

Swamp Youth by Tracy Commons

Well, I have some good news and some bad news. Which would you like to hear first? Let's get the bad news out of the way. The bad news is that Lowell Gehman, who has done an excellent job as Minister of Youth and Young Adults, has ended his term, which means that this position is open. Please join me in thanking Lowell for his dedicated service to our youth and youth sponsors in this role... he will be missed! The good news is that we are very excited about the addition of a few new youth sponsors! Tyler and Rachel Whary have joined us and will be ramping up their involvement as Rachel finishes her commitment in teaching clubs and has ended her term as Minister of CE. We also have Ty Williams joining us as a Youth Assistant on Wednesday nights. If that name sounds familiar it might be because he preached at Swamp this past summer and Pastor Nathan mentioned him at the member meeting. Ty serves as the Crisis Community Liaison and Trainer at Access Services, providing Mental Health and Prevention training, and is also a

member of the Montgomery County Suicide Prevention Task Force. In the past Ty was a high school teacher and also served in youth and young adult ministry leadership in a local church. Most importantly, as Brandon has said multiple times that he gets excited about people who have a genuine desire to invest in the lives of our youth, these three folks are passionate about serving youth and especially the youth at Swamp. So please join us in welcoming Tyler, Rachel, and Ty!!

Adding these youth sponsors is so encouraging, and it also allows for my role with the youth ministry to shift a bit. I will continue to be involved in many of the youth meetings and activities, but I will also be freed up to invest in our youth in other ways such as making myself available for one on one counseling and discipleship, as well as being able to function in the role of Minister of Youth and Young Adults as needed during this next season. I am excited to be able to serve in these ways.

Speaking of investing in the lives of our youth, I would like to

encourage you all to consider ways that you can walk alongside and build into our youth in 2023. You don't have to become a youth sponsor to make a significant impact in the lives of our youth, there are multiple other ways that you can have a meaningful influence, and it is extremely important for our youth to have several adults (not just youth sponsors) who are genuinely caring, connecting, listening, supporting, mentoring, and spending time with them. One of these ways is to be a baptism/membership sponsor! Every year we offer a membership exploration class for anyone looking to grow in their faith or considering what baptism and membership might mean. This year the class will run February 12 -April 30 with an expected Baptism and New Members Sunday on June 4. This would be an amazing opportunity to journey with our youth and support them in this next step in their faith and church life.

I'm hopeful and eager to see what this year holds in store for our youth here at Swamp!

This 'n' That by Arlene Yothers

Happy New Year! You are blessed by God! Matthew 25:40 is the verse that The Worm Project has as their theme verse. Can you help provide deworming tablets to boys and girls around the world? Over 800 million children are at risk of being infected with parasitic worms. In 2022, there were enough tablets purchased to treat 10 million children for the year. Instead of buying gifts only for your loved ones, consider giving a gift to Jesus and donate

money to The Worm Project. There are envelopes on the table in the foyer.

The Mennonite Heritage Center has various programs and displays throughout the year. On January 19, at 6 pm., there will be a program called, "One Room School Houses". Harleysville Hank will make an appearance on Groundhog Day, Feb. 2. Come for coffee and scrapple as early as 6:45 am! The program will start at

7 am. Will Harleysville Hank predict 6 more weeks of winter?

As you are cleaning out your closets, consider donating your unwanted items to the Care & Share Shoppes. They take books, CDs, DVDs, clothing, lightly used shoes, furniture, wall decor, puzzles and MORE. Can you help at the shoppes in one of their many different areas? There are benefits to being a volunteer. See me for more details.



What is an Anabaptist? by Pastor Nathan

The Anabaptist Reformation took place in central Europe in the 1500's. At that time, almost each person you met was "Christian". Baptism into the church as an infant was tied to national citizenship. Being a good citizen and following Jesus were seen as the same thing.

Because of this, people with no fruit of the Spirit were seen as Christians. Immoral business and government matters were blessed by the church. We see the remains of this carried out today. Russian priests are blessing weapons used in the war in Ukraine. It can be easy to look at the blessing of weapons and say it is wrong, but for the Anabaptists in the 1500's the issue went much deeper.

Seeing that the "Christian" world around them didn't look much like Jesus, they developed a two- kingdom theology. There is the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is ruled by Jesus. The kingdom of this world is ruled by Satan. Sin is not only the wrong actions of single people. Sin is also joining in the kingdom of Satan. So, what you do matters, but it also matters who you partner with.

