

Menno-Life



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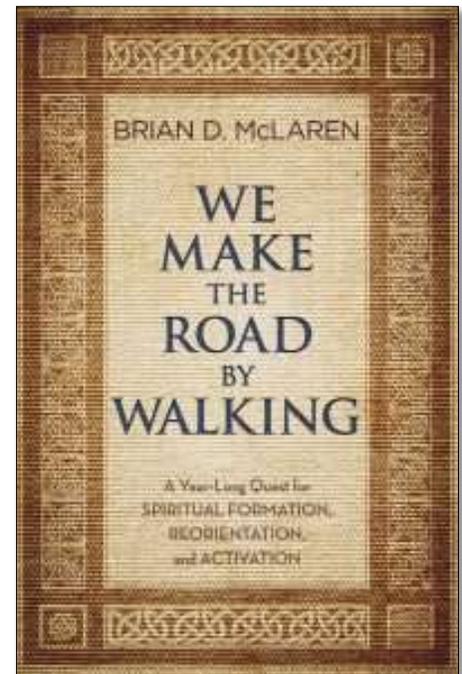
Join us as “*We Make the Road By Walking*”

This coming year (Sept 2018-Aug 2019) at First Mennonite Church we will use the book, “*We Make the Road By Walking*” by Brian D. McLaren as a unifying guide or template for our shared life together. McLaren invites his readers to hear God’s story as told in the Bible, Genesis through Revelation; and to enter into the great adventure of that story, participating along with God’s people in the story that even now continues to unfold. In worship we will follow the scriptures at the beginning of each chapter. The book may also be used by families, individuals, or groups for devotions. And it might be studied by small groups or by Sunday school classes.

The title of the book, “*We Make the Road by Walking*” comes from one of Brian McLaren’s heroes, Brazilian educator/activist Paulo Freire. Freire used this title for a published dialogue between himself and another seminal educator/activist, Myles Horton, who was an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Freire may have derived the quote from the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado:

“Caminante, son tus huellas el camino, y nada más;
caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar. Al andar se hace camino, y al volver la vista atrás se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar. Caminante, no hay camino, sino estelas en la mar.”

*Wanderer, your footsteps
are the road,
and nothing more;
wanderer, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.
By walking one makes the road,
and upon glancing behind
one sees the path that never will be trod again.
Wanderer, there is no road
Only wakes upon the sea.*



~ Antonio Machado, *Campos de Castilla*

The title of the book suggests that Christian faith is a lifelong journey that is discovered along the way. Faith continues to grow, evolve, learn, change, emerge, and mature in us, through us, and

among us as we walk together. What we will be as Christians in the 21st century, for better or worse, will surely change what Christian faith will be in the 22nd century and beyond.

~Adapted from <https://brianmclaren.net/we-make-the-road-by-walking-2/>

Watch for more information about the year ahead including a schedule, how to reserve a copy of the book for your family, and a sheet detailing how you might engage the book and walk with us!

~ Pastors Wanda and Theda

Sanctuary renovation schedule:

**Some of these steps/dates may change as work proceeds. We will provide updates when necessary.*

- June 24-August 26: Our worship services will be held at 10:30 a.m. in the Bluffton Middle School cafetorium. Please enter by the double doors across the street from the FMC Jackson Street entrance. Sunday school classes and coffee time will meet in the basement of First Mennonite Church. Look for the summer Sunday school schedule in your church mailbox.
- June 18-July 24: Removal of pews, removal of organ and some pipes, plaster repair (if needed), painting, new light bulbs
- July 25-August 5: Construction of steps and railings
- August 6-19: Hardwood flooring put in (front of sanctuary floor and stage area), sanding and clear coating of wood floor under and in balcony
- August 20-25 or 31: Carpet installed, along with new rubber stairs by Church Street door

Youth end school year with worship service about serving others

The month of May was a busy time for FMC youth as the school year ended, seniors graduated and families planned summer activities. The youth organized their annual worship service around the theme of serving others. Senior statements included reflections on service opportunities over the years and the youth displayed the variety of gifts God has given them. The annual cupcake sales fundraiser was a great success; thank you for supporting us!

May also brought the end-of-the-school-year party. This year's party was held at Bruce Steingass and Amy Freeman's home, where they enjoyed each other's company, splashed in the pond, roasted marshmallows and got to know Pastor Theda Good and Dawn Kreider with a question and answer session. It was a great evening to finish the school year, and we thank Bruce, Amy, Dawn and Theda for spending time with us!



Landon Cluts completes bachelor's degree, to begin medical school



At Ohio State University, I have been active as the service director for Alpha epsilon Delta (a pre-medicine honorary), the development chair and president of the Akumanyi Foundation at OSU, which works to support the mission of the foundation for sustainable projects and empowerment in Ghana.

I also mentored underclassmen neuroscience majors as a neuroambassador and conducted cancer and behavioral research in two separate labs. My major was neuroscience and my minor was clinical psychology.

