Winter Youth Retreat at The Loft

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Youth Snow Tubing

Clubs

GROWTH MATTERS
SWAMP MENNONITE CHURCH
Volume 17 Number 2 March/April 2026

For the love of God by Nathan Good

Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But what does it mean to love God?

In Psalm 50, we are presented with a picture of God in all of his power and greatness. He is the Mighty One who calls the earth into orbit around the sun. When he comes near, a wildfire goes before him, preparing the way. He is pictured as the perfect authority, who always does what is right, coming to judge the deeds of people.

What does God judge? What is it that God looks for? What is pleasing to God?

We might assume that God wants worship. This glorious, powerful being, the creator and sustainer of all that is, surely his greatest desire is for all glory to be given to him.

However, he says, "I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me." These were their acts of worship. They were a people worshipping God regularly. This is not God's concern in his judgement.

In fact, he goes on to remind them that every wild animal is, in fact, his. The cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. God does not need what is already his.

Worship and thanksgiving are not wrong, but they are not enough. God goes on to say, "sacrifice thank offerings…fulfill your vows." Loving God is not simply about worship, about what we say with our mouths, it is about covenant, what we do with our lives.

What good is it if we memorize Scripture and sing songs of praise, but ignore the hungry, the homeless, the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan? What do we do when we see an opportunity to make money by taking advantage of someone else? How do we respond when a relationship outside of marriage begins to cross sexual boundaries? What do we say about people we don't like when we think no one else can hear?

In answer to all of this, Psalm 50 says, "When you did these things and I kept silent, you thought I was exactly like you. But now I set my accusations before you. Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you."

The Bible consistently condemns religion as a cover for wickedness.

What does it mean to love God? Is it simply about affection and worship?

In James 1 we find that the crown of life is promised to "those who love the Lord". But who is that person? What does it mean to love the Lord?

James goes on to say that people who think they love God, but pay no attention to how they talk about their brother, sister, friend, and enemy, are only deceiving themselves. Their religion is worthless. But "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Loving Jesus is not only a matter of what we think and feel. It is not a matter of heart and mind. Loving Jesus impacts how we live. We begin to love the things that Jesus loves. We love the people that Jesus loves. All of them.

Jesus doesn't just want our worship, he wants our obedience. Jesus wants to send us into our schools and jobs, into our neighborhoods and towns, into our parks and grocery stores, as agents of his love.

Loving Jesus is not simply about what we do at church, it is how we live our lives. And, primarily, it is about how we treat other people and even creation itself.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But in another place, he said that all the law and the prophets can be summed up in how we treat other people, doing to them what we would want them to do to us (Matthew 7:12)

There is a movement in our culture to justify violence with religion. People cover up hatred and do harm to others while claiming to be acting on behalf of Christ, the crucified. May we have discerning hearts to see the difference between true and false religion.

The Bible consistently condemns when people try to use religion to cover up their wickedness.

What does it mean to love Jesus? Not just with your heart, not just in your mind, but with your life.

Church Board Highlights

The meeting started with a devotional, led by Laura Rush, referencing several psalms and proverbs on the topic of trusting God. The board sang the first verse of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and prayed.

Laura welcomed Isaac Longacre to his first meeting. There were many beginning of the year administrative items, such as approving Katie Gehman as Corporate Secretary, Jay Geissinger as Membership Team Representative, and Barry Gehman, Linda Jaindl, and Brandon Longacre as MEP Team. The bylaws and board policy manual were reviewed. Pastor Nathan is following up on a slight discrepancy in two policies.

2025 end of year financial reports were reviewed. We used to give $10,000 every year to Mennonite Mission Network. When the congregation voted to leave MCUSA in 2022, we renamed this budget line to "Global Missions", with the goal of supporting an organization spreading the gospel around the world. In 2023, the board distributed these funds to Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM). In 2024, Pastor Tracy and Bill Longacre (Mission Outreach Chair) recommended a partnership with Global Disciples. We anticipated contributing to Global Disciples again in 2025, however, there was a communication breakdown, so this line item was never distributed.

The board was brought up to speed on this and decided to disburse $5,000 from the General Fund to EMM, pending counsel from Swamp's finance chair (Wendell Gehman) and treasurer (Bill Longacre). This would be in addition to another $10,000 to be given to EMM from the 2026 budget, as approved by the congregation.

Cindy Longacre joined the meeting to share information from a seminar on security planning for houses of worship, with a focus on responding to active shooter situations. A discussion followed and covered current emergency measures, the tension between trusting in the Lord and acting with wisdom, and the pros and cons of developing a specific active shooter plan versus a broader emergency plan. The board will review relevant risk factors, statistics, and security plans from other congregations and continue discussion and discernment at the next meeting.

