



The Vine

A newsletter of First Mennonite Church
April 2023

Burying Grief

by Rhonda Gibson

On Sunday, my FMC co-teacher, Rachel Horst Lehman, led our young children through a craft related to the story of Jesus' death. Each child used tissue paper to create a section of the cross (image below). As they worked, she talked with them about what feelings the colors represented to them, especially in connection to the story they had just heard. As I listened to the conversation, I admit feeling relief that someone else handled this Good Friday story. I'm happily teaching next week about Easter and its hopeful message.

I've always been conflicted about the symbolism of the Good Friday cross. It's a brutal symbol of violence perpetrated by the State, yet also a powerful reminder of God's willingness to enter places of deep uncertainty, pain and suffering to bring us hope, grace and forgiveness.

I find myself more impatient this year, wanting to skip over Good Friday and move on to Easter instead. After all, stories of grief and loss are everywhere: gun violence, war, destructive storms and loss of habitat, loss of loved ones, loss of health and access to safe and legal health care, attacks on LGBTQ+ and on classroom discussions about race and discrimination, Covid's re-shaping of our collective lives...the list of stories seems endless. Maybe I'm experiencing post-pandemic distress disorder (is there such a thing?), but I haven't been eager to engage with Good Friday this year and have struggled to bridge this Good Friday – Easter period of Holy Week.



I recently came across [a news story about Hope Hall](#), a school in New York serving children and teens who learn differently and who struggled in conventional schools. The students at Hope Hall have a tradition of writing down a fear and then burying it in the ground as a way of confronting the fear. Trees, shrubs or flowers are then planted over the "grave" as a symbol of moving forward in hope and new growth.

I found this act of burying and planting to be deeply moving and theological. For me, it's also helpful in bridge between Good Friday and Easter. When Jesus was buried, the disciples were confused and grieving; their hope seemed buried alongside Jesus. Before they had time to process all that had happened, Jesus appeared to them and they were surprised to learn that their hope was alive after all. Not only alive, but it would grow in unexpected ways that surpassed what they had envisioned.

Like the disciples, I am wrestling with loss and grief. So, as I enter into this 2023 Holy Week, I've decided to take up the Hope Hall tradition of burying and planting. I'll bury a grief or two in the ground and plant flowers, trusting God to bring healing and make a way for new and hopeful things ahead.

I don't think that I'm alone in this journey. What loss are you experiencing this Good Friday? I invite you to acknowledge and grieve the loss, and then bury it – whether literally in the ground or figuratively through journaling, prayer, meditation or a contemplative nature walk. When Easter arrives, consider ways that God might bring healing and take hope in the new things God may grow in your life and in our world.

**One Prayer, One Drum, One Circle:
Apache Stronghold Spiritual Convoy
to the 9th District Court in Pasadena, March 21, 2023**

by Sharon Monday



Stay Prayerful, Stay Peaceful, Stay Positive.

These are the words of Dr. Wendsler Nosie, Sr., founder and spiritual leader of the Apache-Stronghold and former Chairman and Councilman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe as we prepare to enter the courthouse.

We are here to listen and to bear witness.

The rain is pouring down on us as we stand in Defender's Park, one block from the Courthouse. We are reminded today the rain is a blessing and a witness. The rain brings us together as we huddle close and look out for each other including the infants, young children, teenagers, women, families, and elders who have come to defend the sacred holy site of the Apache Nation, Chi' Chil Bildagoteel known as Oak Flat. Oak Flat is located about an hour east of Phoenix and part of the Tonto National Forest. We pray with sage smudging, words, song and with our feet and bodies as we dance gently on the soggy grass and circle the four directions. We know the support of the ancestors and prayers from many people of faith throughout the country and world encircle all of us gathered here today.

The path to decolonize is spiritual work.

