

March 2026, Volume 49, Number 4

## DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING SCHOOL

A Discipleship Training School (DTS) experience is currently underway in Berne, and it is occurring right underneath our noses. Born from a longtime deep desire to offer an intense discipleship opportunity within the life of the church, this unique gathering of individuals began meeting in October 2025. The inaugural First Mennonite DTS was offered to the college age Sunday school class. Once a month for nine months 14 young adults, along with their leaders, have committed to completing this course, which culminates this summer with a mission trip to Kosovo from June 12-20.

Fashioned after other DTS programs which offer three-six month immersions, often in the country where ministry will occur, Pastor Jeff and Tim Sprunger wanted to create something for those who may not have a “gap year” to go away for such a length of time. The fact that Global Disciples also specializes in these types of trainings (world-wide) provided the structure and resources to come up with a modified version, allowing individuals who are following local career paths to take part on a monthly basis. They meet for four hours every third Sunday of the month, and dive deep into a variety of topics taught by experienced and relatable professionals in the world of missions.

It has been on Graham and Jenna’s hearts to do missions for several years now, and they are looking forward to going somewhere with an unreached people group. “The discipleship training school that we have been attending here at the church has been very helpful and stretching. Each time we learn about a new aspect of becoming a better disciple of Jesus and we have a goal for the next month to do,” explains Jenna Hart. “These goals have helped me to get back into different disciplines I have maybe let fall, such as reading scripture and prayer, but it has also challenged me to try new disciplines, such as silence and meditation.” Participants are connected with another person taking the class to keep each other accountable from month to month. “It has been so fun to see everyone’s excitement to learn and grow, and their dedication to becoming more like Christ.”

Nine core components comprise the DTS. Each month one of them is broken down into four topics addressed through teaching, self-reflection, and group discussion.

“I am very grateful for the blessing of learning from such wise believers. One of my favorite classes so far was the first session on intimacy with God,” reflects Wendy (Brayden) Gilbert, “because it reminded me how important it is to have our hearts centered on our relationship with God *before* going out to serve Him. I have also enjoyed the power that comes from sharing our testimonies with one another. It is beautiful to see the journey God has given each person in our group. We desire to grow in our love for the work of reaching the nations and sharing the Gospel with others. Brayden and I decided to be a part of this trip because we want to see the ways the Lord is moving and working in Kosovo.”

Michael Richardson adds, “So far, the experience has been incredibly impactful. It has strengthened my faith, deepened my dependence on the Holy Spirit, and reminded me that God is moving everywhere—even in places we may not expect. Being able to serve, pray for people, and witness how hungry people are for hope in Christ has been both humbling and encouraging. It’s been a powerful reminder that the Gospel truly is good news for everyone.”

As was previously mentioned, the course began with a focus on intimacy with God. Secondly, the group dealt with right relationships with God, self, and others. The following months have and *will* look intently at Holy Spirit empowerment, biblical truth, dying to self, kingdom and the church, evangelism and compassion, world mission: reaching the least reached, and finally, multiplying churches (God’s design and practical steps). “Even if a person doesn’t feel a strong call to cross-cultural ministry at its completion,” explained Jeff, “DTS will have a positive effect on the life of our local church, because of the discipleship that has taken place.” Group members will be commissioned AFTER the trip to go apply what they’ve learned to their own lives right here.

So, what will the trip to Kosovo look like? There will be a heavy focus on prayer and intercession, but the group will also be lending a helping hand by painting some houses and working in gardens of some poorer families in need. Historical sites will be visited, such as where some of the massacres at the hands of the Serbians occurred in 1999. Through political connections of Berat (former Mission Festival speaker), the group will be honored to enjoy an evening with the former

*(continued on next page, column 2)*

## THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF FAITH

The definition of faith is *the distinct ability to believe God with confidence for things unseen, spiritual growth and the will of God*. This gift is our focus during March, and a special display has been created, currently “under construction” as people... *that could include you...* share in writing how the spiritual gift of faith has impacted their lives or the life of someone near them.

