

CELEBRATE  
EASTER

April/May 2018



# First Mennonite Church

## The Vine

### Our Faith

*by Jhon Henry Camargo Varela, CPT Colombia*

He has died, they have told me he has died.  
He has died, I saw him, he is dead.  
He has died, and with him, we have died.  
He has died, and with him our hopes have died.  
And with him our liberation has died.  
And with him the light has gone out.  
He has died, and he has left us alone in the darkness.  
He has died, and with him everything is gone... including my life.

But what happened?

They have crucified him, and on his body they made the reason very clear.  
They have crucified him, and on his hands the holes of the seeds we never sowed.  
They have crucified him, and on his forehead the thorns over which we the poor have walked.  
They have crucified him, and from his body the blood of our brothers and sisters.  
They have crucified him, and from his eyes our tears have been dried.  
They have crucified him, and our mothers who give birth in pain, today fall in pain.  
They have crucified him, and with him the poor who die day by day looking to the sky and asking why?

And what happened to his body?

In a hole, they have buried him.  
In a hole, where we are only a memory.  
In a hole, where tears become silence.  
In a hole, where our brothers and sisters wait for his return.  
In a hole, where those who killed him cannot reach him.  
In a hole, where today he distances himself from this hell.  
In a hole, where our dreams are found.

And so everything is finished?

He has resurrected, and some are crazier to continue trying.  
He has resurrected, and it appears that the righteous are multiplying.  
He has resurrected, and in his name the poor have won battles.  
He has resurrected, and life has been given to the assassinated.  
He has resurrected, and those who killed them have no more hope.  
He has resurrected, and with him our hopes have triumphed.

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The Vine is also available on our  
church website (under "news"):  
[www.fmc-cu.org](http://www.fmc-cu.org)

## Sharing Stories and Reflections this Summer

by Pastor Deb

Summer is Coming! I know, it's just April 1<sup>st</sup>, but summer will be here soon. While Pastor Michael is away on Sabbatical this summer, would you consider sharing your stories or reflections during worship? I would like to invite many of you to share during church: How has God been present to you? How do you relate to God? How has your faith been important in your life? What would you like to share with your church family?

So I have set aside five summer Sundays for sharing of stories or reflections! I am thinking that 2 or 3 people could share each of those Sundays, so there would be 5-10 minutes for each story or reflection. (Shorter is OK too.) You may share whatever you would like, and you may choose a Scripture to go with your sharing.

OR

To get you thinking, some of you may prefer to start with some Scriptures and see where you resonate with the Biblical passages. So I am listing the lectionary readings with a very short hint of their themes. Feel free to pick a passage to which your story relates, or to start with your story and choose a Scripture to accompany it.

Please pray about this, and think about what you might have to share with your church family. I am glad to help anyone who has a story to tell but is not sure of how it fits or how to structure it. Thanks!



### JUNE 3

*1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)* – God's call to Samuel, who didn't recognize God's voice.

*Deuteronomy 5:12-15* – Observe the Sabbath.

*Psalms 81:1-10* – Remembering and celebrating God's past actions for Israel.

*Psalms 139:1-6; 13-18* – "O Lord, you have searched me and known me" – you know all about me!

*2 Corinthians 4:5-12* – We carry the treasure of God's light in "clay jars".

*Mark 2:23-36* – Jesus and disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath; Sabbath is made for humankind, not the other way around.

### JUNE 17

*1 Sam 15:34-16:13* – Saul dies; David is anointed by Samuel.

*Psalms 20* – May God help you in times of trouble and grant your heart's desire.

*Ezekiel 17:22-24* – God will plant a noble cedar.

*Psalms 92:1-4; 12-15* – It is good to thank the Lord for God's steadfast love.

*2 Corinthians 5:6-17* – Living as new creation in Christ.

*Mark 4:26-34* – The kingdom of God is like a seed growing, like a mustard seed that grows into a place for birds to nest.

### JULY 1

*2 Sam 1:1, 17-27* – David laments at death of Saul and Jonathan.

*Psalms 130* – Out of the depths I cry to the Lord for forgiveness and hope.

*Lamentations 3:23-33* – God's mercies never end; difficulties come; God has compassion.

*Psalms 30* – Praise and trust in God's restoring and healing.

*2 Corinthians 8:7-15* – Give out of abundance for those who need.

*Mark 5:21-43* – Healing of Jairus' daughter; healing of woman bleeding for 12 years.

**JULY 15**

*2 Sam 6:1-5; 12-19* – Moving the ark of God; dancing before the Lord.

*Psalms 24* – The earth is the Lord's. Lift up your heads for the King of Glory.

*Psalms 85:8-13* – God's salvation is at hand.

*Ephesians 1:3-14* – God's blessings through Jesus – adoptions, forgiveness, redemption, and inheritance.

