



Menno Focus

Monthly Newsletter of
First Mennonite Church of Denver

May 2016

Pastor's Perspective: Missional Drift

by Rob Burdette, Transitional Pastor

Author and church systems consultant Peter Steinke tells the story of being on a boat ride with relatives off the shores of Long Island. When they started out, the weather was clear with few clouds in the sky. However, as the day progressed, the clouds darkened and joined together, the winds picked up, the rain started, everything became gray and then, they no longer could they see land. How would they ever get back home? They were adrift in the storm. Fortunately, the skipper turned to his compass to orient himself and then he was able to get his boat back to land safely.

Steinke's story offers a good analogy for church life today. Many of our congregations have sailed out into the seas of society and then have lost their direction to a way back home. We are drifting, seeking a mooring, an orientation that can get us back to the solid ground, the foundations of our faith, our mission as the stewards of God's church. Many times, I believe that we lose sight of the big picture of mission, instead directing our attention to the many activities of the church which then devolve into isolated pseudo-missions.

So what is mission? Mission is what the church is supposed to be doing having been commissioned by Christ. Jesus directed his disciples saying, *Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you...Receive the Holy Spirit.* (John 20:21-22) Baptism then is a sign of our commitment to follow Christ's mission of redemption, healing and hope, first in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8). The church's mission must closely parallel Jesus' ministry, for example: 1. bringing Good News to the poor; 2. release to the captives; 3. recovery of sight to the blind; and 4. to let the oppressed go free.

The early church was quite specific in the continuation of Jesus' ministry of driving out demons, healing the sick and bringing forth new life. Yet we as the church in the 21st century may have drifted away from our original mission that reflected the radical behaviors and ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. Today, we too may be lost in the clouds of complacency, clinging to the memory of years long gone, while drifting in a sea of activities that no longer orient us toward God's mission of restoration, reconciliation and new life.

Mission must be measured in how it brings about new life. Jesus brought new life to the Samaritan woman through acceptance and inclusion. She was changed as was the community of faith. Matthew, although a tax collector, political enemy and thief, was also touched and redeemed by Christ's compassion. Again, the faith community offered new life and itself was changed. Martin Luther King, Jr. engaged Christ's mission of liberation, inclusion and the commitment of building a new community where all God's creation could be valued. As a result, our entire society was changed. Note also that mission seems to imply an outward movement, not to condemn or direct others, but instead to help us become transformed by the renewal of our minds, the potential of Christ.

Discerning God's will for The First Mennonite Church of Denver offers us the opportunity of reorienting ourselves to God's mission in the world today. Where do we see signs of life in the Denver community? Where is there healing taking place? Where are there signs of hope being established that point the way toward God's reign? Where do we see mutuality, solidarity, humility and compassion in the world today? This then is the direction for the church; this becomes our faith community's orientation for life.

Congregational Notes

[Compiled by Karen Martin]

These are some highlights of our shared congregational life from the past month.

Family Meeting #3: Asset Mapping. Family Meeting #3 was held April 10. We all enjoyed a delicious meal of gorditas provided by Martha Alonzo who lives nearby before settling down to table discussions about what assets or gifts we have individually and as a congregation. Rob led us to think about how we could use our gifts in different ways and each group made a proposal of a project using our gifts. Some of the projects included homelessness, Menno/Muslim relationship building and spiritual growth.



Weather changed our plans again in April! Mountain States Mennonite Conference Faith and Life Forum was postponed from April 16 to May 21. Church was cancelled on April 17. Spring Work Day on April 30 was rescheduled for May 7.



Neighborhood Gathering: A group of FMCers and 20 of our neighbors along Delaware, Elati, Fox and 8th Avenue gathered on April 14 to share a meal of pizza and to hear from Officer Robert Gibbs from Denver Police District 1. Officer Gibbs gave a presentation about crime and tips for safety. This was part of our initiative for an improved presence in our neighborhood.



The Evening of April 15

Women Bridging Borders would like to say a huge **Thank You to FMC** for the amazing response to our Second Chance Center (SCC) event. Thanks to donations of silent auction items and to donations of cash, over \$5300 was given to SCC.

But there was so much more than money that exchanged hands that night. The input from Sean Taylor and Governor Ritter was a rare opportunity to gaze into and learn from the souls of both the prisoner and the pardoner. Hassan Latif, executive director of SCC, sent the church a letter that captures the tone of the evening. It is titled "Second Chance Center overflows with gratitude and appreciation." Here are some excerpts from his letter.



