

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

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**God
is in
the manger.**

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)**

**Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**

(Revelation 3:20)

When early Christianity spoke of the return of the Lord Jesus, they thought of a great day of judgment. Even though this thought may appear to us to be so unlike Christmas, it is original Christianity and to be taken extremely seriously. When we hear Jesus knocking, our conscience first of all pricks us: Are we rightly prepared? Is our heart capable of becoming God's dwelling place? Thus Advent becomes a time of self-examination. "Put the desires of your heart in order, O human beings!" (Valentin Thilo), as the old song sings. It is very remarkable that we face the thought that God is coming so calmly, whereas previously peoples trembled at the day of God, whereas the world fell into trembling when Jesus Christ walked over the earth. That is why we find it so strange when we see the marks of God in the world so often together with the marks of human suffering, with the marks of the cross on Golgotha. We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us. The coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for everyone who has a conscience.

Only when we have felt the terror of the matter, can we recognize the incomparable kindness. God comes into the very midst of evil and of death, and judges the evil in us and in the world. And by judging us, God cleanses and sanctifies us, comes to us with grace and love. God makes us happy as only children can be happy. God wants to always be with us, wherever we may be – in our sin, in our suffering and death. We are no longer alone; God is with us. We are no longer homeless; a bit of the eternal home itself has moved unto us. Therefore we adults can rejoice deeply within our hearts under the Christmas tree, perhaps much more than the children are able. We know that God's goodness will once again draw near. We think of all of God's goodness that came our way last year and sense something of this marvelous home. Jesus comes in judgment and grace, "Behold I stand at the door... Open wide the gates!" (Psalm 24:7)...

One day, at the last judgment, he will separate the sheep and the goats and will say to those on his right, "Come, you blessed...I was hungry and you fed me..." (Matthew 25:34). To the astonished questions of when and where, he answered: "What you did to the least of these you have done to me..." (Matthew 25:40). With that we are faced with the shocking reality: Jesus stands at the door and knocks, in complete reality. He asks you for help in the form of a beggar, in the form of a ruined human being in torn clothing. He confronts you in every person that you meet. Christ walks on the earth as your neighbor as long as there are people. He walks on the

earth as the one through whom God calls you, speaks to you and makes his demands. That is the greatest seriousness and the greatest blessedness of the Advent message. Christ stands at the door. He lives in the form of the person in our midst. Will you keep the door locked or open it to him?

Christ is still knocking. It is not yet Christmas. But it is also not the great final Advent, the final coming of Christ. Through all the Advents of our life that we celebrate goes the longing for the final Advent, where it says: "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Advent is a time of waiting. Our whole life, however, is Advent – that is, a time of waiting for the ultimate, for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, when all people are brothers and sisters and one rejoices in the words of the angels: "On earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests." Learn to wait, because he has promised to come. "I stand at the door..." We however call to him, "Yes, come soon, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (b. 1906 – executed by the Nazis 1945)
"The Coming of Jesus In Our Midst"

(This essay was published by Plough Publishing in their book
Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent & Christmas)

Advent might be compared to a prison cell in which one waits and hopes and does various unessential things...but is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Ministries Council Minutes November 10, 2016

Present: Pastor Susan, Kelly Linnens (Vision Council representative), Joel Klaassen (Stewardship), Glen Diener (Treasurer), Jan Amstutz (Nurture), Douglas Graber (Mission), Tim Frye (Discernment), Aleen Ratzlaff (Worship), Doug Miller (Moderator/Coordinating Cabinet), Pat Bartel (Secretary).

Absent: Hank Unruh (Youth Pastor), Pam Bartel (Hospitality).

Minutes of the October 13 meeting were approved as distributed.

