

Menno-Life



First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 66, No. 2 • February 2019



Thank you to all who participated in the first whole congregational meeting. At left, Elizabeth Kelly explains the agenda. Below, Jacob Biesecker-Mast and Elaine Suderman participate in a small group breakout session.

In times of turbulent change, conversation is essential

I have a sticky note above my desk. Ok. More accurately, one of the sticky notes above my desk contains a quote from the Open Space Technology website. It says, “In times of turbulent change, conversation qualifies as real work and is essential for powerful, profitable action.” Life in the year 2019 in the United States of America, is such a time.

In the midst of these turbulent times of change, we are doing our best as a congregation to find our way, to follow Jesus faithfully and in ways that healing and hope flow through us to our neighbors and neighborhoods! To that end, we just completed our first experience of using Open Space Technology as a vehicle to carry us forward together in conversation about a very important question, “How will we live out our mission and 5 Priorities now?”

Governance Task Force has chosen a distinctly participatory and discovery-based process to fulfill its mandate, “to lead the congregation in a process of examination of our current structure for accomplishing our vision, purpose and priorities.” The mandate includes recognition that “both exploring where vitality and life can be found and identifying challenges and concerns will be part of this work.” Moreover, “GTF will



deliberately work to encourage and free us as a congregation to continue to experiment with new ideas to effectively accomplish our vision, purpose and priorities, and will also lead us in ways of evaluating their effectiveness.

Reminded of these words, I think our first event was a roaring success! The specifics are recorded on the 10 session reports and three news sheet reports which have all been recorded electronically and will be posted on the FMC website soon. We will be looking for further direction based on those reports. However, I also hope we can find some direction as we consider the big picture. And this takes me back to my sticky note. I'm convinced that the most powerful outcome of our Mapping meeting was the conversations that took place.

I believe that the problems that the church and our community and our nation and world face are complex. If they were simple, we would have solved them by now. The complexity of the challenges makes it abundantly clear that no one person, regardless of their goodness or giftedness will have all the answers. We need each other if we are going to find our way, and I believe we'll find our way in the midst of conversations. We will also need one another to be our best for and with one another, offering patience, forgiveness, grace, inspiration, and encouragement. We need all the gifts and creativity of the community, as well as the willingness to step up and contribute.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is both here and near. I believe that one of the things he meant was that the Kingdom has already come to life and there are signs everywhere that proclaim that reality. At the same time the Kingdom is not yet complete, but is coming more and more to its rich, full reality. I believe that our conversations are one sign of the future church we will be, and I look forward with hope and joyful anticipation that we will continue to grow in our capacity talk together with authenticity and grace, to trust one another more, and to find our way in the midst of our conversations.

~ Wanda Stopher



Participants could choose from various subjects in short break-out sessions. From left are Carolyn Rich, Danielle Corbin, Gene Long, Elysia Bush, Beth Boehr, Larry Diller, Kristen Niekamp, Ana Neufeld Weaver, Jacob Biesecker-Mast, Grace Paquin, Lois Wetherill, Walt Paquin and Joanne Niswander.

Regional Gathering March 9

Would you like to learn more about Central District Conference and get to know others from area churches? Plan to attend the Regional Gathering from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, March 9, at First Mennonite.

The event will include updates about CDC, opportunities to get acquainted, and singing. Lunch and child care will be available. Those planning to eat lunch are asked to bring a donation to help cover the costs.

If you are able to provide food for the meal or to help with lunch and clean up, please see the sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall. We will serve soups, bread, cheese, fruit, and cookies/brownies. For more information, contact Lori Nester at nesterl@bluffton.edu or 419-358-9650.

Register on the sign-up sheet on a table near the office or by contacting the office at fmc@bluffton.edu or 419-358-5766.

If you wish to bring child(ren), you must register them with Carrie Mast at mastc@bluffton.edu or 419.230.1568 to ensure we have age appropriate activities.

Mennonite Women to share hobbies at March meeting

Mennonite Women will meet Monday, March 11 at 7 p.m. in the fellowship hall for an evening focused on the theme "Come to the Lord's table."

This will be a night to share hobbies with the group. Bring a hobby to share or a favorite recipe with samples to try.

Mary Ina Hooley will lead devotions. Alison King and Betsi Werling will provide refreshments.



Taking a break from discussing the 5 Priorities, we surprised Pastor Theda with a birthday cake topped with 52 candles. Cake was available to all, thanks to Carrie Mast and Lori Nester.

