

The MennoNet

Summer 2019

Our Story, by Matt and Bridget Rohrer

I. How We Met

Labor Day 2016. We met on a play date at a mutual friend's house (thank you, Jennifer). We both were not expecting a “set-up,” but quickly found that we enjoyed each other's company. Bridget remembers that Matt and his long legs never left the hammock. Matt remembers her ponytail and her wit. Our boys were both beginning kindergarten the following day. Matt used that as an excuse to continue our conversation the next day. We ended up talking for hours each night that week. We coordinated another play date with our two boys, an adult date, and had countless more hours of conversations. We both knew pretty early on that we had found one unlike any other. We took the time to get to know each other on an intense and deep level, we fell in love, but best of all, found our match and our best friend in the process.

II. Proposal

November 2018. What began as a simple kid-free weekend, to get away from normal life for a couple days, ended with a ring and plans to officially merge our lives. We made



plans to stay at a bed and breakfast in the Afton area (shout out to WildmanDan!) and visit some local favorites — wineries, distilleries and breweries. We enjoyed taking in the views of the beautiful season, relaxing (aka sleeping), playing games, cards and reading. Oh, and eating, lots of good eating. We had a beautiful dinner at the Farmhouse at Veritas and came back to the bed and breakfast for socializing by the bonfire with the other guests and owners. Matt managed to get everyone else to hide and surprised Bridget under the stars and by the fire with the most beautiful ring. One of the other guests even caught it all on camera. A weekend to remember for sure.→

