

# Menno-Life



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## Open the doors and see all the people!

As the classic nursery rhyme goes, "Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people." When accompanied by the hand gestures, the thumbs (doors) open and the fingers of the entwined



hands waggle to represent the people inside the church.

Those people/fingers inside are as important to the repetition of the rhyme as they are to the successful operation of First Mennonite Church. We -- the people -- are the church. We want to get to know each other better so we're going to use the Menno-Life to tell some stories. We'll learn all sorts of information such as:

- who is doing what
- all the many ways the church building is being used
- how and where our elders lived, worked, and learned
- who our young families are
- where some of our people are volunteering (*inside and outside the church*)
- what our children are doing in Sunday school and how some of them are connecting with individuals outside of First Mennonite (*keep reading*)
- what intergenerational activities are happening (*and what you've missed by not participating*)
- how our purchase of Legos has inspired intergenerational collaboration on some unique representations of scripture

Do you have a suggestion for a story you think others would enjoy? Let us know! If you feel comfortable writing it, that's great. If not, we'll find someone to do the writing. If you take a photo of an activity at FMC or showing how someone(s) from FMC are active in the community, please share it with us.

We'll continue to include your calendar items and upcoming meetings in the weekly announcements, but the Menno-Life will focus on who we are, becoming better acquainted with each other, and understanding where we're going. For the upcoming year, we'll publish the Menno-Life every other month. The next issue will be published on Sunday, Dec. 1.

~ Mary Pannabecker Steiner

## Time to review where we've been; note our goals, timeframes for near future

At the end of April, 2019 we as a congregation experienced the third of three congregation-wide meetings as part of our New Path Together process. Then we took a deep breath! Pastor Wanda went on sabbatical, and the congregation was encouraged to rest. Commissions and committees were encouraged to meet only as needed throughout May, June and July. For the most part we've returned now from summer schedules,

vacations, and sabbaticals, and hopefully we're rested and renewed in our spirit to pick up the work that we temporarily laid down.

That said, it seems good to review where we've been and note the goals and timeframes we've set for the near future. Last fall, at a retreat open to anyone in the congregation, we identified cultural changes and realities that have impacted congregational life and governance significantly. These changes over the past 50 years include the dramatic reduction of the skilled labor provided by women who volunteered in exchange for meaningful engagement in the church and the church's ministries. At the same time the volunteer force was diminishing, the church's place at the center of social and community life was also changing. The "honor" associated with serving in the church over time became one more thing in a long list of options and obligations. Finally, as technology exploded, we became bombarded with communication overload. We are not alone. Many churches are facing these challenges.

In addition to broader cultural changes, over the past three years we have also recognized that our structure is no longer serving us or our mission, but instead we are serving the structure. It has become increasingly difficult to fill positions on commissions, even after reducing the number of members on most commissions from nine to seven. Some ministries such as FIRST Night and casket making no longer have the personnel to accomplish the work and have therefore concluded. On the other hand, some have observed that it is not readily apparent where the entry points are to become involved in particular ministries. Complicating the process of filling commissions, specific roles are only identified after a person says yes to be a member. So by virtue of saying yes to a commission, a person may find themselves also chairing that commission, recording minutes, or various other duties specific to each commission. Structure that once served us well has become cumbersome, heavy on meetings while leaving little time to actually engage in meaningful service and ministry. Again, we are not alone. Many churches face similar challenges.

Over the past year, we've made significant progress! 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." And "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."

The three congregation-wide meetings last winter: Discovering, Making, and Moving on our New Path Together were designed to do just that, to unleash creativity, energy, and ideas that have been waiting for permission to take root and express our Five Priorities. We have learned from both the process of using Open Space Technology in our meetings and from the specific ministries that have emerged.

Reflecting on all this, what is working and what is not, what seems life giving among us, and what is draining our life energy, GTF is beginning to envision a lighter structure. One that will provide the governance we need, while freeing more of us to engage in ministries with purpose and alignment with our gifts. It must be vision focused, empowering us as a congregation to live out our Five Priorities. It will provide clear points of entry into ministry and a mechanism by which gifts can be identified and developed. The new structure must free us to dream, provide support and resources for ministries, and clarity regarding processes by which those resources can be accessed.

Going forward, GTF plans to have a proposal to Council for the January 2020 meeting. In the following months the congregation will have opportunities to engage the proposal, make suggestions for improvement, and by June 2020 will vote to approve for a trial period. GTF invites your prayers and is eager to engage in conversation about this work as we enter this new phase of the process. See any of us to engage in these important conversations.

