



Menno Focus

Monthly Newsletter of
First Mennonite Church of Denver

April 2015

Editor's Note

Hello dear *Focus* readers. Happy spring to you! Yes, it is the time of the Vernal Equinox, that ancient time when the world in the northern hemisphere feels so much more flooded with light even while our fellow travelers in the south are preparing for the deepening nights of autumn and winter.

What is your season, in the midst of this seasonal change? Is this a time of growth for you? A time of loss? Is there great burden and difficulty in your life? Or are you being set free from some old confinement? Is this a season of fear? Of love? Where are you heading toward? Where have you come from?

On this last question, Edward Hays, the Catholic poet, has a psalm entitled "The psalm of my whereness." The psalm begins:

"The question 'Where have I come from?'
rises up and haunts me;
lingering, it floats like a flower
in the backwaters of my mind."

Hays explores this a bit with a number of affirmations from the voice of God. Some examples:

"You were the dream of my delight."
"Before I shaped a single star, I nursed you for endless ages."
"I laughed at the marvel of your being."

Hays then ends with these lines:

"O my child,
you in whom live all my hopes and loves,
you came from me."

To some, this is wonderful; to others, it may seem a bit sentimental. I think it is an illumination of the affirmation that humans are created in the image of God. One of the most compelling insights of our Mennonite movement is that this "image of God" in each one is the root of a deep and thoroughgoing rejection of killing and of violence. The other, even our enemies, must be considered in this deep well of God's own dreams for that person. Not in what they have done to us. Not in what our country or tribe says. We may consider those things. But the ultimate consideration is rooted in something deep in God's creation - the image of God in each one.

May this affirmation and depth be with us, whatever our "whereness" in this spring season.

Vern Rempel, ed.

Congregational Stories

Stories! Send me your church notes and pictures! They will enrich our newsletter and our life together.

Stories from Church Snow Day February 22

On the weekend of Sunday, February 22, snow totals around the metro area varied from approximately 8 - 16 inches. We, along with hundreds of churches, cancelled our services, partly to honor the CDOT request that folks stay off the roads.

So this opened up a time of alternate activity. Here are some of the things that were going among us:

From Pastor Theda

What does a pastor do with a snow day on a Sunday? Ah, the bliss of sleeping in. Then getting up to prepare for one of my favorite breakfasts, gluten free waffles. But, wait, the walks need to be shoveled for our breakfast guests. So it's putting on the layers of coats, boots and gloves and heading out into the new fresh snow. In just a few minutes, Dawn and I had our walks cleared as well as the neighbor's across the street. Then it's back inside to make the waffles, cook the sausage and brew another pot of coffee. We finish just in time for our guests, Dayve and Gwen, who only walked 3 blocks to join us for breakfast. When is the next snow day?

From Pastor Vern

The deep quiet of the morning fostered some good writing time. So I found myself, while sitting on the couch and drinking coffee, revising the meditation I had prepared for the morning. I was considering the questions of forgiveness and letting go (My inspiration was not the movie *Frozen*, as appropriate as that might have been for writing about letting go on a snow day!). The moment became a natural opening for deeper reflection as I moved into the questions. What a gift.

From Char Hostetler

A Snowy Sunday

I woke up late, did some reading, then communicated with some friends on the Internet. I knew it was my youngest granddaughter's birthday, but took a look outside and decided a phone "happy birthday" would have to suffice. A girlfriend called and we talked for a long time, then a call came in from my daughter. They had gone out for hamburgers and said they would stop by. What a nice surprise. We had the usual opening of gifts and tasted a couple of mini birthday cakes. What a happy little granddaughter! I was expecting to go with plan B, but I did get to experience a modified Plan A. A lot of things have a way of working out when I just trust the Divine process. Here is something about our snow day.

From Karen Martin

We had a cozy snow day when church was cancelled on February 22. We slept in, lingered over breakfast, had a "West Wing" marathon, and consumed the yummy food and drink that had been intended for our small group the evening before (also cancelled due to snow), including making smoothies out of the leftover Sangria! It was a great day for working on knitting projects, too.

From Arlen Hershberger

What We Did on the FMC Snow Closing Day

The snow was already beginning to descend on Denver, Saturday February 21 as we were leaving for DIA. Weather reporters, who need big snowstorms to boost their ratings, were predicting a possible record snowfall and people were already cramming our nearby King Soopers because, as we all know, our snowstorms always strand people in their homes for at least a couple of weeks.

