saying that we must live in the dynamic way of the Holy Spirit in order to find what is the best of the Christ-spirit for our day. There will be no guarantee or simple landing-spot from the Bible or from our tradition. Each generation in its day must offer its own incarnation of the Spirit to demonstrate again on earth what we hold to be possible and true and wonderful about our faith. There is ultimately no other appeal.

How do we do this at First Mennonite? I experience it through Sunday morning reflections and hymns and prayers, through service work, and through the character of our relationships with each other (kindness, care, respect, believing the best of each other). How do you experience this? How are you finding your way on the path of faith in these days? How do you long to bear witness for peace? How are you bearing witness for peace?

Joy for these new days of the new year,
Vern Rempel, ed.

Pizzazz–Y Parenting

Creative Kid Language and Fun Ideas for Parents and Child Caregivers

A compilation of savvy ideas from parents, grandparents, teachers, friends of children, psychologists and even the children themselves from our church family and elsewhere, interviewed and compiled by Char Hostetler.

Some of this may not be new knowledge, but it may definitely have a new slant. The following oh-so-clever ideas are not classified by age, but parents will realize how they can be adapted to their own children. The following strategies may be more successful if you first have a little discussion about them with the kids before using them.

1. So your little somebody is having a big melt down over something that happened? You might CALMLY ask the child "Is this a "mouse problem" or an "elephant problem"??? You may have to first explain that a "mouse problem" is as small as a mouse, then give some examples: you have a tangle in your hair, your little toy breaks, you dropped your ice cream cone, etc. An "elephant problem" could be: your dog is really sick and has to go to the vet; your best friend is moving away, etc. Always validate the problem whether small or large! This idea helps children to learn perspective: is it a really big problem or actually sort of small compared to big stuff?

2. Kids are being stubborn? Here are some fun ways to help them [to] become more aware.

Ask: Are you a great big piece of thick wood or the gently waving branches of a palm tree? Big pieces of hard wood don't bend or give even a tiny bit. They just stay the way they are. They are not flexible! Palm tree branches gently flow and bend easily with the wind. They are very flexible! This can teach kids about adaptability to different circumstances. "Life is all about how you handle Plan B!"

3. Kids are having an argument. Some situations are "win-win". (I'm OK and you're OK too!) Both kids need to feel good about the solution. Other situations are "win-lose" (I'm OK, you're not OK)... or vice versa. This may be just new language for what you have been teaching them all along, but you can help them distinguish.

4. Here's a question for tough situations: "Are you taking the high road.... or the low road?" Teach children that love and kindness is the high road. Ask them for examples of the low road!

5. "No" is definitely an overused word. An alternative way of saying no to toddlers is "oh, oh".

6. Instead of saying "no," you could also ask, "Is that a good idea?"

7. And while we're talking about "no"... instead of wording a correction in the negative, try wording it always in the positive: Say, "Be gentle, be loving", instead of "Stop hitting! Stop arguing! Instead of: "Don't put that thing in your nose!" Try: "We always keep things out of our noses."

8. When kids are physically fighting, you can remind them that God gave them words and they are intended to use words instead of hitting. Our hands are meant to do nicer and much more creative things! At a certain age, you can talk about why we as Mennonites are people of peace and not violence.

9. Why not teach kids about Mother Teresa? Her philosophy is simply: Be Kind, Be Kind, Be Kind. Show them a picture of Mother Teresa. She has a face so memorable that even little children will remember and respond to her teachings.

10. We can always stop fights, but sometimes kids need to learn the importance of living in peace. Let peace begin with me. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPH4LRASWbo. Sing and dance with the kids to this song. Great photos on this version and the second verse is sung by a child. You and your child could also learn a few sign language movements for this song. Or learn it in a different language! The peace pole in the front of the church is a great teaching tool.

11. When your (older) child is arguing with you, you can say, "I love you far too much to argue with you."

12. *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo* is a book that describes a child who is feeling anger and frustration. It is a fun phrase to use when kids need calming down. "Are you feeling bombaloo?" There is a pressure point area under your clavicle, above the chest. It is called your Calm Button and if you rub it (either side) it will help defuse the stress. It is similar to acupressure.

