

Faith Formation *(continued from page 3)*

What is the invitation of the church at this time? As a conference we need to continue to ask the question of how we are passing on the faith and work of the church to the next generation. How are we doing as a church in modeling a self-giving faith centered in Jesus Christ? We

will need to place our trust and hope in a revealing God who has been faithful for many generations. We trust that the same Spirit that is at work in our lives will continue to live and move in our children and the next generation of the gathered body of Christ.

Trustee Update

We will be replacing the copier in the office in December, which is when the service contract expires on the 7 year old copier that we currently have. We were informed by our current service company Advanced Business Equipment, that they would not be able to extend the service contract after this year because of parts availability on our current copier. We got quotes from two companies for either purchasing or leasing a new copier, and have made a decision to go with a new copier and service agreement with Altek. Their purchase option and service contract was the least expensive option when looking at the expected 7 year life of the copier. The new copier will cost a little over \$7,000.

We are currently gathering information about options for replacing the kitchen floor. No final

decisions have been made yet, but we are hoping to have the floor replaced by the end of this year. We have also been asked to look into the possibility of changing the hot water system to an on-demand type water heater, so that we have hot water quicker, and will not run out so quickly, as it currently does. We will be looking into that possibility in the near future also.

As always, if you see something that needs the Trustee's attention, please either fill out a 'blue slip' that is located on Carl's desk, or let one of the Trustee's know. (Ken Longacre, Terry Landis, Linda Martin, Will Sadler)



Ministry Team Highlights

The first hour of the meeting was spent joining the cleanup effort at Johanna Ziegler's.

Monthly devotion continuing based upon the book *Faithful Presence* with topics on the Discipline of Fivefold Gifting and what it means to practice faithful presence by mourning with those mourning and laughing with those laughing.

Encouraging signs included - involvement of new members; upcoming fellowship activities; the VBS

program is fast approaching and looking towards the Wednesday Evening Programs starting in September; successful Youth Auction earlier this year and seeing the congregation interaction.

Other topics highlighted and addressed featured - The picture selection process for the new website included asking specific individuals to take additional photos; an Iron Pigs baseball game night; the Fellowship Committee looking at having speakers for the Men's Event in

This and That

By Arlene Yothers

Thanks for the help of the congregation at the Souderton Mennonite Homes Chicken BBQ. Thanks for the bakers, buyers, prayers and lookers! Thanks for all who participated in the book sale at the Heritage Center. Thanks for the donations and prayers for the Worm Project. These organizations depend on people like YOU.

Here are some dates to mark on your calendar:

September 15, 6 pm.-- Franconia Heritage Banquet & Conf. Center-- Come and learn more about The Worm Project and get a light meal. Freewill offering, reservations needed; phone: 267-932-6050 ext. 123 or email: info@wormproject.org. Please give name and number of people attending.

October 6--Apple Butter Frolic at the Heritage Center--more details will come closer to the time. Consider helping at the beverage stand.

November 9 and 10--Holiday Bazaar at the Souderton Mennonite Homes. Consider making baked goods for this event.

Please read the articles that come in your church mailbox about these groups. For more information, please contact me. I'm willing to talk and listen.

October and Ladies' Tea in December; it was decided to contact members of Mission Outreach about supporting Nate Sims and Cru Ministry for a 3 year increment; the membership list presented by the Pastoral Care Team was reviewed and approved.



GROWTH MATTERS

SWAMP MENNONITE CHURCH

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From Pastor Nathan

What is your home life like? There are many ways to organize our lives, schedules, and relationships. Some of us are single and live alone, others live in multi-generational households. Some are married, others divorced, some are widowed, others remarried. Some don't have a home of their own but bounce from house to house "couch-surfing".

But no matter who we consider our "family", we must make decisions about how we will live together with others. Everyday we choose to eat with others or alone, we choose to go for a walk or watch a movie, we choose to work 30 hours in a week or 80 hours. But we do not make any of these decisions about how to live in a vacuum, we make them in relationship with those we are closest to, those we live with, those we call family.

We are each members of God's household. We are called to grow together in Christ, becoming more like Jesus in our daily lives and activities. We do this by celebrating the free gift of grace that we receive from God, by encouraging one another to grow in godliness, and by proclaiming Christ's victory over sin and death through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just like in our homes with those that make up our immediate families, in the household of God there are many ways to live together, many decisions about how we celebrate, encourage, proclaim, and minister to one another and the world around us. Decisions about what activities are best done as a large group or as individuals and smaller groups, about when we need to rest as a congregation and when we need to work, decisions about when to serve, where to serve, and how to serve.

