

# First Threshings

## First Mennonite Church

Ash & Grand

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I praise him most, I love him best, all  
praise and love is his;  
While him I love, in him I live, and  
cannot live amiss.  
Love's sweetest mark, laud's highest  
theme, man's most desired light,  
To love him life, to leave him death,  
to live in him delight.  
He mine by gift, I his by debt, thus  
each to other due,  
First friend he was, best friend he is,  
all times will try him true.

Robert Southwell

...inwardly we are being restored day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16b

I write this while at Heartland Farm. This is my fifth extended stay here. Heartland Farm is located west of Great Bend, a mile into Rush County. It is not really a farm as we tend to think of farms. It is more like an ongoing experiment in community and spirituality, based on a simple lifestyle with agrarian practices. Here they raise alpacas, can vegetables, sun dry fruit, and make soap. Here you will find a prayer labyrinth mowed in the pasture, practices of holistic health, and a straw bale hermitage with no electricity or plumbing. Here you will find people who sit down for lunch together every day and take turns preparing the meal. Here you will find people who generate only the income they need from various part-time jobs they hold. Here you will search a while before finding a TV, internet, or paper towels. Heartland Farm is a ministerial project of the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend. Living at the farm are Sisters Ginger, Terry, and Mary Ellen. Also living here are Larry and Laurie, Jared and Shana, and Michelle. These five relate to the Bergthal Mennonite Church, a congregation of about 30 people that meets a few miles from here at the crossing of two county roads. Over the years, others have come, stayed a while, then moved on. I met Jane and Mareth on this visit, the two newest residents.

Some might be surprised to learn that I am an introvert who thrives on solitude. I love coming to the farm to find space, emptiness, and quiet. This visit reminds me of my teenage fantasy so long ago. In our youth, we all have fantasies for our lives as we imagine that great blank canvas stretched out before us. Mine was to form an intentional rural Christian community. We called them communes in those days. In my fantasy we would practice Christian community, economic interdependence, with a simple agrarian lifestyle, detached from the corruptions of society. My fantasy was to be in northern Alberta, which really was a fantasy since I have no tolerance for cold and snow. So, now it would be in the southern prairie, at a place like Heartland Farm. So, whatever happened to my fantasy? What became of your fantasies?

I look at my lifestyle now and wonder if all I imagined then was simply that – a fantasy of a naïve, idealistic youth. Or is it that somehow over the course of a lifetime, as we add obligations and distractions, we lose track of who we are at our core, and lose sight of the values and dreams that center our lives? How is my 32" TV connected to cable an expression of who I am at my core and of my values and dreams? Do I cling to my decisions that my primary vehicle should be a 1989 Ranger pick-up truck and that, until Martha Krause's sale, I had never purchased a lawn mower, and that I have vowed never to own a riding lawn mower? Do I cling to these? Could it be that these decisions are actually mere isolated vestiges that provide some comfort as loosely tethered expressions of a fantasy from so long ago and of the values and dreams that remain somewhere within?

Okay, maybe I'm getting a little too heavy for a church newsletter article but, as I said, I write this at Heartland Farm. I wonder what the future holds for Heartland Farm. I wonder about how many more visits I might yet make. Will there be a sixth? I don't know. But I do know there is something here that calls me back to what's inside and pushes my reset button. That's an important matter for each of us. Really, when you were a youth what was your fantasy life to be? Who are you at your core? What are the values and dreams that center your life? Are you living them today? If not, why not? Take time to reconnect with yourself. Don't allow yourself to become distracted from your life values and dreams because life is short and each of us is given one chance to live it.

*Randy*

February 2010

**FMC Ministries Council Retreat  
January 10, 2010 – *What is God’s Plan for  
First Mennonite?***

Present: Mindy Richmond, Keith Harder, Judy Harder, Verda Albrecht, Randy Smith, Jan Schroeder, Dave Mathis, Nadine Friesen, Sharon Ressler, Eric Coddling, Bonnie Funk. Absent: Ken Neufeld, Asia Frye.

