

This 'n' That by Arlene Yothers

The Worm Project will be having a Worm Walk at the Franconia Community Park at 671 Allentown Road in Telford on Saturday, May 21 at 9:00 am beginning at the pavilion. This event is free, however donations would be appreciated. A newsletter which contains a lot of interesting information was published earlier this year. You can pick up your copy of this newsletter in the foyer next to the Worm Project jar on the table. I want to thank you for putting your coins and small bills in the container on the table in the foyer. These contributions help in getting deworming pills for many children around the world.

The Care and Share Shoppes in Souderton are busy places. Many volunteers are busy working in all areas and more are needed. Shoppers come from many areas. Each week there are 50% off discounts on certain items. When you show proof of your birthday like a birth certificate or license, you get 50% off all purchases that day. Come down to Souderton and see what's happening at Care & Share!

The Souderton Mennonite Homes is a growing community for our elderly population in this area. If you would like to contribute to caring for those who have exhausted their financial

means, consider giving to the Benevolent Fund. Envelopes are on the table in the foyer.

The Mennonite Heritage Center will be hosting the 14th annual Whack & Roll Croquet Tournament on Saturday & Sunday, June 4 & 5. Learn more about the event and croquet by attending the practice clinics on the grounds of the Heritage Center the Sunday afternoons in May from 3 to 5 pm. It is a fun event to watch or be a participant. The end reward is earning money for a local charity. Learn more by calling the Heritage Center at 215-256-3020 or checking out mhep.org on your favorite device.

Church Board Highlights

The Board asked Pastor Nathan to serve as one of the delegates to MCUSA along with Ken Longacre. Quincy explained the process the MEP and Endowment committees went through before recommending that the Board change the Mennonite Education Plan policy to allow the inclusion of schools other than Quakertown Christian and Dock Mennonite Academy. A concern was raised about whether added schools would need to be Anabaptist or not and how we would go about defining and deciding which schools were Anabaptist. After extended discussion the Board edited the language recommended by the MEP committee and then voted to change the MEP policy to include other Christian Schools as approved by the board. A second vote was held to add Faith Christian Academy as one of the approved schools. Both motions passed with one no vote.

Pastor Nathan then explained a recommendation from the

Congregational Care Team for updating the language of the Aid Fund Guidelines. Most of the changes were due to outdated language around reimbursements for Congregational Care Team members which no longer matched current practice and around the Everence Advocate who is no longer a member of Congregational Care Team. There was also clarification around how the Care Team disburses funds in circumstances where they are reimbursing a member for expenses they already incurred during an emergency situation. The board approved language changes.

The Board engaged in discussion around the requirements for those who teach in the ministries of Swamp Mennonite Church, focusing on how much teachers were expected to agree with our Confession of Faith. It was decided that anyone who teaches in a ministry of Swamp Mennonite Church must

be able to affirm our Covenant and be willing to teach in line with the Confession of Faith even if there are areas of personal disagreement. It was decided to continue with the current process of how we receive the offering. Nathan presented the first draft of the Covenant Community Initiative, an attempt to live out our covenant together while also forming the congregational into smaller groups for personal enrichment and growth. The board approved the idea and sent it to Ministry Team for further development. Nathan reviewed his Sabbatical Proposal for the summer of 2023 and the Board approved his applying for the Clergy Renewal Program through the Lilly Foundation to help with the costs of his sabbatical. The Board also chose date options for the fall Leadership Retreat and forwarded these dates to Ministry Team.



Covenant Community by Pastor Nathan

As a Mennonite Church, we trace our faith story back to the Anabaptist Reformation. Over 500 years ago the Protestant reformation began, less than 10 years later Ulrich Zwingli started preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible, a practice that was unheard of at the time. As he preached and taught there were questions about the understanding of the kingdom of God at the time, the relationship between the church and state, how a person joins and remains in the church, and what a Christian life ought to look like. After much study and prayer, Conrad Grebel requested to be rebaptized as an adult, an action of defiance against both the Catholic and Protestant Church and the national government.

