

# West Swamp News

Volume 9, Issue 3

April/May '20

## Important Note from the Ministry Team

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### FYI

- Remember to laugh. Remember to look for spots of joy. Laughter lowers our blood pressure, calms our anxiety. (And if you shake like I do when I laugh hard, you probably burn some calories too! L.R.)

Based on what public health officials are recommending, the stay home orders for our area, and guidance from Eastern District and Franconia Conference leaders, **we will not have gathered worship at the church building at least through May 3rd.** We will continue to have worship resources including a video sermon made available each week. We are currently working on creative ways to get some of those resources to members who do not have internet access.

~ Pastor Michael and the Ministry Team

## The work of reconciliation in Quakertown

*This article by Sue Conrad Howes can be found on the Eastern District & Franconia Conference website.*

Over time, the Holy Spirit works, making the things that divide us seem so much less important than the things that unite us.

In 1847, a church split occurred over the style of coat worn by the pastor, keeping minutes at church meetings, and whether Sunday School was acceptable. We may laugh and even scoff at the topics that caused the split some 173 years ago, but the lines drawn during that

split have been felt until just recently; in November 2019, Franconia Conference and Eastern District Conference voted to become one new conference, a reconciliation that went into effect in February 2020.

In the history books, the conference split was rooted in the history of two congregations: West Swamp Mennonite Church (which helped begin Eastern District) and Swamp Men-

nonite Church (which broke away from West Swamp and stayed with Franconia Conference). In the 19th cen-

*(Continued on page 8)*



Pastor Nathan Good (left) of Swamp Mennonite and Pastor Michael Howes (right) of West Swamp Mennonite serve communion to members of both congregations on March 1, 2020. Photo by Sue Conrad Howes

## Pastor's Corner: Anchored to Jesus

We are living in unprecedented times, as we journey together through the coronavirus global pandemic. In just a few weeks we have gone from living our normal lives of work, home and worship to social distancing, working from home, school cancellations, and worshipping through electronic resources. And we are greatly tempted in these days to give in to fear, anxiety and worry - fear of contracting COVID-19, anxiety about the unknown, worry for those we love. Some of you are experiencing economic stress because of the pandemic: job loss or difficulty making ends meet.

In times of stress, one of the passages I turn to again and again is in the book of Hebrews, chapter 13: **“God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.” Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for-**

**ever.”**

In the midst of so much uncertainty, we are anchored by the chain of God’s love to the unchanging Jesus. I encourage you, as you experience fear, anxiety and worry, to focus on the reality that you are continually surrounded by the all-powerful love of God, and practice releasing those negative emotions and resting in Jesus.

If you are in financial need, please contact the church. In response to the coronavirus crisis, Everence has doubled the amount of matching Sharing Fund resources we can access and expanded the ways in which those funds can be utilized.

I am available to you. If I can help in any way, please reach out by phone or text at 717-419-4228 or email at [howes.michael@gmail.com](mailto:howes.michael@gmail.com). Please continue to practice good hygiene and social distancing. As I write this, it is



uncertain when we will be able to meet again for worship at the church building, but until then we will continue to provide weekly worship resources via email. I miss seeing you all but I am confident God will faithfully bring us out on the other side of these challenges. Know you are loved and prayed for.

Peace,  
**Pastor Michael**

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## Worship: What does it look these days?

We are approaching one of the most important weeks in the church calendar: Holy Week. It starts with Palm Sunday (Apr. 5) when we enact Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, knowing—as he did—that he is riding to his death. On Maundy Thursday (Apr. 9) we usually gather to share a simple meal of soup and bread, and reflect on what Jesus’ death means for us. Some of us attend the Community Good Fri-

day Service. Easter Dawn has been a time to worship jointly with Swamp Mennonite (it would have been at Swamp this year), followed by a joyous celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, culminating in the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

None of that is possible this year. It is a challenge for the Worship Commission to figure ways for us to worship individu-

ally or in our small family groups. We will continue to send resources to use for each Sunday we are apart, and encourage you to use them. We are also working on ways to provide resources to our members who don’t have internet or email.

Until we can be together again, remember that “God’s worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth.” That means anywhere!

