



First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 67, No. 4 • June 2020

Grace – something we all need

If there was ever a time to practice grace it seems to me, that time is now. Grace is a word we don't hear that often. And grace can even be a little bit hard to describe fully, so I should begin by explaining what I mean. I'm talking about grace that includes a sense of beauty or elegance, of courtesy, good will, kindness. For Christians it is understood as grace when we, completely undeserving of it, receive God's favor, love, goodness, kindness. So grace is also very closely associated with forgiveness. Furthermore, God is God of justice. And in the Bible, God's way of justice is giving people, not what they deserve, but instead, what they need. This is because God is also love.

There is a lot of anxiety going around these days. Divides are accentuated as communities continue to adjust to new realities, emerging information, and proposals for moving forward. We are facing very real issues of unemployment, disproportionate impact of the virus on black and brown communities, continued risk for vulnerable people and front-line workers. We are experiencing deep and profound grief as the losses of life mount. We are experiencing grief as we lose other things we value: employment, confidence that we can provide care for our families, presence with those who suffer, time with extended family, freedom to gather as we once did. And we are experiencing a moment of profoundly sobering and unsettling truth. The coronavirus has unmasked some of the deeply disturbing injustices and inequities built into the ways our lives are ordered. The coronavirus has stripped away any illusion of control or self-determination. We are now certain only of our uncertainty.

No wonder we are anxious. And yet, anxiety and worry need not destroy the fabric of our relationships or community. Even in this time, we can choose grace as we discover and navigate our new lives. We can choose to offer grace to others. We can choose to extend grace to ourselves. If there was ever a time to practice grace, to be kind, to offer forgiveness, to recognize beauty, to act in good faith and with good will, that time is now. If there was ever a time to focus up and commit ourselves to a new way of ordering our life together so that everyone has what they need to thrive and live at peace, that time is now. Grace - it's what we all need - to receive for ourselves, and to offer others. We really are so much more connected and interdependent than we thought we were before this coronavirus changed our world.

What will this look like? I can't enumerate all the ways this will take place, but here are a few examples. It might include reaching out to neighbors who are at higher risk of infection to see if they have what they need. It might mean setting aside the computer when a child needs a moment to express some sadness or disappointment. It could be as simple as remembering to thank our family members for the little things and big things that they do to keep the household running. It could be offering a prayer of gratitude for Spring that comes despite the world as we know it, being turned upside-down. It might be remembering that everyone is doing the best they can. There are big ways to practice grace, too. It could

mean reaching out to a family member with whom you've been estranged for a long time. Or it might mean forgiving ourselves. It might include a commitment to volunteer, to commit a portion of our life-energy to a cause or ministry that intersects with a deeply held passion or value.

Whatever time it is these days, it is grace time. And it just might be that practicing grace with ourselves and others will be a first step in discovering what we all really need in this life. It might be a first step in discovering what we truly value, and need, not just for ourselves but for the world. When that happens, we will truly be ready to meet the new realities of life before us, whatever they be.

~ *Pastor Wanda Stopher*

Celebrating completion of high school!

Six of our youth graduated from high school recently and will begin college in the fall. Although we published Q and A features of each in recent Menno-Life issues, we wish them well as they move on! Please stay in touch!

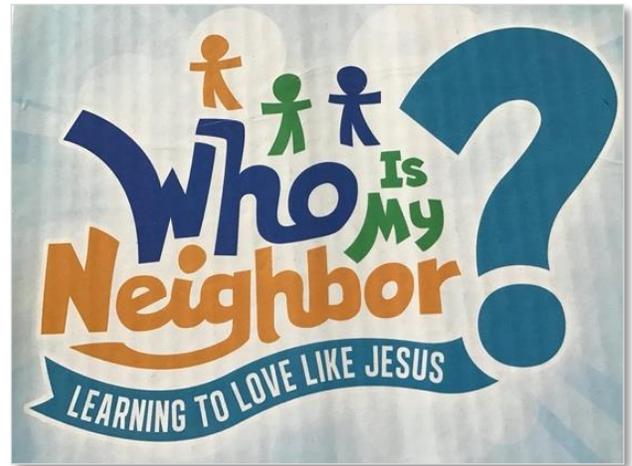


Clockwise from top left: Ana Neufeld Weaver, Eastern Mennonite University; Patrick Estell, College of Wooster; Sophia Gott, Eastern Mennonite University; Danielle Novak, Harvard University; Grace Paquin, Washington College, Chestertown, MD; Jacob Biesecker-Mast, University of Dayton.

