

The Architecture of Worship

by Pastor Michael

Several recent conversations about the Worship Committee's proposal for replacing FMC's pews with chairs have me up at night thinking about worship architecture. Maybe my ruminations can help our deliberations.

Worship is a formational act. Anytime we gather with others, we consent to being shaped by their presence, by our surroundings, and by the words spoken, images displayed, and music sung. It doesn't usually rise to the level of deliberate thought, but this is also true of the opportunities and limitations invited by any worship space. Everything from the texture of the light to the way sound reverberates to what we feel when we cross the threshold into the sanctuary has the potential to shape us in conscious and unconscious ways.

This view of worship sees it as not merely something we do, but as something that shapes us into the people God calls us to become. Worship is faith embodied, which is a way of saying that in worship our bodies learn specific orientations; we are being trained to orient towards God and one another in love, justice, and peace. (This is why at FMC our primary form of Communion is gathered around tables). Worship is kingdom living.

A theological architecture of worship pays attention to how our bodies are oriented. Who or what gets our attention? What visual elements catch our eyes and shape our thoughts and feelings? What sounds strike our ears and who or what makes them? In more concrete terms, does worship draw us to Christ? Does it orient us towards God and neighbor in love, justice, and peace? Rather than being trivial to this task, things like furniture and technologies are designed precisely to orient our bodies and direct our attention.

One striking example of how this works can be seen in the early church's transition away from mostly house churches, which happened on a large scale in the 4th century. When the church met in living rooms and dining rooms, they were

embodying the idea that the church consists of the people – the relationships – not the building. Sitting on the living room couch for prayers turned ordinary gathering places into sacred space; sitting at the table for Communion sanctified every dose of daily bread. While those of us who worship in permanent church buildings may remain committed to these theological ideas, we have to constantly remind ourselves of them. It's not impossible to do, but it's also not something we learn from how we gather; it's not a natural part of our worship formation.

Another extreme but instructive example comes from the trend in Roman Catholic churches from roughly the 11th to 16th centuries in Europe. In these churches, the sanctuary was set apart from the assembly space with screens and other barriers that prevented access. The priesthood occupied the sanctuary, while the congregation gathered below. Worship was primarily a visual act (remember, much of the laity did not read, let alone speak the Latin of the worship liturgy) staged around the presentation of the body of Christ in the Eucharist. At the high point of the service, the priest lifted the communion bread for all to see, with the laity craning for a glimpse of the sacred meal. Historians have called this "ocular communion," because sometimes the mere sight of the bread substituted for having participated in the eucharistic feast.

From our 21st century Anabaptist frame, there are good reasons to be critical of this practice. But for this discussion I'm interested in a different lesson. The development of "ocular communion" corresponded with the rise of Gothic architecture, which sought to highlight God's transcendence through soaring ceilings and luminous reflections. The divine was distant, which for some was not so much a theological statement as a description of reality. Life was hard for many in Europe and God was perceived to be far away. For better or worse, their worship architecture reflected and reinforced this reality.

Much of the conversation about worship architecture swings on pendulums between immanence (God-With-Us) and transcendence

(God-Other-Than-Us), austerity and beauty, simplicity and extravagance, pragmatics and aesthetics, and the subtle distinction between calling a sanctuary “the house of God” or “the house of the people of God.”

It was the Protestant Reformation that made pulpits the focal point of the worship space. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasized hearing over seeing, elevating the preaching of the Word to sacramental status, declaring that Christ is present in the preaching of the Word. Soon after pulpits came pews, mostly because lengthy sermons meant tired feet. Prior to the Reformation, seating was not common in church architecture.

Although Mennonites are not Protestant, strictly speaking, as members of a Protestant-dominant culture and as occupants of a formerly Methodist building, we at FMC are heirs to this Word-centered tradition. Yet even though the pulpit/stage area centers our worship, we are so creative at being formed in a variety of ways by Christ’s presence when we gather. Here are a few I can think of:

- Visual art routinely preaches beautiful, wordless sermons all its own.
- It turns out that forward-centered worship is ideal for 4-part singing. Instead of observers, we turn the congregation into a choir. Instead of a preacher telling people what to think, the stage elevates a choir director and a pianist who help draw many voices together into one.
- Technology makes the pulpit portable. We pass mics for sharing time.
- We scrunch together around tables at the front of the sanctuary for Communion.
- All are welcome at our pulpit. (Someone pointed out to me that if we truly take seriously a theology of accessibility, we would provide ramp access to the stage area).

