

Schleitheim Confession

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In many ways, these are the questions our conference and denomination are wrestling with right now. Who is allowed in fellowship? Who can we be united with? At what point do we say that someone is no longer committed to Jesus as Savior and Lord? With the encouragement of our Church Board, I recently agreed to join a taskforce that the Conference appointed to review our relationship with MCUSA. Not only am I on the taskforce, but I was also appointed to the steering committee that is helping to lead

the taskforce. Our goal is to listen well within our conference in order to provide a recommendation for delegates to discuss at our fall assembly. Your prayers are appreciated.

In light of this ongoing struggle to understand how to follow our king, who came to seek and save the lost, consider these words from the Schleitheim Confession written almost 500 years ago:

"We have been united as follows concerning the ban. The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after Him in His commandments; those who have

been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. They shall be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18). But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup."



Free Fall Event



The 13th annual **Free Fall Event** will be held on **Saturday, September 24** at the Quakertown Skate Park. Activities will include an action sports competition with intentional sharing of the

gospel throughout the day. If you are interested in volunteering or would like to donate food, you may visit their website at www.freefallqtown.com or talk with Pastor Nathan.



Outdoor Service

Our annual **Outdoor Service & Fellowship Meal** is **Sunday, September 11**. We will welcome Dr. Derek Cooper as our special guest speaker. Derek will be hosting our Holy Land Tour next June. After the service there will be a Q&A Information Session with Derek regarding the Holy Land Tour while the Fellowship Meal is being set up. (If you have any questions, please submit the online survey or talk with Pastor Tracy.)

For the Fellowship Meal, please bring a main dish and a salad or dessert.

Afternoon activities include a Bounce House for kids, Cake Walk (please bring dessert items), and Slip & Slide Kickball- everyone is welcome to play, so be prepared to get wet! Contact Shirley Geissinger or Pastor Tracy for additional information..



Schleitheim Confession by Pastor Nathan

When I first started as a pastor at Swamp, our youth were involved in Keystone Opportunity Center's Sleep Out For Homelessness fundraiser. I joined a planning team that organized a second event in Quakertown to supplement the main one in Souderton. As planning began the third year, I was reviewing my commitments and realized I could not give adequate time to the Sleep Out event. I went to the first planning meeting and let everyone else know it would be my last meeting. They were blown away that I would make an intentional effort to disconnect from something I no longer had time and energy for. Many expressed they would have quietly fallen off the scene or blown off meetings and commitments rather than show up and resign a volunteer position.

As a culture, we like to believe we can do everything. We want to feel like we belong. No one wants to be left out. As a result we stretch ourselves thin and, ironically, struggle to create real community. I knew that tentative participation would hinder the mission and vision of the group. I knew where my commitments lay, so I left.

It is harder when we are told that we need to leave. Growing up we were only allowed to play one sport per year. All of my brothers played soccer, but in fifth grade I decided to tryout for basketball instead. The problem was that basketball tryouts were in December, long after the soccer season had ended. I sat out that

year of soccer, practicing what I knew of basketball. The week of tryouts came and I was so excited. I don't remember much of that week of tryouts other than the growing realization that, in comparison to everyone else, I really wasn't that good. The roster was published and out of everyone in the middle school that tried out, only two students didn't make the team. One of them was me. There was no follow up, no feedback on what I needed to change or where I needed to grow. I simply didn't make it. I never tried out for soccer through eighth grade and haven't played organized sports since.

This is the third article in a series on Anabaptism, looking at the first agreed upon statement of faith by early anabaptists at Schleitheim in 1527. The second article of this confession is on "The Ban", about how to remove those who don't belong.

A core belief of anabaptists, from the very beginning, is that the visible church is important. The church is not a social club. The church is the assembly of those who have committed to Jesus as their Savior and Lord and are actively working to bring his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. An army doesn't let civilians hang around during training exercises. A military does all it can to root out spies or anyone who might have sympathy or allegiance for the enemy. In the same way, early anabaptists believed that the church needed to ensure that those who were

participating in the life of their community were serious about fighting back against sin, Satan, and evil.

But how do you maintain the integrity of a group without hurting those who don't belong? How do you stay focused on the mission of God, banning those who are working against the mission of God, when the mission of God is to seek and save the lost? Anabaptists have wrestled with this ever since. The Amish split from Mennonites for various reasons, but a primary concern was that Mennonites were too soft in enforcing the ban. Our current Confession of Faith states that Church Discipline is necessary for faithful discipleship but that "corrective discipline should be exercised in a redemptive manner." Our own church covenant outlines a process for meaningful membership that is rooted in Scripture and historic anabaptist beliefs. That process requires two years of discernment and conversation before someone's membership would be removed. The goal being to balance truth and grace, belonging and focus on mission.

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It's Just Different by Pastor Tracy Commons

On Sunday September 11 we will be joined by Dr. Derek Cooper, the host of our Holy Land Tour next June. I have had a lot of fun planning this trip in collaboration with Derek, Nathan, and others. It has been meaningful partly because of the many memories that have come flooding back to me from the opportunity I had to go on a similar Holy Land Tour in the Spring of 2014. It's been said that there is something different about spending time in a place like Africa, that it changes you and impacts you like no other place in the world... you don't return the same. I would echo that sentiment regarding the Holy Land as well... it's just different.

