

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

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Lord, rescue us from getting sucked into the cyclone of a commercialized Christmas this year. Help! Save us! Help us commit more earnestly to times of prayer, worship, silence, and reflection. Convince us to trade commotion for community and frenzy for friends. Show us what it takes to become more genuinely human that we might recognize You within us and Your face in the face of others. Amen.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

“To Be Virgin”

by Loretta Ross-Gotta (b. 1945)

God asks us to give away everything of ourselves. The gift of greatest efficacy and power that we can offer God and creation is not our skills, gifts, abilities, and possessions. The wise men had their gold, frankincense and myrrh, Paul and Peter had their preaching. Mary offered only space, love, belief. What is it that delivers Christ into the world – preaching, art, writing, scholarship, social justice? Those are all gifts well worth sharing. But preachers lose their charisma, scholarship grows pedantic, social justice alone cannot save us. In the event, when all other human gifts have met their inevitable limitation, it is the recollected one, the bold virgin with a heart in love with God who makes a sanctuary of her life, who delivers Christ who then delivers us.

Try it. Leave behind your briefcase and notes and proof texts. Leave behind your honed skills and knowledge. Leave the Christmas decorations up in the attic. Go to someone in need and say, “Here, all I have is Christ.” And find out that that is enough.

Imagine a Christmas service where the worshipers come in their holiday finery to find a sanctuary empty of all the glittering decorations, silent of holiday carols. What if this year you canceled the church decoration committee and the worship committee and called off the extra choir rehearsals and the church school pageant?

What if on Christmas Eve people came and sat in the dim pews, and someone stood up and said, “Something happened here while we were all out at the malls, while we were baking cookies and fretting about whether we bought our brother-in-law the right gift: *Christ was born. God is here*”? We wouldn’t need the glorious choruses and the harp and the bell choir and the organ. We wouldn’t need the tree strung with lights. We wouldn’t have to deny that painful dissonance between the promise and hope of Christmas and a world wracked with sin and evil. There wouldn’t be that embarrassing conflict over the historical truth of the birth stories and whether or not Mary was really a virgin. And no one would have to preach sermons to work up our belief.

All of that would seem gaudy and shallow in comparison to the sanctity of that still sanctuary. And we, hushed and awed by something greater and wiser and kinder than we, would kneel of one accord in the stillness. A peace would settle over the planet like a velvet coverlet drawn over a sleeping child. The world would recollect itself and discover itself held in the womb of the Mother of God, even as we filled the emptiness of the Savior’s heart with ours.

The intensity and strain that many of us bring to Christmas must suggest to some onlookers that, on the whole, Christians do not seem to have gotten the point of it. Probably few of us have the faith or the nerve to tamper with hallowed Christmas traditions on a large scale, or with our other holiday celebrations. But a small experiment might prove interesting. What if, instead of *doing* something, we were to *be* something special? Be a womb. Be a dwelling for God. Be surprised.

Excerpted from *Watch for the Light – Readings for Advent and Christmas:*
Plough Publishing

December 2015

Ministries Council Minutes

November 12, 2015

Present: Youth Minister Hank Unruh, Pastor Susan Jantzen, Doug Miller (Moderator/Coordinating Cabinet), Aleen Ratzlaff (Worship), Glen Diener (Treasurer), Jan Amstutz (Nurture), Pam Bartel (Hospitality), Joel Klaassen (Stewardship), Tim Frye (Discernment).

Absent: Keith Harder (Vision), Laura Paulus (Care), Pat Bartel (Secretary)

Guests: Cheryl Bartel (Archivist), Marlin Bartel

Opening Prayer/Meditation: Pam Bartel

Minutes of October 22, 2015 meeting were accepted with several corrections.

Committee Reports. Worship: Preparation for Advent is well underway; Susan and Aleen met with Judy Harder last week; Ethan Koerner is considering joining the committee; next meeting is Nov. 19.