So what does all this have to do with the latest iteration of “chairs or pews” at FMC? Sometimes our worship practices struggle against the boundaries of our space in order to express core beliefs. Sometimes they are a natural fit. Usually there’s some of both. In all cases, worship architecture is forming us, defining the limits of our creativity in worship as we seek to be shaped by our Creator God.

As we continue the deliberations about seating in our sanctuary, I offer some questions: How does our worship space form our faith? In what ways is the FMC sanctuary a natural fit with our convictions and faithful yearnings? In what ways do we struggle against the space in trying to embody our particular calling to Christian discipleship?

Reflections from the FMC Retreat

by Mary Krick



We enjoyed wonderful worship outdoors during the retreat. The view was looking over a grassy lawn down to the lake. Refreshing. The children drummed and played the Orff instruments, pounded nails, and ran to play. We sang and watched skits and listened to stories about what was lost and now is found. Special thanks to Doug for thoughtful and memorable retelling of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son scriptures and for his personal story.



Children’s nature walk craft project from the retreat.





During worship sessions, Pastor Michael asked us to consider questions to reflect on and respond to with one word or many. These responses were written on paper leaves and pinned to Kajsa Herrstrom's beautiful tree tapestry. Below are the questions and responses.

Saturday morning worship

Questions:

- What has changed about you or your life during the pandemic?
- Is this sad or joyful or ...?
- What does God want to say to you about it?

Responses:

- Reset.
- I appreciate the love of community after its absence for the last year.
- Pandemic life: More anxious in proximity to others and in public settings; hesitant to accept invitations. God's assurance that our domestic sanctuary and love for each other is enough for now.
- I am not invulnerable. I can't take health for granted. Each day and step I can take is a gift from God.
- During Covid I missed being with friends and family and traveling to new and favorite places. As I hasten to return to 'life as I know it', I find that I need to overcome a certain laziness, or perhaps contentment, to sit on my couch in the evening and watch TV or spend time in our garden. As I face a certain season of loss as I age, life's inevitable losses come to me. I hope that I remember the value of less and the bounty that is still with me.
- Exhaustion has become a norm. Each one of us like too little butter scraped over too much bread. Ever has adulthood been so, yet ever have people found God in an exhausting life full of love.
- Loss, grief. More loss, more grief. God's faithfulness, grace, mercy.
- Time to sort through things left to sit too long. Time to learn new ways to connect. Time to be lonely. Change it to time to be alone and be alright.

- I have gained a deeper appreciation for my relationship with friends and doing things together.
- Overwhelming gratitude that Zoom was and is available. Never expected to be grateful for a computer program.
- I had a change of heart and mind when I joined FMC. I missed connections and personal contact. I learned to work alone. God lead us to shelter in Faith and this strengthened my faith.
- Don't give up.
- What I have lost: some friendships, concentration, visits with family. What I have gained: weight, freedom from 2 jobs, cooking skills and appreciation of it, some friends, sleep, reading time, TV/movie watching time. God's role in these: leading me on the path and encouraging listening.
- During the pandemic, something that has changed for me is that I have more frequent and more intentional communication with out-of-state family members. I believe that God is saying, "You are a valued member of your family community."
- Staying at home is sweet, but it can be lonely too.
- Lost: Being too busy, going here and there, maybe nowhere. Found: spaciousness. God speaks — Come to the Quiet. My wisdom is in the Peace of Quiet Places and My Presence in Nature — children, birds, butterflies, prairie grasses, water, sky...all around you.
- It is what it is...And it will be okay. Jesus said: "Remember, I am always with you." Matthew 28:20

Saturday evening worship

Questions:

- What do you want God to help you find— what are you searching for?
- What tools/gifts has God given to help with the search?

Responses:

- Joy.
- Searching for meaning and purpose. Trying to trust that the lost in me will be found.
- I need people. Giving grace to myself and others. We are in this together even when our views are so far apart.
- Trust, mystery.

- Old friends. Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other gold.

