

FMC Newsletter

Volume No. 1

Issue No. 4

April 2008

The mission of First Mennonite Church is to welcome all to know Christ's salvation through worship and works of love, peace and justice in service for God.

Rachel's Ramblings

The gospel text for the first Sunday in April is Luke 24:13-35, the story of the two disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. These two disciples are walking and talking with Jesus and yet they do not recognize him. It is not until they break bread together that their eyes are opened and they see Jesus.

Not seeing what is right before our eyes happens to us all, doesn't it? We can drive past something for years and not really notice what it is until something opens our eyes – perhaps the way the sun is shining or we have to make a new turn. New spaces and places provide new opportunities to see. I have a different view of the church in my new study. I now see the coming and going of parents as they drop off and pick up their children.

On a couple of occasions I have noticed a parent on a cell phone while dropping off a child. I wondered what message were these parents sending to their children? "You are not as important as the person on the phone?" How can we be fully with someone, if we are talking to someone else? How can we be present to the one we are with physically, when our attention is elsewhere? I realize we do not have to be on a cell phone to divert our attention from the people we are with, but what influence (positive and negative) does technology have on our relationships?

I am attached to my laptop – it is my research library, pen and filing cabinet. It is my connection to friends via email, instant messaging and video phone calls. It is my entertainment – I watch TV and movies on it. It is my radio and CD player. I would feel lost without it, but also wonder about the health of my attachment to it. How do I make sure I don't get too comfortable (or busy) that I only look at my relationship with technology from one point of view? How do we reflect intentionally on our relationships with technology and how that affects our relationships with God and each other?

Continued on page 2

Tax rebates offer witness opportunity

This spring, many Mennonite Church USA households will receive a tax rebate as part of the U.S. government's economic stimulus package. The goal of the rebate is to encourage spending in an effort to boost the national economy.

Mennonite Church USA invites members to view this rebate as an opportunity to do kingdom work, rather than making consumer purchases. If we redirect all or part of our tax rebate to meet any of the needs listed below (*the letter is posted to the bulletin board*), we could demonstrate to the world an alternative vision of how to use unexpected financial resources.

The rebate is an opportunity to put our money to work for the kingdom, like the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with her expensive perfume, rather than keeping it for herself or the young boy who put his lunch in Jesus' hands and fed the five thousand.

Congregations may want to work together and pool their rebates. A congregation of 30 households could receive as much as \$25,000.

The above comes from Mennonite Church USA. How might God make use of our rebates, if we were to take up this challenge?

In this issue...

Rachel's Ramblings	1
Tax rebates	1
Birthdays & Anniversaries.....	2
Community Announcements.....	2
The broader church.....	2
On the horizon	3
April calendar	4

continued from page 1

The month of April offers us a couple of opportunities for looking at technology differently. April 21 – 27 is national turn off the TV week. Sponsored by the Center for Screen-Time Awareness, it is an opportunity to fast from television and enjoy other relationships. For more information visit www.tvturnoff.org.

April 22 is Earth Day. This day offers us a chance to stop and reflect on our relationship with non-human creation.

Whether or not you choose to observe any of these events, I encourage you to spend some time in April looking at the world around you through new eyes. You might be surprised at what you see.

The Penny Power Jug is Back!!!

Save your change and bring it to church. This "Water for Life" project, sponsored by MCC, provides funds to create clean drinking water and new wells for communities all over the world.

The Penny Power change will be collected at the Relief Sale in Kidron, August 2, 2008.

April Birthdays & Anniversaries

2 - Aaron Croyle
10 - Dale Lowe
11 - Jan Croyle
15 - Jan Althaus
24 - Chris Chamberlin
26 - Laura Moss

FMC & Community Announcements

Believers in Conversation, April 18-20 at Christian Central School. Come and hear Ron Sider speak. Brochures are on the bulletin board or on the school's web site, www.centralchristian.k12.oh.us.

Cantate Singers spring concerts.

April 20, 2008 at Sonnenberg Mennonite Church in Kidron and April 27, 2008 at Northside Christian Church in Wadsworth. The times will be announced.

This will be a sacred program that will feature the music of John Bell, Taize worship selections and

several works by local composers, along with a collection of gospel songs and spirituals, to be led by guest conductor Andrea Gerber.

The broader church

The following is a shortened version of a Mennonite Church USA news release from March 18, 2008. The full version is available on the Mennonite Church USA website.

Executive Board shares vision for changing Mennonite Church USA behaviors, organization and structures

By Marathana Prothro

NEWTON, Kan.— At its Feb. 8 to 9 meeting in San Antonio, Texas, the Executive Board stated that the denomination's vision and call "is not adequately supported by our present relationships, behaviors and organization."