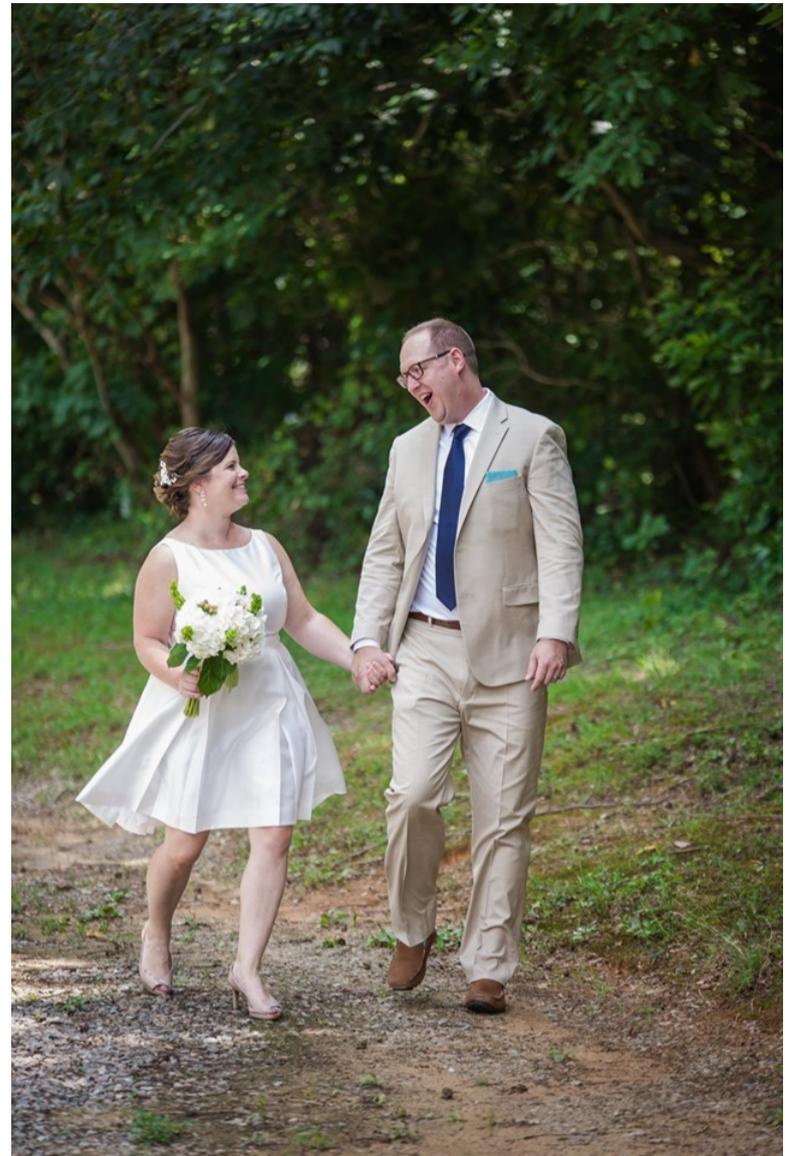
III. What's to Come for Us

After our wedding, Matt and Edward will move to Glen Allen, into the home that Bridget and Parks call home already. It is a perfect spot for two adventurous boys; with multiple parks nearby, the community pool within walking distance and kids everywhere. The backyard becomes a popular spot for friends to come and play. The neighborhood is perfect for tons of bike riding, skateboarding and walking. There is even a trail through the back of the neighborhood that connects us to the grandparents' place!

With their birthdays only weeks apart (Edward 9/2/11 and Parks 9/19/11), they share so much in common. It is a blessing that they are able to "live with their buddy/brother" and grow up doing many of the same things! Both boys are rising third graders for the 2019-2020 school year. Parks will continue at Echo Lake and Edward will continue at Pearsons Corner. The boys will each have their own room, but will likely spend most of their time (when not outdoors) in their large and fully stocked playroom that leaves no room for any mention of "Mom, I'm bored!"

Other than the new and exciting logistics, most of their lives will continue as normal. Matt will have the convenience of close interstate access for his daily commute north to work, and will be thrilled to come home to dinner, warm and ready during the week (not to mention all those lunches packed with love). The weekend cooking responsibilities will be happily managed by Matt, as Bridget will work many weekends, hustling hard in her real estate business. The family outings we love will continue to fill the social calendars and the family vacations will be fun to plan.

There won't be a shortage of love in the home, as the family is rounded out with their 100-plus-pound gentle giant, Hines. Hines is



a 10-year-old yellow Lab who has never met a stranger and goes not a day without kisses, hugs, head rubs and other unsolicited (but still welcomed) rough housing. He brings so much joy and unconditional love every day.

IV. Our Wedding

July 13, 2019. We had a small and intimate ceremony at our church and a lovely luncheon at Tarrant's West with our families. Then it was off to honeymoonin' from July 14-22. We were so excited to head bright and early on Sunday to the gorgeous island of St. John. We kept our celebration going as hubby and wife in a private villa in a location so spectacular, we thought we might not come back.

We did tons of relaxing — poolside, oceanside and sleeping in (you parents hear us, right?!). There was also plenty of fun in

store: kayaking, snorkeling, Jeep adventures, hiking, exploring the vast National Park on the island, and more! Let's not forget the local food and delicious umbrella drinks.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about this trip for us is the memories that will last forever.



Nine New Books for FMC's Library

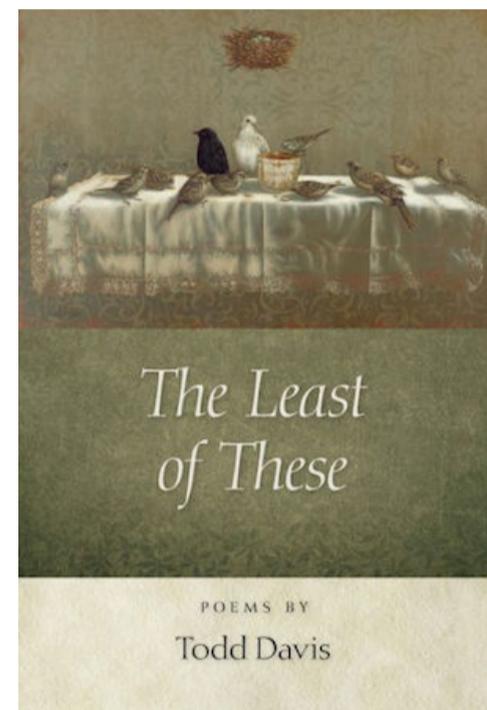
By Ryan Ahlgrim

Recently I donated nine books to the church library — not because I wanted to get rid of them, but because I cherish them and think they are valuable for our congregation. Check out the New Acquisitions cart in the library.