Casket-making endeavor spans 35 years, results in more than 100 caskets

In 1984, a tragic accident resulted in the death of Bonnie Kehler and serious injuries to her brother, Jeff. Both were longtime members of First Mennonite and the children of Neil and Eileen Kehler. Pastor Mel Schmidt, sensing a church in shock, suggested making a casket for Bonnie like the ones made in a church he had previously served. Harvey Bauman went to his workshop and created one with plenty of help. Family members observed the process.

When the next death occurred, family members wanted to help build a casket under Harvey's supervision. After that, Harvey made many caskets and John Moser took over the volunteer job from Harvey, followed by John Rich, who is still using John Moser's workshop. We estimate that more than 100 caskets have been made and lined over the years.

Casket building and lining takes many hours of volunteer work, often under pressure, by several people. In more recent years there has been a shortage of volunteers. Family is rarely part of the process any more. Our local funeral home has attractive, inexpensive caskets available for families who want to express their belief that frugality is part of their faith journey.

We currently have one casket on hand and a commitment to build a few more for people that have already requested a casket or have been part of the building team from prior years. Without new leadership and more volunteers, we will no longer offer to build caskets for our members. If anyone is interested in learning about building caskets or possibly continuing this project, please contact John Rich about this work.

Donating one's body to medical research and cremation are becoming more common in our community. The church will continue to make cremation boxes for members. These are easier to make in a small workshop by members. More volunteers are needed for this ministry. See John Rich for patterns if interested.

We hope to celebrate the many years of building caskets at First Mennonite Church at a future date.

Senior statements shared during Youth Sunday February 24

During Youth Sunday on February 24, we heard statements from our three high school seniors. We include two of them here.

Andrew Raeburn's plans for next year:

In the state of Ohio, students with disabilities may choose to stay in high school until the year they turn 21. In May, Andrew will participate in graduation ceremonies at Bluffton High School with his class, but, at that time, he will not accept the diploma he has earned. He does plan to return to the high school next fall to take advantage of an additional year or two, in the special education classroom he is part of now. He will accept his diploma when he is no longer benefiting from the experiences associated with this classroom, or at the end of the year he turns 21.

Youth announcements

*A Learning Circle is forming in preparation for MennoCon '19 using MCUSA's curriculum, Journey Forward: Pathways. The curriculum is free for downloading here:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/pathways-study-guide/>. The circle will meet during the Sunday school hour in the Senior High Youth room on the following dates: March 10th, April 14th, May 12th, and June 9th. This meeting time is a change.

*The Senior High Youth are accepting donations for their silent auction March 24-30. Contact Carrie Mast at 419.230.1568 or mastc@bluffton.edu.

Isaac Strahan's plans for next year:

Upon graduating from Bluffton High School in the coming months, I plan on attending either the University of Dayton or Ohio Northern University in the fall. Both have awarded me very good scholarship offers.

I currently plan on studying economics or a related field, although I'm not entirely decided as of yet. I also rather enjoy writing, so I may look to involve elements of writing in my studies or future career plans.

Congregational potluck replaces traditional College Church luncheon

Church College Relations has scheduled a congregational potluck at noon following the morning worship service on Sunday, March 31. This is in lieu of Church College Sunday, and the luncheon and informational meeting generally held each spring. With support from Nurture Commission, we want to affirm the many ways that FMC nurtures education and learning at all ages as well as its connection to Bluffton University, which provides enrichment opportunities for children, youth and adults.

We also affirm the financial support contributed to the Church Scholarship Program for students choosing Mennonite Higher Education. Because of your generosity, more than enough funds are already available to cover eight \$1,000 scholarships for the 2019-20 school year. With education costs rising and additional funds already in the account, Nurture Commission affirmed CCR's decision to increase the scholarship to \$1,500/student for this year. (When college matching funds are applied, each scholarship totals \$2,125.)

Nurture Commission also affirms the decision to include an international student attending Bluffton University among the eight students who will benefit from the scholarship program in 2019-20. These decisions will be re-evaluated and determined based on the continued financial support from the congregation.

The names of students attending Mennonite institutions have been submitted for 2019-20 and the first scholarship payments will be made in August. Consider making a financial contribution designated for "scholarship program."

~ CCR: Louise Matthew, chair, Jacob Litwiller, Mona Reichenbach, Theda Good