Drive-thru community VBS: Leads children via videos, crafts, games

Drive-thrus aren't just for fast food! The pandemic-adapted Bluffton Community VBS will lead children on a discovery of *Who Is My Neighbor? Learning to Love Like Jesus* over five weeks this summer.

Rooted in Mark 12:28-31, children will expand their understanding of who their neighbors are and what it means to be a loving neighbor through a combination of short videos, bingo cards, and drive-thru pick-ups of craft kits, game supplies, and snack shopping lists. Videos will be released on a weekly basis beginning the week of June 7, when VBS was originally scheduled. Drive-thrus are slated every Thursday from 6-7 p.m. beginning June 11, and continuing over the course of five weeks.



Spreading out VBS over the course of five weeks instead of five consecutive days is intended to give children and families something to look forward to throughout our pandemic summer days.

No registration is required. If children and their families are unable to participate in the drive-thru to pick up their kits, they can stop in the Jackson Street entrance of First Mennonite Church, where extra kits will be available for pick-up at any time.

This new schedule and structure may also provide wider access to more children in case families are out of town or unable to participate during a particular week, or simply unable to accommodate the drive-thru time slot, since both the videos and the kits will be accessible any time.

The All Ability Playgrounds of Allen County fundraising project is the designated recipient of this year's VBS offering. The Allen County Board of Developmental Disabilities and the Arc of Allen County are collaborating on this project; for more information, check out the website:

<https://allabilityplayground.org/>.

Offering will be collected during the drive-thru pick-up times or may be mailed to Bluffton Community VBS, c/o First Mennonite Church, 101 S Jackson St, Bluffton, OH, 45817. If we can collect at least \$100, the Bluffton Community VBS will reach the Swing Level of donors and will have a name placard on one of the playgrounds!

Check for updates on the Bluffton VBS Facebook page!

"Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:28b-31

Life during these unusual times...



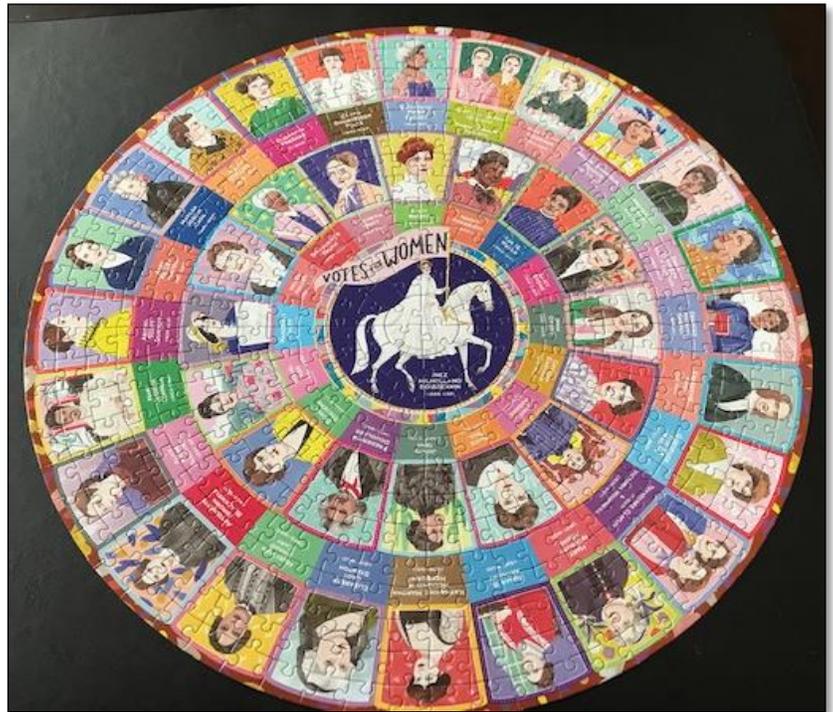
Painting...

