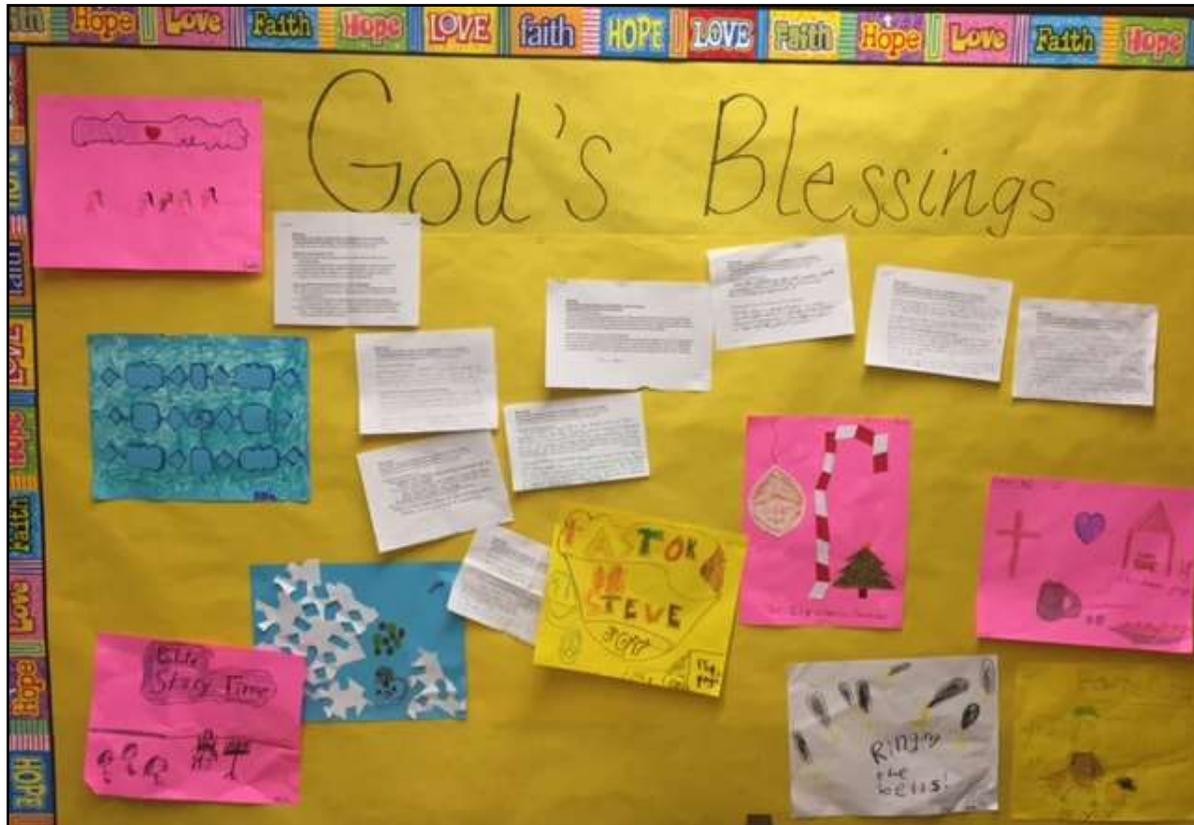


Menno-Life



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Remember Our Past, Explore Our Possibilities, Live Our Journey

As the Congregational Discernment Team moves forward in our process to “Remember Our Past, Explore Our Possibilities, Live Our Journey,” we find there is much to celebrate! Gathering information about our congregation and our life together through documents and conversations has energized us for our work now and in the future. Throughout recent years of leadership change and transition, our congregation has continued to steadily engage the mission of God.

