

The FMC Vine

First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana

<http://www.fmc-cu.org/> + (217) 367-5353 + 902 West Springfield Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801

Editor: Alexandra Bidner

June 2017

The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like...

- by Thursday Morning Bible Study

The participants of Thursday Morning Bible Study have been studying the book of Matthew since the beginning of February. In one of our sessions we had a lively discussion of Matthew 13 and the 8 parables in the chapter that all have something to do with the Kingdom of Heaven is like... (Note that Matthew's reference to the Kingdom of Heaven connotes both the Kingdom **on** earth and **in** heaven.) We were given the task (or opportunity, rather) to write a short modern-day parable mirroring those in Matthew 13. Below is the creativity of the 7 groups who submitted a parable.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...a teabag when it finds the right water temperature to enhance the best flavor of the leaves, bringing inner satisfaction to the drinker.

The Kingdom of heaven is life...a musical instrument. If the instruments are working properly, it can produce beautiful music. If not, it squawks. God will decide whether the latter is a joyful noise and if the instrument can join the orchestra.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...the many birds of the air who trust in the Lord for their food. As many birds visit the bird feeders, some survive, some fly away, and some are controlled by squirrels.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...salt that makes all that is eaten taste better and is sorely missed and dangerous if lacking.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...a small amount of seed corn planted by a farmer that then grows into a field of corn that can feed the world.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...the weather. If you never think about it, you will always be surprised and be taken off-guard. If you watch the sky and learn the signs, you will be prepared and will have shelter in times of storm.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...preparing for a cruise. Get the ticket ahead of time, get packed, get to the place of leaving on time, and have a wonderful cruise. For those who don't prepare, get their ticket, pack, or arrive on time...they will miss the adventure.

The Kingdom of heaven is like...a fabulous buffet. There will be plenty of food for everyone, but there are some who fill their plates many times and eat themselves into a stupor, setting themselves up for a heart attack. There are some that are too picky and never get to enjoy the meal. Still, there are others who go straight to the dessert and never get the full experience. Lastly, there are some who chose a bit of everything and get the richness of the full meal.



Interview with Angela Williams - by Kaye Massanari

Angela is currently the Associate Director at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, and is also working on her dissertation. I appreciate her taking time out of her busy schedule to share some of her story with us.

KM: Angela, tell us something about the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and the work you do there.

AW: When I was hired there, I helped to develop educational outreach programs for teachers, schools and at libraries. I organized a few summer workshops for teachers where they would come to campus for a week and learn about methods and curriculum to teach about the Middle East, including addressing stereotypes and looking at media representations, and looking at music and food, too. I've been working at the Center for the past eight years. Since then my position has changed and we lost some staff. But we still are very active and organize weekly lectures given by faculty and film screenings on campus and various other events. We also have master's degrees and undergraduate minors. The aim of the Center is to further the study and knowledge about these world regions and that's needed more than ever these days. Anyone interested in our events can like the Center on Facebook, or ask me how to sign up for our email announcements.

KM: I imagine the current political climate, especially the proposed ban on immigration, affects you and the people you work with profoundly. Can you share a little about that with us?

AW: The executive order on immigration has created an outcry within academics, particularly in area studies programs and international education since such a ban is directly relevant to what we do. If as academics we can't engage with certain parts of the world through scholarly exchange, then that has a direct result on knowledge production and what we know about those areas of the world. Restricting travel from certain countries, not only affects people from those countries coming here, but also has negative effects on those of us who study or are somehow academically engaged with these regions. It creates a hostile environment for American scholars in a way that is contrary to how most of us think. In the days following the order, it was encouraging to see the university administration come together to think about ways to support those students, faculty and families affected by the order – and the university continues to maintain a blog to do this. In one meeting, I learned that there was a medical scholar from Yemen planning to come here, but the order prevented his travel. Though I don't know the specifics of the case, it was mentioned that this was a person who had suffered from torture, so to ban him from coming to this country to me is unthinkable. I know many colleagues and people in the community from the countries affected and people are all concerned about what this means for their own personal situations. Still there seems to be among my colleagues and at the Center a re-invigorating kind of spirit, like we all know that this is what we are here for.

KM: When you became a member at FMC, you shared that you were born in Champaign and grew up in Central Illinois. What from that experience has influenced you to do the work that you do to promote understanding and connection between different cultures?

