



The Vine

A newsletter of First Mennonite Church
May 2022

Sabbatical Preparation

Part 1: Sabbatical for Pastor Michael Crosby

by Marcia E. Nelson,
Pastoral Support Committee Chair

Our pastors are employed via a Memorandum of Understanding which is written by the Pastoral Support Committee upon hire or following formal reviews. Pastor Michael's most recent one was approved by Council in May 2021. In addition to stating the terms of the position, delineating vacation, ensuring the provision of an office and furniture, etc., the memorandum also addresses sabbath, spiritual care, and a sabbatical. This concern for the well-being of our pastors stems from an awareness of the need for renewal due to the size and complexity of the job of pastoring. Although we are all charged to *bear one another's burdens* I suspect that the load is not equally distributed. Sabbath and spiritual care are part of the memorandum as are sabbaticals. Michael is due for one during the summer of 2022.

Central District Conference of the Mennonite Church, to which we belong, suggests that there are also benefits to the congregation from giving time away. Pastors generally stay longer, and serve with renewed energy upon their return, having experienced "spiritual refreshment, new vision, strengthened skills and wider perspectives." Congregations benefit from the chance to "exercise lay leadership gifts" and hear new voices during the pastor's time away. Sabbatical leaves can take various forms including study, rest and spiritual renewal, service, or writing. All, in all, sabbaticals are a win.

Pastor Michael's Memorandum of Understanding states that the congregation will provide the pastor with a four-month sabbatical at full salary and benefits at the completion of each period of four years of service with FMC. The timing, length, and nature of the sabbaticals will be as agreed between the Pastoral Support Committee and the pastor. Michael has set the dates of his sabbatical,

June 6-August 29, and he and Pastor Deb have been working to ensure that his responsibilities are covered during his absence. We (Sheryl Dyck, Sam Cox, Michael, Deb, and I) have discussed this at Pastoral Support Committee meetings. While we will all miss him, we wish him well in this venture.

Here is what Pastor Michael has in mind:

Part 2: Sabbatical Plans

by Pastor Michael

I am grateful for the sabbatical practice that infuses FMC's care and support for us pastors. As I approach twelve years of pastoring at FMC, this will be my third sabbatical. Over this extended time, it feels like a sabbath rhythm akin to the Torah's counsel to give fields a fallow year (Exodus 23:11).

In the past, I have described my sabbaticals as an opportunity for rest, retreat, and research. That holds true again this summer, though with an emphasis on the first: rest. I am tired! When I pause long enough to acknowledge it, I can see how these past 2+ years of constant Covid adjustments have been exhausting. Even as I make plans for the summer, I find myself struggling to leave parts of the calendar fallow. What will I *do* that week or the next!? As I listen for the Spirit's wisdom, and wise people around me, I hear the call for abundant time with no prescribed outcomes or expectations.

The Hebrew word *shabbat*, from which we get "Sabbath," often appears in verb form. It doesn't just mean "rest;" it means more precisely, "stop!"

We do have a steady stream of family adventures planned, which is another gift of the sabbatical. Most of July will be in New Hampshire with my parents. I am eager to be with Dad as much as possible. While there, in addition to regular hiking outings and playing through some world-class disc golf courses, I'm planning a retreat at the Green Mountain Monastery in Greensboro, Vermont. It was co-founded by the Sisters of the Earth Community and the eco-theologian Thomas Berry.

Sabbatical Plans continued

I was very excited to join a 9-day “Eco-Excursion” to Oregon, a partnership between MC USA’s Mennonite Men, a forest restoration project, and the Eloheh Indigenous Center for Earth Justice, but the trip was canceled only a couple weeks ago. I’m still working on an alternative.

Lastly, I do have some research plans, revising written work – mostly from sermons – that brings concerns about economic justice into our readings of Jesus’s parables in the Gospels. I’ve been thinking about a more in-depth exploration of this since preaching on the parables a couple years ago, and I want to try to expand these writings into a series of articles or other written work.

