

## Ministry Team Update

Ministers continue to adapt with their ministry leaders to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pennsylvania issued new, stronger guidelines and restrictions due to rapidly rising daily COVID-19 case numbers. There was discussion about continuing Sunday School and the in-person worship service. Due to the number of people missing services because of a positive COVID test or contact with a positive COVID case, Ministry Team alerted Church Board that it would be difficult to continue Sunday School at this time, although worship would still be possible. The unanimous recommendation from Ministry Team to Church Board was to cancel all in person activities until January 4.

Tami brought up the Christmas Eve Service asking for input on how to proceed. Ideas included having an outdoor service with singing, possibly at someone's barn, having a bonfire, candle lighting. It was decided to seek out volunteers to help with planning a service.

Kathy has been in contact with Laura Rush about how to proceed with the renewal of child abuse clearance and criminal background check process before the end of this year. It was decided to have all those who are actively volunteering with children at this time to complete their clearances by December 31. Beginning in January, the committee would try to get everyone else's completed as soon as possible. Laura Rush will create a spreadsheet containing all of the names with completed information.

Nathan offered an idea for a Sunday School lesson series highlighting one of the prophets each week that would be a "tie-in" to his sermon that would follow during the worship service. It was decided to offer this as a combined youth and adult class from January-April.

Rachel is looking at options to have all leaders be "on the same page" and to become better organized and have improved communication in the planning of club activities. In addition, she advised that that it would probably be best to have parents complete the Child & Youth Registration form online for a better response.

Nathan addressed the lack of volunteers at the Care & Share Thrift Shoppes in Souderton due to COVID and the appeal they are making to surrounding churches to help bring more volunteers in to serve. He asked how we could form a group to send to help.

Other items included brief discussions about Garry and Ruth Denlinger transitioning into retirement within the next few years and they would like to set up a Zoom meeting or present a 3 minute video during a future service; reviewed the Membership List for 2021 with 3 requests for removal and a decision to move 1 individual to the inactive list; the 2021 Church Directory was reviewed with several edits being made, noting that not all entries were updated by members; ministers were encouraged to come up with goals for 2021 by focusing on who do we want to become as a congregation as a result of each ministry area.



## Nathan

*(continued from page 1)*

These are some of the reasons that led me to suggest this shift to our leadership, but the reality is that this all depends on one big unknown: the candidate that God is bringing to us. We might be coming back to you as a congregation and suggesting something else in 4-6 months depending on the candidates that we find in the search process. Please pray for the search committee, for our leadership, and for the candidates applying, that we would be faithful in following the lead of Christ through the Holy Spirit, allowing us as a congregation to faithfully carry out God's work for his kingdom.



## New Series

Join Pastor Nathan for new Sermon Series focusing on the Minor Prophets. Each week, he will be teaching a combined youth and adult Sunday School class focusing on a different prophet and learn more about their story. This will be followed by hearing more about them during our Worship Service.

This series, which began on January 3rd is scheduled to continue through March 21st.

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## Looking Ahead by Pastor Nathan

Since our members meeting, I have had many of you ask questions and voice concerns about the possibility of me going to 75% time. I am very thankful for your support and the genuine care that I and my family feel here at Swamp, and each of these conversations have reminded me of that. I have heard a lot of ideas about what might be motivating a change like this. Some of you have wondered whether this is a step out the door, setting the direction for me to leave in a few years. Others have wondered if I'm burnt out and not able to handle the full-time load. And others have wondered whether my loyalties are divided and this congregation is not my priority.

Oddly enough, none of these are reasons that led Bill Longacre, Bob Geissinger, Mike Clemmer, and myself to consider this change and present it to Church Board and Ministry Team at the Leadership Retreat.

I thought it might be helpful to explain more of where this idea came from and why we as leaders believe it is what is best for our congregation at this time.

The way we currently practice pastoral ministry places many expectations on one person, letting the Preaching/Teaching, Leadership/Administration, and Congregational Care (including counseling, visitation of the sick, funerals, weddings, etc.) ride on their shoulders. This is not the only, or even the most common, way of structuring pastoral ministry. Congregations like ours have continued to see the weaknesses in this model for ministry, moving towards a pastoral team (seen at Doylestown, Franconia, and East Swamp, to name a few). This feedback came from you as a congregation during my review as

well, with concerns that I am pulled in too many directions and encouraging leadership to consider ways to free me up to do things I am gifted for and reassigning those parts of my role that drain my energy. Within our own history, it wasn't that long ago that we had a different model for ministry where the Bishop carried the main Leadership role, the Preacher carried the Preaching/Teaching role, and the Deacons were responsible for Congregational Care.

