

The Vine

First Mennonite Church of Champaign Urbana
February/March 2019

Lent: Pausing to remember

by Pastor Deb

The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday - March 6. Lent is a time in the Christian calendar when we pause to remember what it means to be human and to be reminded of our need for God as we seek true life and right relationships.

Here is a prayer from our Lenten materials:

God of steadfast love, we put our trust in your care for us.

When we need to find our way home, we put our trust in you. When we need forgiveness, we put our trust in you. When our souls hunger for a new way of living, we put our trust in you. In the morning and in the evening, we put our trust in you.

We trust you, Our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.



LENTEN CALENDAR

Ash Wednesday: March 6

Maundy Thursday: April 18

Good Friday: April 19

Easter Sunday: April 21

**MC USA Lenten materials for
at home use:**

<https://tinyurl.com/ybt3wfta>

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Building a Champaign-Urbana Sanctuary Coalition

by Pastor Michael



The practice of sanctuary for refugees seeking asylum has a long history in Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Someone gave the gift of sanctuary to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in Egypt. Elijah was offered sanctuary by a starving widow and her son living outside ancient Israel. And the Torah famously designates “cities of refuge,” where those fleeing violence would find safe harbor.

In more recent years, we turn to stories like that of pastor Andre and Magda Trocme, whose courage and Jesus-inspired commitment to nonviolence led the entire French town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to serve as a haven for Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. Other examples – within and outside Christianity – abound. A collection of photographs currently on display at the University YMCA (go see it!) shows and tells of Albanian Muslims who gave refuge to Jews fleeing the Holocaust.

And even more recently, houses of worship across the U.S. have declared sanctuary within their walls, building on practices established in the 1980s for giving refuge to undocumented immigrants seeking refuge and asylum. Columbus (OH) Mennonite Church has been home to Edith Espinal since September 2017. Pastor Joel Miller gave a TED Talk at TEDx Columbus; it’s a great introduction to the practice of public sanctuary. Watch it here on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcDSf2S9m3o>. On December 17, 2018, congregational leaders from faith communities in North Carolina attempted to resist the detention of Samuel Oliver-Bruno, a Duke Divinity School student who had been in sanctuary at CityWell United Methodist Church in Durham, NC. Samuel was recently deported. Read more here: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/editors/facing-down-ice-north-carolina>.

There are lots of ways to provide sanctuary, and plenty of current and historical examples, but often missing from these stories is the hard work of coalition-building that prepares the way. Cities and states with a strong sanctuary witness have something in common: a strong coalition of faith communities. Through the Interfaith Alliance of Champaign County and other connections, there is a movement to build such a coalition in Champaign-Urbana. On February 28-29, C-U will be host to Jennie Belle, a Community Organizer for Church World Service’s Immigration & Refugee Program advocacy team. Jennie organizes with the North Carolina Council of Churches that came together on behalf of Samuel Oliver-Bruno (see link above; this includes a fellow Central District Conference congregation, Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship). Jennie’s visit is sponsored by the Interfaith Alliance along with FMC, the UUs of UC, the Friends of Urbana, Sinai Temple, Faith United Methodist, the University YMCA, and a number of other local faith groups. Her visit will provide three opportunities for learning and coalition-building:

- Thursday, February 28, 10:30-12:30 – “Sanctuary Congregations” workshop hosted at the University YMCA. The workshop is part of an all-day Symposium on Local Immigration Activism, conceived and organized by the campus-based advocacy group “Sanctuary of the People.” Anyone is welcome to attend all or part; registration is free at <https://www.imactsym.com/>.
- Friday, February 29, noon – Friday Forum at the University YMCA. Ms. Belle is the featured speaker; the whole Spring semester series is on nonviolent direct action.
- Friday, February 29, evening (time TBD) – Building a sanctuary coalition seminar at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana Champaign (Green St, Urbana).

I hope you will consider joining me at one or more of these events, with an open mind and heart to how God may be inviting FMC to support the emergence of a sanctuary coalition in C-U. If you have interest in helping to coordinate Ms. Belle’s visit, please contact me.

“The immigrant who lives with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself...” (Leviticus 19:34).

Why I travel

by P. Gregory Springer

It may be wrong or even illegal, but I don't have garbage service. I'm traveling too much, recycle most everything, and am single. There is not enough garbage in this household to justify paying for pick-up, especially with plenty of apartment house dumpsters within close walking distance.

