

JMC Community News

A newsletter for members, attenders and friends of Joy Mennonite Church

January 29, 2012 Issue #3



Congregational News

Zach Gleason called as pastor

At our last congregational business meeting, our congregation called Zach Gleason to serve as our next pastor. He is now going through the process of being licensed by the Western District Conference (a transitional status for ministers seeking ordination).

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James, Becky and Ty Branum are now a family

James and Becky were married on New Year's Eve at Roman Nose State Lodge. The ceremony was a modified Quaker-style service and was officiated by Robyn Goggs (Associate minister at Church of the Servant Methodist Church) and our own Moses Mast. (see page 5 For some pictures from the celebration). The ceremony included a special time to recognize James' new role in Ty's life.

Stefan Warner comes home from Kurdistan/Northern Iraq in October, starts new ministry job in January

Since our last church newsletter, Stefan returned from a trip to Kurdistan/Northern Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams. (more information on his trip can be found at <http://oklahomastefan.blogspot.com/> . Stefan has since spoken about his experiences here at Joy, as well at several churches in Kansas.



Read our archive
of past
JMC Newsletters at:

JoyMennonite.org



JMC Community News

Edited by James M. Branum

DISCLAIMER: I try to include stories, opinions, and information that would be of interest to our members and reflect Mennonite values, however, inclusion of a story or link in this email does not necessarily mean that it is endorsed by Joy Mennonite Church.

Contact us: If you have news, photos or other items that you would like see in the next issue, please email us at:

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More recently, Stefan was hired as the Director of Christian Education by Church of the Open Arms. His primary job responsibilities will be to serve as youth minister, as well as to hopefully start up a young adult's ministry. I am excited about this opportunity for Stefan, especially since COA has a reputation in Oklahoma City as supporting peace work (especially the Peace camps) and as being outspoken advocate for LGBT rights and equality.

Sunday School and Changes to our Sunday Schedule

We now have a Sunday school that is meeting at 9:30 a.m. so our regular worship time has moved to 10:20 a.m.

News from the Garden

Laura, Johann and Moses have been very busy preparing the ground for our expanded church garden for next year. They have tilled up a lot of new ground in the front, side (between the main building and the garage building), and back yard (behind the garage building). As for planting, they have planted some herbs and fall cover crops (rye and vetch)/

If you would like to help in this effort, please talk to

Laura or Johann.

Thursday Night Book Discussion Group is considering changes

Our Thursday book discussion group finished its current book, *Mudhouse Gospel* by Lauren Winner. We are not sure yet if we will continue with another book, discuss shorter length articles instead, or possibly do a combined discussion group with our friends from another local peace church(es). If you are regular participant or would like to be and have suggestions on this, please contact James Branum or Johann & Laura Reimer.

In the meantime, we will be having community suppers for the next couple of Thursday nights at 7 p.m.

Joy Mennonite Church Podcast is coming back

I am far, far behind in converting and uploading our recorded sermons for the church podcast, but I am going to do hopefully have them all up this coming week. You can find them online by searching for "Joy Mennonite Church" on iTunes or by going to joymennonite.wordpress.com.

Ladies' Craft Day

The first Ladies' craft day was a big success with Britney teaching everyone how to crochet. More craft days are in the works, so please talk to Laura Reimer, Britney Hopkins or Becky Branum for more information or with ideas on future things to do for craft days.



OCC News

An Update on OCC mission and services

Oklahoma GI Rights hotline ends

In October 2011, we made the difficult decision to end our Oklahoma GI Rights Hotline Project in order focus our limited funds and energies on serving conscientious objectors (COs) and doing counter-recruitment . The national GI Rights Hotline (877.447.4487) will of course continue to operate, and we will refer all non-CO inquiries to them.

As a result of this decision, we will be able to expand our support for legal assistance for servicemembers of conscience seeking separation from the military. Our legal director, James M. Branum, will be now also only take CO cases. OCC will make sure such cases get excellent legal help regardless of ability to pay. We will also provide the resources needed so that James can do writing and multimedia outreach and education in this area. He is one of only a handful of civilian attorneys doing such work., and his extensive experience working with GIs needs a wider audience. Our legal support fund needs your ongoing support.

OCC Program Work going forward

In October, the OCC steering committee drafted this revised description of our program work, in light of our decision to focus our work more squarely on conscientious objector support and education.

A. Education/ Outreach on Conscience and Military

1. writing/speaking/online outreach on a **national** level on military and conscience

- articles and editorial columns - goal of publishing four articles a year in national publications
- livestream/podcast/vodcast - semi-regular presenta-

tions that can be distributed online

- books (write as well as edit compilations, publish under OCC? ebooks?)

