

Menno-Life



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The Young Adult Sunday school class had a pumpkin carving party October 14. Pictured are (clockwise from bottom left, Everett Miller, Tara Miller, Isaac Miller, Kyle Miller, Kristen Niekamp, Arianna Goings, Andrea Goings, Jaden Goings, Braylon Goings, Eli Jones, Kevin King, and Milena King.

Evening Song and Prayer service contemplative, musical

I try to pay attention to what's happening around and within me. There's a lot to observe at this time of year: woolly worms on the roads, a praying mantis clinging to the brick outside my front door, and the changing colors of the leaves everywhere! As I've paid attention this fall, I've been noticing a number of threads in my own life, as I have conversation with others in the congregation, and in the broader community. Here are a few observations:

1. It feels like every week needs a vigil. I don't know if these days are any different or any more intense than other times in history, but it seems like every week there are multiple catastrophes, acts of violence, or developments that need a vigil.

2. I recognize in myself a need for silence, or at least for quiet space to listen, to do my own thinking and simply to breathe deeply.
3. We at First Mennonite have identified the importance of the expression and inclusion of the diversity and breadth of the musical gifts in our congregation in worship. Yet, it occurs to me that currently, Sunday morning worship (1 hour and 15 minutes per week) bears the weight of being our only regular venue for these gifts to be expressed.
4. Each year it seems that the leaves have no sooner fallen than Thanksgiving happens and the holiday season has taken over. I need a moment to prepare and intentionally orient to Advent!
5. In general, I have a renewed conviction that if we are going to live sustainable lives working for peace and justice, it will require a robust life in the Spirit, nurtured by spiritual disciplines.

I've been asking myself what I'm to do with these observations. How do they fit together? To what might God be calling me/us? Over time these observations led me to remember a practice of Evening Song and Prayer in which I've participated in the past.

Evening Song and Prayer is a service of worship at the end of the day, when we sing our prayers and pray our songs. The purpose of Evening Song and Prayer is to gather with others to pray for the world, for the church, for personal concerns, and to intercede for others. The service lasts about 30-45 minutes. A contemplative space is opened with silence and punctuated by music. Personally, I find the Taize style helpful, which is characterized by simplicity and repetition. A number of songs in this style are included in Hymnal Worship Book, and Sing the Journey. Sometimes Evening Song and Prayer includes the invitation to be anointed.

If you, too, have noticed any these things, or if you're just curious, make plans to join Evening Song and Prayer in the fellowship hall at 8:15 p.m. on November 29.

-- Wanda Stopher

Reflecting on traditional Evensong as FMC creates its own version

Note: In August 2017, Religion News Service reported that while churches in Europe are experiencing a decline in attendance at worship, British churches are seeing an increase in attendance of Evensong services. The RNS author likened the line at a recent Evensong service at Westminster Abbey to that of a line of people waiting to get into a theater or to buy ice cream – not church. Church officials cite a variety of reasons – not the least of which is the fact that some cathedrals charge a fee for attending worship, while Evensong is generally free. But, as Guy Hayward, the editor of the Choral Evensong website says, “A lot of people don’t want to directly engage with the church, they don’t want to go in through the front door, as it were...They are attracted by artistic expression and then by osmosis they find it spiritually appealing.” Many of those attending find the music and moments of reflection more appealing. (Pepinster, Catherine. August 30, 2017. Evensong sees a surge even as British church attendance declines. Religion News Service. Retrieved from <http://religionnews.com/>.

Here at FMC, we're creating our own version of the traditional Evensong, calling it Evening Song and Prayer. Here are some reflections from two FMC congregants who have previously attended Evensong services.

Elizabeth Kelly:

I grew up in the Episcopal tradition where Evening Prayer (spoken) was common. Some families read it in their homes or in churches several evenings a week. I served a church in North Carolina where Evening Prayer was read Monday – Thursday, at 5:15 pm. Evensong was a special sung version of Evening Prayer. This didn't happen as often, except in large churches or cathedrals.

When Ray and I went to England about 20 years ago, we stayed in Oxford and took day trips to other cities. We attended Evensong in various cathedrals of the Church of England (Anglican Church). In the late afternoon people would walk from their classrooms, homes, or offices to gather in these sacred spaces. Choirs of boys and men sang the psalms and canticles that I had memorized in the spoken versions.

The music washed over us as we transitioned from the busyness of day to the quieter rhythm of evening and a sense of peace as we concluded the prayers and ventured out into the dusk.

Alex Sider:

I regularly attended Evensong at St Aldate's Church in Oxford, Vespers at Blackfriars' Hall, and before that Choral Vespers while I was a graduate student at Duke. Those experiences deeply influenced my spiritual life.