Dave opened by quoting the phrase, *Be still and know that I am God*. Sharon discussed John 3, *The Spirit blows where it will*. It seems God is working in our church; we should trust his leading in this process. Keith has felt an urging from the Spirit to renew his prayer life. Bonnie feels God’s peace about retiring from the treasurer’s position at the end of this year and that he will provide a replacement for her. Verda read an MCC report recently where people had to move and were unable to return to their places of worship: we should appreciate our place of worship. Jan spoke of parallels of how God is working in her life and through the changes in the church. Nadine led a brief study of Hebrews 11 on how God worked through the lives of his followers: we should abandon our agenda and rely on God. We should also remember where we come from and who went before us. We know God will work in our church in 2010; we just don’t know how. Waiting on God enhances his blessings.

The council worked in pairs to study bible characters and what God may be saying to us through their stories.

God has nudged Dave to reexamine how we present church to our community. Many younger people claim to be Christians but have no church affiliation. How do we provide relevance to upcoming generations without losing our faith? Can we provide new metaphors to explain God, scripture and faith?

Keith said the point was for the people (Hebrews) who received the letter to remember who came before them, and they found relevance and kept their faith. The story of the bible doesn’t change, but there are many ways to find relevance.

Randy asked how the council, as a leadership team, can keep the essence of the story of the church and not get caught up in the daily tasks of organizing the church.

Referring to Romans 12:1-3, Keith emphasized the following phrases: “Present your body as a living sacrifice,” “Do not conform to the world,” “Be transformed so you can discern the will of God,” “Renew your mind.”

Dave wondered if people can see what’s happening at First Mennonite without ever entering our building.

Referring to Deuteronomy 8, “Preparing the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land,” Keith emphasized such phrases as, “Remember the long

way,” “God let you go hungry.” (Food tastes better when you’re hungry). Not all of us have been with First Mennonite long enough to know about the down times (e.g., when Kaye Bartel was killed); those who have appreciate where we are now. We should be grateful without being proud or boastful.

Dave pointed out projects where our members have been proactive, and Bonnie said we must remember we don’t know how what we do affects others’ lives.

Looking ahead 5-10 years:

- ❖ Our changing community should be reflected in our church body.
- ❖ We could start an after-school program.
- ❖ How will we face a reduction in teenaged members?
- ❖ How should we respond in the lives of those not interested in the concept of church?
- ❖ How will we remain a Mennonite church?
- ❖ How will we respond to a diversity of worship, teaching and support?
- ❖ We could provide more conscious support for our spiritual growth.

*The official version of the minutes is available in the church office.*

**Dr. Martin Luther King’s January 18, 1960 message at Bethel College to be ‘maladjusted’ has continuing relevance.**

Bethel College commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King’s visit by afternoon and evening celebrations. Preparations had started months earlier: a highlight was to be able to once again listen to Dr. King’s January 19, 1960 speech, *The Future of Integration*. But, to the consternation of the event’s organizers, no copy could be found in the Bethel archives. BC alums of the sixties were e-mailed and, through a miracle of God, Randy Harmison located his reel-to-reel tape, the only copy of the speech known to exist. Since 1985, it had been stored, latterly in a box in a shed where it had been subjected to extreme temperatures, but experts were able to digitally re-master it as a CD! So, at 1:00 p.m., an overflow crowd at the Krehbiel Auditorium was excited to once again hear Dr. King’s resonant voice and powerful message.

As if that wasn’t exciting enough, we also learned that, while this speech included wording from other speeches, this one, taken as a whole, is unique to his Bethel visit.

King said we must understand the past in order to pave our way into the future. He also

said people sometimes misinterpret scripture to suit their own ends – but that what’s important about people is not their outward appearance but the quality of their souls.

