

Open Table Mennonite Fellowship: Sharing Word and Table

Open Table Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana, was introduced at the 2016 Annual Meeting and 2017 delegates will vote on accepting the congregation into the conference at the upcoming Annual Meeting later in June.

While Open Table is fairly new, having begun in 2012 in something like its current shape, it has a much longer history. And unlike a church planting effort that begins with deliberate work to create a new congregation, Open Table emerged from several sources.

More than ten years ago, a dozen members—a sprout—from Faith Mennonite Church began meeting at Faith House, a large home the congregation owns near central Goshen. In 2012, when growth at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen prompted the congregation to consider space needs, about 20 members

began testing a different approach to worship, assuming they would still be part of Assembly. For their worship at 11 am on Sunday mornings at Faith House, they were joined by the Faith House Fellowship group. Eventually they realized they were going a different direction with worship and congregational life than the Assembly congregation and began shaping an identity as a separate congregation.

A foundation of that identity is Acts 2:42, which tells how the early church met in homes, broke bread together, prayed together and learned from the apostles.

The congregation has committed itself to weekly study of the Bible and a fellowship meal. Sally Weaver Glick, a spiritual director, is the “congregational doula,” helping the congregation recognize what God is doing, to



Open Table Mennonite Fellowship is committed to its small size, to worship that combines reflection on Scripture and eating together, and to discernment of the whole group in its congregational decisions. They worship and share a meal in the large living room of Faith House in Goshen, Ind.

name it and “help bring it forth.” They chose the name, Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, to reflect the importance of eating together and their welcome of people at different stages of faith.

The congregation’s statement of “who we are,” begins:

Open Table Mennonite Fellowship welcomes every individual as a unique and beloved child of God, the Source of life and love. With the Holy Spirit as our guide, we attempt to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Rooted in the Anabaptist/ Mennonite tradition, yet open to insights from other faith traditions, we seek to join God’s plan for healing the earth and bringing peace and justice to its people.

Committed to a house-church approach

The congregation wants to remain small enough to continue meeting in a house, starting additional worship circles when they get too big for the space. “There is something that happens in the house church size,” Sally said. “There are disadvantages, too, but there are things that happen there that can’t happen in a larger congregation.”

Creating the sermon together

Each worship service has a leader, and includes singing and Scripture reading, and sometimes other readings that relate to the Scripture. They usually follow the Revised Common Lectionary of Scripture texts. Worship leaders use a variety of ways to involve the congregation with the Scripture and there is time in each service for conversation about what worshipers have encountered in the readings, singing or silence.

Silence is a part of worship

“Many of us come with a strong tug to contemplative practice, so space for silence shows up in various ways,” Sally explained. Usually five to ten minutes of each service is planned for silence. Some members use this time to reflect on the readings or questions, some draw or doodle, some simply rest in God during the silence.

Sharing the Word and Table

In addition to sharing Scripture and reflections, the congregation also shares a simple meal each Sunday. They retell the story of Jesus’ last meal



Each Sunday gathering for Open Table includes a simple meal.

with his disciples before gathering around tables for soup and bread.

A second, smaller worship circle

A second worship circle meets at 9 am and has breakfast together. This group has an even stronger contemplative approach to worship, Sally explained.

Who is part of Open Table

The congregation consists of members from age one to 89 with people in each decade of life in between. Average Sunday attendance is 20–25. A significant segment of the congregation is students from Goshen College, so there is constant ebb and flow in who and how many gather for worship.

From her experience with Open Table Mennonite Fellowship and the forerunners of the congregation, Sally encourages other small congregations. “For congregations that have been bigger and are losing numbers, the idea of being smaller can feel negative. Our approach is that there are some real positives about being small, deliberately choosing to be small and to think about alternative ways of growing.”

More information

The Open Table website tells more of the story of the congregation’s core practices and commitments. Visit www.opentablemennonite.org/ to read more.

focus is published by the Central District Conference, Mennonite Church USA. To be added to the email subscription list, contact the editor, Mary E. Klassen, at cdeditor@gmail.com.

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