Evening Chore by Shari Wagner. This is Shari's first published collection of poems. She grew up in the Church of the Brethren and has been immersed in the Mennonite Church since college—where I first met her. She's now a member of First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis. This collection includes poems about Mennonite cultural traditions (such as the poem "Rook"), reflections on rural life, Indiana locations, and odd personalities from Hoosier lore (such as "Diana of the Dunes"). Shari is no second-rate poet. She was named Indiana's Poet Laureate for 2016 and 2017.

The Harmonist at Nightfall by Shari Wagner. This second collection of poems is all about Indiana. Shari travelled to every nook and cranny of the Hoosier state and has given a poet's voice and vision to locations familiar and unfamiliar. I was in a monthly writers' group with her, and I had the privilege of hearing many of these poems in their formative stages.

The Least of These by Todd Davis. Todd is another Mennonite poet — one of the best, in my opinion. This collection of poems mostly revolves around nature and faith. For instance, in the poem "The Face of Jesus," he sees the gospel played out in the lives of weasels, hens, opossums, foxes, coyotes, does, bears, squirrels, and owls. Perhaps the best poem in this collection is the award-winning "Tree of Heaven," which finds faith



in the midst of sorrow. (My very favorite Todd Davis poem, "Prayer Requests at a Mennonite Church," is hanging in the church library.)

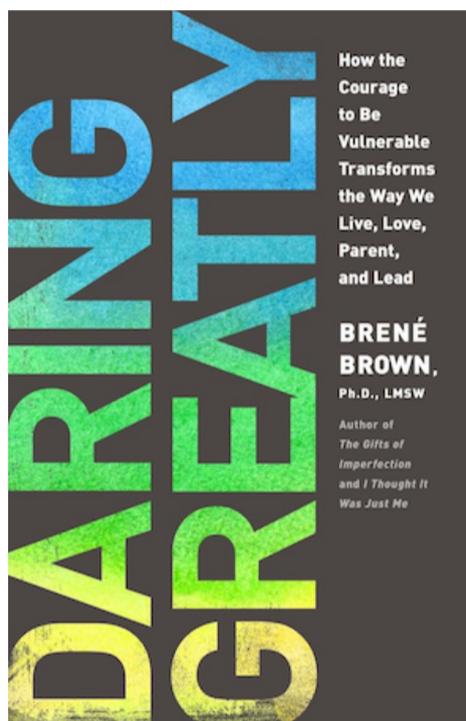
Jesus Matters edited by James Kraybill and David Shenk. Each chapter in this book (written by a wide variety of Mennonite scholars and thinkers) reflects on a different aspect of Jesus' meaning and pertinence for us today. For instance, there are chapters on "Jesus and Creation," "Jesus Triumphs Over the

Powers,” “Jesus Our Peace,” “Jesus Our Mission,” “Jesus Encountering the Religions,” and “Jesus and the Future.” Written for a popular audience, this book is meant to refocus and revitalize our church’s mission and identity.

Satyagraha and Nonresistance by Weyburn Groff. Gandhi’s program of nonviolent resistance to injustice (undergirded by love for the opponent) is both similar to and significantly different from the traditional Mennonite stance of nonresistance. Weyburn compares the two approaches with more depth and insight than I have ever found before. Originally published in 1963, it was republished in 2009 because of its importance.

