



First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 67, No. 6 • August 2020

Current worship services result of years of time and creative energy

When I tune in to the FMC Sunday morning service, I marvel at what our tech-savvy members have done to make each service memorable in such a variety of ways – from keeping some of the age-old traditions, such as regular sermons and prayers from the sanctuary, plus the warmth of our stained glass windows, to innovative children's sermons from outdoors or from a home kitchen, to awe-inspiring music enhanced with drone technologies.

This didn't all happen at once. It has taken time and creative energy from a wide variety of people - from recording and taping started many years ago by Norm Vercler, picked up by Bob Suter and then Bob's son-in-law Ray Raeburn, the sound system worked by Don Pannabecker for many years followed by a number of interested members - you've seen their names listed in the bulletins each Sunday.

And now, with our contemporary technological wizards, we are reaping the harvest. Thank you, technologists as well as those of us with lesser-but-still-important talents, who keep church going week after week during these less-than-deal times with some more than creative services.

~ Joanne Niswander

One of the first, if not the very first, longings we experience as human beings is hunger. As a noun, hunger is defined as a feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food, coupled with a desire to eat. As a verb, to hunger is to have a strong desire or craving. What are you hungry for? This is a common question at our house.

Taken together, hunger and thirst are metaphors in the Bible sometimes applied to describe a longing for God. "As the deer pants for steams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." (Psalm 42:1) Both describe the longing for an experience of God's presence and cry for God's response to the Psalmist's need.

It makes sense then, that as a community of faith who often experience God through the kindness and connections with one another, we're getting a little bit hungry. The pandemic has not prevented us from reaching out to one another, but it has certainly limited the ways available to us. And if there was any question before COVID-19, the question is settled now. There is something real, something qualitatively different about being physically present to one another, different than phone, or email or Zoom.

I'm hungry to worship altogether again. I'm thirsty to sing together in the same space at the same time. I'm looking forward to the release of the new hymnal, *Voices Together*, like a child waiting for a birthday meal! I have a feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by the limited fellowship we've been able to enjoy. I have a strong desire to share communion together again.

That said, Deacons have had discussions about whether or not to share communion in some virtual format. It's been done, and some of us have experienced it. Yet, for now, the Deacons are encouraging us as a congregation to live a little longer with our hunger, with our yearning and longing to be present with one another as we share the bread and cup as the body of Christ.

Just as hunger can be a great motivator to make dinner or to do some grocery shopping, perhaps our hunger for communion will move us to reach out to one another in this dry time. May our thirst for the cup remind us and move us to strengthen our relationships as we're able now, in preparation for our shared meal together in the future. May our hunger for the bread broken and shared only enrich our fellowship with Christ and with one another both now in our anticipation and in the day when we eat it again together.

~Pastor Wanda

Summer Psalms: Chancel symbolize Psalm reflections

Note: Thank you to Wendy Chappell-Dick for her thoughtful and creative chancel visuals during our summer Psalm series. Here is Wendy's verbal and visual explanation of the Psalms of Lament.

During our summer months, the chancel arrangements have been a group effort. Members are invited to leave items on the table that symbolize their reflections on the Psalms. In July, those have been Psalms of lament.

During July we have experienced Psalms of Lament (Psalm 22, 13, 35, 74.) In most of the July chancel arrangements, there has been an upside-down antique style globe on the floor that looks like it fell off the table. That represents the Doctrine of Discovery, an idea from the Middle Ages that white people deserve to take over the world, and that God wants them to do it! When the Psalms lament, it is not just a person crying out to God, it is the whole world crying for justice. That is why the world is upside-down in our chancel visuals. You can learn more about how Mennonites are trying to undo the Doctrine of Discovery here: <https://dofdmennon.org/>. First Mennonite is carrying on that work on a local level through a new anti-racism ministry at First Mennonite Church.



Our chancel scenes are disquieting; a picture of a man shaking his fists, unruly flowers falling over each other, chains, swords, scythes and darkness. But in all the harsh settings, you will see another element that carries through each week. A dragonfly. The dragonfly, with its cross shaped wings is often hard to identify. It blends into wood, metal, and stems. Yet, it is there as a constant reminder of the transformation that is to come through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection into hope and freedom from chains.



Central District Conference Annual Meeting: Unique virtual event via Zoom

We continue to experience the impact of the pandemic as Central District Conference (CDC) held its typical two-and-a-half-day event in one morning via zoom. The delegates from First Mennonite who participated were Brent Schroeder, Darryl Nester, Pat Scheidler, Wendy Chappell-Dick, Gerald Mast, Wanda Stopher, and Theda Good.