Perhaps to atone for this lapse, I take it upon myself to periodically clean up the scattered beer cans and plastic bags near one particular apartment house. On Christmas Day, I did just that, using a rake to assemble a month's worth of trash, picking it up, and putting it all into the dumpster that I most regularly use to smuggle my own garbage.

Given the circumstances, I am not sure this qualifies as a good deed. And I know I'm never going to clean everything up everywhere. I inevitably leave some behind.

In a similar way, when someone asks me for money on the street, in Champaign-Urbana, Chicago, Mexico, or Guatemala, I try to oblige. I try to carry one dollar bills or the equivalent in other currencies to hand out when asked. Sometimes I say no. I know I can't give to everybody. I can't take care of everything.

I spent years as a teacher and substitute teacher here in Urbana, where there is currently a crying need for substitutes and teachers alike. But I have been teaching and working in Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru over the past two years. When there is so much need here, why do I travel so far to do the same kind of work?

Reason #1: I am selfish. I am the first to admit that I have done this for selfish reasons. I would rather be on the cobblestone streets of Antigua, Guatemala, than in Urbana Middle School. The weather is much better. The culture and the food and the language are stimulating.

Reason #2: It gives me purpose. I have held multiple jobs over the span of my life. I set out from the beginning to work independently, to be a freelance writer, teacher, and laborer. I believe that if one can't do what they love, they can learn to love what they do. To paraphrase Will Rogers, I never met a task I didn't like. (Well, rarely.)

Reason #3: It is good to get out more. It is important to act locally, as the political cliché goes, to do work wherever you happen to be. But there is additional reason in going outside of your comfortable neighborhood, especially these days.

Bridges are a structure of exchange. They go both ways. We give and we get back. I am humbled by the example of others, by sharing in their cultures, their families, their beliefs. Overcoming the recent international flare-ups of tribalism and nationalism is more than important; it is essential to our survival.

At least, such is the case for myself. There are people who believe that we create dependence by giving too much to those in need, here or in other countries. My experiences have convinced me that this is not the case. People are eager to work and to share. They want to know, they are curious, they are as welcoming and generous as we are. The faults we see in others are easy to spot because they are likely the faults we have ourselves.

Maybe things don't always balance out evenly. But who's counting? Maybe those asking for money on the street don't deserve it. I know I often have given money and it was misused. But maybe that's not for me to decide. I don't think about it too much. For me, the benefits of going and giving overwhelmingly outweigh the costs. The boundaries for being the keeper of our brothers and sisters do not exist, even if I'm never going to fix everything, here or there. We just keep doing what we do, wherever we are, thankful for the promised abundance of joy.



Vignettes of Colombia

by Kathy Springer

“Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and enjoy the journey.” This quote by Babs Hoffman that I found in my journal seemed appropriate when thinking about to share with you about my trip to Colombia. The view truly was spectacular as our small group bounced along a winding dirt road through the mountains of Bucaramanga to a place called Mision la Gracia, where collections of tin, boards, and plastic were put together to create a semblance of homes, pieced together by squatters in a large, previously uninhabited field. We were accompanying Pastor Sergio, his son Juan Felipe, and Pastor Sergio’s wife Belky to meet with neighborhood children there at “Sabbath School,” which met every Saturday. Each of us was assigned an age group. Keith and I worked with the 9 – 11 year olds. In spite of their poor surroundings, the kids were clean and nicely dressed. They seemed happy to be there, and were curious about where we were from. All ages met together first, and forming a large circle, we all introduced ourselves. It was November 30, and after a Bible lesson, they began coloring paper Christmas ornaments to decorate a paper tree on the wall. One of the grandmothers had decorated an artificial tree, under which she put various creatures and people to create a manger scene.



Besides working with these children, Belky is planning to begin a hygiene program among the Venezuelan immigrants in this area who have fled violence and scarcity in their homeland and have even fewer resources than their Colombian neighbors. After decades of fleeing their own country’s violence, Colombians are seeing the tables turned as Venezuelans enter their country in large numbers.

After we left Mision la Gracia we drove over even more winding roads to Mision Martin Lutero (Martin Luther Mission), where we participated in a short worship and communion service in a building that was built partially with the financial help of Lutherans from Germany.

In the evening we found ourselves arriving at what seemed to be a beautiful gated park surrounded by green trees, lush grass, and a white bulldog. We were greeted graciously by our hosts Haroldo and Yolanda, who are members of El Divino Redentor. After a Bible study of Matthew 11 with the beautiful scenery as background (the parable of the good sower, made a bit more challenging than usual because of the necessary English/Spanish translation), we were served a delicious supper of typical Colombian food. It was certainly a large socio-economic jump to compare their home with the surroundings we had seen earlier that afternoon.