We are soaked and shivering yet warm in heart and community spirit as we listen to defending attorney, Luke Goodrich, Vice President, and Senior Counsel of Becket Law, formerly the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty present his opening remarks to the 11 federal judges who are rehearing the Apache Stronghold v United States case today. Sitting beside me are Luke Goodrich's young daughters, Salome and Zoe, who have traveled from Florida to learn how capitalism and a colonial mindset disconnects us from who we are. Motivations based on profit and greed twist and distort to make it appear perfectly reasonable for the U.S government to transfer 2,500 acres of protected lands to a foreign mining company, Resolution Copper. These lands are the sacred site since time immemorial where the Apache people connect to Creator in prayer, collect water and medicinal plants for ceremonies, gather acorns and other foods and honor the dead buried here. The mining operation would permanently destroy this holy land with a two-mile-wide, 1,100-foot-deep crater rendering the land unusable for Apache religious practices and ceremonies.



Is this transfer of land a substantial burden to the religious practices of the Apache people?

As defense attorney Luke Goodrich presents his opening remarks, the judges repeatedly interrupt with questions that minimize and distract from the larger issue that is on trial...a settler nation which continues to deny the harm done by land theft from the Native peoples and to take responsibility for healing, restoration and right relationships with the Native peoples and their sacred lands.

Oak flat is holy and sacred. To destroy our lands is to destroy our identity. Our spiritual practices are held and connected to the land rather than in a building with walls.

Left: Dr. Wendsler Nosie, Sr. and allies gather in prayer prior to the court hearing at Defender's Park.

One Prayer, One Drum, One Circle, *continued*

These words reverberate in me as the court case continues. My heart and mind are telling me white settler colonialism is on trial. Will we as a nation continue to conquer, mine and destroy the Earth or will we defend the Earth and all creation for future generations to thrive? What is our sacred commitment to the land and all creation?

A decision by the court will not likely be made until later this summer. In the meantime, an Environmental Impact Statement is due any day from the National Forest Service. The land transfer would be set in motion 60 days from the date of its release. We need to be alert and prepared to respond to calls to prayer and action from Apache Stronghold.

What is my decision as a person of faith? How will I, FMC, and members of the Congregational Repair Network work together to honor the land and form right relationships with Native peoples and the Earth?

We the People, the Native people who are here from the Southwest, the Northwest, the Midwest and the East, including members of the Lummi Nation from the Pacific Northwest who completed a 30-day coastal caravan with a 25' totem pole they prepared to place in front of the Pasadena courthouse*, from the Mennonite Repair Network of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery, the Poor People's Campaign, and other faith communities gather after the trial at Defender's Park. The rain has stopped, and the sun is shining. We pray, we embrace, we share a meal and are reminded to let the elders go first. Before, during and after the court hearing, the elders share stories of ancestral wisdom and identity; the elders understand this is an important time to communicate with the younger generation and the white allies about Indigenous culture and connection. Wendsler Nosie, Sr., his spouse Theresa Nosie, adult daughters and a young granddaughter bless us before we disperse with these words:

*Continue to pray, be peacemakers and be positive.
Our battle is a spiritual battle for all of humanity and the Earth.
One prayer, one drum, one circle.*

For study and solidarity visit:

- apache-stronghold.com
- <https://dofdmennonite.org/repair-partners/apache-stronghold/>.



Above: Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition: Members from the Congregational Repair Network gather at the Pasadena Courthouse to pray and protest before the March 21 Court rehearing. The members represented Repair Partners from Tucson, Pasadena, San Francisco, Fresno, Wyandotte County & San Diego County.



Left: Lummi Nation 31-day caravan with 25' prayer totem pole through the Pacific Northwest coastal areas to Pasadena to educate and pray for the protection of Oak Flat and the San Carlo Apache Nation. The goal of the Lummi Caravan: To protect sacred sites from the existential threats of the climate crisis and extractive industries – and to ensure tribal nations have a seat at the table when decisions affecting them are made.

Showing Up with Dr. Nicole Anderson Cobb

by Janet Elaine Guthrie

The Racial Justice Working Group kicked off the 2023 "Show Up" event series the first weekend in March, hosting a community showing and follow-up discussion of *Homegrown: An Insurrection Play* by local playwright Dr. Nicole Anderson Cobb.