Because of this, the early Anabaptists removed themselves from all groups that were connected to the "kingdoms of this world". They rejected any human organizations that were not fully and openly Christian.

In the first Anabaptist Confession of Faith at Schleithem they agreed, "Now there is nothing else in the world and all

creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who are [come] out of the world, God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other. To us, then, the commandment of the Lord is also obvious, whereby He orders us to be and to become separated from the evil one, and thus He will be our God and we shall be His sons and daughters. Further, He admonishes us therefore to go out from Babylon and from the earthly Egypt, that we may not be partakers in their torment and suffering, which the Lord will bring upon them."

In the 1500's this made sense. Although it was painful, it was easily carried out by these early Anabaptists. With the Protestant Reformers pulling away from the Roman Catholic Church, society was fracturing. Lines were being drawn and these Anabaptists picked sides. They truly believed they were picking the side of God.

However, as society and culture changed, it became less clear where to draw the line between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. As local governments organized firemen's associations, could Anabaptist Christians participate or benefit? What about libraries? Anabaptists have disagreed for several hundred years on whether Christians can be Masons, enroll in trade unions, pay Social Security taxes, have insurance, engage in modern banking, and much more.

This past Spring I went to a Mud Sale near York PA with my

family. There were thousands of people, many of them Amish or horse and buggy Mennonite. As we were walking around I saw several Mennonite men, with conservative beards, hats, and clothes, wearing orange vests with the words "security" printed on them. I'm assuming these men weren't carrying guns. But here were modern Anabaptist Christians working as security at a local fire department fundraiser. I joked with Dana that I should let them know I'm an ordained Mennonite minister and ask to speak to their bishop.

However, my hunch is that we have come to similar conclusions. The core of the principle remains. There is the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. However, you cannot draw as clear a line between them as the early Anabaptists tried to. It is possible for a local library to do some good. But there is always the danger that secular organizations or nations will demand allegiance that only belongs to Christ.

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Church Board Highlights

Pastor Nathan Good offered the devotional about God's faithfulness and the loving kindness of God mentioning Micah 6:8 and Hosea 12:6. He also connected this with an article written by Steve Kriss, Executive Minister of Mosaic Mennonite Conference, with a discussion of gallasenheit. This was followed with an opening prayer.

Barry Gehman, as the Finance Committee Chair, presented the proposed 2023 budget to Church Board which noted a 3.99% increase over 2022. He took questions and offered clarifications. After Barry left, the board engaged in further discussion regarding the budget. It was decided to change Mennonite Mission Network to "Global Missions" as a placeholder for this year. With this change it was decided to present the 2023 proposed budget to the congregation. The Board also approved Finance Committee's recommendation that Pastor Nathan apply for a grant from Endowment Committee to help

cover additional sabbatical expenses.

The Board reviewed and approved the previous meetings minutes as well as the Memos of Understanding for staff. The open Church Board member-at-large position was discussed and it was decided that Bob, Quincy, and Pastor Nathan will assemble a list of possible candidates. There was discussion about a homeschool group renting the facility on a long-term basis. Some parameters were approved and sent back to the Trustees.

Pastor Nathan reviewed our current relationships with MC USA and Mosaic Mennonite Conference. Board members discussed a possible separation from one or both. It was decided to remain a member of Mosaic Mennonite Conference while recommending that the congregation suspend membership in MCUSA. Additionally, the Board decided to submit a letter to the congregation for approval that would then be sent to the Conference communicating our

disappointment that the Conference was not suspending membership in MCUSA at this time. The process would involve notifying the congregation of the intent, creating a Swamp Mennonite by-law change in keeping with Mosaic Conference by-laws, and drafting a letter to the Conference. Pastor Nathan will draft a letter based on Board discussion and send to all members of the board for their review. Both the by-law change and the letter were added to the annual member meeting agenda.

Pastor Nathan presented the 2023 Leadership Structure Review document. It was decided to continue with the process laid out in the proposal. He also noted that the Mission and Values document will continually change as meetings progress. The youth ministry assistant role was discussed and Nathan expressed that it would be a great opportunity for us and for Ty Williams. Quincy thanked Robert for his faithful and diligent service as outgoing Church Board Chair.