A week earlier (Valentine's Day) we were at our daughter's place in L.A.. Late that night we had just returned from a wonderful evening at the Pasadena Symphony. We had gone there to see old Denver friends of ours who performed with the symphony that night ... one as the conductor and the other as guest soloist, playing the Shostakovich Violin Concerto. I noted upon entering our bedroom, that there was a message on my phone from Glenn, a friend and former roommate of mine in the early '70's. The message he left was that he had taken his wife, my good friend Jacky, to hospice that morning and that a few moments ago, she had died. It occurred to me that it was probably to the glorious music of Beethoven's 7th Symphony, that she slipped into the music of the universe. Now a week later, with FMC snow closure a virtual certainty, we were headed for DIA to fly back to Milwaukee to "say goodbye" to Jacky and to be with Glenn at this time of loss.

Our arrival in beer city at 1:00 was as to be expected. The leaden skies and high humidity made the cold even colder and people rushed around wrapped in clothing we rarely see in Denver. The Marriott Courtyard room we had reserved online was equally bleak, with a view to the dumpsters in the back and a room that hadn't had the heat turned on in days, if not weeks. The only bright spot was Erin the warm, friendly counter clerk who suggested that we go to the Milwaukee Market for lunch.

Erin knew what she was talking about. Her suggestion turned out to be one of the highlights of the week-end. Walking across the bleak streets with dirty snow and marooned cars along the invisible curb made the entrance into the drab 60's era Market particularly special. Suddenly, as if entering a fantasy Disneyland tunnel, there was light, music ... and food ... lots of it! The first thing we saw was an L-shaped counter filled to capacity with wine tasters who were clearly enjoying their culinary adventure. Other booths had sausages, of course, beers, naturally, cheeses, sandwiches, soups (we tried a pickle soup that was both Wisconsin-appropriate and just amazing), and a wondrous array of breads, cookies, pies and pastries. There, amid the cold, gray winter day of a weekend of bittersweet remembrance, we spent a couple hours in the warmth of friendly conversation with locals, fresh beer, fantastic sausages and the comradery that exists among all people of good will.

The two days that followed were filled with tears, laughter, food, drink and connection with old friends. At Jacky's memorial I sang the song I sang at her wedding almost forty years prior. We ate Polish food, drank Polish beer, told stories and sang. On Monday, before going to the airport, we had time alone with Glenn and talked of old times and of hopes for the future. The wheel of time is nearing the full circle we saw only very distantly in that third floor apartment in Chicago in 1971. That time spent loving and being loved is something to be closely cherished, becomes ever-more clear as the days pass.



JYF (6th-8th graders) took a day exploring different ways of helping people find stable housing and food. Their day included a tour of some Tiny homes being built, SAME Cafe, Purple Door and the Catholic Worker house. We ended the day with a light rail ride back for a sleepover at FMC with the MYF.



Membership Class

Each Sunday of Lent, at 4:00 in the afternoon, a group of 7 or 8 people has been gathering to consider our Mennonite faith and membership at First Mennonite. We have shared stories and looked at Mennonite history. Still to come: more of a look at contemporary church structure and priorities.

Venture Club Families spent a weekend in March together. We played in the snow, ate meals together, and shared a brief Worship Service on Sunday reflecting on the value of nature and rest in our lives.



Women Bridging Borders Immigration Series

Our women's initiative brought us a great education series on the subject of immigration reform:

- Judge Vandello speaking on immigration 101
- Sarah Jackson connecting about Casa de Paz
- Pastor Vern's power point introduction to Danny Carroll's book, *Christians at the Border*
- Helen Thorpe, author of *Just like Us*, about four girls growing up with differing document status
- Professor Danny Carroll, OT theologian and author

An excellent series! And there are many opportunities for continued action.



MYF Sleepover and Soup Lunch

The MYF Soup Fundraiser raised over \$2,500 for our Summer Convention and activities throughout the year. Ron Schmucker was our cook again this year, with splendid Chili, Tomato Bisque and Chicken Noodle Soup.



Lenten Evensong

Each Sunday of Lent, we have been meeting at singing the *Holden Evening Prayer* at 5:00 PM. Come enrich this time together with your voice. It is such a rich liturgy and beautiful music.

