



The Vine

A newsletter of First Mennonite Church
July 2022

FMC Anti-Racism Audit Report

Introduction

Sheryl Dyck, Council Chair

It was a priority of the Church Council last year to begin the work of dismantling racism at FMC. That council purchased the services of Widerstand Consulting, whose mission is “(to) guide organizations to dismantle racism within their organizations”, led by Tobin Shearer and Regina Shands Stoltzfus. This priority has continued this year as many from the congregation participated in the [training offered by Widerstand](#). A committee was formed to guide us through this process, who you will see listed at the bottom of the report. In six weekly sessions, several groups of five to six people met to discuss online training sessions. Following is the report of this training from the audit committee, along with a second report articulating some of the recommendations of the committee. Please take some time to look this over and give the recommendations some thought. A big thank-you goes out to the committee for the time and careful thought that they have put into helping us conduct this study.

Participating in the Widerstand training is only the beginning of our work of dismantling racism here at FMC. On-going work includes incorporating anti-racism priorities into the re-writing of the Organizational Guidelines, which is also in process this year. Regina Shands Stoltzfus, one of the writers of the Widerstand training, will be coming to speak on August 7 with time for questions afterward and hopefully time to meet with Council. We are also consulting with Widerstand for connection with other congregations who may have been through this process and what we may learn from them.

Thank you for taking the time to look all of this over. Don't hesitate to reach out to anyone on Church Council with questions, concerns, or ideas you may have to continue to address the inherent racism we all live with.

FMC Anti-Racism Audit Committee Report

Sundiata Cha-Jua's commentary, “Lifting the veil on racial oppression in C-U”, appeared in the Saturday-Sunday, March 26-27, 2022 edition of the News-Gazette. He highlighted in his commentary the findings of 24/7 Wall St, a financial news and opinion company, that included an updated list of the worst places for Black people to live in the United States. Out of 383 Metropolitan regions, C-U ranked 20th! He stated that “Alleviating the cause of systematic anti-Black racial oppression should be the priority of C-U's governmental bodies, churches, social welfare agencies and social-movement organizations.” This, he said “will require truly innovative thinking and bold action.”

Dismantling racism, white supremacy, and the Doctrine of Discovery will indeed require innovative thinking and bold action. These words from Angela Davis are at the heart of the work of the FMC Anti-Racist Audit Committee's work and the work that will continue: “In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist.”

We took our first steps together by doing an Audit, (even though incomplete), participating in the Widerstand Training, and having Conversation Groups whose recommendations are attached to this Audit. This is an initial attempt to commit to anti-racism as a whole institution, much like our commitment to be open and affirming or to be a peace church or have a green team, and a Sister church. It is a step to strive for day-to-day participation in seeking justice rather than just showing up in a crisis. It is a congregational commitment rather than just the work of the Racial Justice Working Group.

We reviewed policies and documents, but there are also precedents, informal policy, institutional memory, norms, and other things that were hard for the Audit Committee to examine. Focus Groups, Topic Nights, and conversations will be important as we move forward into a congregational life of cyclical plans and actions.

FMC Anti-Racism Audit Committee Recommendations

April 4, 2022



A follow-up to the Widerstand training could be reading and discussing “Been in the Struggle: Pursuing an Antiracist Spirituality” by Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Tobin Miller Shearer, authors of the Widerstand Training. They ask this question: “Is it possible to foster anti-racist spirituality that is deliberate and tended to throughout the church year?”

The Widerstand training posed this challenge: “Transform the congregation from one that only pays attention to white privilege and racial identity when crisis forces it to do so to a congregation that is equipped to focus on and dismantle white privilege, whiteness and white supremacy as a fundamental and normal part of its existence in non-crisis moments.”

This is spiritual work and our ongoing work as a congregation is both timely and essential.

2022 Racial Audit Committee:

Co-chairs, Karen McKenzie and Bharat Patel
Dianna Black, TJ Black Omo-Osagie
David Horst-Lehman, Kaye Massanari
Melissa & Pete Shungu, Pastor James Fielder
Pastor Michael

To Do:

- Connect with other congregations who have been through the Widerstand trainings and share actions and next steps
- Run a focus group of people from outside the congregation to learn about how we are seen in the town instead of just thinking about how we see ourselves. Though our own internal conversation groups are very valuable as well.

To Do

(but they also seem like applying white supremacy culture to the process):

- Written assessment of our organization and leadership styles and their relationship to white supremacy culture
- Written assessment of our social and institutional culture and its relationship to internalized racial superiority
- Write out a clear plan with clear goals, clear deadlines, and an accountability structure

A compendium of our comments and suggestions can be found on the next page.

