

First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 67, No. 3 • May 2020



This kid, Sage Tulip, was born on Easter. We currently have 18 lambs and 3 kids, but we're through with lambs and kids for the season. About half of the lambs (the older ones) are running around the pasture with their moms; the others are in the barn with their moms, except Sage Tulip, who we are bottle-feeding, although she is no longer wearing diapers. We have planted onions, leeks, radishes, lettuce, beets, and kohlrabi so far in the garden with a variety of people who are part of the co-op helping. The last two days I've hauled in 8 dump wagon loads of horse manure.

~ Ray Person

## Spring arrives with more surprises and challenges than usual

In the Northern Hemisphere, spring begins with the March equinox each year on March 19, 20, or 21. This year, spring arrived on March 19, bringing the usual signs of grubs, worms, migration of birds, crocuses, daffodils, and baby lambs and goats. Interestingly, the arrival of spring on March 19 was the earliest in more than a century. That was unusual in itself, but due to Covid-19 and the many changes it has caused to our everyday lives, spring 2020 has been exceptionally unusual.

To step away from the anxiety and fears, we thought it would be fun to highlight some of the positive stories we've heard from our FMC congregation, the new ways we've learned to communicate with each other, and to share how others are managing life in close quarters, and the different ways people are managing self-care.

The FMC staff members are, for the most part, working from home, interspersed with brief solo work periods in the office. Staff meetings continue every Tuesday morning at 9 a.m. via Zoom. Video conferencing is certainly not new to the global workplace and though all of our staff had previously used it in various work situations, we've also had to learn some new skills and explore new ways of working. We do miss being able to yell back and forth to each other and we really miss birthday treats! Maybe by Wanda's June 12 birthday, we'll be able to celebrate together in person. If not, we'll make a plan!



### Life and work at home

**Wanda Stopher** – My new life as a result of COVID-19 has taken a dramatic curve in an upward spike in my use of computer technology. I Zoom a lot! All my regular meetings have moved to the Zoom platform. What was a little frightening at first, Zoom has now become much more akin to second nature. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to connect by Zoom and other tools, and to be able to continue to serve the church in new ways.

Study and preparation for sermons is the same as it has been in many ways. I spend time with the text, I read and listen to what others have to say, I pray, and I write. Lots of books have been carried home from my office at church! However, I've also resumed a practice that I had in years past of searching out great works of art based on the text or representing some aspect of the passage I'm preaching. I did this previously as part of my sermon preparation. And that artwork often made its way into PowerPoint presentations that accompanied my sermons. Now, since morning prayers have moved to a Zoom format, I've been including a piece of artwork in our prayer time.

Art is helpful to me, as I think it is to many people today because we live in a highly visual culture. I've also found art to be a vehicle to help people develop their skill of paying attention. It encourages curiosity. And as our eyes are open to new representations, our hearts also open in new ways. I've also found that over the centuries, artwork has created a kind of visual record of the theological interpretations of scripture throughout the life of the church. Returning to this practice in sermon preparation has been a bit like spending time with a very dear old friend.

Some of the changes I've experienced have been more disruptive and perhaps less joyfully welcomed. I've been fascinated at the ways that worship has unfolded during this time. I believe that the changes we've made about every two weeks have generally improved our virtual worship experience. However, I long to be together again, to sing together, breathe and pray together, one gathered body of Christ.



Our most recent change in worship, videotaping midweek, providing time for Ray Raeburn to edit and add material from previous worship services, has resulted in a lovely worship experience that I believe blesses us and testifies to God's goodness. This change, however, necessitates having a sermon ready by Wednesday morning! That requires a major shift in sermon preparation process. As a result, at least as far as sermon preparation goes, Monday is my new Thursday. Tuesday is my new Friday, and Wednesday is my new Sunday.

Working from home is challenging especially with schedules being so disrupted. It requires discipline to set new work boundaries. For that, I'm also relying on some previous experience. My work as Regional Pastor for Ohio Conference, required a good bit of travel. I sometimes got home very late and if I wasn't deliberate in setting my schedule, I'd need to leave quite early to be somewhere else in the morning. What helped in that situation, I'm finding just as helpful in this one. I instituted a 12-hour rule. That rule stated that I needed to schedule 12 hours of downtime between workdays. In other words, if I worked until 10:00 one night, I needed to begin the next day no earlier than 10:00 the next morning.

What am I doing in those 12 hours? I'm Zooming! I play UNO with Ora and Ellis on Zoom. We read together, and they show me all their new tricks. I talk to our children on Skype or Zoom. I text my extended family, and talk to my parents. And because the problems for refugees have not gone away with Coronavirus, but instead have only become more complicated and burdensome, I continue to sew comforter tops.

