

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

Ash Street & Grand Avenue

Hillsboro, KS 67063

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Break forth, O beauteous heav'nly light
And usher in the morning;
Ye shepherds, shrink not with affright,
But hear the angel's warning.
This Child, now born in infancy,
Our confidence and joy shall be,
The power of Satan breaking,
Our peace eternal making.

All blessing, thanks, and praise to Thee,
Lord Jesus Christ, be given;
Our brother Thou has deign'd to be,
Our foes in sunder riven.
O grant us through our day of grace
With constant praise to seek Thy face.
Grant us ere long in glory
With praises to adore Thee.

Johann Rist, Johann Schop, 1641
Harmony by J. S Bach, 1734

(Mennonite Hymnal No. 609, vs 1&3)

...that same spirit of grace...that is reaching more and more people may cause
thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

(2 Corinthians chap 4 and parts of vs 13, 15)

We have a small antique roll-top desk from my parents, one that my father purchased in Hillsboro before we moved to Wichita. It is just big enough to house my accumulation of blank note cards and some stamps, and the small front drawer holds a few coasters to be used for hot drinks in the living room. Having had this little treasure in my family for so long, the creak of the top rolling back, then rolling closed again is one of those cherished sounds that makes our home, home.

The way things have gone for our family these past months, the desk has gotten crammed full. This fall when I needed just one note card, usually as I was briskly on my way out the door to be somewhere, I could barely edge the roll-top back, sometimes getting it to work only by setting down my purse and moving the cover up and down gently, with both hands. The time I had to finally reach in under the top and shuffle note cards and note card boxes until the top could roll open, I knew it was time to clean the whole thing out.

As I start this year, one of my goals is to keep this desk more orderly. The plan I have is not to toss some of the blank cards, as if I have too many. Nor is it to quit buying more note cards when I find images and colors that are interesting. The plan this year is to take time to *write* more of the hundreds of thanks I *feel* all the days and weeks through the year. We spent parts of this past fall thinking about gratitude – and much of gratitude, I believe, is about taking note, writing notes, you might say, keeping in mind the memory of what all has come my way, of what has come our way.

We have another year before us. There is much to do. Jesus calls us and will faithfully be by our side. Just walking out the door to get to where we need to be will not be enough to be fully present to the array of demands that come our way. Speaking for myself, I will do my best to take more time emptying out my roll-top desk, writing notes that honor the memory of having received, over and over.

God's blessing and power to us all in this New Year.

Pastor Susan

January 2015

Ministries Council Minutes December 11, 2014

Present: Doug Miller (Moderator/Coordinating Cabinet), Julie Anderson (Secretary), Pastor Susan, Judy Harder (Worship), Keith Harder (Vision), Jan Amstutz (Nurture), Joel Klaassen (Stewardship). **Absent:** Tim Frye (Discernment), Andrew Sensenig (Mission), Glen Diener (Treasurer), Laura Paulus (Hospitality), Elfrieda Funk (Care), Hank Unruh (Youth Pastor).

Opening Prayer/Meditation: Judy Harder offered a prayer of thanksgiving for those Ministries Council members who have served but will be stepping aside as of January 1: Julie, Elfrieda, and Judy.

The November 13 meeting minutes were approved as distributed.

Committee Reports. Worship: No report.

Nurture: No report. **Mission:** No report. **Care:** Grateful to be able to give two \$150 gifts from the Deacons' fund in the past month. Elfrieda is stepping down, but all the other members will be continuing on the committee, joined by Nancy Graber. Agreed not to meet in December unless there was an emergency. The next meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2015, at 7:00 p.m.

Hospitality: No report. **Stewardship:** The kitchen flooring should be laid by next week; the plumbing project will continue in January. Discussion followed regarding possible ideas to pay for the recent maintenance expenses incurred: a proposal will be presented to the congregation Sunday, December 14 during announcements that a portion of the Franzen undesignated memorial family gift be used to supplement those contributions and pledges that have been received to date. This will be followed up at the annual meeting, with a possible congregational vote.