On our way back through the winding roads at the end of the day, I thought that this had been a very interesting day. But it was just one day out of my life. Would I want to repeat this trip every single Saturday? I admire Sergio and Belky’s joyful enthusiasm and dedication in the work of the church, and I think of them making that trip week after week. It inspired me to ask myself, “What might God be asking me to do here?”

A few random things to know...

by Marcia Nelson, on behalf of the Hospitality & Fellowship Committee



HOSPITALITY
COMMITTEE

- Several years ago Council designated \$500 for kitchen improvements. We purchased things including a blender, glass pitcher, bread pans, a step-stool, and a clock. We have money remaining if you are aware of additions that would be used.
- The cabinets and drawers in the kitchen have tags stating their content. We keep serving items in the cabinets in the Fellowship Hall, including decorative napkins, all paper cups, serving utensils and additional plates.
- No nuts. No red drinks. No plastic glasses in the bottom of the dishwasher.
- We plan Menno Nite with criteria in mind that include balancing cost with the caliber of food and the aesthetics of the location. We have put a high value in recent years on food. Affordability is always important as this is an all-church event. The committee weighs factors as we decide, but we could use your input either affirming or challenging our assumptions. We are quite willing to look into new locations or caterers if you have ideas.
- Women's Night Out thrives. Men's Night Out limps. If there are those who are interested in either event and have ideas, send them our way.
- Game nights, summer softball, theatre outings - we are open to suggestions.
- Meals of assistance are available during times of trouble. There are those who have signed up on The "Work of the Church" form to help provide meals when care is needed. Speak to a pastor if meals would be helpful. If you would like to be on the provider's list, let me know.

January fundraiser for One Winter Night, CU at Home's annual fundraiser. Mark Jaeger was FMC's box dweller for the event.



Brotherly love

by Pete Shungu

This poem, written over 10 years ago, is dedicated to my two brothers- Nick "Mookie" Shungu and Tevin "Bookie" Jones. Times have changed over the past 10 years, but these words still carry a lot of relevance.



Verse 1 (for Mookie)

Growin up- it was always me and you
 And the older we got- it's like the more our bond grew
 It's true- we even shared the same nickname- Gu
 Started with me thru soccer then got passed down to you
 But it was about much more than competition
 We were two young brothers who were on a mission
 To change the world- though we didn't know it at the time
 I would play beats on the trumpet while u kicked a rhyme
 Two peas in a pod- no doubt
 People still say we look the same now though my hair's grown out
 And we still mad close though we took different routes
 I went up to Boston while u headed down South
 But from the 617 to the 919
 We one collective force that shines when we combine through rhyme
 And Mookie- you my best friend- no matter where you at
 Ain't no connection in the world that can compare to that

Verse 2 (for Bookie)

March 17, 2000 was the day
 We were brought together through Big Brothers of Mass. Bay
 Since then, you've been my second biological bro
 Cuz for over eight years, yo, I've watched you grow
 Trying to teach you to follow the right path
 But at times I feel like I haven't even taught you half
 Of what you've taught me- cuz I've grown so much as a person
 One day I'll be a father-- I'm already rehearsin
 But I know I'm not your father, just a brother and friend
 Bringin positivity to reverse all them trends
 Cuz in the end- life's nothing but a constant rotation
 So when the world turns, I hope you've learned to give back to next generation
 I know that you got mad talents
 When life throws you a curve you always up to the challenge
 And the road of life is bumpy, it can throw you off track

New in the FMC library

by Kathy Springer, Library Committee convener



The library committee recently processed these books. Many of them are displayed on the hallway table outside the library. It's easy to check them out—just put your name on the card inside the book cover and put the card in the box on the table.

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

Mystics and Misfits: Meeting God through St. Francis and Other Unlikely Saints - Christiana N. Peterson. The author was part of Plow Creek fellowship in Tiskilwa, IL, and part of Illinois Mennonite Conference. She discovers "...that she needs resources beyond her own to weather the exhaustion and anxiety of trying to save a troubled farm and a floundering congregation...in the unruly lives of some of Christianity's oddest saints, she discovers radical perspectives on simplicity, hospitality, solitude, church, and death."

Note: Julie Birky's sister, Kimberly Penrod Pelletier, authored a short study guide for this book. It is free and available online at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7zyoxc3>.

