



The Vine

First Mennonite Church
of Champaign Urbana

October/November 2018

God speaks

by Pete Shungu

God speaks
In the bubbling of a gentle stream
God speaks
In the shimmer of a moonlight beam
God speaks
In the chorus of rain cascading on the ground
God speaks
Sometimes without even making a sound
God speaks
In the silence of a peaceful, solitary space
God speaks
Through the discovery of a happy place
God speaks
Through the glorious songs of birds
God speaks
Volumes without even using words
God speaks
In the scent of a fantastically fragrant flower
God speaks
In the baptismal-like sensation of a summer rain shower
God speaks
In the awe-inspiring majesty of a mountain peak
God speaks
In the way that every single inch of this earth is beautifully unique
God speaks
In ways that are visual, auditory, tactile, musical, lyrical
God speaks
Through amazing, life-sustaining, coincidences so unlikely they can only be called miracles
God speaks in so many ways
God speaks through the yin and yang of hot and cold, sun and rain, nights and days
God speaks...
Listen

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

Status Report from the FMC Apartment Task Force

by Clark Breeze



At the September 12, 2018 Church Council Meeting, Clark Breeze presented a status report on behalf of the **FMC Apartment Building Task Force**. In December 2017 the task force was appointed and council gave the following charge.

“Can the apartment building be used to facilitate FMC ministry priorities? If so, how?”

The building was purchased in 2008 to connect the two lots already owned (green space and church building) and create room for possible future expansion. More recently, ideas arising from the congregation have included suggestions for adapting the building for missional and/or outreach possibilities. During Phase 1, the task force was to examine the feasibility of using the apartment building to enhance FMC’s ministry, offering a report to the congregation in 2018. The report was to focus on the building and its needs in the coming years, projected finances, structural considerations, logical next steps and what timeline might be required.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the past few years, apartment income on 8 single units has typically been close to covering expenses, making our ownership a “break even” arrangement. In 2017 expenses were \$1,025 above income and so far after 8 months in 2018, expenses are \$593 below income. We have 10 years left on a 20-year loan with Everence Federal Credit Union. The current loan balance is \$161, 217 and the current interest rate is a competitive 4.5%.

Since the mortgage is the largest apartment building expense (35% of the total), not having a mortgage would allow us more flexibility to consider alternative use of part or all of the apartment building. With input from Church Treasurer, Phyllis Croisant, we identified three potential strategies for mortgage reduction:

Paying off the loan early with higher payments over the next 5 years

Paying down the mortgage early through a fund-raising campaign

Use some the church’s accumulated earnings to help pay down the mortgage

We could use any one strategy, a combination or continue the current arrangement for the remaining four years.

Weiner Companies, our property manager, does not anticipate any major apartment expenses in the near future. When the leases renew in August each year, there are typically some minor alterations needed or some furniture purchases. These funds come out of our Weiner account (currently \$16,761). This is a higher than normal balance and part of it could be used toward reducing the mortgage. Apartments rent for \$650/month and all are rented now until the end of August 2019. Logically, if part of the building were to be re-purposed and not rented, the lost rent of any unit would be an anticipated cost.

MISSIONAL HOUSING OPTIONS

Our charge from the council outlined 6 different possible missions as suggestions for alternate use of the building. The Task Force decided early on that it was not feasible with a break even annual cash flow and 10 years left on the mortgage to consider any alternate use that might involve expensive structural alterations to the building. Consequently, we focused on alternative uses of the building for *housing*. We decided to look closer at two of the housing based suggestions:

- Housing for immigrants and refugees
- Housing for formerly incarcerated persons

HOUSING FOR THE PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED

The task force met twice with Marlon Mitchell and James Kilgore of First Followers (FF) to talk about this subject. They confirmed our assumption that finding available and affordable housing is a critical need of those they endeavor to serve. The work of FF seems like a good fit for FMC with our concern about and activity to address racial justice issues. It is the only local organization of its kind. Angela Williams serves on the board of directors.

Should we eventually have space in our apartment building for this type of mission, FF does not see our apartments as a fit for recent parolees. Instead we discussed the possibility of being a housing option for a later stage participant. Based on their experience, a parolee needs some time to get acclimated to life outside of prison and this is best accomplished within a support community. Since we are on campus the possibility of providing housing for FF participants attending college was also discussed. FF is in the process of trying to secure their first house in the City of Urbana as initial housing for recent parolees. Funds would be needed to operate this “stage one” venture and it could be a pilot project with more houses added in the future.

