Intergenerational Activities for the Holidays

by Sharon Monday

Ask your family members in advance of a family gathering to list songs, poems, or family stories that connect you to your family around the themes of immigration, loss, work, love, sense of place/home and celebration.

When you are together share your songs, poems or family stories with one another by singing them together, reading your poems and/or sharing your favorite family stories. You could also put the songs, poems, stories on your Christmas tree or in a box and pull out ones randomly to share one a night with your immediate family during Advent.

This idea originated as Andrea Welty Peachy and her music appreciation class prepared for the Americas3 Performance. Please consider sending your lists to sharonmonday@gmail.com for a future vine article.

THE VINE IS PRINTED BI-MONTHLY

Editor: Rhonda Gibson
Deadline for the 2019 February/March issue: Sunday, January 27, 2019
Email submissions to: fmcvine@gmail.com
The Vine is also available on our church website (under “news” link): www.fmc-cu.org
Hope(full)

by Jeri Lake

For months now, when people asked “When will you be back in your house?” I would reply “We’re hopeful we’ll be home for Thanksgiving.” The truth is I was not all that full of hope. By “hopeful” I actually meant maybe slightly spattered with hope but not anywhere near full.

As these waiting months go on, I find myself wondering about how we use that word hopeful. Does it in fact mean full of hope? I decided to look up the definition and this is what I found:

Hopeful: An adjective - Feeling or inspiring optimism about a future event (as in “a hopeful sign”).

Then came the synonyms:

Optimistic, full of hope, confident, positive, buoyant, sanguine, expectant, bullish, cheerful, light-hearted, upbeat.

Wow. That’s a lot of territory for a word to cover. I guess I’ve experienced some of that in this time of waiting to go home... in truth with a mix of whatever the synonyms are for “hopeless”!

But what if the waiting time is Advent and the hope is its Christmas culmination, the Incarnation, God with us? And what if it comes in a time when, like my house, things still look pretty broken, unfinished, even charred from the heat of these days. What does it mean then to be hopeful? Full of hope... seriously? How would we do that? Couldn’t we just try for hope tinged, hope touched maybe? Full is a lot to ask.

The only thing I can imagine about this is that in the Advent/God with us context the definition is woefully inadequate, lacking the depth needed for this season. “Feeling or inspiring optimism” isn’t quite enough to hold on to. Something must actually fill us if we are to know hope. The God with us is also the God IN us. The Hope then is not our positive, cheerful feelings but God’s confident, expectant filling.

I think that instead of my desperate striving to find something that looks hopeful and can shore up the hope-ish feelings that I crave, I may need to open up the shuttered windows to all those inner places that don’t feel full at all. To be full of hope there must be a filling...

O come O come Immanuel.
At Long Last: A Sabbatical Report

by Pastor Michael Crosby

My summer 2018 sabbatical was designed with attention to three r’s: retreat, research and rest. I sought a balance between study and adventure that might nurture spiritual growth, physical well-being, and relationships within and beyond my family. Sabbatical is for me an opportunity to strengthen the core connections with God, family, and land. A key concept in that spiritual journey is ‘attunement,’ tuning in to the Spirit present in the crossing patterns of lives and geographies that make up my life.

As a family, we stayed a week at a friend’s farm in Friendship, Wisconsin and ten days at my parents’ home in Stoddard, New Hampshire. I was five days in Clinton, Tennessee at the Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy, hosted on the sacred ground of the Children’s Defense Fund’s Haley Farm. And I was a week in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness and Mt. Evans Wilderness of Colorado. Between these things, I enjoyed spaciousness at home, with time for play and generative work, from building a backyard playhouse to reflection on Christian social activism. I offer the following thoughts as a summary of the trajectory of my studies.

How Is Church a Social Movement? (And How Is It Not?)