2. raise awareness and promote positive action regarding military and conscience on a state and local level

- Affiliate/ally with national organizations and distribute their news, program work and resources (WRL, CCW, AFSC, FOR, SOAW, NNOMY, IVAW, VFT, CPF, GIRN, BMSN, etc.) through newsletters/web site/ Facebook
- CR/CO education to Oklahoma youth groups, churches, schools
- identify, assist and promote school peace groups in Oklahoma (Rob Morrow at OCCC et. al.), identify & assist teachers who need peace-positive resources and counteract military propaganda in schools (NCLB)
- Create a curriculum on peace and conscience issues for home schooling families

B. Legal Services

- legal services to COs - subsidized or low cost by James

C. Special Events

Use these annual events to advance our program work: CO Day (May 1) - Mertens Award?, Mothers Day - greeting card or gift package that promotes peace, International Day of Peace, Human Rights Day , Fall Peace Festival (become a co-sponsor? add an educational panel component?), Occasional films, speakers, forums or other events

D. Organize Oklahoma peacemakers

Use online tools to bring together Oklahoma activists dedicated to peace work and help them coordinate with and support each other better. Oklahoma Peacemaker Conference?

Miss a recent sermon at JMC?

Catch it on the Joy Mennonite Podcast!

Find it by searching for "Joy Mennonite" in Itunes or by going to Joymennonite.wordpress.com

John 3:16 in Context

Opinion by Moses Mast

John 3:16 may be the most quoted verse of scripture. It seems it is usually used as a one verse message, sort of like all you need to know to avoid eternal damnation and get to heaven is found in this verse. This verse is understood as a teaching of Jesus, however our interpretation does not fit the pattern of Jesus teachings. Jesus teachings were primarily concerned with how you live on this earth and God will take care of eternity. The common understanding of this verse was a recipe of getting to heaven.

The way I used to perceive this verse, if I could persuade people to accept Jesus as a sacrifice for their sins and do this in a prescribed ritual they would be saved from eternal damnation and be assured they will get to heaven. However, how can we ask people to believe in Jesus if they have no idea what Jesus taught?

The story begins with a spiritual leader of the Jews named Nicodemus who came to visit Jesus by night. Nicodemus said, we know you are a teacher come from God because no one can perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. From other passages we learn that Jesus was not eager for people to believe in him because of the miracles he performed. Jesus seemed to understand that those who come to believe by seeing the spectacular will be slow to accept the kingdom values and way of life he was teaching. Jesus would have preferred for Nicodemus to say, we believe because we have seen you minister to the forgotten ones, the neglected one, with a message of hope for the sinners.

Jesus gave an answer whose meaning has been debated ever since, "you must be born again." This was a stroke of genius on Jesus part. If Jesus would have given Nicodemus a direct answer of what he meant by that statement he would have lost him. Instead Nicodemus was puzzled but also curious. The Jews believed, as Nicodemus said because of the miracles but they also had doubts. The Jews had two traditions they were passionate about, keeping of the Sabbath and their laws of purity forbidding them to relate to disreputable people and especially emphasized one should

not eat with such people. Jesus was accused of violating both of these laws. Nicodemus must have been aware of this and so was Jesus. In spite of the miracles the Jews still found it difficult to believe in one who violated their most treasured beliefs.

So what did Jesus mean by this unexpected reply to Nicodemus. Whatever I will suggest will probably only be a partial answer. I would suggest Jesus meant something like this: You Jews have too much baggage with all your traditions to comprehend the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God no one is to be excluded from the love of God. There is a starting point and you cannot get to the starting point because of your deep seated beliefs and traditions. You believe you can name those who should be excluded from the love of God. The starting point is to be born again of the spirit.

Perhaps we will understand it better if we first attempt to understand what Jesus meant by being born of the flesh. The religious tradition you are born into, no matter how passionate you are about observing these traditions, is not as reliable as teachers of absolute truth. The spirit is like the wind, you cannot see the wind but you can see what the wind does. So it is with the spirit, you can see what the spirit does, and anything less than understanding that no one shall be excluded from the love of God is not of the spirit.

So now we come back to John 3:16. Now "for God so loved the world" sounds like a defense for associating with publicans and sinners that Jesus was accused of. If God loves the world, so should we. If there are no exclusions on God's part there should be no exclusions on our part. Permit me to make a comparison of Jesus experience and a current issue. Jesus broke their law by associating and eating with sinners. Jesus did not deny these were sinners but said just like it is not those who are well that need a doctor but those who are sick. So instead of saying we have a law that forbids my association with sinners Jesus went and heard their stories and offered love and acceptance. A current issue people feel passionate about is the issue of homosexuality. Do not think you know where I stand on this issue. I am still in the learning process. Instead of saying we have a rule in the confession faith I would suggest we follow the example of Jesus and go sit with them and hear their stories without judging them and permit the spirit to lead us.



Left upper corner: A Sunday at Joy
Right Upper corner: James, Becky and Ty
at the wedding
Bottom: Oklahoma City Peace Festival



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