

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

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Jesus audaciously abolished death, transforming it from a door that slammed to, into one that opened to whoever knocked. He made death, as (Dietrich) Bonhoeffer joyously said on his way to be executed, for a Christian a beginning, not an end. It was the key to life; to die was to live.

Malcolm Muggeridge
(1903-1990)

First Mennonite newsletters from the 1960's and 70's have been crossing my desk because of Robin Ottoson's research. I will share from these newsletters this month and in June.

Roland Goering, Pastor at First Mennonite in 1971, asks "Why Conference Sessions?" in his FMC newsletter column from that year. What makes the expense and the logistical work worth it? Should the same resources be spent on "active service" rather than passing resolutions?

Pastor Goering suggests four reasons that conventions are important:

1. There is value in wrestling with issues around tables and in open floor discussion times. Hearing different feelings from different parts of our country is a foundational step to our brother- and sisterhood. Every theological group must be heard.
2. There is value in passing resolutions. Resolutions put into writing indicate the beliefs that the majority of people *have* agreed upon. There are always areas where we have not yet found our way, but it is good to state consensus where it exists.
3. There is value in learning to get to know each other. Particularly for youth, first-hand experience of youth from across the country changes a person's perspective.
4. There is value in the feeling of "oneness...the feeling of 'we are co-workers in this big cause'". This community feel generates enthusiasm.

Now, in 2015, it seems to me we can still ask why we have conference sessions, and Reverend Goering's reasons still stand. The New Testament book of Acts reminds us that God's Spirit is a large one. The life-changing, inspiring movement that comes to each individual, is just as much a community movement, drawing us to one place from time to time to discern what God is saying to us in the Holy Spirit. If we did *not* gather in our congregations and as a countrywide body, there are leadings of God's Spirit we would miss. Resolutions give us a sense of where our group's position is on issues that are important to faith and life. Where there is significant consensus, strength is gained from voicing that consensus.

At the same time, as a gathered body, we can also live with disagreement and lack of consensus. A resolution on Biblical Discernment, passed at the Phoenix convention in 2013, gives guidelines for listening when a "sizable...range of views is present." Congregations can be deeply faithful when differences exist among them. The church can be a place where we strive to hear all voices.

Resolutions that are likely to be discussed at the 2015 Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) gathering in Kansas City are these:

1. A resolution on sexual abuse.
2. A resolution on Israel/Palestine.
3. Drone Warfare: faithful witness in an endless war.
4. Forbearance: living with difference in our denomination.

Resolutions made in the past include statements on creation care, immigration, protection of children

May 2015

and youth. Details can be found at the Mennonite Church USA website (mennoniteusa.org) under Resources.

Acts 15 is the most frequently cited scripture regarding the church's call to listen carefully to each other and discern the work of the Spirit. "The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and spoke" (v. 6-7a). Then Paul and Barnabas spoke and "the whole assembly kept silence and listened..." (v. 12). Finally a discernment was reached (vs. 22-29), including the following words: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (v. 28). May we be inspired and strengthened by this biblical model of listening, learning, disagreeing, and as the Spirit wills, coming in time to points of agreement.

Pastor Susan

brunch and the hunt are on the church website.

Stewardship: (1) Joel has been tentatively asked by

FMC MINISTRIES COUNCIL MINUTES

April 9, 2015

Present: Doug Miller (Moderator), Tim Frye (Discernment), Joel Klaassen (Stewardship), Aleen Ratzlaff (Worship), Danielle Bartel (guest), Keith Harder (Vision), Susan Jantzen (Pastor), Andrew Sensenig (Mission), Hank Unruh (Youth Pastor), Kelly Linnens (guest), Jan Amstutz (Nurture), Glen Diener (Treasurer), Laura Paulus (Care), Pat Bartel (Church Secretary)

Absent: Pam Bartel (Hospitality)

Minutes of February 12, 2015 were approved as distributed.