QUOTES TO REMEMBER (and/or put on our sign):

“WE REJECT
the American original sin of racism.”
– *The Moore Manifesto*

“Work for racial justice within ourselves,
our congregation, and our community”
– *Pastor Michael Crosby*

A COMPENDIUM OF COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS FROM THE ANTI-RACISM AUDIT COMMITTEE

Subject	Things To Continue [and add]	Things To Add or Do	Things To Change
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting peace witness with Anti-racism [+ anti-taser, etc.] Pastors include Anti-racism work in their self-reporting [but people could call them out sometimes] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study and report on FMC-specific history as it relates to land, race, and ethnicity Study congregation demographics? Look for outside assessors and learn about how people in the broader community see our church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State what we are for, not just what we are against Take action, even if it involves making mistakes
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-racism trainings [but expand to all committees, Menno 101, children and youth, the public, etc.] Keep examining the sources of our wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunday school class on Black history or Black church history Study intersectionality and the complexities of general racism and specific anti-Black violence Topic night on “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in people and education not in written procedures
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoom and YouTube make our service open and accessible [could do more with our online presence] Yard signs [more neighbor ones, do more with FMC’s location] Partnerships with Doctrine of Discovery (DoD) coalition, Interfaith Alliance, TTV, First Followers, sister church, peace garden, C-U at Home, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use our prominent building location to send more messages Work to push Habitat for Humanity to become a reparations-driven restorative housing program Put pressure on Everence to invest in an anti-racist way Commission BIPOC artists Scholarships for BIPOC youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling of stigma around attendees who are visible minorities because of the assumption they are people being helped. A feeling not there for white people who are being helped (larger social stigma around receiving aid being brought in)
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turn repeated ad-hoc measures into a permanent FMC commitment to anti-racism Broad regular and one-time giving Good welcome message in the bulletin [add that to the bags] – the message that you are always-already welcome here and not provision-ally here as a guest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List BIPOC vendors, restaurants, contractors, etc. for both the church and members to use Be generous with our abundance: (see below)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have lots of good in-group sharing of time, food, etc. through potlucks and progressive dinners but what do we do that is open to everyone in our community?

**One of our main ideas was some kind of family nights open to the public where we provide food that anyone can come to eat (pie), activities that kids can do (learn to make pie), and otherwise, take explicit action to make our church building a welcoming place. It is okay to spend resources lavishly to be generous hosts. Youth activities could even come after these nights to hold the kind of evening/night hours that youth tend to favor. We more or less assigned T.J. to lead these night-time youth activities.*

QUILTS

by Lynne Sancken

Bringing wholeness out of brokenness. That is what quilts do well. This summer and fall you will see more than 10 quilts as visuals at the front of the sanctuary. There are elements they have in common. First, they tell stories of individuals from our pasts. These are the people who lovingly pieced and then quilted bits and pieces of fabric together from their lives. Second, they tell stories of the quilts themselves. They were created for births, weddings, and as special gifts. Third, they tell stories of love and connectedness - grandmothers quilting with their children and grandchildren, passing down a skill; the connectedness with art - beautiful colors and arrangements and incredible tiny perfect stitches; the connectedness with history - "this quilt was made by my great-grandmother..."

Many of us have a history with quilts. My own grandmother was an avid quilter. Her love of the color pink came out in the choices of fabrics she made. I remember, as a child, lying under one of the masterpieces she made just for me. I loved to look at each scrap she had used, remembering the apron she had worn as she fried her delicious chicken, or the dress my mother sewed for one of her daughters, giving the leftover scraps to Nana. Many of you have memories that are similarly connected to your quilts.

I hope that these quilts and their stories will be inspiring and spiritual reminders of our connections with each other and with God. Making beauty out of scraps of cloth. Finding a purpose instead of throwing away. We, too, are loved despite our brokenness. God is all about bringing wholeness out of brokenness.



This quilt is an example of a "Crazy Quilt," a quilting style popular in the Victorian era, the late 1800s. This quilt was made by Sarah Little's great-grandmother, Priscilla Buser Mast, as part of her wedding trousseau. She was married to David Mast of Berlin, Ohio, in 1886. Her initials, PB, can be seen in several of the blocks as well as the date 1885 in one block.