As you can imagine, part of the reason why it is so special and deeply moving is the geographical connection with our Jewish and Christian heritage and history. It's just different to be able to walk where Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians walked. It's just different to be able to see these places with your own eyes, and therefore see the Scriptures with

Scholarship Award

Congratulations to Lydia Longacre, who was awarded an Everence Financial® College Scholarship for 2022-2023. Everence, a faith-based financial services organization, invests in the God-given talents of 45 students each year through its scholarship program. Learn more about this and other member benefits at everence.com.



fresh eyes as well, to see the stories come alive. The land of the Bible is often referred to as the Fifth Gospel. It's just different to hear the Sermon on the Mount while actually sitting on The Mount of Beatitudes, imagining Jesus teaching his disciples there in that spot. To walk on the Mount of Olives and through the Garden of Gethsemane and get chills as you envision Jesus praying passionately the night before he was arrested. To take communion together at the Garden Tomb and experience a sense of such deep gratitude, humility, and joy in remembering Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection which changed the course of history and our lives forever.

It's just different to be there first hand and learn about the sobering dual narrative of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, to hear it from their own lips rather than our media, and to come away with more questions than answers as you are confronted with the complexity of the injustices that define those cultural

contexts. (And, in the case of Swamp, to have the chance to see the ministry of Garry and Ruth Denlinger as they have sought to be bridge builders with Jewish and Palestinian Christians.) It's just different to visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem on Friday and experience the energy building as Jews gather from all around to pray and celebrate in community before pausing to engage in Sabbath rest (Shabbat). To experience a Shabbat meal around the table in the home of a Jewish family, participating in the sacred rituals and hearing the stories that have been told for thousands of years.

And so... much... more

As the leader of that trip in 2014 said, "you will take ten days to pack your bags full of experiences – and the rest of your life to unpack them." It's just different... I hope you will join us.



Church Board Highlights

The minutes from March 15 were reviewed. It was noted that there was no meeting in May and Ken Longacre could not attend the MCUSA assembly due to COVID. The students recommended by the MEP Committee for the 2022-23 school year were approved. It was noted that the Trustees' moveable wall project in the Fellowship Hall was approved earlier via email.

Pastor Nathan reviewed a timeline for the 2022 Leadership Discernment Process. The process will begin on August 14 and end with a final vote taken on October 23. The following positions are expiring with some still considering another term of service: Church Board Vice-Chair,

Church Board Member-at-large (2 positions), Minister of Christian Education and Minister of Youth & Young Adults. Pastor Nathan presented the Covenant Community lists and reviewed the possible outcomes with Covenant Communities, filling a void culturally and in our congregation. The current process is a pilot program to gain feedback from the congregation and decide what we will do into the future. He suggested a book titled, "Discipleship That Fits" as a reference for ongoing vision casting. The Board decided to read this book together.

Due to recent votes taken at the MCUSA Assembly in Kansas

City, Pastor Nathan asked how involved the board would want him to be if he were tapped to serve on a Mosaic Conference Committee to address this. The board decided that he should serve in this capacity if he was asked and assessed that he had adequate time. The board encouraged Pastor Nathan to discuss with Pastor Tracy as well. Ministry Team updated the Child/Youth Protection Policy with the assistance of Nancy Kauffmann of Dove's Nest.

Robert asked everyone to be in prayer for the discernment process and the Mosaic Conference, then offered the Closing Prayer.

Ministry Team Highlights

The July meeting was focused on the Child / Youth Protection Policy. Ministers and invited guests viewed a video provided by Dove's Nest. This was followed by a thorough review of the revised Swamp Policy. Several changes were suggested which Pastor Tracy made note of for further revision and discussion. Ministers were asked to consider who should be approached about serving on the Child Protection Leadership Team, and a training session for the congregation was planned and held August 21.

Pastor Tracy opened the August meeting with prayer. He then read 2 Samuel 11:1, spoke of being in front and leading, giving ourselves fully to this season, being who God is asking us to be and doing what God is asking us to do, leading and serving who are called to lead and serve, raising up and empowering who we are called to raise up and empower, partnering with whom we are called to

partner, fighting the battles we are called to fight... not to "stay home" or sit on the sidelines. He then reviewed the main Focus Question "What are you most excited about as we anticipate our Fall Kickoff?" Ministers shared about feelings of having feet on the ground and a clearer picture, being back in rhythm after enjoying quality family time over the summer, and anticipating activities resuming and having a better idea of knowing what is expected. Plans were made to have a prayer for Sunday School during the outdoor service on September 11.

Encouraging updates from ministers included Bill Longacre taking on the Mission Outreach leadership role from Robert Geissinger, who is stepping down on December 1, the chance to meet with and learn from previous ministers of outreach, and developing a core group to work together. Challenges that were

mentioned included the ability to be more "in tune" with the congregation, and the need to find someone to help come up with creative ideas for worship.

It was decided that members of Ministry Team would contact individuals that have not responded to the Covenant renewal process. It was suggested to invite a representative from Free Fall to speak during our worship service on either September 18 or October 2. Ministers were asked to begin the budgeting process in their areas. Advent planning was also discussed. Finally, an opportunity was discussed to help East Swamp Church with reestablishing and developing a Nursing Home Ministry that would have members of our church lead worship services on site at nursing home facilities in the area a few times a year as part of a team on a rotating basis. It was decided to discuss further.