AW: I spent most of my growing up years in rural Illinois, attending Blue Ridge schools, visiting my grandparents', Edna and Alva Cender, farm near Fisher often, and attending vacation bible school at East Bend. These years were sprinkled with trips to visit my grandmother Selena Clemons and relatives on my father's side in Chicago. For me, the norm of my life has always been relating to people from different cultural backgrounds. I am grateful that my parents gave me this gift. In any situation, I look for the commonalities I have with another person rather than the differences. I also saw incredible compassion from members of my family towards people from other countries or backgrounds; my Uncle John and Aunt Terry helped people coming from Mexico and Vietnam. My Aunt Kathy and Uncle Glen always had great admiration and respect for the cultures of indigenous people.

KM: Having grown up attending East Bend, I know your mom, Annette, and your aunt, Kathy. I've met your dad, Willie, and know that he and my dad had a nice connection. Tell us a little about your family.

AW: I have two older brothers, Isaac and Joshua, and a younger sister, Alicia. Isaac and Josh both work on campus. Ike is a grounds manager and Josh has an accounting position. Alicia is a social worker and travels around the state visiting various mental health facilities. She has a daughter, Alana, who is 13. My brother Ike has 5 girls, ranging from 20 yrs. to 7 yrs. The 20-yr. old has

a daughter - so I am a great aunt! I have 7 nieces. That's a lot of birthday parties which I haven't been able to make them all lately since things have just been busy with work and writing my dissertation. I hope to get back to some more family time soon.

KM: After you graduated from high school at Champaign Central, what did you do and where did you attend college?

AW: After I graduated high school, I worked full-time for a couple of years at the Illinois Employment and Training Center. I helped people write resumes and sign in to the automated job search engine. I took a few classes at Parkland College. When I was 19 or 20 it dawned on me that although I had a job, with no degree, my advancement options would be limited. So, I decided to go to Goshen College because that's where my mom went. I didn't think about too many other places.

KM: How was your experience at Goshen College?

AW: Though I had been exposed to the Mennonite mentality of peace, service and nonviolence through the examples set by my grandparents and aunts and uncles, at Goshen I came to learn about Anabaptist theology and benefited from some compassionate educators.

Interestingly it was also at Goshen that I gained a broader perspective and acceptance of world religions, particularly Asian religious traditions. I got to know students from Nepal, India, Tibet, who had very different faith backgrounds but seemed also grounded in peace and community. They honored their traditions and loved their families. They had traveled so far and with so little to build a better life for themselves. They cooked biryani in the dorm kitchen and shared it with me, dressed me kurta pajama, put bhindi on my head. In my Asian Philosophy class I distinctly remember the day when I was reading the textbook and it dawned on me that if I was born in India, then I could be Hindu and culturally, what was wrong with that? Although I had grown up around difference, it was at Goshen that for the first time I came to value and accept religious difference.

KM: You came back to this area and graduated from UIUC. How did that transition happen?

AW: I thought if I could transfer back to Illinois that would save me a lot in the long run. Plus, honestly, I wasn't sure what I'd do after graduation. I was interested in international service, and didn't find a lot of mentorship or help with thinking about next steps after I graduated at Goshen. I thought if I came back to UIUC, at least I could live at home and afford the tuition. So, that's what I did. I transferred back as about a junior and majored in Linguistics. I saw language as being similar to religion – both being systems to express a deeper meaning.

KM: You shared that you spent a year studying in Egypt. How was that experience for you?

AW: I started taking Arabic in about 2002. At the time, I thought I wanted to work in diplomacy or work to create a better understanding of the Arab world and predominantly-Muslim world. I received a scholarship to study abroad in Egypt from 2005-06.

My time living in Cairo allowed me to practice my Arabic and experience living in a predominantly Muslim country. I felt very much at home and fell in love with the culture and people. I remember thinking that I wanted my Egypt experience to be a part of the rest of my life and to some extent I believe that it will. My current work at the university allows me to connect with people from all over the world, mainly from South Asia, North Africa and the Middle East regions.

KM: Angela, I love the arts and how artists affect our lives, so I was awed when I heard about your master's thesis and doctoral dissertation. Can you share a little about that with us?

AW: I finished my master's in linguistics and wrote a thesis on hip hop in Egypt. I had seen a couple of shows in Cairo, so I knew that it was becoming a thing, and a professor from Morocco gave me the idea when I got back. The thesis covered a few male groups.