We cannot have a movement [for God’s justice and peace] unless we are whole people, each one a self-contained gift of God. -Rev. James Lawson, activist & Civil Rights Movement leader

My study plan emerged at the point where church intersects with movements for social and political change. I began with two key insights from activist-scholars Ched Myers and Mai-Anh Le Tran (incidentally, both Professor Le Tran and Ched were participants at the Proctor Institute in Tennessee. Both ate lunch with me and both signed my copies of their books!):

The first insight came from Ched Myers’ commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Binding the Strong Man (Orbis, 1988, 2008). Myers describes Jesus’ discipleship community as an activist network, thinking and acting like a community of nonviolent resistance. Jesus builds resilient local economies, feeding 5,000 people in the wilderness. He organizes direct action campaigns, riding a donkey like a king and flipping tables in the temple. His actions challenge the oppressive politics of the Jerusalem and Roman systems. His community organizing was sufficiently threatening that he was tried, convicted, and executed as a treasonous rebel. Crucifixion was how Rome killed rebel leaders who challenged Roman power, and the New Testament presents Jesus’ resurrection as God’s affirmation of the way Jesus lived his life – not only a life absent violence, but a nonviolent spirituality that empowered body and spirit to live for the liberation of self and others.

The second insight came from a little book titled Reset the Heart: Unlearning Violence, Relearning Hope (Abingdon, 2017). Religious Education scholar Mai-Anh Le Tran reflects on the challenges that faced her own faith community in response to the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. She frames the problem pointedly:

...as [faith leaders] continued to rally and organize churches toward the enduring work of confronting the insidious violence of systemic social injustices in their own backyard, these leaders ran head-on into a familiar yet perplexing wall: the incapacity and unwillingness of their faith communities to respond with some form of faith-driven action.
Le Tran’s urgent questions grew out of the paralysis she witnessed from so many communities of faith, as if collective moral conscience has once again been anesthetized, and the hope for which church folk love to sing and pray suddenly debilitated in the face of actual struggle. ... If the church’s teaching, learning, and practice of faith is purportedly transformative, then where is that faith when it is needed most? If “good” religious formation had been happening all along—or had it?—then why the indifference, paralysis, apathy, exasperation, and downright resistance when a calamity occurred that could have used a faithful response? (3)

Le Tran frames the question of church and social activism in terms of spiritual (trans)formation. Do our practices of Christian spirituality and community shape us for active resistance to the principalities and powers of our age?

- Does our worship ritually embody Jesus’ challenge to imperial idolatry?
- Do our spiritual practices equip us for costly engagement? Do they train joy and hope in the midst of grievous and lamentable injustice?
- Are biblical narratives allowed to shape our collective recovery from the trauma of imperialism, militarism, racism, and ecological destruction?
- Does Christian community life—the ways we eat together, learn together, nurture each other—train us to be an anti-oppressive presence?
- Can I say that church makes me less racist? More understanding of those whose lives take a different path than mine?
- Are our formation practices liberative (process) and liberating (result)?

Faith beliefs and practices—even Jesus-centered ones—are not intrinsically good. At best, they can shape us as bearers of liberation, hope, justice, peace, and joy. But they can also become stagnant, or worse, act as props for the violent systems they purport to dismantle. Le Tran’s point is that Christian living flows from people shaped by forms of community that reflect the liberating Christ. Those of us enculturated to forms of community that reflect the values of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and nationalism are called to a path of reorientation—transformation—towards God’s freedom way of life. This is embodied spiritual work, a process of lifelong attunement to the creative work of the Spirit in the world. The way of Jesus can re-train the ways our bodies are present in the world.

**Christian Formation in Bonhoeffer’s Communities**

I went looking for models of Christian community that generate the kind of embodied spiritual formation seen in the community of disciples that grew up around Jesus. It is widely known that theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer led the Confessing Church in resistance to the Nazi regime in 1930s-40s Germany. He was executed for his efforts. Less well known is that Bonhoeffer’s core theological work centered on the practices of Christian community. His earliest theological tome, *Sanctorum Communio* (“The Communion of Saints”), set a lifelong trajectory of exploring the forms of life together that empowered people to attain their whole lives to the life-giving freedom of the Spirit of Jesus. Indeed, *Life Together* is the title of his book describing the community life of the pastors-in-training who took refuge in Bonhoeffer’s underground seminary. Much ink is spilled trying to identify how Bonhoeffer’s theology led him to resist Hitler when so many of his theological and pastoral peers simply went along to get along. Not enough ink is devoted to the forms of embodied spiritual community that shaped his life. He practiced, with others, for the active expression of his faith. It was this transformational community practice that enabled him to resist when others could not.