Just and Unjust Wars by Michael Walzer. Traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite theology opposes Christian involvement in all wars, but does not necessarily reject the possibility that some wars may be legitimately carried out by

the state. Therefore, it is necessary for us to reflect on the philosophy of “just war” if we want to take part in society’s discernment of whether to engage or not engage in a particular war. This book is the very best analysis of what makes particular wars just and unjust.



Daring Greatly by Brene Brown. Shame, guilt and insecurity keep many of us from becoming our fullest selves. Brown suggests that the courage to be vulnerable can transform how we relate to others.

The Transforming Power of Lectio Divina by

Maria Tasto. There are many scholarly and devotional ways of studying the Bible, but one way that may be unfamiliar to us is called “lectio divina.” It is a prayerful, meditative method of repeated reading and reflection on the same passage until it brings spiritual inspiration and rest.

Why Religion? by Elaine Pagels. This is Pagels’s personal memoir of her spiritual journey of faith. A renowned scholar of early Christian theology and Gnosticism, her journey is an unusual—and unorthodox—one. I am amazed at the diverse array of scholars and spiritual leaders whom she has known and who have helped her through the struggles of life. The deaths of her son and her husband are particularly poignant moments in the book. The title of this book may be misleading. It is not a defense of religion so much as an insightful journey into its mystery.





The Wedding of Kaylee Ferguson and Benjamin Stern

By Miriam Ferguson

On Saturday, May 25, 2019, Kaylee Ferguson and Benjamin (Ben) Stern were married at First Mennonite Church (FMC). Kaylee is the daughter of John and Miriam Ferguson. Ben is the son of Kelly and Craig Stern of Virginia Beach.

Since her birth, Kaylee has been surrounded by the nurturing of FMC family and has developed a strong faith, based in the Anabaptist tradition. Ben's faith background is Anglican, as well as some Jewish traditions passed down from his paternal grandparents. However, Ben attended Eastern Mennonite University for six years (undergrad and graduate school) and has also developed an appreciation of Mennonite and Anabaptist faith traditions.

Micah 6:8 (*Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God*) was the central theme for the wedding. The verse is representative of EMU's motto, and the university is where they met, became friends and started dating, and both of them really like the passage.

The ceremony blended a variety of themes from these faith backgrounds. Both Ben and Kaylee were escorted down the aisle by their parents. Scripture readings were given by Caleb Stern, Sarah Brotherton and Zachary Ferguson, siblings of the bride and groom. Officiants were Ryan Ahlgrim, Barry Loop, and Marty O'Rourke. These three clergy members have played active roles in the spiritual developments of both Kaylee and Ben.

Ryan performed the homily and marriage ceremony. Part of his message was as follows: *Real love is not an emotion. It's not a feeling. It is a chosen act of true self-giving. It is respecting the other person as much as you respect yourself. It is listening carefully to the other's thoughts and needs and perspectives and taking them as seriously as we want to be taken. It is sacrificing time, energy, preferences, convenience, comfort for the sake of enhancing the other person's wellbeing. It is unconditional caring even when you're mad at the other person, disappointed in the other person, hurt by the other person. It is courageously and persistently seeking a way for both of you to be whole. That is real love. That's the love Jesus is talking about when he says, "Abide in my love ... Now love as I have loved you."*

Next, Marty gave a marriage blessing: using the clerical stole, he wrapped together the hands and wrists of Kaylee and Ben, and lifted them up, while quoting Matthew 9:6: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has put together, let no one put asunder." Communion was then presided over by Barry Loop who served the couple. Ben and Kaylee then served communion to their parents, who in turn served the rest of those at the wedding.

The wedding party consisted of family and friends: siblings, in-laws, college friends, and a niece and nephew. The pianist was Christine Suders, and Don Oswald led the congregational singing. A reception followed in the fellowship hall. Decorations were coordinated by Lily and Amber Ocasio, Julie Lehman, and Jean Oswald. Don Harrison orchestrated music for the reception. Riverwood Events and Catering prepared the buffet-style meal. All the flowers for the ceremony were coordinated and arranged by Susan Loop. A cousin,

Marie Lenker, provided calligraphy services for signage, invitations, and favors. Family and friends came from North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York City, and Northern Virginia, as well as Lynchburg, Harrisonburg, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. Both Kaylee and Ben felt a special connection to each attendee.