To support the vision of Mennonite Church USA, the Executive Board is calling for a unified churchwide communication and identity system and a simple and cohesive funding system. The Executive Board is also suggesting that an additional person be added to the Executive Leadership staff with the goal of assisting the executive director to ensure churchwide ministries practice good stewardship by reducing duplication and increasing organizational effectiveness at meeting congregational needs.

Finally, the Executive Board believes that the unity of purpose needed to adequately support the vision requires the development of one, integrated board of directors for the denomination that would replace the individual boards for each agency.

The Executive Board agreed at its September 2007 meeting—its first of the biennium—in Newton, Kan., to lift up *Vision: Healing & Hope* and its missional church priorities as a framework for future board direction. The board said it would lead the church in responding to the Church Member Profile findings and would evaluate churchwide systems by how effectively they supported congregations.

Also at its September meeting, the Executive Board agreed it would accept its leadership position and authority in Mennonite Church USA. [Moderator Sharon] Waltner and [moderator-elect Ed] Diller said this guiding principle was stirred by delegate responses at San José 2007 calling for the Executive Board to take a more prominent role in vision and leadership for the whole of the denomination.

Waltner and Diller said the denomination's six year review, delegate table group responses from San José 2007, feedback from the Constituency

Leaders Council, a 2006 CLC task force report, a 2005 funding study and the Church Member Profile 2006 all indicate a need for improving the ability of churchwide ministries to function effectively, to relate to each other and to support area conferences and congregations as they seek to join God’s work in the world.

One churchwide communication and identity system

The Executive Board sees redundancy—such as multiple news services, uncoordinated congregational mailings and competing organizational identities—in the area of communication as a hindrance to the denomination’s combined capacity to enable Mennonite Church USA congregations and members to strengthen their witness. At present, each of the agencies and Executive Leadership coordinates some joint communication, though the majority of each staff’s work is separate from the work of other staff. To remedy the duplication, the Executive Board calls for one churchwide communication and identity system that is headed by and in the denominational center.

Area conferences will be needed to help shape and participate in a new churchwide communication system. The board wants the system to include *The Mennonite* magazine so that all communication from church entities to congregations and their members will be integrated.

A simple and unified funding system

Currently, Mennonite Church USA has multiple funding systems that are complicated and lead to what appears to be competition among agencies, colleges, area conferences and related groups for funds. As the system currently operates, each agency is responsible for raising its own funds independent of the others. Executive Leadership does not actively raise funds from individuals, but relies on contributions from area conferences and agencies to support its ministries.

A funding study of Mennonite Church USA household giving completed in 2005 by Advancement Associates indicated that Mennonite Church USA is a small denomination with too many organizations competing with each other for the same funds. For board members, this raises a concern about whether existing church structures are sustainable—or relevant—for the future of the denomination.

The board calls for a simple and unified funding system that respects designations from donors while providing funding where it’s most needed in the denomination. The funding system, like the communication system, will be headed by and in the denominational center.

One integrated board of directors

At present, each agency and *The Mennonite* has its own board of directors that are responsible to the Executive Board. The Executive Board acts on behalf of the Delegate Assembly, the denomination’s decision-making body, when it is not in session.

The Executive Board is calling for an integrated board of directors for the agencies, Executive Leadership and *The Mennonite* that would make space for meaningful, connective voices from present agencies and conferences. The shape of a new integrated board will be the subject of discussion between now and the all-boards meeting June 19 to 21 in Columbus, Ohio, Waltner said.

Next steps

The Executive Board’s Executive Committee will meet to evaluate the discussions with agencies and conferences and will [also] prepare for discussion with other churchwide boards June 19 to 21. Boards participating in that meeting include the Executive Board, Mennonite Education Agency, Mennonite Mission Network, MMA, Mennonite Publishing Network and *The Mennonite*. This meeting was set more than a year ago and will be the first gathering of all Mennonite Church USA boards of directors since its inception in 2001. Immediately following the all-boards meeting in Columbus, the Executive Board will have time to evaluate next steps. Those steps will be reported as they are discerned.

Diller shared his optimism about the future, “The strength of our vision, supported by clearer identity and stronger behaviors of community might surprise us in its capacity to invite increased support for all parts of our mission.”

On the horizon...	
May 3	FMC Fish Fry
May 11	Pentecost - communion will be served
June 15	Church Picnic @ River Styx Park
June 26-28	Central District Conference meetings in Wheaton IL
July 8-10	People’s Summit for Faithful Living in Winnipeg MB
Aug 1-2	Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale & Auction

Deadline for submissions (news items, reviews, poems, articles, events, etc.) for the **May 2008** newsletter is **April 22, 2008**. Please submit to Rachel via email or mailbox.