In addition to my own rest, I am excited for the congregation’s opportunities – for people in the church to step into important roles and to receive contributions in ministry from people outside the church. Pastor Deb and I have been making plans. We are excited to welcome Regina Shands Stoltzfus (Goshen College) and Joni Sancken (United Theological Seminary and FMC member) as guest preachers on different Sundays this summer. Church Council will be providing opportunities for engaging the revision of our congregational Guidelines. And the Service & Outreach Committee is staying connected to the RAWtools (rawtools.org) anti-gun violence community event that we have helped initiate. And there’s more:

Part 3: FMC this Summer

by Pastor Deb

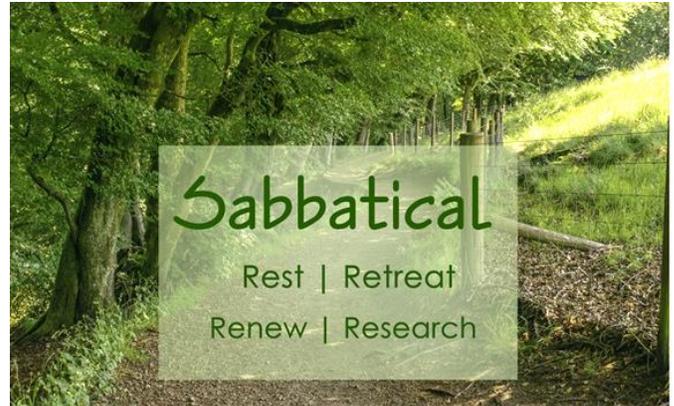
Although we will all miss Pastor Michael this summer, I wish him a joyful and refreshing Sabbatical! While Pastor Michael is away, we have invited Sarah Lake-Rayburn to minister with me.

Some of us know Sarah well, since she spent many of her growing up years at First Mennonite. We knew Sarah as an amazing actress and wonderfully honest and dynamic person. After high school, Sarah graduated from Goshen College, then worked for a bit in costume design for a theater company in Michigan.

Three years ago, Sarah began seminary at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston. She plans to finish her degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling in another year and then to pursue chaplaincy.

Sarah will be preaching frequently this summer, as well as offering a conversation series on faith and mental health (more information coming soon). She will be splitting her time this summer between Urbana, where she will be staying with her sister Hannah, and her home in Chicago, which she shares with her partner, Nick. Her schedule will vary from week to week, but she is also glad to set up a time to talk individually with anyone who is interested.

I look forward to working with Sarah and I am sure you will find her delightful and inspiring!



Pantoums: A Form of Prayer

Our “Leaning into God’s Presence” Sunday school class is exploring different prayer options, one in the form of a poem called a pantoum. Here are two pantoums written by class participants for your contemplation:

I'm thankful for Hannah and Daniel.
They bring me joy, bring light to my eyes.
Small flames burning, like a bright candle
that grants sight, perspective it buys.

They bring me joy, bring light to my eyes.
Even in fuss, fights, messes, and pain
that grants sight, perspective it buys.
My unconditional love they'll retain.
- by David Needham

So thankful, Lord, for sending spring,
With yellow and pink, purple and green.
We praise with joy, and dance and sing
A bouquet of hope through many a scene

With yellow and pink, purple and green
comes love in many sizes and shapes.
A bouquet of hope through many a scene -
Budding trees, flowers, bunnies, birds and snakes.
- by Bev Hertle



Meet Danielle Beard

by Norma Nelson

Newcomers to FMC have not yet been able to participate in the full experience of FMC's services, what it has to offer, nor its prospects. One of those newcomers, Danielle

Beard, checked out FMC last September and was delighted with the reception she received. "I appreciate Pr. Michael and Pr. Deb so much and really enjoy learning from the sermons, centered around love and how we treat each other. About trying to be Jesus to other people and live as He lived. I find that very beautiful and very helpful; it helps me to grow in my faith."

Danielle is looking forward to more personal engagement with FMC's various groups. Currently, she is involved with the Young Adults, which is great, she said, "also because there are people from Arizona, California, and the East Coast who can participate on Zoom."

She had received a bachelor's degree in music education at the University of Illinois in 2006 fully intending to pursue a career combining music with youth ministry. Having been raised in the Southern Baptist tradition, she attended Northern Baptist Seminary near Chicago to fulfill the second part of that goal.

"I completed my seminary education in three years of full-time classes while working part-time. I had to do Clinical Pastoral Education while doing the Master of Divinity courses and I enjoyed it. I think anyone who ever did chaplaincy work either hated it or never wanted to do it again. Or, if they liked it, they became a chaplain."

So, during her residency, when one of her colleagues recommended her for the chaplaincy of a nursing home, she became the health care chaplain for that facility instead of a youth pastor. She first worked one year in a hospital and then six years in the nursing home.