This wedding was a labor of love and could not have happened without the support of many persons, friends, and family — both biological and church families alike. From the efforts of some FMC men who rearranged the sanctuary, to the many hands that helped organize, decorate, and clean up, a HUGE THANK YOU for ALL your efforts! Kaylee and Ben feel honored and blessed to have the friendship and spiritual support of FMC. Kaylee and Ben wrote the following note on the back of the wedding program, and it undoubtedly also applies to the church family at FMC: "To Our Family and Friends: We would like to thank everyone who has come to share in our joy and happiness on this day. Each of you has played a very special role in our lives, and each of you has touched our lives in some significant way, shaping us as individuals. As we celebrate our marriage, we would like to thank you all for your love, support and friendship."

Following a honeymoon trip to Jamaica, and another week-long trip to Texas, Kaylee and Ben have settled (for now) in an apartment in Virginia Beach. Ben continues to work at Patient First while waiting for medical school. Kaylee continues to apply for various jobs in the Virginia Beach – Norfolk areas. In the meantime, she's doing some work for Sheltering Arms Hospital here in Richmond. Kaylee and Ben covet your prayer support as they ascertain the plans God has for their future together.

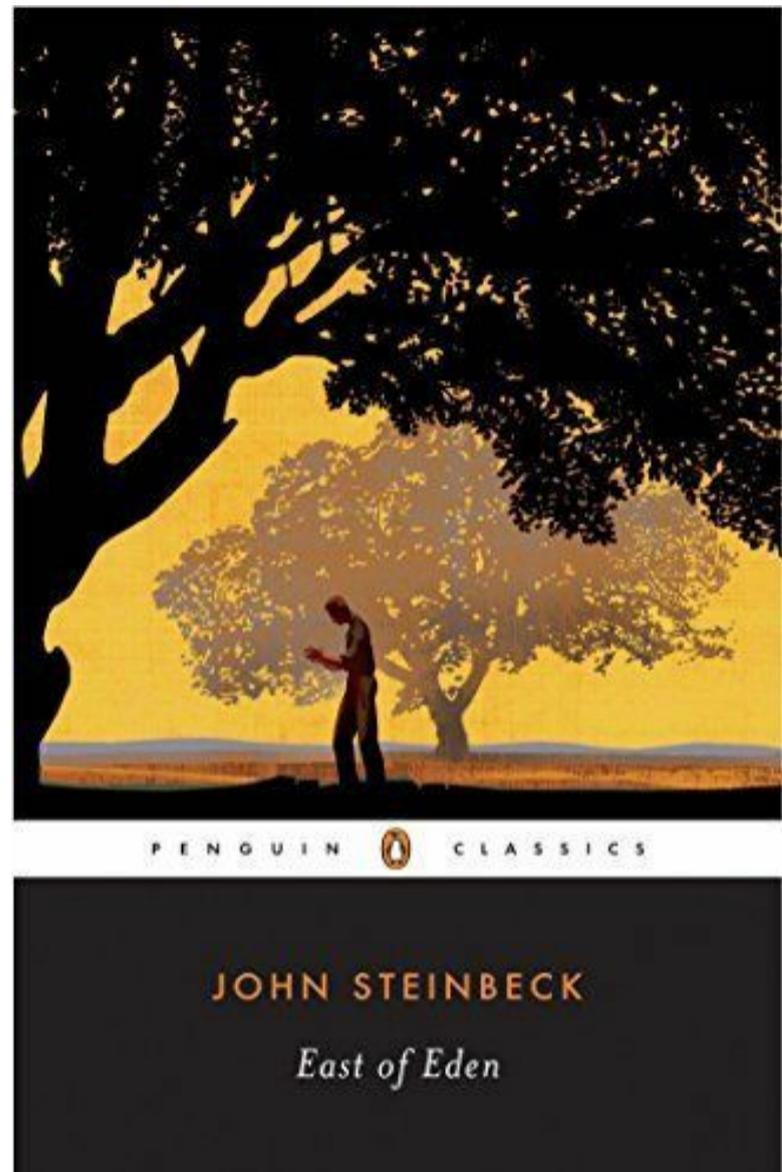


Searching for Steinbeck's Beliefs in *East of Eden*

By Murray Ellison

I am a big fan of the classics, and John Steinbeck's 1952 novel, *East of Eden*, is one of my favorites! This book is made more understandable because the author also kept and later published a journal to document the planning of his story. By exploring these two works, readers may get a glimpse of what the Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning author believed to be universally true and wise. I have just completed a Master Class on *East of Eden* through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Richmond. Previously there, I have taught courses on Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Travels with Charley*. Due to student requests, I will be teaching *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* in the fall of 2019. (These classes would be open to FMC retired members — see Murray.)

Even though Steinbeck had written several acclaimed books before *East of Eden*, he called it his “first book.” He reported that he used every technique he knew to write this book and wanted it to be a lasting statement that expressed his core beliefs about truth and universal wisdom. After Steinbeck reflected deeply on his beliefs, he sought to produce the settings, characters and dialogue that expressed what he stood for and against. He started writing the book as a documentation of his family ancestry, which he hoped would, one day be available to his sons, who were young at the time. With those anecdotes, which he admits he embellished for good storytelling, he traces his family genealogy three generations back. He begins with his maternal grandfather, Samuel; his Bible-believing wife, Liza; and their nine