In late 2014, the Vision Task Force guiding us through our time of leadership transition coordinated a listening process to gather comments from across our congregation. Now we wondered, what did that listening process spark? Where have we seen strengths affirmed, weaknesses addressed, plans made for the future, even in the midst of transitions? Below are just a few of the ways that we have been living our journey together in these days:

- Approval of a welcoming statement affirming our commitment to fully include all in the life of the church
- Six young adults engaged in voluntary service, and many others in our congregation committed to short- and long-term projects

- Two new Sunday school classes formed, with focus on younger adults and young families
- A full nursery and growing preschool Sunday school
- Sunday school classes, potlucks, small groups and youth fellowships that continue to meet faithfully
- Improvements to our physical plant; for example, the updated library entrance
- Our doors remain unlocked, our building utilized by congregation and community

What else will you add to this list? What has God been doing, and how has FMC been an instrument of God's blessing? The Congregational Discernment Team invites your input. Share your story in writing or tell it to a team member. Your story will help shape the story of our congregation for the future. Let us celebrate together and look forward in hope!

-- Rhonda Winstead

(The Congregational Discernment Team includes: Rich Bucher, Laura Hartzler, Chris Moser, Rhonda Winstead, George O'Reilly and Wanda Stopher)

Happy birthday to:

Mary Blosser, 86, Dec. 22
Keith Brauen, 88, Dec. 24

Marilyn Kern, 83, Dec. 27
Ann Shumaker, 84, Dec. 29

Happy anniversary to:

Marty and Lowell Hostetler, 53, Dec. 21
Geneva and Luther Shetler, 76, Dec. 22

In our prayers:

Khloe Hostetler, daughter of Mark Hostetler and Kami Brenneman and granddaughter of Don and Joyce Hostetler. Khloe was released from Toledo Hospital after being in newborn ICU the first four weeks of her life. She still faces unknown challenges and the family appreciates your continuing prayers.

The family of Anna Ruth Balmer, who died October 31 at Maple Crest. Her service was held November 3 at FMC.

The family of Doris Hamman, who died November 9 at Frieda House, Willow Ridge. A memorial service was held November 14 at FMC.

TR and Judy Steiner and their family; TR's father, Ralph Steiner, Jr., died November 3 at Bridge Hospice Care Center, Findlay. Services were held November 12 at Chiles-Laman Funeral & Cremation Services, Bluffton.

The family of Treva Dillman Suter, who died November 19 at Bluffton Hospital. A service was held November 23 at FMC.

The family of Mary Ann Kooker, who died November 27 at Mennonite Memorial Home. A service was held at First Mennonite on November 29.

Welcome new members!

On November 6, we welcomed Sarah Phillips and Liana Gott to the FMC congregation. They shared their faith statements as follows.

Sarah Phillips -- I grew up in Swanton, Ohio where I was born and raised in a Christian home. We attended church weekly and my parents were heavily involved in the church. I accepted Jesus Christ when I was eight years old and was baptized Southern Baptist. As I was growing up, my family moved to different churches in the area. Throughout middle and high school, I was involved in the youth group, youth band, children's programs and vacation Bible schools at Crossroads Evangelical Church. I attended Bluffton University, which was a great place to learn how important

service and community are. At Bluffton, I met my husband, Adam Phillips. He introduced me to First Mennonite, where I felt welcomed and included whenever I attended. After Adam and I were engaged, we knew that we wanted to be married at First Mennonite. Pastor Steve Yoder married us and gave us great marital advice and counsel. After Adam and I married, we strived for a deep connection to a church family. After attending other churches for a short time, we still felt called to attend FMC. I want to become a member of FMC because I feel like this is a “family” and I believe that the Mennonite faith closely aligns to my beliefs of putting God first, non-violence, family and service. I am a Preschool Intervention Specialist at Marimor through the Allen County Educational Service Center in Lima. I look forward to being of service to the church, getting to know more fellow members and participating in church activities.

Liana Gott -- As a daughter of Lynn and Linda Miller, I grew up all over the place. I was baptized at Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart, IN. I attended Bethany Christian High School and then Bluffton College. Having earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology, I moved to California and became a bookkeeper for my aunt and uncle on the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Working there in our offices under the Boardwalk, I met Chris Gott, a California native. We have been married for 20 years and have two daughters, Sophia and Kendra. About three years ago we moved our family from California to Ohio for the better schools, cheaper housing, small town advantages and to be closer to my side of the family. We are now slowly renovating a house on Spring Street and I am working on a master’s in social work through an online program. After many years attending churches of various denominations in California, it is a great joy to be back among Mennonites.