Committee Reports. Worship: Really enjoyed working on the Lent-Easter worship; appreciated all the help; a few reflections have been received. **Nurture:** Met March 25; discussed ongoing children's classes/curriculum: *Child of God* and *I Belong to God*. One class focused on encouraging others. Vacation Bible School (theme: *Blast From the Past*) will be held August 2-6; annual Sunday School picnic is June 7 at Doug and Pam Bartels' farm: Deryll will do some story-telling; discussed ideas for summer Sunday School: may not be providing food; will meet in the chapel. The committee will attend the June 12 Anabaptist Faith Formation conference at Bethel. **Mission:** If Hillsboro's curbside recycling works well, the Recycle Center will probably be phased out; no outreach events planned for the summer; MCC activities are going well; a Ministries Team Leader is needed for the committee. Susan prayed for God's blessings on the Sensenigs as they consider moving to California. **Care:** There have been many needs; they are planning a wedding shower May 3 for Casey and Mieka Bartel and a baby shower for Grace Emery, daughter of Amanda (Bartel) and Brandon; they recently gave away a gas card for someone's travel needs; Willis Penner is hospitalized. **Hospitality:** Doug read a report from Pam: committee met in March to discuss possible future activities; there was a good turnout for the Easter brunch; thankful for help from the church family and the Kitchen Committee (especially Eydie Graber for table decorations). Lenna (and helpers) distributed 210 Easter eggs for the kids; photos from the

Prairie View to use our church for their summer (noon hour) programs; they would need the kitchen, fellowship hall and bathrooms – and PV will do the cleanup. (They have a good reputation for leaving places clean. (2) Scuppers have been installed on the fellowship hall roof, and the new downspouts are connected to the drain; for fifty years there was no way for the water to exit! A video of their work will be uploaded on to the church website. (3) The chapel air-conditioning is now working. (4) Furnaces for the fellowship hall have been ordered and are expected to be installed sometime this month; various light bulbs need to be replaced and the floodlight on the pulpit repositioned; also, the grid on the overhang is broken. Marvin Funk will do some of the work.

Council Reports. Vision: seeking a structured way to get feedback on how the church can attract additional people to our congregation, especially younger ones. Members up through their 50s have been invited to attend a meeting this Sunday (12th), 6:30-7:30 p.m., to discuss outreach: tables of six or eight, each led by a member of the Vision Council. The VC has e-mailed the focus group three questions: (1) What do you affirm about your experience in FMC? (2) What would make your experience more positive for you and your peers? (3) What would energize and nurture your spiritual life? Information will be compiled and critiqued by VC who will report their findings to the Ministries Council (MC) for input; a report will probably be given to the congregation. Input from other age groups is also welcome; Nadine Friesen has been meeting as a new member of VC, which they have appreciated.

Discernment: Met a month ago and settled on next Wednesday night (15th) after the meal to offer a DnA session under Jim Paulus's leadership for the second time; a follow-up session will occur during Sunday School on April 26 led by Tim Frye and Jim. Still looking for youth sponsors: one female, one male.

Coordinating Cabinet. Met today. Because Harders will be away through May, the next MC meeting may be postponed from the currently scheduled date (June 11) to give Vision Council more time to process the comments

from this Sunday's congregational meeting. **Treasurer:** No line-item budget report was prepared; we've spent all our original carry-over from 2014 and are still running a deficit, i.e., we've spent \$10,000 more than we've taken in. But Glen suggested we continue on as we're doing for now. Jan reported that the stethoscope is still missing from the church's blood-pressure instruments box. It was decided to purchase a new one and then invite people to contribute to the cost.

Youth Pastor: Eleven people are going to the MC USA convention; April 22 is the variety show. On Saturday, April 25 HiFY may have a combination meeting/activity (maybe to include some form of service) to plan summer activities; HiFY's new shirts and hats are in; they will continue to meet during May and into early June; they plan a 30-hour lock-in-famine. They'll meet again in June (at Pizza Hut) to further discuss the convention, then Hank will have a final follow-up meeting with the parents. Hotel rooms have been booked; they are looking into vehicle rentals and food. They have \$7,000 in their budget so they still need to raise \$3,000; they're hoping the variety show will bring in some funds. He plans to turn in their Arts & Crafts Fair registration by the April 15 deadline.