Committee Reports, Worship: Met October 25 and November 9. Discussed counsel given regarding financing the new hymnals but are undecided how to proceed; planned the schedule for the January worship leaders and children's time; will confirm commitments with the individuals involved; discussed the possible role of their committee in the 50th anniversary celebration of the church building; Judy Harder has chosen the theme of hope (as a verb), for the Advent season and is planning the music for the worship services with Holly; Advent ensemble rehearsals begin November 16 – will sing during worship on December 4 and 18; are planning "flexible" worship services (both starting at 10:00 a.m.) for December 25 and January 1; Hank has been introducing ways that HiFY members can take "leading roles" in the Sunday worship services: Caleb Diener and Carson Linnens have volunteered to help usher and will be included in the regular schedule. Next meeting: Tuesday, February 7. **Nurture:** Plan to meet soon; Judy

Harder's finale Show 'n Tell program promoting *Kids for Kindness* with the youngest children (toddlers to sixth graders) was fun: several of the children only attend our church Wednesday evenings, so it was good to see so many parents and family members in the audience; Judy would like children included in one of our Christmas mission projects, possibly helping with comforters, to be discussed further; plan to distribute Christmas boxes to our college students (also to those Tabor students who are helping on Wednesday nights) to arrive by the beginning of final exams week, December 5-8. **Mission:** Douglas reported that November 20 Missions speaker Ben Kreider (Offender Victim Ministries) will lead the Sunday school hour and speak during worship; MCC's traveling exhibit of quotes of children whose parents are in prison is on display in the fellowship hall. (MCC helped pay for shipping.) The carry-in meal will include decorated cakes focusing on release, rather than imprisonment. **Care:** A meeting is scheduled for November 16. **Hospitality:** Provided popcorn snacks for a time of fellowship after Brett Klingenberg's *Creek Crossings* presentation October 23; will be providing kitchen help for the Mission Sunday meal; will soon be planning for the time of fellowship following the Christmas Eve service; the last Wednesday night meal for this calendar year will be November 16; Lenna Knoll will be coordinating the meals for January on. **Stewardship:** Met November 3: approved a 2017 budget for Ministries Council (MC) approval then congregational approval at the annual meeting; approved upgrading the phones; WiFi and the computers will be

upgraded next to ensure backed-up files are saved securely; discussed the snow removal plan; will be checking the exterior Christmas lights to ensure they're all working; both lights above the cross will soon be functioning; discussed: (1) pew shortening/removal to accommodate wheelchairs be brought up at the annual meeting for a general discussion, (2) adding some land on the south side of the church property for parking, (3) giving trends (which have been fairly stable for the last few years) and projections, (4) importance of bringing before the congregation a discussion on: (i) improving our technology – e.g., purchasing a new soundboard; (ii) going to a digital system, (iii) possibly upgrading the sound system in the fellowship hall. The new hand-held microphones seem to be working well.

Council Reports, Discernment. Have put in a lot of work but there are many committee positions to be filled, especially Nurture, Stewardship, Care. There's a new member for Vision, but no Ministry Team Leader (MTL) yet; next meeting November 30. **Vision:** Met November 8 with Pastor Susan: reviewed the *Creek Crossings* presentation; Susan and Pastor Norma Duerksen (Trinity M.C.) have been meeting regularly to discuss doing more together to support each other (e.g., Trinity was invited to attend the recent *Creek Crossings* presentation), not to merge the congregations; Susan's review is on hold, pending finalizing the budget, and the annual meeting.

Coordinating Cabinet: Met November 13 and discussed: (1) Designated offerings: the rotation is the same as for 2016 – the December offering is for the local budget, but there are other opportunities to contribute to MCC in December (list is posted on the bulletin board, and in the weekly worship service bulletins); MC passed the current list as presented. (2) Nadine, representing Vision, and Doug Miller, will meet with Hank as a follow-up to his recent annual reviews. (3) They affirmed Tim Frye for another year as Discernment MTL.