**Mark Suderman** – I am working from home (both for my church work and my Habitat for Humanity work). Part of this feels familiar, since I did about half my Habitat work from home, even before the coronavirus. I miss the human connection, especially not being able to make music with others. However, I am grateful for the technology, some of which wasn't around 10 years ago.

I've used Zoom, regular and conference calling, email, texting, and enjoyed a few in-person conversations in my neighborhood (obviously at a safe distance.) We are attempting to get my parents to use Zoom, so that we can have a face-to-face family gathering, at least online. (We had two extended family gatherings planned in May and June that needed to be cancelled.)

I am also thankful to have Elaine keeping me, at least partly, sane. We have enjoyed some light-hearted movies together, games almost every evening, two or three walks every day, and we've tried some new recipes. I even created a new chocolate dessert the other night.

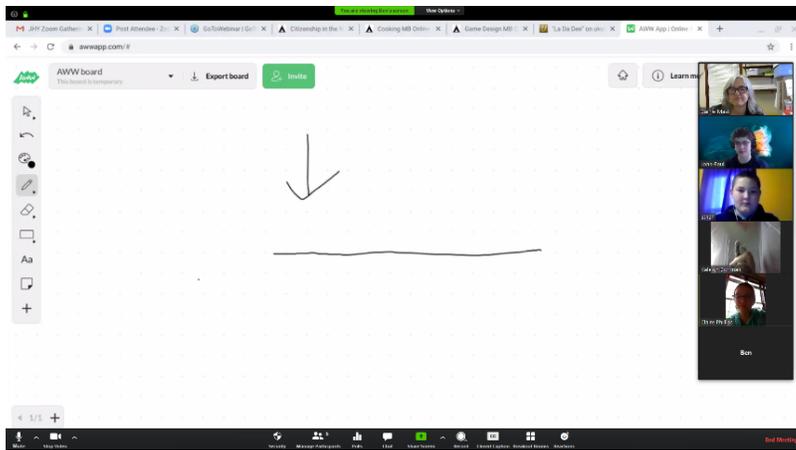
Overall, I believe that it is my faith that keeps things positive. That especially includes my faith family that I can virtually connect with in Sunday school classes and during our worship service videos. Thank you for all that each one of you does for the church, your community and the world.

**Carrie Mast** – As a parent working from home, I'm balancing multiple jobs, home-schooling, parenting, cooking, etc. This meme perfectly describes my days.

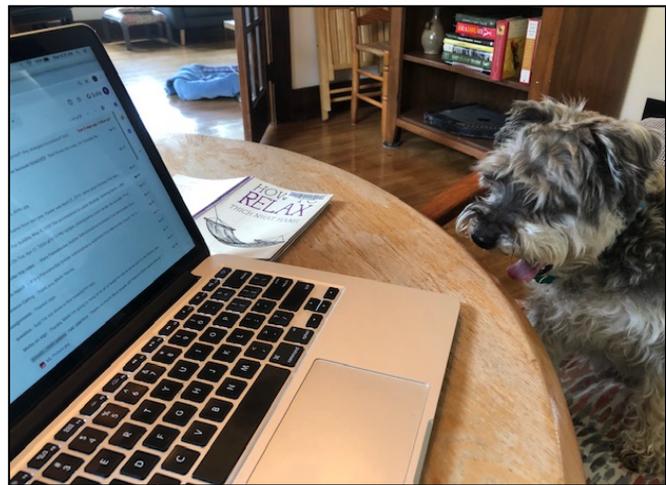
I'm doing youth group chats over Zoom. Here is a picture of the JHY playing Pictionary over Zoom this afternoon. Ben Hartzler is the illustrator, and Ethan Nickel was able to guess that he was drawing the Lower Flat at Camp Friedenswald with this line and an arrow! Both the SHY and the JHY spent some time thinking about Camp Friedenswald, reflecting on the spaces and places there, and the activities they do at camp, while we played games of Charades, Pictionary, and adapted



Scattergories. This was our way of honoring Camp and making space for the feelings of disappointment that summer camps are canceled.



**Mary Pannabecker Steiner** – No matter which home space I’m working in, I’m surrounded by reminders of First Mennonite. From the dining room, I can watch Xavier and Kari Diller playing soccer in their yard. Working upstairs, I sometimes see Ann Kingsley working in the yard or the top of Don Pannabecker’s head as he mows the yard. Through the trees in the wooded area at the back of our lot, if the wind is blowing just right, I can see Sam and Joan Diller’s house. From any west-facing window, I see John-Paul Yoder shooting baskets, often with JD or Lynda.



Working from home isn’t new for me so this isn’t a too challenging. Although my husband works from home, his office is in the basement so we rarely see each other during the day. However, our schnauzer, Ike, is completely confused and can’t decide where he should be so shuffles back and forth between us. Every few days, I stop at the office to check mail, phone messages, input contributions, and to print bulletins.

