

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

Ash Street & Grand Avenue

Hillsboro, KS 67063

620-947-5662/www.fmchillsboro.com

Marvin Zehr, Sabbatical Pastor (pastor@fmchillsboro.com)

Hank Unruh, Youth Pastor (youthpastor@fmchillsboro.com)

Doug Miller, Ministries Council Moderator (dougm@tabor.edu)

Becky Gage, Secretary (secretary@fmchillsboro.com)

Open My Eyes That I May See

Open my eyes that I may see glimpses
of truth thou hast for me.

Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp, and set me free.

Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my
God, thy will to see.

Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit
divine!

Hymnal, A Worship Book
No. 517, v. 1

Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh On Me

Hymnal, A Worship Book No. 347, line 1

Along with watering the garden, I was to pick the peas while house-sitting at my sister's. There were two rows planted closely and two chicken-wire fences stretched and staked on which the peas could cling. I would finish going down one side of the double row, thinking I had gotten all the peas. But then, when I was picking on the other side, I would see peas on the first side that I had missed. This happened several times. If I didn't see the peapod that I had missed right before my very eyes, I would have vowed and declared that *I had gotten them all!* Picking peas is a pretty easy task, but I found myself having to concentrate: the plants and peas were all the same shade of green. And all those leaves and curling tendrils...

At one point I dropped the little paring knife I had brought along. With its wooden handle and tarnished blade, it took a while to find, blended as it was into the wet leaf mulch. Too much stuff that is the same color!

Sabbatical time stirs up things that are the same color. No matter the specifics, one goal is to "change things up", disrupt the sameness of routine and thought patterns. Different town, different kitchen, different people, different neighborhood, different sounds. different social expectations.

Change exposes new things. In short order, the sameness of our tamed and sorted-out lives gets shaken up. We see new things in ourselves, in others and in the world. If it wasn't for this new view, we easily vow and declare that what someone else might point out *is not true!*

House-sitting at a farmhouse, I watched on the afternoon of May 26 as the strong weather moved through. I could see the field of wheat just paces away. I held my breath as the heavy rain turned to quarter-sized hail. In moments, some of the wheat went down. I am pretty aware of crops around Hillsboro, crops that many of you farm, but in that moment, the perspective was new and different – I watched it happen. I was there.

A seminary alumni gathering in Kansas City set me in the middle of a group of Asian, African, African American and Caucasian people. Relief came to me that once again I would not have to guess how the world might feel to others. "Where are you in ministry?" I could ask, "And what are you doing?" And I would be told.

God waits for us to be changed, exposed. God wants wellbeing for us, but quickly our vine and fig tree turn into routines and contingency plans that keep us from seeing God, keep us from needing God. As much as we deny it, we resist being with God. We see that in the Bible story: God comes to humans, humans struggle or run away from God. But the Bible also, in one story after another, testifies to God's patience, very real presence, and actual pursuit of us, our whole life long, century after century. The Bible rings out with joy! God's movement toward us is greater than our ability to hide in the leaves and tendrils of God's garden.

This sabbatical was not for the specific purpose of picking peas and watching someone's wheat weather the storm (most of it did). At its center, time away was to increase the likelihood of God having access to me, to my spirit and soul. This happened. I was able to see, hear and deeply be with our patient, present and pursuing God. For this great gift, I humbly and joyfully thank you.

Pastor Susan

July 2016

Farewell from Pastor Marv

During these days I am completing my interim pastor assignment with you after having served during the past three months. Since my retirement as Western District Conference Minister, I have now served similar interim ministries in eleven congregations. In three of them I have served twice. They have all been both challenging and rewarding.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as your interim pastor while Pastor Susan has been on sabbatical. It has been good to renew relationships with you and to meet new persons who have become involved over the past five years since my previous interim time with you. I am grateful for the support and words of encouragement that you have extended to me. You have been generous in your hospitality.

I wish you God's richest blessings as Pastor Susan returns and as you continue to seek to be faithful to the ministry to which God is calling you, with each other and in this community.

I leave you with the words of Paul to the church at Corinth: "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (I Corinthians 16:13-14).

Pastor Susan's Brief Sabbatical Report

Sabbatical time was more calm in the middle and bustling at beginning and end. Jim and I spent the first week and the last 15 days together. Otherwise, we saw each other at least twice a week.

April 10 – 28. During our two weeks on the west coast, we had time with thirteen sets of families or friends. How good it was to have Robert be part of those two weeks in California and Washington! Robert said it was so good to let down a bit and be with family. For our last three nights in Washington, Robert traded roof repair for three nights at a cabin near Rainier. We walked trails, we cooked, and we scrubbed and vacuumed his replacement car. Beautiful in a different way than the deep beauty of Kansas.

