

Ministry Team Highlights: Fostering Growth and Addressing Challenges

In a recent Ministry Team meeting, ministers gathered to discuss important topics and make significant strides towards fostering growth and addressing challenges within our congregation. The meeting was marked by thought-provoking discussions, inspiring updates, laughter, and a shared commitment to create a thriving and supportive community.

The meeting began with an impactful reading of Matthew 11:25-30 by Pastor Nathan, which set the stage for a conversation on an often overlooked issue—burnout. It was a candid discussion that shed light on the feelings of guilt associated with anxiety and the importance of rest in our lives. Shannon added an interesting perspective, highlighting how rest is often respected more in cultures outside of the United States. The ministers present expressed their concerns about the reluctance to address burnout openly, noting a prevailing sense that if they don't shoulder every task, it may not get done. This led to an exploration of the delicate balance between managing expectations and the need for moments of pause and reflection. Pastor Nathan encouraged everyone to consider what changes they could make to eliminate burnout, encouraging a shift in mindset and a commitment to sustainable practices.

Amidst the discussions on burnout, there was cause for celebration as the Ministry Team shared several encouraging updates within our congregation. Wendell and Katie Gehman's upcoming leadership of clubs promises to create opportunities

for growth and fellowship among our young families. The engagement with "Growth Matters," a valuable resource within our community, was heartening to see. Cindy Weaver's resourcefulness in saving supplies from a previous 5K event demonstrated the spirit of stewardship and creativity present among our congregation. The cleanup along Rosedale Road reflected our commitment to caring for the environment and our community. The success of the Pinewood Derby brought joy and camaraderie to participants of all ages. Furthermore, progress is being made on the installation of a camera for the playground area, in order to create a more welcoming presence for members of the community. The newly formed One Body Initiative group continues to grow, with the goal of creating a community worship service with other congregations in the Quakertown area. We express our gratitude to Kathy Mease for her willingness to continue overseeing decorating, which adds beauty and warmth to our worship spaces.

While celebrating these achievements, the Ministry Team also addressed challenges and considered important factors that lie ahead. The team deliberated on how to engage and involve our young adults in church life over the summer, recognizing the need to create meaningful connections and foster their active participation. In addition, the Church Board is exploring the reshaping of the Ministry Team, aiming to optimize operations and ensure the best possible use of our

time and talents. Prompt communication and planning were emphasized as the team acknowledged the importance of releasing the Worship Schedule earlier for the third quarter due to the Israel trip.

During the meeting, Pastor Tracy shared insights on meeting expectations and establishing a rhythm for the team's gatherings. To ensure the presence of all members, the September meeting was tentatively rescheduled to September 21, with a possible joint session alongside the Church Board. Pastor Nathan also reminded everyone of his upcoming Sabbatical, which will provide him with a well-deserved period of rest and rejuvenation. The team decided to review the anniversaries and birthdays on the monthly calendars, ensuring those listed are still accurate and active in the life of our congregation. Lastly, the upcoming Covenant Sunday/Membership Renewal Process was discussed, a significant event that invites us to reflect on our commitment to the community and renew our bonds as members of this vibrant congregation.

Stay tuned for more updates and opportunities to engage as we Connect For a Purpose.

Swamp Mennonite Church
2125 Rosedale Road
Quakertown, PA
18951-4013
Email: info@justswamp.com
www.facebook.com
Phone: (215) 536-7928



What Is An Anabaptist, Part 8 by Pastor Nathan

As we conclude our series on the Schleithem Confession, we come to the seventh and final point of agreement reached by the Anabaptist leaders in 1527. This point addresses the issue of swearing oaths. This was a controversial topic in the 16th century that still has implications today.

Growing up in a Mennonite church I struggled to understand the emphasis on not swearing oaths. When I first returned to the Mennonite church as an adult, I was surprised that we have a whole article in our Confession of Faith about it. It felt outdated, out of context, and irrelevant. I have come to understand that this is really an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Taking the teachings of Jesus seriously and interpreting all of Scripture through these teachings was an important part of the Anabaptist Reformation and continues to be important to us today.

In the 16th century, it was common to swear oaths of loyalty to the government, church, or other authorities. However, Anabaptists believed that oaths were unnecessary. They felt that taking an oath went against the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This was an extreme political stance in their day! Refusing to swear oaths was seen as a threat to the established authorities. Because of this stance, many Anabaptists were persecuted and even executed.