Two years after I started working at the Center, I went back to school in the College of Education. After several years of trying to figure out my dissertation topic, I decided to go back to music and rap, and to this time look at how women in the Middle East region are using this form of music to speak out against male dominance and to give voice to what they feel it means to be a woman and have equal rights in the region. So, I'm looking at the music (which is all online) of 5 artists from Morocco, Egypt, Palestine and

Iran. I've also done some interviews of women from these countries who are students to see what their perceptions are of the music and lyrics. I'm encouraged that these women are speaking out against the same issues women deal with all over the world I think, including having agency and choice in their own lives to be the kind of people they want to be. I enjoy the music. It's empowering and I find the lyrics brave and provocative. I have another chapter to write on the dissertation and then revisions.

KM: How fascinating. What are the artists' names? Can we listen to them on YouTube?

AW: Yes! They are easy to find and some videos are subtitled in English. I'd recommend checking out Shadia Mansour (from Palestine), Soultana (from Morocco), Malikah (from Lebanon), Soska (from Egypt) and Justina (from Iran). There is a collaboration of 3 women and 2 men that was posted online last year for International Women's Day. The artists were from Egypt, Jordan and Yemen and they met up in Jordan and visited a refugee camp. Their lyrics talk about the strength of women even in such desperate circumstances a war, "in the midst of the camps, women are as tough as a thousand states." That video, sponsored by Oxfam, is found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8iOTB818VE>

KM: Thanks. I'll check these out.

Aside from your busy work schedule, family gatherings and working on your dissertation, what do you do for fun and relaxation?

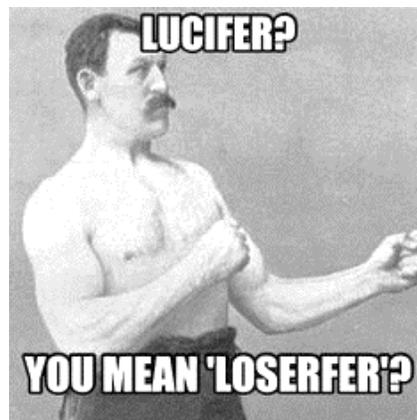
AW: I love music. I like live shows, usually anything folk or acoustic, and I enjoy singing with people. I play basic guitar and am trying to teach myself the banjo. Also, I play piano. I like to play guitar songs from a variety of pop and folk artists that is constantly expanding based on my mood or life experience! These have included Tracy Chapman, Dolly Parton, the Eagles, Van Morrison, Alison Krauss, India Arie, Lizz Wright, Shakira, and the list goes on. I also enjoy reading. Two authors I can usually appreciate anything from are Anne Lamott and Terry McMillan because they make me feel like I'm talking to a friend.

KM: Angela, thank you again for taking the time to do this interview. It's been fun getting to know you better.

3 Ingredient Banana Bread

3-4 ripe bananas
1 box of yellow cake mix
2 eggs

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
Smash bananas in a large bowl, then add remaining ingredients and mix well.
Spray 2 small loaf pans or 1 large loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray.
Fill the pans with batter.
Bake at for 35-40 minutes.



Library Committee Report

The library committee currently does not have plans to purchase new fiction, but we welcome donations of quality classic and contemporary fiction that are suitable for the FMC library. If you have questions about your donation, please contact a library committee member before bringing your books to the church.

The FMC library is now online! You can search the collection from the convenience of your home using this link: <http://www.librarything.com/profile/eatplants>. The link can also be found on the FMC website homepage. Open the FMC library homepage. You'll notice that your current user name is "eatplants", but we hope to change it to "fmc-cu" soon. Search our library by using the search bar to the right of our FMC picture.

Thanks to the library committee and other wonderful FMC folks who entered data and made this project possible: Beth Otto, Bev Hertle, Kathy Springer, Cynthia Nafziger, Mary Krick, Martha Moore, Michael Crosby, and Ruth Stoltzfus.

Interview with Barb and Danny regarding their upcoming two-year tenure at the World Friendship Center

AB: Congratulations on becoming the next Co-Directors of the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan! How did you become acquainted with the WTC and ultimately decide to work there?

