

First, Contact

In *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality and Mortality*, Richard Beck writes powerfully about Jesus healing a leper in Matthew 8:1-3. “What is intriguing about this story is the sequence. Jesus touches the leper first. Then the command ‘Be clean!’ is offered. That is, Jesus’ first move is into ritual defilement. By first touching the leper, Jesus ... [is] standing in solidarity with the unclean.” Beck finds this “striking” because typically we expect purification before contact. But Jesus’ actions reverse the pattern: “Contact occurs first.”

How fortunate for us, too, that God didn’t wait to reach out to us until he had cleansed us of sin. God didn’t save us from afar and only *then* come to live among us. Rather, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, ESV). And continuously, Jesus loves us, comes to us and touches our hearts, even when we are at our worst — straying from God, trapped in sin, unworthy, unclean, unrighteous.

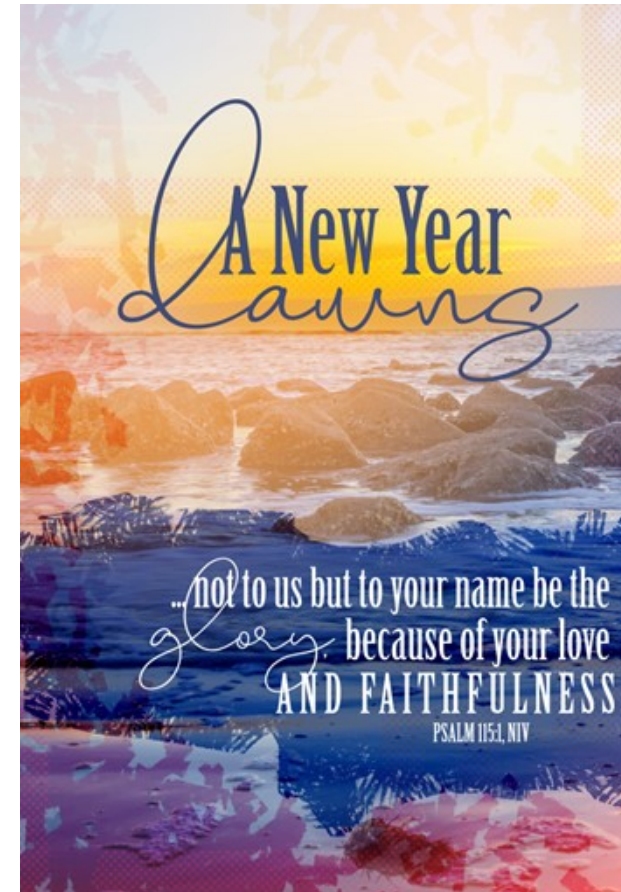
For it’s not *our* righteousness or purity that heals and saves us, but Christ’s.



The Church Corner

January 2024

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First Mennonite Church

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Sunday School at 9:15 am
Worship at 10:30 am and
Live Streaming at 10:30 am on the
church Facebook page

“We are a community of
believers who follow Jesus
Christ as we receive and
share God’s love.”

We, of First Mennonite Church,
Valuing the convictions of our faith,
Endeavor to:
Engage our members in ministry,
Expand community outreach,
Embrace new people,
in the love of Christ.

Opening the New Year

Another year has passed and 2024 has begun. How does that make you feel as we stand at the threshold of a new year? Do you lament that some things have passed on as 2023 fades in the distance? Or maybe it's good riddance in hopes that 2024 will be better? Do you march into this new year with fresh goals and resolutions? Or are you wandering into it with little direction simply along for the ride? Personally, I have no New Year's practices that I engage in every year. I think more often than not it comes and goes and I give it little notice.

This year though I have been thinking how "New Year's" is perhaps a bit like opening gifts at Christmas. Opening a gift often comes with a sense of wonder, anticipation and even hope. What will be inside? Will I like it? Will it be what I was hoping for? So much possibility residing there in the moments before a gift is opened. That is the way I am looking at this coming year. The year 2024 is filled with possibilities and needs to be opened up each day to see what is there. What will be in each day? Will I like it? Will it be what I was hoping for? Just like opening gifts, some days those hopes and anticipations will be met exceedingly and others will likely be more challenging.