Other Business:

Treasurer: Current budget balance is approximately \$3,000; since Christmas Day is the last giving Sunday of the 2016 FY and New Year's Day is the first day of the 2017 FY, MC decided that announcements should be included in the December 17 and 24 bulletins that, if anyone wants to give in 2016, they should do so before January 1.

Youth Pastor: HiFY is going well: looking forward to holding a fund-raising soup dinner November 20 then shopping for Christmas kids and prisoner kits (50%/50%); holding meetings November 13 and 20, when parents can attend, to discuss the convention: appreciates having Tim Frye as a youth sponsor; thanked everyone for allowing him to be innovative in the November 6 worship service, which he presented as an assignment of his seminary class.

Pastor: (1) Enjoyed a long visit with Hank November 9: went through his job description from the policy manual for his annual review and discussed HiFY, the good and the challenging. (2) This is the start of the fifth year of the Hispanic gatherings so she and Juana Pritchard got together for their annual meeting to discuss how they are going. (We contribute toward snacks for their gatherings through our Mission fund.) They try to arrange three or four special events annually. On December 4 at 4:00 p.m. they are having a piñata event on the Tabor College campus, to be done by the time the *Messiah* starts. (3) She attended communion at TMC on election night and found it very meaningful; grateful that people from different congregations attended; hope to be able to give the public longer notice next time. (4) She and Jim invited Hank and Erin Unruh to their home November 6: discussed joining FMC; they will be meeting with Care Committee November 16 and hope to join December 4, and to share on the theme of hope. Ethan and Laurel Koerner also plan to join the church but are undecided which Sunday – have met with the Care Committee. (5) Sunday, April 30, 2017 is when we may choose to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our current church building: plan to request our congregation provide: (i) devotions to post on our website (ii) recipes to be scanned in and added to our website. She and Cheryl Bartel plan to get together in January to make definitive arrangements, then letters of invitation will be written. Written responses and photos will be posted on our bulletin boards. (6) Regarding the *Creek Crossings* talk, she invited MTLs to make observations on what might be our creek crossings: what makes it hard for people to feel at home here? After a discussion, it was agreed that stability of belief in our core Mennonite principles is more important than trying to be everything to everyone, e.g., to offer a wide variety of worship styles in an effort to attract the largest possible group of believers to worship with us. We have something to offer people: how can we find creative ways to help people realize that our church is what they're looking for? What are the barriers to figuring this out? Judy Harder's *Kids for Kindness* group created a creek crossing. We should think creatively to emphasize what we do, rather than change.

Old Business: No Policy Manual changes by any MTL have yet been submitted, so Doug hopes none need to be made; after a discussion of Glen's proposed budget (already approved by Stewardship), MC approved it unanimously, to be recommended to the congregation at the annual meeting in January.

Meeting adjourned 9:40 p.m.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 26, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
(The official version of the minutes is available in the office.)

December events

- 1 7:00 p.m. Stewardship Committee meeting
- 4 Second Sunday of Advent
- 7 8:00 p.m. Care Committee meeting
- 11 Third Sunday of Advent
- 15 7:00 p.m. Ministries Council meeting (if needed)
MTLs: annual reports are due!
- 16 7:00 p.m. Community Carol Sing: sanctuary
- 18 Fourth Sunday of Advent
- 24 6:30 p.m. Christmas Eve service
- 25 Christmas Day – Merry Christmas!
10:00 a.m. Worship
- 31 New Year's Eve – Happy New Year!

January 1: New Year's Day. 10:00 a.m. Worship

One of our elders remembers that it was a "given" to be in church on Christmas Day, also on the 26th, so, whenever Christmas Day fell on a Friday, it meant that there'd be the Christmas Eve program on Thursday, Christmas Day worship on Friday, the second day of Christmas worship on Saturday and regular worship on Sunday. It'd be interesting to know when the practice of worshipping on December 26 was dropped.

"We were poor but we were all the same so we didn't know it."

Verda Albrecht started off by embellishing Lee's story of how they met.