The second week of the two weeks on the west coast Jim returned to Hillsboro. When I flew back April 28, we both helped Peter and Sarah prepare and move into a home they have just purchased in North Newton. We cleaned, painted and repaired, and I provided food each day. I felt such gratitude that I was free to help. I constantly remembered those of you who frequently cook, or pack, paint, repair or do whatever is needed for each other. Thank you for your modeling!

June 16 – 27. At the time of writing, this time has not yet come, but the plan is for Jim and me to drive up to Wisconsin so I can attend the Washington Island Forum: this is a time when pastors and other church leaders gather each year to pray, share and discuss together particular church issues. This year, the issue is the changing forms of church, in worship and in physical facilities. We will see relatives on the way up and back.

In the middle weeks, the Spirit has gathered my reading and quiet meditation around two themes: violence and prayer. This is the twenty-ninth anniversary of atrocities which our Chadian friends fell victim to, June 1987, just three weeks after our departure. Then president, Hussein Habre, has now been brought to trial before a pan-African court and was sentenced on May 30, 2016, for crimes against humanity. As an act of memory, love and respect, I am starting a process of digitizing slides and recorded songs from our 1984-87 time, voices of dear ones who did not come out alive, and their families, who had to keep living. I have begun arrangements with Mennonite Central Committee to eventually share these photos and recordings with those affected in Chad. Prayer, my other focus, strongly compliments those events, compliments all the realities we see in the world. Prayer takes us in, toward God, then back out into the world, renewed and reoriented in God. Related to the amount and kind of time we offer in prayer, we more closely become aware of what God wills for us here. All is known to God. Nothing is lost on the breath of God.

I met more often for Hebrew reading with Pastor Dave Stevens of Hope Mennonite Church in Wichita. We are currently reading Genesis 41 and 47, the story of Joseph and the time of famine in Egypt.

Oh yes. Our oven is clean, our pantry reorganized, paperbacks sorted, back porch rearranged and our second story inside walls are painted. I exercised regularly and visited with friends and family. But, most centrally, my spirit has been exposed, open to the breeze of comfort/discomfort of God's presence. I have felt the strike and pummel of the Spirit, and have felt, most surely, the quenching waters. Love surrounds us. Gratitude is love come to fruition.

It will be a blessing to see you all again, to hear how God has been moving in your midst during this time.

Thank you, First Mennonite.

Minutes of Ministries Council Meeting June 15, 2016

Present: Doug Miller (Moderator/Coordinating Cabinet), Glen Diener (Treasurer), Hank Unruh (Youth Pastor), Pam Bartel (Hospitality), Joel Klaassen (Stewardship), Marv Zehr (Interim Pastor), Carolyn Penner (Vision), Aleen Ratzlaff (Worship), Douglas Graber (Mission), Jan Amstutz (Nurture), Tim Frye (Discernment), Pat Bartel (Secretary).

Absent: Laura Paulus (Care)

Minutes of the April 21, 2016 meeting were approved as distributed. Later, it was noted that Marv Zehr was listed incorrectly as Marv Penner; this will be corrected.

Committee Reports. Worship. Their planned June 14 meeting was canceled because of a storm and power outage; their intended agenda was: (i) overseeing the summer worship services and the schedules for the worship and children's time leaders; (ii) altar and flowers; (iii) music; and (iv) a welcome back observance for Susan. They are seeking additional worship leaders for July, August, and September; they will schedule another meeting in July, after members have returned from their vacations. **Nurture.** During worship May 8, they expressed appreciation for the teachers of both children and adults by handing out gift certificates from Serenity Gardens; summer Sunday school began last Sunday (June 13) with good attendance and good food. They have a variety of ideas for each week; they are very grateful to those who are helping but would appreciate more people signing up to provide food. VBS, with the theme "Deep Sea Discovery", is July 31–August 4, to be held at the Methodist Church. August 28 they hope to have a teacher training session after worship, and to go over the Safe Sanctuaries policy; HiFY will provide lunch. This fall, they are considering a different format for Wednesday nights, to be announced later. Jan will be stepping down from Nurture at the end of this year. Anyone interested in joining the Nurture Committee is welcome to attend a meeting to see what's involved. **Mission.** Douglas reported that he met with Susan before she left but the committee has not met since. **Care.** No report. **Hospitality.** Pam had no report, but they are working on an FMC@Restaurants evening this summer. **Stewardship.** Met recently with members of the Vision Council and the FMC Moderator to reflect on giving trends and patterns which are reduced. Proactive suggestions include: (i) encourage estate planning among the congregation with the assistance of Everence; (ii) encourage outreach to those who may be interested in being part of First Mennonite; (iii) make Ministries Council aware of the trends and invite their reflections and suggestions; (iv) offer financial planning and training for any families that need such assistance; and