This year I also thought it would be good to store up the good days in an attempt to weather the more challenging ones. It would be like filling up our own personal wells of joy from which we can draw memories when needed. Some of that is also remembering the ways that God blesses us and is active in our lives and orders our days beyond what we can perceive or imagine. Psalm 16:11 says, "You teach me the way of

life. In your presence is total celebration. Beautiful things are always in your right hand."

As we open up each new day of the coming year, I pray that our good days will outnumber our bad days, and that the good gifted to us can be held onto throughout the year. We can remember God is "teaching us the way of life," that He is with us, and in His presence there is celebration!

-Blessings, Pastor Steve



Near the end of every January, stories circulate about "Blue Monday," supposedly the year's most depressing day. Factors include broken New Year's resolutions, Christmas debts and cold weather. But this phenomenon actually originated as a PR gimmick. U.K. marketers invented Blue Monday as "the best day to book a summer holiday," and a psychologist they enlisted to help later admitted the saddest-seeming day became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

January may lack the excitement of December, but it doesn't have to be a let-down. Christmas is over, but Jesus isn't! No matter the season of the year or our season of life, Christians always have reason for joy: God's promises of forgiveness and eternal victory. As Jesus says in John 16:33, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (KJV).

Camp Mennoscah

- ⇒ **Volunteers are needed immediately (M-F)** to work alongside the facilities director on general maintenance tasks. Please let us know if you can come for a few hours and bring a water bottle and your own lunch.
- ⇒ **A wish list** for camp needs and volunteer opportunities are listed on the website.

Contact camp:
(620) 297-3290

www.campmennoscah.org
office@campmennoscah.org

MCC Learning Tour

Register now for the MCC South Texas Learning Tour, February 4-9, 2024! This immigration-focused learning tour presents a unique opportunity to engage directly with organizations making a positive impact on our neighbors. You won't want to miss this opportunity. Details and online registration can be found at mcc.org/south-texas-1t. Deadline to sign up is Jan. 20. Please contact Abraham Diaz Alonso with questions, abrahamdiazalonso@mcc.org.



MDS Annual Celebration

The MDS Annual Celebration, *Ready. Set. Grow!*, is a time to gather and celebrate the work of our volunteers and donors. It's a time to learn more about MDS responses to disaster and to recognize the contributions of volunteers to help bring people home. It's also a time for us to gather together for fellowship, singing and worship.

This year we are meeting in Fresno, California, February 23-24, 2024. Register at mds.org/annual-celebration.

AMBS Conference

AMBS Pastors & Leaders 2024: Strategies for Peacemaking: Feb. 19-22. How do we find our calling as a peace church in the world today? This conference will focus on tools for peacemaking — building our capacity to tend to our inner work; address conflicts within our churches; and lead people to action on big issues of the day. Featured speaker: Betty Pries, PhD, CMed. Preachers: Nekeisha Alayna Alexis, MA, and Isaac Villegas, MDiv. Check out the list of workshops, and plan to join us in person or online! Early registration deadline: Jan. 19. ambs.edu/pastors-and-leaders

Church Council Notes

December 18, 2023

- ⇒ The Discernment Team (Ruth) has been working on a brochure to explain all the various options for volunteering in the church. They are considering a gifts discernment survey.
- ⇒ The Vision Team (Chuck M.) plan to have the evaluation report ready to hand out at the annual meeting with a pastoral vote taken at another time. A name change for the vision team is being considered to better reflect their tasks. The covenant commitment signing was discussed as well as a listening opportunity with WDC.
- ⇒ The Care Ministry (Ron D.) is planning communion for January 8, March 31, June 23 and October 6.
- ⇒ The Hospitality Ministry (Brocia) reported that supper clubs are forming for January and February. Magnet clips with our church information will be ordered for sharing in welcome baskets and for our 150th anniversary in 2025.
- ⇒ The Mission Ministry (Sandy) reported they will look over the policies and procedures soon. Verenike making will be Jan. 13 and the supper on Feb. 17.
- ⇒ The Nurture Ministry (Debbie) reported the fall offering for angel gifts was used for 4 angels (children) as well as angel gifts for Halstead Health and Rehab residents. Kids Club will be Jan. 17-March 6 and the adult study will begin Jan. 24 or Jan. 31. The beginning of a new term and new teachers for the children’s Sunday school is Jan. 7.
- ⇒ The church treasurer (Larry R.) reported a budget balance at the end of Nov. of \$2,586.74.