The four BHS grads collaborated on a larger version of the “We’re glad you’re our neighbor” sign during the village and school-approved senior painting of College Ave. From left, Sophia Gott, Patrick Estell, Danielle Novak, and Ana Neufeld Weaver. (Photo credit John Estell)

Puzzling....

This is a good, fun way to learn and be entertained at the same time. Plus, if you get a circular puzzle, you get added exercise going round and round to place pieces! I finished a 1000- piece one of best selling book but I prefer the 500- piece because I’m like a dog with a bone when I begin one!

~ Alice Lora



Watching FMC worship services from a distance...

(From Judy Decker, Lima, who makes many bags for FMC health and school kits.)

Your online services are AMAZING!

I can be at First Mennonite without leaving my home. Such JOY!

I must say, the song choices did bring tears to my eyes... but tears of joy.

I am looking forward to the days when I can come and deliver my gifts of bags in person on a Sunday morning (smile).

Blessings...lots of love... and even more hope,

~ Judy Decker

Writing...

I wrote this poem at almost the very beginning of our lockdown here at Maple Crest. Now, nearing two months later, our isolated life here at MC continues on almost the same as it did then - with just a few more perks now and then. No need to change a word of update in the poem. I marvel at the human spirit that just keeps on keeping on.

~ Joanne Niswander

Isolation

It's for my own good
They say
This lock-down
This new way of living

It's necessary for all
They say
This six feet away
These new rules

I nod
I agree

I obey
I try

To do my best
To keep well
To exercise
To be content

It's not easy
This isolation
Neither is illness
Nor death

I have much
To be thankful for
Thank you
For listening

~ Joanne Niswander, 3-21-20

Staying creative despite isolation...

Ever since Wednesday, March 25, Maple Crest residents have been getting little "things to think about" with their mail delivery, thanks to Joanne Niswander's daily brainstormers. Many have to do with memories, while others are small projects to keep us thinking. On May 1, we reminisced about making

May baskets when we were children, with a suggestion to make a May basket to say thank you to staff.

Elnore Yost took this suggestion to heart and got busy. But what could she find in her apartment - not especially equipped with craft items? Aha! An empty cardboard bar soap box which she reconfigured to open at the top rather than the side. Then cover the box with a small green plastic bag she found. She cut out three lovely flowers from some old greeting cards - but then, how to make the flowers stand? Ah, yes - tape them to a few old spools of thread. Put them in the box, along with another card with "Thank you" on it. Then add a hand-written "God bless you and keep you" to make it complete.

Don't tell us we can't be creative in our 90s!!



Ana and Erin: Cooking their way through *Simply in Seasons*

1. Are you really cooking your way through Simply in Season? Every recipe? How many recipes is that?

Yes, Erin has had the idea to cook through Simply in Season for a while and we realized it would be easier and more fun to do the challenge together! We will hopefully become better cooks and have some great recipes in our repertoire! The plan was to do every recipe until we realized both of us are vegetarian so we can skip the meat ones if we don't want to substitute tofu or something else for the meat. If I counted correctly there are 307 recipes.

2. What prompted you to start this project?

We watched a movie called *Julie and Julia* based on a true story of a young woman cooking her way through Julia Child's cookbook. Afterwards Erin mentioned she would love to do this with simply in season so we made a schedule and we started cooking!

3. Are you each cooking different recipes or the same?

We are cooking different recipes but that doesn't mean we couldn't duplicate if we wanted to.

4. When did you start this? How long did you give yourselves to do it?

We started on March 15, 2020 and aim to be done by New Year's Day 2023.

5. What's been your favorite recipe so far?

Erin's, fresh strawberry pie yum! Ana's is Shitake Mushroom Pasta (made instead with local Blue Oyster mushrooms.)



6. Any total failures?

Erin's roasted asparagus -- it didn't taste good at all but I think it was probably bad asparagus and not the recipe! The first recipe we made, Sweet Potato Crescent Rolls, did not rise at all. That made it a bit of a failure, but they still tasted good!

7. Are you documenting this with notes and pictures?

Yes, Erin is printing all our pictures and writing some notes and sending them to Ana to put in our journal for the challenge!