One such example from this Faith Wall: “The Lord tested and grew my faith as I struggled with anxiety my whole life. In 2015, after 40 years of struggle and prayers too many to count, God provided complete healing of my anxiety. All glory to Him!” Ephesians 3:14-21. “If you are experiencing anxiety and need to talk to someone who understands, I am willing to listen.” Erin McKean

Perhaps *you* can think of an experience about how your faith grew or was tested. Is there a spiritual mentor or hero that greatly influenced you? You could write about that. Sharing a favorite Bible verse(s) or song is also appropriate. Take a minute or two, walk by and read what others have written. And don't let this opportunity pass by to post something of your own on the Faith Wall (just to the north of He-Brews) before it disappears! †

## EASTER WEEK SERVICES

Join our First Mennonite family as we celebrate Holy Week. Beginning with Palm Sunday when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, the week leads us through the Last Supper, His crucifixion, and ends on Easter Sunday as we celebrate His resurrection. Jesus' love for us is reflected in every significant step toward the cross, every breath up to the last, and His resurrection. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

*A special (free) Holy Week family devotional is available at the family resource wall by the offices.*

- † Palm Sunday: Sunday, March 29, at 10:00 a.m., First Mennonite
- † In celebration of Holy Week, families are invited to a “Resurrection Egg Hunt”, a come-and-go FREE family fun event on Wednesday, April 1, from 4:00-8:00 p.m. Search for 12 symbols of Easter in and around the church building and gather your own set of Resurrection Eggs. Check in at the Family Life Center entrance. Please register on the church app by Sunday, March 22, to ensure supplies.
- † Good Friday Service of Shadows: Friday, April 3, at 7:30 p.m., First Mennonite
- † Easter Sunrise Service: Sunday, April 5, at 6:30 a.m., Cross Community
- † Easter Morning Worship: Sunday, April 5, at 10:00 a.m., First Mennonite †

*(Discipleship Training School continued from page 1)*

Prime Minister of Kosovo in his home. Also, the group will be hiking up a mountain together with about 30 other young people from Berat's town. Overall, they will get to experience life and relationship in a Muslim context.

Most of the students in this first DTS have been on at least one prior mission trip, many of them outside of the U.S., so the group is well-seasoned. “The training itself has been an incredible time so far,” shares Nate Linthicum. “One of the impacts for me has been gaining discernment and making use of the different spiritual gifts. Leading up to that particular class we were asked to take a quiz on our spiritual gifts before hearing about them and studying more about what they do. Another of the topics covered in the most recent class (as I am writing) was on how history helps to validate what is told in the Bible. I enjoyed that. I am looking forward to leaving in a few months and am *very* excited to return to serve around Kosovo once again.”

Kenneth Richardson states, “I've loved [being in] community and gaining an understanding of another culture, realizing sometimes as Americans we don't slow down enough to really focus on what matters... [I'm] so thankful to have a church that is willing to support the younger generations to pursue the Lord's work!!”

Each DTS participant would appreciate your prayer support as they complete this journey. Those individuals are Blake Gilbert, Brayden & Wendy Gilbert, Graham & Jenna Hart, Nate Linthicum, Karah Meyers, Andrea Morales, Grant O'Dell, Kenneth Richardson, Michael Richardson, Grace Shoaf, Josie Shoaf, and Parker Collingsworth (attending the class only); leaders are Jeff & Megan Linthicum and Tim Sprunger.

You can find a half-sheet with specific prayer requests on the table in the hallway outside the sanctuary. Funding for this trip is coming largely from the Missions TBD fund; however, for anyone desiring to help offset the overall costs, donations can be made through the church to the *Short-term Team Missions fund*. †

## SING YOUR PRAISE TO THE LORD

**A men's chorus** is being formed to sing for the morning worship service on Easter Sunday. ALL MEN are encouraged to sing! Two rehearsals will take place right after the morning worship service on Sunday, March 15, and again on Sunday, March 29. Each rehearsal will last about 20 minutes.

**Mennonite Choral Society** is rehearsing on Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. in preparation for the presentation of Haydn's *Creation*, parts 1 and 2. Rehearsals will continue weekly through April 28, with a final rehearsal on Saturday, May 2. ALL SINGERS are invited to join in presenting this oratorio on Sunday, May 3, at 7:00 pm. †

## HOMEGOING

Suanne E. Sprunger, 67, of Berne, Indiana, peacefully went home to be with her Lord and Savior on Tuesday morning, March 3, 2026, at her residence following a courageous battle with cancer.

She was born on April 4, 1958, in Decatur, Indiana, to Kenyon L. and Elizabeth S. "Betty" (Hayden) Sprunger. Suanne married Timothy W. Sprunger on October 15, 1977, in Berne, Indiana.

Suanne was a lifelong member of the First Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana.

She was a career mission worker and was sent to Hong Kong in 1981, serving there for 17 years. Suanne finished her career working for Global Disciples across 30 nations. She was instrumental in developing a small business training program for developing nations.