One of Bonhoeffer’s deepest moments of spiritual conviction came while he was exiled to the U.S. worshiping at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York. It was there that he encountered a “thick” Jesus, a Jesus whose liberating power could be seen in the community practices of resistance that shaped the black people of Harlem living under the oppressive thumb of racism. Much like the Anabaptist tradition, they read the Gospels attuned to how Jesus’ actions and teachings embodied the skills of resistance living. Jesus was not saving passive people; he was modeling practices and teaching skills for active liberation. These are the skills that form people into vessels of “healing and hope” shaping communities of “grace, joy, and peace,” to quote from Mennonite Church USA’s vision. Embodied spiritual formation in the Way of Jesus does not happen by confession (belief) or strength conviction (faith) alone; it happens when those confessions and convictions are guided by concrete community practices.
Christian Formation in the Early Church

The early church also wrestled with this challenge. Former Mennonite seminary professor Alan Kreider explored this in a recent book called *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*. Building on a rich philosophical tradition of “embodiment,” Kreider reconstructs the formational habits of Christians living in the Roman Empire. Their practices of worship, catechism, and baptism depict the work of transforming “habitus” from bodies that live for the empire of Rome to bodies that live for the empire of God. They were reconstructing what Pierre Bourdieu calls “corporal knowledge,” “the knowledge that truly forms us, ... more profoundly ... than our intellectual knowledge.” It is a knowledge “that we carry in our bodies” (Kreider, 2016, 39) so that response to injustice is lived hope, not an anxious mind or a fearful spirit.

The early Christians lived with the conviction that “corporal nonconformity could be taught,” which is to say that they could retrain their bodies to act differently than the empire would have it. It is no accident that this happened through participation in the body of Christ, the corporeal expression of God’s liberating hope. Kreider argues that this re-training of bodily presence and action was seen as the essence of Christian conversion.

The protagonists [in stories from the early church] indicate this by showing—at times in situations which they could not control, in which they had little time to think and ponder and discuss, in which they were responding to intimidating powers and unimaginable dangers—that they were behaving in unconventional ways that did not reflect their original [i.e., Roman societal] formation. They were behaving unconventionally with their bodies. They were manifesting what Jennifer Glancy has called “corporal nonconformity” (40).

This understanding of Christian conversion – as membership in an emerging movement that re-trained people’s bodies for alternative living – is a far cry from thinking of conversation as a heartfelt prayer about Jesus.

Kreider makes the case through a careful study of Christian practices of worship, catechism, baptism, and unconventional witness (facing lions without fear took years of corporal training and eventually brought down the brutal system by invoking the crowd’s compassion, he argues). For instance, catechesis in the early church took an average of 3 years, with new Christians undergoing a rigorous process of transformation that demanded evidence of real change in their lives, from demonstrating increased capacity for generosity (rich people might give away much of their wealth) to learning the forms of worship and prayer that shaped the Christian community’s time together and gave social power to their lived witness. The stakes were high; the prospects for martyrdom were real and the need for trust was great. Kreider’s book is worthy of more study, perhaps at a future FMC Sunday School class.

The Paradox of Shalom Community

As I studied these forms of “corporal nonconformity” – embodied spiritual community – that emerge from communities trying to follow the liberating path of Jesus, I began to see a series of paradoxes. They look something like this:

- Deep roots ↔ Wide branches
- Radically inclusive ↔ Strong shared culture
- Shared intimacy ↔ Safe boundaries
- Spiritually quiet ↔ Action-oriented
- Risk-taking ↔ Patient
- Unified in all things ↔ Free to disagree
- Open to all ↔ Expecting transformation
- Tradition ↔ Innovation
Our bodies have been taught that these things cannot coexist in one space, but the body of Christ is meant to live out a different kind of knowledge. The community of people living bodily into God’s shalom (and therefore living “out of” the Egypt paradigms of this age) learns to hold together where the exclusive, time-bound, have/have-not mentality of empire falls apart.