"He was in the infirmary – he had a bad case of 'flu. My roommate and I went to see his roommate because that was a classmate of hers. And," she laughed, "as they say, 'the rest is history'!"

"I grew up on a farm near Henderson, Nebraska. It isn't too interesting when you grew up and all your relatives lived right where you did. My dad and mom got married in '35, right after the Depression. They struggled for a long time. I had three brothers – one older, I came next, then my two younger brothers.

"I went all eight grades to a country school: there were just two of us in my grade most of the time; in eighth grade, there were less than a dozen in all grades. Then I went to high school in Henderson so there were 35 in my high school graduating class."

"What kind of a farm did your parents have?"

"Grain and livestock – something of everything, like they had in those days; it was self-supporting. And my mother had a lot of chickens."

The children were raised to work hard on the farm. "Even just the laundry was work," Verda said, "because we didn't have electricity until I was in sixth grade. So we had to fill the rendering kettle with water and heat it up, and pour it into the washing

machine. We had a double washing machine so we'd wash everything twice – and rinse everything twice." I asked her why twice and she laughed as she said, "My mother wanted things to be real clean I guess. We made our own soap in the rendering kettle too.

"Butchering day was a big day, I remember. The uncles and aunts would all help. We kids could never stay home: we had to go to school. We made liverwurst, spare ribs, cracklings, and we made our own lard. We were poor but everyone was the same so we never knew we were poor." In spite of that, Verda attended Bethel College for two years and got her AA degree in secretarial science. "You were a long way from home," I commented and she agreed. "You only went home two or three times a year. We car-pooled." And she seemed to remember they paid the driver \$4 for the round trip. We digressed some, discussing the cost of gas in those days and decided it was about 28 cents a gallon.

Lee and Verda were married in 1959, and she went to work as a receptionist/insurance clerk at Bethel Clinic. "I worked there 'til Mike was born then we moved to Hillsboro, in 1961. My first job was secretary at our church. That was when Elbert Koontz was pastor. Margo was born in '62 then, in '64, we started Lee's Drive-In on Main Street where the Baptist Church is now. We had that for twelve years. It was a short-order place – deep-fat fried chicken, shrimp, hamburgers. Our customers' favorite drink was a CVL – cherry vanilla lemon-lime. It was named after the Cottonwood Valley League which was the name of the junior high league that Lee coached at that time – football, basketball, track. So, of course that was the favorite drink of all his athletes and other people as well. And a favorite sandwich was called the Cheese Supreme which was two slices of steak with cheese in between." Lee laughed and said, "We had to warn people the first time they had it because the melted cheese would squirt out, all down their front!" "And soft serve ice cream, malts and shakes," Verda added. "We had a drive-up window – it was mostly a carry-out place. We had a lot of Tabor students.

"In '67, we built a bigger building. We cooked a lot of hours in the drive-in. Then I went to work at Sterling Drug in McPherson, in Purchasing & Quality Control; I worked there for five years ('77-83), then I ran the MB Bookstore" (on the north end of Main Street in Hillsboro). "Then I decided to go fulltime with Lee on the harvest crew." Verda is a good cook and very organized and efficient but she said, "I didn't particularly enjoy taking meals out to the harvest crew: timing was important and it was often a challenge to deliver the freshly-cooked food at its best.

"We'd be gone from May to October – started in Oklahoma and went up to South Dakota, then back through Nebraska. Mike and Hallie" (his wife) "joined us for three years. Hallie had allergies to wheat chaff so she couldn't continue, so they stopped coming.

"I got my Nurse Aide and Home Health certificates so I'd work at Parkside for the six months or so we were home. I was a CNA and did some home health for ten years. I also worked at Dale's Supermarket – in the meat market and as cashier. I was a school bus monitor for four years for the pre-school kids. I'm at Parkside now for about four years, in Dietary. I enjoy that. I've always enjoyed visiting and working with older people. I always try to visit with the residents (at mealtimes). Sometimes you make their day."