All people everywhere deserve to live under the mantle of freedom and justice because those are moral issues, and should not be granted for diplomatic expediency. He was concerned that liberals who continually look at all sides of an issue aren’t true liberals because they don’t become personally committed: he maintained that, only by taking a stand to help resolve the problems of segregation and discrimination are we true followers of Christ. And he stressed the importance of talking to those with whom we have differences: when we understand each other we stop being afraid of each other. He reminded his listeners that we are all made in the image of God. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

King was adamant that his followers work fervently and inexorably for first-class citizenship. “But,” he said, “we must never use second-class methods to gain them.” Rather, they were to always approach white people amicably and to use good judgment, all under the umbrella of non-violence and *agape* love (which he said theologians would describe as ‘the love of God operating in the human heart’). He distinguished between love and like: we might not like individuals or what they do but we are to love them because God loves them. This was King’s interpretation of Jesus’ exhortation to love our enemies, and he felt that *agape* love was the best guide in their struggle for human dignity and full citizenship. He ended by saying that Jesus was ‘maladjusted’ to this world, that he himself was proud to be ‘maladjusted’ to the evils of segregation and discrimination, and to the use of force. And he urged his listeners – and people everywhere – to also be ‘maladjusted’ to this world.

*A CD and a hard copy of Dr. King’s speech are now part of the permanent collection of Bethel College’s Mennonite Library and Archives, and may be accessed for research purposes.*

Following King’s speech, a panel of eleven 1960s alums, described their various experiences in Atlanta and in Alabama. Some were exchange students in the Spelman-Bethel exchange program (Spelman College, Atlanta, being the nation’s oldest college for black women, many of whose students and faculty helped introduce integration, equality and the concept of dignity

for all people). Other panelists described picketing experiences, being verbally attacked and refused service in public places when they were seen in the company of black students, which included being denied access to whites-only restrooms. And yet others described working in the office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and walking in the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march in support of voting rights. Some of them said how very naïve they were about the extent of the black-white hostility down South, and others told us about some of their frightening – almost life-threatening – experiences. But they all returned safely to Bethel when their terms of service were over. And, looking back, they are glad to have been part of a sea-change in this country because the Civil Rights Act paved the way for voting rights, women’s rights, gay rights, etc.

After the panel discussion there was a ceremony to dedicate a plaque commemorating King’s visit.

The evening’s activities took place in Memorial Hall (where King had given his speech in 1960). We were greeted by a display of artwork by Newton USD 373 students and a reception for the artists, a trio playing jazz, and several songs sung by the Newton Community Children’s Choir. The keynote speaker was Vincent Harding, erstwhile friend and worker for King.

Harding, who grew up in Harlem, served two years in the U.S. Army then started to explore conscientious objector status. He graduated from the University of Chicago with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. While in Chicago, he joined the pastoral team of an interracial Mennonite church and met his future wife, Rosemarie, who had graduated from Goshen College (Ind.) and was working out of Bethel Mennonite Church. After their marriage in 1960, they moved to Atlanta as representatives to the Southern Freedom Movement (SFM) from Mennonite Central Committee. The Hardings started working for King and opened Mennonite House, close to the King family’s residence, which provided housing for many Mennonite volunteers (black and white) over the next several years and became an SFM headquarters. And, he drafted the anti-Vietnam War speech King delivered exactly one year before he was assassinated.

Harding started off his address, *More Than Nostalgia: Revisiting King in 2010*, by asking,

rhetorically, where King would be encouraging us to go from here. He wouldn't want us to simply commemorate his visit, rather, we should keep moving towards realizing his goal. He enlarged on King's theme of being 'maladjusted' to the world and said we should be 'maladjusted' to such things as terrorism, since fear is so destructive. And he challenged us to take a stand against the re-segregation of schools, joblessness, bigotry, homelessness. We should think creatively about how we can become 'maladjusted.' And, invited to participate, some audience members' suggestions were that we should be 'maladjusted' to the fear of immigration and inhumane immigration policies, to capital punishment, and to Christians who are more concerned about prosperity and being American than about what Christ stood for.

While the following is a paraphrase of what Harding said at the previous evening's KIPCOR dinner (which I did not attend), it seems appropriate to end with his memories of the general response of those who stood up for African Americans' civil rights. He said their knees were "practically buckling with fear" as they sang *We are not afraid*, knowing their lives were in jeopardy. But they weren't going to let their fears paralyze them: they learned that people walking arm-in-arm help each other overcome those fears.

May each of us be gladly and fearlessly 'maladjusted' as we seek to do God's will. *PB*

## **On Talking Politics (Or Not)**

by Heidi Unruh

My holiday break was no doubt like many of yours: I visited family, ate big meals, exchanged gifts, and got into heated political discussions with relatives.