Pastor: (1) The Ministerial Alliance's Lenten inter-congregational worship series was community-building: it provided a clear sense of the Holy Spirit's moving. The Methodist church is willing to hold these services again next year. (2) Work on the Western District Gifts Discernment committee has almost finished for the year. (3) WDC Reference Council meets twice a year and its next meeting is this Saturday (11th): the denomination is requesting input regarding membership guidelines. The committee is being faced with preparation work for the two upcoming conventions: MC USA (June 30 – July 5), and WDC (October 31). (3) Our church's celebration of Lent-Easter was meaningful; now concentrating on summer-fall. In April and May, will be focusing on Acts and the church's beginnings. Hank is speaking on the *Church and the Web* this Sunday (12th). Pentecost is on Memorial Day weekend (May 24) so we may move that up to the 17th. (4) Looking forward to the sharing Sunday evening (with the younger members of our congregation). (5) Hopes to take a week off toward the end of May. (6) Will be attending an intensive three-day leadership training (June) in Wichita through a WDC grant (cost-free to our church). (7) Starting to think about the Ministries Council retreat in August. (8) Stewardship and other committees can be considering needs that memorial funds could meet. (9) There was a large memorial service this morning for Joyce (Funk) Ediger – good attendance from our church; a handicapped guest was generally pleased with our building, but he had some good ideas on how to increase accessibility, and how to publicize that; Susan will follow up.

Old Business: Stewardship Task Force (STF) Report (Joel Klaassen, Glen Diener, Kelly Linnens, and Danielle Bartel) was created to address how to better facilitate the Stewardship Committee's mandate to address financial planning, budgeting, a regular audit, communicating stewardship issues with the congregation, and supervision of church personnel. Kelly explained the STF's handout which designated a four-part organization of the Committee: Building-Inside, Building-Outside, Finance/Administrative, and Events. As suggestions for each area, they gave the name of a Committee member to lead that area along with church members who could provide helpful resources through their knowledge and abilities; the leader would have access to appropriate budget lines so the committee as a whole would be freed from addressing all areas. The STF feel that this plan would increase efficiency and relieve much of the burden of the committee as a whole, and suggested it be implemented with the blessing of the MC. Tim noted that when they contact committee leaders in fall about their manpower needs, the Discernment Council will ask if they have any specialized needs. Kelly and Danielle thanked the MC for inviting their input. After a general affirmation of the STF's recommendations, Doug confirmed the MC's blessings on the recommendations and stated that, since only internal restructuring of the Stewardship Committee was being proposed, no formal action need be taken by the MC; he thanked the STF members for their work.

Minutes of Annual Meeting (January 25) were approved as distributed.

New Business: Nadine Friesen Recommendation Letter. (1) MC needs to affirm the process for Nadine to be recommended for ordination: Doug distributed a proposed letter of affirmation on behalf of the congregation which was unanimously affirmed. A planned ordination celebration would be held at our church on June 14. (2) **Historical survey request.** For her Ph.D. dissertation (History) at Kansas State University, Robin Ottoson is focusing on responses to the Vietnam War by Mennonite colleges in Kansas (Bethel, Hesston, Tabor). She would like to talk to people in our congregation who were here then: she has requested permission to conduct a survey and has offered proposed questions. The MC approved her request and commended Susan and others to offer help to Robin in crafting the questions appropriately. (3) **The picture directory** should be updated. During a discussion, Susan mentioned being impressed by the bulletin board of photos at Shalom Mennonite Church in Newton, and how useful it is to be able to see photos of the members easily; no decision was reached. (4) **Fiftieth anniversary of our church building.** It was proposed to discuss this at our June meeting. (5) **Farewell to Andrew Sensenig.** Given that this was likely Andrew's last meeting, Doug thanked him for his

work on the MC. A farewell will be planned for him and Erica.

Meeting adjourned 8:45 p.m.

Next meeting date: June 11, 2015

**A Cheerful Heart is Good Medicine
(Proverb 17:22)**

About 65 of us gathered in the fellowship hall on Wednesday evening, April 22, for HiFY's now-famous annual Variety Show. This was Hank's first time compèring it, and he started by acknowledging that many of us don't really know what forensics is so he had recruited Erin to help him demonstrate it – and she put him to quite a test.