One example is the story of

Dirk Willems He was a Dutch Anabaptist who lived in the 16th century. After being imprisoned for his faith, Willems was able to escape. He climbed out of a window and crossed a frozen pond. A guard, noticing his escape and chasing after him, fell through the ice. Despite the danger to himself, Willems turned back and rescued the guard.

Though grateful, the guard still arrested Willems and took him back to prison. There, he was given the choice to swear an oath of loyalty to the government or be executed. Willems refused to take the oath, citing his belief that Christians should not swear oaths. He was sentenced to death by burning at the stake.

Willems' story became a symbol of the Anabaptist commitment to nonviolence and refusal to swear oaths. Willingly standing by his convictions in the face of death is an example of what it means to follow Jesus' teachings.

The Mennonite church has a long history of not swearing oaths, particularly in court. This practice is rooted in Jesus' teaching to let our yes be yes and our no be no. Honesty and integrity are to be emphasized and practiced in everything that we say and do. However, swearing an oath implies that one's word is not trustworthy. Instead, Mennonites have traditionally affirmed their commitment to tell the truth in court as an alternative to taking an oath. This practice is seen as a way of demonstrating their faithfulness to God and their fellow human

beings, while also honoring the teachings of Jesus.

In modern-day society, the issue of swearing oaths remains particularly relevant in business and legal matters. For Mennonites, who are committed to truth-telling and avoiding oaths, this can pose a challenge. In the business world, contracts are often signed with an oath or affirmation that the information provided is true and accurate.

Some Mennonites may choose to sign contracts without the oath. Others may add a statement that affirms their commitment to truth-telling. Some may also seek legal counsel to determine if there is a way to sign a contract without taking an oath. This is particularly challenging in situations where the oath is a requirement by law.

Similarly, the pledge of allegiance presents a challenge. While many Americans view the pledge as a patriotic duty, Mennonites have traditionally chosen not to say it. This is based on two things. First, the belief that allegiance should only be given to God, not to a country or government. And second, the belief that making a pledge is similar to taking an oath, therefore violating the teachings of Jesus. Our current Confession of Faith states: "Throughout history, human governments have asked citizens to swear oaths of allegiance. As Christians, our first allegiance is to God. In baptism we pledge our loyalty to Christ's

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Lenape Asks PA Mennonites for Land to Bury Their Ancestors *by Eileen Kinch*

The Mennonite Heritage Center, a Conference Related Ministry (CRM) in Harleysville, PA, welcomed the Lenape (Delaware) tribe of Bartlesville, OK, on April 12. After a potluck supper with local Mennonites, Chief Brad KillsCrow, tribal elder John Thomas, and tribal historic preservation officer Susan Bachor presented their request: land to bury their ancestors.

Since 1990, the Native American Graves and Protection and Repatriation Act has required that museums and universities return Indigenous human remains and funerary items after consulting with descendants and tribal organizations. As Indigenous groups receive the bones of their ancestors, however, some tribes face the next question: where to bury them.

Mennonites arrived in southeastern Pennsylvania in 1683 and many now live on the Lenape ancestral homeland, which encompasses greater Philadelphia, New Jersey, and parts of New York.

"We have no presence in our homeland," KillsCrow said. "How do we put our ancestors back in the ground?"

The Lenape have already worked with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to bury about 200 ancestors at Pennsbury Manor, William Penn's country estate in Morrisville, in 2022. But thousands still need burial space.

Addressing the crowd of 120 gathered in the Mennonite Heritage Center barn, KillsCrow said, "Our ancestors helped you. Your ancestors helped us. I humbly ask if there is anything

you can do." He suggested a few acres, preferably an open meadow in a remote location. The Lenape would like to bury their ancestors with traditional ceremonies.

The Lenape had considered burying their ancestors in Oklahoma, KillsCrow said, but tribal elders pointed out these ancestors never lived in Oklahoma. The Lenape settled there in the 1860s after gradual displacement from Pennsylvania by European expansion and then forced removal by the U.S. government. The Lenape want to honor their ancestors, whose bones have been kept in museums and other institutions, by bringing them home.

The event took place after a year of conversation between John Thomas, a Lenape tribal elder, and John L. Ruth, a noted historian of Mennonites in eastern Pennsylvania. The two men first met in 2022 at the Perkiomen Valley School District's dedication of the Lenape Arboretum. The southeastern Pennsylvania school district partners with Ursinus College on the Welcome Home Project, which honors the history and culture of the Lenape people.

