

Ministry Team Highlights

In September discussion was held on budget preparations for 2023, a reminder was given to ministers about long-range planning of events, followed by discernment sessions for the open positions.

The first discernment session was held for the Minister of Christian Education position. The candidates included Jenna DeWitt and Katie Gehman, both of whom were present, and Debra Rush who was not able to attend. Pastor Nathan started by reading excerpts from Psalm 46 and giving context for the discernment process. Members of Ministry Team then discussed a variety of topics with the candidates including the level of interest and enthusiasm if considered for the position, as well as the role responsibilities, thoughts and reflections from the current Minister of CE, etc. Further follow-up conversations included Deb Rush.

The second discernment session was held for the Minister of Youth & Young Adults position. The candidates included Brent Gehman, Hilary Gehman, Wendell Gehman, and Ashley Geissinger who were all present. Pastor Nathan started this session similar to the first session. Members of Ministry Team then discussed a variety of topics including those mentioned above in the first session, thoughts and reflections from the current Minister of Youth & Young Adults, what the candidates envision for the ministry, etc. Further follow-up conversations were initiated.

Pastor Tracy opened the October meeting reading Matthew 6:25-34 and encouraged ministers that as we think about processes, goals, methods, etc. that are necessary for our ministries, our

desire is to recognize and seek God's Kingdom at work in order to cultivate a healthy culture and lead in such a way that what we do smells like Jesus and His kingdom rather than just a good church program. He then reviewed the Focus Question *"What is your process for establishing goals, encouraging successful methods, and securing needed equipment?"* Ministers shared about the challenge of thinking about their ministries in terms of goals, or their focus being more on the process for accomplishing goals that they feel are already laid out.

Ministers also mentioned being encouraged by things such as the Youth Auction, the fact that outreach means something to the congregation, that people are willing to volunteer to help with worship, and that it is nice getting back into the Fall routine.

Rachel recapped the process of reviewing the Child Protection Policy and the next steps of how to get the information to everyone, especially those that work with children. Suggestions included placing notices in each of the classrooms and also in each of the bathrooms, posting the policy on the church website, etc. to be completed by the end of the year. Tracy reached out to an attorney to review the current version of the policy and how to word an added statement about children being present at an adult function with no scheduled child supervision. There was some discussion regarding aspects of the language of the policy, and the language as -is ended up being affirmed. There was then discussion about the ministry area the Child Protection Leadership Team (CPLT) should be placed under, and it was decided to propose that

it should fall under the Church Board.

Pastor Tracy then addressed the current discernment process and the lack of final candidates for the position of Minister of Christian Education and Minister of Youth & Young Adults. He also gave an updated on the Israel trip in 2023, and he spoke of the Covenant Communities and ministers mentioned some encouraging feedback and some of the challenges.

A number of planning items were addressed for future events and activities including: Growth Matters, the annual Christmas season bulletin insert, Christmas Caroling, a review of the next month's calendar, and member meeting reports.

Finally, the membership status of those that have not completed the Covenant Renewal form was reviewed. The membership list for 2023 would be finalized and approved at the next meeting to forward to Church Board.



**Article deadline
for the
January/February
Growth Matters
Newsletter is
Tuesday, December 20**

GROWTH MATTERS SWAMP MENNONITE CHURCH

Volume 13 Number 6

November/December 2022



Extending and Embracing Grace by Tracy Commons

Recently I have noticed several things converging in regards to who I am personally and pastorally, who we are as a church, and who we are as a conference. Questions are being asked and pondered. Questions around healthy leadership, vision, values, and mission. Good questions that will shape us for the future individually and corporately.

In the midst of a stressful fall season filled with transition and new family routines, I have felt like my areas of weakness are on full display. Last month I participated in the first two sessions of the "Community in Mission" course through Mosaic Institute. At the end of each day we had intentional time set aside to be alone and reflect on what the Spirit was impressing upon us from that day. The first day the Spirit impressed upon me to "remember and be refreshed" by extending grace and embracing grace in this season. In all of its chaos and in all of my imperfection, God continues to show His favor, and I need to recognize it and receive it. God prompted me to remember what it's like to have healthy rhythms that are refreshing and life-giving. It was encouraging to dwell on these things, especially in the midst of a season where I haven't felt like I've been experiencing those refreshing and life-giving rhythms.