As we discussed this type of mission, it became clear to the task force that we would likely need a partner like FF or other churches if we moved in this direction. FMC does not have the funds or staff to manage this kind of ministry alone. We have been told there has been some interest from the local Quakers and Unitarians about working with FF. The task force has had discussion with FF about hosting a meeting this fall where other interested faith groups would be invited to hear more about collaborating on housing.

FF knows that the task force has strong interest in their work and we have been studying the possible alternative uses of our apartment building and awaiting further guidance from Church Council. No formal commitments have been made to FF on behalf of FMC.

Council received the report with gratitude and affirmation for the thorough research and thoughtful listening done by the task force. Council also encouraged continued exploration with First Followers and potential faith community partners around the housing needs of those in C-U who have previously been incarcerated. Please join our prayer that God will continue to lead this unfolding process of discernment. Council anticipates a formal opportunity for congregational discussion and input, if and when a more concrete ministry vision should emerge. In the meantime, if you have ideas, comments, or questions, please feel free to talk with us.

FMC Apartment Building Task Force:

Clark Breeze, Convener
Chuck Gibson
Earl Kellogg
Randy Nelson
Angela Williams

NOTE: A FULL WRITTEN COPY OF THE **TASK FORCE REPORT TO COUNCIL** WITH CHARTS IS AVAILABLE TO READ IN THE CHURCH LIBRARY.

Service and Outreach Committee

by Karen McKenzie



Each issue of The Vine features two organizations supported by FMC.

Salt and Light

WHAT: Salt and Light strives to empower individuals towards change by affirming their dignity. Salt and Light creates opportunities for individuals to utilize their talents in meaningful and productive ways. It is much more than a thrift shop. It is also a community training ground. Their desire is to share God's love by fighting poverty and they believe that the store is where change to family and community happens.

Who: Volunteers can help with a single event or on a regular basis. Contact Lisa Sheltra for group events. All volunteers must attend an orientation. Every hour worked by a volunteer is valued at the minimum wage. A total of \$165 (20 hours) can be earned each month and can be spent in the thrift store or grocery. Volunteers can learn teamwork, problem solving, self-management and computer skills.

Where: There are now two locations. Champaign: 1512 W. Anthony Drive. 217-355-5654. Urbana: 1819 S Philo Road. 217-355-3654. The thrift stores provide clothing, shoes, furniture, household items and the grocery provides fresh produce and frozen items.

When: Donations can be brought to the Champaign location Monday-Saturday from 9 – 8pm. Donations for the Urbana location can be made Monday -Saturday from 9-8pm and Sunday from 11:00-5 p.m.

Empty Tomb

What: Empty Tomb is a Christian service and research organization. They strive to stop global child deaths. They provide financial discipleship strategy and information about church giving patterns at the national level. At the local level, they provide opportunities for volunteers to become involved in meeting various needs. They provide affordable clothing, groceries, home repairs and food pantry coordination. Empty Tomb also gives national money for mission projects. Services include Health services, clothing, delivery of groceries, pick up and delivery of furniture, limited cash assistance and home maintenance.

Who: Staff and Volunteers. Volunteer Coordinator can be reached at 356-2212. Volunteers must attend a historically Christian Church. They try to match Christians with resources with families in need.

Where: 301N 4th Street, Champaign. 61825

When: Empty Tomb closes at 5 p.m.

Note: FMC writes a letter each year to Empty Tomb lovingly challenging them to reconsider their current restrictive staffing policies regarding LGBTQIA individuals and restrictions on individuals' relationships.



#spiritday weekend
October 18-21

This annual *interfaith-pride.org* initiative is a weekend-long celebration of LGBTQ spiritual affirmation. It begins with Spirit Day on Thursday, October 18. **Supporters are encouraged to wear purple on Spirit Day** and to watch for welcoming advertising throughout the weekend. Our FMC website will be included in this advertising, and we have joined the #spiritday initiative, a nationwide movement to encourage LGBTQ+ folks to seek out welcoming faith communities.