(v) promote stewardship ideas during Sunday worship services. Ministries Council then discussed these ideas, and also the possibility of alternative ways to give to the church such as automatic bank withdrawals. This topic could be further addressed at the upcoming fall Ministries Council retreat. The sewer pipe upstairs is cracked; Lester and Stuart Funk continue to work on it, and on the leak in the nursery below. The Committee received a complaint that the cemetery wasn't mowed for Memorial Day; they will discuss this with the groundskeeper.

Council Reports. Discernment. They will be meeting soon. Tim's plans are unknown since Asia is candidating at some churches in Newton; he might need to be replaced as chair this fall; they want to schedule another DnA session in the next six months. **Vision.** Met with the Stewardship Committee, as reported above; they have appreciated Marv's shepherding the church through Susan's sabbatical. Susan will return to work on Tuesday, June 28; they will be welcoming her back with a small ceremony on a Sunday morning. They next plan to meet in early July.

Coordinating Cabinet. Met today and discussed: (i) delegates for Western District Conference Assembly in July; (ii) leadership of FMC committees and councils, and (iii) the concerns about giving trends raised by Stewardship.

Youth Pastor. Since HiFY will not be going to St. Louis, the summer focus has changed to monthly activities and service opportunities which they think will be fun: they plan to have a church service project, a local service project, and a greater area project – maybe at Camp Mennoscah. They will encourage friends of HiFY to join them, thereby hoping to reach out to other community youth. This weekend (June 18-19) they plan a lock-down at the church. In fall they will continue to hold their popular "gab sessions", also same-gender discussions and events: the goal is to continue to build relationships between middle and high school students. During Sunday School they'll be doing a unit on food that will include an ethical look at eating; they may need some adults to help cook. Hank appreciates the sponsors who have volunteered for summer youth activities, and will be inviting sponsors for fall when he develops more specific plans for Wednesday night activities.

Interim Pastor. Marv has appreciated the affirmation and support he has received from the congregation for his service as interim pastor. He also acknowledged the help and work that Aleen and Holly Swartzendruber have provided in planning the worship services. Demands have not been onerous; he plans to make his first hospital visit when Susie Kliewer has surgery next Thursday (June 23). He would like to be informed if there are people to visit. His last Sunday will

be June 26. August 5-15, while Susan is at a conference, he will be on call (through his cell or home phone or by e-mail). He will not be here on Sundays and not necessarily in the office. He will give more details to Doug to disseminate.

Treasurer. Glen handed out a first-half of the year Budget Versus Actual by Program sheet. The current fund balance is approximately negative \$2,000. A discussion followed on possible ways to make cost reductions: bulletins and *First Threshings* were considered for electronic distribution and fewer print copies since they are regularly posted on the web and printing/copying them is charged by the sheet. No decisions were reached.

Old business: MTLs were given updated pages for the *FMC Manual of Policies and Practices*. Regarding WDC Assembly delegates, those who have offered to be delegates (along with Pastor Susan) are Keith Harder, Douglas & Nancy Graber and Jeff & Tammy Wintermote. All five were affirmed. Doug Miller will find out which delegates would request financial assistance. Coordinating Cabinet will submit an announcement in future bulletins asking for those interested in tuition support (scholarships) for the upcoming academic year (at an MC USA college or Tabor College) to contact Doug Miller. Students enrolled in seminary are evaluated on a case-by-case basis for possible tuition support.

Next meeting is August 18 at 7:30 p.m.
(The official version of the minutes is available in the church office.)

July Events

7 8:00 p.m. Stewardship Committee meeting



July 31-August 4: VBS at United Methodist Church.

Biblical Women, Wieners & Marshmallows

Over 40 women and children enjoyed a Celebration of Summer wiener roast at Mike and Carolyn Kleibers' on Wednesday evening, June 22. Although it was a warm day, the setting at Kleibers' was beautiful and the breeze made it quite tolerable. When the children weren't roasting hot dogs or marshmallows they were most likely in the water keeping cool!

Women visited around tables in the shade and listened to Asia challenge each of us to identify with a woman in the Bible and to find our place in the Biblical story. Because of our familiarity with God as Father, Asia highlighted Scriptures that show the feminine characteristics of God so that we can

incorporate those into our own stories of who God is.

