

# The Vine

## Have we failed our sister church?

by Greg Springer

Colombia has been in the headlines these past weeks with what may seem disheartening news. The 2016 peace accord that ended five decades of battle, winning the Nobel Peace Prize, was facing renewed resistance. Some 3000 guerrillas were re-arming and returning to battle. The Colombian army had been issued new orders to double their efforts at killing, although this later was rescinded.

We need to remember how things have changed in Colombia. In 2003, when I went to meet with El Divino Redentor, our new sister church in Bucaramanga, war and kidnapping and violence and the drug cartels were powerful. They defined Colombia. With an MCC learning group, I visited Bogota and we were sequestered in our hotel, jokingly handing each other "Get Out of Kidnapping Free" cards.

The U.S. State Department warned against travel to the country. There were no travel guides published or available in bookstores or in the library. Drug lords like Pablo Escobar ruled the country. The city of Medellin was one of the most dangerous in the world. A bomb went off in Bogota in the week I spent there. Even visiting shopping centers required extreme security measures.

Sixteen years later, Colombia has become a tourist mecca. The city of Medellin is a shiny, modern city filled with restaurants, museums and great public transportation. Kidnappings have dropped 92 percent. Escobar's estate is now a crumbling mansion that draws gawking tourists from around the world. The violent crime rate in Bogota is lower than that of many American cities, including Indianapolis and Miami.

Did First Mennonite Church play a role in any of this transformation?

Yes, we did meet with representatives in the U.S. Embassy in Bogota. Yes, we wrote letters and contacted our local politicians. We informed ourselves about Plan Colombia and the situation in the country. We listened to the stories of our sister church. And, yes, we provided some of our leftover food to the hungry children displaced by the war, and we continue to do so.

All these efforts have been valuable, but our sacrifices have been minimal and the credit is not to ourselves. Rather, we have been blessed by being able to share.

We have been privileged to have accompanied the Colombian people on their journey. I heard that word used several times by Christian Peacemaker Team members in Colombia and, again, when Marcos Knoblauch visited FMC last year: "to accompany."

We have witnessed the transformation and we have accompanied our family in Colombia. Our willing presence, then and now, is what matters. The outcome is never ours to claim. We have been there and we remain there today. That is blessing enough and blessing indeed.

### Summer Theme



## CALLED TO COMMUNITY

June 2: All-church discussion on sponsoring asylum seekers (12p)

June 6: "Trail of Death" potluck & panel discussion (6p)

June 16: Words of witness (9:15a)

Father's Day picnic at Hessel (12p)

June 30: 5th Sunday -  
Psalms & songs (10:45a)

July 21: MYF service (9:15a)

July 28: Interfaith Picnic at  
Crystal Lake Park (4p)

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The Vine is also available on our church  
website (under "news" link):

[www.fmc-cu.org](http://www.fmc-cu.org)

## Journey to the Top of Mt. Kilimanjaro

by Randy Nelson

Climbing mountains seems like a pointless activity. You walk for days enduring physical discomfort for a 2-hour stay at the summit. I base my conclusion on a sample size of one so perhaps I should be more circumspect in my decision or maybe the point of the endeavor is not just the conclusion.



It was a journey. It took us 8 days to make it to the top but we took the longest route. The trailhead was at 6825 feet above sea level. The initial hike was through a lush tropical rain forest with the occasional monkey sighting, but by the second day, we were in the moorlands. The vegetation was sparse with plant forms that are unique to this region and alien in appearance. Some reminded me of cacti but they are not. Instead of towering trees, the giants of this land are shorter than 20 feet. Each day as the altitude increased, the plant life seemed to be under more stress with the fewer survivors staying closer to the ground. One common human response to high elevation is increased urinary output. Unfortunately, my kidneys decided that the night was the best time for this enhanced activity. The upside was that for the first three campsites the night sky was spectacular. As we moved around the mountain, the light from Moshi washed out the star intensity that deep darkness delivers. We walked about 6 miles on day 4, half up hill and half downhill. The uphill was not steep but continuous. The

downhill was steep, mostly on rocks, and was the more challenging hike. On day 5, we started walking toward a canyon wall that from a distance showed no discernible way out. This was Barranco Wall, a very steep 1250 feet vertical gain, which at places was more like climbing a ladder than following a trail. This definitely transitioned us from the moorland into the alpine desert. Some have compared this land to the surface of the moon. There were locations that looked very much like the pictures from Mars with large, gently sloping spaces accented with large rocks. At 11 pm on the 7<sup>th</sup> day we began our assault on the summit. For nearly 8 hours, I walked through the dark with the beam from my headlights fixed on the feet of the person just ahead. Occasionally I would look down to see other headlights in the distance or look up to confirm that we are not there yet. The endless switchbacks and a view constricted by a narrow beam of light were hypnotic.