Next year, I begin medical school at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. I look forward to beginning my journey with medicine as I explore my opportunities in the city, such as those at Pittsburgh Mennonite Church.

Landon is the son of Shelby and Kevin Cluts.

Plan to celebrate 100 years with Mennonite Women!

In September 1918, women from First Mennonite Church began to meet separately as a women's group after more than 10 years of meeting in combination with the other Swiss congregations. Over the last century, there have been a variety of groups who have reflected different ages, marital status, purpose of meetings, and projects carried out by the women who attended.

MW will kick off a year of celebration with a birthday party on September 10, followed by other events throughout the upcoming year to commemorate the history. The group will be gathering information from the Bluffton University archives, but are also asking for memories, pictures, or other ideas for the celebration from church members. If you or other family members were involved in any of the groups over the years, please send information to Lori Nester (nesterl@bluffton.edu).

Anyone who would like to be a part of planning the birthday party in September, or other events in the coming year are welcome to join. Mennonite Women officers for next year are President: Lori Nester, Secretary: Alison King, Treasurer: Betsi Werling.

Three FMC youth graduate from high school

Anna Biesecker-Mast, daughter of Gerald and Carrie Mast, and Sue and Bill Trollinger

I graduated from Oakwood High School at the end of May and I couldn't be more excited. I am ready to embark on the journey imminently ahead of me. In the fall, I will begin my freshman year at the University of Dayton in the honors program. As of now, I am thinking about majoring in a discipline in the humanities. This could include religious studies, English, history, theology, and philosophy. I also imagine myself taking advantage of the plethora of study abroad opportunities available at UD.

I chose UD because I strongly feel that this particular institution molds well with my specific values, aspirations, and interests, many of which I believe to have been shaped by First Mennonite Church. For instance, my passion for music is deeply rooted in my musical participation at FMC. I remember performing at piano recitals, accompanying hymns, performing trios with my friends, playing in youth bells and performing in the youth choir. Music has been, and I think always will be, a core



element of my faith.

Growing up at FMC has been quite the experience and has been meaningful to me in different ways throughout various stages of my life. When I was in elementary school, church meant a vast space to run around and play Sardines. It also meant a cushioned bench to play Littlest Pet Shops on. As I got older, my dad required me to sing the hymns and listen during the sermon. Begrudgingly I complied. However, after a while I came to excitedly anticipate singing certain hymns and learning harmony with my fellow alto singers. Sermons became more relevant to my life and more pertinent to my struggles. I began searching for answers in sermons, instead of ignoring them.

Throughout my college years, I plan to further my passion in music and attempt to satisfy my hunger for a deeper understanding of my faith. I believe that FMC has planted these seeds for me, nourished them, and set me up for a successful exploration of my faith and my love for music.



Christopher Harnish, son of Monica and Steve Harnish

I've been attending First Mennonite Church for around 18 years (I'm 18.) Growing up in First Mennonite has been a positive influence on me and has shaped my college decision. Being surrounded by people passionate about peace and social justice has made me want to attend a college that also emphasized these values.

For this reason, along with having both my brothers attend Goshen College, it was always clear to me that I would attend a Mennonite college. It wasn't until recently though, that I decided to follow in my brothers' footsteps and also attend Goshen. Along with Goshen's values, I was drawn by their strong academics, smaller size, Study Service Term, and what I perceived to be a supportive community.

While there, I will be studying mathematics as a major and I plan to minor in computer science and/or Spanish, although I'm keeping my options open and fully expect my plans to change in some way. I also plan to participate in cross country, track, men's choir, and whatever clubs perk my interest if I have time.



Laura Strahan, daughter of Esther and Jeff Strahan

Laura graduated May 26 from Bluffton High School. She plans to attend Ohio Northern University in Ada.

Pastor/Congregational review

Appreciative Way reflects relationship between pastor and congregation

Wanda had arrived to First Mennonite Church and was taking the import first step, *getting to know the congregation*. She'd studied the directory, was eager to put names and faces together, and was listening carefully as we shared our individual and collective stories. Each meeting she updated Staff Relations about her progress. One early report went something like this:

Wanda: To increase contact with church members I've taken opportunities to go to Sunday School classes and other groups as they meet. The other week I dropped in on Cherub Choir. Laura was leading them in an exercise where they were making noise and doing motions at the same time, using animal sounds and movements. They stopped to greet me and shared their names.

Child 1: We're slithering like snakes! Want to join us?

Child 2: It's easy! Don't be scared, we'll show you how!

Wanda: I slithered like a snake on the choir room floor! They were right, it was easy.

Nearly three years later, we have stepped back (or is that slithered back?) to review our time together and gather information to shape our future. We chose to use the Appreciative Way review process that guides us to assess both Congregation and Pastor, aligning information and expectations.