BS: I owe it to Trip Advisor. I had heard about WFC from Jill Schreiber about ten year ago when her aunt and uncle served as Directors. This summer while visiting Hiroshima with Ruth Stoltzfus, I had tried and failed to contact them through [booking.com](https://www.booking.com), which somehow registered with TripAdvisor. Trip Advisor started to harass me for reviews of my stay at WFC, which had not even happened. I got curious enough to start reading other folks' reviews and noticed in one of them that the current directors' term would be up in the summer of 2017, which was when I would be retiring. Spending several weeks in Japan last summer had made me aware of how much I longed to live there again, if only I could find something useful to do. Dannie and I had already decided that we would live somewhere new over the next year or two, even if that new place was a van, so all these things started to come together. WFC's mission of peace education aligns so well with our interests, I don't know what more we could ask for!

AB: Barb, you lived in Japan as the child of missionaries. This is a cool opportunity for you, what are you most excited about being able to do/see/etc.?

BS: Mountains, oceans, rivers, food (don't get me started), people, language, aesthetics, trains, hot springs baths, tatami floors, toilets, coffee shops, and a certain sense of orderliness and restraint are the first things that come to mind.

AB: The WTC strives to be a place of understanding and hope. It seems to focus on the citizens of Japan who survived the bomb, yet who are outcast from society. Can you give more insight into your goals for the WTC?

DO: *Hibaksha* (bomb survivors) were not treated well after the war. They faced social stigma and discrimination because of fears that the radiation had created heritable characteristics that could be passed on to their children. Non-Japanese organizations provided a lot of medical, material and emotional support to the bomb survivors. Among these outsiders, was the family of Barbara Reynolds, whose father moved his family to Hiroshima to provide medical aid to *hibaksha*. Barbara Reynolds organized a world tour of bomb survivors so the rest of the world would have to deal with the effects of the bomb. Eventually, Barbara Reynolds established the World Friendship Center as a place to "To foster peace, one friend at a time." This is achieved by welcoming visitors to Hiroshima, organizing tours of the Peace Park (ground zero of the bombing), organizing meetings with *hibaksha*, and supporting local groups and movements who oppose nuclear weapons and the increasing militarization of Japanese society.

AB: In 1945, Americans overwhelmingly supported the use of the bomb. Now, it looks like it is mostly concentrated among older people (according to national interest.org). As historian David McCullough has been known to say, "people living 'back then' didn't know they were living 'back then'," and to judge the decisions of people in 1945 by the standards of 2015 is not only ahistorical, it is pointless. As someone who has grown up learning about the Enola Gay and the bombs, I would love to hear your views of the American decision, how Japan responded then and now and what you see for future.

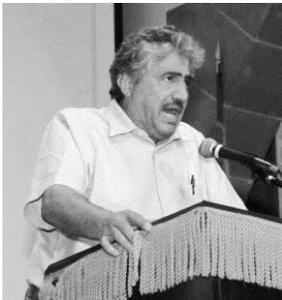
DO: The "American" decision was a decision taken by a few government and military leaders. The American people knew little about the factors taken into consideration by those decision makers and generally were left with little information about the decision other than information provided by the leaders. It is understandable why many Americans accepted the rationalization given by the government at that time. The official rationalization was that although the use of the two bombs at the time saved many more lives because it ended the war earlier and it saved the Allies from a long land invasion which would have cost many Allied lives as well as killing many Japanese.

What we now know is that Japan was on the verge of collapse. Their ability to sustain their military was exhausted. The civilian population was underfed and under housed. The major cities and infrastructure had been destroyed. There was no plausible way for Japan to have sustained the war effort. The Japanese government was already in negotiations with the Americans on the terms of a surrender. So, why did the U.S. use the two bombs?

1. The Soviet Union had not yet declared war on Japan. It had been focusing on the war in Europe and had not participated in the Pacific war. The American government wanted to end the war with Japan before the Soviets joined in so that they wouldn't have to share authority over post-war Japan. The Soviets did declare war on Japan in the interval between the bombing of Hiroshima and the bombing of Nagasaki.
2. Curiosity about how this new weapon would perform when dropped over a major city. This seems callous, but there is evidence that rather than waiting several more days or weeks for Japan to surrender, there was a rush to drop the second bomb over Nagasaki. It created more data.

I disagree with David McCullough. The opinions of the American people in 1945 are not the issue. They believed what they were told after the fact. The decisions of the government in 1945 are decisions that we can judge. We now know what information they had available when they decided to use nuclear weapons. In my view, those decisions were not justifiable by the rules of war in place at that time.

Jonathan Kuttab: Peacemaking as a Way of Life (*Featured on TheMennonite.org, March 6, 2017*)



For Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian Mennonite, peacemaking is more than a concept; it's a way of life.