I remember little about this time and at least once feel asleep sitting on a rock during a rest break. Just at sunrise, we made the final transition into the arctic climate zone when we reach Stella Peak and then another 100 yards up to Uhura Peak. Some describe the region as a “world of glittering ice and snow”. We walked by one pile of snow that would have been dwarfed by the mass pushed off a State Farm Center parking lot but our path to the summit at 19,341 feet was only bare ground. There were some large glaciers in the distance but like everywhere else permanent ice is now less permanent. To be fair, we arrived at the very end of the dry season so the snow would soon begin to be replenished but not to the levels of the past.

It was a journey by a community. There were 12 hikers that started the trek and 11 made it to the top. We ranged in age from 21 to 71 and came from 3 continents. Everyone had some link to MJ or John Sharp. It was definitely an EMU-centric group with a sprinkling of Hesston College connections. I was the only one without one of those college associations. Guides and porters outnumbered the hikers by a factor of nearly 4. Each day one guide was assigned to lead and to set the pace for the group. As we started the first day, I thought the pace was exceedingly slow but I quickly learned that the race is not to the swift. The key to getting the most people to the summit is a slow and steady pace with adequate time for acclimation to the change in elevation. One or two guides were always in the back to make sure no one was left behind



## Journey to the Top of Mt. Kilimanjaro (continued)



and provide additional support if needed. Each hiker carried 3 liters of water, food for lunch and breaks, and whatever extra clothes we might need during the day. The porters transported everything else including tents, sleeping bags, food, water, fuel, their personal packs and even chairs and a table so that our morning and evening meals were luxurious by camping standards. Each hiker could give the porters 26 pounds to carry. In the morning, we left our duffle bags in a central location for the porters to pick up. The hikers would generally leave camp first but the more swiftly moving porters would quickly overtake us with our duffle bags balanced on their heads. By the time we arrived at the next

campsite, the porters would have already pitched the tents, placed each duffle bags in the right tent and started preparing the evening meal. In this wilderness, the porters provided service that I never experience in normal travel. Offering a warm basin of water for washing and a cup of hot coffee while we were still in our sleeping bags was 5 star service. Porters were always accommodating, friendly and gracious but I wondered what they really thought about people like me. Some had good boots but others had only worn tennis shoes that provided minimal support and protection. If a porter worked every day of the 8-month, prime climbing season and was paid the recommended wage plus received the recommended tip, he could make about what I was paying for my trip. Porters could not work every day and many would not receive the recommended compensation. It made be uncomfortable to think about it so mostly I didn't.

During the long days on the trail, we continually switched the order of the hikers that provided opportunities for conversations with everyone. It was a very compatible group and that greatly enhanced the experience. One of the highlights of the trip was at the end of each breakfast and supper when John Sharp would ask for MJ stories. Mostly the stories came from John, or from Surge, a Congolese, and Charlie, from Illinois, who worked with MJ in the Congo. It was often a highly emotional experience to hear these stories, some funny, some tragic, some inspiring, and some that John had never heard before.

Fewer than 50,000 people attempt to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro each year and between 60 and 70% make it to Uhuru Peak. Most of the unsuccessful climbers try to summit in 6 days or less and altitude sickness is a common barrier. It was disappointing that Wilmer was unable to complete the hike but his major contribution to organizing the trip was a gift to all of us who made it to the top. John Sharp carried some of MJ's ashes and as a substitute for Wilmer, I took some of John Otto's ashes to the summit.

Climbing mountains may be a pointless activity. Sharing the adventure with a diverse group of people that held a common bond, remembering the life of peace making and barrier shattering of MJ Sharp, and honoring him by helping to educate future peacemakers was a very meaningful activity. I am very fortunate to have had this opportunity.