The Appreciative Way process reflects the relationship between pastor and congregation that is qualitatively different than a typical employer-employee relationship. The Gospel of John illustrates this distinction when Jesus describes his work as a shepherd in comparison to a hired hand (John 10:12-14.) A pastor is called, invited, to shepherd – to help the flock stay together, to guide the flock through bad weather or rough terrain to safe spaces, to lead the flock to nutritious pastures and clean water. In the life of a congregation, the shepherd cannot and should not do the work of the flock – rather serves as a companion and guide toward common goals of faith and service.

Wanda was called to FMC with a particular charge – become the Lead Pastor as the current Lead Pastor transitions to the Associate Pastor position. This change of roles in any congregation is highly unusual and (potentially) fraught with problems. After Steve Yoder made this request, to move to the Associate position, the discernment plan with Steve, leadership at FMC, and in conversation with the Conference Minister (Lois Johns Kauffman) was *prayerful, thoughtful and intentional*. The spiritual, emotional, physical and professional wellbeing of Steve, a new Lead Pastor, and First Mennonite Church were considered.

Following the pastoral search, Wanda exercised careful discernment in stepping into this position and finding her place alongside Steve. When the circumstances shifted she demonstrated the ability to both provide strong pastoral presence within the congregation as well as guiding leadership to plan and maintain stability for the ongoing life and ministry of FMC. As we know, the better the work behind the scenes, or "leading from behind" as one respondent put it, the better things work or develop.

These are a few of the ways Wanda exercised effective leadership over the past 2½ years:

- Wanda and Steve immediately established a collaborative and mutually supportive relationship – with intentional planning for implementing the new structural changes in pastoral roles.
- Leading the congregation through Steve Yoder's illness and the time following his death. Her effective leadership was demonstrated through intentional pastoral care of the Yoder family, the congregation, and administrative leadership in planning for and seeking a Pastoral Associate to be with us during this time of grieving and change (George O'Reilly).
- Established the Congregational Discernment Team to lead us in looking forward in our life together.

- Working with FMC leadership and the Conference Minister (Doug Luginbill) to envision and develop the roles of Pastor of Spiritual Formation and Pastor of Connections so that a search committee could be formed for filling the Pastor of Connections position. She supported the congregation through this process of search, discernment, selection, and welcoming.
- She operated from a place of faith not fear, even when things were very uncertain.
- Used her external and internal resources for discovering the way forward at each step, and encouraged others to participate in this discovery process.
- Continually identified gifts and encouraged members of the congregation to step into new roles – expanding the range of participants in worship, commissions, and in other areas.
- Recognized the struggles that FMC staff were experiencing – grief, lack of clarity about their roles, confused or changed reporting structures, and she responded to their needs, as well as defining, shaping and strengthening their positions and teamwork.

During the month of April we met with or received written information from about 75 people, ages 12 to 100. Staff Relations is especially grateful to Andrea Goings, Adam Phillips, and Shelby Cluts for helping lead these meetings.

We heard strong common themes of reflection regarding the characteristics of the congregation, across youth, young adults, middle-aged and elder members, and between long-time and newer church members.

Common themes were also identified as people described what we value about Wanda's ministry. The consistency of response from the congregation is an indication that although we may experience or describe it differently, we value First Mennonite Church as a caring community of faith and we observe Wanda as an authentic person and pastor.

Eureka! The Holy Spirit was at work through the long conversations and deep discernment process leading to her call.

Likewise there were strong commonalities of response regarding areas for growth in our congregational life and mission, as well as areas for growth in Wanda's ministry. These responses indicate a desire on the part of the congregation to move from a time of transition of pastoral leadership into a time of revival and discovery of potential within and action beyond. People imagine a strong and vibrant future for First Mennonite Church, maintaining and leveraging the qualities that we most value while opening ourselves to renewed ministry and mission.

Brief summary regarding Wanda's performance:

Wanda demonstrates a deep faith and trust in the work of the Holy Spirit guiding her and us. She verbalizes her thoughts and accepts responsibility for her actions. She has a way of leading people, encouraging them to think for themselves and reach their own conclusions. It doesn't have to be *her way*. She isn't a hero figure, nor is she afraid of change and/or new ideas – this characteristic was repeated and affirmed by young and older members. She has done a marvelous job of gaining confidence, raising questions, and shaping change. She is visionary, can envision things down the road and then willing to take the curves to get there. She exhibits a non-anxious presence in the face of uncertainty, as well as ability to encourage people to join her in the journey. And she uses humor and playful action along the way. You know she has heard you.

Next Steps:

Staff Relations will work with Wanda over the next several months and report to Church Council our recommendation to be voted on at the Congregational meeting scheduled for August 19.

Copies of the written report are available at the church. This report and Wanda's response were videotaped and a link sent to the FMC email list.

Respectfully submitted,
 Staff Relations Committee: Ken Shenk, Chair
 Rich Bucher, Annette Heslep, Elizabeth Kelly