Suanne loved her two sons and daughter-in-law. She enjoyed flowers, antiques, and time spent traveling.

She is survived by her husband, Timothy W. Sprunger of Berne, Indiana; son, Andrew J. Sprunger of Hong Kong, China; son, Nathan J. (Roshni S. Verghese) Sprunger of Clearwater, Florida; father, Kenyon (Mary) Sprunger of Poneto, Indiana; brother, Brent Sprunger of Wichita, Kansas; brother, Eric Sprunger of Berne, Indiana; and brother-in-law, Tom (Kerrie) Sprunger of Monroe, Indiana.

Suanne was preceded in death by her mother, Betty Sprunger; father-in-law and mother-in-law, John and Romaine (Lehman) Sprunger; and brother-in-law, Bob Sprunger, survived by wife, Linda.

A memorial service will be held at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, March 29, 2026, at the First Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana, with Pastor Jeff Linthicum officiating.

The family will receive friends from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, March 28, at the First Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana, and one hour prior to the service at the church on Sunday.

Preferred memorials can be given to Global Disciples Emerging Areas. †



## AMONG OUR PEOPLE

Paul Norr was treated for an infection at Bluffton Regional.

Anita Marble was hospitalized at Adams Memorial Hospital after a fall.

Rose Tschannen was treated at Lutheran Hospital following a heart attack.

Paul Lehman had heart catheterization at Lutheran Hospital

Jen Meyer is recovering after gall bladder surgery.

Beckett Hart, infant son of Graham and Jenna, was treated for pneumonia at Lutheran Hospital. †

## NOTES OF APPRECIATION

Dear First Mennonite Church,

Your continued prayers and support are so greatly appreciated! You are helping this mission work be possible in our community. Just the other day a child shared that he now tells his whole family about Jesus, including the babies! We are excited to see what doors God will open. Thank you for your donation!

Sincerely,  
The LifeWise S.A. Team †

## CAMP LUZ

### 2026 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Registration for CAMP LUZ is now open, but early bird prices go away on April 15, 2026. Dates for the various camps are:

- Youth Camp for ages 15-18: June 8-12
- Boys & Girls 1 for ages 9-11: June 14-18
- Fledgling for ages 8-10: June 21-24
- Grown Up & Me for ages 4-6: June 25 & 26
- Mini for ages 7-8: June 28-30
- Boys & Girls 2 for ages 9-11: July 5-9
- Preteen for ages 11-13: July 12-16
- Jr. High for ages 12-14: July 19-23

Further information can be found at [www.campluz.org](http://www.campluz.org). The church helps underwrite the cost for all families wishing to send children to camp. Any questions may be addressed to Josie Pfister ([josie@firstmennonite.org](mailto:josie@firstmennonite.org)). †

Update is the publication of the First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana. It is published once a month to keep our people informed about the news and events in the church.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>APRIL 2026</h1> 			1 <b>4-8PM:</b> Resurrection Egg Hunt (no chapel service)	2 	3  GOOD FRIDAY <b>7:30PM:</b> Service of Shadows  CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	4
5 10AM: "First Fruits": Pastor Jeff Linthicum (Leviticus 23:9-14, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) <b>NO EVENING SERVICE</b> Offering  EASTER SUNDAY He Is Risen!	6	7 <b>6:30PM:</b> Sunshine Hour	8 <b>7PM:</b> Genesis 48 Pastor Jim Schwartz	9	10	11
12 10AM: "Dare to Be Different": Pastor Jeff Linthicum (Matthew 5:13-16) 6:30PM: South Adams Acapella choir Offering for Global Disciples	13	14 <b>6:30PM:</b> Sunshine Hour	15 <b>7PM:</b> Genesis 49 Pastor Jim Schwartz	16	17	18
19 10AM: "Fulfillment": Pastor Jeff Linthicum (Matthew 5:17-20) 6:30PM: "My Story": the Lynnyk family Offering	20	21 <b>6:30PM:</b> Sunshine Hour	22 <b>7PM:</b> "From Daniel to Peter Living in Exile" Reverend Bill Lopley	23	24	25
26 10AM: "Not Even Anger": Pastor Jeff Linthicum (Matthew 5:21-26) 6PM: Handbells Festival at First Missionary Church Offering	27	28 <b>6:30PM:</b> Sunshine Hour	29 <b>7PM:</b> "From Daniel to Peter Living in Exile" Reverend Bill Lopley	30 		