## You are Enough

- by Pete Shungu

Restless- 3 am- insomniac

Life is a blur in this Grand Prix- Pontiac

Speeding down the highway of life- no direction

Surrounded by people yet feeling no connection

Images on the screen- be this, be that

Be strong, be straight, eyes blue, tummy flat

Be someone else cuz being you ain't cutting it

Cutting wrists seems like the only way to come to grips

Square peg round hole

Try to get in where you fit in but what's hidden is your heart and your soul

You don't have to hide, be you, be proud

Be joy, be pain, be soft, be loud

Just be who you are- you don't have to modify

You are the perfect mix- you don't need Spotify

You're the one that we've been waiting for- in all your glory

You're the next chapter of a beautiful story

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

Life can be beautiful, life can be magic

Life can be brutal, life can be tragic

Life can be so many contrasting things

And it's all in the way that the pendulum swings

Is the glass half full or half empty?

The glass should be full- don't buy the bull that half is plenty

Cuz you are a whole human being

When you recognize this, it's your soul that you're freeing

We're caught in a system that don't even listen

That force feeds us lies, hiding knowledge and wisdom

Killing our souls while their pockets are filling

No wonder they calling it 'making a killing'

But we gotta choose to value people over profits

It don't take a prophet to see that we lost-it's

Time to take back the night

Take back your life, shine light- let your spirit shine bright

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

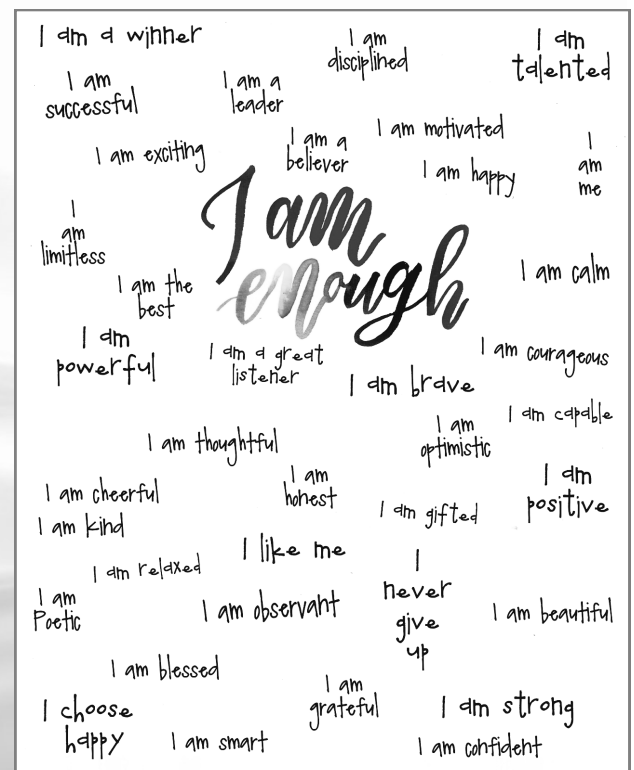
So say..

I am enough

I am enough

I am enough

I am enough



## Green space update

- by Mary Krick

The results of the questionnaire are in. Thank you to all who filled one out!

Open space for children to run was a decisive first choice. Additional pollinator-friendly plants and a gathering space were virtually tied for second. The labyrinth was fourth, closely followed by an individual meditation space and play equipment. Space for worship was seventh and the sculpture was last.

### What has happened

We have added some plantings to the Springfield Avenue side and would welcome donations of hostas, ferns or woodland wildflowers for along the east side. We can add some now and will need more later. We also added a bench for a place to rest.

We created a bed for additional pollinator-friendly plants and will incorporate some play options within it.

### Other plans

Planning is just getting underway for the gathering space and labyrinth. Come out and see what is going on. Visit often!