~ GTF: Elizabeth Kelly, Greg Hartzler, Gerald Mast, Pastor Wanda

## Spiritual memoir invites reflection and dialogue

*Editor's note: In her recently published memoir, "FAITH TALK: a spiritual memoir inviting reflection and dialogue," Ruth Naylor writes about important life choices, her teaching career and her call to be a pastor and spiritual director. A book signing will be held in the fellowship hall Sunday, Oct. 13, before Sunday school, between SS and worship, and following worship. All proceeds from this book signing will benefit the First Mennonite Church youth program.*

How did you learn to know or know about God as a child? How have you experienced God's presence, guidance, and providence through the joys and challenges of your life so far? I wanted to review my own faith journey and maybe share it with my children and grandchildren. That's what got me started writing this book about my life-long spiritual adventure.



I presented the first chapter and a tentative outline of my book to the leader of a Christian Writers Conference 20 or more years ago. He encouraged me to add questions at the end of each chapter that would help a much wider audience reflect on and possibly share their own stories.

As you know, life has a way of interrupting such endeavors. I admit that I gave up on the project a number of times—not knowing quite what to do with it. Then something would encourage me to pull out the manuscript and keep going. But what should I include and what should I leave out? Eighty-plus years is a long time.

In the preface, I tell about Christmas Day 2015 when two of my grandchildren, Ben and Karen McCullough, were sitting with me in front of a warm fire in Ben's family room. The conversation began with Stan's death a few weeks earlier. Then it turned to prayer and how I felt God had guided my life through the choice of a college, a marriage partner, family and mid-life crises etc. A call to the dinner table came well before I ran out of stories, and both of them insisted that I really must finish the book even if it were only for the family.

I saw that they truly were interested and I realized that the death of their grandfather, after our 61 years of marriage, offered a way to share about end of life challenges and end the book. I went back to work and finished the manuscript --then made what I thought was a final decision to print just a few copies for my family.

The very next day I received a call from WestBow Press, a division of Zondervan and Thomas Nelson. Thus *FAITH TALK: a spiritual memoir inviting reflection and dialogue* is now available to individuals and/or small groups who want to read about such things.

My spiritual journey is no more important than anyone else's. It's my hope that the book will inspire readers to think about their own faith stories. All stories are certain to be different, but we can encourage and learn to know each other better by sharing our faith or lack-of-faith as we face or prepare to face the unique mountain tops and valleys of life.