Lent "Belonging, Behaving, Believing"

Our preaching rubrics for the three church seasons have been:

Epiphany – Belonging – what does it mean to be part of a faith community?

Lent – Behaving – what are the good practices that make our lives and commitments good and strong?

Easter – Believing – what is the orientation, what is it that we pay attention to that gives us joy and hope for the days of our lives and as we work and serve in the world?

Welcome Statement Process and KS2015

Our congregation continues to consider what we might want to say on our website and in other places that would clarify a welcome to all people, including LGBTQ or simply folks who self-identify as “queer.” Also, what are our hopes and plans for our national convention in Kansas City this summer?



Anabaptist Songwriting Challenge

Pastors Tory and Vern were involved with this congregational music-writing challenge, based in our conference. We ended up with 47 entries. The three prize winners will each be receiving \$1000. The top ten entries will become part of a digital songbook for congregational use. Also, some of this music will be used in ways small or possibly large, at KC2015.

Together Colorado

Pastors Theda and Vern participated in the annual Together Colorado State-wide clergy meeting. We heard moving testimonies from folks affected by immigration policy. We heard a moving presentation from national

organizer Michael-Ray Matthews based on his experience of bearing witness in the streets of Ferguson, MO. We were invited to be allies and co-workers for justice and peace, to be “prophets of the revolution” rather than “chaplains to the empire.” Connected with this, organizer Will Dickerson, an inspiring and passionate leader, has been meeting with a small group of folks from our church to talk about our congregation’s own sense of community, our own pain and joy, and how we might link that with others for a greater regional witness of things like immigration, education access, prison reform. Contact pastor Vern if you’re interested in more information or would like to connect.

Casa de Paz

A few folks from our congregation, along with pastor Tory, participated in Sarah Jackson’s Casa de Paz training on a recent Saturday morning. If you’d like to do something practical to help lift the burdens of folks caught in the web of our immigration policies, you may contact any of our three pastors or search for Sarah and Casa de Paz on the web. There are many options for connecting, helping, joining in solidarity.

One more note from Arlen Hershberger – baseball!:

The eternal Big Leagues

January 24, Lola, Laura and I were returning to O’Hare Airport from Goshen where we had spent a short week end with an older, ailing cousin. It was early Saturday morning crossing the Chicago Skyway when we heard on the radio in the rental Laura was driving, that beloved Chicago Cub and world-citizen Ernie Banks had died during the night. I was immediately saddened and also struck with the timeliness of our being in Chicago upon receiving the news.

We exited the Skyway and drove up Lake Shore Drive which dropped us off near Wrigley Field, only four blocks from one of the places I lived in the early ‘70’s. The old stadium was quiet, most Chicagoans having not yet heard the news. A single press camera was there as the three of us stood together, looking at the marquis on the front of the stadium which read, “Ernie Banks, Mr. Cub. 1931-2015.

We paid quiet respect, shed a few tears and said a symbolic prayer for the man who played for the love of the game. He didn’t make much money and never played in the World Series but he was loyal to his team and to his fans. He personified all that was noble and good about the national pastime. I remembered being there with two of my cousins, May 12, 1970 when he hit his milestone 500th home run. They had stopped the game and given him the ball as he made an additional run around the bases, waving his cap to screaming spectators. The energy between him and the die-hard fans was magic. I also recalled a beautiful summer evening more recently when, with our daughter, we saw the Cubs play Philadelphia. It too was magic, a generation later. There was just something truly special about the old stadium in a gritty, old city with the spirits of Ruth, Cobb, Greenburg, Veeck, Brickhouse, Carey, Musial ...

So, another icon of a past era is gone and with him the innocence and hope of a time when sand lot kids with talent sometimes went on and played in the bigs and sometimes even left an indelible print on the hearts of generations of Americans. RIP, Mr. Banks. "Let's play two."

Highlights of Leadership Council Meeting

By Karen Martin, Congregational Administrator

The Leadership Council met on March 18 at 7:00 PM. Chair Susan Burkholder led the meeting.

Council reviewed the minutes of the February meeting and the Pastoral and Commission Reports. Chris Barnes, Coordinator of Finance, reviewed the income and expense report as of February 28, 2015. Contributions are behind by \$5,500 and he noted it is a little tight for this early in the year. The Council approved the February minutes, the Pastoral and Commission Reports and the Finance Report.