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## DISCO: While events are on hold, trust God

The Discipling Commission had been busy working on various events and activities for our members such as the Youth Auction, the April Prayer Breakfast and a new Women's Book club. Unfortunately, current events have put all these activities on hold.

It can be disheartening and frustrating, but we need to put our trust in God that this is temporary. We need to have patience. I

think this current situation is an opportunity to bring us closer. I encourage everyone to reach out to others in our church family by phone or even email and let them know you are thinking about them. It may not seem like much, but it can mean the world to the other person.

Katie Mood will be leading a Women's Book Club meeting bi-weekly on Thursday evenings. The meetings will take place in

the homes of Katie Mood and Jan Wieand. They will be studying Nancy Sleeth's perspective on how God has given us the guide to a "Slower, Simpler, More Sustainable Life" with her book entitled, "Almost Amish." The start date is to be determined. Let Katie know if you are interested. If you are interested in starting your own small group, contact Lori Farrell.

~ *Lori Farrell*

## Creation Care: Recycling

Why Recycle? We have been blessed by God with an EARTH that is our home for now. As Christians, we are led to be caretakers. I would like to see a **Creation Care** effort here at West Swamp!

Did you know that Mennonite USA has a Creation Care website? Check it out to see just how active other Mennonite churches across the United States and Canada are in their communities.

Whitetail Disposal is our current Trash/Recycle service and here are some guidelines they would like to emphasize:

### **Acceptable items:**

*(A detailed list can be found at [whitetaildisposal.com-buckscounty](http://whitetaildisposal.com-buckscounty))*

Paper/Cardboard  
Cartons of any kind  
Rigid Plastic Bottles  
Aluminum & Metal Cans  
Glass

Keep in mind:

- BAD recycling ruins GOOD recycling:
- #1 Cause for recycling contamination is YARD WASTE!
- Rinse and clean recyclables
- NO plastic bags of any kind, NO grocery bags, sandwich bags, and any type of film plastic

DO NOT bag your recyclables—they must be loose when placed in the RECYCLE receptacle. ANY plastic bag even if tossed loose in the recycle bin will CONTAMINATE the entire load of recyclables being collected by Whitetail that day.

### **Items that are NOT Acceptable:**

Loose Plastic Bags & Film  
Styrofoam cups or containers

We have placed a new "PAPER ONLY" tall recycle bin near the mailboxes. Look for two new recycle bins to use in the kitchen area. Items can be rinsed and placed in these bins to dry out before tossing them in the large Recycle Tote outside.

I have placed a two-sided "RECYCLING FAQs" on the bulletin board. If you have any questions or comments, please see me. My hope is that we can learn together how to be better Stewards of the Earth.

~ *Barb Moyer*





## Mission: Certainty in uncertain times

As I try to write this article for the Mission Commission portion of the newsletter, it is obviously difficult with all that is going on with the COVID-19 pandemic. In these times the need for mission is ever increasing. With all the restrictions on gatherings and contact with others, I feel it is futile to try to organize any formal efforts to do mission work. So I would encourage everyone to find mini-missions to do as you are able.

The telephone is still something we can use to check in on people, as Pastor Michael has encouraged us to do. Not only will the person receiving the call be blessed and feel cared for, but you yourself will most likely benefit. As is the case in service trips, like SWAP for instance, those going to “serve” often feel that they themselves have benefited tremendously from the experience. That is why the “S” in SWAP stands for “sharing.” More often than not I come home to my nice “up country” home from a Crossroads board meeting feeling inspired and energized by the things I have heard about being done in a very poor and not ideal section of Philadelphia. I guess I am trying to say: Do what you can for those around you in a safe six foot distancing manner. You and the ones you serve will all be blessed in some way.

I often do not give enough credit to prayer. In times like these that is often the only thing we can do. It may be the only thing, but it is probably the best thing. So please keep our mission partners in your prayers as they are effected by COVID-19 directly or indirectly. Our church camps, Men-O-Lan and Spruce Lake, are unable to host groups for now. Crossroads Community Center in Philly and Ripple in Allentown are unable to function



*Rod checks in with his parents after making calls to several church members.*

like normal. Thankfully the weather has not been very cold recently since the AHUB Code Blue Shelter is not open due to the virus.