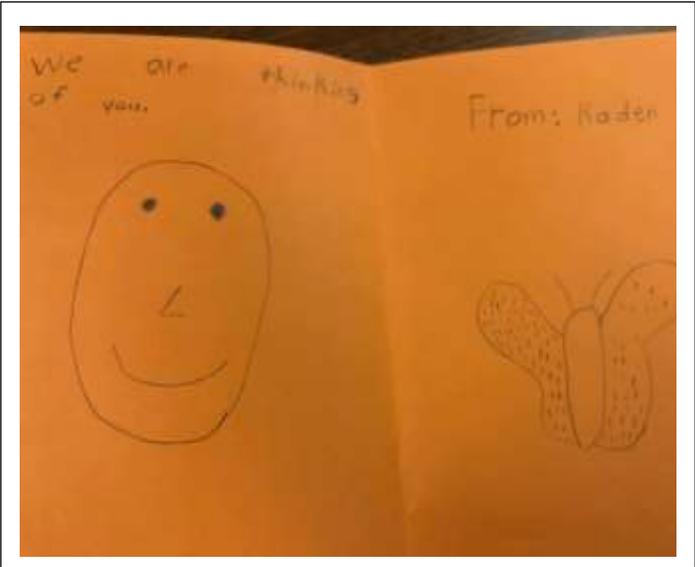
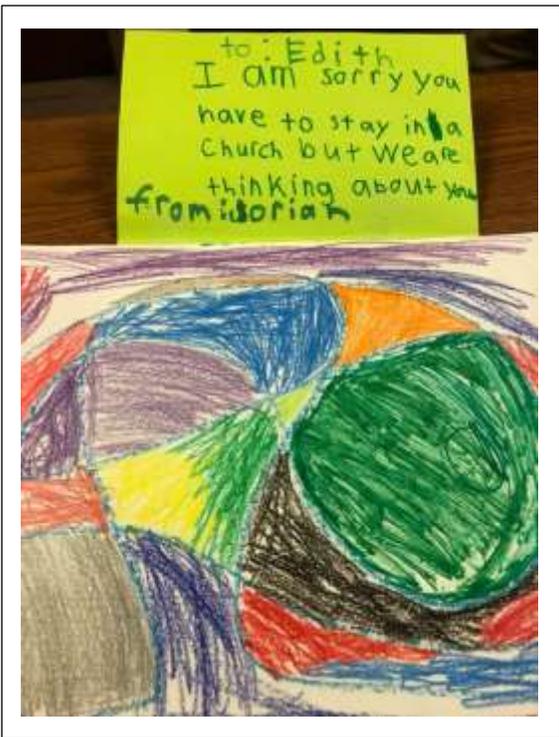
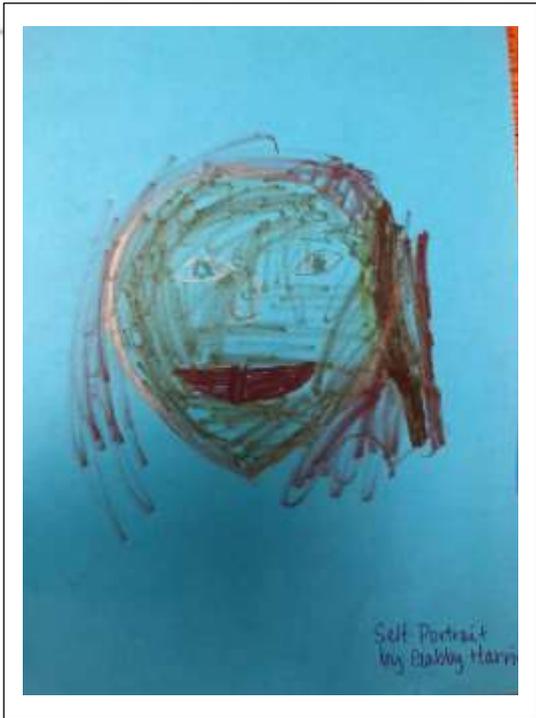
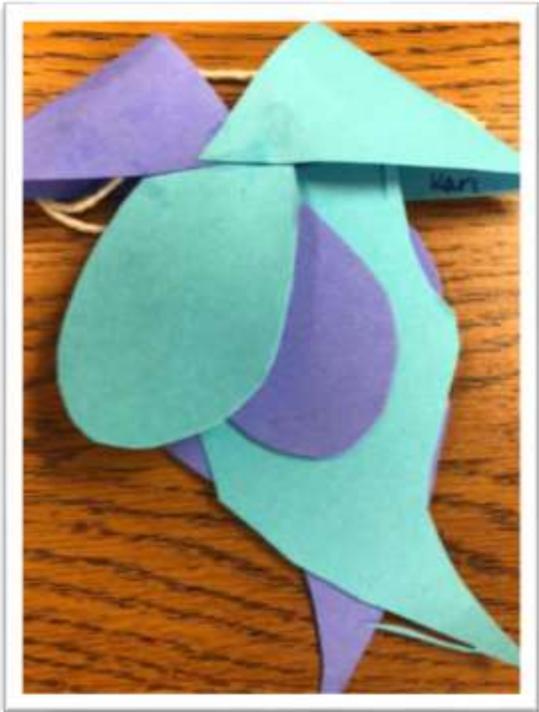
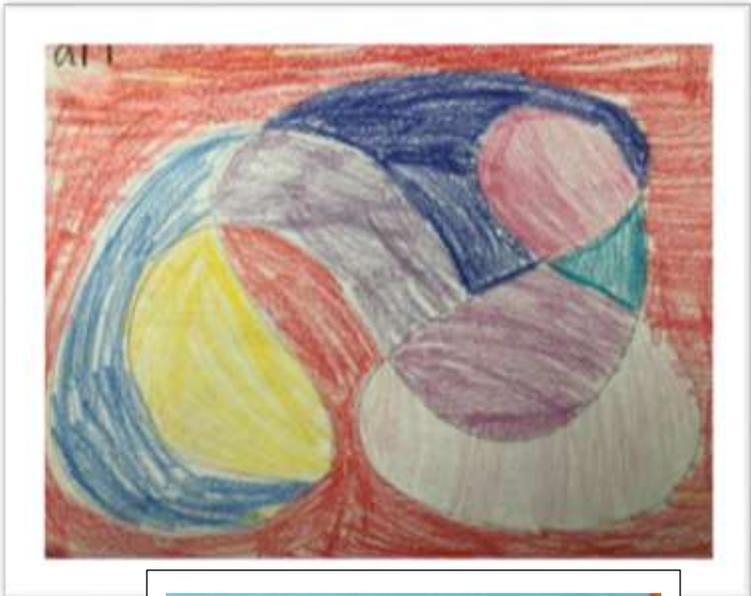
~ Ruth Naylor

## Third- and fourth-graders make connections with Edith Espinal

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school class spent two Sundays discussing similarities between the stories of Paul and Silas and Edith Espinal, a woman, mother, and wife who has lived in sanctuary in Columbus Mennonite Church since October 2017.

Paul and Silas were not always welcomed in the cities and towns they visited, and in fact, their presence made some people angry, and they were threatened with violence and run out of town. Paul and Silas were thrown into jail at one stop on their journey, and yet, they remained steadfast in both their faith and their love for God and for people. The class discussed immigration; sanctuary churches, including how the church

is both sanctuary and jail for Edith since her undocumented status means she cannot safely leave the building; and above all, love for neighbors. To show love and support for Edith, the class mailed her notes and some of their artistic creations.