Choral Vespers at Duke was a venue for calming down and centering myself near the end of each busy week. It showed me regular and scripted rhythms of prayer that disciplined me spiritually in ways my personal practice of prayer didn't.

I went to Evensong at St Aldate's faithfully. There, the service wasn't as important as the place. St Aldate's gave students and post-grads a place to belong, especially when they felt out-of-place and alone – and remember that residential universities (even tiny ones like Bluffton) are giant engines of displacement in students' lives.

Vespers at Blackfriars demonstrated community. The brothers at Blackfriars didn't always like each other: sometimes their work was at cross-purposes, other times they were stressed out from living together. But in Vespers each brother participated in a way that gave voice to a common activity, the worship of God, and relativized everything else.

Dates to remember

Nov. 5 – All Saint's Observance during morning worship

Nov. 5 – "Music of the Martyrs: A Choral Tapestry," Dr. Mark Suderman, conductor, Yoder Recital Hall, 6:30 p.m.

Nov. 10-12 – SHYF/JH FY work camp, Camp Friedenswald

Nov. 12 – Mentor/mentee baking event, assembly room kitchen, 6 p.m.

Nov. 13 – MW Project Night, 7 p.m., FH

Nov. 14 – MW Project Day, 9 a.m.-noon, FH

Nov. 19 – SHYF fundraiser meal, 11:30 a.m., FH

Nov. 23 – Thanksgiving dinner, noon, FH

Nov. 26 – Stewardship Sunday, communion

Nov. 29 – Evening Song and Prayer, 8:15 p.m., FH

Learning new songs and hymns while struggling to find the right notes

These last few months have created a lot of space for wondering in my life. As I took a change in my life's path this past year, it offered me a chance to reflect on my career as a teacher and how part of that life is behind me. But part of that life will continue to guide me into the future as well, especially as I continue as a musician at FMC and with the Lima Symphony Chorus. Plus, teaching

comes in many forms. It doesn't have to be in a formal classroom setting. Many of you are extraordinary teachers, but you wouldn't name teaching as your profession. I am finding that education will play a key role in my new position at Habitat for Humanity, and I look forward to the challenge of a new type of teaching others and new ways of learning for myself.



Mark Suderman conducts a choir rehearsal

This space has also caused me to reflect on the people that have influenced me in my life, especially here in Bluffton. Earl Lehman, Chris Purves and Steve Jacoby were all key figures in how I learned about the community of Bluffton and how I came to understand some of the musical history both at the university and at the church. I am grateful for their leadership, their commitment to feeding the soul of the church, community and college through music and especially through their warm friendship and support. They offered me a warm, safe place to work at my craft in a new location, and they fully prepared the fabric and resources for continuing to provide rich musical

experiences for people. When you are a choir conductor, you are extremely dependent on others to present a wonderful musical experience. For instance, we are so fortunate at FMC to have more than 40 people involved in the Chancel Choir. Most churches would be happy to have half that number. And the quality of the singers is tremendous (and not just musically). But on the music side of it, Earl and Steve helped many of "my" singers learn how to read music and to be good musicians. In fact (along with Chris, Jim Bixel, Russell Lantz, and others), they created a wonderful choir of First Mennonite Church congregants who sing from the pews. A short story...

On October 1, 2017, we sang HWB #430 "God be with you" as our sending hymn after communion. I love the beautiful, simple movement of the melody and harmony working together with words of comfort and blessing. The hymn is one that only has a few extra "moving" notes, where one part moves while the other parts remain steady. It was on one of these moving notes that a special surprise of joy happened for me. Were you aware of this? Deb Niswander was playing the organ. I was thinking how nice it would be if she dropped out on the last verse and we just sang it unaccompanied. Lo and behold, she did.

But that wasn't the best moment for me, nor was it the beautiful sound that wafted through our sanctuary. What really astounded me and made my heart leap was in the middle of the this a cappella verse, where the basses have a moving note that no one else has, and the basses have that note at a place where everyone should and needs to breathe, the entire congregation (without a conductor or any words of instruction) all waited for the basses to move before they took their breath together. They waited for the ones who needed extra time. The congregation only wanted to move on when everyone could move on together, as God's community in that moment – caring about all the people. This could not have happened without the excellent leadership and training that many musicians offered to the worship of FMC, as well as the careful and thoughtful worship that we are privileged to experience each Sunday morning.

So, as we embark on a new hymnal for Mennonite Church USA, as we learn new songs and hymns together, as we struggle to find the right notes, as we wonder about the words we sing, let us remember the past and the gifts that we have to move forward, to move forward together as one, as God's wonderful family, full of wonderers, and dreamers, and doubters, and sinners and saints.