Dr. Anderson Cobb's play premiered at the Station Theatre in December 2022 and the theatre made a performance recording available for our program. Bad weather the night of the showing dampened attendance, but the hardy souls who came out on Friday night returned with others Sunday afternoon to engage with this talented African-American artist and social justice advocate.

The rich discussion brought forward many interwoven themes in the play including the role of faith communities in addressing polarization and violence, political radicalization in families, race relations, masculinity and gun violence, parenting challenges, women in ministry, and the costs of conflict and neglect. The play's title reflects the fact that the January 6th insurrection attracted people from all walks of life and all parts of the country, with Illinois ranking #8 in the number of people charged thus far for their participation. The challenges aren't just "out there." The challenges are right here in our hometowns.

Following the weekend, Dr. Anderson Cobb sent us the following blessing:

My hope is that the Homegrown: An Insurrection Play reminds us (in yet another fraught, challenging season in American life as we continue to live in the wake of January 6 insurrection among other shocks/stressors):

*To have EVEN MORE loving encounters
To have EVEN MORE intentional encounters
To have EVEN MORE equitable and just encounters
To have EVEN MORE courageous encounters
To have EVEN MORE sacred encounters
With one another
Each and every day
In love and hope!"*



Currently, Dr. Nicole Anderson Cobb and her collaborator Latrelle Bright are putting the finishing touches on another new work, *Unsettled: An African American Reflection on the Potawatomi Trail of Death*. This performance piece engages the forced removal of 859 Indigenous American Potawatomi from their homeland in Northern Indiana in the fall of 1838. The Potawatomi were marched to Eastern Kansas, on a route that passed through our region of East Central Illinois, with campsites near present-day Danville and Monticello. The piece invites reflection on the Potawatomi removal and the broader subject of settler colonialism and native resettlement and how we might move beyond Land Acknowledgment. The upcoming April 15th performance of *Unsettled* at Allerton Park sold out quickly.

The Potawatomi Trail of Death Association will be sponsoring a memorial caravan along the removal route this coming September. The Racial Justice Working Group plans to explore ways for FMC to be involved with the caravan and with the *Unsettled* performance piece and its important themes. Stay tuned!

APRIL OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOW UP

The FMC Racial Justice Working Group invites us to show up in places where God's hope and joy are making a way through racism. We're highlighting monthly opportunities in the CU community, and encourage you to discern where God is calling you to show up.

EXHIBIT OPENING: WELCOME TO THE POWWOW: AN INTERTRIBAL POWWOW EXPERIENCE

Saturday, April 1, 2023 from 4 – 6 pm | Location: Knight Auditorium at Spurlock Museum, 600 S. Gregory St., Urbana, IL

Join this [opening celebration of the new exhibit Welcome to the Powwow](#): An Intertribal Pow-wow Experience with a performance by [Bizhiki Culture and Dance Company](#) and reception to follow.

SEVEN LAST WORDS GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE (sponsored by the Ministerial Alliance of Champaign-Urbana & Vicinity)

Friday, April 7, 2023 from 2 - 4 pm | Location: Bethel AME Church 401 E Park Street, Champaign IL 61820

RANDOLPH STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN WORK DAY FOR FMCers

April 15 | Time: 9am - Noon | Location: The garden is located on Randolph Street, just past Stratton School, near the intersection of Neil St. & Beardsley Ave. Come help prepare the gardens for the upcoming growing season! [If you plan to come, please click here to sign up.](#) Information about what to bring will be sent closer to the work day.

BETHEL AME CHURCH 160th ANNIVERSARY: April 28-30

This year marks the 160th Anniversary of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Champaign, IL, the oldest Black church in Champaign County. To pay homage to the ancestors whose faith, hard work, determination, and perseverance established a pillar in this community, they have chosen the theme: "Rooted in Faith...Honoring the Legacy" based on Psalm 78:2-7.