Both having assured us that he hadn't seen it yet, she gave him the following quote: *I will charge thee nothing but the promise that thee will help the next man thee finds to do what's right.* Not surprisingly, he looked a little perplexed at first but he stepped aside to think it through. Erin entertained us for about four minutes then Hank came back to the mic with an ingenious two-minute monologue based on that quote. Somehow, he intertwined the movie *Finding Nemo* – fish – the theory of net community to Tarzan – and sharing and caring for one another. He barely paused for breath and we all agreed he did an impressive job – but, not surprisingly, some of us found the thinking to be rather convoluted!

Later, Erin honored her artistic grandmother by imitating something she used to do: she painted a picture that illustrated a taped song as we all listened to it.

Andrew Sensenig came up with the *Top Ten Strangest Hymns* (e.g., "If men go to hell, who cares" by E. M. Bartlett, 1939), and *The Top Ten Strangest Hymn Titles* (e.g., "All Men Living Are But Mortal" by J. Albinus, 1652) and problematic *Contemporary Christian song lyrics*, e.g. "Yahweh, Yahweh, We Love To Shout Your Name".

Sarah, Caleb and Joshua Diener featured more than once. In a skit, Sarah was wearing a deep red western hat, Caleb had on a wild, neon-colored wig and Joshua looked quite elegant in a top hat, and they lip-synched the silly song, *Mahna*, making us all laugh.

Later, Sarah and Joe Knoll (who were being "inducted" into HiFY) were given a stack of clear plastic cups which they had to restack by removing the top one and placing it underneath, until they came back to the smiley face on the bottom of the first cup. Sarah quickly developed a technique and was amazingly fast. Later, they had to sort out a sackful of candy pieces into groups; Joe won on a re-evaluation of a piece in Sarah's grouping, so they were even-steven. After a third contest between these two,

Hank presented them each with a HiFY hat and officially welcomed them to HiFY.

Some of the little kids had a variety of skateboard races – and Sarah and Ruthie Paulus made us laugh: all bundled up, Sarah was sitting in front of her little sister on a wheelchair and (using Ruthie's arms and hands) they demonstrated how Sarah brushed her teeth in the morning and ate her breakfast. What a mess!

Doug Bartel read a list of jokes he'd gleaned over the years, even catering some to the young ones. "What's black and white and black and white and black and white?" he asked them, then answered: A panda rolling down a hill." "Why didn't the butterfly go to the dance? Because it was a mothball!" It was amusing to hear them laughing. And, of course, he had plenty of jokes for the adults, some of which, he said, were actual maintenance requests from UPS pilots and the corresponding solutions by the maintenance engineers:

Pilot: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

Maintenance: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

Actual conversations at Computer Helpdesk.

Helpdesk: Click on the 'my computer' icon on the left of the screen.

Customer: Your left or my left?

Customer: Hi. Good afternoon, this is Martha. I can't print: every time I try, it says 'Can't find printer'. I've even lifted the printer and placed it in front of the monitor, but the computer still says it can't find it.

Deryll Amstutz told us some stories and jokes, ending on a biblical note by re-telling the story of Jesus calling the disciples Philip and Nathaniel (John 1:44-46). Putting their story into a local context ('rival' towns Durham and Lehigh) he advised us not to jump to conclusions when we see someone that we think we know everything about: first, we should 'come and see'.

Susan and Jim Jantzen trundled a cart into the room with about 15 glasses filled with blue water – and, by tapping the glasses with a metal utensil, they played *Home on the Range*. It took a lot of very serious concentration!

Doug Miller and Holly Swartzendruber re-enacted "Sixteen going on Seventeen" from *The Sound of Music*. Doug was quite serious (his character feeling, of course, a whole lot more mature than Holly's since he was a whole year older) while Holly played the coquette and made the role fun to watch.

And, again this year, we had Carson Linnens and Caleb Diener and their litany of zany jokes: Where did the sheep get a haircut? At the baa-baa. What do

you call a boomerang that doesn't come back? A stick. How do you stop an elephant from charging? You take away his credit card. And so forth...

Hank introduced Grant Knoll as "our youth group's best rapper" and Grant rapped out a song in good staccato style.