-- Mark Suderman

Mennonite Women knotting comforters November 13-14

November is project month for Mennonite Women. Comforters for knotting will be set up in the fellowship hall Monday, Nov. 13, at 7 p.m., and Tuesday, Nov. 14, from 9 a.m.-noon.

JP Schumacher will provide devotions on Monday, with a focus on “Do,” from John 21. In the scripture passage, Peter jumps into the sea to reach Jesus before his fellow fishermen. Sitting around the breakfast fire, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, with the response, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus wants Peter to give substance to his words. So too, our love should take concrete acts, reaching across boundaries to show Jesus’ love in physical form.

Barb Stettler and Ginger Theis will provide refreshments on Monday night.

Following knotting on Tuesday, all are invited to stay for lunch. If you are able, bring a salad or dessert and your table service. Soup, bread and beverages will be provided. Please consider helping with frame set-up on Sunday, Nov. 12, at 2 p.m. in the fellowship hall.

Getting to know....Mick Hardy

Note: Mick Hardy is the custodian at First Mennonite Church, where he does everything from cleaning the church, maintaining the grounds, setting up and tearing down before and after every event, sometimes washes dishes, and occasionally entertains children. Mick is married to Tami (Shetler) Hardy, and they are the parents of Katie, Jeremy, Kyle, and Jesse, and (as you’ll read below) eight grandchildren. Mick grew up in Elida, and was a member of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church.

MennoLife: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up and why?

Mick: Pro baseball player. I was fairly good. Played Little League and then for Elida High School.

ML: What is one accomplishment people might not know about that makes you proud?



Mick: Eight grandchildren -- they all get the same amount of attention, same amount of hugs and kisses. The kids range in age from two months to eight years.

ML: What has been your favorite road trip or vacation?

Mick: Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, GA. It was a resort with the circus that performed at night. We could take classes with the circus staff during the day. I learned to juggle and on the way home, I bought three little foam balls and practiced in the car all the way home. They had an air buoy that allowed us to wear just a snorkel and mask (no need for carrying air tanks.) We dived straight down 20 feet and could swim around and look at the ocean.

ML: How would you describe your favorite meal?

Mick: Anything Tami cooks.

Mick and grandson, Coen

ML: Three apps on your phone you can't live without?

Mick: Don't have any!

ML: Tell us about the most inspirational thing you have experienced.

Mick: My back was healed by a faith healer. I was performing with Good News and Company at St. Paul's and we had invited a youth pastor, who was also a healer. I sat in a wooden pulpit chair with my legs straight out and he noticed one was shorter than the other, so he adjusted them and my back felt much better.

ML: What is one thing you are passionate about?

Mick: My grandkids.

ML: What is a hard-learned lesson from your life?

Mick: My brother died when I was 10. I suppose I learned that life goes on. You're sad but you can't give up.

Youth council forms; discerns and dreams about goals for youth

First Mennonite now has a youth council, whose purpose is to better plan, communicate, and determine the needs of the youth groups. The council includes parents, sponsors, and youth who meet to discern and dream about goals, hopes, and needs for the junior high and senior high youth fellowships.

The calendar will be under review by this group, so some items on the long term calendar may change time, location, or subject. The youth council met for the first time recently, according to Shannon Thiebeau, director of youth ministries.

Made up of eight representatives, the council includes Greg Hartzler (JHYF sponsor), Lynda Nyce (JHYF parent), Paul Neufeld Weaver (SHYF parent), Rhonda Winstead (SHYF sponsor), Annalise Nisly (HS youth), Christopher Harnish (HS youth), Jacob Suter (9th grade youth), and Shannon Thiebeau.

Everence: Monthly series focuses on financial education, women's stories

Written for women, by women – the new Women and Money series by Everence® aims to share the unique experiences women face and how these experiences affect their lives and finances.

This series is inspired by Women and Money educational seminars led by staff in several communities for the last few years. The seminars addressed financial concerns women may deal with, with the goal of helping women learn more about finances and feel more confident about their financial decisions.

Rhoda Blough, Everence Stewardship Consultant, advocated starting the educational seminar for women because she saw the importance of talking with women about the financial situations they may encounter. Blough felt this acutely because her husband died unexpectedly, and Blough had to quickly figure out their finances while also trying to grieve.

“Reflecting on my own experience, I recognize the importance of women being knowledgeable in all aspects of their finances,” said Blough in the first article of the series.

Although many of the financial principles are universal, the common thread of the series is women sharing their experiences with other women.

Find the series at <https://www.everence.com/everence-articles/everence-corporate/everence-news/an-introduction-to-women-and-money>.