Like author Susan Cain (of the 2012 viral Ted Talk) I’m an introvert and prefer reading to socializing so maintaining distance isn’t difficult, with the exception of missing visits with our daughters. Sewing has always been therapeutic so I’ve been making masks for family and friends. My choice of fabrics often depends on the wearer’s personality/likes – my son-in-law got one made of fabric featuring his favorite sports team – the LA Kings. We love artist Charley Harper so many masks are made from fabric designed on his art. I also made one-of-a-kind Bluffton Icon masks for Fred and me.

Fred and I FaceTime with our daughters at least once a week and text/talk with them most days. On Sunday afternoons, our extended Steiner family in Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Massachusetts, has a 1.5-hour Zoom and Kahoot session. Ages range from 12 to 77 so conversation is pretty crazy.

One thing I know for sure: Exercising is key to managing stress and worry. Covid-19 has canceled so many things, but so far it hasn’t interfered with getting outside. I’ve been able to run, walk or ride my Elliptigo outside every day. Run Toledo replaced a canceled race with Run the Virtual 419 so I did a run/walk/bike combination. I also joined the Maintain Your Distance run/walk/bike streak sponsored by Up and Running Dayton. *Tiny Bluffton sports trivia: Ann Stechschulte Alyanak, former Bluffton High School and Purdue University runner and recent Olympic Marathon trial competitor, is sponsored by Up and Running.*

**Theda Good** – Working from home is not entirely new to me; I've done it in the past but not for the entire work week. There are things I enjoy like the ability to concentrate on projects, the privacy on phone calls, and occasional (when the weather is nice) walking around the yard while talking on the phone. All my meetings are now done on Zoom. It's become an essential tool for the work of the church. I am able to continue all the work I was doing before; it's just learning how to do things differently. There has been an occasional driveway or porch conversation, sometimes running into people on my walks through town. I appreciate those chance encounters.



Dawn and I regularly take morning and evening walks. When the weather permits we like to ride our bikes. A few days last week we got on our bikes only to discover the winds were higher than we thought as we headed out into the unprotected area of the countryside.

Those rides ended up being quite short. Our car stays in the garage all week with an occasional run to the church or the university if work demands our physical presence. For me, Theda, it's the weekly recording of our services that gets me to the office at least once a week.

We have added more phone calls and Zoom meetings to our weekend events staying in touch with family and friends in other states. There is a lot to be thankful for even though there are times I feel down about this distancing practice. I'm reminded that it's for the good of the community, the good of the world that we learn new ways of inhabiting the space we live.

### **Summer musicians needed: Several ways to participate in a service**

Pianists, organists, musicians of all ages and types: despite the new “normal” that we face, we are still hoping some of you will offer your musical gifts during the worship services this summer (June-August). There are two ways that you can do this:

1. You can video record your musical selection at home and send it to Ray Raeburn to put into our worship service video.
2. You can come to the church at 11 a.m. on the Wednesday before the service and be part of the taping of the service. We are working hard to make sure that all who come to each taping session are safe and stay at a good distance from each other.

Opportunities include:

- Play for the service, including opening music, prelude, offertory, and postlude
- Provide special music during the service, vocally or instrumentally, as a soloist or in an ensemble

Please contact Director of Music Mark Suderman at 419.230.5368 or [sudermanme@bluffton.edu](mailto:sudermanme@bluffton.edu).

If you have some specific dates when you could offer your musical gifts, please let Mark know.

Thank you!

## Vimeo report: Stats show FMC reaching global audience

Ray Raeburn ran some reports on the reach of our worship videos last week and shared these statistics with us. A bit of explanation will help you understand: A finish means that the person watched all the way through the postlude. "It's a little bit of a misrepresentation. Someone could watch 90% and it would not qualify as a finish. There is a separate stat that I did not include, which is % watched. I didn't include it because it doesn't format as well in their spreadsheet. Anyway, that number over the last month is as high as 75+% watched some weeks, with some weeks closer to 60%.

While it's difficult to identify our watchers in countries outside the U.S., we're pretty sure we can identify the New Zealand contingency: Tim, Jo, Seth, Kate, and Mia Pannabecker.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Plays</b>	<b>Finishes</b>
First Mennonite Church March 15, 2020	48	0
First Mennonite Church March 22, 2020	158	8
First Mennonite Church March 29, 2020	118	26
First Mennonite Church April 5, 2020	234	21
First Mennonite Church April 12, 2020	205	96
First Mennonite Church April 19, 2020	133	55

<b>Name</b>	<b>Plays</b>	<b>Finishes</b>
United States	1,015	218
Canada	29	4
New Zealand	6	0
Ukraine	2	1
United Kingdom	2	0

For comparison, here are the stats from a similar time line in 2019. Easter was April 21, 2019.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Plays</b>	<b>Finishes</b>
First Mennonite Church April 7, 2019	20	5
First Mennonite Church April 14, 2019	48	3
First Mennonite Church April 21 2019	26	9
First Mennonite Church April 28, 2019	29	4
First Mennonite Church May 5, 2019	16	5
First Mennonite Church May 12, 2019	10	2

## FMC families working, playing, making music together



This screen shot shows the Harnish family making music together. They've appeared in various configurations in our worship services. From left, Christopher, Lucas, Julian, Steve, and Monica.