The second day as I walked in silent reflection around the Dock Academy campus I felt the Spirit

saying to me that in a season like this, extending and embracing grace also means that I can still be who God has created me to be. I don't know about you but one thing I struggle with is comparison. I compare myself to those (many who are my close friends) who are seemingly more gifted, or more gifted in an area of leadership or ministry, or higher capacity, or extroverted. I even compare myself to a previous "version" of myself from another season of life. It's brutal, but in my middle age I'm trying to let go of all of that. God has never asked me to be someone else, or to live out someone else's calling. With that comfort and confidence I can then ask myself what it means to live out my calling in the most healthy and natural way in this season of life.

I wonder if these thoughts from the Spirit are not just for me? I wonder what it looks like to extend and embrace God's grace and favor for the Mosaic Conference as they discern a way forward? For conference leaders to remember and be refreshed. For it to be okay for Mosaic to be Mosaic in this season as they pursue what it means for the conference to be who God is calling them to be now and in the future.

I wonder if these thoughts from the Spirit are for Swamp? Our Swamp Church Board and Ministry Team gathered for our Leadership Retreat a couple weeks ago. We entered into prayerful reflection and intentional dialogue as we explored together what makes

Swamp Swamp. What is our mission and vision, what are our values? What are the best ways to communicate and live out our mission, vision, and values so we can be faithful to who God is calling us to be? How can we as Swamp remember and be refreshed? Even as we enter into a season of some uncertainty, and as we evaluate our leadership structure, how can we extend and embrace God's grace and favor for each other? It would be easy for us to compare Swamp to other churches or ministries, but God is asking us to be Swamp, and I'm grateful for God's grace and favor as we are Swamp together.

Save these dates!

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**Wednesday, November 23
Thanksgiving Eve
Service @ 7:00 pm**

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**Tuesday, December 6
Member Meeting
@ 7:00 pm**

**Swamp Mennonite Church
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Leadership Structure Review

In 2020 Church Board and Ministry Team considered our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a congregation. This prepared for and guided our search for an associate pastor. We saw a strong sense of belonging and care in the congregation. Our congregation has resources and energy for meaningful ministry. This strong foundation can lead to a community where everyone belongs and everyone is needed.

However, we also identified some weaknesses. In our summary from the retreat we said: “Swamp Mennonite Church struggles with being overcommitted. Because of the breadth of activity sometimes it feels like there is a lack of depth. People end up serving out of obligation to keep the ministry going and there is a lack of leaders to fill positions, especially when they require long-term commitment. There is a hunger to connect more deeply with the community, to connect

more deeply with God and Scripture, and to connect more deeply across generations. However, sometimes it is difficult to keep people engaged and communicating mid-week and there is a resistance to having difficult conversations where there might not be agreement.”

This was highlighted in our leadership discernment process this year.

In our Confession of Faith we say: “We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is one body with many members, ordered in such a way that, through the one Spirit, believers may be built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. ... In making decisions, whether to choose leaders or resolve issues, members of the church listen and speak in a spirit of prayerful openness, with the Scriptures as the constant guide. Persons shall expect not only affirmation, but also correction. In a process of discernment, it is

better to wait patiently for a word from the Lord leading toward consensus, than to make hasty decisions.”

It is always amazing to me how, when we take time to wait and listen, God gives direction.

Going into 2023 we have two open positions on Ministry Team: the Minister of Youth and Young Adults and the Minister of Christian Education. We have had our current Church Board and Ministry Team structure for 14 years. This year Church Board will review how it is working for us and where it falls short. As we review and debrief our Covenant Community experiment this winter and spring, considering who God is calling us to be as a congregation in the next 5-10 years, we will also review our leadership structure and how we will organize ourselves in order to fulfill the mission that God has for us.

Church Board Highlights

Church Board looked forward to the Leadership Retreat for October. The plan is to review the mission and values of our congregation. There will be an exercise for reviewing our values, a time of prayer and Scripture meditation, presentations, and a review of our Common Understandings and Covenant Community process.