13. Younger kids respond to fun, silly phrases. They will recite these cute, warm and loving phrases years later. Adding humor will make parenting more fun. Make up your own!

Eat your lunch, honeybunch,
Ducky, you're quite lucky.
Need a hug, lady bug?
Okey Dokey, Arti chokey
Take care, Teddy Bear
Nice thinkin, Mr. Lincoln
You're so funny, honey bunny.
That's so silly, willy nilly.
Ready Freddie?
Cutie-patootie

14. Kids should learn to respect another person's personal space. You can help by showing them what "personal space" looks like (about an arm's length away). If they get into someone's space or someone gets into theirs, just say, "personal space." They will get it!

15. Teach kids that "Plan A" is the first plan we come up with. But remember that there's always a "Plan B" available if plan A does not work out. We can even go to "Plan C", etc. This teaches kids to be adaptable.

16. Especially for older kids - "Happiness is an inside job." In other words, it is a choice we make ourselves. No one can MAKE you feel unhappy unless you let them." Even with small children, you can say "You can choose to be grumpy all day, or happy today. It is all up to you."

17. Sometimes kids will rant on and on. You can ask them, "Do you want advice or do you want me to just listen?" They will know. Most of the time, they just want to be heard.

18. Delayed consequences: If after your child does something that really upsets you and you need some cool down time, it's sometimes better to say something to this effect: "Right now, I am pretty angry, so I need some time to think about how I am going to handle this because I want to think about it very carefully. I will let you know when I have decided." Everyone will think more clearly after a cool down time.

19. Parent----- friend for the first 21 years.
Friend----- parent for the rest of their lives.
Obviously the ages can be different for each child.

20. Once in a while, have older kids substitute the word, WONDER for WORRY. Instead of "I am worried about the assignment that is due, "I am wondering about the assignment that is due." Takes away some of the stress!

21. This is an "awareness game" for older kids who have a habit of complaining.
Write down some things that would fall under the word "awfulizing." You know, when everything is just awful. Then write down some things that would fall under the category of awesome-izing. (yes, a made-up word).

22. One grandmother shared this web site which has some meaningful insights.
<http://momastery.com/blog/2014/01/30/share-schools/>

23. EFT (emotional freedom technique) is a great tool to use to calm kids. <http://eft.mercola.com> is a video if you want to see how it works. Let kids practice it on their stuffed animals or dolls. It works for many children and adults. It is used with great success for post-traumatic stress and soldiers who were in the war.

24. When kids are upset, have them rub their hands together until their hands are very warm. Then they can cover their heart, thus warming and healing the heart. Can use for headaches, stomachaches, etc. Breathe deeply while applying the warmth.

25. Children can learn to use visualization for any negative emotion. They can find a safe place in their minds where they want to go. Maybe they would like to jump from one cloud to another or climb on the rainbow. A bird bringing a little box to them to put their "troubles" in and then watching the bird fly away with all the "troubles." It often works wonders for many kids. They can create the box, bird, etc. as elaborately as they wish. Deep breathing is key.

26. To change behavior, the most powerful tool is to "catch kids doing things right" rather than what they do wrong. Let them know the POSITIVES that you observed. Works for all ages! This can be miraculous, according to a teacher friend. (Works with adults too.)

Thank you to everyone who participated in this exercise. Your ideas were great! Enjoy trying some of these out on your kiddos.

The Connections Project

Send me your good stories of connection to LGBTQ folks, conversations you've had, family stories, congregational and denominational connections and stories.

Remember that they need to be in a format that you feel comfortable having posted on our website (and with some excerpts in our newsletter). This is the *Connections Project* that I announced last summer. You may send these to my address – vkrempel@gmail.com.

This month: a few notes about our "welcoming statement."

Aimee Voth Siebert has been leading a writing group to put together a "Welcoming statement" for our congregation. This is a statement that makes explicit who is welcome among us. In particular, at this moment in our denominational and Christian era, the question of LGBTQ welcome comes into question. Often, people will assume or fear that there is not going to be a welcome at a Christian or Mennonite congregation, because that has often been the case. So groups who work at this question, such as BMC (The Brethren and Mennonite Council) have recommended that congregations make explicit our welcome.