Sunday worship

Questions:

- Think of a time when someone showed you compassion. What happened?
- What did it feel like for you?
- How is God trying to show you compassion right now?
- For yourself? For someone else?

Responses:

- That person I'm upset with? They're probably trying their best.
- I need people. Giving grace to myself and others. We are in this together even when our views are so far apart.
- Joy in seeing children playing! Lots of room to run.
- God showed my compassion by giving me a second chance at faith in God and Jesus and showing me the way to FMC.
- "God's love is enough! God's love is enough! God's love is enough!"

Thoughts on Mutual Aid, "Small Groups" and Practice

by Marcia E. Nelson, Council Chair



In January I attended a Zoom workshop at Hesston College and am still pondering the message from David Fitch. He defined the church as a community whose practices gather us into his Lordship, reminding us of the description of the early church in Acts: those who broke bread in the presence of the living Christ, baptized, studied and taught, prayed, fellowshiped, reconciled, accompanied, and shared the gospel. In the early church the people were shaped by practice, not belief. And practice made visible the presence of God.

Hence, our practices of mutual aid and gathering are central to being church. In the spring, in preparation for Mennonites 101, I updated the list of ways in which we provide mutual aid to each other, the more "formal" practices and also what I know of (and could remember) the many, many acts of caring individuals. [I think you would be surprised to see the length of that list \(view it\)!](#)

Small groups have been a part of our history and we have surviving remnants at present, but in 2019 SLT decided to replace that practice with the Care Groups that included everyone in the congregation. The goal was worthy - to ensure that all were offered a "home" group of people for connection. As we moved in 2020 to life on Zoom, for some these groups were lifelines to our community. Karen McKenzie had the idea to have [each group produce a photo montage of group members on their porches \(view the videos\)](#). These were shown in our worship and were such good reminders of those we loved and missed. On the downside, the groups were large and the lack of structure which was supposed to give freedom to the group also produced confusion. SLT has decided that these groups will not continue in any formal sense beyond their two year trial.

So, what is next? Stay tuned. But also remember the many ways that we have here at FMC to nurture relationships individually and in small groups. We gather for worship, for work, for play, to celebrate, and to provide care without any label of "small group." But when we gather, we gather in His name and become church. Our options here are many and if you have suggestions for new ways in which we can strengthen our community, SLT members welcome your input. The current SLT members are: pastors Michael and Deb, Kathy Springer, Tammie Bouseman and Marcia Nelson.

FMC Apartment Ministry Comes to an End

by Clark Breeze,
Apartment Building Liaison



For the first time in our ownership history, the FMC apartment building next door to the church was not fully rented at the start of 2021. Consequently, in February 2021 the Church Council appointed an ad hoc committee to explore the possibility of offering our two unrented apartments at a discount to those in the community needing transitional housing. The committee of Bob Hudson, Greg Springer, and Clark Breeze met to consider options and came up with guidelines for the new FMC Apartment Ministry. These two one-bedroom units were offered at a discounted rent and without requiring a damage deposit. The program would run from February until July 15, 2021, when it would then be

re-evaluated before the start of the fall semester in August. Weiner, our property manager, reluctantly agreed to go along with this offering but cautioned that we could be in for some surprises since we had also decided to waive background checks. We were told that those in need of transitional housing would likely not have spotless rental histories and might be ruled out through the normal process.

Oddly, our most troubling ministry tenant on paper turned out to be our most successful case.

Someone with a less than positive history with Weiner turned out to be a model tenant. His stay was without incident. Once he was approved for a local subsidized housing building, he moved out and left his unit in excellent condition. In this case, we were able to fulfill a real need for true transitional housing.

We had little background on our second tenant but knowing there was a supportive local family involved seemed like a positive indicator. We did not anticipate that this tenant would be the source of multiple police calls, a trashed apartment, and would single handedly create a negative environment for our other traditional tenants. The peaceful student building which had been an asset for many years was now in jeopardy. Calls to the family were not returned, and it was not until mid-September that the tenant's personal property was removed and needed repairs began. Our waiving of the damage deposit means that FMC will pay the full cost of rehabilitating this unit.