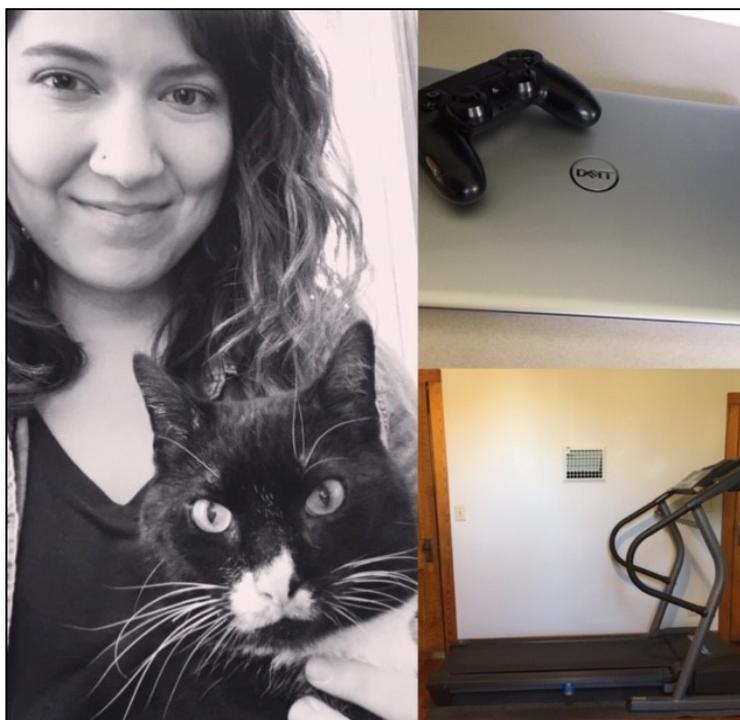
### Brent and Leah Schroeder

Brent Schroeder shared this collage of pictures showing how he and Leah are working and relaxing. Explanations of the pictures are included.

1) **Leah and Luther** - We adopted a 6-year old pet cat, named Luther, from the Hancock County Humane Society. He's the ideal housecat and enjoys belly rubs, sleeping next to us on the couch, and he really loves playing with his toy mouse.

2) **Our virtual intermediaries** – We've turned to technology to connect us with family and friends. For Leah, she's had multiple occasions where she's had multi-hour Zoom chats with her friends from college, and we are both active on social media sharing updates and stories with our families on Facebook. For Brent, this includes turning to video games to reconnect with people he hasn't talked to in many months, including cousins, his college roommate, and other friends from Bluffton University.

3) **Self-care routine** – At the beginning of the year, Brent set a goal of walking and running 2,020 miles in 2020. Before Covid-19, Brent would average more than enough miles to cover that distance, so this goal was more of a challenge of self-regulation than activity. After Brent's walk to work went from nearly a mile to just a flight of stairs, this treadmill has been getting substantial use. Brent runs anywhere from 5-6.5 kilometers every day on his lunch break, just one example of how we've adjusted our routines to serve self-care. Our evenings are filled with other routines: watching movies, new TV shows, playing board games and doing puzzles, or just doing whatever we want, with specific nights of the week designated for each routine to help keep us anchored. We're missing physical interaction with everyone at FMC, and thankful for the gifts of life all around us.





**Shannon Thiebeau is completing her second year of master of divinity studies – now completely online -- at Methodist Theological School in Columbus. She says that daily walks with Lizzie are “one of the things keeping me sane at home.”**

**Beth Boehr has spent some of her time at home designing (and making) greeting cards like this hand-cut butterfly. If you’re looking for a unique card for Mother’s Day, talk to Beth.**



**For Easter Sunday, Pastor Wanda suggested that individuals create a worship center. Bobbie Chappell created the spring arrangement at left.**

The children and grandchildren of Julie and John Mackey surprised Julie on her birthday, with a parade of decorated vehicles in the Mackey's driveway. Ben Hartzler popped up through the moon roof of the family van to play happy birthday on his saxophone. Everyone else sang along and left gifts on the porch. (Thanks to Laura Hartzler and Amy Blount for the photos.) The kids and grands include Laura, Greg, Ben, Ellie, Micah, and Anna Hartzler; Amy Blount, Jeff Shadbolt, Ethan, Ryan, and Evan Blount; and John, Claire, Emma, and Lauren Mackey.