- **Friday, April 28, 3 - 4:30 pm. at Bethel AME (401 E. Park St., Champaign).** Public dedication ceremony for a Champaign County Historical Landmark Plaque, with a presentation by Dr. Barbara Suggs Mason. Reception to follow.
- **Saturday, April 29, 5 - 9 pm. Gala banquet and celebration at the CityView Banquet Center at the Illinois Terminal (45 E. University Ave, Champaign).** Matthew White from WCIA will be the M.C. Entertainment will include a DJ and the Bethel Reunion Choir. Tickets available through Eventbrite. Prices: \$75 individual; \$130 couple; \$535 8-person table. Those of us who plan to attend might prioritize single/couple tickets to allow for mingling. About half the seats have already been sold. [Click here to purchase tickets.](#)
- **Sunday, April 30, 11 am. Anniversary/Homecoming Worship Service at Bethel AME.**
Guest speaker: The Rev. Dr. Micheal A. Smith, Head of Spiritual Care, Bishop Anderson House, Chicago.



Sunday, May 21

Worship & Fellowship with Church of the Brethren
at the Randolph Street Community Garden



Little Food Pantry Update

by Oleta Miller

The FMC Little Food Pantry could use some additional items. We are finding that the pantry is heavily used, and we are refreshing items at least two or three times a week even during school breaks.

The donations should be new and in small unit sizes (no glass containers).

The most desired items are:

- Canned or foil pouches of tuna or other seafood, chicken, turkey, ham, or other meat
- Shelf-stable plant milks
- Small cans of beef stew, heavy soups, or chili
- Canned spaghetti sauce (Meijer carries the cans)
- Small boxes or pouches of muffin mixes (any variety)
- Small units of Mac and Cheese
- Single serving size fruits, vegetables, applesauce, or cereal
- Small containers (16-18 oz) of oatmeal and various nut butters (peanut, almond, Nutella)

Place your items directly into the Little Food Pantry. If there is no room, place items in the labeled cabinet in the youth/young adult room next to the kitchen. Questions? [Contact Bruce Miller](#).

Thank you for your continued support of this initiative!

MCC Comforters

by Sheryl Dyck

Every year Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) ships thousands of comforters to people who are displaced and in vulnerable situations around the world. Comforters may be used as bed covers, room dividers, carpets, curtain, wraps, mattresses and more and are a blessing to those recovering from disaster situations or lacking basic necessities. These colorful works of art are a tangible reminder to people that their needs are not forgotten and send a message of hope and comfort. Each comforter measures approximately 60 x 80 inches and is hand knotted with cotton yarn to keep the pieced top, batting, and bottom layer together. This makes them different than quilts or purchased blankets. There are many steps in the comforter making process—from making the comforters to distributing them to places around the world like Haiti, Ukraine, and Lebanon. - by Diana Voth, [Mennonite Central Committee](#)



The Friday Morning Comforter Knotting Circle

Our FMC comforters have been made by, as I like to say, three Kathys and a Sheryl. Kathy Anderson has used her artistic skills to piece five lovely tops. Sheryl Dyck has purchased supplies and sewed together fabric for the backing. Kathy Martin and Kathy Springer have brought their skills to help assemble them and mount them in the quilt frame. And then there are the knotters (Mary Krick, Ruth Stoltzfus, Kathy Martin, Kathy Springer, Cynthia Nafziger, Janet McClean, Lynne Sanken and Sheryl Dyck), some of whom you see in the photos! It's a fun project requiring the learning of tying a correct square knot and providing a great sense of accomplishment as each one is completed.

Scenes from Children's Sunday School During Lent



We shared grapes and crackers as we learned about Jesus' final meal with his Disciple friends, making a connection to communion at FMC. We also learned that Jesus modeled Servant love by washing his friends' feet. The children participated in hand washing and made foot care kits for a local service organization to give to people who have no home. Foot care is among the top health care issues of people living on the street and foot care items are needed.

HOLY WEEK



WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Services will be livestreamed, except for the Maundy Thursday service, which will be in-person only.

People are invited to give an additional special Holy Week Footwashing Offering at any FMC services during Holy Week to benefit DREAAM.

Driven to Reach Excellence & Academic Achievement for Males (DREAAM) works with children and young adults who need to overcome challenges such as school suspension, anger issues, parental incarceration, and low academic skills.

