



# First Mennonite Church

## Midweek E-Newsletter

December 29, 2021

### From Pastor Tom

#### Joyful New Year!

I preached recently about the difference between happiness and joy (“God’s Song of Joy,” December 12, 2021). Happiness, I proposed, is merely fleeting, here one day or hour or minute, gone the next. In contrast, joy endures forever. Happiness can come from all kinds of sources. Joy can come only from God. Happiness is focused on the self. Joy is focused beyond ourselves—to others, and to God.

It is customary on January 1 to wish one another a “happy new year.” But such a wish is indeed wishful thinking. It declares the hope that the next year will somehow be better or “happier” than the last, which is not a bad thing to hope for, but is it realistic? 2021 was for many a difficult year. Covid 19, at the very least, put severe limitations on our day-to-day lives. At the worst, some of us lost a loved one to the pandemic. Others lost income and other sources of security. And those who actually became infected with the virus may have lost not just their taste and smell, but their stamina. Unfortunately it appears that, as it begins at least, the new year will not be any better than the old, with the Omicron variant rapidly catching up to the Delta.

Covid 19 has also made it difficult to be church. Some of us simply don’t feel safe coming to Sunday worship services. Others are out of the habit or have tragically found that they get more out of staying home than coming to church. We were able to have Wednesday evening programming this fall, including a hot meal and an adult Bible study. But the families in our church with children are no longer coming, and so our gatherings sometimes seem like a mere shadow of what they used to be. But as the saying goes, “hope springs eternal,” and there are indeed reasons to feel hopeful about the new year. We just had a wonderful Christmas Eve service, complete with children reading the Scripture lessons that told the beloved Christmas story! A significant number of you have agreed to fill vacancies in those councils and committees which comprise our church’s leadership structure (pending approval at our annual meeting on January 23), bringing much needed spiritual gifts. Thus the turning of the calendar will indeed give us an opportunity to set some new goals in the life of our church.

But the bottom line is, pandemic or no pandemic, we’ve all been offered a joy that cannot be taken away, by a God who promises a coming kingdom or realm in which God’s love and peace will fill the universe. To be sure, it is still to come in its fullness. But it is already here in part. And the joy it brings with it, a joy focused beyond ourselves to others and to God, can never be taken away. So when the clock turns to midnight on January 1, 2022, we can safely, securely and without hesitation wish one another a “joyful new year!”

## Upcoming Events

- ☞ **The church office will be closed Friday, Dec. 31. Kara will also be out of the office Monday, Jan. 3. Happy New Year!**

## Other Announcements

- ☞ **It's time for the annual church directory update! If your information has changed this year, please contact Kara in the church office (620.947.5662 or [secretary@fmchillsboro.com](mailto:secretary@fmchillsboro.com)) by January 15.**
- ☞ **WDC Office Schedule** - The WDC office and library will be closed through Friday, December 31. The office will then open on Monday, January 3. Have a merry Christmas season, and we will see you in the new year!
- ☞ **Luis Elier Rodriguez, a WDC pastor and ACPE Educator, would like to announce his book *On Significant Components of Spiritual Care*, now published and available for purchase.** This book can be helpful for pastors, chaplains, spiritual counselors, ACPE Educators, CPE students, and people with careers related to spiritual care and human services. Also, it is a resource for spiritual retreats and spiritual caregiver's training. You can send any feedback to the author's email: [Lerodriguez@houstonmethodist.org](mailto:Lerodriguez@houstonmethodist.org).

## Verse of the Week

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—" —Psalm 103:1-2 (NRSV)