Deanne Duerksen

Hiebert-Weigand Family Reunion

Together with my sons, Jack and Edward, I hosted the annual Hiebert-Weigand reunion on Sunday, May 29. It was held at the Hiebert White House, 218 S. Adams, Hillsboro. Thirty-five family members were present, ages ranging from 1 year up to 94 years. Some were first-timers. They came from Florida, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Illinois, Colorado, Arizona, the Kansas City area and Wichita. A good time was had, visiting and getting acquainted. Meat, bread and drinks were furnished; others brought in side dishes. There was food a-plenty. I hoped and prayed for nice weather so we could be outside part of the time, and it was, indeed, a nice day although the wind was a little cool.

You read of people all over the world living in dysfunctional homes and families. I am so thankful for my family. Jack left for home (Arizona) Monday morning; Ed stayed 'til Friday morning then flew back to Pennsylvania, and I went back to bed and slept for two hours.

Velda Hiebert

The article regarding Dawn Abrahams' award as
2016 Volunteer of the Year
for the
Ellsworth Correctional Facility –
because of its timeliness –
is supplanting the conclusion of
Jess Klanderud's biography
until the August 2016 issue of
First Threshings.

You will enjoy reading
the rest of Jess's story next month!

“Great achievement is usually born of great sacrifice, and is never the result of selfishness.”

Napoleon Hill (1883-1970)

The above quote of Napoleon Hill (American author and impresario) was included on the certificate Dawn Abrahams received from the Ellsworth Correctional Facility (ECF). How apt it is – for Dawn, certainly, but also for all award-winning volunteers everywhere.

Contrary to the announcement in the June issue of *First Threshings*, Dawn was voted Volunteer of the Year for the Ellsworth Correctional Facility, not the state, but she received plaques at both the prison (Thursday, May 26) and in Topeka (Wednesday, June 1).

The awards ceremony held at ECF was for several categories of people – employees and volunteers – and Dawn started off by describing that day. For nine years, she has worked with Larry Temple co-directing an annual play at the ECF. (Larry received this award a few years ago, and he was able to attend Dawn’s ceremony at the ECF.)

At the ECF ceremony, Dawn received a really nice wooden plaque in the shape of Kansas which says:

2016 Volunteer of the Year presented to

Dawn R. Abrahams.

For your diligence and determination.

For your willingness to work above and beyond the call of duty.

For your dedication to the Ellsworth Correctional Facility.

Not surprisingly, Dawn has a good relationship with everyone she works with at the ECF, including the two chaplains, and they all had fun after the formalities were over. She told me that, every year, ECF honors award recipients with a photo displayed in the prison and their name engraved on a plaque. “I had a picture taken with several prominent prison employees,” she said. And, smiling broadly, she added, “They all got down on their knees to take the picture with me – that was cool!”

She continued, “We had a cast party which was nice because it was the guys who were involved. One

of the new guys asked me, ‘When do you come back?’ I told him I don’t come back ‘til next January and he said, ‘That’s a long time.’ “Yes I know, it’s a long time for me too,” she replied. “But maybe, if we did it too often, it wouldn’t be so successful.” And, to me, she commented, “This is the reason I do this. The enthusiastic ones are the ones who make the cast work. We talked about my award and I told them that, when I was young, my dream was to go to Hollywood and make it big there. Because I didn’t go to Los Angeles, this is my Hollywood. I didn’t walk down the red carpet to receive an Oscar but this award means more to me than an Oscar ever would. I just wanted them to know how important this award was for me.”

It turned out that none of the guys involved with the show were allowed to come to the ceremony because there was a total prison lock-down during that time. Dawn was disappointed but lock-downs happen often enough that she’s learned to accept them, and she knows the cast members were with her in spirit.

(O)

Now, to the awards ceremony that took place in the State Capitol in Topeka on Wednesday, June 1 when Dawn and honorees from around the state met Governor Sam Brownback. Limitations were put on the number of people who could attend this ceremony so only Sylvia Abrahams, and Bev and Darold Klein, Dawn’s mother, sister and brother-in-law, were able to be in Topeka with her. We digressed some, talking about the governor, and she said how funny it was, when people knew she was going to be meeting him, that everyone had some sort of a request that she should ask him: the ECF chaplains said they’d like a pay raise, inmates said they’d like an early pardon and others mentioned things like not closing schools. “But I didn’t talk to him about any of those things,” she laughed. “Too bad,” I said, “you had a golden opportunity!” Dawn laughed again as she assured me, “It was about my accomplishment and being recognized by the state, not about meeting the governor”.