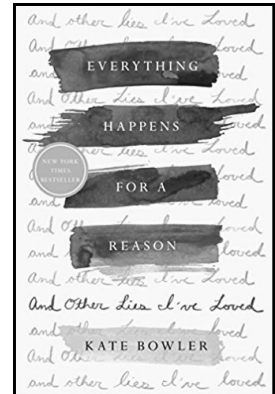
Reviews from FMC Library

by Cindy Breeze

I recently read two books that will soon be in our church library: *Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved* by Kate Bowler and *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, and Getting Old* by Parker Palmer.

Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved, in the words of one reviewer is: "a meditation on sense-making when there's no sense so be made, on letting go when we can't hold on, and on being unafraid even when we're terrified."

The author, a professor in the religion department at Duke University (married to a Mennonite husband and mother of a newborn) is a leading expert in the study of prosperity gospel - a theology that promotes good fortune as a sign of God's blessing and misfortune as a sign of God's disapproval. She strongly disapproves of the prosperity gospel, however, much to her surprise, she finds herself fully and unexpectedly subscribing to it once she is diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer.



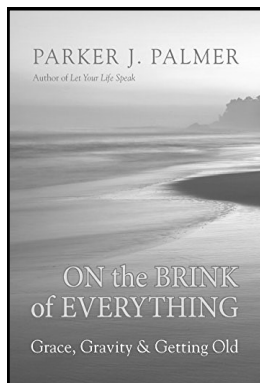
The book follows the struggles the author faces as she receives this grim diagnosis and trudges through the trauma and the necessary treatment to combat the disease. The reader should be prepared that her writing is often poignant, sometimes irreverent and profane, and occasionally humorous.

Bowler wonders what it means to die in a society that subscribes to the tenets of the prosperity theology. Carefully and systematically, sometimes using the church year as an organizational technique, she weaves her story to defy the theology that things always happen for a reason. Not wanting to create a "spoiler alert," one will have to read the book to find out how her story concludes.

One of the treasures in the book is the Appendix. She titles this section "Absolutely Never Say This to People Experiencing Terrible Times," and it is good reminder to avoid the unhelpful and hurtful things that are often said to those experiencing dark and difficult times.

I found the book to be thought-provoking over and over again because, I too, find myself sometimes unwittingly falling for the prosperity gospel - thinking that because I am a pretty good person things should always go well for me.

In one of Pastor Michael's recent sermons, he referred to Parker Palmer's excellent book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. Other well known Palmer books include: *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (his first book), *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, and *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward an Undivided Life*.



Palmer's most recent book, *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, and Getting Old*, is a compilation of essays organized into various chapters about getting older, the difference of generations, work and vocation, staying engaged with the world, and, as the title might suggest, death. Writing this book in his 80s, Palmer's reflections center around grace, forgiveness, friends, family, faith, engagement with life and death, and the wisdom of Trappist monk, Thomas Merton.

Although the book is a bit more disjointed than the others Parker Palmer books I have read, it is still a worthwhile read with many gems of wisdom and original poems by the author liberally sprinkled throughout the book. One of the added bonuses when reading *On the Brink of Everything* is the way to easily access original Carrie Newcomer songs that she and Palmer deliberately paired to go with various essays in the book. (If you aren't familiar with Newcomer, check her out on YouTube, especially her songs "Sanctuary" and "You Can Do This Hard Thing")

Sunday School Lessons

by Sharon Monday

*When you look into the mirror what do you see?
the toddlers creep forward
on their knees
they plant their elbows on the carpet
with their buttercup hands in their chins
still moist with soggy cereal crumbs*

*They come ever so close to the wide mirror
and peer inside;
their eyes aglow with mystery
Moonbeam –Sunlight Grins
as if they are falling inside the mirror
ready to go down
the rabbit hole
of fables and fairy tales and adventure
their smiles reveal a secret*

*Is it a secret or a mystery
or just gossamer threads
of synapses
darting through their lightening mental pathways
on cloud praises
They speak
Of mommy and me
two circles with dots for eyes, nose and a mouth
it's just me and mommy
together in the world
floating
without pieces of gold or power
between us.*

*Or is it a song
that makes
the wee one
become a dancing top
twirling and spinning in motion
round and round and bouncing up and down
on an invisible polo stick*

*Or is it the child
who draws a cloud praise
in thanksgiving for the TIGER
(or butterfly or turtle or hedgehog)*