These are just a few examples. Another factor is the economic hit these ministries will most likely feel because of job loss or reduction in hours of those that would normally donate to the

work of these organizations. So please keep ministries like these in your prayers.

A word on “social distancing.” I have heard that it is better to talk about this as “physical distancing, social solidarity.” Especially in times like these, we should be social—just not physically close. It means we need to be creative in our ways of staying in touch. And maybe when we do have to go out, it means we smile that much bigger and speak up a bit when we say a warm, “Blessings to you.”

So what is certain in these uncertain times? Thinking way back to my childhood, there is the Sunday School song we probably all learned: Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. In Romans 8:38-39 we have these words: For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else

in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Things are very uncertain in our world right now, **but we can be very, very certain that we are all still very much loved by Christ Jesus our Lord!**

~ Rod Rush

## Stewardship and the new normal

With almost all the news in recent weeks going from bad to worse as the impact of the Corona virus is evidenced, I was encouraged twice this morning.

First, when I had my quiet time with the online Church service, I felt connected and spiritually uplifted.

Second, after viewing the online service, it was off to the church to meet with a couple of the trustees to prepare a deposit of the offerings that were received during the past two weeks. It was a deposit in excess of \$4,500 which, for two weeks, is under what we really need to meet all our commitments but was certainly an indicator that you haven't forgotten that the work

of the Lord must and is still happening.

Stewardship asks that you continue to get your offering envelopes to the church or better yet set up a bill pay online. With that your bank can mail a check from your account to the church which can include your offering envelope number.

Now for some less than encouraging news. The Trustees recently made the decision to take the elevator out of service. In January the elevator stopped functioning and the service technician did a repair to the hydraulic pump. After that people have noticed it was operating more loudly and so a service

technician was called out again in early March. That service call did nothing to fix the problem and since then the elevator performance has deteriorated to the point that we deemed it unsafe. Communication with Otis Elevator has been extremely difficult due to their corporate structure and a change in our contact person that we were not notified about. Without going on for another 200 words, suffice to say, this is a bad situation playing out at a very bad time. Your patience and prayers are very much needed and appreciated as we work through this problem.

~ *Randy Rush*

## Mission: Keep collecting those coins

The April **PA Relief Sale** that raises funds for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is canceled. Also canceled in April are relief sales in Idaho, Nebraska, Kansas, Harvey, ND, and Fresno, CA. March relief sales, like one in Illinois, did not take place either.

MCC Meat Canning events in March and April have been canceled. Last year the Meat Canning project distributed over 800,000 lbs of meat both in the U.S. and overseas.

With many MCC Thrift Stores also currently closed, MCC is one among many ministry and relief organizations that will be hit

hard by the economics of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To do our small part to help out, we encourage you to keep collecting coins! When we are able to once again worship together—in body as well as in spirit—we'll make one last collection for My Coins Count. Never forget, in big and small ways, we can make a difference in the world!



## Staying connected

It's obvious that those of us who use email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., have more opportunities to stay connected and even have some visual contact. While working on this newsletter, I put out a request for people to send me photos and messages of what they are doing these days. Thank you to everyone who responded.

Though this newsletter is published, please continue to send in photos and messages. As one way of keeping our older members who are not tech-savvy connected, I plan to send out a weekly sheet through both email and snail mail to keep us updated on each other. If you do not have

email, you are welcome to call me at church during my regular office hours, or at home other times, and dictate a message for me to include. We want to know how you are doing too!

My son shared with me something he saw on social media, that I want to pass on to you. Instead of talking about "social distancing," let's follow "physical distancing and social solidarity." To me that paints a much more accurate picture of who we are and what we need to do right now!

*~Lynne Rush*

*(More photos on pages 7 & 10)*

### **Karen Parzych:**

No drama with my lamas!



**Gretchen Isaak:** Everyday I go for a walk near my house. I'm also enjoying watching these old TV shows: *The Waltons*, *Family Ties*, and *Little House on the Prairie*.

**Jeff & Penny Rice:** Life hasn't changed a whole lot for me and Jeff! Still have to take care of the horses!! I have decided to paint my kitchen cabinets with my down time. They are looking great! Everybody please stay safe and remember we will get through this!!!