⇒ The Stewardship Ministry (James N.) presented the 2024 church budget. No changes were requested by the council. The vent hood motor in the kitchen was replaced.

Next meeting:
Monday, January 22 at 7:00 pm



A Prayer for New Beginnings

In his book *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, Walter Brueggemann writes in an Epiphany poem:

... this is a time to be born.
So we turn to you, God of our life
God of all our years,
God of our beginning....
We dare pray that you will do for us
and among us and through us
what is needful for our newness.
Give us the power to be receptive,
to take the newness you give
There is a time to be born, and it is now.
We sense the pangs and groans of your new-
ness. Come here now in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

How fitting that the Epiphany season and the new year coincide! Epiphany reveals a new King, the beginning of his ministry, his new disciples, his first healings, his “new teaching — with authority” (Mark 1:27). We, too, experience newness, now and year-round. But newness can be tough. So we trust that God, who “[makes] all things new” while banishing “mourning and crying and pain” (Revelation 21:4-5), walks with us in this new year — and always.



Church Announcements

1. The Neighbors Store pantry needs tuna and spaghetti sauce.
2. The deadline for the February newsletter is January 29.
3. Offering schedule for January:
Jan. 7: MC USA
Jan. 14: Church Budget
Jan. 21: Western District Conference
Jan. 28: MCC Relief Sale
4. The link for our church online library is librarything.com/catalog/FMCHalstead.

Treasurer’s Report

Budget balance @ 01/01/23	11,449.83
Jan.-October receipts	110,056.61
Jan.-October expenses	(115,668.17)
Budget balance @ 10/31/23	5,838.27
November receipts	6,826.32
November expenses	(10,077.85)
Budget balance @ 11/30/23	2,586.74

MCC Christmas Tree Offering

Thank you for your generosity for the MCC Christmas tree! Items collected included 118 hand towels, 166 toothbrushes, 170 onesies and 44 sleepers. The total monetary offering was \$2,000. Way to go!

January Calendar

Jan. 7	10:30 am	Communion
Jan. 8	9:30 am	Women’s Mission Society
Jan. 9	7:45 am	Early Birds Breakfast
	9:00 am	Prayer Team Meeting
Jan. 10	7:00 pm	Bell Practice
Jan. 13	9:00 am	Verenike Making Day
Jan. 14	6:00 pm	Mom’s Group
	6:00 pm	Jr. & Sr. High Youth
Jan. 17	5:00 pm	Kids Club
	6:00 pm	Kids Club Supper
	7:00 pm	Bell Practice
Jan. 22	6:00 pm	Nurture & Mission
	7:00 pm	Church Council
Jan. 23	7:45 am	Early Birds Breakfast
Jan. 24	5:00 pm	Kids Club
	6:00 pm	Kids Club Supper
Jan. 28	11:30 am	Carry-in Meal
	12:30 pm	Annual Meeting
	6:00 pm	Mom’s Group
	6:00 pm	Jr. & Sr. High Youth
Jan. 31	5:00 pm	Kids Club
	6:00 pm	Supper
	6:45 pm	Adult Bible Study
	8:00 pm	Bell Practice

Looking Ahead:

Feb. 14	Ash Wednesday
Feb. 17	Verenike Supper

WMS

The Women’s Mission Society will meet on Monday, January 8 at 9:30 am for a work day at Linda’s downtown studio. All women are welcome to attend!

Verenike Making Day

It’s time to make Verenike! Join your church friends on Saturday, January 13 at 9:00 am. Bring a friend to this fun and worthwhile day!

