

# West Swamp News

Volume 10, Issue 1

February 2021

## The question everyone is asking

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When will we worship together in person again? That question is probably on many of our minds, and the Ministry Team has given the answer much thought and prayer.

Statistics from the PA State Health Department show that although the COVID-10 case count is declining

in Bucks County, it is still significantly higher than in the spring.

Based on those statistics, the Ministry Team has decided to look toward warmer weather and a return to outdoor services as the first appropriate time for meeting together in person. This decision

has been made with the desire to safeguard the most vulnerable members of our congregation.

(So the question now is, how warm does it need to get? We had some pretty brisk Sunday temps in the fall!)

Please contact Pastor Michael with any questions about this.

### FYI

- Missed a video service and can't find the link in your email box? Links are provided on the church website, under the Worship page.
- Would you like to be a part of a Zoom scripture reading or participate in the service by recording a scripture or prayer? Just let the church office know.

## "Souper" Bowl drive-thru

Even though the Eagles were far from playing in the Super Bowl this year, it is still a popular event that many look people forward to. Whether or not you plan on tuning in to the big game, why not enjoy a cozy, delicious meal on Super Bowl Sunday?

Under the inspiration and direction of Katie Mood, West Swamp will extend some pandemic-style hospitality

on Sunday, Feb. 7. You can order your choice of homemade soup, plus salad and freshly baked bread, in the quantity that's best for you.

Meals will be picked up in a drive-thru procedure in the church parking lot between 3 and 4 pm on Super Bowl Sunday. Delivery service is also available.

A minimum donation of \$3.00 per order is ap-

preciated to cover material costs; any extra money raised will be given to the Cassidy Gehman family to help with medical expenses.

Place your order by Feb. 5—either online or by calling Katie Mood (267-733-2141).

Pass this on to friends and neighbors—or maybe order some for them as a tangible way to show love and care!

## Pastor's Corner: The journey inward and the journey outward

Ash Wednesday is coming. This year, we won't be able to gather as we usually do and receive the cross of ashes on our foreheads or hands. We will meet instead by Zoom, connecting in a way that is safe.

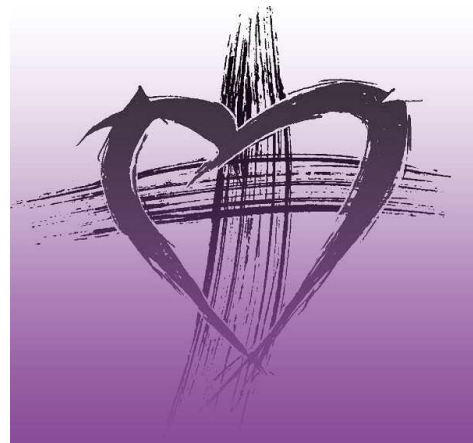
But this year, it seems especially meaningful to reflect together on our mortality and that of our neighbors. "From dust you have come and to dust you are returning."

In a year when more than four hundred thousand Americans have died from covid-19, it's hard not to think about mortality. And it's a year when we have felt that loss within our own congregation.

It would be easy to reflect on all that death and be paralyzed, depressed by it. And it is sobering to think about. But the good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, in his life and death and resurrection, God has conquered death and made abundant and eternal life available to everyone. As Paul, quoting the prophet Hosea writes in 1 Corinthians 15:5: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

We look ahead to the day that is coming, according to Revelation 21:4 when "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

May our confidence that Jesus is



bringing that day empower us to live lives of hope in the present, and to love our neighbors well in these extraordinary days.

Peace,

*~ Pastor Michael*

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## Worship: What do you do for Lent?

I did not grow up in a faith tradition that promoted giving something up for Lent, and I'm not sure when I began the practice. For years now I have given up computer games—Wordtwist, Reverse Wordsearch, Puzzles, etc—and that has been hard. They are a stress-reliever for me, a way to relax. Unfortunately, they are also like Pringles potato chips for me: I can't play just one. I can waste a lot of time starting "just one more."

One year I decided to not just give up something, but take on something as well. That has included going to bed earlier and getting up earlier; reading scripture daily; and, the year we were

preparing to move my mom in with us, getting rid of something every day to make room for her stuff. This year, I may be inspired by something Emily has done and make that my Lent practice. (Read on.)

Anyway, I asked the congregation if there are special things you do, or want to do, for Lent. These are the answers I got back:

**Jan Wieand:** I have never given up anything for Lent, but will do so this year. Every evening I have a couple pieces of chocolate as a treat. I am going to give up this practice for Lent. Instead of reaching for a piece of chocolate I will reflect on my day and praise

God for the blessings he has provided.