Council Reports. Discernment: After a discussion, it was determined that the goal is to have ministry team leaders and committee members in place in January but, because this is not always possible, joining during the year is acceptable. It was suggested that the congregation be informed of who is serving on the committees.

Vision: Keith. No report.

Coordinating Cabinet: See Stewardship and Discernment notes above.

Treasurer: No report.

Youth Pastor: No report.

Pastor: Scripture (Gospel of Mark) will be delivered by heart during the month of January. Discernment continues for needs in our church; planning of Christmas events continues; we are encouraged to recognize and greet those who have recently begun attending our church.

Old Business: None.

New Business: (1) WDC polity issues: a meeting on Wednesday, February 25 will be called to report on the results of the WDC sexuality survey and to share what is anticipated over the next six months. (2) There was a

preliminary discussion on whether the Ministries Council could reduce its regular meetings to every other month, with supplemental meetings for specific issues, as necessary. More discussion will follow.

Next meeting: January 8, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.

(The official version of the minutes is located in the church office.)

January events

7 6:15 p.m. meal/7:00 classes and activities

14 6:15 p.m. meal/7:00 classes and activities

21 6:15 p.m. meal/7:00 classes and activities

25 Noon carry-in followed by the annual meeting

28 6:15 p.m. meal/7:00 classes and activities

February 8: Youth Sunday

February 18: Ash Wednesday

February 22: First Sunday of Lent

Bundling Bundles

On December 23, eight members of the Home Builders Class, along with seven volunteers from church, met at Park Village to bundle the infant clothing items for the MCC Christmas Eve offering. There were several minutes of confusion and questions ("Do we remove tags? How many pins? Oh, look at this hat with the cute little ears!") until the activity settled into a process. Diapers counted and folded, socks rolled together, pins counted out... In less than 45 minutes about 35 bundles were assembled and ready to go! And there was a whole collection of extra pieces to be given to MCC with the bundles.

And then – a surprise visit from the carolers of the Alexanderfeld youth choir! What a fitting way to end our Christmas assembly line!

Susie Kliever

(Many thanks to Susie and Judy Harder for arranging the "bundling" and for their main helpers: Nancy Graber, Jan Amstutz and Deanne Duerksen. A good time was had by all!)

Just as our Lord came into human history from the outside, so He must come into us from the outside. Have we allowed our personal human lives to become a "Bethlehem" for the Son of God? ...The conception of new birth in the New Testament is of something that enters into us, not of something that springs out of us.

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

“We both do scenic design – technical theater – so, set construction, lighting design and behind-the-scenes kinds of things. We both direct.”

Getting to know Ethan and Laurel Koerner

Laurel grew up in Sanborn, Iowa. “It’s an agricultural community,” she said, “a lot like Hillsboro in size.” And she added with a smile, “Main Street looks eerily similar! There’s a creamery in town and a grain coop; they both employ a lot of people. There’s a lot of cattle and hogs, and corn and soybeans.” And, when I asked what her parents do and where she went to school she said, “My parents own a propane and oil company so my dad delivers propane to his customers. I went to high school in Hull about 30 miles away and I went to college in Dordt in Sioux Center about 45 miles away.” At Dordt, she stayed on campus during the week and drove home for weekends – to do her laundry and enjoy her mom’s good home cooking...typical student!

Ethan was born and grew up in Sutton, Nebraska, “which,” he said, “is a town smaller than Hillsboro. My dad was a minister – still is. We moved from there when I was twelve to Watertown, South Dakota; it has the reputation of being the fifth coldest place in the country! We moved to Pueblo, Colorado, a month before I went off to Dordt College.” Both Koerners grew up in the Reformed Church, Calvinist, although, since then, they say they’ve been at home in other traditions and nondenominational churches. “We have a couple Mennonite friends from college who are now MCC missionaries,” Laurel told me, “but we hadn’t heard of Tabor or Bethel until we were searching for jobs at Christian colleges. It’s been great to both have work in our fields here. And, we’re glad to be a part of First!”