*Even as I sit to write this thank you letter I struggle to find words adequate enough for the task. **First Mennonite Church of Denver and Women Bridging Borders...**the night of April 15th 2016 was amazing, moving and so powerful. I imagine this is true in different ways for different folks. Showcasing a film, such as **Lost for Life**, was courageous and important. We know it was difficult for some to view. The world is full of ugliness that far too many have chosen to ignore...so it remains, grows and continues to harm.*

Bringing together Governor Bill Ritter Jr. and Sean Ahshee Taylor was such a blessing. It was also clearly ordained to happen. I mean, Really? Who would have ever thought it possible - certainly not Sean or Dietrick Williams when their sentences were commuted years ago. Nor from the vantage point of places so dark many struggle to find the light of hope anywhere in sight. Your gracious and generous support of Second Chance Center helps in our effort to point towards that light, share hope, help so many (Thank God) embrace the possibilities that can accompany second chances.

*...It's people like you all and caring just like that which is the answer to so many of this world's problems...the healing ointment for so many of its wounds. Thank you all so very much. We love you and will continue to work hard to prove worthy of such love and support!
Peace and Blessings in Abundance*

Spirituals Concert: On Sunday, April 24, a 40-voice choir made up of past and current members of the Spirituals Choir provided a morning worship of beautiful music. The Spirituals Project requested the service as a way of saying thank you to First Mennonite for hosting and supporting the choir over the past eighteen years. The Spirituals Project will become part of the Lamont School of Music at Denver University in the fall. Arlen Hershberger first organized a Mennonite Area Community Choir to do a fundraising concert for a Public Service Station film project that Dr. Arthur Jones was doing. That collaboration led to a full-fledged organization known as The Spirituals Project and the choir changed into a multi-racial, multi-age community choir of The Spirituals Project which has rehearsed at First Mennonite since 1998. Many from our congregation have been involved over the years.



Focus on DOOR: The DOOR Dwellers served a delicious French toast brunch on May 1 following the worship service. While the brunch was served, the Dwellers were available at various tables to talk about their experiences this past year as they lived in community and worked at various non-profits in Denver. Thank you for all who donated, DOOR made over a \$1000!



Guest speakers: We enjoyed several guest speakers in the past month. Sharon Nelson, MCC Young Adult Program Coordinator, brought the message on April 3. Justin Chambers, DOOR National Recruitment Associate and Atlanta City Assistance Director, spoke on May 1.



Mentoring Ski Day: I had a hard time keeping up with Isaac and Tyler on Breckenridge Mountain Saturday, April 9. Snow boarder Tyler knew the mountain well and headed us right down a black diamond for our first run which would have made a better finale than starter run. Isaac was a trail bomber while Tyler conquered a few jumps! I only had to say “definitely no” once for the good of all our health and safety! We returned safe and sound to Denver by late afternoon with 12 runs and 14,588 vertical feet under our belts and a good time had by all! ~ Tom Bishop

More to Do

By Norm Dewhurst, Vice Chair

October 2015 was seven months ago and much has happened since that time. We are in the midst of exploration of our direction as a congregation. We are exploring our past together, our mission and our goals, our connections to one another and to the community.

As I think about all of this a question comes into my mind; “so where are we in this journey?” The answer is we are on the road but there is more to do. Rob was brought into this milieu to guide us through the anxiety, confusion, and pain. He is here to help us emerge transitioned into the next phase of our history. If I ask a writer “where are you in the story”? “Are you near the end or closer to the middle”? The answer, I suspect, would be “it depends.” It really does depend upon how the elements come together. It depends on what emerges as the story unfolds. Who can rule out new themes or even a new character or two?

The analogy to a writer, I hope, gives a sense that there is an intention and an end point to this story but it isn't always clear what will emerge.

Rob has told us from the beginning that we are doing the work that needs to be done but it is also not always clear what is going to emerge. He said that we should consider 18 months to do this work. In October we will reach the end of the first year.

The Council voted to extend Rob's contract for another year, i.e. October 2017. This protects Rob and FMC from not being able to finish this work. Rob continues to say that we are looking at about 18 months. We will mutually end the contract short of October 2017 if we are finished.

This may cause many of us to feel impatient and to squirm. Being patient doesn't come easily to most of us. That being said, at some point this will be behind us and the hard work will have paid off.

If you have questions or comments, offer them to a member of the Council and/or Rob.

“Robotics” Expands the Mind...and a Relationship

By Debb Reed



Who knew that being a mentor involves not only developing a relationship with a FMC high school student by meeting at a coffee shop, restaurant, movie or sporting event but also, by attending events that the student is passionately involved with at his/her school. I am all about school events but what is this? Robotics? Hmm...must have something to do with gadgets, computer program design, electrical wiring, wheels, belts, smoke and even fire at times? All of which I know nothing about!!