As Ruth and Thomas talked, they discovered they had common roots in southeastern Pennsylvania. Ruth's Mennonite family has lived in the area since the early 1700s. Thomas' ancestors lived on the same land for thousands of years before that. Eventually, Ruth said, "My people have been living on your land for 300 years. We didn't run you off or kill you. We prospered here. We have freedom. What can we do to help you?"

Thomas responded, "We need a

place to bury our ancestors."

Ruth began to lay groundwork with Mosaic Mennonites. In November, Ruth introduced Thomas and his wife, Faye, to about 80 people gathered at the Salford (Harleysville, PA) Mennonite meetinghouse. Ruth also gave a talk at the Mennonite Heritage Center about his own journey with Lenape history.

At the April 12 meeting, Bachor, the tribal historic preservation officer, said it is not appropriate for ancestors to be buried in Mennonite church graveyards. She also requested Mennonites not offer land with a known history. "We also have to look out for everybody's historic preservation," she said. Archaeological research is more expensive for lands with known histories.

The evening ended with John Ruth leading the group in singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds." At a follow-up discussion on April 25 at the Mennonite Heritage Center, attendees reflected on the conversation with the Lenape and discussed possible ways to continue Lenape-Mennonite dialogue and to respond to the land request.

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Church Board Highlights

Board Vice-Chair – Laura Rush brought the meeting to order. Pastor Nathan offered the devotional by reading from the book, "Humilitas", spoke about profoundly disagreeing while deeply honoring those around us, and read from Luke 19. This was followed with an opening prayer.

The minutes from the Church Board meeting of March 23 were reviewed and approved. The MEP list of names for participation was presented and approved. Students participating include: Sadie Commons, Will Commons, Franklin Cooper, Iris Cooper, Sarah Haas, Caleb Snedigar, Esther Snedigar, Isaac Snedigar, Rachel Snedigar.

Pastor Nathan reviewed the Leadership Structure Review process. Any by-law changes would need to go to the congregation. The main question

was what the board needs to do before September. It was decided that all information is needed to make a decision once the full board is present. Nothing will be done to address this before September. In addition, he opened discussion on Parts 3 and 4 from the book, "Discipleship that Fits". It was mentioned that the Social Context, groups in the 20-70 size range, seemed like a new concept. The Covenant Community process helped many people to connect with others in the Personal Context, groups of 4-12. However, for some Covenant Communities was a negative experience. The board reviewed the Church Covenant, Covenant Community Process, and the working document from last year's Leadership Retreat. The Covenant Community Process did not adequately review the Common

Understandings of the Covenant. However, the board is not sure that doing more with the congregation to review the Common Understandings would be helpful right now. There was affirmation of the idea of updating the covenant with summarized values, one or two word statements that summarize what we value. It was decided to review the Common Understandings of the Covenant at Leadership Retreat before moving forward with submitting anything to the congregation for review.

Finally, Pastor Nathan spoke of the upcoming discernment process in August, which will happen while he is on sabbatical. The board will need to decide at the July meeting which positions we are trying to fill and which are being left open. Pastor Tracy offered the Closing Prayer.

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community, a commitment that takes precedence over obedience to any other social and political communities."

This has been a contentious issue for Mennonites, particularly during times of war when patriotism is emphasized. During World War I Mennonites faced significant pressure to conform to the expectations of the government and participate in the war effort. Many refused to participate, citing their religious beliefs. This led to significant persecution and, in some cases, imprisonment.

This final point of agreement amongst early Anabaptists encourages us to consider our own speech. Do we take our belief in

Jesus and his kingdom seriously enough to discourage our children from pledging allegiance to human governments today? Do we value clarity and honesty? When are we tempted to say one thing but do another? Especially when we are relating to our children, strangers, or those we do not trust, do we still choose to follow the way of Jesus in honesty and integrity? Jesus, when he was wrongly accused the night of his crucifixion, chose the simplicity of silence rather than caving to the temptation to lie or defend himself against false accusations. When Pilate asked him point blank, "Are you the King of the Jews?" he simply responded, "You have said so."

This challenges us to consider how we respond to accusations or misunderstandings, and whether we prioritize honesty and integrity over our desire to be right or defend ourselves. As followers of Jesus, we are called to speak the truth in love and let our yes be yes and our no be no. May we be inspired by the courage and conviction of the early Anabaptists to live out these values in our daily lives.