*Or is it the doe eyed child
with the long wavy, wind strewn hair
who in her imagination
whizzes out of the classroom on her
Fluorescent pink petaled scooter
flying high into the cloud sky*

*Or the Children
who can't wait to get out of their tiny chairs
to jump and clap and cheer
after hearing the Biblical story of a healing
"The man in the story is now able to walk!"*

*My praise cloud is just this
A flower bouquet
made up of petals
of delicate plum, peachy
Child faces who peer into
The mirror
And smile back at me.*

Background: I am part of a weekly women's writing group where we take turns bringing in poems or other writings on a particular theme. We write what comes to our imagination and then have a time for sharing. Last week we shared on the beauty of hummingbirds and what they represent. This is part of a Mary Oliver poem which prompted my "Sunday School Lessons" writing. I am sharing it with you and I am thanking the children of FMC who mirror the imagination of God.

*"I am scorched to realize once again
how many small, available things are in the world
that aren't pieces of Gold or Power
that nobody owns or could buy even
for a hillside of money that just
float about the world."*

-Excerpt from the poem "Summer Story" by Mary Oliver

The Ten Rule Commandments of FMC Retreat

(inspired by the “Ten Duel Commandments” from *Hamilton*)

by Matt Yoder, with input from the retreat committee

Before we wrap up this evening, we have one more thing to cover: announcements. Now, these announcements aren't just suggestions. In fact, you might call them commandments. Delivered on tablets of pure granite, recorded in the book of Retreaticus, chapter 20, transcribed into King James English by scribes and scholars of yore, I give you:



Commandment 1: Thou shalt not go through the breakfast line.

For you, oh daughters of First Mennonite, are a thrifty nation, and have rebelled against the tax collectors of Menno Haven by providing your own breakfast. Therefore, find your morning nourishment on the tables clearly labeled for FMC, or risk becoming nourishment for a den of hungry lions, also known as Hospitality and Fellowship Committee.

Commandment 2: Remember my quiet hours and keep them holy.

God created the daytime for boisterous activity and laughter, and the nighttime—specifically, the hours of 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.—for blissful, uninterrupted rest. Any who dare to disturb the peace of the hotel or dorms during these hours will be cast out into the darkness of the campground, where there will be weeping and gnashing of tent poles.

Commandment 3: Musicians and readers, honor thy practice time.

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord,” the Psalmist writes. But a joyful noise is more joyful when all of the instruments play in time and know when to come in. Musicians for the Saturday morning session, we’ll practice briefly immediately after tonight’s activity. Everyone else, you can find your practice times listed on the schedule posted on the wall.

Commandment 4: Thou shalt play thy table tennis preliminaries of thy own accord.

For it is written: “Do not oblige thy associate pastor to track thee down, find thy partner, or otherwise facilitate thy participation in the table tennis tournament. For each associate pastor has enough troubles of her own.”

Commandment 5: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s gym time.

And God said, “The tribes of Schlegel family reunion have made with me a holy covenant for exclusive use of the gymnasium from 7 to 10 p.m. on Saturday. *Do not enter if you know what’s good for you!* I am the Lord thy God.”

Commandment 6: Thou shalt show up for group sessions and participate therein.

For God has made each one of you, a unique and special little snowflake, and the blessed community requires your presence. If you disobey this commandment, the retreat planning committee will weep bitter tears and rend their garments in protest.

Commandment 7: Thou shalt put away balls and dishes in their God-given places.

Thou shalt not put a dish in the ball place, nor a ball in the place of dishes. For it is written: “In the Year of Jubilee, each ball and dish will be returned to its ancestral home, *but seven years is a pretty long time to wait—just sayin’!*”

Commandment 8: Thou shalt not enter the pool unless a lifeguard is present.

For God created two types of creatures: those with gills to live in the sea, and those with lungs to live on the land. And thou art most definitely among the latter.

Commandment 9: Honor thy bunkmates and respect their bedding.

Thou shalt not place in the sleeping bag of thy bunkmate an insect, nor shall thou short-sheet or otherwise prank their bed. For God, the Great Prankster, will settle all scores in the final judgement.

Commandment 10: Thou shalt have fun, but not too much fun.

Thou shalt not laugh at the expense of another, except thy lead pastor, Michael Crosby, whose ill-timed sabbatical during the planning of this retreat has earned him the scorn of all the nations of the earth. Thou shalt enjoy the company of thy fellow travelers and the beauty of creation, and *thou shalt wear a smile at all times—no exceptions!* Thus saith the Lord!