Red Cross reschedules December and February FMC blood drives

Due to a scheduling error at the Fort Wayne office of the Red Cross, the First Mennonite December blood drive has been rescheduled for Thursday, Dec. 15 from 1-6 p.m.

Volunteers are needed for this event: If you can provide cookies, help with registration, make sandwiches, help serve food, or unload and load the truck with their equipment, add your name to the sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall.

To schedule your blood donation appointment, call 1-800-RED-CROSS or go to redcrossblood.org, sponsor code “fmennobl.” (Note that this scheduling change results in a change to our next blood drive, which has been rescheduled for Thursday, Feb. 9.)

Christmas programs at FMC

December 18 carol singing -- The Christian Education Commission invites you to attend a time of Christmas carol singing on Sunday, Dec. 18 at 6:30 p.m. Children and youth of the church will be involved in selecting and leading this time of Christmas celebration. Please bring a plate of snacks or cookies to share during intergenerational fellowship immediately following the music.

String players needed Christmas Eve -- String players of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a string ensemble to play during the Christmas Eve Service. We will have 1-2 brief rehearsals, with times to be confirmed. If you and/or your children would like to join us, please contact Rhonda Winstead (rhondaandwalt@yahoo.com or 419-890-7012) or Laura Hartzler so that we may share music and rehearsal information.

New Year’s Day brunch – We will have an all-church brunch at 9:15 a.m. Sunday, Jan. 1 in the fellowship hall. Please watch for more details.

Getting to know the congregation

Editor’s note: In September, we began a series in which we briefly profile those among us, focusing on the work they do now or have done in the past. We’ll touch all ages and all areas of work.

Jesus told us that all work is honorable if done honestly and well; it’s important to recognize that all of us work in different ways.

We're hoping you'll all help with this, so if we don't approach you with these questions and you're willing to be included, please let us know at fmc@bluffton.edu.

Get to know...Amy Freeman

Where do you work?

I work for the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities. It is a state-wide nonprofit organization based in Marion, but I work out of my home.



Describe your job (current, past, volunteer).

I am the director of a 1:1 reading mentoring program for children and youth with disabilities. We work with schools and organizations all over Ohio, but most recently in all three of the Department of Youth Services Prison Schools. We also have a partnership with Bluffton University and the Allen County Juvenile Detention Center. During this fall semester, four BU students served as reading mentors with incarcerated youth who are reading far below grade level using 1:1 mentoring. There is a high correlation between low reading ability and incarceration.

What do/did you like most about your job?

I love traveling around this beautiful state and working with all different types of people, including incarcerated youth.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not at work (i.e. hobby, volunteer)?

Walking with my dog, weight training, gardening, cooking and spending time with our children....

Who are your family members at FMC?

My husband, Bruce Steingass; son, Logan Steingass (service year in Athens) and daughter, Halle Steingass (service year in Seattle.)

Honor family and friends with Christmas gifts that changes lives

Buying gifts and finding the perfect item with real meaning can often feel overwhelming. Here we will share some suggestions for gifts that have purpose and can change lives and don't require a lot of searching.

Heifer International -- Heifer International's mission is to work with communities to end world hunger and poverty and to care for the Earth. According to Heifer, "We empower families to turn hunger and poverty into hope and prosperity – but our approach is more than just giving them a handout. Heifer links communities and helps bring sustainable agriculture and commerce to areas with a long history of poverty. Our animals provide partners with both food and reliable income, as agricultural products such as milk, eggs and honey can be traded or sold at market. When many families gain this new sustainable income, it brings new opportunities for building schools, creating agricultural cooperatives, forming community savings and funding small businesses." Provide support by purchasing an animal, making a financial donation, funding a project – all of which will

help families to become self-reliant. For more information, go to <https://www.heifer.org/>. We also have a catalog in the church office.