Few of us can avoid contact with close friends or family members who hold a different worldview, or at least an opposing opinion on certain issues. Indeed, if we were entirely surrounded by people who thought as we did, it would make for an uninteresting and, dare I say, unhealthy intellectual life.

The question is how to relate to these individuals when a controversial topic – abortion, say, or Afghanistan – is broached. We have a stock of options for response: retreat, limited resistance (arguing only until someone gets upset), a strategic diversion ("Speaking of Afghan affairs, did I tell you I've learned to crochet?"), or full-scale engagement.

Hmmm... Interestingly, these are all military metaphors. There's something about political dialogue more than any other topic that flips us into combat mode. There's ground we feel compelled to protect, or to gain. For the duration of the argument, the other person stops being my sister or my uncle or my friend: They are opponents, and I can either convince them of my rightness, or lose.

But lose what? I've been mulling that over. Why do I feel so threatened when people I care about take a different political path – and are vocal about it? It's not the same as reading a columnist I disagree with, or exchanging political punch lines with Facebook acquaintances, or getting into a discussion over healthcare with a colleague at work. Such cases may generate hot air, but they don't leave me feeling as heated up and vulnerable inside. There's no personal relationship. When we care about someone, we let them have a stake in our well-being. And part of our well-being, we believe, is staked on being right. The relationships and the rightness get all tangled up.

I'm not as much of a political hothead as I was in my college years. Although I have even less patience now during arguments, I simply am more likely to avoid them. My husband is the one who dives in, but he rarely loses his cool. (There are a few exceptions: You know who you are.) So, I asked him for his secret. Somewhat obliquely, he reminded me that the essence of discipleship in any situation boils down to loving God and loving our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39)

So, what does it mean to be a disciple in the midst of arguing over tax policy or immigration, or which president is the worst in history? How do we love people while passionately disagreeing with them? Is it more loving simply not to talk about divisive matters at all? Or, does love demand that we try to help misguided people become more informed, ethical and biblically consistent?

Love must govern *whether, why, and how* we enter into political conversation. Surely it is no more loving to keep silent while thinking snide, superior thoughts than to call someone an ignorant fool to his face? Surely it is no more loving to avoid a discussion with someone because I am afraid she will win than to pick an argument because I am confident of proving her wrong?

I need to keep reminding myself that the relationship comes first. What does it profit me to gain a reputation as a bulldog on the political court, but lose all my friendships off the field? What have I won if I shred my relative's arguments but shred our relationship along with them? Once I stop thinking of political dialogue

as a competition, I can imagine that I love my brother or sister as myself by genuinely wanting to learn why they believe as they do. I can even remain open to the possibility that what they have to say might help me become more informed, ethical, and biblically consistent.

If I am on the right side of every social issue and convince everyone in my circle of family and friends to switch to my political party, yet have not love, I win nothing. Before my next family get-together, I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 13. And, after the arguments end, may faith, hope, and love abide.

(Taken from *Evangelicals for Social Action*, Jan 2010.)

Submitted by Sharon Ressler, Mission Team

### **“...my ‘play’ was baseball. I loved baseball and still do!”**

Getting to know Frieda Birkle

Frieda is a kind, loving lady with a beautiful and ready smile. I spent some very pleasant times with her talking about her life, particularly her growing-up years, and found it interesting to learn something of farm life in mid-twentieth century Kansas. While there were many daily chores – in the house and outside – a 45-minute walk to school and back every day, and a lack of material wealth and indoor amenities, yet the kids found time for fun and games, and Frieda's memories are happy ones. “My parents were very special,” she told me. “That's not to say that other parents aren't, but I really loved them.”

She started by telling me about her family.

“My dad was George Martens and my mom was Hattie (Guhr) Martens. I had eight brothers and three sisters, born about two years apart, and I was fourth from the oldest. So we were fourteen, and we always had at least two Kliever brothers at our place. They'd eat with us and they'd sleep at our place.” (Their father had been widowed and had remarried, and their family was even bigger than the Martens'. And, as Frieda explained, they liked to do things with her brothers.)