Our third tenant was referred by a local governmental agency and only stayed for two months. This was another true transitional housing case, but despite the short stay, left behind some negative vibes. There were reports of smoking in the apartment - which is a violation of our "smoke free building" policy, complaints about noise, and some misuse of parking spaces. Thankfully the tenant moved out on time and left the unit in good shape.

At the June Church Council meeting, I attended in person and reported on our experience thus far with the Apartment Ministry.

- I emphasized that FMC should feel good about trying to meet the local need for transitional housing in our community, even if just for a short time.

- We have made a difference in the lives of two individuals.
- Financially the program was positive because we received at least some rent.
- The final cost of repairing the trashed unit has yet to be determined.
- We need to consider the impact such a ministry has on current and prospective tenants, as well as our positive relationship with Weiner.

After much discussion, Church Council voted unanimously to end the Apartment Ministry at the end of the July 15 trial period. Weiner has been asked to rent all units at full rent with normal screening and security deposits in place. With seven years left to pay on our mortgage, it was felt that we cannot afford to have ministry tenants impact the building environment so that it is no longer a good fit for the traditional student market. Perhaps a charitable use of the building can once again be considered in the future.

NOTE: As of 9/23/21 there are 3 units still unrented for the fall semester including the one being repaired. Hoping to make the building more attractive to prospective tenants, I recommend that we paint the dated wood paneling in each living room of the vacant units, upgrade the light fixtures, and purchase some new modestly priced more modern furniture. Cost estimates are currently being prepared for Church Council to study before a final decision is made.

Green Space Update

by Mary Krick



Since March 2020, we've been using the green space more and are thankful it is available.

Gardeners Sheryl Dyck, Rosalee Otto and Mary Krick have begun planting outside the chain link fence on the Springfield side. Our hope is to provide a beautiful visual and sound diminishing barrier along Springfield Avenue. The area will be mostly evergreen and will require minimal maintenance. We are excited to begin this project and recognize that it will be several years before the effects of our work is realized.

Rethinking Our Shopping Habits?

by Cindy Breeze

We create opportunities for artisans in developing countries to earn income by bringing their products and stories to our markets through long-term, fair trading relationships.

The above mission statement guides the philosophy of the fifty-plus nationwide Ten Thousand Villages stores. Our local Ten Thousand Villages, at 105 N. Walnut in Champaign, began 36 years ago from a united effort of First Mennonite Church, East Bend Mennonite Church (Fisher), Dewey Mennonite Church, and Arthur Mennonite Church. Originally under the leadership of Mennonite Central Committee, the policy has always been for each store to have minimal paid staff with all other work done by volunteers. Since the launch of our local store all the managers have been from First Mennonite (with one of the managers later attending another church). In addition, many board members and scores of the store's volunteers have come from our congregation. Currently, FMCers include the manager Emily King, three board members - Cynthia Nafziger, Sam Cox, and Cindy Breeze, and 8 volunteers.

Those facts, as interesting and informative as they may be, especially for those newer to our congregation, do not begin to tell the real story of Ten Thousand Villages and its impact around the world. From its inception, the philosophy of Villages has been to create an opportunity for global artisans to earn a fair wage from their artistry. Paying 50% of the artisans' wages upfront has been a practice that has made all the difference to struggling households.

At the recent National Ten Thousand Villages Workshops on Zoom, we learned how the pandemic and devastating floods have negatively affected the people of Bangladesh. While many lost jobs and were unable to provide for their families because of these catastrophes, Ten Thousand Villages artisans - most of whom are women - continued to receive purchase orders and fair wages. This allowed them to provide food, shelter, and education for their families. These Bangladesh artisans create seventy-five products for Ten

Thousand Villages, and overall, 6 of the top 10 Ten Thousand Villages' products sold are made in that country. Fair trade partnership stories like this are duplicated in 30 countries and throughout the United States, and 20,000 artisans are now receiving fair and life-saving wages for their work. After serving on the local Ten Thousand Villages board for two years, which in itself is somewhat surprising since I don't particularly like shopping and know next to nothing about retail, I am now chair of the board of directors. I find it very inspiring to see how the staff and volunteers work so hard to better the lives of women and men around the world and want to remind each of us that we have a stellar fair trade opportunity "right in our backyard." I invite us to reconsider our shopping habits and make Ten Thousand Villages a first stop when needing to make personal or gift-giving purchases. As easy as it might be to order something quickly online or run into a big box store, might we remember that shopping at Ten Thousand Villages is a conscientious, sustaining, fair wage, life-giving alternative? Many of you are already doing this and have been doing it for a very long time. However, I have to admit that until I became more involved in the store, I didn't always think of Ten Thousand Villages as the first place to begin my shopping.

