



## TAFTSVILLE CHAPEL MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP

To begin the work of our congregation's intentional transition, the Transition Team invited Randy and Carie to lead us in a Congregational Timeline activity. For two consecutive Sundays in November, 2014, the members of the congregation met to share stories, memories, insights and historical information about who we are as a church. Participants ranged from those who were present at the congregation's beginnings to those who joined in membership as recently as a year ago. Bob R. captured this event on video and has created a 2-DVD set that will be available through the church library.

This activity involved everyone in individual, small group and large group discussions, brainstorming, reflecting and feedback. We stretched a long roll of paper across the back of the meeting-room, divided into decades beginning with 1960 when the congregation first formed at Taftsville. We began with sticky-notes, indicating when each individual member became part of the congregation, and then shared personal stories of meaningful moments.

In the first round of sharing, we discovered that most of us began attending at Taftsville because of the familiar Mennonite heritage, or because we were invited or recommended by someone we knew. And we stayed because of the genuine welcoming, caring community, living out a faith of love and acceptance.

### The Early History

In a large group discussion, we learned that in the 1950s, churches from Franconia Mennonite Conference (FMC) in Pennsylvania sent workers into Vermont to conduct Summer Bible Schools. Vermont was seen as an unchurched area of the country, and this was part of an outreach ministry of the Conference. The little schoolhouse in Taftsville was one of the locations for these summer Bible Schools, with sometimes a hundred or more children attending. Also during these years young Mennonite men in 1-W Service were assigned to this area to work at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital.

In 1959, FMC decided to plant a Mennonite church here, and Taftsville's schoolhouse was available as a meeting place. Arden Godshall was sent as the first minister, and soon several young families in 1-W Service began fellowshipping at what was then called 'Taftsville Mennonite Church'. Among its very first members, Richard and Ruth Ann are still faithfully attending.

### Pastoral History

- Arden Godshall 1960-63
- Homer Detweiler 1963-64
- Jim Millen 1964-70
- Dale Heisey 1970-71
- John Lutz 1971-78

- Dan Bartlett            1979-81
- John Lutz                1981-83
- Nelson Kraybill        1983-87
- Marty Kolb              1987-96
- Randy Good             1996-2012

### 1960s – Defining Moments

- This was a unified, homogeneous group with strong community fellowship, enjoying spontaneous visitations in each others' homes.
- In 1962, FMC bought the Taftsville schoolhouse, which had no running water, and was heated with wood. A well was drilled by Lloyd Moyer in the mid 60's and from then on we did not have to carry in water jugs every Sunday. There was one primitive bathroom in the corner of the basement.
- A felt loss during this time was the loss of Arden Godshall as pastor. He brought strong leadership to the beginning of the congregation. It was difficult to find a new pastor, and the Conference stayed involved in arranging for pastoral leadership during the rest of the decade.
- A strength identified during this time was the commitment and involvement of everyone, including the many young families with children.
- Finances were tight, but this young congregation was service-oriented, and responded to those in need.
- Outreach Ministry included a singing ministry in nursing homes and the local jail, and continuing the summer Bible Schools for community children. Bethany Birches Camp was begun, and the Ramers were sent as missionaries to Red Lake, Ontario in 1967.
- One cultural issue that had to be worked through was the issue of 'wedding rings'.

### 1970s – Defining Moments

- The core of the congregation was made up of many young families raising children. They remained involved with potlucks, visiting, softball, biking and singing together.
- With the death of Pastor Millen in 1970, the young congregation struggled to find pastoral leadership. Lay ministries were begun, with a Teaching Minister chosen from among the members.
- When the draft ended, many 1-W families returned to Pennsylvania, and membership at Taftsville declined.
- After the death of bishop John Lapp, connections with FMC became more distant. The name of the church was changed to 'Taftsville Chapel', dropping the word 'Mennonite', as a way to facilitate community outreach.
- Outreach continued with singing ministries and a Sunday morning service at the jail. Vacation Bible School continued for community children, also work projects at BBC.
- The women's service project group *Candlelighters* was begun.
- A major building project was finishing the basement, including the Adam & Eve bathrooms.