Mike and his family live about 600 miles from Hillsboro – a long, eleven-hour drive going north on highway 81 from Salina to Nebraska's I-80 to Grand Island, then a lonely, rather slow stretch going north through the Nebraska Sand Hills where towns are sixty-plus miles apart. That said, Verda and Lee feel very fortunate they are all still able to get together at least once a year and, of course, having Margo and Tom and family in Newton is a special blessing. When their daughter, Katelin, got married in September, all but one of Mike's family were able to attend. Verda showed me a photo of the whole family (minus the one) who were at Katelin's wedding. "By the end of the year we will number twenty," Verda smiled, "because there's a baby on the way."

Next, Verda started talking about some of their church activities. "We have been involved in our church's ministries since we moved here," she said. "We were youth sponsors several times. Lee was church moderator when Roland Goering was hired. We had gone to visit my brother in California so we decided to go on to Reedley" (where Roland and Fern Goering were living) "to help them make plans to move here. And then, when Ed Springer was hired, Lee was a deacon with Irv Schroeder and Johnnie Bartel, so he had a lot to do with Ed's transition to our church, too.

"We both taught Sunday school – Lee taught the adult class and I taught the children on Sundays and mid-week. And you won't believe this, but we had 98 children age two to eighth grade." I was absolutely amazed and after a short pause she asked me rhetorically, "What happened?" It reminded me of Sylvia Abrahams' comment to me recently that, as a young person, you had to get to church early if you wanted to sit upstairs. ("Of course," Sylvia had laughed, "all the young people wanted to sit upstairs!")

"On and off," Verda continued, "I have worked on the social and kitchen committees, to the current time. I remember working with Mildred Jantz and Esther Penner who were sisters. I also helped on the peppernut committee for many years, working with Milford and Kathryn Blair." That was when the dough was rolled out in long, skinny 'sausages' and cut by hand. We talked some about the Blairs, and how particular they both were about making all the peppernuts uniform. Kathryn had been a school teacher so she was used to organizing people. Some members of the congregation will still remember those days very vividly – Marcella Ediger for one!

"My biggest recent highlight is having the church kitchen remodeled – and it's so wonderful to see how it turned out." Verda is really grateful to Clark Wiebe and Don Penner who put in so much work on the cabinets, and to Lloyd Anderson who did a lot of electrical and plumbing work. "And, over the years," she said, "I've really appreciated the addition to our church of Eydie Graber: she has been a real asset to our social committee. She and I work together very well.

"Then, Lee and I have always been very involved with the MCC sale. For six years we were on the Feeding the Multitude committee and, for twenty years plus, we were on the verenicke-making committee where we helped set up and make the verenicke, and transport them to Hutchinson. And then we'd bring all the supplies back to Hillsboro to put in storage." While they had plenty of good help, it was a massive, multi-layered task to produce 16,000 verenicke in one day every spring, drawing in scores of men and women helpers from many congregations in the surrounding area.

Lee and Verda have some longtime friends who they get together with every year. "Lee and I haven't traveled a lot," she said, "but we were able to take a trip with them to Nova Scotia. We flew to Halifax and then we did a bus tour up there of the Maritime Provinces." We laughed as we talked about Prince Edward Island, and *Anne of Green Gables*. "Yes," she said, "we walked down Lovers' Lane" – and she showed me a photo of them doing just that. We looked through the whole album she'd put together about the trip and she obviously enjoyed reminiscing about the good time they all had.

"The last trip Lee and I took, we went to Alaska. We had never been to the northwest so, first of all, we went to Ferndale, Washington, to visit my college roommate. Then we went to Marysville, Washington to visit Wilbur Fast who Lee taught and coached with in Hillsboro for many years. They were best friends. Then we got on the ship at Vancouver and we were on the water for four days, and then we had a three-

day land trip there – Anchorage all the way to Fairbanks. Then we flew home from Fairbanks.”