The quilt was made by Nancy Fleming Norcross, great grandmother of Sue Biddle's father. Nancy was born in Erie, PA in 1809 and died in Erie on October 31, 1908, the 9th birthday of Sue's father. The quilt was in Sue's family when she was born and she has had it since about 1960. The quilt pattern is "Double Irish Chain" and is the finest hand quilting Sue has ever seen.

Forward Together

by Sharon Monday



“Forward together! Not one step back!”

This rallying call of the 140 million people in the U.S. who are low-income workers and living in poverty resounded in the capitol at the June 18th Poor People’s Campaign march. Although I was not physically present at this march for justice, the voices of people all over the U.S. came through loud and clear as I listened to their testimonies on the virtual screen:

- *A teacher in Texas said his dream was that he would no longer have to tell his students to be brave as they drilled on safety in the event of an attack by a person with an assault weapon in school.*
- *The grandson who grieved his 86-year-old grandmother gunned down with other victims of targeted racial hatred at the only grocery store in a food desert in an impoverished neighborhood in Buffalo, NY.*
- *A woman from a rural farm community in Montana who spoke of the devastation of their lands by a copper mining corporation.*
- *A young man with mental illness who survives on \$585/month disability payments in a squalid, crowded apartment.*
- *A grandmother from Flint, MI who grieves for all the children poisoned by water and air pollution in their community who said 8 years later the system is still broken while they pay the highest water bills in the country.*
- *A civic leader who seeks repair legislation for Indigenous people whose lands, culture, and languages were stolen from them and which continues today with broken treaties and the transgenerational loss of income equality for African-Americans.*
- *An immigrant from El Salvador who does back-breaking work without the benefits of medical care for injuries experienced on the job.*



“We won’t be silent anymore.”

The 43 percent of adults and 52 percent of children who are the poor and low-wage earners in the United States – who represent the rainbow of brown, black, red, yellow, and white brothers and sisters are giving voice with their stories and testimonies to our national moral crisis which must be corrected, reckoned with and repaired. These injustices are interlocking and policy choices that engaged citizens must address at every level of government. [Visit the Poor People’s Campaign website](#) to engage and unite our voices for change.

“When one tugs at a single thread in nature, he finds it is attached to the rest of the world.” - John Muir

Faith in Place is a multi-faith community that is also lifting up the interlocking injustices of poverty, racism, the environmental crisis, health care, and the economy by working across faith communities to bring hope and collective action for policy change at the state and national level. At First Mennonite Church, we have been engaged with Faith in Place since its formation by Rev. Brian Sauder, a former member of FMC. Faith in Place is now a multi-state organization representing Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana. I have found the annual Green Team summits, lobby days, and action alerts, resources, and connections with other Green Teams especially valuable for staying engaged and committed to addressing and working for change on interconnected systems of injustice that endanger all of us on the planet. Catherine Hayhoe Professor and author of “Saving Us: A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World” will be the keynote speaker at this in-person and virtual summit from September 11-13. [Free registration is available on the Green Team Summit website.](#) Join me in staying engaged.

“Forward together! Not one step back!”
“We will not be silent.”



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: University YMCA Friday Forum and Mennonite Brethren Council.

The University YMCA Friday Forum

by Dannie Otto

Established in 1873, the University YMCA is one of the oldest organizations affiliated with the University of Illinois. Originally a more overtly Christian and religious organization offering Bible studies and daily chapel as an alternative to the required daily chapel led by the university president, John David Gregory. Over time it has evolved into a more secular organization offering opportunities for student service projects, meeting spaces for campus groups, and housing for a small group of students on the 3rd floor.

One of the long-standing traditions of the University YMCA is the weekly Friday Forum, meeting at 12:00 noon. Attendees are invited to bring brown bag lunches or order food from the Thai eatery adjacent to the meeting hall. The format is a lecture for 30 – 40 minutes followed by a Q & A with audience participation. The formal part of the meeting always ends a few minutes before 1:00 p.m. so professors and students can get to their classes, but typically the lecturer and interested persons continue the conversation. First Mennonite Church has been a co-sponsor of this series for many years, even decades, although I don't know the origin of this affiliation. The church and other sponsors are always acknowledged in Friday Forum literature and in acknowledgments opening each meeting. Each lecture and discussion is recorded for broadcast on WEFT and currently on the Friday Forum YouTube channel. In earlier years the lectures were also broadcast on Urbana's Public Access TV channel. During the tenure of David Inge on WILL's Focus 580, the Friday Forum lecturer would be a guest on Focus 580 followed by an appearance at the Forum. This greatly increased the exposure of the Forum.