“Mom and Dad raised us on love but my dad was strict about some things – like, we had to wait at the table until the last person had finished eating. And, I remember one of my brothers was sort of leaning over on the table with his head in his hand, waiting to get up, and my dad made him sit up straight.” She smiled almost apologetically. “Mom was more lenient. But they were both very hospitable: they liked people, and nothing was too much work.”

I asked her where they lived.

“We lived four miles north of Lehigh on a Scully.”

Given the size of their family, I was interested to know how big their house was. “We had six rooms,” she said. “The girls had one room upstairs – we all slept in one bed and,” she added seriously, “we never fussed. And the boys had the other two bedrooms. Mom and Dad slept downstairs. And we had a dining room and a kitchen. And,” she laughed, “there was a two-holer outside. The kitchen table had benches and that's where we'd play table games, mostly cards. We'd have real good times together!”

I asked Frieda which school they went to.

“We went to Waldeck School. We had to walk 2-1/4 miles each way. And, that's when I first had to speak English. We always used Low German at home but, of course, some of the older kids (in our family) had learned it so it wasn't hard for us.” Then she added with pardonable pride, “I had perfect attendance for three years, and I got a certificate to show for it. I'll show it to you sometime.”

“Did you walk even when it was snowy?”

“Oh yes, we walked many days through snow. Sometimes it was so we walked to school over the fences and everything, the snow was so deep – lots and lots of times. But, if it was real bad my dad would take us with the lumber wagon.

“And I can remember the Dust Bowl days. Dad would come and get us with the wagon because you couldn't see anything. We had to stay in school until the parents came and got their kids.”

“Was there any subject you liked best at school?”

“I liked all of school. I made school in seven years too. They put me in my sister Linda's class so then we graduated the same time, the eighth grade. I only got to go to school just to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.”

We talked about games they played. “Oh,” she laughed, “we played Hide and Go Seek and Fox and Geese and Kick the Tin Can. And, in winter, we played a lot of card games – and we drank a lot of coffee.” She smiled broadly. “They used to say it'd stunt our growth, but it didn't – and I bet I was only two when I started drinking it. And, in winter, we went sled-riding. We had to build our own sleds, and we'd tie it with a rope to the back bumper of a car and ride around the pasture. Sometimes, if they made a corner too short, we would fly 'way out from there, too – but that was wonderful!” Frieda laughed at the memory. “We made up our own games,” she continued. “Our barn roof kind of went down like this” (gesturing as she spoke, to show the slope) “then down” (gesturing again, a more gradual slope) “and we'd pour water on the roof and slide down.” I asked her if it was a tin roof. “No,” she said, “it was wood shingles. The water

made it slick so we never got slivers or anything. And, I never remember any of us breaking any bones or anything. Of course, we wouldn't have had far to fall at the bottom." She laughed, and we agreed that it's amazing what kids got up to in those years, and survived intact. After pausing for a moment she added, "We finally got a croquet set, and we were pretty busy with that for a while. But my 'play' was baseball. I loved baseball, and still do! We had a ball field in Lehigh so that's where I learned to play ball. And we had a ball diamond in our pasture. And we played different teams like Marion and Durham. I played for the city."

"Lehigh was quite a thriving town in those days, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Oh yes, it had two grocery stores. And a bank. And Rosie Olleck had a restaurant. And Jake Groening had an auto sales store. There was a blacksmith and a lumberyard. And Ferd Unruh had a gas station that had a little store where they sold fans and things. And Jake Riffel had a barber's shop. And John Unruh ran the hatchery, and he had a cream station where they took cream and eggs. And Jake Banman had a locker and one of the grocery stores. I worked there a little while."

Referring to professional baseball teams she's followed, Frieda said, "My first team was the Royals but then I liked the Cubs, too." She walked across the room and brought back a framed letter dated July 28<sup>th</sup> (1986) from the manager of the Chicago Cubs (whose signature is illegible). It read: *Dear Mrs Birkle, The Chicago Cubs would like to extend our best and say 'Get well!' It is because of people like you that the Cubs are loved and revered throughout the world. Thank you very much for your support of us. Once again, we wish you the best. Go Cubs!* (Frieda still doesn't know how he found out about her then-upcoming heart surgery. She is, of course, very pleased to have that letter – and maybe those good wishes were what helped her recover so quickly.) Smiling again, she added, "But I also like the Atlanta Braves, and so on! I like most sports."