**Lori Farrell:** In the past, I have always tried to give something up for Lent, usually something I eat. Some examples are coffee, chocolate, sugar, etc. Last year, I decided to make it a point of getting up 30 minutes earlier every morning to say a prayer or do a devotion and I am proud to say that it stuck and I am still doing it now. So this year I will try to find something similar, a challenge that I hope will stick with me through the whole year.

**Karen Parzych:** I am am going to do a 40 day short devotion.

**Emily Rush:** My sophomore

*(Continued on page 3)*

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## Worship: Lent practices

(Continued from page 2)

year in high school through my senior year in college I wrote a note of encouragement to 40 friends and acquaintances during Lent. Not sure what I'm going to do this year.

**Katie Auckland:** Merriam-Webster defines Lent as: a period of 40 days before Easter during which many Christians do not eat certain foods or do certain pleasurable activities as a way of remembering the suffering of Jesus Christ. Growing up my family attended a Baptist church and I honestly cannot remember anything about Lent. I vaguely remember knowing that other people adhered to strict dietary guidelines during this time, but I never had a good understanding of what was going on. As an adult, I now understand Lent to be a time to recognize and emulate Jesus' suffering leading up to His death. I can't say I've ever given some-

thing up for Lent. However, I have paid more attention to what is going on during this season and have had fulfilling, holy experiences that have brought me closer to my Savior, Jesus Christ. So, I'm going to give it try! My choice is not tangible but I am hoping it will bring me long term results. I am going to give up complaining for Lent, both verbal and internal. I am going to do the dishes not because they are dirty but because I love the person that is going to use them next. I am going to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done even when I don't want to do it. I am going to smile my way through piles of laundry and laugh when even more are brought down the hall. I will have a servant's heart for the ones I love which will in turn please God. 40 days of no complaining, not even a complaining thought, will be a challenge. I want to celebrate Jesus' resurrection knowing He has the

power to change me as long as I am ready to be changed. Amen!

*Philippians 2:14-16—Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Maybe this inspires you to give up or take something on for Lent. Remember, the point is *not* to test your will power or resolve, but to give you time to focus on Christ and to go deeper into your relationship with God. Below are more suggestions of things you can do.

May Lent 2021 be one of deep growth for us all.

~ Lynne Rush

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## Ideas for a Lenten practice

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| *Spend time in solitude & prayer each day              | someone each week  | time with family   |
| *Read a book for inner spiritual growth                | *Give up a grudge or forgive someone who has hurt me                     | *Memorize a passage from scripture                           |
| *Read one of the four gospels                          | *Say "no" to something that is a waste of time or money                  | *Take on an undesirable task in the name of Christ's love    |
| *Go to bed earlier or sleep later so I get enough rest | *Keep my tongue in control and resist a critical spirit                  | *Give up something I enjoy doing & use the time a better way |
| *Pray for someone with whom I need reconciliation      | *Focus on <i>thanksgiving</i> rather than on <i>asking</i> in my prayers | *Eat simple meals or do regular exercise to care for my body |
| *Plan to visit a homebound person every week           | *Go through closets and donate items to Care & Share                     | *Offer to take a meal to a sick or recovering person         |
| *Write a note of affirmation to                        | *Turn off T.V. one night and spend                                       | *Send a card & note to a sick or recovering person each week |
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## Lent 2021: Deep calls to deep

[For Lent and Advent the Worship Commission uses materials from the *Leader* magazine, a resource from Menno Media. The resources are put together by a writing team from a specific geographical area. Many years ago I had the privilege of being on a writing team from southeastern PA. To meet publication deadlines, you start working about a year ahead of the season. Here is what the writing team from Eastern Canada faced in their task. ~ *Lynne Rush*]

Our writing team began our work the very week that everything in Canada began closing, canceling, and locking down around us because of the novel coronavirus that was about to become much more real to us. We had one embodied meeting, seeing the shape of each other's faces, shaking each other's hands, and then we entered the world of isolation and virtual

connection with which all of us are now familiar.

Suddenly the wilderness of Lent was all too real, as we were stripped of our usual resources, surroundings, activities, and circles of relationship. As our world changed from week to week and even day to day, we didn't know what kind of reality we would be planning worship for in one year's time. In the months that followed, the world experienced both deep grief and invitations to a new spaciousness of time, as we needed to release so much of what usually fills our lives.

Our team dove into the Scriptures for this season and found within them stories, songs and promises that called us to identify what is essential, what really matters, who we are at our core, and what God asks (and doesn't ask) of us. In the Scriptures and the traditions of Lent, we saw a scrubbing away of the

excess to get to the core of our Christian journeys and of ourselves. We know that Lent 2021 could be a time of reopened grief but also a season for renewed questioning of what we have discovered to be the deepest and truest parts of our lives and our journeys with God.