Nursing homes in general have been understaffed and the obligations of their personnel increased. "I regularly visited everyone in the facility but spent more time with those who had no family. Family members had only 30 minutes to visit, but I got to know them, talk with them, and pray with them." Kudos to Danielle for the six years she was able to devote to the residents and their caregivers.

She would probably still be there, except "I was at that facility in spring of 2020 when Covid hit, and activities were stopped. It was a very sad period with everyone confined to their rooms. The facility was owned by Lake County and bought out by a private company. The organization at church that funded me didn't want to fund a facility that was privately owned. I also lost direct funding from the church. And the privately owned company didn't want to fund a chaplain either, so I lost my job and decided to come back here."

Danielle came here instead of going to her hometown of Mahomet, where her family of mom, two brothers, and one sister-in-law still reside. Instead, she moved to Savoy with her 15-year-old cat Rocky last September. She sometimes thinks about going to law school and then working for a nonprofit that does advocacy work.

She keeps herself busy with job hunting, most recently at Carle as a hospice chaplain. She also enjoys reading and, weather permitting, hiking and bicycling. Danielle enjoys theater—plays, being in plays, going to see plays—perhaps slightly influenced by Doug Malcolm, another FMCer also in the Young Adult group. Snorkeling and/or scuba diving might be on her bucket list (it's never too early to start one) after reflecting on a wonderful trip to Hawaii when she was in high school.

You can find Danielle's contact information in the FMC directory. She would love to hear from you if you have any shared interests, and she would be extremely grateful if you could direct her in any way in her quest for employment.





FMC Library Update

by Rosalee Otto,
Library Committee Convener

The Library Committee has been processing a large backlog of new books and donations. Please look for these on the table in the foyer.

A special thanks to Dave and Neta Jackson, as we have greatly increased the youth book section, which can now be found on the shelves to the right of the fireplace. Adults are also invited to explore this collection.

Spring Worship Memories

by Bruce Miller



Above: Lent Animal Puppet Stories during children's time

Below: A Faithful Remnant of the Hallelujah Chorus Singers



How to See Deer

from *Lifelines* by Philip Booth,
Shared by Marcia E Nelson

Forget roadside crossings.
Go nowhere with guns.
Go elsewhere your own way,

lonely and wanting.
Or stay and be early:
next to deep woods

inhabit old orchards.
All clearings promise.
Sunrise is good,

and fog before sun.
Expect nothing always;
find your luck slowly.

Wait out the windfall.
Take your good time
to learn to read ferns;

make like a turtle:
downhill toward slow water.
Instructed by heron,

drink the pure silence.
Be compassed by wind.
If you quiver like aspen

trust your quick nature:
let your ear teach you
which way to listen.

You've come to assume
protective color; now
colors reform to

new shapes in your eye.
You've learned by now
to wait without waiting;

as if it were dusk
look into light falling:
in deep relief

things even out.
Be careless of nothing.
See what you see.

Service & Outreach Mission Corner

FMC's 2022 spending plan lists 34 organizations that are beneficiaries of our mission giving. At least five others are recipients of either the children's offering or special congregational offerings. We provide you with information about some of these important groups. Featured this month is Mennonite Church USA.



An Overview

FMC belongs to the denomination Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). The denomination's vision, which also guides our own congregation, states that "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." To live out this vision, MC USA serves its congregations through its area conferences, denominational agencies, and a multitude of initiatives and resources. The best way to follow MC USA news is to sign up for the weekly *Peacemail* email newsletter (mennoniteusa.org/publications).

Recent initiatives of MC USA are exciting and wide-ranging. The #bringthepeace campaign provides financial resources for congregations doing peacebuilding in their local contexts. Only just announced, a new "Mennonites Against Militarism" is a collaboration with Mennonite Central Committee to offer U.S. youth viable alternatives to military recruitment. Recent faith formation resources include: a massive collection of anti-racism tools for congregations; a card deck called *Pause: Play, Breathe, Play*, containing 40 ways to stop, slow down, have fun, and reconnect with God and each other; and a curriculum project produced by the Women in Leadership center entitled, *Laboring Toward Wholeness – A Training On Dismantling Patriarchy*.