Where do you see FMC embracing both ends of this embodiment of shalom community? In what ways do deep roots give way to wide branches? Where do innovation and tradition come together to enrich our faith? How are we training one another to be spiritually quiet and loud for justice? Risk-takers who know the long arc of heavenly hope? I invite you to join me in pondering how this embodied spirituality can shape our church’s practices of formation in the liberative and liberating Way of Jesus. What hope-filled, disruptive, justice-seeking, unconventional behavior will we embody next?

Gratitude

The pastoral sabbatical is a treasured gift that requires congregational commitments of time, energy, and financial resources. Mine could not have happened without an attentive Pastoral Support Committee (Jon Welty Peachey, Sheryl Dyck, Randy Nelson), committed elders (Sam Cox, Janet Liechty), the congregation’s prophetic preachers, and many others who stepped up during the summer months. I am especially thankful to Rhonda and Pastor Deb, who tended the added burdens of administration and pastoring with the dexterity and skill that we know to expect and must not take for granted. Thank you!
Jubilee Funds Sent to El Divino Redentor

In 2014, as a part of FMC’s 50th Anniversary celebration, we raised funds to contribute to our sister church’s proposed building project. When that project was put on hold for a variety of reasons, we postponed sending the funds to learn how they might be re-designated. On the recommendation of the FMC Sister Church Committee, upon Council’s approval, and after confirming with the original donors, the money was disbursed as a gift to El Divino Redentor, designated for the ministry priorities they will choose. Pastor Sergio indicated that a top priority was covering a small debt accumulated by the cafeteria feeding program. It seems fitting that a gift of Jubilee—named for the biblical event marking the cancelation of all debts—might be used in this way. Below is the letter sent with the funds.

November 9, 2018

Dear Pastor Sergio and all the congregation of El Divino Redentor,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ! As sisters and brothers in the body of Christ, we think of you often. We light a candle each week in worship, symbolic of our friendship and the prayers we offer to God in your behalf.

Your ministry in Bucaramanga inspires us, as you worship God together and reach out to share God’s love across your city. It is our privilege to learn from you about Christ-like service, and a joy to continue supporting the café at Giron.

In 2014, First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana commenced a Jubilee celebration, marking the 50th year since the founding of our church. As part of the celebration, we committed to giving generously to support ministries that have been impactful in the life of our congregation. At the time, El Divino Redentor was making plans for a church building project, and we raised funds intending to contribute to this significant moment in the life of EDR. In the years since 2014, we understand that these plans were canceled.

This letter is to notify you that we are sending $3,972.51, all of which was raised at our Jubilee celebration in 2014. Since the building plans were canceled, please designate these funds in a way that will assist the mission and priorities of the congregation of El Divino Redentor.

At the start of the biblical year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25), the celebration trumpet inaugurates a year of rest and relief from all debts. In honor of our own Jubilee, we pray that this simple gift might bring joy and enhance your work as servants of God and ambassadors of Christ’s love for the world.

May the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

In Christ’s peace, your friends at First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana (Illinois),

Pastor Michael Crosby
Pastor Debra Sutter
Sheryl Dyck, Congregational Chair
Champaign County Christian Health Center

What: Our congregation has supported this vital, free to the un-insured consumer, healthcare ministry from its inception some 15 years ago. We have helped with volunteers and operating funds. There are 2 types of clinics which have hours a few days a week - medical and dental. Help comes from volunteer physician and nurse providers. A Behavioral Health clinic has ceased to operate because of a serious psychiatric professional shortage in the U-C community. Spiritual Care/support is also offered in the clinics.

Where: OSF Heart of Mary Medical Center, Northwest corner of the campus at 1400 W. Park, Urbana

Who: Volunteers at all levels are needed. Further information: 217-766-6425 or visit www.ccchc2003.org

East Central Illinois Refugee Mutual Assistance Center (E.C.I.R.M.A.C.)