Joshua Diener has dropped guitar-playing in favor of the piano. After the show, Susan asked him about the first piece he played, since it wasn't one she recognized. He told her, "I found it on You-Tube." Susan became very interested in this – and in his diligence. She explained to me later, "Having taught kids piano for many years, I usually recognize the pieces they play but I didn't know that first piece. He told me that he heard and viewed a pianist playing it: he watched the fingers move on the keyboard and listened to the music over and over, writing it all down, phrase by phrase." And she added, "I have done that before myself, and it is a superb exercise; it is a sign of a person who loves the language of music, and loves to spend time getting to know the music from the inside out."

And Abby Frye (7), drew a fine-looking kitty which we all admired; she did a great job.

The evening ended with Hank quizzing us on HiFY facts – everything from, How many couches are there in the Youth Room? to How many youth are going to convention?

A good time was had by all.

Planning – Recruiting – Purchasing – Organizing – Searching – Collecting – Requesting – Coordinating – Following-Up – And a lot of hard work.

That's some of what goes into putting on the Mid-Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale! But it is all done for Christ – and it would be hard to imagine a more convivial, congenial group who willingly empty their billfolds to relieve the plight of people everywhere. Not only that but, to the general public on sale day, all this comes across as a seamless happening on a grand scale.

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I met with Deryll and Jan Amstutz and Douglas and Nancy Graber after the HiFY Variety Show, so they could tell me some of the highlights of being on the MCC Committee. After a wrap-up session in May, they will have completed three years – the first with Marvin and Elfrieda Funk, and the last two as just the four of them. (*They would be very happy to have another couple join them on the committee next year so do, please, consider it!*) The four are good friends and obviously enjoyed working and socializing together while they figured

out their MCC responsibilities. My first question was about their meetings – where they were held.

"It'd vary: sometimes, one church would provide the place and another would bring the food: there's always a snack. And they always passed a bucket around." And they all laughed when one of them said, as an afterthought, "Jerry Toews always had stories to tell!" Jerry certainly is great fun and, with Leann, is a very enthusiastic supporter of MCC. (The Toews can almost be considered extended family since Jerry's brother Francis (Fritz) is married to one of Pastor Susan's sisters – and Amstutzes' children were band students of his when he taught music at Goessel – and, of course, many of us consider him and Leanne to be good friends.)

Jerry is definitely one of the leading lights at the sale: starting months beforehand, people bring him (mostly vintage) tractors, trucks and cars for him to get running and tune up so they entice collectors to bid well for them. Van Schmidt, owner of the firm that always does the auctioneering in the main auction building, has Jerry introduce each of the machines he's worked on that year, and he does an excellent job of assuring all the would-be buyers that what he tells them about each vehicle is totally honest, so there are no unexpected surprises. It's a real pleasure to hear his sincere assessments, and makes we Mennonites grateful to have among us a man of such integrity. We reckoned that he brought in over \$40,000 through the sales of this year's vehicles. That buys a lot of chickens and goats...

But I digress. Back to my meeting with Grabers and Amstutzes. All four pitched in comments here and there and Jan told me: "The liaison people you meet with are the board and the chairmen of the different committees: they'd make their announcements, and tell us the number of people we needed to recruit, and the deadlines we had to meet. And they'd hand out things like the bread bags and sign-up sheets and posters and things."

"How many people would attend?" I asked.

After a short discussion, they guessed there were probably 150-200. "It really does take thousands of people to put it on," Nancy said. "We went to lots of meetings at different churches and it's always fun to see all the people involved. It's fun to meet all the new people and ones that we have met at all of the meetings. It's a big Mennonite family of people."