As a human rights lawyer in Israel-Palestine and the United States, Kuttab knows the value of finding alternatives to violence as a means of solving conflict. And as a Mennonite, Kuttab recognizes the legacy of activism and social justice work that many Mennonites have upheld. Kuttab attends Community Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

"Mennonites were radical," he said, "and not afraid to stand up for what they believed."

Born in West Jerusalem, Kuttab and his family moved to the United States after the Six-Day War in 1967. His father, George Kuttab, was a Mennonite pastor who spent significant time working in the Philadelphia area. This connected Kuttab to Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1973 with a degree in history.

He then went on to attend law school at the University of Virginia. Kuttab was always interested in human rights work, but wanted the chance to be professionally involved. "It's so much better to work with human rights in terms of international law than to pick up the gun and go fighting," he said.

After completing his studies, Kuttab worked with a Wall Street law firm for several years but returned home in the 1980s to serve with Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine. He went on to help found the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence in 1983 as well as Al-Haq, a nongovernmental Palestinian human rights organization. In 1990, he also cofounded the Mandela Institute for Political Prisoners.

Currently Kuttab is a member of the New York, Palestine and Israel bar associations and spends much of his time traveling back and forth between the United States and the Middle East, often working from his law office in Jerusalem.

Kuttab served as the lawyer for Christian Peacemaker Teams and was part of the initial group that developed ideas for CPT's formation. He says CPT's mission is incredibly important.

"People talk about nonviolence but they don't take it really seriously," he says. "If people put just a fraction of their time and energy and resources and personnel into trying to be peacemakers, we could accomplish a whole lot."

In terms of the Christian response to injustice, and specifically Mennonites' response, Kuttab maintains that Mennonites should be among the first and foremost to speak out because of their Anabaptist roots in pacifism. "I think Mennonites would be the first to tell Palestinians and Israelis that violence doesn't work and that we have to think of other means of achieving [our] objective[s]."

Kuttab is a supporter of the boycott, divest and sanctions movement in response to the Israeli government's occupation of Palestinian land and people, and he says it is an effective, nonviolent and Anabaptist response. "Mennonites should be the first to jump on something like the attempt to use nonviolence to achieve political objects of peace, of resisting occupation and violence, and resisting the kind of human rights violations that are taking place for the Palestinians," he said.

He encourages Mennonites to respond by taking money away from the occupation, by boycotting and divesting, by persuading.

Building bridges with the Jewish community

In November 2016, Kuttab was invited to speak at a New York City synagogue, where he spoke in favor of Palestinian nationalism and shared about his strong commitment to working toward a one-state solution with nonviolent strategies and respect and understanding.

Kuttab supports a solution that would bring Israelis and Palestinians together as equal citizens, and a state government would meet the needs of both "those who want a Jewish state and a place of safety and security, as well as the Palestinian Arabs who want a place where they can live in security and dignity," he said.

"The question is," said Kuttab, "can we have genuine equality. Can we satisfy both sides at the same time?"

The solution to this problem, Kuttab believes, is there with strategic thinking focused on a nonviolent response. "People have to go back to the drawing board, so to speak," he says in terms of why his work is important. "People have to think outside the box; we have to rehash what hasn't worked out this whole time."

Kuttab extends this to the responsibility Christians have as peacemakers, saying "it is important that our input be based on our principles. As Mennonites, for example, we believe in peace and nonviolence, and that must become the thesis of how we evaluate any proposed solution."

Kuttab continually challenges himself and colleagues to find alternatives to violence as a way of responding to conflict situations. "We need to stop emphasizing military power and start emphasizing other ways of resolving things."

"We must return to international law and to human rights and dignity, return to the principles of equality and nondiscrimination," he says, "and respect for other people." Kuttab keeps these principles in mind, as he works toward finding a peaceful solution to a tense and conflict-ridden situation in the Middle East.

His "out-of-the-box" thinking combined with a commitment to nonviolence and respect for all human dignity based in the Anabaptist tradition, makes him one of the leaders in his field, both within the church and without.

Preparing for Orlando 2017 Delegate Assembly

Kuttab, along with a peacemaker from Jewish Voice for Peace, will be part of a Mennonite Church USA speaking tour across the United States in April and May, coordinated by Jonathan Brenneman, an Israel/Palestine Partners in Peacemaking Coordinator for MC USA.