Albrechts are trying to downsize and to sell their house. They’ve shown it to several people but, so far, no one has signed on the dotted line. She doesn’t look forward to moving but her immediate challenge is to constantly keep the house ready for showing while she and Lee try to live a normal life.

Verda’s a salt-of-the-earth type and one of the hardest-working people I know. She’s also fun to visit with and, particularly, to have a good laugh with. There are many pillars in our church and she and Lee are two of them.

PB

A Retrospective of First Family News

Since this is the last issue of *First Threshings* under my aegis, Pastor Susan asked me to write a farewell article about my time as compiler/editor.

I’ll start by admitting that, while using the word “First” in the name was an obvious choice, I made up the word “Threshings”: it was a nod to Bethel College’s mascot and to the fact that, when farmers harvest grain, they thresh the edible kernel from the stalk: barring Ministries Council meetings, I hoped that the newsletter would cover our church’s more important activities each month.

Originally, the masthead included an old-fashioned (wishbone-shaped) barn roof with a cornucopia, then I decided I’d enjoy coming up with a different short scripture or quotation as a condensed message – mostly to be pertinent to the pastor’s letter but sometimes to speak to that month’s events or something I felt was spiritually significant. Finding one I liked usually took a while but that became one of my favorite tasks every month.

Pastor Keith (who initiated the idea of a newsletter) gave me free rein and, since I was often disappointed at memorial services that I hadn’t known the deceased better, I liked the idea of interviewing people about their lives. I wanted each story to be accurate and to give the interviewee no upsetting surprises when he or she read “their” newsletter, which meant that we’d sometimes go through a couple of drafts before it was finalized. A few people turned me down – and, I regret to say, there were too many of you I never got around to asking – but those who did allow it seemed to enjoy reminiscing about their younger years.

A favorite memory of mine was visiting Verla Redger in the nursing home shortly before she died: she was blind and quite withdrawn, but I read her interview to her and was rewarded with her laughing at some of the antics she and her siblings got up to on

their farm. God blessed us both mightily that afternoon.

I know writing the opening letter was often “another thing” that our pastors had to do each month, but I hope they all agreed that it was good for them to be in touch with their flock in this informative, informal way. I, certainly, enjoyed reading their thoughts. (Keith, (Ruth Penner), Ken Peterson, (Stan Bohn), (Nadine Friesen), Randy Smith, (Marvin Zehr), Susan Jantzen.) Our youth pastors, too, were good about updating us on youth news – Corey Miller, (Kerry Saner), Eric Schrag, Todd Lehman and Asia Frye. Hank’s quarter-time schedule here – and the fact that he has a part-time job, is taking seminary classes and lives in Newton – all cut large chunks out of his every day so he’s exonerated. You should know, however, that, by all accounts, he’s doing an excellent job with our youth group, which he has enlarged to include young people from outside our church.

Another feature of the newsletter, which has become a fixture in the months they meet (although, for space reasons, I condense them), is the Ministries Council minutes. Pastor Randy started that.

So, here I am, writing a retrospective – leafing through all the issues, and thoroughly enjoying reminders of so much that we’ve experienced over the last quarter century.

Beyond what we do now, I’ve been reminded of (in no particular order) the revamping of our church’s organizational structure – creating DnA seminars to identify our spiritual gifts – organizing the 125th anniversary of our church’s founding – creating the *Pumpkin Patch Treasury* – the Women’s Mission Society – parade of tables – Christmas brunches – tea parties – salad suppers – mother-daughter (and father-son and father-daughter) suppers – retreats – collecting tools and making beautiful items of fabric, wood and metal that were submitted for auction at the MCC Sale – working enthusiastically at the sale’s various venues – manning the Hillsboro recycle center on Saturday mornings – building boxes and sewing burial cloths for the *Return to the Earth* project – rising to the challenge to grow \$12 through bake sales, a “garage” sale in the fellowship hall where we sold our unwanted “stuff”, and other income-producing ventures, resulting in sending more than \$1,200 to MCC for Indonesian tsunami relief – the Menno men’s monthly breakfast – organizing the pumpkin race-run-walk around town and, in tandem, arranging for the delivery of pumpkins to create an artistically excellent pumpkin patch complete with hay bales and a mock barn (and I remember the grateful truck driver who’d never seen 835 Jack o’ Lantern-sized

