



Menno Focus

Monthly Newsletter of
First Mennonite Church of Denver

October 2016

Pastor's Perspective

By Tory Doerksen, Pastor of Children and Youth Faith Formation

This spring and summer I have been wrestling with a lot of things, personally and professionally. I am doing my best not to let my personal faith journey affect my professional ministry, yet I find myself at a moment where the two are intertwined, and that it's time to explore what the future will look like for me and for FMC. Please pray with me as I consider where I need to be in the future, and as you pray where God is calling you and FMC in the future. So as our Transition continues, here are some of my thoughts for you to consider:

- 1.) I am reminded regularly that it is quite challenging to have a different vision for the future outside of what we have been in the past. I get the sense that many of us long for the FMC of the 70s, 80s and 90s, with regular Sunday morning attendance, large and vibrant choir, and strong four part congregational singing. I hear that we have lost our identity as these markers have waned or changed. What anchors this congregation for you into the next decade?
- 2.) I wonder if we are still living off the relationships that have been growing before we built the current sanctuary. Society and Denver have changed significantly since 1990, and I'm not sure it's as easy for FMC to encourage and intentionally develop deep relationships in today's context the way many of us intended and expected. I sometimes see our church as a large tree that lived off of deep roots from the previous generation. I wonder what the next generation "root system" will look like, and what kind of tree(s) it will grow.
- 3.) Personally, I see the future of church **growing in localized expressions and smaller gatherings**. Not just for FMC, but for many established churches moving into this 21st century. Consider how you can be God's church within walking distance, and on a daily basis. How could this look for people of FMC?
- 4.) I see the future of church anchored in **deep relationships developed intentionally with time and authentic conversation and shared prayer**. Who are your deepest relationships at FMC, and how did they start and grow?
- 5.) I personally see the future of **Christianity anchored in knowing our next door neighbors and partnering with them** for the health of society. What does "outreach" and "service" look like in your life, and who reaches out to you and serves you and your household on a daily basis?
- 6.) I personally see faith formation including corporate education (like Sunday School), but grounded in **individual and household-based spiritual practices**. What do you and your household do to stay grounded, and focused on following Jesus (and listening for God) on a daily and regular basis?

Right now I am feeling a bit saturated with the Transition of this congregation, and I feel like we are wrestling with our past identity and our possible future. I often feel and hear stories of deep mourning and grieving that we are not the church we used to be and expected to always be. We are fearful that spiritual practices and relational community that we enjoyed and invested in may not continue in ways that are meaningful for us. We are skeptical that new ways of being church will exclude us and leave us behind. We are reluctant to invest in changes that feel too foreign and risky.

To be honest, I'm a bit worried too. I think of the job I've valued the past 6 years, not being around anymore. Will I have the skills needed for a new job description? I think of the staff that changed when Annie left, Vern left and soon Karen will not be in her staff role either.

What I am sure of these days, is that God is with me. Maybe we feel God the most in times of change. Abe heard God's voice when he left his homeland. Moses heard God when he left Pharaoh for the desert life. Maybe it's better said, that it's God who causes times of change. Paul converted from persecutor to evangelist on the road to Damascus. Cain heard God after he killed Abel. Esther heard God when her people were threatened. And maybe it's grace and strength that we hear from God in these moments, that feel too strange, too fraught with stress, and seemingly hopeless.

I've needed God these past 7 months. And sometimes all I can hear from God is to take it month by month and let this Transition run its course. We've had a year of Transition with Pastor Rob, and I know we still have a good 6-12 months ahead of us. In order for the church to truly follow God's call, I've had to continue to hold my calling quite loosely. I'm thankful for your grace, patience and support as I continue trying to hold it loosely.

I pray that each one of you can feel God's grace too. May we have the clarity and courage to follow God into this next chapter for FMC.

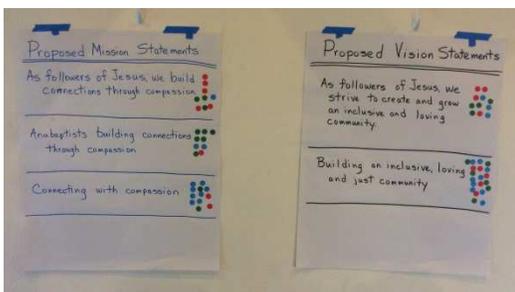
Peace be with you, Tory

Congregational Notes

[Compiled by Karen Martin]

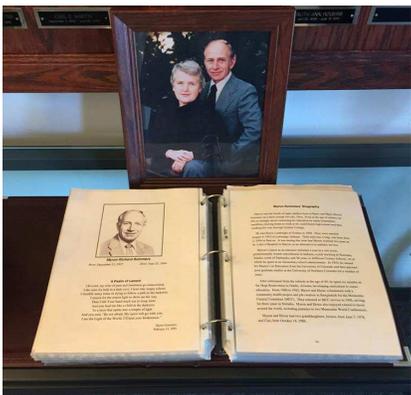
These are some highlights of our shared congregational life from the past month.