The denomination also provides resources for pastors and other clergy (like chaplains). We rely on MC USA's guidance for negotiating pastoral salaries and employment arrangements and conducting occasional pastoral and congregational reviews. Our pastors and staff also have access to health insurance through a denominational program called *The Corinthian Plan*, which merges conventional health insurance with a mutual aid project that helps congregations with fewer financial resources to provide insurance for their pastors.

An Update

MC USA holds a bi-annual week-long Convention, consisting of a large gathering for high school youth, along with workshops and worship sessions for all ages in the church. Convention also provides time for a series of delegate sessions; delegates from congregations, conferences, and other denominational entities come to discern about church business, theological statements, and other matters of church polity. The 2021 Convention was limited due to Covid, and with several critical matters proposed for discussion, the Executive Board decided to hold a special delegate session in 2022, rather than wait a full biennium. The special session will take place May 27-30 in Kansas City. Sheryl Dyck and Pastor Michael have been appointed by Church Council to serve as FMC's two allotted delegates. Four resolutions have been presented:

1. "For Justice in the U.S. Criminal Legal System" documents the violence and racial disparities in the U.S. practices of policing, cash bail, sentencing, and incarceration, and calls on MC USA churches to respond with education, advocacy, and action.
2. "Mennonite Church USA Accessibility Resolution" was created by the Anabaptist Disabilities Network in collaboration with Mennonite Health Services and invites us "to deepen our understanding of barriers for people with disabilities, to take action to make our community life and facilities accessible and welcoming to all, and to discern and affirm the gifts of each person for the common good."
3. "Clarification on MC USA Polity..." is presented by the MC USA Executive Board. It acknowledges the history of a document called "Membership Guidelines" [for membership in MC USA], which was created in 2001 at MC USA's inception. It names the document's purpose and shortcomings. Prominent among these is its call for punishment of clergy who officiate same-sex weddings and the congregations who support them, a prescription that has never been universally approved or enforced by conferences or congregations. The resolution asks, "to retire the Membership Guidelines as the active polity in MC USA."
4. "A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation" was drafted by the leadership team of Inclusive Mennonite Pastors, an informal support network of MC USA clergy advocating for full queer inclusion in the church. The resolution has been sponsored by 27 congregations from a range of MC USA conferences. FMC is one of these sponsors, following discussion and a decision in fall 2020. It picks up where #3 above ("Clarification on MC USA Policy...") leaves off, insisting that it's not enough simply to "retire" the Guidelines. A path to healing for the church includes naming the ways that our policies and practices have been harmful and committing to concrete actions that begin the work of repair.

This is a substantial delegate session at a significant moment in the life of MC USA! As Sheryl and Pastor Michael prepare to represent FMC at the session, we want to hear from you. There are several ways you can participate:

- Visit mennoniteusa.org/special-delegate-session-22/ to read the full resolutions and view resources compiled by MC USA. These include recorded webinars about the role of resolutions in MC USA and discussion of each of the proposed resolutions.
- Come to an all-church conversation on **Sunday, May 22 at 12 p.m.** (just after Sunday School) to learn more about the proposed resolutions, ask questions, and discuss them together.
- Reach out to Sheryl and Pastor Michael individually with your thoughts and/or questions.
- Finally, MC USA has issued "A Call to Prayer and Fasting" for individuals and communities in the time leading up to the delegate session. Denominational leaders are hosting a prayer and fasting webinar on May 2 at 7 p.m., open to all; registration is free at the MC USA website. During this important time of decision-making for our denomination, please be in prayer for the leaders and delegates from across MC USA.



Thursday Morning (9:30 am) Bible Study - Fall 2021

Neither rain, nor masks, nor cold, nor wind could prevent the Bible Study from carrying on!!



Ideas from Everence

by Keith Springer



Everence helps individuals, organizations, and congregations integrate finances with faith through a national team of advisors & representatives.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A WILL

Do your loved ones know your final wishes? Have confidence your legacy will be a blessing lived beyond your years. The will preparation benefit for Everence members provides a partial financial reimbursement on the costs of preparing or updating your will. Learn more at everence.com/member-benefits.

SIGN UP FOR MYNEIGHBOR CARD

Everence donated over \$444,000 in January 2022 to congregations and charities through its MyNeighbor credit card. You can join in the joy of generosity to generate reward dollars every time you use your card. Our faith-based partner, Everence, will donate 1.50% of the total amount of a purchase to our church or a charity of your choice. Learn more at everence.com/myneighbor.

Questions? Please reach out to me as your FMC Everence Advocate.

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