8. Has anything sounded so complicated, you've had to consult with someone?

Not yet for Erin but right now she is picking easier recipes and once we get farther into it we will probably have questions! Although Erin feels Simply in Season is pretty straightforward most of the time. Ana has consulted her parents for some assistance on difficult parts of the recipe.

9. How has the quarantine impacted your plans? Any ingredients hard to find?

So far I think it has helped Erin because she is home more and has more opportunities to cook! For Ana, quarantine has actually made it easier to make more recipes. It has given Ana something to do with all her free time. One ingredient that was hard to find for Ana was the shitake mushrooms. She ended up getting locally grown Blue Oyster Mushrooms at the Food Store. Erin had trouble getting asparagus for the Spring Quiche Trio, so she used broccoli instead.

Recipes we have done:

Winter Recipes

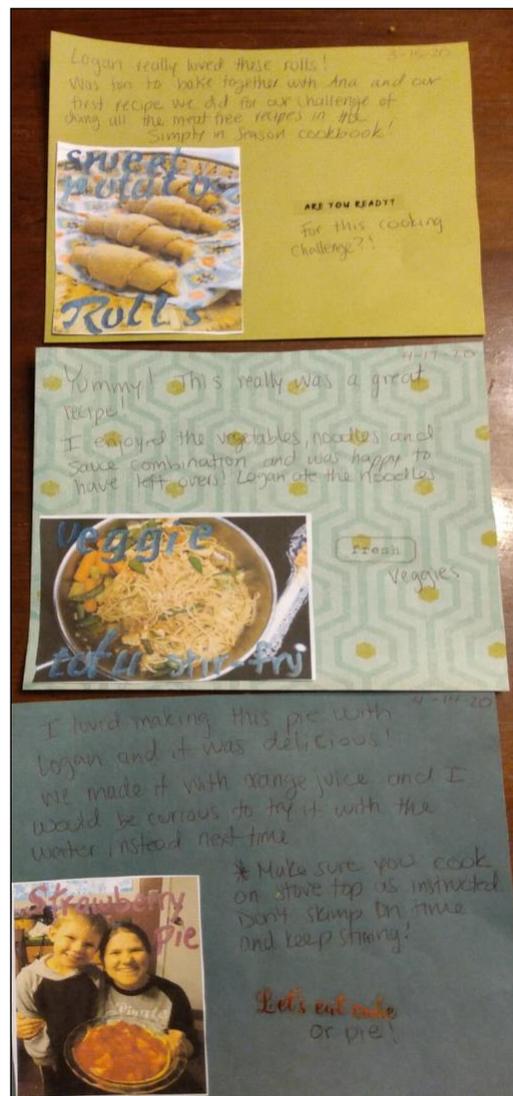
- Sweet Potato Crescent Rolls 3/15/20 Ana and Erin
- Sweet Potato Quesadillas 3/20/20 Erin

Spring Recipes

- Roasted Asparagus 4/7/20 Erin
- Veggie Burrito 4/9/20 Erin
- Strawberry Pie 4/14/20 Erin
- Tofu Stir-Fry 4/17/20 Erin
- Shitake Mushroom Pasta 4/18/20 Ana
- Velvety Vegetable Soup 4/19/20 Ana
- Spring Quiche Trio 4/22/20 Erin
- Spinach Squares 5/3/20 Ana

All Season Recipes

- Whole Wheat Flax Bread 3/28/20 Ana
- Everyday Oatmeal Bread 4/4/20 Ana
- Seeded French Bread 4/18/20



Bicycling...

We have been riding our tandem around the countryside. Glenn has also been doing some longer solo trips. We discovered a granola bar recipe in case a snack is needed.

~Glenn and Judy Buller

Simple, Soft and Chewy Granola Bars (From Inspired Taste.net)

- 2 1/2 cups old fashioned rolled oats
- 1/2 cup whole almonds, coarsely chopped
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, cut into pieces

1/4 cup packed light brown sugar
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 tsp salt
1/2 cup dried cranberries, coarsely chopped
1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons mini chocolate chips

Directions:

Toast oats and nuts:

Heat oven to 350 degrees F. Line bottom and sides of an 8- or 9-inch square pan with aluminum foil. Then lightly oil or spray with cooking spray. Add oats and almonds to a baking sheet and bake for 5 minutes, stir and bake another 3 to 5 minutes until lightly toasted. Transfer to a large bowl.