offspring, including Olive Hamilton — who is Steinbeck's actual mother. Young John Steinbeck even writes himself into the first part of the novel with informative and humorous anecdotes that he was either involved with or witnessed. As the book planning and writing progressed, Steinbeck admits that the storytelling needs of the novel overtook his need to produce a family biography. He wrote that he virtually lost control of the direction of the story as the characters almost started speaking for themselves. By the second part, the Hamilton family essentially took a back seat in the story to the Trasks, who Steinbeck needed to create to express his main themes. However, we can understand several of →

Steinbeck's beliefs by looking at the many storylines of both families.

After 12 chapters, Steinbeck pauses the plot to reflect on his values: “At such times it seems natural to me to ask these questions. What do I believe in? What must I fight for and what must I fight against?” He explains: “I believe that the free, exploring mind is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes. And I must fight against any idea, religion or government which limits or destroys the individual.”

He further elaborates that he believes that “There is only one story: the human struggle over good and evil.” The author illustrates this idea throughout the book in various situations, settings and characters. But most important, he expresses his most profound beliefs through Lee, the Chinese philosopher-servant of Adam Trask. Lee explains that he understands that God gives humans the freedom to make choices. This free will, he asserts, is “what distinctly separates humans from beasts.” The universal wisdom that Steinbeck offers here is that humans may be influenced by their ancestry, but they are not controlled by it. Lee and a group of Chinese scholars had studied the Hebrew language and scholarly biblical teachings for three years before coming up with this interpretation of the Cain and Abel story. They concluded that it was the best-known story in the world and

that it symbolizes “the human soul.” Lee understood that universal teaching of this story may be best summed up by the Hebrew word, “Timshel.” He explains that scholars found that “Timshel” could be translated as “Thou mayest” do good. This meant that God proclaimed Cain still had the choice to decide whether to do good or not, even after he stoned his brother to death and was exiled to “Nod, east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16). Lee understood that this meant that even modern-day humans also had the choice to decide if they would do good or not do good. Steinbeck tests the idea of Timshel through various characters and situations he created in his greatest masterpiece. Thus, “Timshel” is the primary theme of *East of Eden* and the emphasis that Steinbeck places on this idea suggests that it is a universal truth that Steinbeck believes transcends all cultures and generations. Therefore, I highly recommend this book to church attendees who like to read literature that weighs the wisdom of biblical teachings in current social situations. For readers unfamiliar with Steinbeck, I would recommend *Of Mice and Men* or *The Grapes of Wrath* first. Serious literature aficionados must read *East of Eden* to claim that you understand Steinbeck’s most profound wisdom.