*Mark 6:14-29* – Story of the beheading of John the Baptist

**AUGUST 19**

*1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14* – David dies; Solomon asks for wisdom and is also given riches and honor.

*Psalms 111* – Praise the Lord. The works of God's hands are faithful and just.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

*Proverbs 9:1-6* – Walk in the way of wisdom and insight.

*Psalms 34:9-14* – Fear the Lord; keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

*Ephesians 5:15-20* – Be careful how you live; be filled with the Spirit; give thanks.

*John 6:51-58* – Whoever eats the living bread from heaven will live forever.

## DECLARATION AGAINST HATE, VIOLENCE, & INJUSTICE

*from the Sisters in Faith Leadership*

*The following statement was developed and signed by a number of local women in faith leadership roles, including Pastor Deb, Laura Brenneman and Janet Guthrie. Since then, many other women and men in the community have added their names to the statement. A copy is hanging on the bulletin board and all are invited to sign it.*

***We are a diverse ecumenical and interfaith group of women in faith leadership in East Central Illinois. We gather together for unity, purpose, interrelatedness, and moral consciousness. We collectively agree that any form of violence, hatred, racism, intolerance, and social injustice must be named and resisted. We must act courageously.***

***We commit to challenging the resurgence of groups in our communities and nation who are promoting dangerous, white supremacist, far-right ideologies. We speak out against words and actions that seek to demean, threaten, or devalue others in any way. As civil rights and non-violence champion Rosa Parks said, "I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people."***

***We commit to inspire ourselves and our communities to act from a spirit of love, justice, and radical hospitality. In this, we echo the commitments made by faith leaders in Charlottesville, VA: "We will stand firm in our pursuit of justice and the honoring of all peoples, and we will move forward together as one community, united in our common humanity as beloved of God" (Charlottesville Clergy Collective, 2017). Together, let us take up the challenge with vigor, dignity, and compassion.***

## Service and Outreach Committee Update

by David Schrag



The Service and Outreach committee has recommended that 12 local charitable organizations be included in the spending plan for 2018 which was approved at the annual congregational meeting on January 21, 2018. At the January Service and Outreach Committee meeting, we decided to provide some information to the congregation -- in the form of articles for *The Vine* -- about these various local groups with which we work and to whom we donate money. This is the first such article.

### FirstFollowers

**What:** FirstFollowers is a community-based reentry program that provides services and guidance to those impacted by the criminal justice system. They provide support and guidance to the formerly incarcerated, their loved ones, and the community as a whole. Their advocacy and outreach initiatives aim to promote healthy relationships that build strong and peaceful communities.

**Who:** The First Followers Team includes Founder/Programs & Services Director, Marlon Mitchell, Advocacy & Outreach Director James Kilgore and ten other Coordinators, Specialists, Promoters, and Peer Mentors, several of whom are individuals who were formally incarcerated.

**Where:** Although FirstFollowers is not a religious based program, Pastor Larry Lewis, of Bethel A.M.E. Church, and his congregation provides the organization with a safe nurturing space that allows them to administer to the needs of the community. FirstFollowers operates a drop-in center located at Bethel A.M.E. Church, located at 401 E. Park Street in Champaign, IL.

**When:** Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 pm to 5 pm.

**For more info visit:** <https://www.firstfollowersreentry.com/> (or contact Angela Williams)

### Education Justice Project

**What:** The mission of the Education Justice Project is to build a model college-in-prison program that demonstrates the positive impacts of higher education upon incarcerated people, their families, the communities from which they come, the host institution, and society as a whole.

**Who:** EJP is a vibrant academic community of incarcerated students, educators, formerly incarcerated individuals, family members of the incarcerated, and others who are committed to a more just and humane world, achieved through education and critical awareness. Members of the EJP community believe that providing opportunities for quality postsecondary education within American prisons is an important step towards that vision. Accordingly, EJP offers educational programming at Danville Correctional Center through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Where:** The Education Justice Project office is located in the University of Illinois YMCA, 1001 S. Wright Street, Champaign.

**When:** Normal business hours Monday through Friday.

**For more info visit:** <http://www.educationjustice.net/home/> (or contact David Schrag)

# FMC 2018 Priorities: Celebration and Dedication

- Pastor Michael

## INTRODUCTION

Stretching back to early 2017, the FMC Council began an annual process of prioritizing. Following a series of congregational conversations and a great deal of listening, Council distilled several foci to guide our collaborate work as a church in 2017. The process continues in 2018, as we watch closely for where God is working and name ways we believe God is shaping and calling our church community. These annual priorities are not all-inclusive in the sense that they define everything we will do as a congregation in a given year; they *are* all-inclusive in the sense that we hope each person – individually, on committees, in worship, small groups, service, and in other ways – will find a way to engage each priority throughout the year. Spiritual growth and transformation is both personal and communal work. Council offers these priorities as a way to invite God’s continual renewal in our individual lives and our church life.