At the Delegate Assembly in Orlando, Florida, this July, delegates will consider the "Seeking Peace in Israel-Palestine" resolution.

Delegates at the 2015 Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri voted to table a previous resolution and asked that it be rewritten. Table comments from that assembly were considered in revising the resolution, which was drafted by a three-person writing team in consultation with a ten-person reference group. The resolution writing committee talked with both Jewish and Palestinian peacemakers and leaders and took into account more than 80 responses to the resolution's first draft that were submitted by individuals and groups across MC USA.

Andre Gingerich Stoner, former director of holistic witness and interchurch relations for Mennonite Church USA, says the resolution seeks to speak in a uniquely Mennonite voice. It opposes military occupation of Palestinian lands and anti-Semitic attitudes and actions. Adopting a restorative justice framework, the revised resolution identifies ways Mennonite have participated in harms done against both Palestinians and Jews, and names ways Mennonites can work to address those harms.

"This has been an extremely consultative process and it really represents us trying to work across differences in some significant ways," said Stoner in a March 2 phone interview. "This process has brought people who are Mennonite and deeply engaged and

connecting in a lot of different directions, both with Jewish and Palestinian communities, into conversation with each other. That alone has already been a very positive thing. Not always easy but positive.”

The resolution urges Mennonites to avoid purchases and investments directly related to the military occupation of Palestinian territories. Unlike the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) the resolution does not call for a boycott of all Israeli goods or for academic or cultural boycotts.

The revised resolution will be reviewed by MC USA’s Executive Board at its March 30 meeting and will be made public soon after that. It includes calls for Mennonites to repent of participation in both the occupation of Palestinian lands and anti-Semitic attitudes.



***Leading from the Inside Out:
Reflections on the Values-Based Leadership Program***
- by Pastor Michael

Back in February I concluded the five-month Values-Based Leadership Program (VBLP), an Anabaptist-rooted initiative for the development of Christian leaders ranging from pastors to non-profit leaders to church agency staff and administrators. The program is hosted annually at Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center in Mt. Pleasant, PA. (Years ago while working together at Laurelville, former FMCer Don Rittenhouse in collaboration with current FMCer Jon Welty Peachey were instrumental in the creation of VBLP).

For me, VBLP began with a three-day conference at Laurelville last October and completed with a second three-day residency in February. In between was a series of readings, reflections, and monthly phone calls with a cohort of colleagues. The program offered a range of tools for evaluating leadership style and personality tendencies, promoting productive conflict, growing intercultural competency, and understanding team dynamics.

The program stresses accurate self-awareness as a key to healthy leadership (health for both the leader and organization). Whether navigating conflict or moving together towards a common goal, it’s crucial that we know ourselves well. I was encouraged to claim natural strengths, like: empowering others to act; speaking with directness in conflictual circumstances; and drawing on shared energy and momentum. I was also challenged by critical growth areas: routinely collecting critical feedback; encouraging others by acknowledging their contributions; articulating clear common vision; and taking care not to overwhelm or overpower.

These insights were explored in the contexts of disagreement/conflict and in team settings. As a pastor, my “teams” are dynamic, ranging from our team of three staff – Rhonda, Pastor Debra, and myself – to any committee or working group I might join. Teamwork is about celebrating the diversity of gifts and perspectives we each bring. My energy grows when expanding the box, brainstorming big ideas, and creating more options than we could ever accomplish. Someone else (maybe you), rich in practical wisdom, prefers to keep both feet on the ground and is needed for moving us towards what’s feasible and how we plan to get there.

VBLP was enriched by an “intercultural competency” component, facilitated by an inventory designed to assess strengths and weaknesses in cross-cultural understanding. It was a challenging and hopeful process that is now integral to the matrix of cross-cultural, interfaith, and educational experiences shaping my ministry journey so far in 2017. I met with a coach trained in intercultural proficiency and have considered making this a monthly routine. Throughout my life, formative cross-cultural experiences mark periods of rapid growth in my relationships with God and others; that trend continues.

Despite all this good work, leadership eludes clear definition. As an Anabaptist follower of Jesus and a pastor, I remain mindful of the dangers of leadership even while committing to persistent self-reflection and healthy organizational process. Throughout VBLP, we returned to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12) as a guide for character formation. Meekness, humility, mercy, integrity, and the quest for righteousness serve as the guiding light for Christ-like leadership. I am grateful for FMC’s commitment to healthy pastoral leadership and for the opportunity to grow through the VBLP.