Shoppers may be surprised at the wide array of wonderful and affordable products available in the store or online: table cloths, children's books and toys, napkins, cookbooks, baskets, recycled sari aprons and flowers, shawls, gloves, hats, Christmas ornaments, candles and holders, picture frames, chocolate, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, bags, lotions, soaps, gels, incense, journals, nativity sets, lamps, wall hangings, coffee, soup and cookie mixes, planters, garlands, purses, chess sets, pizza cutters, puzzles, book ends, platters...on and on and on.

Stay tuned for the announcement of the annual fall "bag sale" where everything a shopper can fit into a large bag will be discounted 25%.



Anti-racism Audit

by Marcia E. Nelson,
Council Chair



Hopefully you have heard of the antiracism audit to be conducted by our church. Things are moving. Committee appointments have been made. Karen McKenzie and Bharat Patel will co-chair the committee, serving with Amber Anderson and Rev. Dr. James Fielder, a leadership consultant and pastor in the United Methodist Church. Committee advisors will be Michael Crosby, pastoral liaison; Kaye Massanari, Council liaison; and Melissa Shungu and Pete Shungu, accountability advisors. The work will be guided by a resource offered by MCUSA and developed by Widerstand Consulting. Widerstand's team is led by Dr. Tobin Miller Shearer, teacher, scholar, and skilled anti-racism trainer long active in Mennonite anti-racist work.

The timeline for the work, like most things, has been impacted by Covid. The video trainings from Widerstand total 16.5 hours and Council began the study of those materials in July, appreciating the content and the good discussion that followed. It was our hope that relevant portions of these materials would be offered to the congregation in the fall, in various formats including Sunday School and individual study with living room conversation. That did not happen. But we will be offering access when the time is right.

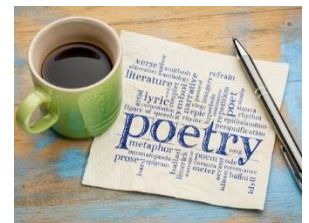
The work of the committee will begin this fall and will focus on all institutional levels, examining how racism is expressed by taking a look at FMC's procedures, policies, practice, program, and personnel. A timeline of two months is suggested. The process invites broad conversation with congregants, leaders, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) members of the community.

Transparency will invite accountability. The committee will "Identify concrete, specific, actionable steps with clearly identified dates and outcomes" helping us to continue on the journey of dismantling racism in our congregation.

Why are we doing this? Much has led us to this point: a series of Sunday school classes beginning with The New Jim Crow, hearing the Word, discussion of the manifesto written by Thom and Martha Moore, Michael's document for Council:

Dismantling Racism and White Supremacy, and the Council action in November 2020 signing the Faith in Place Anti-racism Pledge.

Last spring Council affirmed that the congregation had been moving in recent years towards an institutional commitment to dismantling racism and white supremacy. Indeed, the question of readiness for this was posed in the 2020/2021 Questions. What this would mean for the congregation was outlined in a Statement of Intent that we prepared and released last spring. One of the components of that became one of Council's Priorities for 2021/2022: Appoint and work with a committee to complete an anti-racism audit of our church. We have begun.



Thursday Morning Bible Study Poems

by Cindy Breeze

This fall, the participants in the 9:30 a.m. Thursday morning Bible study are focusing on the lives of New Testament women. A recent session included the stories of the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:21-43) and the bent-over woman (Luke 13:10-17). Several people wrote Haiku, Cinquain, and Shadorma forms of poetry about these women.