So, from the very beginning, God placed leaders over his household to cast vision for how the church might live and serve together. Within our own congregation we have divided

these leadership tasks between Church Board and Ministry Team. Church Board asks the question, "What will this congregation do?" And even more fundamentally, "Who is God calling us to be, as a congregation?" Ministry Team then takes this vision for who God is calling us to be and what things he is calling us to do and asks the question, "How can we best get the ministry done?"

If you have ideas about where God might be calling us as a congregation, or if you see better ways for us to organize ourselves for ministry, perhaps God is calling you to be a leader within this church.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:1 that, "Those who want to be leaders in the church desire a good thing." However, leadership is not open to just anyone who might have an idea or a criticism relating to how things have been done in the past. In the pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus), we see that the first thing Paul did after planting a new church was to select leaders within that church to help make decisions and ensure that the congregation continued in the faith, trusting in God for salvation and living as witnesses to God's power and presence. But he goes to great lengths to express what qualifies someone for such a position, saying that they must "first be tested" to be sure that there is "nothing against them" (1 Timothy 3:10). I would encourage you to read these qualifications at length in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but here is a quick summary.

Leaders ought to:

- Have a good reputation inside and outside the church
- Be faithful in their marriage, if married
- Not be given to drunkenness, not violent, and not in love with money
- Have a sound mind

- Love all people (including strangers and enemies) and be able to communicate well with others
- Be the type of person who resolves conflict rather than stirring it up
- Manage their own affairs well (schedule, finances, relationships, commitments)
- Be mature in their faith (not recently converted)
- Hold firmly to the message of the good news of Jesus as it has been taught

From September 2-23 we will be accepting nominations for three leadership positions in our church: Church Board chair (serves two years as vice-chair followed by two years as chair), Church Board member-at-large, and Minister of Outreach.

If you think there is someone in our congregation that God is calling to lead in any of these areas, please fill out a nomination form. If you are personally interested in leading in one of these areas, please fill out a nomination form with your name and also come talk with me to further discuss your interest and passions. Also, this year we are opening nominations up to all members, no matter what position that person might already serve in our church. If someone is qualified and God is calling them to take up one of these roles, we do not want to stand in their way.

Once we have received the nominations there is a discernment process with the nominees and then there will be a selection or affirmation ballot for the congregation to confirm those who will lead us into the future. May God show us the right persons within our congregation that his Spirit will fill with creativity, motivation, energy, and a vision for where Jesus is leading us into the future.

Reflections From Pastor Tami

As many of you know this summer has been a VERY BUSY one for our family. Moving might sound great in theory, but actually DOING it is a whole different ballgame! Selling a home can make you feel as if you are back in Middle School passing notes to your special crush, asking the question, "Do you like me? Check yes or no". Then waiting anxiously to hear back. Except in this case it was more like, "Please like our home as much as we do!". Unfortunately, most of the time the answer came back as, "Showed well. Nice place, but NOT what we are looking for." With each response I would feel a bit less hopeful and a bit more dejected. Moving is not just physically demanding, but an emotional game as well.

My dilemma, even if not done consciously, was I had allowed part of my identity to be wrapped up in other people's perception of our home. The idea of someone liking or disliking our home was in some strange way linked to them liking or disliking me. I know that might sound like a bit silly, but

the whole experience left me asking the question, "What other things have I placed my identity in?"

Since the beginning of creation, God has told us he "created human-kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27) Even before our conception God knew us and had a plan for our lives: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." (Jeremiah 1:5) Later in scripture we are called a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), children of God (1 John 3: 1-2), and temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20). God is longing for us to take up each of these characteristics and live into them fully. This is our purpose. This is our calling. This is who we are created to be. However, too many times we see ourselves through different lenses. We answer the question, "Who are you?" through our material possessions, our job descriptions, our children's successes or failure or other people's

expectations. The last time someone asked you the question, "What do you do?" how did you answer? Can you imagine responding, "I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm a child of the one true King."?

As summer winds down, school begins, and seasons change, I wonder how we could daily take time to reflect on WHO God created us to be and HOW we can begin to see ourselves through His eyes? Are there scriptures you could memorize and meditate on that would remind you of who God created to be? Can you journal your thoughts throughout the day, focusing on the positive things God is doing in your life? Could you stop a moment and pray over your loved ones for the gifts and talents God has created in them? Let's challenge ourselves over the next couple of months to consciously find ways to be a blessing to each other and others as we "encourage one another and build each other up". (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Church Board Notes

Laura Rush started her devotion with "being with" and "mind of a child". She asked about virtues and what your children have taught you. In addition, she posed questions about "What does it mean to be present with children?" and "What makes it difficult to be present?" This was followed by prayer.

