

Menno-Life



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The father/daughter team of Greg and Ellie Hartzler volunteered recently at Camp Friedenswald, helping with a clean-up of Lakeside Lodge.

Finding balance

Giving and receiving counsel

During baptism, we commit to give and receive counsel in our congregation. Navigating the past year has required us to have difficult conversations with family members and church family about what safety measures are important to us and to others. This has required us not only to give and receive counsel, but to accept boundaries that others create and sometimes to create boundaries for ourselves that others see as unnecessary. Giving and receiving counsel has sometimes been understood as telling others what to do or being told by others, but I think that our ongoing experience of boundary setting may be a better way of framing this practice.

We do our best to be clear about our values and priorities and how they are shaping our decisions and impacting the boundaries we create and observe. We also listen to the values and priorities of others and respect the decisions they make, sometimes adapting, but most often simply and steadily holding the boundaries that express the values and priorities we have identified. During the pandemic, one of the most challenging aspects of our experience is that while we need to make decisions, we do not have all the information we'd like to have in order to make those decisions, and both the information and our lived experience continue to change along the way.



We are all learning in new ways that life on this good earth is a balance that includes managing risk, never eliminating it. We manage risk to our own lives and the lives of our families. COVID is teaching that we are our neighbor's keeper as well. So as we consider attending worship we encourage everyone to recognize that first and foremost our lives are in God's hands. And as stewards of the gift of life, if you are sick, it seems wise to stay home and rest. It is not only a gift to yourself, it is also a way of caring for the community. Wearing a mask and distancing in public settings, even with the number of vaccinations rising, continue to be reliable acts of care for family, neighbor and for self.

In addition to caring for one another, as a congregation we are actively seeking ways that God is calling us to deepen our welcome at First Mennonite Church. Our protocols for returning to in-person worship and other gatherings will reflect this open question. And our protocols will reflect our commitment to give and receive counsel, in a spirit of open, honest, loving, respectful conversation and in an effort to more fully embody the Spirit of Christ Jesus whose living presence we make real in the world here and now.

The body of Christ may be more aware than ever before of its own brokenness, frailty, vulnerability. But as people of resurrection hope, this does not cause us to despair. We have seen what God does with tiny seeds, with dust, with the lost, the least, the dying and the forgotten. May the healing presence of Christ's broken body be a reminder of our Lord's death until he comes and a sign of hope to the suffering world.

Reflecting on baptism – now and then

On the day before Easter, First Mennonite Church baptized five young persons and welcomed them into the church – Allison Diller, Ellie Nickel, Landon Novak, Andrew Raeburn, and Elam Suter. In this issue, we invited some others to reflect on their own baptisms. What do you remember of your own?

Gerald Mast

On April 3, our church congregation baptized five young people—who promised to renounce the evil powers of this world and to follow the way of Jesus Christ, to give and receive counsel in the congregation and to join the mission of the church. And then the water flowed over their heads and they were enjoined to walk in newness of life. As a congregation we responded by renewing our own baptismal vows, promising “to bear each other’s burdens, to assist in times of need, to share our gifts and possessions, to forgive as Christ has forgiven, to support each other in times of joy and sorrow, and in all things to work for the common good, thus proclaiming the presence of Christ among us so that our lives may glorify God.”



As I recalled the similar baptismal promises I made nearly 40 years ago, I realized that in this ceremony is enacted practically everything I believe about the Christian life—which is full of ups and downs, renouncing and following, giving and receiving, responding and renewing, bearing and forgiving. I also recalled the simple confession of faith I was invited to make at my baptism, the baptismal confession made by the Ethiopian eunuch (according to at least some ancient versions of Acts 8): “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” I still so believe and still so confess.

Mary Pannabecker Steiner

In the '60s and '70s, baptism at FMC usually took place in mid-May to mid-June. The boys wore suits no matter how hot it was in the not yet air-conditioned FMC sanctuary, which caused some discomfort – especially during the long period of kneeling.



On May 21, 1961, my oldest brother, Phil, was one of those baptized by then-pastor, Jacob Friesen. As they kneeled in front of the front pew, one of them wavered, then suddenly fell backward and smacked his head on the pew.

As a five-year-old with a vivid imagination, I was sure he had died. As some of the men carried him out, I told my mom I would never attend another baptism. I was both surprised and relieved when we saw the young man walking home with his family. But for the next 10 years, I dreaded baptism knowing my other three brothers would have to suit up for their own in 1963, 1968, and 1969.

Before my baptism on June 13, 1971, I begged Stan Bohn, our pastor, to let the guys forgo the suits. You'd have to ask Jeff Boehr or Dave Moser what they wore, but I'm quite sure neither of them fainted.

Sadly, no picture exists of that 1971 graduation in my photo library and perhaps even more sadly, I remember very little about what was surely an auspicious occasion. Instead, I recall clearly the countless lively and meaningful discussions and arguments of our catechism classes in Stan Bohn's tiny office.