Haikus:

Bent by an illness
Broken by an unkind world
Made whole by Jesus

From hopeless to hope
All else has offered nothing
Jesus you are my Hope

He called me daughter
Healed my body and my soul
Faith, Courage, Action

Cinquain:

Woman
Dirty, Shunned
Weeping, Hurting, Hoping
Took a Chance
Courage

Shadormas:

Bent Over

Neither Loved nor Seen

Unvanquished

Reached out to one who cared

Met with grace and love

Thank you, God
for all the women
who reach out
and have faith
who take a bold risk and know
that you love and care

Meet Cindi Schieber

by Norma Nelson



Cindi Schieber is the newest editor of *The Vine*. She is also relatively new to FMC, having moved from Alexandria, Virginia, to Champaign with her husband Mat in October 2018. As retired empty-nesters, with their younger son Cameron (22) attending Old Dominion University in Norfolk VA, they came home to the Midwest. Mat spent much of his youth in Tuscola and Cindi in Morton, the “pumpkin capital of the world,” she laughed.

Cindi’s is an easy and ready laugh these days, although hidden behind a mask. The eyes above the partial face covering, though, cannot mask her enthusiasm and curiosity. When she and Mat first arrived in the area, Cindi sought out places in which to use her energy in meaningful ways. Church often is the place to begin. She and Mat were raised Methodist, so that’s where they started “church shopping.” Cindi also signed up to volunteer for the Champaign Public Library’s FriendShop resale Bookstore. Cindi was excited to support a resource that gets everyone reading at an affordable cost, with most books costing \$.50-\$2.

It was at the FriendShop that Cindi met Rosalee Otto, who in late 2018 or early 2019 suggested that Cindi visit FMC, offering to meet her in the church’s parking lot and sit with her during the service. The offer was accepted, and the rest is history. Cindi reflected momentarily, “Everyone at FMC was exceedingly friendly. So many came up to us. I was all in.” However, between snowbirding (more below), services switching to Zoom and the building closed in March 2020, Cindi was not able to get

involved in church activities quickly. In addition to the FriendShop she is also involved with Feeding Our Kids, which is the program that prepares bags of shelf-stable, mostly snack-type foods to send home with students. “Social workers at the schools put the bags in the kids’ backpacks and the kids take them home,” she explained. “Some mothers at elementary schools realized several years ago that kids were saving parts of their school lunches to take home for the weekend and to share with siblings.” Cindi and Mat help with food sorting and grant writing for the program.

Perhaps their cat Skadoodle was an influence in Cindi’s recently taking on another volunteer gig a couple of times each month with privately run CATsNAP in Champaign where all cats are altered, vaccinated, microchipped, and tested for FeLV/FIV before adoptions [a small plug for CATsNAP]. “I like to stay very busy,” says Cindi.

“Mat and I spent more than 23 years working in Washington, DC. It’s a crowded, hectic place to be, something is always going on. When we retired, Mat wanted to live in a college town. Mat’s daughter Kim and her husband Curt, both social workers, live in Chicago’s Edgebrook area. Granddaughter Taylor (20) is an NCAA swimmer currently attending the University of Maryland/Baltimore County. Grandson Drew (16) is a junior at Lincoln Park High School and plays hockey. Older son, Ben (30), an IL grad, is here and is the live-in manager of Park Place, where we live one floor above. So this just seemed like the place to be,” said Cindi.

Mat also went to the University of Illinois and was a tenured Economics professor at Illinois State University, until he joined the private sector in DC. Ben and Cindi joined him shortly thereafter.

Cindi got her economics degree at ISU. Her capital career covered a lot of territory: 14 years with the Federal Communications Commission, the agency that regulates communications including radio and cellular spectrum; six years with the International Trade Commission, which provides support for U.S. trade representative among other missions; and a shorter stint with the National Institutes of Health at the Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). “I particularly liked working at NIH because it’s a big campus; similar to U of I. There are 27 separate institutes, including Dr. Fauci’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). They have

their own hospital, power plant, fire department, etc. But we didn't want to retire there. It's a bit too crazy. I sorely miss all the friends we made during that time. But we will be going back to visit in a few weeks...before we take off for Georgia for the winter," she explained.

Mat and Cindi have a get-away condo in the historical part of a vibrant downtown Savannah. Savannah is also a mild climate city where Mat can continue his 50 year love of cycling, sans snow and ice. "My husband is a long-time cyclist and he'd been bugging me," chuckled Cindi, "So I picked up a recumbent trike at the beginning of the pandemic and I'm working on that."



They plan to head to Georgia in late November and return here around the first of May. Which is why it is nice that they can remotely continue with some of the projects begun in C-U, like grant writing and The Vine editing. Hopefully, they will also have friends (who are vaccinated, of course) and family with them this season.