We talked about the fact that everyone in the family had chores to do. "We were put out to work about nine years old: we milked and separated and fed calves and pigs, and came home and milked some more. We used the cream for butter and cheese. And, we had an orchard – peaches and all kinds of fruits, and lots of rhubarb, and vegetables. And Mom would make jelly. Of course, we always had sugar and flour that they'd buy, and coffee on the table, and bread. My mother would spend most of her time cooking – she'd bake nine loaves a day." My eyes grew wide and, laughing, she added, "We bought our flour by the wagon-load – lots of sacks.

Saturday was a big baking day; she made zwiebach and cakes, and cinnamon rolls as well. And she did all that on a wood stove.

"And we had chickens for our eggs." Frieda smiled impishly. "But, when we kids were left alone, as soon as Dad and Mom left to go to the store, I remember we'd take some of the eggs and fry them up and eat them. And, Mom and Dad would come home and Mom would say, 'You didn't gather as many eggs today!' But they wouldn't tell us off."

Concerned, I asked, "Did you do that because you were hungry?"

"Oh no, I never remember being hungry. Of course, quite often we'd have biscuits and gravy for supper, or cracklings sandwiches. But we were never hungry. We had lots of different soups – milk soups. And potato pancakes. I remember Mom would sit for hours, shredding the potatoes; there were no grinders then."

All those flour sacks came in useful: they had pretty floral designs on them and, like many farm mothers, Frieda's mom would make them into dresses, four being needed for each one. And, while they bought overalls for her dad and the boys, she'd make their shirts and other clothes, all on a treadle sewing-machine.

"A lot of kids would get a plate of fruit and nuts at Christmas," I said. "Did you get that?"

"We didn't each get one. We had one plate for all of us. And we always had candy that was out for everyone. But, at Christmas at the school, we each had a sack with an orange and nuts – peanuts, they were cheap – and candy. We always liked those."

We talked about jobs she'd had and she said that, growing up, in addition to her chores at home, she worked for the Dave Oblanders, "...doing chores and cleaning house and helped her with the bed-making. Then, when I left school, I worked for Herman Pankratz at the Johannesthal Church, but I got homesick so I didn't do that for very long. Then I worked for a couple of years for Francis Johnson, an attorney in Marion. I cleaned the offices and cooked, and brought his wife breakfast to bed, and set tables. I remember riding the doodlebug from Lehigh to Marion. It cost fifteen cents." Frieda smiled again.

"So, how did you meet Jake?" I asked.

"He had a sister living between Canton and Lehigh and we had our own ball games at home, and he'd come to watch. She was at our house quite a lot. Then I met him at the Hillsboro Fair and we really got together when we went to the Avon Theater in Hillsboro. I remember we went to see the *Three Stooges!*" Again, Frieda laughed. His father's first wife died and he remarried so Jake

was one of 18 children. Frieda added, "He was in C.C. camp for six years in Shattuck, Oklahoma." (Civilian Conservation camp was a work program created during the Depression to provide jobs.)

"We got married on December 13, 1941 – it was a Saturday evening – in Reverend Goering's parsonage in Lehigh. We lived a little here and there but our first real place was at Lehigh at Jake Peters' farm. We farmed there for Scully until 1950 when we moved to Lehigh, and that's when he went to work at Buller Manufacturing in Hillsboro."

"What did they make there?" I asked.

"Things like feeders for cattle. Later, he worked at the egg factory for John Voth. He was good at a lot of things – he was a mechanic, he was a carpenter, he was a welder and a plumber and an electrician." And, after a short pause, she added, smiling, "He had his own car and he used to like racing it. They didn't do it for money – just fun."