April 2: Palm Sunday Worship 9:15am

April 6: Maundy Thursday Meal & Service 6pm

April 7: Good Friday Service 12:15-12:45pm

April 9: Easter Sunday

- 9am Easter Sunday potluck brunch
- 10am "Hallelujah Chorus" pickup choir rehearsal
- 10:30am Worship and Communion
- No Sunday school



Mark your calendars!

**September 1 – September 3
(Labor Day Weekend)**

**FMC All-Church Retreat
at Camp Menno Haven
(Tiskilwa, IL)**

Theme: This is the Day

Join us for fellowship, worship and an opportunity to enjoy this beautiful setting.

Details and registration coming in late April.

Questions?

Ask a retreat committee member:
Mary Krick, Courtney Malcolm, Ken Moyer,
Rhonda Gibson or Pastor Michael

Facilities Committee Report

by Phil Martens, Committee Chair

Everyone knows what the Property and Finance Committee of FMC is, since it has been around for many decades. But what is the Facilities Committee? During the past year, Council decided that we should have a new name, since the Property part is really what we are about, and the Finance piece isn't. "Facilities" doesn't quite roll off the tongue like "P&F", but this has not prevented the committee from being centrally involved or enabling a lot of positive changes and ever-needed upkeep of our buildings and grounds.

Just a short list of initiatives and projects will give you an idea of what has been going on with our committee during the past year:

New Name,
Same Great Work!



- Completed needed Roof Repairs.
- Completed HVAC upgrades to our admin offices with heat-pump heating and cooling. (*Much appreciation to long-time committee convener Chuck Gibson for his close attention to this project, and to the pastors and Rhonda for patience while the bugs were/(are?) being worked out.*)
- Upgraded signage around the building, including new Lift and Restroom signs.
- Repainted sanctuary walls (*Shoutout to Perry Biddle for his leadership.*)
- Replaced carpet in sanctuary (*Many, many folks assisted with this effort.*)
- Replaced pews with chairs in sanctuary (*Very much a team effort by the whole congregation.*)
- Closed leaks in sanctuary Air Conditioning ducts (*Thanks to Ken Nisly-Nagele for this very itchy work.*)
- Had two successful Workdays in spring and fall (*Chuck Gibson made these happen.*)
- Repaired attic pulldown stairs (*Marlin Sieber painstakingly refurbished this back to "better-than-new" condition.*)
- Rewired the HVAC junction box in attic to take advantage of our smart thermostat (*Phil Martens wrangled a mess of wiring into a neat and enclosed unit.*)
- Carried out Radon tests in church basement (*Ken Nisly-Nagele provided the use of his Radon test equipment and analyzed the results.*)
- Added MERV13 furnace filters to sanctuary HVAC (*Phil Martens also cleaned decades of gunk from the air conditioning coils.*)
- We purchased a snowblower to deal with our sidewalk-clearing headaches (*Perry Biddle spear-headed this purchase and training.*)
- Re-fastened parking space bumpers for the apartment (*To be completed in May.*)
- Implemented gender-neutral restrooms.
- Worked with Eileen Westervelt on an Energy Audit and heating/cooling planning (*Rebecca Moyer provided this introduction to Eileen.*)
- Attended an accessibility walk-through with Mylinda Netherton, a UIUC DRES veteran who provided much fodder for our to-do list (*Tammie, Sam, and Mary Krick contributed to make this happen.*)
- Organized a volunteer grounds-keeping crew to spruce up our outdoor spaces. (*Clark Breeze provided leadership on this initiative.*)

My apologies if I missed mentioning someone...there have been so many amazing efforts by so many people, it is really hard to keep track. A big Thank You goes out to everyone who has given time, talents, and attention to keeping our facilities in such good shape.

Please Note: This year's **Spring Workday is on Saturday, May 6, and will begin with donuts and bagels at 8:30am.** There are tasks available for all interests and abilities. Many folks will be delighted to know that this is the first spring workday where we will NOT be needing to install window A/C units in the admin offices, including hauling them up from the basement storage closet. Hurray for permanent heat-pumps! Now we can save our efforts for other tasks this spring. Please look for signup sheets at the church during April.