MCC School Kits were assembled by children on September 11. Thanks to Rod and Barb Stutzman for coordinating the effort.



We gathered for Family Meeting #6 on Wednesday, September 14. An enthusiastic group met to think about goals and objectives and to indicate preferences for proposed mission and vision statements. We shared a meal of sloppy joes before we got to work. These are posted in the Community Center. Please add a dot to indicate your preferences if you haven't already done so. Dots are on top of the piano. It doesn't matter what color dot you use.

Great Getaway Weekend at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp. September 23-25. A fun weekend was enjoyed by 70 adults and children.



Eloise Sommers Memorial Service: We remembered our friend Eloise Sommers on Saturday, October 1. Eloise, long time member of First Mennonite, died August 18.

DOOR 30th Anniversary: We worshipped at West High School on September 18 in honor of DOOR's 30th Anniversary.



Special musicians on September 11: Emily Martin, Nikki KandeLind, Sam Martin, Arden Slotter. Who knew we had a trombone player?

Reflection on 20 Years at FMC

By Karen Martin, Congregational Administrator

On one hand, it seems like 20 years has flown by in a flash. On the other hand, it seems like forever. I can hardly recognize my life then as compared to my life now.

In the summer of 1996, there was a bulletin announcement advertising a new position at First Mennonite, Congregational Administrator. I was overwhelmed when I saw the announcement. A feeling overcame me that I had never experienced before or since. Although I was already working part time between a parapro job at my daughter's elementary school and keeping the books for the family printing business, I knew I was called to apply. Clearly, I got the job and started on September 16, 1996.

My daughter was just starting third grade and my son was a tenth grader, starting his first year in high school marching band. She remembers feeling a little mad that I wouldn't be at her school anymore and he remembers being too wrapped up in school to remember much about mom heading into the "real" work world. For me, it was a major transition into a more busy life, juggling work responsibilities and family life.

On my first day of work, my husband and children sent flowers to my office. I was warmly welcomed by the church staff. There was a dismal old computer in the corner of my office. My desk chair was also pretty old and it didn't take long for me to lean back too far in it and crash against the wall! The church did not even have an e-mail address or website and we didn't know much about the internet. There was no such thing as Facebook and Twitter. No one had a smart phone.

And so I launched my 20 years at FMC. In the course of the 20 years, I have probably worked with almost everyone in the congregation in one way or another. There have been ups and downs for sure, but mostly, it has been a wonderful opportunity for growth, learning and service. You have taught me a lot about what it means to love one another. It has been sacred to walk with you in the good times and the not-so-good times. It has been my honor to participate with you in the life of our congregation. All of us have been through much together!

Thank you for all of your support over the years. Imagine my delight when I open an envelope that I think contains a check to find that it contains a check and a sweet note, thanking me for what I do! Thanks for all the times you said "yes" when there was a need at church.

Now, with mixed emotions, it is time for me to leave my work at FMC. A desire to simplify my life led me to consider an unexpected opportunity that came up a few months ago. I have accepted a position that is close to home. Instead of driving 36 miles a day to work and back, I will drive 8 miles a day, round trip. I look forward to this simplification in my life as Denver traffic has become increasingly stressful. Just as different responsibilities and focus will open a new chapter for me, it is also an opportunity for a new chapter for the church. My hopes, prayers and love will be with you always.

Results of the Child and Youth Program Survey

By Anita Miller, Coordinator of the Child and Youth Commission

In May 2016, the Child and Youth Committee asked participants to complete a survey about their beliefs and practices, and their thoughts about the Child and Youth Program. The survey was given two times on paper during church services and was available electronically for about one month.

We had 105 total respondents: 42 were parents to children 18 and younger, 34 were not parents, 19 were unknown (respondents remained anonymous) and 10 were children 18 or younger. We had an even representation of kinds of families with 21 having their oldest child 11 or under and 22 having their oldest child 12 or over. There were 36 total families represented (both parents answered in some cases); this was 65% of the total families possible.

Here are our top findings. The questions in italics are items for the Child and Youth Committee, and the congregation, to continue to reflect on.