[Note: This picture was obviously not taken during a "shelter at home" time. They went to Lake Tahoe last summer.]







**Sue Howes:** I am at work at St. Luke’s Hospital. Chaplain needs have increased during the past few days and the administration is desiring more chaplain hours. It is a scary time to be working in a hospital, but it is also a honor to be able to offer support, encouragement, and a listening ear to patients & staff

who are dealing so intensely with these realities.

After each shift, I drive home and put all of my clothes into the wash and immediately take a shower before doing anything else.

Beyond nurses and doctors, who do need our prayers, please pray for so many hard working hospital staff: food preparation staff, cleaning/environmental services who are working extra hard to clean and sanitize everything, lab personnel (overwhelmed with resting requests), security, front desk staff, administrators (needing to make difficult decisions), suppliers (trying to keep medical equipment stocked), and so many, many more!



**Barb Moyer:** I've been trying to remember HOPE and enjoying the happy faces of these little pansies (Charlene's [Smoll] teapot)!



**Emily and Ben Rush** decorate “Verna cookies” in preparation for baking. (If you don’t know what “Verna cookies” are, give Joan Hallman or Deb Stevenback a call.)



**Jan Wieand:** This virus has made my work life very crazy. I am in and out of the St. Luke’s hospitals some days and working from home (picture) when possible. I am retiring Apr. 3. I never thought that I would end my 45-year career in healthcare like this!

I would ask for prayer for safety for all the healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients. This is a very stressful time for them.

**So what are YOU doing these days?**  
**Send in a photo**  
**Call in a message**  
**Help us all stay**  
**CONNECTED!**

## Celebrating reconciliation

*(Continued from page 1)*

tury, West Swamp's pastor John Oberholtzer was a leader in the 1847 division. The two congregations are now located just over a mile apart in Quakertown, PA.

As a celebration of the reconciled conference, West Swamp and Swamp congregations worshiped together for two Sundays in March 2020. On March 1, both congregations gathered at West Swamp, enjoyed breakfast together, and worshiped with Pastor Nathan Good of Swamp preaching. The next Sunday, the two congregations worshiped together at Swamp, with Pastor Michael Howes preaching, and a fellowship meal following the service. Members of both churches participated in Scripture reading, worship leading, and music at each service. Perhaps most importantly, communion was celebrated both Sundays, together.



**Children from West Swamp and Swamp gather for children's time on the topic of forgiveness and reconciliation during a joint worship service at Swamp Mennonite on March 8, 2020. Photo by Sue Conrad Howes**

The theme for the two services was reconciliation. On March 1, Pastor Nathan invited the congregations to evaluate our conflicts, acknowledging that we all have them. He encouraged each person to engage our conflicts, for God's sake, and to commit to genuine love. "God is bigger than our disagreements and God's love frees us to love people despite our disagreements," Pastor Nathan said.

"God is impartial," he said. "In a divisive time, we need to be reminded that God is the God of all people. God is not ours; instead, we are God's."

The next Sunday, Pastor Michael invited the congregants to reach out to those in our lives with whom we need reconciliation. Referring to the Old Testament story of Jacob and Esau, Pastor Michael shared that it is not enough to hang back and let the other person make the first step. "Today the Holy Spirit is prompting you to initiate that reconciliation," he encouraged. Pastor Michael focused on the ministry of reconciliation that all of God's people are called to: "God says to us, 'I want to make you an agent of reconciliation.'"

He acknowledged that the ministry of reconciliation is hard work. "Sometimes we need to say, 'I forgive you,' and other times we need to



**Members of Swamp and West Swamp congregations gather around tables and take communion. Photo by Lynne Rush**

say, 'I'm sorry, please forgive me.'"

From the joyful hugs and delightful connections made in the foyers to the active conversations that happened across tables at the meals, you would not have known that these two congregations ever battled with each other to the point of locking each other out of their church building.

Sometimes it takes a long time to partake in the ministry of reconciliation. While these two congregations will return to their regular places of worship next Sunday, both groups welcomed the opportunity to celebrate the work of reconciliation and to commit to being agents of God's reconciliation into the future.