These early Anabaptists were rebels and radicals. They had no organized church structure but were instead a result of the movement of the Spirit of God rippling across the countryside as lay people, many uneducated, formed themselves into small groups to discuss Scripture together and then took the radical step of living out what it was they were learning. By 1527 these splintered groups started to organize themselves, coming together to write the first Anabaptist statement of faith that did not mention any doctrine or belief but was instead focused on 7 main practices that all Anabaptists agreed upon: baptism for those who freely request it and have shown changes in their life, church discipline following the Matthew 18 principle of private

correction first before public discipline, communion as an observance of the Body of Christ, separation from the evil in the world, the ordination of pastors who are supported materially by the congregation, the rejection of violence as a method for defeating evil including for personal defense or holding any civil office, and the refusal to take an oath or swear to confirm that what one says is truthful but instead to speak truthfully at all times and in all things.

While these basic principles remain important to our faith, the core belief is that following Jesus means joining with other believers in relationships of accountability where we not only read Scripture but also take specific action in our lives to obey Jesus as our Lord. This is the heart of Anabaptism, and it is why it is hard to define who is an Anabaptist. When John Wesley in the 1700's had a radical conversion experience and then formed groups of lay people focused on studying Scripture and holding each other accountable to the principles of doing no harm by avoiding evil of every kind, doing good to all people, and attending to the ordinances of God, was this a form of Anabaptism? When the Pentecostal movement started in the early 1900's as small groups of lay people taking Jesus seriously, meeting for prayer and worship, and advocating for social justice and reform within the church as a witness to the reign of God, was that a form of Anabaptism? When Saint Benedict led a religious reform in the 400's, forming small

groups of people who made agreements together about how they would live as followers of Jesus, focusing on caring for the poor and marginalized, was that Anabaptism?

I am not a Christian because I am an Anabaptist, it is the other way around, I am an Anabaptist because I follow Jesus and when I look at the New Testament and Christian history I find that when the Spirit of God shows up and moves among God's people the result looks a lot like what we find when we look at the Anabaptist reformation in the 1500's. I do not follow Jesus because I am Mennonite, I am a Mennonite Christian because I follow Jesus, because I believe that being a Christian is not simply about what we believe but is about being united in a community of faith that practices the principles taught by Jesus in our daily lives.

This Anabaptist history and view of New Testament Christianity is some of what has led us to form Covenant Communities where we will eat meals together, study Scripture together, and talk about what it means for us as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus. Once the Covenant Communities are formed in June, we will provide a handbook that the group can work through together. You will consider your own habits and practices and to share how your life is different because you follow Jesus. Each month you will review one of the common understandings in our church

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Ministry Team Highlights

In the March meeting Pastor Tracy talked about 2 types of structure, Centralized and Decentralized, and how our church structure functions. He then reviewed the Focus Question “How will you create forums to hear the passions and ideas of the congregation?” Ministers responded by mentioning examples such as utilizing natural venues like Sunday School, debriefing after events, and having periodic meetings with intentional groups of people related to that ministry, like parents of youth in youth ministry.

In the April meeting Pastor Nathan read Psalm 49 and Matthew 16 asking “How are you caring for your own soul?” Ministers engaged this question by mentioning some of their spiritual practices like keeping up with Scripture meditation, writing out prayers, focusing on praying for others, and starting to journal. He then reviewed the Focus Question “What is your plan to check in with key leaders based on your annual planning calendar?” Nathan encouraged ministers to create an annual planning calendar for each of their areas.

Will and Shannon Sadler have been developing a new support group ministry for parents of LGBTQ kids. This ministry was approved.

Ministers reflected on what has been good or encouraging in their life, our congregation, or their ministry. Encouraging comments included them feeling like things are coming together, people are being supportive, seeing God at work through ministries like Ripple, and the Sadlers’ new ministry developing. Youth ministry has been encouraging with things like the winter youth retreat, the faithful ongoing work

of the youth sponsors, and increasing attendance at Youth Group.

Ministers also shared about what has been challenging or difficult in their life, our congregation, or their ministry. There were comments about the loss of more leaders from Praise Team, the upcoming transition that will take place on Mission Outreach, the loss of the Kitchen Committee and how that is impacting Fellowship Committee. The VBS Committee was not able to continue this year and therefore many other people from the congregation were asked to help plan VBS but unfortunately it will not be on the calendar for this summer.