Deryll said, "One of the first things I did (at the sale) was work in *Feeding the Multitude*. Susan and Jim (Jantzen) were there too; it was a positive, cheerful atmosphere – people were enjoying each other. It was fun to be there and to see so many people you see in different venues." He also talked about working with the bohne beroggi. "I had never

served in the line before; it was fun. There were some people who had no idea what a bohne beroggi was; some people didn't realize it was a dessert," (even though it's a mashed bean roll, there's cream and sugar in the dough and the beans are sweetened) "and some people said, 'I get one a year so this is why I came to the sale!' And others were saying, 'I had one, and never again!'" We all laughed and Deryll continued, "Bethany and Tim" (Amstutzes' daughter and her husband) "are on the bohne beroggi committee and they told us, the last two years, they've run out fairly early on. It's tough to estimate how many to make because people come and buy some while they're making them; some bought dozens." He admitted that people are disappointed when they come to the sale and they've already run out, then he gave a slight shrug, "But I guess they made money anyway." He then went on to say that he went through the breakfast line and had struck up a conversation with a father and two daughters there. One daughter said she didn't want any sausage so Deryll joked, "Just take it and I'll eat it!" They all ended up at the same table and she passed her sausage to him, rather to his embarrassment! But, this type of friendly interaction is typical of what most of us experience at the relief sales: you might sit across from a complete stranger but we all know about the Mennonite Game: you feel at ease striking up a conversation – and, very often you end up making connections.

Then Jan mentioned the two ways that the organizers and committee members raise funds for various expenses that will be needed to put on the sale: the mini-auction in February which people donate items for, and the bidders' sheet which is a long list of items and a dollar amount for each one (e.g. \$1,200 for Colby cheese, \$2,825 for rental of tables, etc.). Churches bid on these at each meeting – offering to pay for part of an item or more than one item with the goal of having all the supplies paid for before the sale. That way, all the proceeds from the sale itself can go to MCC. There are many expenses involved and it seems that there's often a friendly rivalry among church groups, each trying to outbid the others. "A men's Sunday School class might give \$500 for butter and milk," Nancy smiled. "It's awe-inspiring. They really have the MCC sale in their hearts and minds."

Amstutzes and Grabers all agreed that they particularly enjoy the fellowship meals. "They also organize those," Nancy said. "They start off by asking the group, 'Who will have a meeting at your house, and then have a meal together?' And it goes from there. This year, our church raised \$801 for our KMRS meal. And three of us got to go to a fellowship meal at Hofnungsau: they invited us to

be at the church as guests and come to their Sunday School, and the meal afterwards. There were other couples there too, from Topeka and Newton. And of course they're encouraging all the churches to raise money any way they can." Nancy gave the example of how one church raised extra money. "They hold their worship service before Sunday School," she explained, "so they offered snacks after worship and requested donations."

The group then talked about the Penny Power - My Coins Count as it's now called. I commented that Penny Power's easier to say and Nancy and Jan laughed: it stands for MCC! And thinking of that, Nancy told the amusing story about Loraine Avenue M.C. in Wichita. "The final Sunday before the sale, all the coins they had collected were taken up to the balcony where they'd rigged up some sort of a trough that hung down, and there was a metal washbasin on the floor of the sanctuary. They emptied all the coins into the trough and they landed in the washbasin below. The sound was deafening!" We all laughed.

"Another church said they would encourage their children to collect money throughout a certain number of weeks then put it in a sheet. They would count their money and, if it came to an odd amount, they'd ask people to donate more so they'd have raised an even amount. And people were glad to pitch in more!"

Next, we talked about the quilt auction and Nancy said she understands it brought in \$180,000 (versus \$140,000 last year). And we discussed the fact that more machine quilting is being done every year: in fact, some of the quilts that brought in the most money this year were machine quilted. Jan and Nancy decided that buyers mostly go for the colors, not so much whether or not a quilt is hand-stitched. That doesn't seem quite right at the MCC sale but it's probably the way of the future.

Many thanks, Amstutzes and Grabers, for all your excellent work. Hopefully, another couple will step up to help you next year. PB

May/June Events

- 3 Carry in meal/shower for Casey & Mieka Bartel
- Farewell for Andrew Sensenig and Erica Buller
- 7 8:00 p.m. Stewardship meeting
- 17 **Pentecost**; last day of regular Sunday School
- 17 4:00 p.m. Bethel College commencement
- 20 7:00 p.m. Last Day of School party
- 23 10:00 a.m. Tabor College commencement
- 27 Care Committee meeting

June:

- 7 Sunday School picnic with Trinity

Au Revoir, Clark and Anna Marie Wiebe!