Portions of this article have appeared on Murray’s website: www.Litchatte.com.



Mennonite #CommonRead Selection

Mennonites across the United States and Canada are reading *The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today*. The author, Meghan Larissa Good, draws from contemporary biblical scholarship and the ancient well of Christian tradition. A free study guide and other resources are available at www.MennoMedia.org/CommonRead. →

High School Graduates: Maggie Sobel and Sam Yoder

Maggie Sobel graduated from Hanover High School on June 15. She was involved in many activities in high school. She was a member of the National Honor Society, Beta and Spanish Honor Society. Her senior year, she was the Service Committee chairperson for the National Honor Society. She was also a member of SODA (Students Organization Developing Attitudes), where she was a mentor to fourth grade elementary school students. In addition to the clubs she participated in, she was captain of her Varsity Soccer team and played varsity soccer all four



years of high school. Maggie is continuing her education at the University of Virginia this fall. She plans to pursue a degree in biology or math.

Sam Yoder graduated from home schooling this spring After attending the Mennonite Youth Convention in July and

visiting EMU, he has decided to attend Eastern Mennonite University in the fall of 2020. He has an interest in pursuing a career involving global studies. Sam is now planning to work and travel before pursuing his education.



Summer With the Majidi Family

By Jean Oswald

Through the work of Church World Service, the Majidi family arrived in the United States in January of 2017 as refugees from their home country, Afghanistan. FMC has supported the family in their transition to life here in the Richmond area. Naveed is now 8, Muzghan is 11 and Hamid is 12.

The highlight of this summer was a trip to Washington, D.C., with Chris Yoder as →



chauffeur and guide. The children's father, Zia, took vacation time from his work at Franco's, and coordination with the start of the children's summer ESL classes made it possible for family to spend two days and a night in D.C. The guest house with helpful hosts amazed the family! The Air and Space Museum and the National Zoo filled their days. Of course, ice cream cones from street vendors ranked high with the kids. All the children attended ESL summer school to continue acquiring English and reading skills. Being enrolled in the Henrico County Library reading program has provided motivation for reading and access to books at appropriate reading levels. Tina arranged for swimming lessons, as the kids love being in the water! Naveed enjoyed a week of Martin Farm Day



Camp and Hamid was able to attend only one day as the rest of the week conflicted with ESL classes. All the kids attended Peace Camp (see picture above), with Afghanistan being one of the featured countries. With careful tending by their mother, Qaimagh, the family is enjoying fresh vegetables, tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and cucumbers, from their raised garden. In the fall, Qaimagh will continue ESL classes and

Zia will take GED classes through Henrico County's adult education program. The church continues support of the family as extensive dental work is provided for Zia and Qaimagh through Capital Area Health Network at the Glenwood Dental Clinic. Challenges for the family include finding employment for Qaimagh as well as a driving permit for her. They have received three of five green cards, and wait patiently each day for the mail deliverer to bring the other two. Agha Gul, Qaimagh's younger brother, has moved into an apartment with friends and has steady work at Altria. He maintains contact with the Majidi family.



The MennoNet is the newsletter of First Mennonite Church of Richmond, 601 E. Parham Road. Our phone number is 804-264-3200. Website: firstmennonitechurch.org. Email Pastor Ryan Ahlgrim at pastor@firstmennonitechurch.org; secretary secretary@firstmennonitechurch.org. Tina Eshleman (teshleman@comcast.net) and Murray Ellison (bluemur@verizon.net) are the *MennoNet* editors for the 2018-2019 year.

****Recycle this issue after reading it by placing it in the MennoNet box in the foyer for guests to read.***