The minutes of the previous meeting on May 17 were reviewed and approved.

Pastor Nathan asked for questions for the Leadership Retreat which will be held on Saturday, October 27 from 9 am to 3 pm.

Ken noted that giving continues to be over budget. In addition, the scholarship fund has not been used. It was suggested to encourage parents to consider sending children to Christian School. Finally, it was reported that the Trustee Fund balance is low due to some "surprises".

Ken spoke of the new Fire Alarm Procedure. It was decided to advise the congregation by speaking during the Celebrating our Lives portion of the worship service.

Lowell offered an update from the Youth Task Force. There was discussion about where to go from here. It was decided that Lowell will meet with the youth in September as a final part of the board review process.

Wendell is continuing his work with the Columbarium Committee.

The role of the Minister of Outreach was reviewed noting that it should be a position of passion or vision with the ability to manage existing programs. The Board discussed the best way to communicate what authority they have stepping into the role. What is the best way to encourage members to be involved in Outreach. Added new requirements to the job description.

Lowell met with Mike Clemmer to discuss the logistics of the potential merging of Franconia and Eastern District Conference. There are currently 5 major differences between the conferences. It was decided to update the congregation at the annual member meeting in December.



Faith Formation of the Next Generation

By John Stoltzfus,
Conference Youth Minister
(originally appeared in the Franconia
Conference Intersectings Newsletter
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Psalm 133 states, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" My heart felt full and grateful after recently meeting for the last time with some of the youth pastors from both Eastern District and Franconia Conference congregations. This group of persons representing seasoned and new pastors and sponsors invested in youth ministry has met together on a regular basis for many years. To me, they embody the strengths and gifts of God to our broader church collaborating around a unified purpose of passing on a vibrant and living faith to the next generation. We have learned much in our journey together and deeply enjoyed one another's company along the way.

We have discovered that we can do much more together than on our own. Particularly as the landscape of the church changes, we will need to find more ways to partner together rather than become isolated in ideological or theological siloes. The church has an opportunity to offer a compelling vision of God's reconciliation to the next generation and beyond if we can find ways to come together in genuine humility and trust. Our youth need to see the church model a way to be authentic community together, when so much in our world is building walls of separation.

One of the highlights of our monthly gatherings is hosting one another in different churches. We

value the opportunity to be stretched and encouraged as we share the challenges and joys of our respective ministry contexts. As our conference continues to expand our borders, we can capitalize on the gifts of our diversity. We have mutual gifts and perspectives to offer in our churches in Philly, Allentown, Souderton, throughout Pennsylvania and beyond — in Vermont, New York, California, and around the globe. These gifts and perspectives can help our youth grow in their understanding of the expansive love and work of God in all people and places. Our youth need the skills of building relationships of understanding and mutual respect that cross boundaries of race, theology, culture and more. Initiatives such as the [Walking the Walk](#) program of Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia or [Taproot Gap Year](#) birthed from Philadelphia Praise Center can offer transformative faith experiences for our youth and young adults.



As we meet together we are encouraged in the reality that we are not alone in this work. Our task is to initiate young persons into mature Christian faith through relationships with numerous adults who join them in living the way of authentic discipleship. As elders we can offer youth friendship, guidance and listening ears as they make the passage through adolescence into spiritual maturity. This is the work of the whole church and not just a youth pastor or a few youth sponsors in the congregation.

Youth ministry cannot be done in a vacuum. As we consider forming faith in our young people, we cannot think

that the process of discipleship begins in ninth grade, or can be relegated to a youth pastor. Youth ministry is only part of the whole life-cycle of faith formation embedded within a multi-faceted approach between home and church and the broader community.

Research shows that those youth who go off to college and beyond are more likely to hold onto their faith and become involved in church as adults based on the commitment and priority that church and spiritual matters played for their parents. Youth ministry has to include parents by supporting parents in their own faith and by helping parents model and communicate faith to their own teenagers. In addition, one of the most common factors for youth who stick with faith and church into adulthood is that they had at least five significant relationships with adults as a youth. Might the future of youth ministry be less programmatic and become more embedded into the fabric of the overall mission and life of the church?



One of the things my wife and I have appreciated about our time at Plains Mennonite Church is the investment by the whole congregation in the life and faith of our children. When we were looking for a church home, we were not looking for a church with a dynamic youth program as much as we were looking for a community of believers modeling an active faith that incorporated the nurture of children and youth into the whole life of the congregation.

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