pumpkins, 750 miniatures and many gourds unloaded so fast, made possible by the help of 30 members of the Tabor basketball team) – working intensely to realize our mega-capital improvements program (*Sprucin' up the Little Brown Church*) – the creative building in wood and metal of useful and decorative items for the church – starting a Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) chapter in Marion County – master-minding the perennial challenge of improving our sound system and upgrading our internet connectivity to include the videoing of our worship services for our shut-ins... Given all the years we've been struggling with our sound system, as our family has grown older, the following quote amused me:

"The acoustical properties of our sanctuary have been analyzed by our audio engineers and found to be needing more presence in the pews to absorb the reflected sound waves." (Feb '96)

Who said that, I wonder??

The youth, too, have been very active in our congregation – under one teacher's guidance, even the littlest ones became enthusiastic flower-pot gardeners for a couple of years, bringing plants to be sold in the MCC Sale's *Plants & Things* department – and the older ones have provided creative and spiritual worship services for us every year, and have exhibited innovative ideas and great energy in their money-raising for local charities, to go to snow camp and to conventions – to say nothing of the fun they've provided at the annual variety shows. We've watched infants become students, and students become adults – and now, thanks to Hank's innovative ideas, members of HiFY are taking on regular roles in the adults' worship services. And so much more.

I particularly loved interviewing our seniors – listening to their stories of old-time Hillsboro or farm-life – of phones coming in, the menfolk stringing the lines and, when they broke down, of being responsible for fixing them – of each family having its individual "code", and of listening in to each other's conversations – of a 2-mile walk or buggy ride to school, sometimes in snow so deep that fences were buried – of teachers having to get to school early enough to get the stove going to warm up the building so the kids could dry their wet clothes – of neighbors providing wood for the stoves – of being forbidden entry to the school-house after being sprayed by an angry skunk – of being picked up after school because flying dust (in the '30s) was so thick – of flour-sack dresses (proudly going to town with Dad to buy the week's groceries and being given strict instructions by Mother to be sure to bring home

four flour sacks of the same pattern) – of growing up speaking only Low German at home – of Christmas at school, or church, or at home: making cards and paper-chains, pulling in a cedar tree and decorating it with popcorn strings and real candles, and enjoying what often was their only plate of fruit and nuts – of sledding around the pasture, being pulled by cars driven by big brothers – of summer evenings playing Fox 'n Geese and Andy Over – of turning pastures into ball diamonds for hours' long fun. It was sobering to me to find out that children as young as five would be given chores like gathering the day's eggs while, every morning and evening, the older ones would chore the other animals and milk the cows, separating the cream for butter and cheese. One of my interviewees was from a family of twelve children: they lived in a six-room house with only one two-holer (outside, of course); they had benches around the kitchen table (and no one could leave a meal until the slowest eater had finished); the kitchen table was also where they gathered for playing table games in winter. This particular family also had an orchard and a garden so, from spring to fall, there was plenty to do sowing and reaping, canning and jelly-making – and all in addition to preparing regular meals. Not only that, but this mom would bake nine loaves of bread six days a week. They bought flour by the wagonload and stacked the sacks around the parents' bedroom.

There wasn't much time for kids to get into trouble in those days!

A refrain I heard often was one that Verda also mentioned (in the previous article): "We were poor but we were all the same so we didn't know it." In the material sense they were poor but being surrounded by many family members and always having something to do, eating "whole" foods and getting plenty of exercise in the fresh air were, on the whole, all excellent attributes for living long, healthy lives.