- "Remaining mindful of being a follower of Christ as you make daily choices" was the most frequently chosen element of spiritual practice.
 - *How is this practice modeled, taught at home or through our community?*
 - *Are people talking about how they are a follower of Christ?*
 - *How will our children learn this practice?*

- “Read and reflect on the Bible” is a distant last in a faith formation practice of respondents.
-- *What do we do with the Bible at FMC?*
- The Sunday morning service and child and youth programming are important to all people.
 - “Sunday service” was the **most frequently** chosen source of connection to FMC.
 - “Sunday morning Peace School” was the **most important** element of programming.
- “Community building through formal groups (Venture Club, JYF, MYF)” was the **second** most important element of programming for parents.
 - *What do we want our formal groups to look like?*
 - *How do we get sponsors involved and inspired?*
 - *How do we get families and kids excited about the potential of these groups?*
- People seem generally satisfied with
 - the time they spend developing their faith,
 - the extent their personal spiritual development is encouraged or expected at FMC,
 - their connections to FMC, and
 - their knowledge of the Child and Youth Program and Pastor Tory.
- How should Pastor Tory spend his time on Sunday mornings? Parent results:
 - #1 “Finding ways to get to know all children and youth individually (other than teaching)”
 - #2 “Preparing and leading topical conversations for families.”
 - #3 “Teaching middle school or high school.”
 - #6 (of 8 choices) “Catching up with families or volunteers regarding administrative details.”
 - *The Committee and Pastor Tory are using these responses to shape Tory’s time this year.*

There were no notable differences between families with older or younger kids or among groups divided by length of time attending FMC.

Here are the survey questions and results:

1. Please rank how you practice the following elements of faith formation in your own life.

	parents	not parents	all
Remain mindful of being a follower of Christ as you make daily choices	165-1	111-2	427-1
Serve others / work for social justice	140-2	114-1	402-2
Spend time with other members of FMC	133-3	100-3	348-3
Spend time with God through prayer or meditation	128	97-4	348-3
Read and reflect on the Bible	59	61-5	202

2. Please mark on the scale how satisfied you are with the time you spend developing your faith?

fairly or completely satisfied: parents = 69% not parents = 70% all = 70%

3. To what extent is your personal spiritual development encouraged or expected at FMC?

a fair amount or a great deal: parents = 50% not parents = 64% all = 60%

4. Check ways you are connected to the First Mennonite community.

	parents	not parents	all
Sunday services*	38-1	32-1	119 -1
Kids to Peace School*	36-2	2-7	48-6
Have close friendships with other FMC participants	30-3	28-2	106-2
September RMMC Getaway	27-4	6-5	50-5
Organized small group	26-5	23-3	81-3
Kids to RMMC camp	25-6	3-6	38-7
Volunteer	24-7	20-4	70-4

* at least twice a month between September and May

5. How satisfied are you with your connections to FMC?

fairly or completely satisfied: parents = 81% not parents = 76% all = 78%

6. Please rank the following elements in terms of what you think is most important for our children or youth to be getting from organized FMC programming.

	parents	not parents	all
Peace School time - Sunday morning education and experiences together	202-1	152-1	580-1
Community building through formal groups like Venture Club (3 rd -5 th Grade), Junior Youth Fellowship (middle school), Mennonite Youth Fellowship (high school)	190-2	148-2	576-2
Service opportunities - Both on Sunday mornings and other times during the year	166-3	132-3	478-4
Mentoring Program for high school youth	155-4	131-4	481-3
Resources that encourage family faith formation outside church	114-5	113-5	348-5
Christmas program	95-6	101-6	305-6

7. How much do you know about the Child & Youth Faith Formation program?

a fair or a great deal: parents = 74% not parents = 24% all = 47%

8. How much do you want to know?

interested or very interested: parents = 93% not parents = 27% all = 80%

9. How well do you know Pastor Tory?

fairly well or very well: parents = 69% not parents = 64% all = 70%

10. Check the top three ways you'd like to see Pastor Tory spending his time on Sunday mornings.

	parents	not parents	all
Finding ways to get to know all children and youth individually (other than teaching)	27-1	20-1	79-1
Preparing and leading topical conversations for families	24-2	12	62-2
Teaching middle school or high school	21-3	9	44
Connecting with a wide variety of people from the congregation, not just families	16	18-2	55-3
Getting to know individual families privately	10	15-3	36
Catching up with families or volunteers regarding administrative details	8	5	28
Teaching kids 5 th Grade and younger	8	5	18
Preaching more often	5	8	21
Don't know	5	4	20

The Child and Youth Committee also hosted a congregational roundtable on May 22, 2016. We asked table groups to reflect on our mission: Building Community - Learning about the Bible - Strengthening our Relationship with God. Here are some takeaways:

- There is tension between wanting to do things together and being busy and geographically spread out.
- How are we accountable to each other?
- What is the role of the multi-generational community in faith formation?
- Intellectually people know that the Bible is foundational for Christians, but it is a fraught topic. How do we teach the Bible meaningfully? People seem ambivalent or conflicted about the place of the Bible in our lives.
- God is also revealed through the lives of both famous and ordinary persons. Are we sharing our stories?
- There is a broad variety of ways we strengthen our relationships with God. This might be the hardest element to “teach” or model on Sunday mornings alone.