Mennonite Central Committee – Give the gift of a livelihood through MCC in places like Burkina Faso, where MCC partners with farmers. Your gift helps families establish seed banks and extend their harvest, can provide the opportunity to learn new skills that can provide more income and better opportunities for education, nutrition and health. Your donation can provide rabbits or a share of a cow and training in how to raise them. More information at <https://donate.mcc.org/>. We have a catalog in the church office or you may order one by calling 888.563.4676.

MCC Alumni & Friends Gathering:

As alumni or interested friends of Mennonite Central Committee, you are warmly invited to join us for an MCC Alumni and Friends International Potluck at 6:00 pm on Saturday, January 21, at First Mennonite Church, 101 S. Jackson Street in Bluffton. Special guest speaker will be Amela Puljek Shank, current MCC Area Director for Europe and Middle East. Please RSVP at 574-534-4133 or to lmq@mcc.org.

Youth activities during December

Sunday, Dec. 11: Youth caroling. 6-8 p.m. Let's spread some Christmas cheer to our neighbors. We will meet at Mennonite Memorial Home, then return to church for some hot chocolate and a cookie potluck. Families and friends are welcome!

Sunday, Dec. 18: Christmas decorating and youth potluck, noon-??? Time to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas. Please bring a dish, drink or paper product to share.

Camp Friedenswald work weekend -- The SHYF had a great volunteer weekend at Camp Friedenswald November 18-20. The youth and adults who attended were: Patrick Estell, Seth Andreas, Isaac Andreas, Sophia Gott, Eli Bourassa, Christopher Harnish, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Douglas Nester, Heather Theis, Greg Hartzler, and Shannon Thiebeau. Despite the (beautiful) snow that arrived after a warm week, we were still able to get a lot of work done. Some of the tasks that we were assigned included: entering data on computers, wiping down chairs in the dining hall, cleaning up brush from a controlled burning of the woods and chopping and moving firewood. We had great conversations, drank a ton of hot chocolate, and enjoyed spending the weekend at a place that is so near and dear to our hearts.

-- Shannon Thiebeau, youth ministry director



Attending Camp Friedenswald work camp were (from left) Heather Theis, Seth Andreas, Anna Biesecker-Mast, Greg Hartzler, Douglas Nester, Shannon Thiebeau, Isaac Andreas, Christopher Harnish, Sophia Gott, Eli Bourassa and Patrick Estell.

Outside the FMC walls...

Bluffton community meals held twice each month -- Bluffton community meals are scheduled for the first and third Thursdays of each month at 6 p.m. at the Bluffton Senior Citizens Center. This month's meals are Thursday, Dec. 1 and 15. Each meal is free but donations of canned goods or cash are accepted and benefit the Bluffton food pantry. All are encouraged to attend.

Regional CDC gatherings -- Three regional gatherings for CDC members are set for early 2017: February 25 at Southside Fellowship (Lambright Center, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN); March 4, First Mennonite Church, Urbana, IL; and March 11, First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth. Regional gatherings allow us to hear developments and work in progress and to meet others in the conference. They are intended for all in the conference -- not only leaders in congregations or the conference.

Join the #MennoLove fun -- Participate in the Love is a Verb storytelling project by submitting a Love Your Selfie! Send us a photo of yourself practicing self-care and a brief explanation, and we will share it across the church online. Send emails to alysabs@mennoniteusa.org

Update on MDS in Detroit

John Rich traveled to Detroit November 14-18 to serve along with four others from Grace Mennonite. A report of their week is posted in the fellowship hall. Pat and Dennis Sheidler volunteered in Detroit Nov. 28-Dec. 3; Mitch Kingsley and Ron Headings, Dec. 5-10. Lynn Miller is serving as project director in Detroit for three weeks, Nov. 26-Dec. 17. The Detroit project has been ongoing since October 2014, following the August 11, 2014 flood. The current project will officially close on December 17. However, MDS and other Anabaptist agencies are planning to maintain a presence in Detroit in 2017 as a result of relationships that have developed there over the past two years. Thanks be to God!

-- Lawrence Matthews, MDS
project coordinator for Detroit
(Photo by Lawrence Matthews)

