

THE

FELLOWSHIP INFORMER

Stephens City Mennonite Church
November 2008

Worship Schedule

- November 2** - Dr. Lawrence Yoder will preach Fellowship meal/ table discussions
- 9** - Book of Acts- Pastor Jim will preach
- 16** - Book of Acts - Pastor Jim will preach
- 23** - Book of Acts/ Thanksgiving - Pastor Jim
- 30** - Advent series begins -"Let your face shine" The hidden face of God
- December 7** - The comforting face of God
- 14** - The restoring face of God
- 21** - The indwelling face of God
- 28** - The embracing face of God

Mark your calendars:

November 26 @ 7:00 p.m. - The Stephens City Ministerium invites you to the Community Thanksgiving service. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church will host the worshippers this year.

December 5 @ 6:30 p.m. - Christgiving/ Thankmas meal & program. Feel free to invite your family and friends.

December 21 @ 3:30 p.m. - Christmas caroling

December 24 - Christmas candlelight service

"Travelers, there is no path, paths are made by walking."

Antonio Machado

Advent 2008

We yearn to experience God's fullness in our lives. As we worship during Advent we will catch glimpses of God's face in the scriptures, songs, and prayers we offer. We will respond to the God we meet. Let Your Face Shine is our plea to God and also a call for us to become part of the shining transformation of our world. Our faces can reflect the light of God as we welcome the Divine to dwell among us. As we embrace the way of Jesus, work for justice, and open our arms to include all whom God welcomes. Right living and peace are united in our world when God's people join in God's mission to reconcile and restore all things.

In some Mennonite Churches "**Mennonite Heritage Sunday**" was celebrated in October. Despite the stereotypes, our heritage as Mennonites is not simply white and Germanic. Growing numbers of people in the church carry the African slave trade, Native American's Trail of Tears and other "holocausts: in their familial and cultural DNA just like many claim the Anabaptist martyrs of the 16th century. They are all components of the U.S. Mennonite Story.

The church is created, in every time and place, by the power of God-with-us, the Holy Spirit. Those who have experienced the living power of God in their lives, and those who desire this power will gather for worship, counsel and encouragement. We learn together what it means to walk in Christ's footsteps and to be his body in the world. It is a natural response for the gathered body of Christ to include and embrace others, so that God's life-changing power and communion can also be theirs.

This is being missional. We are branches grafted together onto the living vine. Together we recognize, celebrate and cultivate a close spiritual walk with the living God. We bear fruit of active and reverent love for one another, for all God's children and for God's creation.

Birthdays and Anniversaries

- 4: Kelly Phillips
5: Kristen Hoffman
7: Crystal Musser
7: Samantha Pack
9: Heather Myers
19: Ben Rosenberger
20: *Doug and Darcy ZehrVogt, 2004*
25: John Lazer
25: *Greg and Diane Gum, 1989*
28: Mike Spory

One Political Perspective

-by Sandra Snodgrass

In the midst of the economic and political chaos of our times, and as I am deluged by so many different political perspectives among Christians, I feel a need to offer my own perspective and some food for thought.

The first thing I should make clear is that I am not going to vote. I believe Jesus came to set up His kingdom on earth, and as a Christian, I am now a part of that kingdom. It is a kingdom very different from and separate from this world's kingdoms. When Jesus walked on earth, He did not try to take over the world politically. In fact, He rejected this idea many times. (see Luke 4) His way was (and is) not to change things by government action, but to change people's hearts. As hearts are changed, people's lives and actions are radically changed, and so the world is changed around them, one step at a time, from the grassroots up. (see John 18:33-37, Luke 22:24-29, and Luke 9:23-27) I believe the church and state should be separate. In fact, our country was founded on this principal: freedom of religion. We can look at history as well. Whenever the church has become the state, it has become corrupt, starting with Constantine and on through history (The Roman Catholic Church in the Dark Ages, even Luther of the Reformation period). Many Christians today in the US seem to want Christians to take over our government. I believe this would just lead to more corruption of the church. This is not the approach Jesus took. Power corrupts. Jesus rejected this power, showing a better way. He came to serve, not control other people's lives with rules. Also, I've been reading some about the early church, before Constantine. From what I've read, Christians at that time believed they should not be part of the military, nor should they hold public office. Those who became Christians who were already in these positions resigned when they joined the church of believers. I recently came across an interesting quote from George MacDonald: "It is not in the nature of politics that the best men should be elected. The best men do not want to govern their fellowmen." I'm not sure I totally agree with this, but it is something to think about.