April 26 – your last Sunday to worship with us on a regular basis. Even though you'll be living quite close by, we will miss you. To think that you have both worshiped at First-Hillsboro since you were very young, and have been members since 1957, makes us very aware of what an integral part of our congregation you have been over the decades. Remember, *Au Revoir* means "until we see you again" so don't wait too many weeks before you come back – so you can tell us about your new life in North Newton.

May God bless you richly.

April 26 Blog from Amelia Brandt

It's almost the end of my fourth month in Sierra Leone and things are changing but, even more so, staying the same. We still haven't managed to get the Ebola epidemic to zero: we're stuck in a tricky middle ground where we have to be constantly prepared for a surge of cases but, at the same time, turn our attention towards recovery projects.

For me, this means dividing my time between my original role of managing the Observational Interim Care Center (OICC) and my additional responsibilities as Freetown Health Manager. With the OICC, every month I have to try to get funds to keep it open, and determine what to do with the staff, and our longterm plan. At this point, we're all comfortable with it remaining open through May, but it's April 26 and I don't yet have the funding secured for May 1. This kind of constant uncertainty is a sharp contrast with Freetown Health, which is a long-term health project with a broad array of activities. Trying to juggle the two, along with new projects that will likely be thrown my way, is proving to be more difficult than I had anticipated.

As things change and stay the same at work, the same thing is happening in the rest of my life. Since we're still in the midst of an epidemic, albeit one that is losing steam, our options for a social life in Freetown are limited. There are still only four restaurants open after 6 p.m., and every Friday night inevitably means going to the only one with a DJ: Country Lodge. Our lives have reached a level of monotony that can become quite depressing: even our Sunday escape to the beach is no longer possible: the official stance of the President is that beaches are off limits, although the authorities had become lax and we were able to go the beach with no problem – that is, until Easter weekend when a group of staff from the Ebola treatment centre in Port Loko were arrested. Since then, the beaches have been off limits for all staff.

As far as we can tell, we're the only NGO that has this restriction, so it's really frustrating for all of us: when you have such a limited option of things to do, having such a key one taken away is no fun.

It's funny, even the little things grow monotonous. I didn't bring a lot of clothing with me, just like everyone else. I open up my closet in the morning and internally sigh as I think about wearing the same thing I wore last week, and for every week in the past four months.

Our office isn't exactly surrounded by restaurants, and the streets are dusty and full of traffic, so going out to lunch isn't really a nice experience. A woman at the office cooks, but every single day it's rice with chicken and fried plantains. Every. Day. The chicken always has bones, but she only gives us a spoon, so I spend my lunchtime trying to get some meat off the bone with a spoon and inevitably making a mess of the task.

In crisis situations like this, people are usually given six-month contracts. Many people extend but, all around me, my social circle is deserting. When I first arrived, I just took all of the people around me for granted because I saw them so often, but now people are leaving left and right. Luckily, though, my flat mates aren't going anywhere. It makes me sad when my friends start leaving, but if any of my flat mates left I think I would be in really bad shape.

I think that the way I'm feeling is just part of the stages of living abroad. As the new wears off and the small frustrations start to seem bigger, you find yourself feeling dissatisfied with your life. I've been through it before, so I know that this feeling will pass with time. And I know that, when I have to board that plane to head back home, it will be hard to go. There are of course some ways to break up the monotony. Last weekend, my flat mates and I went to a chimpanzee reserve just outside of Freetown. It had been closed for months because of the outbreak, and had just reopened. We stayed in an Ecolodge in the heart of the jungle where we could hear the chimpanzees and other jungle animals all around us. As soon as we arrived, I felt this wave of calm wash over me and I continued to feel that way for the entire weekend. We didn't do much – went to see the chimpanzees, went on a hike, and ate food and drank wine and just relaxed.

I'm also distracting myself with making plans. I've worked out my schedule for the future and I'll be leaving Sierra Leone at the end of the first week in August. And I'll be taking a trip to a few countries in Europe in June – for right now, I think it will be Germany, the UK, and Ireland. And on August 19, I'll be starting my DrPH program at Tulane (Public Health & Tropical Diseases). It feels great to have made a decision and I'm really excited

about new challenges in a new city. Onward and upward!