BOOK REVIEW

## ***Finding God in the Waves: How I Lost My Faith and Found It Again Through Science***

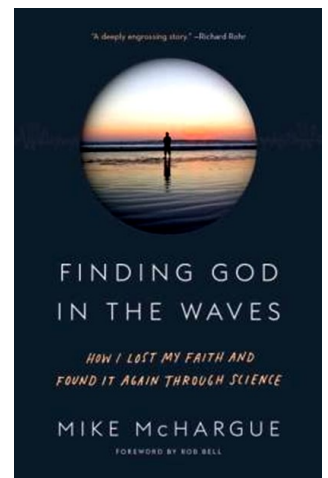
- by Amber Anderson

In January, I, along with some friends, started a group with the goal of reading through the entire Bible in one year. While I have grown up in the church and even attended a Lutheran school from kindergarten through sixth grade, I had never read through it all, or even most of it.

As I started going through the first several books of the Old Testament, I was struck with how violent a lot of it is. I really struggled with reconciling this Old Testament God with the New Testament God when I've been taught my whole life that God is love and we should love our neighbors. Soon after I started thinking about all of this, I saw a new podcast episode from Jen Hatmaker. She had interviewed Mike McHargue, whom I had never heard of, but the description caught my eye. He talked about how reading the Bible actually caused him to lose his faith and how he then came back to being a Christian.

After listening to the episode, I immediately bought and started reading his book, *Finding God in the Waves: How I Lost My Faith and Found It Again Through Science*. It is a very interesting story of his faith journey. But the chapter I appreciated the most was "Chapter 14: The Good Book". It really helped provide me with a new viewpoint from which to read the Bible. The big takeaways that I found involve reading the Bible through the lens of contextual history and it is the "Word of God through words of men," a quote from N. T. Wright. "I think the Bible was inspired by God in the same way 'Song for Jenny' was inspired by Jenny. She didn't write it but you can learn a lot about her if you hear it".

I realize that his theology is far from many Christians, but I think we can all learn things from his journey and I highly recommend his book.

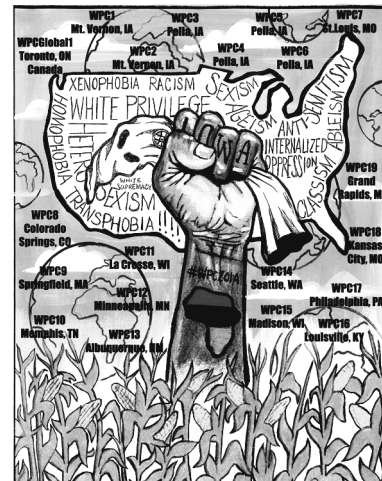


## A report on the White Privilege Conference 2019

- by Janet Elaine Guthrie

For twenty years, the organizers of the White Privilege Conference (WPC) have been, in their own words, “exploring, exposing, and challenging White Supremacy, White Privilege, and Oppression.” Mark and I got to experience their commitment first-hand at the 20th Annual White Privilege Conference, which took place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa from March 20 - 23, 2019.

We first learned of the WPC from friends who had attended in the past and praised the challenging program, which was birthed and has always been led by People of Color (the term they employ, along with Bi/Multi-Racial/Mixed-Heritage).



Our decision to participate was further encouraged by the opportunity to experience the conference with a group of Quakers sponsored by Friends General Conference (FGC). Quakers have a long history of attending the conference and FGC arranged for a discounted registration fee, a dinner and worship at a nearby retreat center, and a hospitality room for lunch-time conversation. These opportunities to fellowship and process the anti-racism journey with others were welcome.

Other faith groups also had a designated presence at the conference. Presbyterian Church USA made a formal presentation about the work that their denomination (90% white) has been doing, including truth-telling about their history. A particular focus has been owning their “settler” identity, drawing on the Anabaptist materials about Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery; a DOD video clip was shown during the session.

I left the conference wondering whether MC USA has ever been involved with WPC and hoping to encourage our denominational leadership to pursue the possibilities.

The other major constituency at the conference appeared to be school teachers at all levels, especially White teachers asking heartfelt questions about their ability to empathize and motivate their students, and how to address implicit bias, both their own and that of their less-aware colleagues.