Make bars:

Combine butter, honey, brown sugar, vanilla extract and salt in a small saucepan over medium heat. Cook, stirring occasionally until butter melts and the sugar completely dissolves. Pour butter mixture into bowl with toasted oats and almonds. Mix well. Let cool about 5 minutes then add cranberries and 1/4 cup mini chocolate chips. Stir to combine. (The chocolate chips will most likely melt a little. This is fine, they turn into glue and help to hold the bars together). Transfer oat mixture to lined pan, then use a rubber spatula to firmly press the mixture into the pan. Press hard here, up to a minute so the bars will hold together when cut. Scatter the remaining mini chips over pressed granola mixture and gently press them into the top. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours. Remove block of granola mixture from pan and peel away the foil. Cut into 12 bars. Store in an airtight container for up to one week. They freeze well. **Options:** Substitute dried cherries or apricots, coconut or pistachios. So far we have tried cranberries and ???

Sewing...cooking...painting...working...homework

The Niekamps have had a whirlwind of changes due to COVID19 and these unusual times. It started out as a glorious, slowing down of a fast-paced life. Nursing homes were preparing polices/procedures and the kids didn't have sporting events or school to go to.



We made homemade cookies! We went for hikes at the Nature Preserve and we even started some projects at home (*Ryan and Jackson painting at right.*) Things hadn't really settled in yet. Church was different as I was watching it on TV and participating in the Taste and See Sunday School class.

Shortly after, the Hilty Home called me back in to work (*Kristen at left.*) I love my career but there was still some hesitation and fear with the COVID19 sickness. Masks are a must and most of us employees are very tired after our shifts.





Reinforcements were called upon as we were desperate for childcare. Grandma Kim McCullough came to our rescue and even gave Leah sewing lessons (*left.*)

Homework turned burdensome and stressful as we are both working parents and then coming home to do homework/teach school. Kaden (*below with his helper, Rosie*) was already starting his assignments. Kaden also had a great experience with his teacher, FMC's very own Mrs. Beth Raeburn!

School ended in late May and the warmer weather is coming!

Things are opening up and maybe some concerns will change for our child care or workload. We now feel even busier than before, but we are blessed. We hope everyone is staying safe and healthy.

~ Excerpt from Kristen Niekamp



Working in the garden and in the shop...

Linda and Ron Headings are pleased with the beautiful geraniums they ordered through FMC's Easter flower order from K&J Greenhouses. Drive by their Elm Street house to see them!

Ron has also been busy making flowerboxes in his shop.



Despite some challenges, the wedding goes on...

Amy Blount and Jeff Shadbolt were married May 23, with their children and immediate family members attending the ceremony led by Pastor Theda Good. Thanks to Amy for sharing this reflection on their day.

It may not have been perfect in traditional standards but it was perfect for us! The rain and the corona virus changed our plans but it was beautiful! There was laughter, tears, smiles, hugs, and pure joy.



My parents (John and Julie Mackey,) brother (John) and sister-in-law (Claire) surprised us with a beautiful set up. The moment I saw it I teared up. The rain didn't ruin anything! The corona virus just made us appreciate everything more!

My sister, Laura, Ben and Ellie played beautiful music. Greg watched the littles so they could practice. Jeff's siblings and parents traveled from afar to share in our joy.

Pastor Theda was wonderful to work with and made sure all of our kids were part of our special day. There are many more people who helped make it special and we appreciate it!

The day was full. Some high points were the ceremony, meal, dancing with my new husband, visiting, watching the kids play after being separated for so long, playing in the water, going on a family hike, and finishing with a movie.

We did try to social distance - Individual meals, families at separate tables, chairs kind of apart, drinks for each table, etc.

Top photo back row, Ethan, Amy, Jeff, and Ryan. Front row from left, Evan, Kendyl, and Cameron.



Bottom photo, Jeff, Kendyl, Ethan, Ryan, Cameron, Evan, and Amy.