At Dordt, of course, was where they met. They both grinned as they acknowledged how well their interests complement each other. “Ethan was a Theater major,” Laurel said, “and I was really involved in the theater program.” They both graduated with B.A. degrees, Ethan’s in Theater and Laurel’s in Fine Arts & Graphic Design the following year. They got married before Laurel’s senior year. In the meantime, Ethan had enrolled in graduate school in Bowling Green, Ohio, then she joined him in the Master’s program. “We both were on assistantships,” she said, “so we were working for the Theater Department of the college – for the scene shop – building sets, doing lights for shows – and for the humanities troupe.”

I asked about the troupe and Ethan described it.

“I would act on and off campus on skits on justice issues, political issues, general identity issues, and sometimes we did in-classroom stuff, like, teachers

would ask us to come in and help facilitate discussions, and some local businesses would have us come in and act. Sometimes, after our program, we’d have the audience discuss the issues with us and sometimes we’d invite the audience to step into a role and, impromptu, act out an issue. There wasn’t necessarily a script.”

Laurel continued. “We both do scenic design, technical theater – so, set construction, lighting design and behind-the-scenes kinds of things. We both direct.”

I asked what the difference is between a director and a producer and, between them, they said, “The director has the creative control; they decide what things are to look like – costumes, etc. The producer is more of a facilitator of the big picture – putting the production together, deciding how the money is spent; things like that.”

Then she continued, “For our master’s studies, we were employed by the school to make productions happen, but the focus of our studies at Bowling Green was more theater history and performance theory. (It’s about) how perceptions of identity are shaped by theater, film, and t.v. – examining assumptions – doing critique and analyzing strengths and weaknesses of scripts and performances.”

“It informs a lot of what we do,” Ethan explained. “It’s how and why I chose *The Man of La Mancha* (for the fall production at Bethel) because it deals with the idea of professional and family roles, and the male role in that, and there are some interesting dynamics of relationship and autonomy.”

Looking back on her schooling in Bowling Green and what was to become her schooling in Los Angeles, Laurel said, “I’m really grateful I had that Master’s experience before going on to my MFA (Master of Fine Arts) training. After an MA (degree), we could proceed to a PhD (doctorate), which we both considered, but, for me, it was a lot more important to do my craft (acting) rather than more theory, so we went back to Iowa and I worked at Dordt for a year as their set designer and taught a couple of classes. Ethan taught at Northwestern College which is just a little ways down the road, and he was their tech(nical) director/set designer, so we were both interim faculty for that year.

“Our main intention was for one of us to go back to school so we took that year to apply,” she continued, “and I was accepted into the MFA acting program at the California Institute of the Arts in L.A.”

I was impressed. “Yes,” she agreed, “it’s a really exceptional program – one of the top three in the nation.”

“Did you see stage and screen stars while you were there?” I asked, half-jokingly.

Laurel smiled. "I worked with and learned from exceptional artists. It was fun to see stars in the audience," and she named some. "I was there three years. I also had two work-study posts (assistant-ships) so I was designing and building props for the plays, and I was a research assistant for one of the faculty – for productions at the school and for my professional work. I was trying to collect all the existing translations of *Alcestis* by Euripides" (a classical Greek playwright who died in 406 B.C.) "for a production at the Getty Villa – helping them decide which translation to use for their production, and gathering information on productions from the past; it's what we call dramaturgical work."

While Laurel was at school in Los Angeles, Ethan was mostly free-lancing, doing technical theater work. He ended up working back-stage for shows put on by two or three theater companies. "I worked for the puppet company, *Triumvirate Pi* which," he grinned; "was known as Tri-Pi. I got to build some puppets for them – some out of cardboard, some out of papier mâché – and performed several shows with them, and they were used in parades and festivals."

"How big were the puppets?"

"All sizes. Some were bigger than life-size: for instance, we built a hawk with a ten-foot wing span."