The Game – The Way We Were to the Way We Are - Michael J. Woods. The author is the husband of Karen McKenzie and he donated this book to our library. This is his "story of changes" as he grew up in Fulton, IL, presenting a "look at sports (as well as cultural changes) in America from the 1950's to the present," drawing on personal experience and reflection.

The Patient Ferment of the Early Church- The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire – Alan Kreider

You're Wearing THAT? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation – Deborah Tanner (donated by Marcia Nelson)

A Hospital Visitation Manual - Perry H. Biddle, Jr. (donated by Sue Biddle)

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns – A Muslim Book of Colors - Hena Khan. This book, written in rhyme, was donated by Donna Nelson Evans.

Water Bugs & Dragonflies – Explaining Death to Young Children - Doris Stickney, donated by Pastor Deb.

Lifetimes – The Beautiful Way To Explain Death to Children – Mellonie and Ingpen, donated by Pastor Deb.

Three Wise Queens - James Allen. This book was written in response to the author's daughter's question "Do the three wise kings have three wise queens?"

* Hannah's Way – Linda Glaser. (Ages 4 – 8) After Papa loses his job during the Depression, Hannah's family moves to rural Minnesota, where she is the only Jewish child in her class.

* The Golden Rule – Ilene Cooper. A gentle reminder of a timeless rule for parent and child. (Ages 4 – 8)

*The Whispering Town – Jennifer Elvgren. (Ages 7 – 11) The story of neighbors in a small Danish fishing village who sheltered a Jewish family during the Holocaust. Based on a true story.

*Emma's Poem – The Voice of the Statue of Liberty – Linda Glaser. (Ages 4 – 8) Jewish Emma Lazarus, moved by an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, wrote the words that give voice to the Statue of Liberty.

*As Good as Anybody: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Herschel's Amazing March Toward Freedom – Richard Michelson. (ages 6 – 9) How the two men formed a remarkable friendship and turned their personal experiences of discrimination into a message of love and equality for all.

(continued on next page)

New in the FMC library continued...

YOUTH FICTION (These books can be checked out in the JYF room)

* Refugee – Alan Gratz. (Ages 9 – 13) The stories of three young immigrants seeking safety.

* The Inquisitor's Tale, Or the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog – Adam Gidwitz. (Ages 9 – 15) Three children are on the run to escape prejudice and persecution and save precious and holy texts from being burned.

* The Hired Girl – Laura Schlitz (Ages 10 – 14)

*Note: The youth and children's books marked with an asterisk * were recommended by the Association of Jewish Libraries in response to the tragedy at the synagogue in Pittsburgh and to rising anti-Semitism in the U.S. They are all stories about standing up for each other.*

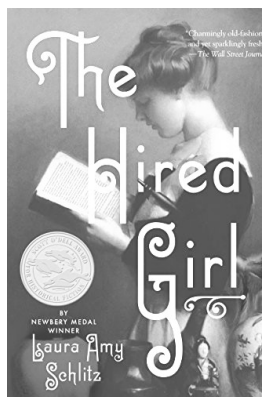
Book Review: *The Hired Girl**

by Rosalee Otto

If you're not afraid to be caught reading a "teen" book (Harry Potter? The Book Thief?), I think you'll be entranced by this one, whether you're a teen or older. The author, a Newbery Medal winner, pulls us into a world that feels both old and new.

It's 1911, and Joan Scraggs is a girl with big dreams. She loves to read and dreams of becoming a writer herself. But when her mother dies and her father pulls her out of school to take over the housework as well as doing farm chores, her dreams seem impossible. Her only hope comes through her teacher, who recognizes her potential and gives her three books to read - and a blank one to write in. We get to read this one.

For this 14-year-old, the life of deprivation and endlessly demanding work seems enough to crush her aspirations. But it is the cruelty of her father's actions that causes her to escape to Baltimore, where she becomes a hired girl for a Jewish family.



Joan's often painful story, leavened with humor, is enhanced by well-drawn characters, and especially by the believability of her emotional responses to situations that arise. Gratitude, resentment, fear, love, insecurity, wonder and so many other feelings tumble together, ringing so true for those of us who remember our teenage years.

For me, the story (inspired by the diary of the author's grandmother) of life in a Jewish household in the early 1900s is fascinating. But I was most compelled by the exploration of a young girl's spiritual journey as she learns to value her mother's Catholic beliefs while developing an understanding of and appreciation for the Jewish faith. The possibility of more than one "truth" is a theme that is beautifully developed through the eyes of a young girl who observes and records the imperfect humans around her.

*Available for check out in the JYF room.