Pastor Vern Rempel announced his intention to leave First Mennonite and start a new church plant in Littleton. The Leadership Council had a lengthy discussion about this idea as well as some ideas presented by the Pastoral Partners about how to reinvigorate the congregation, generate enthusiasm and promote community.

The Council discussed the Leadership Council slate. Keith Wood has accepted the position of Vice Chair. Member-at-Large Greg Stauffer is working on other positions that will need to be filled for the start of the new church year in September.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

New Books in our Church Library

By Carol Rempel

Donations from the Mervin Dick library:

Cherishable: Love & Marriage by David W. Augsburg

Life Together [a discussion of Christian fellowship] by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Becoming God's Community by John Driver

The Community of the Spirit: How the church is in the world by C. Norman Kraus

The Authentic Witness by C. Norman Kraus

The Christian and Jury Duty by Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

The Price of Church Unity by Harold E. Bauman

These Are My People: The New Testament Church by Harold S. Bender

CD

Upendo: Salvation Mennonite Choir [Tanzania]

The Month of April

Compiled by Harlan Unrau

April 1990 – 25 Years Ago

24 – The Hubble Space Telescope was launched aboard Space Shuttle *Discovery*.

April 1965 – 50 Years Ago

3 – The world's first space nuclear power reactor, *SNAP-10A*, was launched by the U.S. from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. The reactor operated for 43 days and remains in low Earth orbit for an expected 4,000 years.

5 – At the 37th Academy Awards *My Fair Lady* won eight awards, including Best Picture and Best Director.

9 – The Houston Astrodome, baseball's first domed stadium, was unveiled for an exhibition game (first baseball game to be played indoors) between the Houston Astros and the New York Yankees. Although the Astros won the game 2-1, the Yankees Mickey Mantle had both the first hit (single) and the first home run in the Astrodome.

11 – An estimated 51 tornadoes (47 confirmed) struck six Midwestern states on Palm Sunday, killing between 256 and 271 people and injuring some 1,500 more.

April 1940 – 75 Years Ago

7 – Booker T. Washington became the first African American to be depicted on a U.S. postage stamp.
12 – The National Football League reduced the penalty for “clipping” from 25 yards to 15 yards.

April 1915 – 100 Years Ago

5 – Heavyweight boxer Jess Willard, the latest “Great White Hope,” defeated Jack Johnson, the first African American world heavyweight boxing champion, with a 26th round knockout in sweltering heat in Havana, Cuba. Willard became very popular among white Americans for “bringing back the championship to the white race.”

April 1865 – 150 Years Ago

9 – Confederate States Army Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his forces to Union Army Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, effectively ending the American Civil War – the U.S.’s bloodiest conflict with some 620,000 soldier deaths (two-thirds by disease) and more than 419,000 wounded. Additionally, the war resulted in about 50,000 civilian deaths. Total casualties amounted to approximately 3% of the American population. The war accounted for roughly as many American deaths as all American deaths in other U.S. wars combined.

14 – President Abraham Lincoln was shot while attending a Good Friday evening performance of the play *Our American Cousin* at Ford’s Theater in Washington, D.C., by actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth. That same evening U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and members of his family were attacked and wounded in their home on nearby Lafayette Square by Lewis Powell. George Atzerodt, who was assigned to murder Vice President Andrew Johnson at the Kirkwood House in Washington, did not carry out his assignment. Lincoln died early the next morning.

April 1815 – 200 Years Ago

5-12 – Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) blew its top explosively during an eruption (the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history), killing more than 92,000 people and propelling thousands of tons of aerosols (Sulfide gas compounds) into the upper atmosphere. The high level gases reflected sunlight and caused widespread cooling (known as a volcanic winter) and heavy rains in 1816, causing snows in June and July in the northern hemisphere, widespread crop failures affecting North American and European agriculture, and subsequently famine (worst famine in the 19th century). Thus, 1816 later became known as the “Year Without a Summer.”

April 1790 – 225 Years Ago

10 – The Patent Act of 1790 was the first patent statute to be passed by the U.S. federal government. The law defined the subject matter of a U.S. patent as “any useful art, manufacture, engine, machine, or device, or any improvement thereon not before known or used.” The law granted the applicant the “sole and exclusive right and liberty of making, constructing, using and vending to others” of his invention.

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