Nurture: Met Nov. 4 and will meet Sunday (15th); finalizing the list of college students to receive the 8 snack boxes; emergency response sheets for children have been placed in the classrooms; reviewed safe sanctuary policies; adult sponsor rotations for Hi-FY is going well; may need some help with the large group of children Wed. evenings; commended Jason Klanderud for his creativity; more help is needed in the nursery; discussed Circles of Grace curriculum, also some safety concerns; are considering some of the listening groups' ideas. **Mission:** Susie Kliever, Elfrieda Funk and Pastor Susan met to plan for Sunday; it was their idea to walk forward for the offering; they are moving ahead incrementally for a mission trip next summer; will possibly visit a church in St. Louis and do service in the community; they had a good report on meat canning helpers from Marion County; Pastor Susan will seek closure with the city of Hillsboro on FMC's role with recycling. **Care:** They listened to the testimonies of Derek and Katherine Hamm and Ethan and Laurel Koerner and commended them for membership (later approved by Ministries Council): Hamms will join FMC Sunday, Nov. 22; Koerners will pick a future date. Others are in the process of joining the church.

Hospitality: Nothing to report. **Stewardship:** A workday will be held at the church one week from Saturday (21st); the Christmas lights will be checked soon; their recommended budget was presented by Glen and, after a discussion, MC approved it unanimously.

Council Reports. Discernment: Met Tuesday (10th); Mission (which has always been important to FMC) is the one significant committee that remains under-filled: hoping to encourage active involvement, Discernment may hold some mission-related conversations in spring to highlight our current mission activities. **Vision:** Continuing to consider suggestions from the listening sessions.

Coordinating Cabinet: Met today; the designated offering schedule for 2016 has been set and, after a brief

discussion, it was approved by MC. Coordinating Cabinet invited feedback from the recent Wednesday evening meetings regarding the Western District Conference and the Rainbow Mennonite Church's resolutions. Comments made during a brief discussion were positive. Given Keith Harder's health issues, Vision Council is considering increasing its members: more will be reported after possible candidates have been approached.

Treasurer: Glen reported that peppernut sales netted \$4,677.79 (monthly transfer to budget \$389.82).

Youth Pastor: Hi-FY stands for (Hillsboro Inter-Faith Youth) not Hillsboro First Youth; discussing study options for December; there are enough funds to start planning for Phase 1 of their room renovation; they have two November projects: raking leaves and Hanging of the Greens; divided by gender, they have GAB Sessions every third Wednesday; discussions (*Jesus for President* on Sundays) and mission focus on Wednesday evenings are going well; very pleased with the month-by-month adult youth sponsors however, Tim suggested a six-week commitment would have the advantage of more time with the youth after "breaking the ice" for the first couple of weeks; starting to look at plans for summer.

Pastor: Dec. 15 is the deadline for electronic submissions of annual reports to Becky Gage (Pastor Susan will send an email reminder as well); setting up small groups could be discussed by the congregation in table groups at the annual meeting; Hank's one-year assessment and Becky's three-month assessment are being discussed by the Coordinating Cabinet and Stewardship Committee respectively. She sought a response to the idea of transforming the bulletin board outside the pastor's office to display pictures of congregation members and attenders (to be implemented by her and Becky); the response was positive. Ministries Team Leaders (MTLs) are to bring their 12-month outlines of committee tasks to the January MC meeting. A network of churches (Care Portal) is working with government social services to provide tangible needs for people and hoped for relational connections; if FMC would like to participate, a contact person will be needed.

Old Business. MTLs were reminded to submit any Policy Manual changes to Doug. Reflections on the recently implemented schedule of MC meetings, skipping every other month through spring and summer, were requested: the response to continue that schedule was positive.