By then, Birkles had three girls, Betty, Barbara and Patty Sue, "I didn't go to work until Patty Sue went to school. Then, Betty and Barbara had their chores to do after school – dishes, and things like that. And they had to do their schoolwork. I remember that they'd complain that the t.v. wouldn't work, but Jake had fixed it so they couldn't turn it on!" Frieda laughed again, and added, "They were good cooks and good housekeepers."

"Did you go on vacations as a family?" I asked.

"The only vacations we took was sometimes we'd go to see his dad and mom in Shattuck, and sometimes we'd go there through western Kansas, but it was only for three or four days. We couldn't afford it. What we would have spent on a trip we would spend on the kids and ourselves. Then Jake became sick and couldn't work no more." He died on September 30, 1984.

Frieda lived in Lehigh one more year then she moved to Grand Oaks Apartments in Hillsboro. Shortly after she moved, her sister Anna and her husband Lewis (who lived in Wichita where they worked for an estate sales agency) suggested she help them. They would pick her up and she'd stay two or three weeks with them, returning home for a few days to take care of her mail, etc. After a person died and before the estate sale, Frieda, Lewis and Anna would clean up the furniture and other items so the property would fetch the best possible price. "It was hard work," Frieda admitted, "but I did it for several years."

After she returned to live in Hillsboro, she was very generous in the amount of time she'd spend helping people, mostly by driving them to doctors' appointments, to the senior center, or on errands. And, until a few weeks ago, she would spend many hours a week at Salem Home visiting her sister,

Anna. "Now," Frieda told me, "I'm the only one left." But, she has her three daughters and their families and many friends, and she seems to be constantly on the go. She and a friend get together most mornings for coffee at Vogt's and, for her birthday last month, she was amused that Louis Hagen played *Happy Birthday* to her on his trumpet. She is obviously happy and readily admits that God has blessed her throughout her life.

PB

† † †

#### SOME LENTEN THOUGHTS

*I pray that we may be found worthy to be cursed, censured, and ground down, and even put to death in the name of Jesus Christ, so long as Christ himself is not put to death in us.*

Paulinus of Nola (354-431 A.D.)

The Christian must not only accept suffering: he must make it holy. Nothing so easily becomes unholy as suffering. We can deny ourselves rigorously for the wrong reason and end up by pleasing ourselves mightily with our self-denial.

To believe in suffering is pride: but to suffer, believing in God, is humility. For pride may tell us that we are strong enough to suffer, that suffering is good for us because we are good. Humility tells us that suffering is an evil which we must always expect to find in our lives because of the evil that is in ourselves. But faith also knows that the mercy of God is given to those who seek him in suffering, and that by his grace we can overcome evil with good. Suffering, then, becomes good by accident, by the good that it enables us to receive more abundantly from the mercy of God. It does not make us good by itself, but it enables us to make ourselves better than we are. Thus, what we consecrate to God in suffering is not our suffering but our *selves*.

To know the cross is to know that we are saved by the sufferings of Christ; more, it is to know the love of Christ who underwent suffering and death in order to save us. To know his love is not merely to know the story of his love, but to experience in our spirit that we are loved by him, and that in his love the Father manifests his own love for us, through his Spirit poured forth into our hearts.

If we love God and love others in him, we will be glad to let suffering destroy anything in

us that God is pleased to let it destroy, because we know that all it destroys is unimportant.

If we love God, suffering does not matter. Christ in us, his love, his Passion in us: that is what we care about. Pain does not cease to be pain, but we can be glad of it because it enables Christ to suffer in us and give glory to his Father by being greater, in our hearts, than suffering would ever be.

Excerpts from *To Know the Cross*  
by Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

## February events

MCC Relief Sale Penny Power offering will start this month.