I also remember the blue dress I wore. My mom had made it for my brother's wedding, held a few weeks earlier. I have no idea how I kneeled in that dress, which in my Dad's words was “too short.” He was probably right.

In retrospect, I think I prefer today's outdoor baptisms despite the fact that our unpredictable weather brings a possibility of hypothermia. Perhaps we should invest in a stash of wetsuits.

More memories of baptism

Our Maple Crest reporter, Joanne Niswander, asked some FMC members living at MC to share memories of their own baptisms.

Judy Kingsley was baptized here at First Mennonite, at about age 13. Alvin Beachy was the pastor. They had a series of classes before the day of baptism. She remembers, particularly, Marty Hostetler, Ann Stauffer Nafziger, and Jim Burry (brother of Mary Ramseyer), in her class.

Wilda Shrag was about 13 when she was baptized in an Old Mennonite church in Milford, Nebraska. It was a big church, with about 400 regular attendees.

Marilyn Diller was also baptized at First Mennonite, Bluffton, with J.N. Smucker as pastor. She remembers that Sam Buhler was in her class.

Elnore Yost's father was the pastor at Salem Mennonite Church in Dalton when she was baptized, at around age 12. She particularly remembers that several of her good friends were baptized at the same time, making it a special memory in that way.

And then, if you really want to know, **I (Joanne)** was baptized at about age 12 at Meadows Mennonite Church, Meadows, Illinois. My biggest memory is that the water dripped down onto my dress. ~ JN

2021 graduates: Congratulations to all those graduating this year!

Jacob Suter, Pandora-Gilboa High School

My parents are Pete and Kim Suter. My brother is Elam Suter, and my sister is Makayla Suter. Bob and Linda Suter are my grandparents, Beth and Ray Raeburn are my aunt and uncle, and Andrew Raeburn is my cousin.

This fall I will attend The Ohio State University at Columbus and major in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, as well as Computer Science.

In my free time I enjoy playing golf and video games with my friends! I am the president of my high school's esports program, and am a co-president of our student council.



Carter Dyar graduates this year from **Bluffton High School**. He and his dad, Eric Dyar, have attended FMC for several years and Carter has done a remarkable job as our custodian throughout the pandemic. We are grateful for the hard work he has done to keep the church building clean and safe.

Douglas Nester, Eastern Mennonite University



My family at FMC includes my parents, Darryl and Lori Nester, my grandparents, Lynn and Linda Miller, and my uncle and aunt, Chris and Liana Gott, and cousins, Sophia and Kendra.

I am majoring in Computer Engineering.

I have held leadership positions and been an active member in EMU's Engineers for a Sustainable World Club and Young Democrats Club.

This summer, I will be working as Waterfront Director at Camp Friedenswald and in the fall I hope to begin work as a software engineer or a related field, although I don't know where yet.

Shannon Thiebeau, MTSO

I am graduating from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio at the end of May with a Master of Divinity degree with a specialization in feminist and womanist studies. In addition to my coursework, I spent the last year in an internship with OhioHealth serving as a student chaplain at a local hospital for my first unit of Clinical Pastoral Education.

I am pursuing a career in hospital chaplaincy and I will continue living in Delaware, OH for an additional year to serve as a resident chaplain with OhioHealth. This resident internship will help me meet the requirements to become a board-certified hospital chaplain. Since moving to Delaware last August, I have been attending Columbus Mennonite Church, although I miss my FMC and Bluffton family.



Thank you for all of your prayers, encouragement, and support during my seminary journey!

FMC needs your musical gifts!

Instrumentalists and singers, musicians of all ages and types: there are opportunities for offering your musical gifts during the worship services this summer (and throughout the year.)

Opportunities include:

- Play an instrument for the prelude, postlude, offertory, or as an obbligato instrument with hymns or ensembles
- Provide special music during the service, vocally or instrumentally, as a soloist or in an ensemble

During this time of COVID-19, whether we are gathered in person or recording a service, we will take safety precautions for your music presentation. Special thought to placement in the sanctuary, especially for wind instruments and singing, will be implemented.

If you are willing to offer your musical gifts or have any questions, please feel free to contact our Director of Music, Mark Suderman, at 419.358.5368 or sudermanme@bluffton.edu.

If you have some specific dates in mind when you could offer your musical gifts, please let Mark know. Thank you!

CDC requests welcoming messages for new congregation

Along with the other CDC churches, we're invited to send messages of welcome to a new incoming church, Grand Rapids (MI) Mennonite Fellowship. Each of us is encouraged to write a message of welcome -- a poem, a prayer, a work of visual art or a sentence of good wishes. Welcome messages may be placed in Pastor Jeff's mailbox or contact him to pick it up by May 26. Thank you for being a part of this broader act of hospitality! Anabaptist World recently published an article about Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship. [Read more here.](#)