What: The center was started in 1980 by Vietnamese refugees but now assists many cultures/languages. Our congregation has assisted the center in their mission of helping with resettling families in our region, with sponsoring families as well as volunteers and financial assistance. They assist with material aid as well as counselling persons on obtaining their U.S. citizenship documents.

Where: 302 S.Birch Street, Urbana (side entrance of The Unitarian Universalist Church)

Who: Volunteers at all levels are needed. Further information: www.ecirmac.org or 217.344.8455

Sewing Kit Project Update

After communicating with people in the MCC office this year, the Service and Outreach Committee decided to collect and assemble items for sewing kits to be distributed overseas (rather than the school kits that we usually send). With wonderful help and guidance from Kathy Anderson, we had an afternoon of sewing the kit bags (to MCC specifications) early this fall. About a dozen people, including 2 of our youth, gathered to measure and cut fabric, press edges, sew seams, and insert drawstrings. It was the closest thing to a sewing bee that we’ve had in a few years.

Then in November, we put our collection tub to gather donations of sewing supplies. We asked for donations based on the detailed list provided by MCC, which included specific quantities, sizes, colors, and composition of the desired items. Thanks to some financial donations and all the careful shopping by folks in the congregation, we were able to assemble 15 complete sewing kits.

These kits will soon be taken to an MCC pick-up point and eventually be distributed to people in refugee camps, perhaps providing a means to earn some income in places where paying jobs are scarce. The S&O committee truly thanks everyone who participated to help us launch this new endeavor.
FMC Visits African-American Cultural and Genealogical Center in Decatur

by Sharon Monday

On Saturday, Nov. 3rd members of the FMC Racial Justice Task Force and FMC community visited with founder, Evelyn Hood, at the African-American Center, which began in her home in 1993. “People who knew of my interest in African-American culture and history just started bringing me relics which they thought might be of historical significance. Before I knew it my home became the beginnings of the African-American Cultural and Genealogical Center.”

The mission and purpose of the African-American Cultural and Genealogical Society of Illinois, Inc. established as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation is to:

▪ promote and facilitate an interest in research, preservation and publishing of African-American genealogy and family histories;
▪ provide resources and education about Africa-Americans and African-American history of the Central Illinois community as a whole and African-American youth in particular;
▪ enhance self-esteem and race relations through education, cultural activities, fellowship and cultural events;
▪ foster self-worth through cultural, artistic and educational presentations.

I first found out about the Center when my granddaughter, Kaori, enrolled in a Mt. Zion high school African-American history course taught by Mr. Richard Hansen who is a board member at the African-American Cultural and Genealogical Center. “Mr. Hansen changed my life by involving me and my classmates in putting together a permanent exhibit at the Center on the Civil Rights Movement. We had to research and collect photos that depicted the fight for civil rights in the 1960’s, we visited the Memphis Dr. ML King Center, we built an exact model of the lunch room counter where the sit-ins took place and I was appointed chair of the fund raising committee. We all worked very hard to make this a quality exhibit for people to visit and become better educated on the civil rights movement and African-American history and culture.” - Kaori Riviera Dorsey

Here are some reviews from the FMCer’s who visited:

Peter Dyck: “I think it to be a very worthwhile place to visit to educate ourselves about our African American brothers and sisters. It is our responsibility to know what has happened and how the spiritual consequences of those traumatizing events have trickled down into our present community/national malaise.”

Tammie Bouseman: “My biggest "take-away" was probably the unlikely way this Museum came about. From Evelyn’s desire to study her own genealogy, to people giving her items to finding a "home" for the Museum (and then a bigger "home") it certainly feels as though there was more at work here than human endeavor could explain.”

Learn more about the African-American Cultural and Genealogical Center: http://www.african-american-cultural.org.