After saying all of this, I do not believe that it is wrong to vote. And, I respect those who choose to do this. However, we need to keep in mind that what we hear the candidates say and what they do can be two very different things. Also, I do not believe voting is most important in Jesus' kingdom. And we need to be spending more of our time influencing society for Jesus by loving, serving, and caring for the "least of these."

For those who do vote, I have some things for you to consider. First of all, I do not believe that Christianity equals patriotism, and I'm not sure how so many in the church in the US have come to believe that. As a Christian, I am a proponent of the worldwide church. As a follower of Jesus, I am commanded to reach out to others across all nationalistic boundaries. My citizenship is with Jesus' kingdom, not an earthly kingdom. We are here on earth to promote God's kingdom, not the USA. Many Christians say we are a nation blessed by God. Perhaps we have distorted what it means to be blessed by God. Nowhere in the Bible do I read that I am blessed if I have religious freedom or comfort or wealth. No, I read that you are blessed if you are persecuted (Matthew 5:10-11), and if you are poor and hungry (Luke 6:20-21) and if you have regard for the weak (Psalm 41:1) and if you keep God's law (Proverbs 29:18). We also need to be very careful calling the USA a Christian nation. Jesus did not come to set up a Christian nation. And there is so much in our past (including the recent past) that should give us shame as Christians. We have done some positive things as a nation, such as giving aid to help other nations. But, how many militaries have we supported that have contributed to genocide and the death of many? Are we really a Christian nation, and do we even want to be?

The FELLOWSHIP INFORMER is a monthly publication of Stephens City Mennonite Church. Submissions can be made to Doug ZehrVogt via church mailbox or at dougzv@verizon.net by the last Sunday of each month.

To view past issues, please visit www.stephenscitymennonite.com

Secondly, I do not believe we should fight to protect our freedoms. Governments will always promote war, but we as Christians should not. What is more important: our "freedoms" or other's lives? Should our heroes be military heroes, those who've killed for their beliefs, or should they be Christian martyrs, who've laid down their own lives for their beliefs? I believe the "holy war" mentality we've seen in our government is dangerous. This is the mentality that says, "We're good. They're evil. And we need to rid the world of evil." Jesus said to let the wheat and tares grow together and he'd sort it out at the end of the world. Shouldn't we leave that in his hands? (Matthew 13:24-30) Does 6,000 American civilians dead justify 600,000 Iraqi civilians dead? And, shouldn't we be supportive when presidents want to use talks and diplomacy before war? Jesus told us to love our enemies, and I doubt any president will follow Him on that, but at least we can be glad when they try to talk before killing.

Thirdly, what does it mean to be pro-life? Pro-life is concerned about the horrible amount of abortions in our country, but shouldn't it also be concerned with quality of life for the poor, the lives of those killed in war, providing adequate health care for all, nuclear weapons, the worldwide deaths of children from preventable diseases, and the quality of life to those born in unwed or difficult circumstances? And what public policies actually reduce the amount of abortions and prevent them in the first place? Most pro-lifers voted for Bush. Have we seen abortions reduced during his terms? No, they've increased, and they had decreased during Clinton's presidency. Why? Because there were more public policies in place that actually helped those facing hardships. Statistically, it has been proven that during times of economic difficulty, abortions increase, and the reverse is true as well. Abortion rates are lowered when people have greater access to health care, when poverty is reduced, when adoption is promoted and when people have good pre- and postnatal care. So, if you're voting pro-life, consider these things. Should we only be concerned with outlawing abortions or should we be trying to prevent others from deciding to have abortions in the first place, and reducing the likelihood of abortions happening?

And, shouldn't we be concerned about other issues concerning life, too? If all who call themselves Christians would reach out to unwed pregnant teenagers and adopt unwanted children, perhaps abortion wouldn't even be an issue.

Fourthly, I've heard many say they don't want the government involved in social programs. Ideally, that would be great if the church could take care of that. Perhaps if the church stopped spending so much on its own budgets and buildings, it could have more to help the difficulties facing the "least of these" in our society. (See Matthew 25) But, we have not done this. So, who is going to do it? I'd rather have the government spend its money on helping people than on hurting others through war. And if we're concerned about government spending too much and increasing the deficit, have you looked at how much the government spends on war compared to social programs? It doesn't even compare.

Fifthly, I have heard Christians equating capitalism with Christianity. Again, how can we do this? Capitalism is based on consumerism, spending, greed, etc. These are not virtues Jesus touted. In the Bible, I read about being content with what you have, giving all your wealth away, not hoarding, and not taking advantage of the poor. We need to be very careful how much we let our culture influence our Christianity.

My ultimate hope is that Christians would agree to come together and work for what is best in this world, no matter their political party, economic status, gender, race or nationality. And we should work at it from the grassroots up, as Jesus did.