The Finance Committee has already started preparing the 2023 budget which will be presented to the Board at the November meeting. There was discussion about additional financial needs as a result of Nathan’s sabbatical. During that time, there would be a need to have someone available

for planning worship services and taking care of any funerals. Supply pastors would be used along with Pastor Tracy to cover sermons during Nathan’s absence. It was noted that the Congregational Care Team would be able to handle hospital visitation. Quincy asked Nathan to include all financial details pertaining to his sabbatical in an email to Finance Committee for their discussion next month. It was decided to ask Mike Clemmer about what other churches do during sabbaticals.

Board members reflected on our current Covenant Community experiment. Hopes and dreams for the process are meeting casually,

connecting on a deeper level, and deepening relationships. It was noted that a few groups have merged due to the small size.

Ministry Team has been reviewing the Child Protection Policy. Pastor Nathan spoke about the possibility of including a line about children at the facilities when there is not an activity specifically for children. It was stated that the parents should be responsible for their children in these instances. The Board decided that Ministry Team should seek legal counsel regarding the type of wording that should be used to protect us in the event of a potential situation occurring.

Sabbatical Plans by Pastor Nathan Good

As of October 4, 2022, I have served as a pastor here at Swamp for 11 years. Our LEADership Minister from the conference as well as Bob Geissinger, our Church Board Chair, have been encouraging me for the past two years to consider taking a sabbatical. I am thankful that our Church Board has a pastoral sabbatical policy to guide this process. Our policy states the purpose of a sabbatical is: “...to provide an extended time for spiritual, intellectual, physical, relational and emotional renewal for ordained pastors, and to enhance congregational health through long-term vital leadership.”

I have been in conversation with the whole Church Board about this since March and we are planning for me to take a sabbatical from June 8 – September 7, 2023. During my sabbatical I will be exploring the prophetic use of symbols and stories to communicate the truth of God.

Preaching through Matthew I was impressed by how Jesus used stories, metaphors, and even prophetic symbolic actions in order to communicate with the people. Preaching through the Minor Prophets I noticed the same things. I also have become more aware of how much pastoral ministry relies on storytelling and

symbolism. When I read and interpret Scripture, I am constantly confronted with stories and symbols. When preaching, a text can come to life through a good story or metaphor, or it can fall flat when these illustrations don’t connect. More and more, leadership ideas focus on using story and symbols in order to communicate, teach, and guide people and organizations. And much of the work of pastoral care focuses on helping others tell their stories well and guiding people through symbolic rituals, like baby dedications, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. These are symbolic rituals that help us to tell our own personal stories well.

In our culture, we have a word for communicating with stories and symbols. The word is “art”. Art is a powerful tool for changing how we think and understand our world. During my sabbatical I will explore the idea of “Pastor as Artist”. This is something new I have been reflecting on as I read the Bible and consider how God has spoken to his people through time. It is interesting that there can be pressure as a pastor to be a symbol. Some people don’t even refer to pastors by their name but simply call them “Pastor”. Some Christian traditions have their pastors dress in special clothing as

a way of holding them apart from the people as a symbol. In this sense, as a pastor you can feel like you are a symbol, like you are art. But this can be dehumanizing, can lead to loss of identity, and can create unhealthy expectations for yourself and within a congregation.

So, throughout my sabbatical I will read several books related to art, storytelling, and pastoring. I will also work with a mentor/coach as I write short stories each week in order to become a better storyteller. I will also take an art class and experiment with different types of visual art. During this time Dana and I will travel to Israel with the group from our church, which will allow me to interact with the stories and visuals of the Bible in new and deeper ways. Later in the summer our family will travel through Canada, connecting with various Mennonite communities and artistic communities along the way, as well as spending time in God’s beautiful creation. I will continue my learning activities during this trip as well.

I am extremely grateful for this opportunity for rest, learning, and renewal and pray that God uses it to strengthen me in my ministry and us in our community as a congregation.

Trustees Update

The Fellowship Walls have all been serviced and recovered and are all the same color for the first time in many years. The outside windows have been painted. We will be installing a new floor in the bathroom in the back of the Sunday School wing. We are getting a quote to cap all the wood

on the outside of the Sunday School wing next year. There are places that are rotting, and we are hoping to cap the windows and soffits before they get too bad. Let a Trustee know if you see anything that needs attention. They include Terry Landis, Ken Longacre, Brian Rush, and Will Sadler.