When Council gathered for a February retreat, we grouped many of last year’s congregational efforts under their corresponding priorities. We gave thanks to God as we named so many ways the Spirit led us to faithful and transformative discipleship. This seemed like the perfect way to introduce a new set of priorities, so on Sunday, March 18, 2018, Council presented a litany of thanksgiving framed by the 2017 priorities. A simple refrain directed our gratitude to God: “we thank you Lord” was sung after each item of praise. The litany follows:



### Priority 1

*Celebrate the gifts of diversity and difference within FMC. Grow our capacity to extend Jesus’ radical welcome.*

- For the FMC children and youth
- For our diverse Illinois Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA connections
- For learning to sing soul music for justice
- For FMC parents sharing wisdom
- For Scripture readers young and old
- For music in many languages
- For worship visuals with colorful skin tones
- For El Divino Redentor via WorshipCast
- For women bearing witness
- For 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Sunday School connections

### Priority 2

*Make visible our commitment to service, outreach, justice, and peace in the neighborhood and community.*

- For signs declaring neighborly welcome to all
- For interfaith Seders, picnics, and thanksgivings
- For Sinai Temple, for Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center
- For FMC serving others in New Mexico, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Orlando, and Japan.
- For bridges across racial lines, for Racial Taboo
- For FMC t-shirts testifying: “God’s love is for everyone”
- For worship on the lawn
- For FMCers serving at home and at work and on the playground

Priority 3

*Envision ways to counter discriminatory rhetoric and prepare to act quickly in response to issues of discrimination that may arise during the year.*

- For Bystander Intervention Training
- For Prophets Punching Up
- For Palestine/Israel learning and advocacy
- For teaming up to work for racial justice
- For FMC marching – for immigrant justice, in the CU Pride Festival

**PRESENTING THE 2018 PRIORITIES**

Giving thanks for God's faithfulness and a rich tapestry of congregational activity flowed quite naturally into a new set of priorities for 2018. In that same March 18 worship service, as a congregation we committed ourselves in prayer to the work of living out Christ's call on our lives in community.

The 2018 Priorities and Questions are listed on page 7. The litany of commitment follows:



L1: Gracious and Loving God:

We dedicate ourselves anew to your love that is ever seeking fullness in our hearts.  
We thank you that we are called into the fellowship and service of Jesus Christ,  
and that Christ is able and willing to use us to proclaim the reign of your love.

**P: We dedicate our gifts of language, listening, and creativity  
to the cause of peace, love, and reconciliation.**

L2: We thank you that we are called to use the work of our hands,  
the opportunities of professional and business life,  
and the occasions of conversation and fellowship  
to share with others the love of Christ.

**P: We dedicate our time, relationships, work and play  
to the cause of friendship and joyful witness,  
to the inward transformation inspired by your grace and hope.**

L3: We thank you that we are called into conversation with those of other faiths, other nationalities;  
to share with all humanity the liberation we have gained from Christ.

**P: We dedicate to the human family our passion for justice and peace,  
seeking the good of all,  
following the work and word of Jesus,  
and trusting your Spirit moving in us, through us, and with us. AMEN.**

# 2018 Priorities

These three priorities are concrete tasks we will be working on as a congregation this year. They will guide the work we engage in as a congregation: committees, small groups, Council, and individuals.



Grow a church culture that invites God's diversity.



Be formed inwardly by God's grace and hope.



Work for racial justice within ourselves, our congregation, and our community.

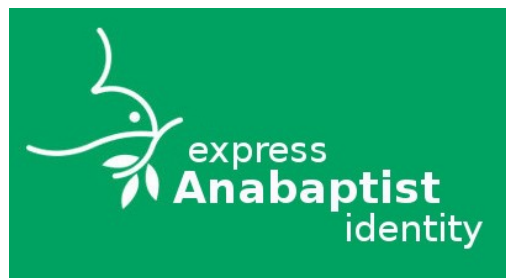
Graphics designed by Rhonda Gibson

# 2018 Questions

These questions are ongoing conversations that may guide our work and develop into future priorities.



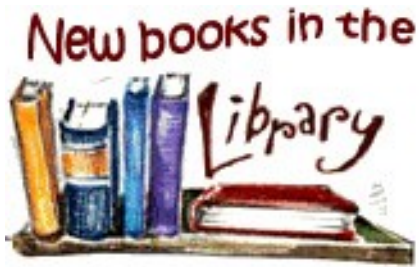
How shall we create space for those in our church who feel vulnerable and marginalized, and embrace our own vulnerabilities?



How will we explore our Anabaptist peace church identity in our place and time?



How and when is God calling us to use the apartment building for ministry?



**Adults**

*Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai

*Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* by Perry Yoder

*Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* by Gregory Boyle

**Children**

*Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* by Simms Taback

*The Secret of Saying Thanks* by Douglas Wood



"Hope the choir does some hip-hop for Easter!"

## Pictures from the March Retiree Game Day