One of the themes that resonated throughout the program is how much harm is done by White Privilege, including the hurt to White people and our human development. White Privilege limits our ability to develop deep connections and serve others. Topics included:

- White guilt and shame hold us back from practicing empathy and from working to interrupt White Supremacy.
- White Supremacy produces hate on multiple levels, including self-hatred.
- Post-traumatic stress not only affects the oppressed but also “lands in the bodies of multigenerational White folks.”
- Authenticity involves choosing to know who we are and how we have been formed by structural racism.
- American history has been sanitized and distorted to teach a false narrative, thereby giving us a distorted view of who we really are.
- Midwest Sundown towns need to be called out and repented.
- We need to learn to recognize White cultural values and habits.
- We need to know how to explain White Privilege to a skeptic.
- We need to know how to challenge White Supremacy with love.

## A report on the White Privilege Conference 2019 *(continued)*

Obviously there are no shortcuts to this kind of work, which requires sustained commitment, self-reflection, and practice. We left the conference with more tools in our toolkit and more resources, and inspired by the several thousand attendees from diverse backgrounds. Every participant is asked to take accountability back into our home environments with a focus on personal action, group/organizational action, and institutional/systemic change.

Opening ourselves to non-defensive learning about what it means to be White is the first step. Should you wish to pursue readings by conference speakers and other experts, we recommend the following titles:

Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (2018)

Debby Irving, *Waking Up White* (2014)

James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (rev. 2007; new preface, 2018)

Eddie Moore, Jr. et al., eds, *Everyday White People Confront Racial & Social Injustice* (2015)

The next annual conference will take place in Mesa, Arizona from April 1 - 4, 2020 ([www.whiteprivilegeconference.com](http://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com))

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## Exploring the Way in Santa Fe

- by Kaye Massanari

Kristy and I have been fans of Deva Premal for many years. She performs Sanskrit mantras with her husband, Miten, and flutist, Manose. Their music feels healing and inspires a feeling of connection to Spirit. We've been fortunate the last two years in May to travel to Sedona, Arizona to hear them perform live. This year we decided to see their May 3<sup>rd</sup> live performance in a different venue, and chose Santa Fe, New Mexico. In addition to the location change, we decided to make it more of an adventure by driving.



We had fun planning our route to Santa Fe. We took off on Monday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, and spent a night in Topeka, Kansas. The second night we stayed in Dodge City, Kansas, and enjoyed viewing historic sites and reminiscing about Saturday nights as kids watching "Gunsmoke." Our third day of driving was an interesting journey on remote two-lane highways through Kansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Much of the drive followed the Old Santa Fe Trail. There was only a brief moment of concern as the needle on the gas tank went down to a quarter tank, and the next "town" on the map had only one building, a mercantile store with no gas and a sign "Gladstone, NM, Population 5." We drove on and eventually found a gas station in Wagon Mound, NM.

Later that afternoon we arrived safely in Santa Fe, the oldest capital city in North America. We were immediately refreshed by the laid back energy and calming sights of red adobe buildings against the bright blue skies.



This trip was made even more special for us because Janet and Phil were able to join us for the long weekend. They flew in on Thursday evening. Friday was a fun day as we explored Santa Fe together. It felt as though for all of us the experience of being in this unique place, getting away from our routines at home was a relaxing and healing time. We took the time to reflect on that while visiting the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. We spent part of the afternoon walking the labyrinth there.

## Exploring the Way in Santa Fe (continued)



Friday night was the Deva Premal & Miten concert. They performed for three hours. It was a magical evening of beautiful music and spiritual energy filling the auditorium space and the hearts of the audience. It was wonderful sharing the experience with Phil and Janet and being able to talk about it after the concert.



Another highlight of the weekend was driving an hour north to Abiquiu to tour Georgia O’Keeffe’s home. It was interesting to see her living space maintained much as it was when she lived there. Especially fascinating was looking at scenes familiar from her paintings.



On Sunday, our last afternoon together, we sat at a cantina on Canyon Road discussing how the energy of the landscapes and art we’d experienced had inspired us and sparked our creativity. I know for myself I felt rejuvenated by this trip. A big thanks to Janet and Phil for enhancing this experience for us by their presence.



**SAVE THE DATE**

**4th ANNUAL INTERFAITH ALLIANCE  
COMMUNITY POTLUCK PICNIC**

JULY 28 at 4 pm  
Crystal Lake Park, Urbana

A stylized illustration of a picnic basket filled with food (burgers, an apple) and flowers, positioned at the bottom right of the text area.