Cindi is sure she will again pick up some volunteer work with the Savannah Humane Society and other places. On rainy days, well, she's knitting. Their lives hardly sound like they are retired. Retired from some of the stressors, perhaps but taking on new challenges and exploring seems part of their way of life. Future travels might include a train ride across Canada or the US, visiting countries where they haven't yet ventured, extended bike trips, catching up with friends, or just doing what they want whenever they want and wherever they want. When asked about skydiving, bungee jumping, or zip lining, Cindi was quick to respond, "No, no, no, I have a fear of height issue and I'm not a thrill junkie."

But she's quite thrilled with her FMC family. Catch up with Cindi the next time you see her and find out more.

Institutional Lifestyle

by Randy Nelson

During this season of creation, I think about my relationship to the environment and how that relationship has changed over time. In 1978 when I was a member of the Presbyterian Church, they produced a manual for individual lifestyle assessment that was designed "to encourage and enable small groups to assess and alter their lifestyles in the context of Christian community." I don't know what the Mennonites were thinking in the 70s, but at that time these were radical ideas for Presbyterians. When I reread the material now, most of the ideas seem to be common sense but in 1978 concepts about the limits of resources and over-consumption were new and controversial and they changed my life.

At the same time, the Presbyterian Church came out with a resource to explore institutional lifestyle change. It was entitled *How to become a poor church (and save faith)*. Individual lifestyle is still a mainstream topic but institutional lifestyle not so much. Recently I Googled lifestyle and got 57,400,000 hits. When I limited it to "institutional lifestyle," I got 2,030 hits. Almost all were concerned with making institutions for those with medical, aging or behavior (criminal and otherwise) issues more livable and about five referenced spiritual communities. As a religious term it is nearly dead, but as a concept it is still powerful. It implies that institutions have lifestyles just as individuals do. These lifestyles are important because institutions are a powerful driver of societal norms and changes. We are familiar with the idea of institutional racism and the concept is the same. Moral, non-racist people do not ensure that the institutions of which they are a part are moral and non-racist. In fact, it may be easier for us to personally do the right thing if the institutions that provide us benefits are conforming to norms that work in our favor.

There were at least two strains of thoughts on institutional change. The most extreme idea was radical divestiture. The proponents of this idea thought that the church should sell or give to

independent boards all property: churches, schools, hospitals, camps, and houses. As programs were closed, employees would be given decent severance pay and remaining employees would be paid based on need and not on seniority or duties. There may have been a couple of individual churches that adopted some or most of these ideas but obviously it was not embraced by any denomination. Adam Daniel Finnerty (co-author of *How to become a poor church (and save faith)*) wrote, "If nothing is clear, it is evident that if Christ should return to the earth today, he would find himself heir to an astounding amount of real estate."

An alternative plan opposed radical divestiture for a variety of reasons but a major point was that institutions are a needed vehicle for the transmission of religious values. We don't live in the first century. What we need is a modern, focused, simplified church that can provide a model for institutions in a new society. Faithful institutions should embody lifestyles befitting both the insights derived from the Gospels and the realities of the world situation. Like the new ideas about individual lifestyle modified my behavior, the concepts of institutional life profoundly altered my vision of church.

One of the first aspects that is considered in lifestyle change is reduced consumption. I am not going to outline all the statistics to prove these points but there are three major aspects of our patterns of consumption. First, in the US we are consuming most of the world's resources at 3 to 6 times more than our per capita share. Second, there are simply not enough resources for everyone to consume at the rate that we do; and third, we now know that our rates of consumption are destroying the ecosystems on which we depend.

The key word of lifestyle change is sufficiency. It is the normative term to define and describe an appropriate Christian response in the contemporary world. Consumption ceases to be simply a matter of what we can afford. The reality is that we cannot afford all that we have the money to buy. Any lifestyle appropriate to Christian faithfulness entails a voluntary restraint upon consumption. To employ the concept of sufficiency would radically alter the lifestyle of most Americans. However, sufficiency is not the same for everyone. Sufficiency ethics requires us to ask, when is enough enough and in what areas is there insufficiency.