We are exploring what would be good for our congregation, in terms of a welcoming statement. The council has looked at a couple of drafts of a statement from Aimee's group. We have had two public discussions during our Adult Ed. hour on the 11th and 18th of January.

Here are several notes on the process that is likely to develop from here on out:

1. We will articulate what the decision-making process will be for this statement. This will likely be a version of "consensus" decision-making that emphasizes good speaking and listening, the possibility for a continuum of response, caring for a process in which nobody is simply "voted down", and a process that is clear about how to be decisive and move forward so that we are not "bogged down" by an unwieldy search for absolute agreement.
2. A small group discussion guide that will include a draft of the statement, questions for discussion, and an articulation of the proposed decision-making process.
3. A chance to offer response via the internet, either on the website or through a simple survey.
4. At least three Adult Ed. sessions (March 8, 15, and 22 have already been set aside), for additional dialogue about the statement, and, if time permits, some preparatory discussion for KC2015 (our MCUSA national convention in Kansas City, June 30 – July 5).

Highlights of Leadership Council Meetings

By Karen Martin, Congregational Administrator

December Meeting

The First Mennonite Church Leadership Council met on December 17. Susan Burkholder, Chair, led the meeting. Pastor Theda Good led an opening meditation.

The Council reviewed the November Minutes and Commission and Pastoral Reports.

Susan gave a brief synopsis of the November 30 Congregational Meeting where the 2015 Draft Ministry Plan was approved by ballot. It was suggested that we review insurances and coverages. A number of questions were asked about specific line items. Susan led a stop light exercise where everyone indicated where they stood personally, red light, yellow (caution) or green on a post-it note. The post-it notes will be summarized and reviewed by the Council.

Chris Barnes, Coordinator of Finance, gave a financial report as of the end of November. He stated contributions have come up and expenses are down and generally, it is beginning to look better. He also updated the Council on pledging for the 2015 Ministry Plan and continues to follow up with people who have not turned in a pledge yet.

Council approved the November Minutes and Commission/Pastoral Reports and the Finance Report.

The Council approved these nominees and terms for the Architectural Review Committee:

Carla Stoltzfus, rotating off August 31, 2015
Darcey VanWagner (almost 2 year term, chair in 2015-2016)
Angie Nofziger (3 year term, chair in 2016-2017)
Ron Olson (4 year term, chair in 2017-2018)

The Council continued to discuss a draft welcoming statement and suggested some changes. This will be brought to the congregation for discussion in the new year.

The Council discussed delegates for Kansas City MC USA Convention and hopes to approve the slate at the January meeting.

January Meeting

The First Mennonite Church Leadership Council met on January 21. Susan Burkholder, Chair, led the meeting. Pastor Vern Rempel led an opening meditation.

The Council heard a report from Aimee Voth Siebert about the Welcoming Statement. A draft was presented in the Adult Education hour on January 18 followed by helpful discussion. The Council planned for further discussion which will include small group conversations, preaching, and teaching in Adult Education (there will be a series in March). It will be a process similar to the process the congregation underwent when we updated our Mission and Vision Statement a few years ago.

The Council reviewed the December Minutes and Commission and Pastoral Reports. The reports were affirmed.

Chris Barnes, Coordinator of Finance, reported on preliminary financial statements for the end of 2014 and pledging of the 2015 Ministry Plan. After considering the year-end report and the pledging update, the Council voted to move ahead with the 2015 budget as approved by the congregation. The Council approved the following statement: *Thank you for your contributions in 2014. Because of your generous contributions and some savings in expenses, we ended the year with a little over \$15,000 in excess income. The Leadership Council will use these surplus funds to fulfill the 2015 Ministry Plan. We believe we can sustain the 2015 Ministry Plan that the congregation approved at the November 30 Congregational Meeting, even though pledges were under our anticipated 90% of contributions threshold. We are grateful for the strong giving in 2014 and we invite you to remember our congregation with your contributions throughout 2015.*

Leadership Council approved the following slate of delegates to Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City in July 2015: Susan Burkholder, Jeremy Garber, Theda Good, Vern Rempel and Aimee Voth Siebert with Michael Regier as alternate.