Knowing that Kristin (Kraybill-Voth) has been working tirelessly and intensely for the last several months, I knew I

wanted to attend the Area National Robotics tournament at the DU Ritchie Center. Kristin is the captain of the George Washington High School Robotics team and has been involved with Robotics

since her freshman year of High School (she is a junior this year). Robotics involves a team designing, building and programming a



robot to compete against other teams around the country (even out of the country....a team from Mexico attended this year's event!). They are given a problem six weeks ahead of the competition and form alliances with other teams during the competition. Trying to explain the scoring and rules is impossible in a short article, so please, ask Kristin about it sometime (or google it). What I do want to describe is the overall sounds and sights of the day: Large groups of students wearing matching t-shirts with weird

(meaningful?) graphics, extremely loud music played at ALL times of the competition with constant movement from the crowd, long boards with a variety of technological devices attached being transported to the floor of the arena, a bald guy (wearing rotating costumes) announcing each team with wild enthusiasm, loud chants and cheering supporting their team and other teams, and frantic team members moving their beloved robots to and from the appropriate area for competition. I had no idea I would be so entertained!

Robotics helps develop our next generation of scientists, engineers, techies and problem solvers. The arena was bursting with talent and intelligence but also, a sense of unity was evident....teams were all working for a common goal and it was important that they all accomplish it together!

I won't forget that day and how fortunate I am to learn so much from Kristin and her talented teammates.

Highlights of the Council Meeting

By Karen Martin, Congregational Administrator

The First Mennonite Church Leadership Council met on Wednesday, April 20. Norm Dewhurst, Vice Chair, led the meeting. Rob led an opening prayer.

Council minutes and pastoral/commission reports were reviewed and accepted. Below is some of the work that has been done in the past month by members of the Leadership Council:

Chair – met with members of the congregation about various concerns

Vice Chair – helped plan and attended a community meeting with church neighbors

Children and Youth Faith Formation – Met with the CYFF Committee to talk about various programs of the Commission, their viability and the desire for feedback from parents and others in the congregation.

Facilities – Prepared for Spring Work Day, performed various repairs

Fellowship – Planned the lunch for Family Meeting #3

Finance – Reviewed financials, met with a number of individuals and committees

Member at Large – Met with various committees and continued working on the leadership slate

Pastoral Partners – Discussed the purpose of pastoral partners and what the pastors need during the transition.

Worship – Worked on an upcoming survey on worship

Coordinator of Finance Richard Wyse reported on the financials as of March 31, 2016. At the end of the first quarter, expenses are below budget, income is under budget and overall, expenses are greater than income by \$353.

Council discussed Rob's Interview Summary Report and where we stand on the five recommendations. [The report was sent to FMC active participants following the Council meeting.]

It was proposed that we extend Rob's contract for an additional year to allow plenty of time to complete the transition work. We are still working hard to complete it in 18 months. If the transition is completed earlier than 24 months, Rob and the church would mutually agree to end his position per his Memo of Understanding.

Shelva shared some comments that had come up at her table at the last Family Meeting regarding pastoral structure, Sunday morning structure and church structure for the Council's consideration. There will be further discussion about these issues.

The Council voted to recommend the following leadership slate to the congregation for the Spring Congregational Meeting on May 15.

Vice Chair: _____; Facilities: Matt Baron; Fellowship: Angie Nofziger; Member at Large: Arlen Hershberger; Pastoral Partners: Ron Olson; Worship: Jeremy Garber

Norm and Rob reported on the recent neighborhood meeting at the church which was an official neighborhood watch meeting with a police officer presentation.

Tory reminded everyone about the Mountain States Mennonite Conference Faith and Life Forum rescheduled for May 21. All are welcome to attend and it is our chance to give input about the future of the conference.

In addition, Mountain States has sent a letter asking for written input regarding FMC's request for Theda's ordination. [The letter was sent to all active participants for individual responses.]

The Council walked around the exterior of the building to assess exterior lighting and to discuss if and where additional lighting is needed.

First Mennonite Church of Denver
430 West 9th Avenue, Denver, CO 80204
Phone 303-892-1038
Fax: 303-892-6106
e-mail: fmcdenver@aol.com
website: fmcdenver.org

Menno Focus is published monthly.

Editor and Layout: Karen Martin

Contributors: Tom Bishop, Rob Burdette, Norm Dewhurst, Karen Martin, Debb Reed

Photos: Tom Bishop, Tory Doerksen, Katie Hegedus, Karen Martin, Debb Reed

© 2016 First Mennonite Church