Modern English translations of the Greek New Testament use the word repentance for the word metanoia. However, in early Christian literature, the term was used more expansively to express a fundamental change in thinking that leads to a fundamental change in behavior. One of the authors of the Presbyterian manual for individual lifestyle assessment stated, "One expects to sense a commitment to peace in how Quakers, Mennonites and Brethren live, work, write, and speak. In the same way we can assume that an institution that is really committed to simplicity will live that way without the need for conscious planning." Metanoia is a new way of thinking and living where changes become part of who we are and not what we struggle to be.

Any meaningful discussion of lifestyle change will not end with consumption. If the church pursues the lifestyle question with the depth of biblical theology, we will be asking very radical questions that go beyond buying habits and energy use. We are called to freedom from insatiable appetites, the need to dominate, and the need to succeed as the world defines success. Authentic lifestyle change for institutions requires challenging the way power is held and used, the way plans and decisions are made, and the way support is given to the weakest member of the institution. We need to closely examine how much of our mission is preoccupied with the wants of our current membership compared to reaching out to the needs of the world. How much do we incorporate the dominant culture's devotion to material success, size, financial stability, and outward display; and how often do we play a servant role and speak with a prophetic voice?



Church & Apartment Roof Repair Project

by Ken Nisley-Nagele,
Property and Finance Committee Chair

On 2 June 2021 the roof repair project was awarded to Popejoy Roofing, Inc., Farmer City; the solar panel removal and replacement to New Prairie Construction Company, Urbana; and the supplemental insulation to Illiana Insulation, Inc., Cissna Park, IL. The total of all contracts is approximately \$86,000, of which about \$66,000 has been paid by our insurer, Church Mutual. Most of the \$20,000 difference is for insulation and roof ventilation improvements, with the remainder going to the insurance deductible.

Due to a delay in getting some of the materials, the Property and Finance Committee agreed to postpone the start of work until all the materials were received. The postponement will allow the entire project to be completed during a single mobilization and demobilization by the contractors, rather than have multiple construction disruptions to our facilities over an extended period of time. The project is now scheduled to start in October. The project will cause some disruption in and around the church and apartment building, particularly in areas to the north of these buildings where most of the roofing materials will be removed from the buildings. A storage unit will be rented and located in the northwest corner of the main north parking lot and probably will result in losing several parking spaces. In addition to new roofing, the gutters and downspouts will be replaced. The cupola will not be refurbished, but it will be loosened and lifted to properly complete flashing around its base. The cupola does need a coat of paint - anyone interested in a high-visibility job?

FMC Library Display



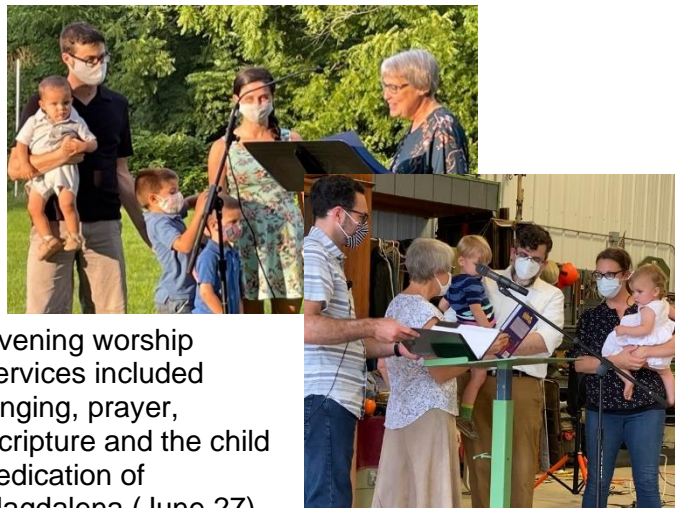
Stop in and check out the books in FMC's library. On display are books authored or illustrated by FMC members and friends.

FMC Happenings at Henry's House



Thanks to Perry Biddle, Henry now has a locked shed with a donated mower in it. It will need to be painted ~ perhaps orange! Henry's garden also took shape this summer.

Child Dedications this Summer



Evening worship services included singing, prayer, Scripture and the child dedication of Magdalena (June 27) and Jonas (July 25).

Next Vine Deadline: October 31.
Send submissions to editor Cindi Schieber:
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