Pat Scheidler reporting on the worship service:

I will share my thoughts on the worship service, but do not just take it from me. I highly recommend watching it for yourself at vimeo.com/430229775. I found the service delightful and inspiring. It started in the beautifully adorned sanctuary of First Mennonite Church with conference minister Doug Luginbill greeting, challenging, and centering us. The adornments at the front of the sanctuary included four pieces of visual art inspired by the theme, "Spirit, bless our souls with yearning." At two points during the service we were heard the artists sharing inspirations behind and thoughts on their pieces. One of these artists was Anita Lehman, who created a painting within which were incorporated the words "Healer of our every ill." Anita put visual elements around and within the letters on the canvas. Being able to include these pre-taped vignettes in the service was one advantage to this type of presentation and helped to mitigate some of the disappointment of not being able to meet in the traditional way.

Following Doug's call to worship was a stirring rendition of the theme song *Spirit, Bless Our Souls with Yearning*. It included several voices and instruments from across Central District Conference and was presented in a gallery view. Glen Guyton, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, greeted us, playing guitar, and singing *Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord*. In his message, *Can You See What I Am Saying?* he said that in this time of anguish and racial unrest our historic peace church is being called to action more than ever. In the words, "I can't breathe," we are reminded that the word of God can be equated to breathing. We have an obligation as the people of God to be that breath of life. He talked about bringing our senses to the work of God, touching as we are hands-on in our service, seeing those who need served, breathing with the Spirit, and listening to the cries of pain and to the stories of others. Glen concluded his message by reminding us that people should hear what we are saying and see how we are living our lives. Then he closed in prayer.

As a sort of virtual hymn sing, there were several musical performances, including vocal and instrumental sharing by members of several CDC churches. We returned to the sanctuary of First Mennonite with a small group singing *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*. Doug Luginbill closed the service with announcements and a benediction.

Darryl Nester reporting on Delegate Session 1 first half:

Conference president Anna Yoder Schlabach welcomed us to the first delegate session. She noted the unusual circumstances of our gathering: Seeing each other in a Zoom gallery instead of face-to-face. Worshipping together in a pre-recorded video. Calling the meeting to order with a rubber mallet, standing in for the wooden gavel that has traditionally been passed from one CDC president to the next. She thanked the planning committee for the work they put into preparing to host the conference, even though the pandemic altered most of those plans. She acknowledged the ways the CDC has adjusted to these uncertain times, both as a conference and as individual congregations: Facing challenges to our finances, and to how we worship and serve, but discovering new ways to be the Church.

Delegates took action to approve the 2019 minutes, and to accept the 2020-21 Spending Plan proposal. We also accepted the slate of nominees from the Gifts Discernment Committee, including re-appointing Pete Suter to the Camp Friedenswald Board. We commissioned those appointees with a prayer.

Brent Schroeder reporting on the second half of Session 1:

Timothy Lind, conference treasurer, started this session off with an update on our financial position. Contributions are close to spending plan projections and expenditures are under budget. We will be balanced again in FY20. FY21 plan differs little from FY20 and we expect increases of about \$3,000 for

both giving and expenditures. There is a contingency plan developed in case there is a needed reduction of programs and with this the vote to approve carried.

The Ministerial Report was informative, letting us know of pastoral transitions and changes to the list of credentialed ministers. A holy moment each year is naming of pastors and conference workers who have died in the last year. This year included, JR Burkholder, Anna Rupp, David Habegger, Jake T. Friesen, and Eileen Kehler, long time conference administrative assistant; also, Gilberto Guyton, who died in 2015 was named.

The Missional Church Committee presented their work with a short video. A few of their highlights are the resources they are gathering for congregations to do more work on racial and ethnic reconciliation. Upcoming webinars included, "Taking Each Next Step: Anti-racism in Our Homes, Churches, and Conference," which was held July 16 and worth watching the [recording](#). Additional webinars included "Climate and Community," held July 30, and "Anabaptism and Spiritual Practice," scheduled for Sept. 16.

All CDC leadership are encouraged to use Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to gauge their ability to engage in the work racial and ethnic reconciliation.

An annual highlight is the welcoming of new congregations into the CDC family of churches. This year was the introduction of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship. This is a small house church seeking to become a member of CDC. This begins a year-long discernment process on the part of Grand Rapids folks and CDC to see if this indeed is a good match.

The nurture of networking between Central District churches through "Reign of God" grants included two grants this past year. The first was to FMC Champaign-Urbana & Chicago Community Church for Ted & Co. performance of "I'd Like to Buy an Enemy." The second was the combined work of Assembly/Eighth Street/Silverwood for a "Creation Care Summit for Youth" (pending rescheduling to sometime in the next 12 months).