For me, Dawn is a very beautiful name. It conjures up images of contented quiet – of mists – of wispy clouds hanging in a rose-gold sky – of sparkling dew on every blade and leaf – and, from among trembling branches, the day’s first bird-calls. “But,” Dawn said emphatically, “I am *not* an early morning person. And I didn’t get much sleep last night.” Rested or not, her day started early. She stowed her scooter into her car-trunk, climbed into the driver’s seat and was in Salina by 7:00 o’clock where she met her family who’d driven up from Hillsboro, and Dan and Dale, two ECF chaplains, who then drove them all to Topeka in an

ECF van large enough to accommodate Sylvia's wheelchair and Dawn's scooter. They reached the capitol at the appointed time of 9 o'clock. Although some locals have complained about the 13-year, \$325 million renovation of the building – reopened to the public in 2014 – it is certainly gorgeous, and has been described as this country's most beautiful state capitol. They spent some time looking around the building. Sylvia said she hadn't been there since she was in high school, and Darold, Bev and Dawn all said they hadn't been there since their respective eighth grade field trips. Bev said, "None of us remembered much of the building until we were in the rotunda. We were impressed with the historical Kansas statues and paintings and how well they had been preserved. The lower level where we entered had been recently remodeled with huge beautiful limestone blocks." Dawn agreed warmly, "It's beautiful."

All the honorees and their families assembled in groups – each group had a leader that they were to follow. "When it was time for our group to go in, I went in on my scooter," Dawn told me. "The family was directed to stay on the left side of the room; the rest of us were to go around the back of the big desk. When I went in, the governor was talking to people on the other side, then he walked over to me and I put out my hand and said, 'Hi, I'm Dawn Abrahams. It's a pleasure to meet you.'" She laughed when she told me this because she didn't say anything about why she was there and she scooted herself behind the big desk. He walked over to Bev to talk to her. Bev told him she was Dawn's sister and she had come from Colorado to see her receive this award. "It was kind of funny," Dawn said. "He spent a little time telling her he liked Colorado, blah, blah, blah, and that he'd just come back from visiting there. They took our group's picture with all the volunteers; the governor is sitting at his desk and we are behind him. When they were done with the group picture, someone said the governor wanted a picture of Dawn and her sister from Colorado. So we all came back, and they took a picture of the four of us and the governor. It was then that the governor asked me, 'What is it that you do?' since I failed to tell him when I shook his hand. I said, 'Well, I'm Volunteer of the Year of Ellsworth Correctional Facility; I'm assistant director of the play every year with the inmates.' He said he'd like to know when the next one would be held so he could try to attend. I thought, I'm not quite sure how the inmates would react to acting in front of the governor!"

After they left the governor's office, they went over to the Jayhawk Tower for a buffet lunch and the presentation ceremony. Dawn remarked that the meal was "nothing to write home about. It wasn't

ready when we arrived, the food was mediocre and we were rationed to one piece of chicken each." And, adding insult to injury, they used paper plates and plastic utensils. "But, the speaker saved the day; he was very good," she said.

The honorees were called out in groups: each group walked to the front to be handed their framed certificate by the Secretary of Corrections. When her group's turn came, Dawn decided it was important that she walk all the way up to the front of the room – not use her scooter. Her certificate reads:

Dawn R. Abrahams

In recognition of being named the 2016

Volunteer of the Year

for the Ellsworth Correctional Facility.

For your motivation of offenders by being a positive role model,

demonstrating patience and objectivity and by

being trustworthy, devoted,

reliable and committed to the mission and goals.

Signed by J. L. Norwood, Secretary of Corrections

Sylvia, Bev and Darold agreed that it was both a privilege and a pleasure to travel to Topeka and be with Dawn when she formally accepted her award. "We were very glad that Dawn was recognized for her hard work doing something she loves to do, even though it is very time-consuming," they said. "Dawn has an excellent rapport with the male prisoners who participate in the plays, and she feels her time spent working and sharing with them is her mission."

Everyone else who knows you, Dawn, would agree that you absolutely deserve this honor. You're kind and diplomatic when you talk about some of your experiences at the ECF; the work is perhaps more challenging than you realized when you started there but you've had some excellent results and, best of all, you've brightened the lives of many men who have taken some wrong turns because they had a rough start in life. You've given them good guidance on how to interact positively with each other using respect and humor.

We ended the interview with Dawn saying, "Never in my life did I think I would be volunteering in a correctional facility and using my love of theater the way I have. I'm glad I did. It was a very nice day – and" (perhaps, I wondered, to erase the memory of the disappointing meal they'd just had?), "it ended with Dale buying everyone ice-cream!"

As I got up to leave, Dawn said, "It means the world to me; it's probably one of the most important things that's ever happened in my life. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything."

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.