

Let Me Entertain You

40th Anniversary of Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship – October 11-12, 2014

I've been mulling these five minutes over for weeks....jotting down notes....reliving memories. When it came to writing something down, I realized I couldn't possibly write anything serious to share in five minutes. Hopefully, these few anecdotes will be entertaining as well as a jot to our collective memory. Penelope Lively in her wonderful book on aging, Dancing Fish and Ammonites, reminds "the old carry the potential to bore like a red warning light".....I will try to keep this in mind.

My first years as your pastor were on McMillan Street where CMF worshiped in an aging Methodist Church....primarily in an open space with a large stage in front and two small offices on either side of the stage. As Mennonites we seldom saw ourselves on stage unless we were hosting the Mennonite Arts Weekend. The Administrative Assistant was in one office and the other was my space.....a bit of a challenge for communicating effectively. Naomi and I tried an intercom but found that yelling back and forth was much more effective.

Barbara Havlovic, the Methodist minister at the time and still a dear friend, and I were never able to acquire Weldon's expertise in changing the light bulbs hanging from a cathedral like ceiling or in unplugging toilets in ancient bathrooms. Our janitorial skills amounted to collecting dirty coffee mugs scattered about the church on Monday morning....and appropriately muttering while washing them by hand....no dishwashers there.

The large space we used turned into a market place when selling our Fair Trade wares from 10,000 Villages during the pre-holiday season. I'm not sure if the "come-on" was for the lovely items for sale or if it was for Karen Diller's spiced (not spiked) punch and Linda Headings' homemade cinnamon rolls. While we represented 10,000 Villages, it took the village of CMF working together to bring this event to

fruition. At the end of each sale, we would wonder if some day we might open a 10,000 Villages store in Cincinnati.....who would have dreamed that within a few weeks a second store will be opening north of the city.

Not only did we have visions of a store but we realized we needed to find a permanent church home. Through much prayer and planning we purchased this building on Brownway. Hours of labor and sharing of dollars went into making it the building it is today. From the first walk through to the present, I must admit my eyes have been drawn to the Barbie pink windows.....although much has been done to disguise their brightness, I still covet the original stained glass windows which now reside in Oakley Methodist Church on Madison Road.

The "nuts and bolts" of church business and work happens in the office.....while we didn't have a "staff" we had ever patient, productive and creative administrative assistants.....Naomi Goertz, Suzanne Marie Hitt, Kris Shenk and several others. The walls of each office are likely still echoing our laughter and our tears. For a small church the telephone rang often....one of the most memorable being of an insistent caller wanting to donate her treadle sewing machine to CMF. She thought surely someone in the Mennonite church could use her gift since we didn't have electricity. I finally assured her that I had a similar machine in my home and considered it an antique. Thank you very much, but no!

I have memories of watching teenagers sitting in the back row slowly disappearing one Sunday morning as I was preaching....slinking lower and lower on the bench. Baptisms....one at Mirror Lake in Eden Parkand dedications of newborns....singing Jesus Loves Me....many of those little ones now in college. Of course, there were weddings.....playing matchmaker for Carol Lehman and John Kampen was a once in a lifetime experience.....and thankfully, few funerals. Retreats, many fellowship meals in homes and at church, White Elephant Christmas gift exchanges.....I'll never forget the time Pam Denlinger and I both were trying to disguise and give away tents to keep the flies off picnic food. Preparing the community

meals and marveling how the food always seemed to stretch.....I learned much about cooking "more with less" from Pat Penner. Assembling the CMF cookbook finely edited by Suzanne Marie.....I have given away dozens over the years. I recall the humbling experience of having Mennonite Church USA including CMF.....our life together.....in a video of "the missional church." Several Children's Sermons are easily remembered.....Leonard Beachy dressing like a cow and mooing his way down the aisle.....Julia Sprunger and the worm project which grew around the walls of the sanctuary.....Linda Headings and the empathy she expressed in her story after we put our beloved dachshund to sleep. Of course, no reminiscing would be complete without recalling the strains of four part harmony among us....often I would just stop and absorb the sound.....what a blessing to have shared.

Oh....Penelope also warned...."we must beware that glassy smile of polite attention; they are searching for an exit strategy." Before that begins to happen a few departing words.....

From Ecclesiastes, "there is a right time for everything on earth"this is the right time for celebration....of what has been and yes, what is yet to be. Thank you for sharing a part of your journey as a faith community with me.