The Child and Youth Committee thanks those of you who completed a survey and/or participated in our roundtable discussion! We gathered useful information that will help us in this time of transition.

Highlights of September Council Meetings

By Karen Martin, Congregational Administrator

September 12

The FMC Leadership Council met in special session on September 12 at 7:00 PM. The meeting was called to order by Norm Dewhurst, Chair. Craig Sommers and Lynn Williams from the Governance/Structure Task Force were present as well as the Council. Pastor Theda Good led the opening meditation.

The Council continued their discussion of the Governance/Structure Task Force Proposal. It was decided to move ahead with presenting the Board and team structure to the congregation for their input. This will take place on October 2.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

September 21

The Council met again on September 21 for the regularly scheduled monthly meeting. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Norm Dewhurst, Chair. Jeremy Garber led the opening meditation.

Council reviewed the minutes of the August 27 and September 12 meetings. The minutes were approved as written. Commission and pastoral reports were reviewed and approved.

Richard Wyse, Coordinator of Finance, gave a report on the financials as of August 31, 2016.

- Total income year-to-date was \$297,076 which is \$41,498 under budget.
- Total expenses were approximately \$310,524; \$28,050 below budget.
- Expenses are greater than income by \$13,448
- Contributions were \$36,418 under budget.

In a continuing discussion about the Governance/Structure Task Force proposal, Council discussed staffing at great length. This discussion will continue at next month's meeting.

Norm Dewhurst reported on behalf of the Human Resources Committee. With Karen Martin's departure from her position as congregational administrator at the end of October, HR has met several times and has decided on the following interim plan until a more permanent staffing plan is reached:

- outsource financial operations [Payroll will be outsourced to a payroll company through our bank; the rest of accounting will be outsourced to a CPA firm.]
- increase Linda Welty to full time with a rewritten job description that includes elements from both the administrative assistant and congregational administrator job descriptions
- pastoral staff and caretakers will take on some additional tasks from the administrative assistant and congregational administrator job descriptions

This interim plan will be in place for six months while the Council and congregation work on staffing.

Council spent time planning for the October 2 presentation to the congregation about the new Board structure and teams. Rob, Norm and someone from the Governance/Structure Task Force will be the advocacy group to oversee taking this forward.

Rob gave an update on the transition work, noting some highlights from the September 14 Family Meeting where goals and objectives were discussed.

The Council discussed forming an ad hoc task force to examine uses of the building by various groups and come up with a recommendation. Matt Baron, Facilities Commissioner, will chair this group and. Arlen Hershberger, Member-at-Large, will also serve on this group. Matt and Arlen will recruit a few more members.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Assistance Program Report

Compiled by Norm Dewhurst, Assistance Office Volunteer

The Assistance Office served 84 people from December 1 2015 through March 2016. This current study of the characteristics of the population served is a follow-up to the study done between October and the end of November 2015. In that study, a sample of 25 people was drawn to consider the characteristics of the population served. The sample in this study is three times larger.

Location

Zip 80204 accounted for 54% of those seen.

Zip 80223 accounted for 11%

Zip 80219 accounted for 16%

The remaining 19% were spread out over a variety of other zip codes

Service

During the period covered by this study 69% of the requests were for **rental assistance**. **Utility assistance** was requested by 31% of the population.

Living Situation

Apartments were home to 65% of this population while 18% were in a House and 17% were in a Duplex.

Reason(s) for Seeking Assistance

In this sample **44% didn't provide a reason for their situation** while **56% of the population did provide information** about the reason for seeking service.

Of those providing reasons; unemployment was a reason for 32% of the population, medical problems or illness was the issue for 15%. The remaining reasons were varied.

Gender and Income

Male assistance seekers accounted for 37% of the population and females were 63%.

The average income for males who reported this was \$903 and the average income reported by females as \$852

Employment and Disability

In this study 94% of the people reported their employment status. There were 67% not employed while 33% were employed.

In this study 8% did not report their disability/ability status. Of those reporting 74% did not consider themselves disabled while 26% did consider themselves disabled.

Family Situation

The average family size was 2.5 people in the household.

Households with children comprised 43% of those in the study.

Households with no children comprised 54%

There was 3% of the sample that didn't indicate whether they had children or not.

In those households indicating they had children 56% said they had children age 5 years and younger.

Ethnicity

In the population studied 24% identified as African American, 54% identified as Hispanic and 22% identified as Caucasian.

Benefit Programs

27% of the sample received **no benefits**

61% received food stamps

SSA 16%

SSDI 15%

TANF 8%

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: Norm Dewhurst, Tory Doerksen, Karen Martin, Anita Miller
Photos: Carrie Baron, Tory Doerksen, Andi Gingerich, Osvaldo Gomez, Rod Stutzman
© 2016 First Mennonite Church