Related to this, I have always been struck by the lack of a biblical model for a solo preacher. In 1 Corinthians 14 we read that each week there were multiple people who came with a word for the congregation. In the letters to Timothy, which we often call the "pastoral epistles" and think of as instructions to Timothy as a pastor, Timothy is charged by Paul with building up other leaders in the church, some of whom were responsible for preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17-19). We see the example of Stephen, who was a deacon, delivering one of the first sermons in the book of Acts; Paul traveled with others who carried preaching and teaching responsibilities; and even Jesus himself called a team of disciples around him, giving them real responsibilities for ministry, and sending them out in groups of two in order to preach. I strongly believe that churches are healthiest when they are regularly receiving preaching and teaching from multiple preachers rather than just one, broadening our perspectives on Scripture and discipleship. We have a strong history of that in Mennonite congregations and there are models of ministry in other denominations that support this.

This is not my church, it is Jesus' church. If the end result of my ministry is that this church or you as individuals have become like Nathan,

then I have not done my job. If I become the One or you cannot imagine church with other pastoral leadership, I have not done my job. If people join this church primarily because they like me, rather than because they love Jesus and see Jesus at work in this community, then I have not done my job. But the history of solo pastors has many times led people to be more committed to the pastor than they are to the church.

Also, from a congregational ministry perspective, we first paid someone for the music/worship ministry of the church when we brought Emily Ralph to intentionally transition us to a blended style of worship. Both I and Tami have helped to further that transition, but at this point we as a congregation have solidly transitioned into that "new" way of worshiping. This combined with my ability and willingness to support the music ministry of our congregation, raised the question of whether we still need a halftime position focused on the music and worship ministries of our church. A large portion of our Leadership Retreat was spent identifying what our growing edges are as a congregation *today*, considering what it might mean to hire a new pastor with an eye towards our future as a congregation rather than towards the past.

On a personal note, I love what I do! I also love meeting new people and starting new things. Long-term a pastoral role by itself could be stifling for me. My hope is that moving to 75% time and doing other things in my 25% time will scratch that itch while allowing me to dedicate more time to my family and last even longer as one of your pastors here at Swamp.

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## Church Board Highlights

In advance of the Members' Meeting in December, the Church Board took action on the following items. It is proposed that we change all references to 'Franconia Mennonite Conference' to 'Mosaic Mennonite Conference' in the bylaws, and that we change 'Pastoral Care Team' to 'Congregational Care Team'. Pastoral Care Team is requesting the name change to reflect that their task is 'congregational care'. The preliminary 2021 budget was approved for presentation at the meeting. Finance Committee recommended and there was a discussion about an end-of-year congregational donation from the general fund. The goal is to bring the General Fund to \$50,000 at year end. This year we will leave an additional \$10,000 to cover any additional costs of staffing through the transition. It was recommended to give 50% to Spruce Lake and 50% to MDS for the farmers in central Pennsylvania. Quincy made a motion to approve an end-of-year congregational donation from general fund if balance is over \$60,000 once the livestreaming update is completed, giving 50% to Spruce Lake and 50% to MDS for the farmers in central Pennsylvania. Bob seconded the motion. Motion passed. The proposed agenda was then reviewed and it was decided to hold this year's meeting in the Sanctuary.

The current COVID-19 Guidelines were reviewed. The following actions were taken: Chairs were previously placed in the foyer to help reduce the crowding conditions in the sanctuary for worship. We need to be sure that the speaker volume in the foyer is adjusted for better clarity; masks must continue to be worn in the Sanctuary; it was decided that the Nursery can now be staffed at Ministry Team's discretion. We will ask the Trustees to look into the cost of adding video streaming of the service in the fellowship hall, with the idea that we could also use the live streaming on-line as well. We would use funds that are being underspent in this year's budget to purchase the necessary equipment.

The 2021 Pastoral Housing Allowance was reviewed and approved. Other action items for 2021 included the review of language in The Memo of Understanding for Pastor Nathan and Pastor Tami; the priorities and goals for fulfilling our mission and purpose were reviewed with the decision to continue the use of "Connecting for a Purpose", the board appointed Bob Delp to a 2 year term to finish out Quincy Longacre's term as he moves to the Vice Chair position; it was decided not to complete an audit for 2020, recognizing that given the disruption of the year, many things have not been done normally.

Bill reviewed the recommendations with church board for the staff restructuring process and the search/hiring plan. We made a couple small changes to the recommendation. We will advertise for a .75FTE position, but give flexibility to the search committee to expand the search to .5-1.0FTE if necessary. Also, we adjusted the second outcome recommendation to "Hire with an eye towards equipping the congregation to participate in ministry." It was reported that the Pastoral Search Committee will include Mike Clemmer, Nathan Good, Russ Haas, Brandon Longacre, Mary Longacre, Will Sadler and Amy Snedigar. These persons were previously approved by Church Board. The first meeting will be on Tuesday, December 22 at 7:00 PM.