### 1980s – Defining Moments

- Strong lay leaders continued from the early membership.
- Strong core families and a large youth group all shared common cultural Mennonite backgrounds.
- There were 4 different pastors during this decade, including the first woman pastor in FMC.
- After Nelson Kraybill came in 1983 (arranged and assisted through FMC), the congregation reconnected with the Conference. The word 'Mennonite' was added back into the name of the church, and ties with other regional Mennonite churches were developed.
- Congregational fellowship was shared through softball, quilting, and small groups.
- Outreach included Christmas caroling, Homestead visits, involvement with Habitat for Humanity and BBC. The congregation sponsored a family from Cambodia.
- The meeting room was remodeled, and FMC deeded the building to the congregation for \$1.00.
- A piano was first used during worship.
- Worship was very consistent in style and format, with the council chair leading worship each Sunday.
- The consistent message of salvation and of peace helped strengthen the congregation.
- The issue of women in leadership had to be dealt with.
- When the draft was re-instated, the congregation studied the issues related to peace and non-resistance and young men registering for the draft.
- The issue of divorce and re-marriage also was faced.
- The loss of Victor Glick in 1989 affected many, and some left Taftsville at that time.

### 1990s – Defining Moments

- The second generation was heading off to college – there was a lack of children and young people in the congregation.
- There was a transition in membership, with people coming and going from the area.
- With a woman pastor, women began to take more leadership in the congregation.
- Community fellowship continued with softball, game nights, and camping at Groton; there seemed to be many opportunities to help people move.
- There was a transition in makeup of the congregation with an influx of non-mennonite members.
- Worship became more interactive, and congregational sharing increased.
- Outreach included the 10K Villages Christmas sale, food for the Haven, and various work-service projects.
- The congregation faced the issue of the first full-time, non-ethnic Mennonite pastor.
- The congregation worked through issues of identity and diversity.

### 2000s – Defining Moments

- Strong, consistent, committed leadership was evident, with individual strengths working in harmony.

- Strengths of the congregation during this time were continuity, hospitality, community, generosity, and active children and youth.
- Worship became more participatory, with flexible services (such as Ekklesia), story-telling and visuals.
- Participation was intergenerational, and the younger generation began taking more leadership roles.
- A vibrant youth group developed, bringing in outside young people.
- The worship band was introduced, along with the worship binders.
- There was a general awareness of the working of the Holy Spirit.
- Communication was enhanced with the addition of the CURRENT newsletter (2004), and the website (2005)
- Outreach included the awareness and support of many others, such as New Beginnings, Haiti, Tucson, Health in Harmony (Indonesia), MDS (Katrina), etc.
- The kitchen was remodeled, and the meeting room was renovated.
- Randy's sabbatical called for the congregation to adjust to new leadership.
- There was also the loss of several key families during this time.

#### 2010 to Present - Defining Moments

- The transition from consistent leadership with Randy as pastor to everyone pitching in seems to define this period.
- Spiritual life, hospitality, fellowship, involvement, and living faith continue to be strengthened.
- We began our Pikangikum outreach, and continue to be sensitive to global events and other needs.
- Sharing our stories with one another has drawn us closer, even as 'the Vote' threatened to draw us apart.

#### Personal Stories of how Taftsville made a difference

- One sister shared how the congregation faced the topic of divorce and remarriage, helping her through her own situation.
- One family's experience with near-bankruptcy was ministered to in a unique and powerful way through the 'Orford Project'.
- One shared how the congregation supported him at the time of his brother's death.
- One brother shared how the congregation helped him after a plane crash.
- Many mentioned Taftsville's support, assistance & prayer through times of loss and death of loved ones.

#### Follow-up Reflections:

*"What do you notice, what emerges for you as a result of these stories?"*

- There is a pattern of flow and cycles: population goes up & down, numbers of children, growing families, pastoral leadership, etc. Most of what we're going through, we've been through before.
- The congregation is made up of many different people than were here 30-50 years ago. People have been blessed here, and moved on to bless others.

- There is a strong core of members who have continued faithful involvement at Taftsville from the early years.
- The 'founding spirit' has continued through the decades: a commitment to outreach, welcome, service, healing and giving.
- Strong sense of community has helped bring us through tough times and tough discussions.
- There is a sense of boldness (independence?), willing to take new risks.

*"As we move into the next decade, what can we continue to trust God for?"*

- The ongoing un-self-conscious movement of the Spirit.
- The Word alive IN us, creating vessels of His Spirit.
- That we do have a Chief Shepherd.
- He has a purpose for us that we can trust.
- God is BIG enough, and adequate, for everything we might face.
- He is Good; and He loves *us*.
- He will most likely surprise us.
- He will protect us.
- He will continue to use us to touch and bless others, for His glory.
- We can trust Him for wisdom as we continue to take risks.