Amelia Brandt

In the Light of Victory

The resurrection of Jesus is a sign of God's purpose and power to restore his creation to its full stature and integrity. Just as death could be seen as the culmination of all that is wrong with the world, the resurrection can be seen as a pledge of God's ultimate victory over the disorder which plagues his creation on account of the fall. Death is the greatest enemy, and yet death has been defeated by God through Christ. And so we are given hope that the remainder of the powers and forces that confront us are similarly being defeated and their power broken.

The cross spells freedom. It brings liberation from *false understandings of God*. It shows that God is *there* – despite all the suggestions that he is not. Good Friday seemed to confirm the idea that God was dead, asleep or indifferent. Easter Day showed that God was alive, well and caring. The cross frees us from the idea that human nature is somehow too sinful, or the human dilemma too complex, for God to do anything about it. The surly bonds which tie us to these deeply pessimistic and oppressive views of God are torn apart by the cross. The creator becomes a creature within his own creation, in order to recreate it. In the aftermath of Gethsemane, we catch the fragrance of Eden. Jesus was betrayed within the Garden of Gethsemane, in order to undo the disobedience of human nature within the Garden of Eden. The resurrection is like the first day of a new creation.

So how does this image of what God achieved through the cross help us make sense of sin? What does it tell us about our situation apart from Christ? It encourages us to think of sin as enslavement and oppression. That enslavement could be political, military or economic. It is like the oppression which burdened the Israelites in Egypt, and which so grievously affects many people in poorer nations today. It invites us to imagine the sense of despair and hopelessness which plagued the continent of Europe in the darker days of the Nazi occupation. It declares, "This is what sin is like." It reminds us that an objective state of oppression leads to a subjective feeling of oppression. No amount of tinkering around with the subject side of things can ever change the real situation, which causes that sense of despair in the first place. Real peace of mind requires a real change in our situation.

Now think of the cross and resurrection of Jesus as breaking the power of sin. But if the power of sin, death and evil has been broken, how can we make sense of the fact that it still continues to plague us? Human history and Christian experience tell us of a constant struggle against sin and evil in our own lives, even as Christians. There is a real danger, if would seem, that talking about the "victory of faith" will become nothing more than empty words, masking a contradiction between faith and experience. How can we handle this problem?

A helpful way of understanding this difficulty was developed by a group of distinguished writers, such as C.S. Lewis in England and Anders Nygren in Sweden. They noticed important parallels between the New

Testament and the situation during the Second World War. The victory won over sin through the death of Christ was like the liberation of an occupied country from Nazi rule. We need to allow our imaginations to take in the sinister and menacing side of an occupying power. Life has to be lived under the shadow of this foreign presence. And part of the poignancy of the situation is its utter hopelessness. Nothing can be done about it. No one can defeat it.

Then comes the electrifying news. There has been a far-off battle. And somehow, it has turned the tide of the war. A new phase has developed, and the occupying power is in disarray. Its backbone has been broken. In the course of time, the Nazis will be driven out of every corner of Europe. But they are still present in the occupied country.

In one sense, the situation has not changed, but in another, more important sense, the situation has changed totally. The scent of victory and liberation is in the air. A total change in the psychological climate results.

I remember once meeting a man who had been held prisoner in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Singapore. He told me of the astonishing change in the camp atmosphere which came about when one of the prisoners (who owned a shortwave radio) learned of the collapse of the Japanese war effort in the middle of 1945. Although all in the camp still remained prisoners, they knew that their enemy had been beaten. It would only be a matter of time before they were restored. And those prisoners, I was told, began to laugh and cry, as if they were free already.

The end of the Second World War in Europe came about a year after the establishment of the bridgeheads in Normandy in June 1944. But an objective change had taken place some time before in the theatre of war – with a resulting subjective change in the hearts and minds of captive people. And so with us now. In one sense, victory has not come; in another, it has. The resurrection declares in advance of the event God's total victory over all evil and oppressive forces – such as death, evil and sin. Their backbone has been broken, and we may begin to live now in the light of that victory, knowing that the long night of their oppression will end.

Alister McGrath (b. 1953)

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All submissions of interest to the FMC family are welcome and will be included, depending on timeliness and space availability. (It is preferred that they not be submitted anonymously.) *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

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