Each semester the lectures are organized according to a theme. This past semester's theme was "Diversity & Social Justice Education" and featured a presentation by FMC's own Thom Moore. Examples of previous themes in recent years include:

- Fall 2017: "Building a Better Environmental Movement"
- Fall 2013: "Beyond Mass Incarceration"
- Spring 2013: "Faith in Action"
- Spring 2011: "Americans at War"
- Spring 2010: "Social Entrepreneurship as a Force for Change"
- Fall 2010: "De/Re-constructing the American Dream"



Lecturers can be local figures from the university or community, but frequently are national figures from leading universities or are nationally recognized activists or authors. I attended many of these Friday sessions, especially after our family moved to Urbana in 2004 and I could easily attend the sessions. I got to hear many fine presenters over the years. One of the personal highlights was March 1994 when I was the invited speaker for the Forum and interviewed by David Inge on Focus 580 in a series on Health Care Reform. During those years Barbara and I were involved in the Campaign for Better Health Care advocating for Canadian style single-payer health insurance growing out of our experience living in Canada. Someday in my leisure I hope to look up those presentations on their digital archives to see what a more youthful and hopeful me had to say about the topic.

I encourage any of you who can make time on Fridays at noon when the university is in session to [check out the schedule of the Friday Forum](#).

Brethren Mennonite Council

by Randy Nelson

Brethren Mennonite Council (BMC) was founded in 1976 by Martin Rock, a gay man from the Church of the Brethren. After successfully working for MCC for 11 years, Mr. Rock was deemed unqualified when he was open about his sexual orientation. For nearly 50 years the Brethren Mennonite Council has been an advocate for change and haven for those who have been rejected by the church but refuse to accept that rejection. Its mission is to cultivate an inclusive church and society and to care for the Mennonite and Brethren lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and those who support them. Because of denominational policies of exclusion, BMC has no official institutional ties with any denomination, but it has made its influence felt through the many supportive congregations and church members, its unofficial presence, and more recently official exhibit space at national conventions.

BMC seeks to fulfill its mission through a wide variety of programs and resources:

1) **Kaleidoscope** is a network for LGBT, questioning, and allied people on Mennonite and Brethren college campuses, but also includes those in high school and young people, in general. The Kaleidoscope Coordinator is a full-time one- or two-year volunteer position. Our own Ruben Sancken was a past Kaleidoscope coordinator. The Kaleidoscope program offers a variety of resources to support LGBT youth and their allies and provides connections with faculty, staff, alumni, and church members to help them navigate this formative time of their lives.

2) **The Supportive Communities Network** consists of over 140 members mostly Brethren and Mennonite congregations in the US who are publicly affirming LGBT members. There are some Canadian congregations, some colleges, and a few other agencies that are members. FMC joined the SCN in 2010. This network encourages interactions among welcoming congregations and provides a means to promote dialogue at the denominational level. The listing of SCN churches provides a directory for those seeking accepting churches.

3) **Connecting Families** is a support network of Brethren and Mennonite people committed to supporting families with LGBT members.

Families provide mutual support and create a community of joy through social media and periodic gatherings that include worship, education, and storytelling.

BMC communicates through an online newsletter and two blogs:

- **Newsnet** is emailed about once a month and contains announcements, a calendar of events, and news from BMC. You can subscribe to the newsletter at the link above.
- **Outspoken** is an outlet for articles and opinions from the BMC community with one or two new posts each month.
- **Coming Out Strong** is a blog focusing on contributions from youth and young adults.

The BMC website has an extensive library of digital and print resources for educating people about all aspects of gender and sexuality, curricula for churches, guidance for becoming a welcoming congregation, counseling for individuals, and worship planning. There is also a listing of workshops for congregations, pastors, youth leaders, and university students, faculty, and staff provided by BMC.



BMC recently appointed Annabeth Roeschley as the new executive director. For more than a decade, Annabeth has been an advocate for LGBT people in the Mennonite Church and recently completed her Master of Divinity degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. She grew up in Flanagan Mennonite Church and Prairieview Mennonite Church, and later had connections to the Mennonite Church of Normal. She has been a guest preacher at FMC.

Our congregation has benefited in many ways from our association with BMC. Besides guiding new members to our church, it has provided counsel for effectively advocating for LGBT people, made available educational material, and presented workshops that our members have attended. BMC is a vital force for change within the MCUSA and with the new change in denominational policy can be a valuable resource as we move toward more inclusion.