One last networking event was the visit of eight members of CDC to Guatemala to learn and tour Semilla, the Anabaptist seminary in Central America.

The Ministerial Committee met twice this year and discussed two major topics: healthy boundaries for pastors, including the creation of clear processes for investigations of pastors accused of misconduct. They also recognize the need for greater training and awareness on how to respond when abuse or misconduct is committed by non-credentialed members of congregations; and how patriarchy and unhealthy power and authority structures within congregations can create pain and trauma

Camp Friedenswald reported on the challenge to this year's camping season. As we already know, they cancelled all the typical summer camps for children and youth. They have developed a camp getaway for families to come to camp. There are social distancing practices put in place to enjoy the camp, yet remain safe for eating, swimming, and being about the grounds. Camp leadership is encouraged by the outpouring of CDC churches and individuals who are supporting and encouraging them through this precarious disruption to their regular programming.

We concluded this session with a virtual communion led by Doug Luginbill our conference minister.

Gerald Mast reporting on delegate Session 2:

MCUSA executive director Glen Guyton responded to questions from delegates, many of which were about the denomination's response to the Black Lives Matter movement. In his responses, Guyton urged Mennonites not just to advocate for cultural change and awareness, but also to learn the deeper history of black people's experiences in American society. For example, he suggested that we not only learn to sing and appreciate music from the African American tradition, but also learn about historical and social background of this music. Delegates also broke into small groups to discuss their congregations' responses to the coronavirus pandemic.

Annual Assembly is often a fun time to learn to know new people and see in person friendship created over the years. This year will go into the memory bank like so many other things during this unprecedented time.

Junior High Youth explore the disorientation of summer

Crafting a lament wasn't on their top 10 list of summer activities, but the junior high youth made time for this creative endeavor during Sunday school in July.

The youth began meeting for Sunday school on Monday afternoons (aka Monday school) midway through the pandemic gathering on the church lawn, socially distanced and with masks handy, under the shade of the maple tree. Topics for study shift between discussion of the impacts of current events on their lives - like the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement - to the Psalms of Orientation and Disorientation at the heart of the summer worship series. Using a modified Lectio Divina practice, the youth take turns reading and reflecting on the Psalms, then applying to their lives and their questions.

In the earliest sermon of the summer series focused on Psalms of Disorientation, Pastor Wanda reviewed the 5 parts of a Psalm of lament:

1. Address
2. Complaint
3. Petition
4. Statement of Trust
5. Praise

Using Psalm 13 as their example, the youth started their Lament project with Lectio Divina to consider the Psalm, followed by identification of the 5 parts of a Psalm of lament. As often happens with youth, surprising and remarkable insights and connections abounded amidst humorous and spontaneous applications to their own circumstances. Opening up with serious vulnerability turned out to be a vital part of the discussion, too. After that, it was a short distance between each youth choosing one part of the lament that resonated with them and writing their own stanza as an illustration. In the final step, the group listened to each voice share their portion of the lament in the same order as Psalm 13. Their creation was yet another example of the necessity of each part of the body of Christ to fully realize our work as the church.

Psalm of Disorientation

By members of the JHY

July 6, 2020

O God, my God,

Why hath you forsaken me
and with an empty head.
Why, God, do thou let
me injure myself and suffer
day after day?

How long will my cousin
bully me?

I will die of her book hurling!
Why, oh why, is she doing this to me?

Oh Lord, how could this happen?
How could you let those closest by
let others mislead me?

How, this year, could you give me
heartbreak and depression?
Why, Lord? Why?

God of Creation, recreate in us
the ability to care for all
who are hurting for justice,
for your love,
or surely, we will not find you
all of our days.

I trust that you will end COVID soon,
and that everyone will stay safe.

I will rejoice in the world
my God has created,
for he has protected me.

The idea for the Lament project grew out of a Sunday evening Sermon Discussion circle in which Children and Youth Ministry Director Carrie Mast participated.

SHY puzzles through scavenger hunt created by Jacob Biesecker-Mast

The senior high youth participated in a scavenger hunt July 30. For his last meeting with the SHY before heading to college, Jacob Biesecker-Mast created the hunt with clues describing places in town they had to go to find a paper with a word. When each team found the piece of paper hidden at the location, they texted the word to Jacob, who then texted them the next clue. Locations included the town hall, the movie theater, First National Bank, the high school, the library entrance of the church, and the public library. Teams included Danielle Novak with Sophia Gott and Ana Neufeld Weaver with Patrick Estell.