New Business. June 2017 is the 50th anniversary of FMC's building (1967). Cheryl Bartel and Susan have been talking about commemorating the event. Cheryl brought a recommendation to acknowledge the milestone somehow, seeking input from MC on ideas, e.g., a project. One might be to create 52 devotional readings written by members of the congregation. Cheryl

mentioned celebrating "the house," since it is a church home for all of us. Several ideas were discussed. MC encouraged continued drafting of ideas.

Next meeting date/time: Agreed to cancel the December meeting and to plan the annual congregational meeting by (tentatively) moving the January 2016 meeting from the 21st to the 14th at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

December events

- 8 7:00 p.m. Worship Committee meeting
- 15 Annual reports due
- 24 6:30 p.m. Christmas Eve program
- 25 **Merry Christmas!** Office closed

January events

- 1 **Happy New Year!** Office closed
- 14 7:00 p.m. *tentative date* for Ministries Council meeting

"...So, we had children born in three different decades and two centuries. That makes us sound like we are really old!"

Getting to know Tammy Wintermote

Tammy Vogt Wintermote grew up in Pretty Prairie. Her parents, and her family generally, were a strong Christian influence on her: she accepted Christ as her personal Savior when she was quite young and she was baptized at the age of sixteen.

Tammy's interest in working with children began when she was a teenager, and this influenced her college major: she graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education from Hesston College and has been working with children ever since.

"I met Jeff at Hesston College," she told me. "He was a year ahead of me and we got married the December before I graduated in 1980. I was nineteen, Jeff was twenty. It was funny: I took a Marriage and Family class for January interterm and my classmates told me, 'You are an expert (at being married)' – but I had only been married for two weeks!" She laughed.

"After I graduated, I did a lot of childcare in our home; I also worked in several daycare centers. We were married eight years before we had our own children. The first one, Peter, was born in 1989, in Homestead, Florida, where we were in voluntary service (VS). In 1993, Aaron was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia, when Jeff was in seminary. And then Matthew was born in 1998 in Chester

County, Pennsylvania; Jeff was youth pastor there. Victoria was born in 2001 in Wauseon, Ohio; Jeff was youth pastor and director of Christian education there. So, we had children born in three different decades and two centuries. That makes us sound like we are really *old!*" Tammy laughed at that, too, then added, "From Ohio, we moved to the panhandle of Oklahoma, Turpin, where Jeff became lead pastor for about six years. We then moved to Hillsboro for Jeff to be lead pastor at Trinity. We have lived here for seven years.

"We did seven years of voluntary service a few years after we got married: in Freeport, Illinois for two years, working with low-income families; in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (Canada) where we ran a boys' group home for two years, and then to Homestead, Florida, for three years, where we lived in a migrant camp and worked in the community in social work jobs. After we came back to Kansas, Jeff enrolled at Bethel College to get his degree in Bible and religion, so he could go on to Eastern Mennonite Seminary to get his Master's of Divinity degree.

"In Florida, I worked at a daycare center for migrant children. I got pregnant with Peter about halfway through our VS term and we decided that I would be a stay-at-home mom, which lasted for twenty years." Tammy has an upbeat attitude toward life and she laughs often, which she did when she was telling me that. Then she went on, "The first job I had outside the home was here in Hillsboro. I interviewed over the phone from Oklahoma and started working less than a week after we moved to Hillsboro. My job was working with one and two year olds at Kids' Connection (at the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church). I did that for five years. I then became a para-educator at Eisenhower Elementary in McPherson. I worked there for two years with K- to fifth grade. I'm now at Lincoln Elementary in McPherson, working with four year olds in the Head Start program."

Thinking of some of the wonderful, creative – and thoroughly honest – comments kids come up with, I asked, "Is there anything that's funny or stands out that the kids you work with have said or done?" She thought for a bit and then told me, with an amused smile, "When the kids see me outside of the school, they are surprised to see me with Victoria. They must think that I live at school because that's where they see me the most. I love the spontaneity and humor of the kids, too. They make me happy and keep me laughing!" That said, she then told me soberly, "We have a lot of troubled kids that come from unstable homes. What some of my four year olds know, say, and have been through, they shouldn't have to experience these kinds of things. It makes my heart

hurt. They need a safe place to be and we provide that for them at preschool. We have a treasure chest in our classroom. Each child's name is written on a fish. Every day we have them put their fish in the chest and we close the lid. We tell them that they are safe at school, like the fish are safe in the chest. We also tell them how special each one of them is to us. This is a very meaningful part of our day for the children and the teachers to experience together."