Laurel had a grueling schedule in L.A.: she had a 45-minute drive to school where her classes started at 9 o'clock – and she was acting: rehearsals often went 'til 11 p.m., plus Saturday afternoons.

After she graduated in May 2012 she said, "We weren't really sure what would come next – if we wanted to commit to L.A. – then a friend of ours in the Theater Department at Austin College in Sherman, Texas" (just north of Dallas), "called Ethan and said, 'I need a technical director and set designer, and she offered him a job working in academic theater, so I could continue acting in Dallas.'" (Academic theater is working in an academic setting, i.e., with students.)

Ethan was glad of this opportunity. "It confirmed for me that I wanted to be working in academic theater rather than the professional, cutthroat theater of L.A. or New York City. Work-wise, my friend and I meshed well, and getting to work with the students was lots of fun."

I asked him if there was an incident that stood out in his experiences there – that was interesting or fun – and he thought for a minute or so. "Well," he smiled, "there was one kid, he was built like a footballer and he was a very boisterous, enthusiastic person and he got carried away: he was very good at breaking things, so everything we built had to be built extra sturdily – but he still managed to break things!" We all laughed.

Laurel enjoyed their time in Texas: along with acting in shows in Dallas she was working on a couple of projects. "The El Salvador project had started by then," she said. (*The El Salvador project will be covered next month.*) She was also working part-time for a church as a worship leader.

I teased Laurel a bit by suggesting that she take Judy Harder's place on the Worship committee and was sorry to hear her instantly demur. She told me that Tabor has expanded its theater program, having added a Theater minor, and has plans for a major which means that several classes have been created this year. This Interterm (January), she is helping students produce their own play: they've chosen to create one based on the cartoon characters Calvin & Hobbes, and will perform it right at the start of spring semester when more students will be around. Laurel's job will be as the producer/facilitator. She's looking forward to seeing what they come up with – and it sounds like it'll be a fun play!

While I've been to scores of productions, I've never been taken behind the scenes before (other than to get an actor's autograph!) so it was fun to get a peep back there through Ethan and Laurel. They are extremely enthusiastic about their work and they're very pleasant to visit with, especially since their professional lives are intertwined so each one provided grist for the other's comments as they talked to me. I hope I'll get to see Laurel act, and to watch one or both of them build sets and some aspect or other of them working on rehearsals.

PB

Senegal Update

The following e-mail, written to our congregation, was received by Pastor Susan on December 22 from Margaret de Jong, who spoke to us during our Mission Sunday celebration November 9. The names/initials are those of fledgling Senegalese Christians who Margaret is privileged to serve, all of whom need to be bathed in prayer.

1. I finished my semester of seminary studies on December 16, but my next (hybrid) class has already begun. I have learned much and made some great friends. Thank you for praying me through the semester. I will be returning to the seminary for the one-week on-campus portion of my hybrid class January 12-17.

2. I called Z on her birthday earlier this month. She is doing well, and is encouraged that a few others in her city have joined her family of faith this year. She has not re-started the Kids' Club as hoped: when she

went around to speak with parents, most did not want their children learning from the New Testament. Pray for all the kids, that what they learned while they were able to attend will grow deep in their hearts.

3. Pray for the four persons who have made decisions to follow Jesus this year, for them to continue to grow in their faith, to be a light to those around them, and to remain strong in spite of hardships because of their decision.

4. From what I hear from my teammates, our teenage friend SG is thriving in his new setting, living with a Christian family, going to vocational school, and fellowshiping/worshipping regularly with a small church in that city. Please continue to pray for pain control for his hip, and for wisdom as to when and how to proceed with surgical options.

5. Ababacar, a former regular attendee at our gatherings, has moved back to our town after a couple years elsewhere. He is again regularly joining gatherings with the followers of Jesus. Please pray that he, too, would grow in his faith walk.

6. Thank the Lord for safe travels to my parents' place last week. I plan to head out to Edmonton on January 1 to visit my brother, and back to Indiana on January 8 for my next class. Please pray for safe travels and restful, good times with family.