The Council decided Vern Rempel should attend both MC USA convention in Kansas City and Mennonite World Conference in Harrisburg, PA next July. Council also noted Vern's sabbatical planned for August 16-November 16, 2015.

The Month of February

Compiled by Harlan Unrau

February 1990 – 25 Years Ago

11 – Nelson Mandela was released from Victor Verster Prison near Cape Town, South Africa, after 27 years of incarceration.

14 – The Pale Blue Dot photograph of Earth was sent back from the *Voyager I* probe after completing its primary mission -- from some 3.5 billion miles away.

February 1965 – 50 Years Ago

7 – US started saturation bombing of North Vietnam.

21 – African American Muslim minister and human rights activist Malcolm X was assassinated in New York City.

February 1940 – 75 Years Ago

10 – Tom and Jerry made their debut in *Puss Gets the Boot*. However, their current names were not adopted until 1941.

23 – RKO Radio Pictures released Walt Disney's second full-length animated film *Pinocchio* to theaters. Disney's first animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* had been released in 1937.

27 – Martin Kamen and Sam Ruben discovered Carbon-14 at the University of California Radiation Laboratory in Berkeley.

29 – Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Academy Award. Her role as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) earned the Best Supporting Actress award.

February 1915 – 100 Years Ago

8 – The controversial racist silent drama film -- *The Birth of a Nation* – based on the novel and play *The Clansman* both by Thomas Dixon and directed by D.W. Griffith premiered in Los Angeles. It was the first 12-reel film in America and the highest-grossing film for about 25 years.

12 – In Washington, DC, the first stone of the Lincoln Memorial was put into place.

February 1890 – 125 Years Ago

9 – The Weather Bureau, predecessor of the National Weather Service, was established as an agency in the Department of Agriculture.

February 1865 – 150 Years Ago

1 – John Stewart Rock, teacher, doctor, dentist, lawyer, and abolitionist, was the first African American lawyer to be admitted to the bar in the US Supreme Court.

8 – Martin Robison Delany, considered to be the “Grandfather of Black Nationalism,” was commissioned as a major, the first African American field officer in the US Army during the Civil War.

12 – Henry Highland Garnet, abolitionist, minister, educator, and orator, was the first African American to speak in the US House of Representatives – about the end of slavery.

February 1840 – 175 Years Ago

1 – The Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, first of its kind in the US, was incorporated.

February 1815 – 200 Years Ago

6 – The State of New Jersey gave the first railroad charter in the US to Col. John Stevens III and others for the New Jersey Railroad. Stevens was an American lawyer, engineer, and inventor who constructed the first US steam locomotive, the first steam-powered ferry, and the first US commercial ferry service from his estate in Hoboken, New Jersey.

New Books in our Church Library

By Carol Rempel

New Books in Your Church Library (purchased and donated by you)

Easy Children's Fiction:

Pelle's New Suit by Elsa Beskow

Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky by Faith Ringgold

Swimmy by Leo Lionni

We Shall Overcome: the story of a song by Debbie Levy

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend by Calvin Alexander Ramsey

Stone Soup by Jon J Muth

Selavi: a Haitian story of hope by Youme

The Caged Birds of Phnom Penh by Frederick Lipp

Mouse Count by Ellen Stoll Walsh

Brothers in Hope: the story of the lost boys of Sudan by Mary Williams

The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss

The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss

The Girls Who Loved Wild Horses by Paul Goble

Yanni Rubbish by Shulamith Levey Oppenheim

Juvenile Fiction:

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

Juvenile Non-Fiction:

Ain't Gonna Study War No More: the story of America's peace seekers by Milton Meltzer

A Young People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn

Paths to Peace: people who changed the world by Jane Breski Zalben

Seed of Change by Jen Cullerton Johnson

Planting the Trees of Kenya: the story of Wangari Maathai by Claire A. Nivola

Freedom's Children: young civil rights activists tell their own stories by Ellen Levine

Mosque by David Macaulay

Adult Non-Fiction:

Credo by William Sloane Coffin

A Passion for the Possible by William Sloane Coffin

The Imagine Project: stories of courage, hope and love by Dianne Maroney

Just Like Us: the true story of four Mexican girls coming of age in America by Helen Thorpe

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