"Do you have any hobbies?" I asked. She said, "I love to do word search puzzles and jigsaw puzzles. They challenge my mind. I like to embroider and I enjoy reading non-fiction books – true stories of people that have gone through struggles and how God has brought them through. I also like to collect nativity scenes and, in the last few years, angels. My first angel was given to us by our congregation at Turpin when Jeff's father passed away. I now have 50-70 in both collections." And, as an afterthought, she added, "I like to walk for exercise but I don't walk fast; I go at my own pace. I also ride bike. I use these times to get away from my kids!" She laughed again.

I asked Tammy if there was anything else she would like to say about their time in Hillsboro. She said, "We have hosted two exchange students. One was Theeparan Jarumetheechon; his nickname was Pang Pang, pronounced Pong Pong, which translates to bread, bread; that is what we called him. His language barrier caused difficulties for him in school and at our house (until we got used to him). He is Buddhist, so we learned much about his religion and his culture. He was very open to going to church with us and to learn about Christianity. Jeff has been to Thailand several times on mission trips and got to meet Pang Pang's family while he was there on one of his trips. The other boy was from Brazil; he was sixteen. His name was Leo Sontag. Much easier to pronounce!" She smiled. "Leo was from a Christian family and was very fluent with his English. We got to meet part of his family when they came for his graduation and the other part of his family came during the summer after he left. Pang Pang is now getting ready to graduate from high school and is studying to take a test to get into university in Thailand. He is not for sure what he will study in university. Leo is in his first year of college in Santa Barbara, California, studying engineering. They both enriched our lives immensely and have become a part of our family forever. We continue to keep in contact with them through Skype and Facebook. Our family hopes to host more exchange students in the future."

After a short pause when she stared out of the window, Tammy added, "I was seventeen when I graduated from high school in Pretty Prairie. I decided that I would then go to Hesston College and never return to live back in Pretty Prairie for the rest of my life. I had no idea at that time what I would be doing after I graduated from college, but Pretty Prairie was too small and I wanted to see a lot more of the world, and have more experiences than my family had had living only in Pretty Prairie all of their lives. I guess I wanted to be the adventuresome one in my family. I have definitely had some adventures in my life so far, and hope to have more!

"My dad passed away four years ago and my mom still lives in Pretty Prairie, as well as my two brothers and most of their families. We go visit Mom and our families quite often so our family can have good times and good memories."

To finish up her story, Tammy said, "Through my Pretty Prairie and Moundridge roots, I'm very distantly related to the Vogts in Hillsboro. I am also a distant cousin to Lee Albrecht: my Grandma Vogt was an Albrecht. I also just found out from Mom that I am also related to Lee through my Grandma Schwartz who was a Graber. It's a small world!"

I've never known Tammy to be anything but upbeat. Some of her experiences – particularly her years in VS and now working with under-privileged children – have provided plenty to sadden and worry her, yet, through her close relationship with Christ, she's also found much to enjoy, and she maintains a positive attitude. We look forward to welcoming her and Jeff into our membership in the not-too-distant future.

Pat Bartel

All submissions of interest to the FMC family are welcome and will be included, depending on timeliness and space availability. (Anonymous submissions are accepted but not preferred.) *First Threshings* is distributed the first Sunday of each month so materials should be submitted at least one week previously. Comments pro/con regarding any aspect of the newsletter are also welcome. Please address these to Pat Bartel, compiler/editor: mailslot 107 or meadowlark. bartel@gmail.com.