**\*Kid's Page\***



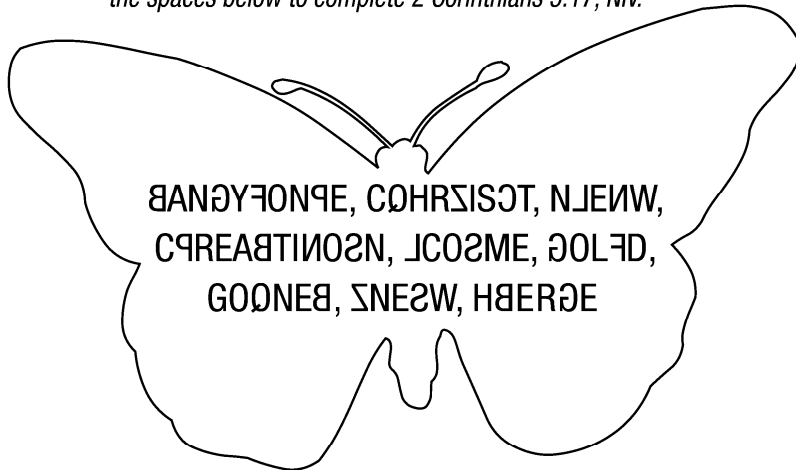
**Transformation POWER**



Just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly,  
God transforms us from old to new.



*Directions: Cross out the backward letters. Write the remaining letters in order in the spaces below to complete 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.*



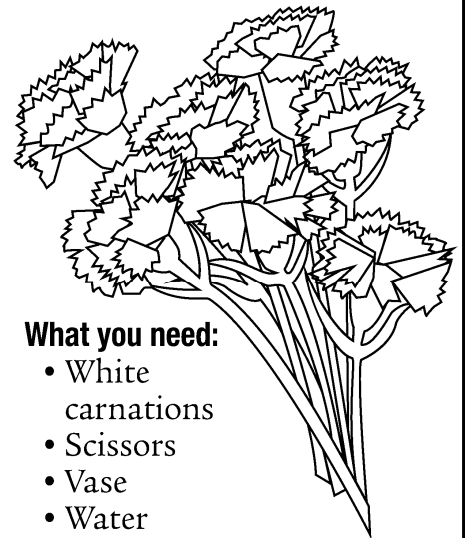
Therefore, if \_\_\_\_\_ is in \_\_\_\_\_,  
the \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_:

The \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_,  
the \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_!

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, NIV

*Scripture* **AND**  
**NATURE**

Conduct a simple experiment to illustrate Easter's meaning.



**What you need:**

- White carnations
- Scissors
- Vase
- Water
- Red food coloring
- Bible

**What you do:**

1. Cut the carnation stems (at an angle) to about 8 inches long.
2. Fill the vase halfway with water. Add 10 drops of food coloring. (More may be needed to darken the water.)
3. Add the cut flowers and observe what happens to the petals over time.
4. Discuss how this is like Jesus' work on the cross. Read 1 Peter 2:22-24 (NIV) and reflect on what his death means for us.
5. To learn more about this experiment, research capillary action.

Answers: anyone, Christ, new, creation, come, old, gone, new, here



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Reflecting God in our  
living, loving and serving

### Pictures from the Mood Farm

Katie Mood shares these photos, showing that life goes on at their farm. Life begins too! They've had three calves born recently, including a set of twins. [I put the photos here since I really can't put anything on the calendar at this time! -L.R.]



## Birthdays

### April

- 4/4 Bev Mellan  
Kimberlee Opdyke
- 4/13 Karen Butenuth  
Cara Riley

### May

- 4/15 Carl Kiesel  
Kyleigh Opdyke  
Edna Rosenberger
- 4/25 Emma Richards
- 4/30 Troy Shelly
- 5/5 Griffin Bear  
Gretchen Isaak  
Tim Scheetz
- 5/6 Stephen Shelly
- 5/7 Tanja Prosock
- 5/11 Jane Burkett
- 5/15 Lee Hallman
- 5/20 Judy High
- 5/22 Matt Mood
- 5/23 Tim Butenuth  
Ruth Rosch
- 5/26 May Keiser
- 5/29 Don Jacobs
- 5/30 Charlene Smoll