My very sincere thanks to each one of you who contributed to the newsletter – by allowing me to interview you, by writing book reviews, poems, accounts of your celebrations, family trips and (usually at my request – you're all so modest) accounts of your expert work building items and otherwise enhancing our church. I've very much enjoyed visiting with you and getting to know some of you better.

I couldn't possibly do justice to everyone who has contributed to the life of our congregation during all these years, which is why I've mentioned so few names here, but each one of you helps keep our church vibrant and, for that, you are essential to our continued wellbeing.

As Shakespeare said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." So, yes, I'm going to miss my monthly creative activity – I've really enjoyed it – but I'm looking forward to working on other projects now. And, guess what? After almost sixty years of writing shorthand, I'm going to miss that too! It's been very useful over the years.

I very much hope someone will step up to continue the newsletter, even if it takes on a very different format: maybe it'll become more of a pictorial record since it seems not many people like to write. Do, please, consider it: it's a very useful tool for keeping us all in touch with each other.

Pat Bartel

P.S. I'm hoping to have all the interviews in the *First Family Life Sketches* binder in our church library soon: I'm having to retype all those that were done before 2010. A few life sketches were written by family members, usually donated after having been read at a loved one's memorial service: I do not plan to retype those. When all the interviews I conducted have been saved electronically, they will be available through the church office, if you'd like to make copies. Otherwise, you're welcome to browse through the binder.

P.P.S. Well, there's some extra space so I'm going to indulge myself in giving you, dear Reader, a short English lesson – very, very short, and very inadequate, considering: (1) the intricacies of our language and (2) the small amount of thought I've given to it today.

Here are some of my greatest pet peeves of language/punctuation misuse:

I/me

Our friend, John, was very kind to Mark and me. (John was very kind to Mark. John was very kind to me. He was never very kind to I.)

Lie/lay

The verb to lie is "to cause to lie; deposit, especially to place in a horizontal, reclining or low position" so: I lie down for a nap after lunch every day.

Lay is the past of lie:

I lay down for a nap after lunch today.

The command (to a dog or maybe to a child who's meant to be going to sleep!) is:

Lie down!

If you're going to set the table, you lay the table; you lay bricks; you lay the groundwork. And chickens lay eggs.

There are good lie/lay examples in 1 Samuel 3:1-9.

Apostrophes

(Since so few people seem to know where they should go, I visualize a writer grabbing a handful of them and flicking them across the written page, hoping they'll land in at least some of the right places.) Here are a very few examples:

The girl's mother. (The mother of one girl.)

The girls' mother. (The mother of two or more sisters.)

The girls' mothers. (Several girls have several mothers among them.)

At the deacons' meeting it was decided... (There was more than one deacon at the meeting.)

It's is an abbreviation of it is.

Its indicates a possessive, e.g., Its colors were faded.

Singulars/Plurals

The following words are singular: each, neither, either.

Each of us is... (Each (one) of us is planning to...)

Neither of us is... (Neither (one) of us is ready...)

Either (one) of us is available to help you.

Quite recently, I've been noticing how many people are pluralizing where they shouldn't. For an example: One in four children have a food allergy. The meaning is: Out of four children, one has a food allergy. Therefore, the original statement should be: One in four children has a food allergy.

I realize that most people don't notice whether or not one uses the right words (or maybe they're just being polite) so you can either enjoy the fact that you are a good grammarian, or you can happily join the masses. A really excellent – and fun – book is *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss.

I rest my case.

And, with that, I bid you a fond farewell.

Pat Bartel

Christmas gift suggestions

To your enemy, forgiveness.

To an opponent, tolerance.

To a customer, service.

To all, charity.

To every child, a good example.

To yourself, respect.

Oren Arnold (1900-1980)