It was decided to investigate live streaming and possibly viewing services from the fellowship hall. The cost would be under \$9,000 for live streaming, and it would be a system

### A Message from Bethany Birches Camp:

Thank you for your ongoing support, interest, and prayer for the ministry of Bethany Birches Camp. As we understand that you are not using your mailboxes as much right now, I invite you to read our current digital newsletter. We share about our experience this past summer, a staffing transition, winter and summer camp dates, among other things. Take a look! <https://mailchi.mp/550d7736f450/newsletter-2020>

Brandon Bergey, Executive Director - Bethany Birches Camp

with one camera that can pivot and zoom. Copyright license fees have significantly decreased and we expect \$73 per year for a congregation our size. Ken Longacre believes we can add this without adding additional sound booth volunteers. A question was raised about needing multiple people in the sound booth that would be closer than 6 feet apart (the guideline given by church board). We agreed to the following guidelines (1) The sound booth may have two people to operate equipment and up three people for training. We strongly suggest that we adhere to PA guidelines which say, "Sustained physical distance" means the practice of staying at least six feet away from others to avoid becoming a close contact. On October 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its definition of close contact to "someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period." There shouldn't be more than one person in the booth for more than 15 minutes total during the service. (2) One person should leave the sound booth at any time that it is not necessary for two people to be there. (3) All technicians must be masked at all times in the sound booth. The technicians would have the choice to participate or not. It was also decided not to add viewing capabilities in the fellowship hall due to the additional cost. This could be added later without duplicating costs. We approved moving forward and adding live streaming. We expect that this can be completed before the end of the year.

## An Advent Story by Pastor Nathan



Not sure what exactly happened to our advent candles, but apparently love burns long in our house.

The benefit of ritual, especially for kids, is that Winslow says "hope" and "peace" at dinner every night without prompting, and Eulalia can tell you that hope, peace, joy, and love all come from Christ.

The other benefit is that kids love lighting and blowing out candles, so rather than throwing out our advent "wreath", we took our advent tradition and started learning of Jesus from the gospel of Mark every night at dinner. I chose Mark because he's kid friendly - quick, story focused, not much commentary. Rather than reading it, though, I tell it. I mean, I read 75% of the words from Mark, but when there's a word they don't know I change it up, or explain it, or add my own commentary. Tonight we had a discussion about what synagogues are.

Surprisingly when I asked, "Do you know what a synagogue is?" Eulalia, who I expected to have an answer, was blank, but Deacon lit up and said, "It's where Jesus would go to preach!"

They're quick; and they love it.

Each night they ask, "Can we read a story again from Mark?" Tonight, we read three stories before I finally convinced them it was time for me to eat too.

But then it hit me, as I asked questions, added commentary, brought life to the stories with words they understand, that they aren't getting the gospel according to Mark, they're getting the gospel according to Daddy. And that's good.

Talk about Jesus with your kids. Find what works for you. Don't be afraid of rituals. Especially if they involve fire.

## From the A/V Department by Ken Longacre

I assume that by now, everyone is well aware of the new live streaming service that we are now offering during our services. Please bear with us as we are going through a learning curve as to how best offer this service to members who may not be able or choose not to attend our services in person during the pandemic.

It is already obvious to those who have been viewing, that there are times when the live stream is muted

during the service or pre-service, and I want to make sure that everyone knows the reason we have to do that. Our current licenses do not allow us to broadcast the original recordings of copyrighted music from the original artist. We are able to broadcast members singing or performing a copyrighted song, just not the original. This means that if we are playing pre-recorded music or a video from a CD, etc, we cannot

## This 'n' That

by Arlene Yothers

Thank you for your prayers and donations for ALL these organizations! The Souderton Homes is still closed to all volunteers, including the auxiliary. Volunteering in new areas might be an option in 2021.

The Care and Share Shoppes have reopened the furniture store. Volunteers are needed in many areas of the Care and Share Organization. Please share your time and abilities, call Suzanne Kratz for details.

The Worm Project needs your donations. Three cents is about the cost of one tablet to rid worms from a child or adult for about 6 months. There are MANY children around the world who need them! If you would like to be on the email list from Gary Delp, president of organization, please let me know.

The Mennonite Heritage Center has many changes in their schedule because of the pandemic.



live stream the music or video. It is a time consuming and potentially expensive process to gain permission to play the original recordings, so we most likely will not be pursuing that.

Hopefully, in spite of that limitation, the live streaming we can do will still provide a way for those who are not in attendance to still participate in our services during this time of being temporarily separated by the pandemic.