Pending the congregational vote to affiliate with LMC, the board needed to decide who would fulfill the Conference Minister elements of our by-laws. Currently, Mike Clemmer and Josh Meyer are filling the role. It was noted that if the congregation votes to affiliate with LMC, Mike Clemmer would become our bishop. The board decided to discontinue the contract with Josh Meyer, Mosaic LEADership Minister.

The board discussed the recent CrossGen event. Attendance was lower this year from all congregations. Discussion centered around participating at least one more year to be able to better assess attendance trends but also holding a worship service at the Swamp building for those who choose not to attend CrossGen.

The board approved the Trustee recommendation to rent the building to the Classical Conversations Homeschool Group for another year. This group uses the building from 8am-4pm every Tuesday.

The board discussed the visioning process for next year. Laura asked the following questions: What role should church board play in the process? What are we looking for from a visioning time? She encouraged the board to view this as our visioning process, not as Pastor Nathan's visioning process. There was discussion around not overcomplicating it, looking at deficiencies and how we can do those things better, developing a sense of belonging, honoring our congregational culture, creating a culture where "outsiders" can feel like "insiders", and increasing our ability to reach out to the community. It was suggested to form a sub-committee of the board, including some board members as well as a cross-section of the congregation, to develop this visioning process with Nathan. This group should include people who are visionaries. For the next meeting, Nathan will get some example documents and/or processes from other congregations.

Due to scheduling conflicts, future meetings were rescheduled for Thursday, May 28 and Tuesday, July 7.

Ministry Highlights by Pastor Tracy

At the beginning of our February Ministry Team meeting Pastor Nathan read a passage from Acts 4. In that story God was up to something, and Peter and John couldn't help but spread the Good News. "As for us, we can't stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

These ministry highlights serve as recognition that God is up to something among us at Swamp. Here is what I have seen and heard over the past couple months.

- I have seen people come together for our Wednesday evening activities. I love the fact that we gather around tables for a meal together. There is a table of boys that allowed me to sit with them recently under one condition… that I would do a cartwheel. I still owe them that cartwheel, but I haven't forgotten! I walk up and down the halls and hear voices of kids, youth, and adults who are sharing life with each other. Some talk as they clean up from the meal, others jump into a game or a lesson. Some are behind the scenes, others are leading a group. All are evidence of the grace and presence of God in community.
- I have seen Worship Planning Team lean into planning for Lent and Easter. We invited David Krauss to meet with us and share his vision for a Passover Seder here at Swamp on Good Friday. David reminded us that God has made appointments with His people throughout the year! We are excited to experience this together.
- I have heard the Fellowship Committee meeting and processing ideas in new and creative ways in order to provide spaces and opportunities for our church family to both come together and also invite others to "*come and see*" (John 1:46).
- I have seen a group gather to discern what would be the best way to build intergenerational community this summer. I heard this group get excited for what God might be up to in all of this. We think you're going to like what's coming!
- I have seen the youth group and young adult group enjoy snow tubing together at Blue Mountain. I have heard stories of how these groups are building momentum and community as they discover their identity and who they are within these different groups.
- I have seen the faithfulness of the group that comes together to set up and serve at the Widow/Widower events. I have heard stories of how this group is growing, and how the event in January was such an encouragement to those who participated.
- I have seen people contributing resources, books, and time to continually enhance our church library.
- I have seen people serving sacrificially behind the scenes, as well as up front, to make this church a robust and healthy expression of the Body of Christ.
- I have seen our Swamp youth group invite the youth group from Line Lexington Mennonite Church to join them on the winter retreat. I heard them getting to know each other around the dinner table. They played games together, hung out together, listened, learned, and worshipped together during the sessions.

What have you seen? What have you heard?

We'd love you to share those stories with us!

Trustee Update

We are extremely grateful for the response of the congregation, which has donated over $90,000 towards the Air-Conditioning replacements we will be doing in the Spring of this year. God has truly blessed us through the generosity of our members.

The big snowstorm and subsequent cold temperatures caused a significant ice damming issue on the roof along the front of the church. We have had this problem at the same place several times in the past and this has been a recurring issue over the years whenever we have similar conditions. Water did come in and caused some relatively minor damage in the hallway in front of the bathrooms. We had a group of volunteers meet at the church and shovel the snow and ice off the roof so we are hoping no further damage will occur, but we will need to do some work on the roof this coming summer to try to avoid this happening in the future. We are not entirely sure of the best solution at this time, but we will do everything we can to get it resolved.

As always, if you see anything that needs Trustee attention, let any Trustee know. They are Ken Longacre, Brian Rush, Terry Landis, and Will Sadler.