Ministry Team Highlights

Pastor Nathan opened the November meeting by handing out different passages for each person to review and asked them to reflect on their passage and what it is like to walk in Christian Unity. Ministers shared about singleness of heart and action and how it requires grace. He then reviewed the main Focus Question "What is your plan to connect ministry leaders with Ministry Team so we do not function in silos?" Everyone wrestled with this idea in their own ministry areas and for the congregation as a whole. Shannon mentioned utilizing fifth Sunday sharing services for

ministers to communicate with the whole congregation.

Shannon shared about Deb Rush stepping down from Nursery Scheduling, and Will talked about Wendell Gehman joining Mission Outreach and that he is looking for another individual, as well as how to best recognize Bob Geissinger for his years of service. Prayers were requested for youth relationships, and it was encouraging that ladies' tea and men's lunch activities went well.

It was decided to give the Thanksgiving Eve offering to Fostering Hope. The upcoming Christmas season insert was

reviewed. It was decided to move Covenant Sunday to June 4. The membership status was reviewed. The following were moved from Active to Inactive Membership at their request: Helen Asbury, Camron Good, Robert Good, Ryan Good, Tamira Good, and Johanna Zeigler. The following asked to be removed from membership: David Edenfield, Darren Gehman, Brent Landis, and J.R. Roach. The following were given exception and will remain as active members: Brianna Engdahl and Joseph Engdahl. The following will remain as inactive members Jamie Haas and James Mason.

Winter Group by Ashley Geissinger

Some of you who are friends with me on Facebook or the church Facebook page may have seen that I have shared a link to a Death Café I am helping to facilitate. I was introduced to the Death Café by coworkers. You might wonder what a Death Café is. It is a safe and relaxed space to talk about all things death related. The objective is to engage in interesting, thought provoking, and life-affirming conversations with others in a small group setting. It is not counseling or bereavement sessions but an opportunity to increase awareness of death and make it a less taboo subject to talk about since we all must face death and dying. After attending my first Death Café in Kennett Square in November, where I met the owners of Naugle's Funeral Home, I was given the opportunity to help them launch one in Quakertown! This is something that I am passionate

about and look forward to being able to help facilitate this event monthly on the 3rd Thursday of January, February, and March 6:30-8:00 pm at Naugle Funeral Home in Quakertown. If you are on Facebook, please feel free to go to the Death Café Quakertown page and like and share it! If you have questions, I would love to talk with you so come find me!



Ministry Team Highlights (cont.)

Pastor Tracy opened the January meeting by having each person find a comfortable spot around the church to read Philippians 3:12-17 using Lectio Divina as a reading pattern. Everyone came back with observations and application to share. This was then connected to the focus question: "What are your plans for selecting, overseeing, encouraging, and equipping leaders?" It was a meaningful time of prayer and sharing. The main takeaway was that we need to lead by example.

The open Minister of Christian Education and Minister of Youth and Young Adults positions were discussed. At this time questions for either ministry area should go to Pastor Tracy. Pastor Tracy will

communicate to the congregation through multiple formats. Will shared an idea for a One Body Initiative. The goal would be to get all churches in Quakertown together for worship.

The directory was reviewed with updates provided to the church secretary. It was decided to remove the word "coordinator" in spots where it is unnecessary as well as removing "Open" from ministries that have not had a clear leader for an extended period of time.

The annual organizational chart was reviewed with updates provided to the church secretary. Caroling and Loved Not Lost were added under Outreach while the Blood Drive was removed. Covenant Communities were

Anabaptist

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So we say in our Confession of Faith, "We may participate in government or other institutions of society only in ways that do not violate the love and holiness taught by Christ and do not compromise our loyalty to Christ. We witness to the nations by being that 'city on a hill' which demonstrates the way of Christ."

We would be wise to reconsider our own affiliations. In what ways does your employer demand allegiance that belongs only to Christ? In what ways does our government, schools, insurance, or banks compromise our loyalty to Christ? What about Little League or travel sports? What about Hollywood or Disney? What about cable, internet, and phone subscriptions?

These are not easy questions, but each day let us turn from evil and do good.

added under Community Life. Wednesday Evening Coordinator was removed from Christian Education. VBS was moved from Christian Education to Youth and Young Adults.

The Anabaptist Bible Project for the creation of a study Bible celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist Reformation was discussed. There were ideas for participating in this project.

Rob Good will no longer post sermons on the website. Pastor Tracy will do that for now until we find someone else.

Shannon Longacre will meet with Pastor Tracy and Pastor Nathan to discuss Covenant Communities and the Common Understandings of the covenant with the congregation.