Prayer & Praises

- * Pray for the recovery of Sara Dick following her knee surgery last month.
- * Pray for Robin Hoss, daughter of Pauline Regier, who will have back surgery on January 10.
- * Pray for Edith Unruh who continues her recovery from a broken pelvis.
- * Continue praying for Cameron Nightingale as he continues his battle with pancreatitis and the long rehabilitation he will require. He is the nephew of James and Debbie.
- * Pray for Chuck & Ruth who are serving at Jubilee in Georgia for 6 weeks.
- * Praise God that Craig Rodenberg was released from the hospital and is now recovering at home with Brad & Joyce following his car accident.
- * Praise God for the celebration of Jesus' birth and the meaningful choir cantata on Christmas Eve.

Church Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars for **Sunday, January 28, 2024**. We will meet as a congregation for the annual business meeting at 12:30 pm. This is a great time to learn about what is happening in the church and make suggestions for ways our church can meet your needs and the needs of the community. Before the meeting we will share in a carry-in meal. Please bring a yummy dish or two to share. The social committee will welcome your food before Sunday school and/or before church. Finally, if you are responsible for a report for the meeting, the **deadline** for submission to the church secretary is **Tuesday, January 23**.



Kids Club



The next session of Kids Club begins Wednesday, January 17th! During this 8-week session, we will address topics that can help take your relationship with God to the next level. Topics include Worship, Prayer, Baptism, Communion, Sharing our Faith, Bible Reading/Memorization, Attending Church and Service. Children ages 3 to 6th grade are invited to join. Older students are welcome to join the elementary-aged group. Supper is available for all at 6 pm. Invite a neighbor or friend you know to join us!

January Celebrations



- 1 (A) Dick & Marj VanWye (65 years)
- 1 Kenneth Schmidling
- 2 Denice Klassen
- 3 Mark Berger
- 3 Isaiah Haspels
- 4 Shelby Korgel
- 6 Vivian Snell
- 7 Eric Mueller
- 7 Nathan Allen
- 8 Debbie Nightingale
- 8 Lakyn Ortman
- 9 David Haspels
- 10 Brenna Kaufman
- 11 Kathleen Koehn
- 12 Thomas Finley
- 13 Sara Smoker
- 14 Grayson Chandler
- 16 Elaine Mohler
- 17 Sawyer Mueller
- 18 Andrea Wingard
- 18 Brendan Gundy
- 18 Kaleb Black
- 19 (A) T.J. & Stacey Hackler
- 21 Josie Whorton
- 21 Max Whorton
- 22 Julie Parker
- 23 Julie Dalke
- 23 Ann Lintz
- 25 (A) Jerry & Carol Linn
- 28 Rick Lee
- 28 Leah Kawanguzi
- 30 Kenneth R. Stucky
- 31 Trae Regier

Ordinary Time

In liturgical churches, more than half of the church-year calendar is labeled as Ordinary Time. Although that merely means the weeks are designated by ordinal numbers (*First Sunday after the Epiphany*, etc.), people may assume that “ordinary” means not special, or not a church holiday. Ordinary gets a bad rap, but it represents the bulk of daily life. Not all days contain mountaintop experiences that warrant Facebook posts. Yet “simple, consistent, sometimes boring faithfulness” can lead to out-of-the-ordinary results, according to blogger Karl Vaters. “When you’re following God’s will for your life and you string a bunch of ordinary but necessary actions together, extraordinary things can happen,” he writes at ChristianityToday.com.

Likewise, although Christians may strive to be radical, out-of-the-ordinary followers of Jesus, everyday discipleship leaves a powerful legacy. In *The Ordinary Christian Life*, pastor Michael Horton extols the value of “the regular preaching of Christ from all of the Scriptures, baptism, the Supper, the prayers of confession and praise, and all of the other aspects of ordinary Christian fellowship.” He says the result of participating in “the ordinary life of the covenant community” is quite extraordinary: “steady maturation in Christ.”

—adapted from *The Wired Word*

There is a time
for everything,
and a season for every
activity under heaven...