- 1-7 Pastor Randy and Ann on vacation.
- 4 8:15-5:00 p.m., Bethel College M.C., WDC *Preventing Clergy Misconduct* seminar for credentialed ministers,
- 7 Youth Sunday.  
Carry-in dinner. Grocery shower for Tim and Asia Frye.  
2:00 p.m. Memorial Hall: Bethel College Concert Choir home concert. Freewill offering.  
3:00 p.m. Faith M.C., 2100 N. Anderson, Newton: public reception for Ervin Stutzman, MC-USA executive director-elect. Ervin will speak at 3:30 p.m. followed by a Q&A session.
- 10 Camp MennoScah staff will visit B.C. to recruit counselors and summer staffers: [campmno@mennowdc.org](mailto:campmno@mennowdc.org) or 620-297-3290 for information.
- 12-14 Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, CO: WDC Senior High Snow Camp.
- 13 7:30 a.m. Bubbert's: Mennonite Men's breakfast.  
5:00-9:00 p.m. T.C. Gym: *Church Spirit Night*; watch basketball free of charge.
- 14 9:30 a.m., Youth Room: *Understanding Christian Faith* S.S. series begins, taught by Pastor Randy and Asia.  
2:00 p.m. Nursing Lamplighting ceremony, Krehbiel Auditorium, B.C.
- 15 6:30 p.m. Offender/Victim Ministries annual meeting at Hutchinson Correctional Facility (Central Unit). Dinner provided; donations appreciated. RSVP by Mon. Feb 8: 316-283-2038 or [ovm.ks@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ovm.ks@sbcglobal.net).
- 17 **Ash Wednesday.**
- 18 7:30 p.m. Memorial Hall, B.C.: HBPA Ladysmith Black Mambazo,
- 21 First Sunday of Lent.  
4:00 p.m. Chapel, B.C.: Organ recital.
- 28 4:00-5:00 p.m. Chapel-Auditorium, T.C.: *Afternoon of Song* with **Holly Swartzendruber**, Glenn Litke and Sheila Litke (accompanist).

Wednesday evenings (3, 10, 17, 24):

6:15 p.m. Supper, followed by classes at 7:00 p.m.

### All month:

MCC is seeking donations of relief kits, heavy comforters, sheets ([mcc.org/kits](http://mcc.org/kits) or 326-283-2720). \$s also welcome: ([mcc.org](http://mcc.org) or First Mennonite Church/Haiti Earthquake).

### February 1, 8, 15, 22:

5:30 p.m., 105 Main St., Hillsboro: *The Spiritual Side of Health*, a class offered by Anna Woods for "women interested in culminating their physical health along with the spiritual, emotional, and mental side". Cost \$10.

### Starting February 2:

Tabor College is offering a spring semester class which is open to the public, *Folklore of Family and Culture*. Instructor:

Peggy Goertzen, Enrollment information: Office of Enrollment Management, 620-947-3121 ext.1723.

### February 3:

Relay for Life kick-off event: Marion Family Physicians' Clinic basement, 537 S. Freeborn (west door). Past/new captains, and anyone interested to form a team are invited. Refreshments will be served. Information: Becky Hulett (620-381-4617/[bhul05@yahoo.com](mailto:bhul05@yahoo.com)) or Jo Hett (620-382-4451 [joella.hett@slhmarion.org](mailto:joella.hett@slhmarion.org)). RFL (a fundraising event for the American Cancer Society) is scheduled for June 18 & 19 at Reimer Field, Tabor College. Volunteers are welcome!



Faith & Life Bookstore's new location: 606 N. Main, Newton

February 13-March 27: VBS open house

March 1-6: Grand Re-opening Celebration

March 6: 1:00-3:00 p.m. *Writing Your Personal Stories* with author Naomi Gaede-Penner

## **Kids' Birthday Party, January 24**

This year, for our fourth annual party, we invited 24 kids aged three years through fourth grade, offering each one to bring a friend. Only twelve kids came but, judging from all the yelling and laughter, they had a good time. While it must be admitted it was a very manageable sized group, some of the games are more fun with more kids. Next year, maybe we'll invite them to each bring two friends.

Many thanks to Mindy Richmond for her good help. PB

There are four months left to rise to Pastor Randy's challenge to read the New Testament.

On June 6, instead of the annual Sunday School picnic, there will be an all-day exam. But, be assured, the reward for passing will eclipse all worldly recognition.

All submissions of interest to the FMC family are welcome and will be included, depending on timeliness and space availability. *First Threshings* is distributed the first Sunday of each month so, if possible, materials should be submitted at least ten days previously. Comments, pro/con, regarding any aspect of the newsletter are also welcome. Please address these to Pat Bartel, Compiler/Editor.