Pastors' Note: We received this gift of poetry from an FMCer wishing to remain anonymous. It is offered as an honest expression of pain and hope.

The anonymous author never learned to write; he was too busy trying to breath. Was diagnosed working dyslexic at age 42.

Breath part one

Breath just breath. 7 coyotes attacking a dog. The dog does not give up. It is not a movie. Not a story, just the journey. One last gasp then I screamed ENOUGH!. The seven men stop beating me. No time to cry. They did stop.

I stood. I felt a million eyes look away from me. Smell of black polish leather covering steel toed boots filled my nostrils. Taste of metal. I can hear my heart beating. No tears yet. It is hard to see, like looking through a tunnel.

I see the same picture in my mind I have seen before. A hand reaching down from above to me. I feel hands and then two voices. I am standing naked I am unable to see the tunnel has closed up. I feel my body convulse and fluid comes from my mouth. I yell what is wrong. I hear the deep soft voice say "it is natural it is caused from your adrenaline." I have no tears I am blind my eyes swollen shut.

Wake in the dark or is it light. I have no clue. I still see the hand of the father extends to me. The vision of beautiful white robe and a hand is shown to me it makes me feel so warm. I think of my real father that has passed away but the hand is not his. I want to forget my Dad for ever.

The Humiliation

Breath it has been three days. or has it been four. I am not sure, I can see figures. I am clothed. A door opens I hear two voices and hands on my arms. I only have one thing that is mine - a vision of a hand I will not let it go. I feel hands on my wrists and hands on my ankles. One voice is lower to my face the other over my head. Over my head says to me. "You have caused trouble and will be put up on charges". Lower voice explains, "we are taking you to the hospital."

I see small cracks of light and I rub my face to my shoulder I see more. I hear the ankle cuffs jingle my steps are short. It seems I have walked a mile. I hear people, and that hospital smell. I am told to sit guided to the chair. I hear voices young and old. A small child I do not know to this day asks their mother, "Mommy is that a bad man." She was quite then I heard them move away. My hands are bound my feet are bound. I am Alive.

Clean Me

I felt her hands on my cheek then I feel my eyes open. Then my eyes burned and felt them scrub away the blood. I could make her out she looked at me with disgust. I have seen that look a million times from my mother by the time I was 11 years old. "How long ago did this happen" she said looking at me like it was my fault then she turned to look at the at a tall person. Over my Head voice rang out "five days ago" His voice explained. I have been in the dark for 5 days where have I been. "Five days lucky he still has eyes. Why so long?" No answer came from him. Lower voice (I can see him now) says "Fix him up. We got to get back for lunch". My eyes are open I can see. Strapped me to a bed and wheeled me to another room. Xrays, then then I wait.

Everything is fine

My eyes are taking in the light. I am holding on to the hand that reaches for me. I am placed in the ER waiting room. I am clean. I can breath. People can see me. I see them look away like a million eyes. The child's voice, I get to see them. A boy mid-length, short hair, light brown, has not been cut in months. Rounded cheeks full of energy. Stands few feet away looks at me. His voice rings out. "Are you a bad man?" Tears fall down my cheeks. I have no words.

Are we hungry

Over my head a voice - a six foot five tall man walked like he had had carried the world. Big round face, large arms, hands, a pocked nose, hair look of a military cut that was over six weeks old. Clean shaved. Lower voice - a blond man five foot ten, clean shaved, pressed clothes, hair cut. "What did he have to prove?" I thought.

Asking me to stand, they walked me outside. I had to walk around the building with many people in the street watching. Over my head, someone says " That was good lunch. " "Yes" the lower voice agreed, "cuffing him to the chair worked. Nice to get a bite at the restaurant."

Who am I

The pain of the ankle cuffs and walking several hundred feet, people looking at me. I was so glad to be in my small room and feel the door lock. This has been the room I had been in for 5 days never seen. Six foot by ten foot with a bed and a shower in it. Walk to the sink. Wash my hands. Look at the bruised wrists. My ankles scream for a soothing rub. I look in the mirror. I have no idea what I see. I close my eyes. Tears flow down my cheek. I see the hand reaching for me. I fall to sleep.