Recommended Reading: “Proud Shoes: The Story of An American Family” by Pauli Murray available in the Champaign Public Library Main Branch.
Reflections and Notes from Restorative Practices Training Workshop

by Jan Sabey

Mary Krick, David Schrag, and I attended a 2-day IBARJ*-facilitated training workshop on Sept. 19-20, 2018. There were about 12 other people there from the C-U community; most were in social work and/or child welfare professions, including staff from the Youth Assessment Center. The facilitator was Kathryn Rayford, from IBARJ (*Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice).

Throughout the first day of training, we spent much time in talking circles. Talking circles are part of the restorative practices array. Participants literally sit in a circle and pass a talking piece from person to person. When someone has the talking piece, they have the floor to speak about the topic of discussion while the others in the circle listen. In the first few circles, we responded to easy, non-threatening questions and statements (introducing ourselves, sharing why we were at the training). As the day progressed, the circle topics were more personal and dealt with deeper topics. For example, we named and talked about the values that we bring to work, church, or various activities where we interact with others. Our facilitator, Kathryn, encouraged us to think in terms of creating a restorative culture in those settings. This means to intentionally work on ways of living and interacting together in a group that uses common agreements and values to support healthy relationships.

On the second day of training, we compared and contrasted aspects of restorative circles to restorative conferences, both of which can be used to deal with conflict and situations in which harm was done. Restorative work is concerned with the harm that arises out of wrongdoing, not just the rules or laws that have been broken.

Both the circles and conferences usually require preparation. Before a circle or conference gathers, the facilitator meets with those involved in and impacted by the harmful incident. The facilitator explains the restorative goals and process and then invites these individuals to participate in a circle or conference. No one is coerced into participation or threatened if they choose not to participate. Restorative justice requires voluntary buy-in to be effective.

Conferences are more formal than circles and address only the issue of wrongdoing/harm done. A conference provides opportunity for those who were harmed to speak about how they were harmed and the results of that harm. Then those who caused the harm talk about what they did and why they did it. Then there is a time for those who were harmed to describe what they need to make things right again. The goals are for everyone to be heard, to be held accountable, and to reach consensus in finding a way to repair the harm.

Restorative practices do not necessarily punishment. Rather the effort is to creatively address the harm, offer means to repair the harm, and support both the one(s) harmed and the one(s) who caused the harm.

These are just a few highlights of the workshop. I found the training to be quite uplifting. Our facilitator reminded us that there can be no restoration or repair of relationships if there are no relationships to begin with. To me, that is the first challenge – to build connections. There is much brokenness of bodies, minds, and spirits all around us. I think restorative practices provide us some positive ways to bring people from the edges and margins into circles of belonging, to provide reconnection with a community. Isn’t that what we all want?

Several years ago, some members of FMC were involved in V.O.R.P. (Victim and Offender Restoration Program) which used restorative justice practices to offer alternatives to youth incarceration. I also know that talking circles were used as part of the FMC work done before our decision to become an open and welcoming church to all.

So I know that many here at FMC are familiar with restorative practices. As we consider how we might use these tools again, we stand on their strong shoulders. I am grateful for their foundational work. I think we are in a new season of need in the C-U community (and beyond). Once again, we need creative ways to use these time-tested restorative techniques. Let’s explore the possibilities together.
Song for my Father
by Pete Shungu

Sixteen bars to share my emotion
Cause sixteen was the age that you crossed that ocean
From Congo to mad snow, you flipped the scene
Upstate New York, how’s that for a ‘sweet sixteen’
Culture shock couldn’t begin to describe it
The only black face in a sea of whiteness
But you persevered, worked hard, collected the skills
To support fam back home and pay the bills
Became Dr. Shungu, much praise is due
So whatever we achieve is a reflection of you
One son an educator, the other in medicine
Following the legacy you set for them
As a father you were there to help guide our steps
While too many black fathers up and left
You up and started your own non-profit, that’s right
United Front Against Riverblindness - giving the gift of sight*

*Find out more about United Front Against Riverblindness (UFAR), founded by Dr. Daniel Shungu, at www.riverblindness.org
For Kids...
(or young at heart)

Puzzle

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

In the Christmas story in Luke 2, an angel tells some shepherds to go see baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

Directions: Follow the maze to arrive in Bethlehem.