The call to go deeper can be frightening or overwhelming when we feel we are not ready and do not know what we will find. We keep much of our pain in our depths. But the theme "Deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42:7) arose for us as we experienced God calling out from a deeper place than the areas we usually think we can plan and control. And God's call echoes in a deep place within us as well, a place where the words of love spoken to Jesus at his baptism dwell: "You are my Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Live deeply into this throughout Lent.

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## What's your love language?

In 1992 Gary Chapman wrote a book about 5 Love Languages, the ways that individuals in relationships give and receive love. I have *not* read the book, but I've seen the list, and it seems to me that God uses all five.

**Words of Affirmation:** God calls us his beloved, the apple of his eye. He speaks his love to us throughout the Bible. And he lives within the praises we give to him.

**Acts of Service:** God cares for us and provides for us. Images in

the Bible include pictures of God as a hostess preparing a banquet, a wonderful act of service. And God rejoices in the service we do for him as we serve those around us as his hands and feet.

**Receiving Gifts:** Many and glorious are the gifts God has given us—from the tangible beauties of creation to the intangible gift of peace of mind. And he delights when we give back to him cheerfully.

**Quality Time:** We are always in God's attention. Psalm 139 says

God even knew us in the womb. He always has time for us and longs to spend time with us as we give him, as Pastor Michael often prays, "our mind's attention and our heart's affection."

**Physical Touch:** This one is a little hard to make a connection, but I think that's where God lets us be partners in sharing his love with others. God uses *our* hands and feet to give healthy and loving physical touch that humans need to survive.

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## Are you up for a Virtual Game Night?

One thing that has been on my mind during this pandemic is ways to foster connections. I've been kicking around the idea of a game night for months and think I've finally figured out how to do it. Are you up for a try?

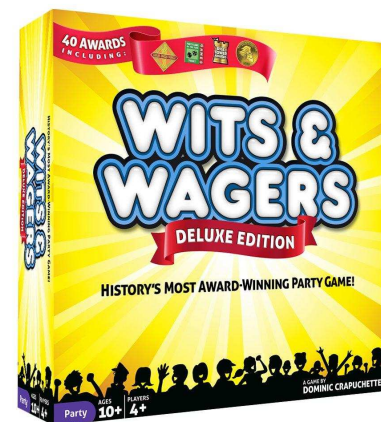
This (hopefully just the) first game night will be **Friday, Feb. 12 at 7 pm**. Since it's Valentine's weekend, couples are invited to be a team. (Don't mean to leave singles out—if this works, we'll schedule another one.)

We're going to play **Wits & Wagers**, a game that takes no skill whatsoever, just a lot of guess work. Number questions are

asked: things like "How many windows are in the Empire State Building?" or "In what year was the first polio vaccine produced?" You take your best educated guess—or wild stab—then wager on what you think is the right answer.

The game has room for 7 couples. Pastor Michael & Sue have the first spot, so the next 6 couples to email the church office are in. You'll be sent a Zoom link and get a packet of all you'll need to play.

In the downtime between rounds and while we're totting up the scores, there will be time for get-



ting to know each other better.

Get your reservations in without delay!

From your game hosts,

~ Rod, Lynne & Emily Rush

## Missions: Your coins really do count!

It's that time again—time to collect coins for Mennonite Central Committee. Even amidst the pandemic, the 2020 PA Relief Sale My Coins Count event raised \$133,670.96! West Swamp gave just a small fraction of that and we know that *every coin counts*!

In 2021 proceeds from My Coins Count will be designated toward MCC's water projects around the world. One in ten people don't have access to clean, safe water. You can help in supporting local partners make sure people have clean water closer to their homes, both today and in the future.

So start collecting your coins

now. Choose an interesting container to keep them in—and send in a picture. When we meet in person again, we'll all bring our coins with us.

(If you are afraid of another national coin shortage crisis, remember: bills are OK to collect too!)

**Top right:** When water is more readily available, more children can go to school.

**Right:** It takes an entire community to build a sand dam.

Both pictures are from Kenya.