## Getting to know...

### John Murray

By Joanne Niswander

John Murray hasn't lived here his entire life but is a strong advocate of Bluffton and its history. Anyone who knows John is aware that his knowledge of this town and its people is phenomenal. If John doesn't know a fact offhand, he certainly has the newspaper clipping, article, or picture in one of his many scrapbooks that will tell you the story.

But let's begin at the beginning it was back in the mid-1800s when the Murrays first came to town. First generation: John Murray (our John's great-great grandfather) came to settle in Bluffton in 1850, when this town was still named Shannon.

Second generation: Joseph Murray was a wagon-maker and casket-maker who was on the committee that changed the village's name from Shannon to Bluffton. His family became big news when his family suddenly grew larger with the birth of quadruplet boys.

Third generation: Medlow Murray was one of those quadruplets and was John's grandfather.

Fourth generation: Clayton Murray, John's father, was a plasterer. He met and married Ruby Beery, who was a school teacher who had been teaching in small country schools around the Bluffton area. After their marriage, Clayton and Ruby made their home in Bluffton.

Fifth generation: John Murray, born August 21, 1936 at Bluffton's sanitarium (the first hospital -- a house where the library now stands.) John says that the first shovel of dirt dug for the current hospital was dug on the day he was born.

John's mother grew up on a farm just a few miles west of town, not far from Zion Mennonite Church which the Beery family attended. The church is no longer standing, but Zion Cemetery is there - on the north side of Grove Road just a few miles out of town. This is the cemetery where John expects to be buried.



After John's birth, his parents were told there was a problem. Their baby was found to have cerebral palsy, a motor disability. When he was about 10 years old, John's parents took him to a Dr. Phelps at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore. Although he doesn't know what happened there, he knows that the family returned to Bluffton prepared to do the best they could for the son that they loved.

Ruby taught first and second grades for 10 years before her marriage to Clayton Murray, and quit teaching when John was born so she could spend all her time with him in those early years. After he started school, she returned to teaching for another 25 years.

John expresses a great appreciation for his mother. "If I hadn't had a teacher-mother, I wouldn't be here today," John said. Many Bluffton residents remember beginning their elementary school years with the gentle Ruby Murray, a beloved teacher at Bluffton Elementary.

The Murrays were members of Bluffton's First Methodist Church and John was enrolled in the cradle roll there. So his early church education came in the building just across the street from First Mennonite. His formal education was at the old elementary school building at the corner of Jackson and Church Streets. He

attended school through 8th grade, then began his working career. He first worked on a farm belonging to his mother's brother and mowed the cemetery for the township.

When he was 21, John began working for Cal Workman, the principal of Robin Rogers School (now Marimor). John also worked at the TB hospital south of Lima, a facility no longer in existence. There, John lived on the grounds and worked in housekeeping as well as taking meals to patients.

During this time, John met Barbara (his wife-to-be) who was also at Robin Rogers. John and Barbara were married when John was 33. They were married here in Bluffton at the United Methodist Church. They lived most of their married life in Lima, where John worked. They first attended Salem Mennonite Church, then a Nazarene church.

The primary job that John held during his adult years was working in the kitchen at St. Rita's Hospital in Lima, where he worked for 37 years and had many friends, including fellow workers, doctors and nurses. When John retired, St. Rita's held a going-away party for him.

John and Barbara raised two children. Their son, Christopher, is estranged from the family and lives in Florida. This has caused John much sadness. Their daughter, Jennifer, lives in Lima and they see each other quite often. Jennifer's daughter, Cary, will be a junior in high school in the fall. In the early 2000s, John and Barbara moved to Maple Crest where they lived until she died in 2003. John then moved to Riley View Apartments and lived there several years before returning to Maple Crest. Three years ago, he needed extra care and moved to an apartment at Mennonite Memorial Home. He is still very active there, attending programs and keeping up many friendships.

In John's apartment, he has many framed pictures on the walls and tables - pictures of family long deceased as well as recent ones of his daughter and granddaughter. Family means a great deal to John. But John's apartment also holds other gems. If you need to know anything about Bluffton history, his apartment has that, too. Bookcases are full of notebooks and folders that tell the story of the town of Bluffton, how it developed, hundreds of people who live or have lived here. He's happy to share it with you. John loves to fill in the blanks on whatever you ask. His memory is fantastic and enthusiasm contagious.

If you haven't yet met John, don't hesitate to introduce yourself. The cerebral palsy that has been with him all his life doesn't define him - it has only made him stronger in other ways. The fourth graders at Bluffton Elementary have been learning that when Louise Matthews of the Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center introduces them to John. They learn a physical disability does not define an individual, as he is a good example of a full life lived.

John wraps up his life in just a few words: "My mother, my dad, my wife -- the best people in my life."