7. And while I am thankful for a low-key Christmas, I am remembering my colleagues and Senegalese brothers and sisters in Senegal. Whether they are sharing the meaning of Christmas with a few friends or in various gatherings, it can be an intense season. Please pray for God's anointing upon them, and for open doors and open hearts as they share about Jesus.

8. If you are in any of the following areas while I am speaking, you are very welcome to come hear about what God is up to in Senegal! And pray for mutually encouraging times as I am with the following congregations:

Jan 4 - Holyrood Mennonite, Edmonton, Alberta

Jan 11 - Belmont Mennonite, Elkhart, Indiana

Feb 15 - Bethany Mennonite, Virgil, Ontario

Thank you so much for your perseverance in prayer!! Many blessings to all of you, and have a very merry Christmas!

MdJ

God Sent Us A Savior

If our greatest need had been information
God would have sent us an educator

If our greatest need had been technology
God would have sent us a scientist

If our greatest need had been money
God would have sent us an economist

If our greatest need had been pleasure
God would have sent us an entertainer

But our greatest need was forgiveness
So God sent us a Savior

(Anon)

Christian One-Liners

Peace starts with a smile.

Be ye fishers of men. You catch them, He'll clean them.

God doesn't call the qualified he qualifies the called.

God loves everyone, but probably prefers "fruits of the Spirit" over "religious nuts".

God grades on the cross, not the curve.

God promises a safe landing not a calm passage.

He who angers you, controls you.

If God is your co-pilot, swap seats.

The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.

The will of God never takes you to where the Grace of God will not protect you.

You can tell how big a person is by what it takes to discourage him.

The best mathematical equation: 1 cross + 3 nails = 4 given.

And now, here are some Church Chuckles that Stan Bohn provided for our enjoyment when he was our interim pastor!

A little child in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed the offering plates. When they neared the pew where he sat, the youngster piped up so that everyone could hear, "Don't pay for me, Daddy, I'm under five."

A little girl became restless as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on. Finally, she leaned over to her mother and whispered, "Mommy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?"

Pastor Dave told us, "After a worship service at First Baptist Church in a city in Kentucky, a mother with a fidgety seven-year old boy told me how she finally got her son to sit still and be quiet. About halfway through the sermon, she leaned over and whispered, 'If you don't be quiet Pastor Dave is going to lose his place and will have to start his sermon all over again!' It worked.

A little boy was attending his first wedding. After the service, his cousin asked him, "How many women can a man marry?" "Sixteen," the boy responded. His cousin was amazed that he had an answer so quickly. "How do you know that?" Easy," the little boy said. "all you have to do is add it up, like the bishop said: 4 better, 4 worse, 4 richer, 4 poorer."

After the christening of his baby brother in church little Johnny sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That priest said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I want to stay with you guys!"

Terri asked her Sunday School class to draw pictures of their favorite Bible stories. She was puzzled by Kyle's picture, which

showed four people on an airplane, so she asked him which story it was meant to represent. "The flight to Egypt," said Kyle. "I see... And that must be Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus," Ms. Terri said. "But who's the fourth person?" "Oh, that's Pontius, the pilot."

The Sunday School teacher asked, "Now, Johnny, tell me frankly – do you say prayers before eating?" "No, sir," little Johnny replied, "I don't have to, my Mom's a good cook."

A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked. "Why, God tells me." "So, why do you keep crossing things out?"

A college drama group presented a play in which one character would stand on a trapdoor and announce, "I descend into hell!" A stagehand below would then pull a rope, the trapdoor would open, and the character would plunge through. The play was well received. When the actor playing the part became ill, another actor who was quite overweight took his place. When the new actor announced, "I descend into hell!" the stagehand pulled the rope, and the actor began his plunge, but became hopelessly stuck. No amount of tugging on the rope would make him descend. One student in the balcony jumped up and yelled: "Hallelujah! Hell is full!"

All submissions of interest to the FMC family are welcome and will be included, depending on timeliness and space availability. (Preferably, they should not be submitted anonymously but each author's wishes will be honored.) *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