## Staying Connected

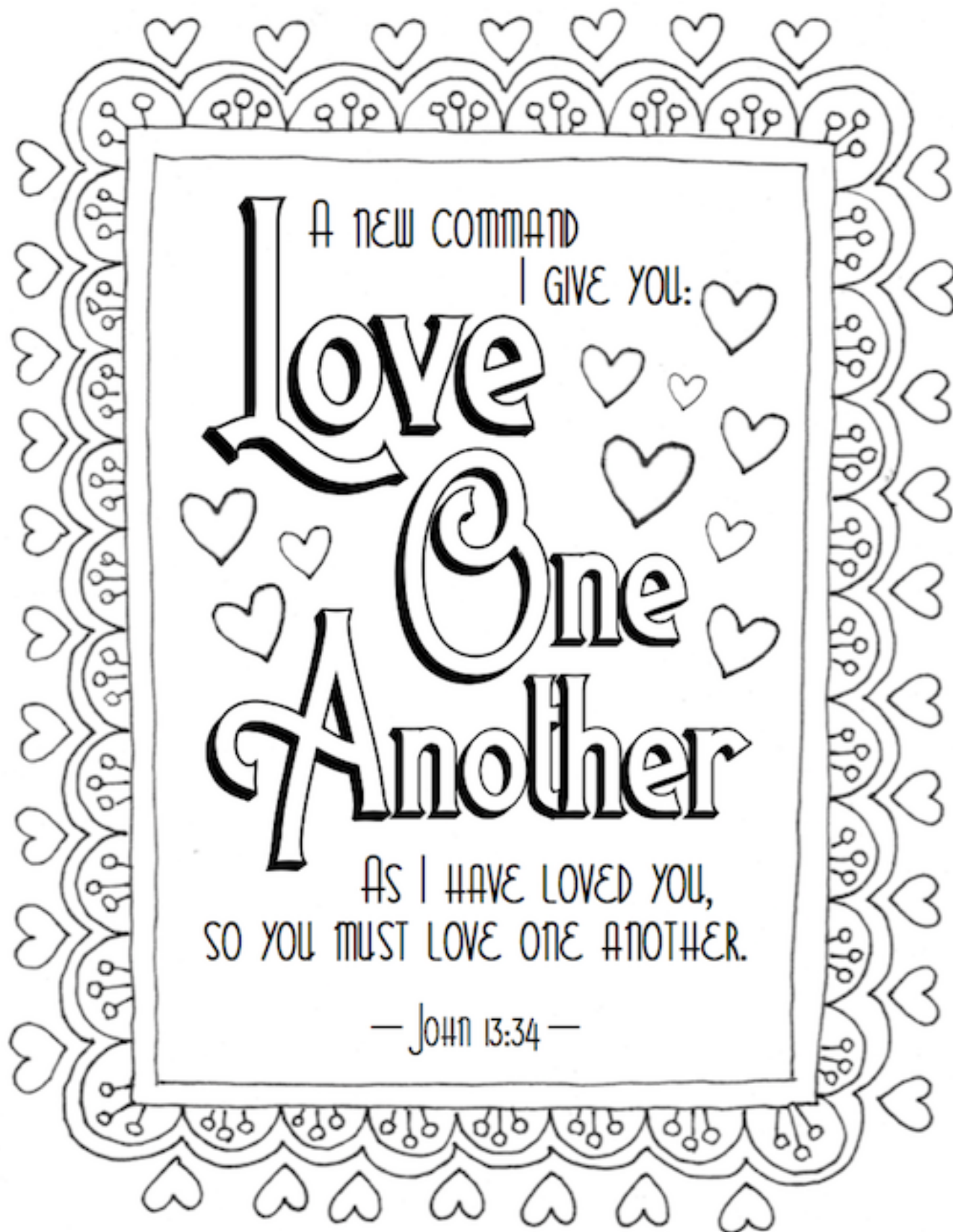


**Gretchen Isaak:** Here is a photo of my family, taken Dec. 28. The weather that day was pleasant (50 degree temperature). My brother & family came to my house for a gift exchange and visiting outside. Photo/ back row left to right: Noah, Anna Rose and Ian. Front row left to right: Melissa holding puppy Ajax, Gretchen, and Garth with dog Azara.

**Sue Conrad Howes:** Before COVID-19, I never did puzzles, but puzzles have become a regular activity for me now. I started this puzzle the week before Christmas, and this photo was taken on January 27! As a novice puzzler, I know I'm not very fast, but THIS puzzle is super hard (without a straight border ... shaped like a Christmas tree.) However, I keep reminding myself that the joy is in the journey!



**Katie Mood:** We had a litter of 9 Labrador Retriever puppies on Thanksgiving. Needless to say we have been preoccupied with them over the last 8 weeks. Watching them grow was so fun and it was extra comforting getting to snuggle a puppy whenever we wanted. They are all now living in their new homes with loving families! (More pictures on page 6)







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Reflecting God in our  
living, loving and serving

## Puppy Love at Windy Springs



## February Birthdays

2/4	Karalynne Parzych
2/6	Nancy Propst
2/10	Paige Mood
2/11	Brandon Mininger
2/12	Sue Keller
2/15	Ernie Reich
2/21	Kinsley Searfass
2/22	Michaela Wieand
2/26	Jim Bevan