Pastor Tracy distributed and reviewed a revised version of the “Communicating with the Congregation” policy to include updated communication options and processes. Pastor Nathan clarified Trustee responsibilities and authorizations, and also distributed “Guidelines for Membership”. He facilitated a review of the initial draft of the membership renewal letter, and working on finalizing the location

Covenant Community

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covenant, talking about how you personally live that common understanding out and discussing whether these should be edited or expanded. We encourage you to make commitments together about how you want to live as you follow Jesus and to hold each other accountable out of love and respect, spurring one another on towards love and good deeds. The groups will be intergenerational and formed with consideration

for baptisms and communication plan for Pentecost Sunday on June 5. The initial plan is to have fellowship time begin at 9:30 that morning with no Sunday School, and a barbecue to follow the service and baptisms.

Long range planning items included Graduate Sunday and Outdoor Service on June 12, the last day of Primary Sunday School on June 26, an Outdoor Service and Picnic on September 11, and the first day of Sunday School on September 18. Ministers present selected October 22 as their first choice for the annual Leadership Retreat. The tentative dates for the Israel trip were announced as June 15 to 25 in 2023. More information will follow as it becomes available.

Pastor Nathan spoke of the Covenant Communities Initiative project which would encourage all members to be organized into small group settings for a 6-month period of time, tentatively beginning in June, to gather in intergenerational settings in order to pursue and practice the way of Jesus together in everyday life. There will be a congregational survey to gain feedback.

given to where people live, so that there is not a burden of extra driving time. After we finish the curriculum there will be a time to share about the experience and consider what parts of this covenant community experience we might want to continue in the life of our congregation. My prayer is that your soul is revived, that your spirits are knit together, and that your life is transformed as we engage Jesus through his Word and Spirit.

Shameless Audacity by Pastor Tracy Commons

In Luke 11 Jesus teaches his disciples to pray “The Lord’s Prayer” and then follows it up with a parable- *“Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”*

Has this scenario ever happened to you? Have you ever had a friend come to your house at midnight asking for food so they could feed their guest? Have you ever gone to a friend’s house at midnight to ask for food so you could feed a guest

in your home? I’m guessing probably not, in fact I’m guessing most of us would view this scenario as uncomfortable, inappropriate and kind of crazy. And yet Jesus tells this story as an example of prayer and says “... because of your **shameless audacity**...”

When was the last time you asked God for something with shameless audacity? I find it hard to pray those kinds of prayers, as if it goes against “The Lord’s Prayer” where it says “your will be done”. Maybe you are like me and find it easier and more comfortable to pray prayers of indifference and submission to God’s will (which are good prayers to pray!). Jesus invites his followers to also pray with shameless audacity. Wow.

This parable is one that I need to revisit from time to time to remind myself that God can handle all of our prayers, both with a posture of submission to His

authority, and with a posture of shameless audacity. But if you’re still not convinced, Jesus gives some helpful context a few verses later- *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

Kids ask for things with shameless audacity... can I get an Amen! God loves to hear from His kids, and He knows what we need, so go ahead, pray with shameless audacity like a child and see how God responds.



Widow/Widower Ministry Highlights by Kathy Werner

The Widow/Widower ministry enjoyed their first time together since last summer and oh what a time we had! Fun interactive games played by the various tables, fellowship and laughs, and announcing various trips available for get togethers. A superb dinner of ham, green beans, and an amazing buffet of side dishes lined the table... to say nothing of the various delightful desserts. One never goes hungry when we get together!

Our November event was cancelled due to Kathy’s hospitalization and John’s “new hip” surgery (we just did not feel we had bounced back enough to take this on yet). Then in February, there were still some

concerns regarding the COVID infections so we postponed that event until March 19. A total of 52 people came with smiles and cheers that we were “back on track”. It was so refreshing to see the smiles and re-uniting of friendships as well as the 10 new friends that attended. I am always amazed at how warmly our widows and widowers embrace those who are newly walking this path.

Becky Schaffer (Kathy’s daughter) presented the song “Watch the Lamb” by way of a human video that acted out the song. With Easter approaching, we were all so emotionally moved by this presentation. And then, there was the swap table.

If you know of a widow or widower who might benefit from this type of event, please let John or Kathy know. While their path in life is completely different then it was before, we are reminded that Christ, in His mercy, promises us that He walks with us every moment of the day.

We are now making plans for our July picnic! John and I can hardly wait!

For more information, please contact John and Kathy Werner at (215) 808-6856.

