

West Swamp News

Volume 12, Issue 1

December 2022/January 2023

October Fifth Sunday

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FYI

- Christmas Eve Candlelight Service is 7 pm on Dec. 24.
- Need an alternative gift? Check out MCC's Christmas Giving catalog at <https://mcc.org/christmas#>!
- Save the Date: The Annual Business Meeting is January 29.

On Oct. 30 three groups took worship "on the road" to members unable to attend church in person. Equipped with only a worship outline and some hymnbooks, no one knew exactly what to expect.

The group that traveled the farthest visited Richard Rosenberger. "We had a really nice time with Richard," Karen Parzych said. "Learned things about him and my Dad's travels that we never knew. The worship was very nice too. I think it was a great idea."

During their singing time, the group made sure to sing the Doxology in memory of Richard's father Arthur, a long-time pastor at West Swamp. It was something he always included in the service.

Another group worshiped with Carolyn Rush. It turned out to be quite serendipitous that Brenda Landt was part of that group. Carolyn

listens to CDs of the service, and had been praying faithfully for Brenda's family. It was so good to finally be able to put a face to the name and be able to ask Brenda questions like "Did you get a dog for your father yet?" When they do, Carolyn wants to know the name so that she can pray for the dog too.

The third group met with Evelyn High at Life Quest and worshiped together in a conference room. Evelyn

was very happy to see everyone, especially her good friend Gretchen. Since Evelyn's favorite hymns are Christmas songs, they started their song time with "Silent night."

Each group, including a fourth one that met at church, spent the hour sharing, praying, singing and pondering scripture. Thank you to all who participated in this special Fifth Sunday service!

~ Lynne Rush



Randy Rush, Nancy Jacobs, Lee Propst, Elaine Propst and Gretchen Isaak with Evelyn High.

Pastor's Corner: *Being over doing*

Advent begins this year on Sunday November 28th. Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. It is a season for us to prepare our hearts and lives for the coming of Jesus. The church I grew up in didn't observe Advent. It was a zero to sixty in five seconds kind of thing. One week it's an ordinary Sunday and then bang it's Christmas Eve and there are poinsettias everywhere and the pastor is wearing a red necktie and the choir is singing Christmas carols. It doesn't help that in south Louisiana the temperature is often in the seventies the week before Christmas.

Things were not that different at home either. After we got home from church on Christmas Eve, my dad and I would put up the Christmas tree, with my mom telling us when it was straight. Then the three of us would deco-

rate the tree and I would read the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke.

Perhaps that is why Advent is such a big deal to me. I started pastoring when I was in college, and I remember introducing the practice of Advent in the open-country church I pastored. I remember making an Advent wreath out of styrofoam and aluminum foil, and finding Advent candle readings in the early days of the Internet by actually looking them up in books from my seminary library.

Down the decades since then, it's remained important to me to spend the season leading up to Christmas making room in our hearts for the arrival of Jesus the King.

This year, our theme for Advent is *restoration*. What is it in your

life that needs restoration? Where in your life with Jesus do you need renewal? As you celebrate Advent this year, I want to challenge you to set aside time weekly on Sunday afternoon after worship to reflect on the Scriptures we will be looking at in worship, and seeking out the connections between those words and your life. Particularly, we are going to be looking at parts of the Hebrew Bible book of Isaiah, where God reveals God's dream for humanity to live in peace - peace that flows from Jesus.

I invite you to make space and time in your life this Advent to wait expectantly for the arrival of Jesus, and to experience the restoration that he offers.

Peace,

~ *Pastor Michael*

Worship: So Christmas Day is on a Sunday this year!

This year Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, so we are going to do a few things differently in worship that day to make things fun. We will have a relaxed, informal service with lots of Christmas caroling, including requests of your favorites..

Everyone is encouraged to wear a fun, colorful Christmas sweat-

er. We will have a contest for who has the loudest Christmas sweater, with a prize awarded. Don't worry: The prize will NOT be a regifted fruitcake.

I'm excited that we'll get to be together on Christmas Day this year, to celebrate the incredible gift of Jesus. .

~*Pastor Michael*



DISCO:

Warm holiday greetings from Discipling Commission! I am very happy to remind you of the **Prayer Breakfast** happening **Dec. 4** during Sunday School hour. Please join us in the fellowship hall for coffee and breakfast beginning at 9:30. This is a great opportunity to reach out to someone you haven't seen lately at Sunday morning worship or consider inviting a neighbor, friend, or family member. See you there!

The Bible Project Sunday School group continues to meet Sunday mornings as a hybrid class (in person and virtual). This class has been meeting for almost three years now and I pray their study continues to be blessed as they work through the latter part of the New Testament. Thank you to Lynne and others for leading.

This fall, I have found myself doing a lot of reflecting and seeking. I've been reflecting on the health of our church. I am thankful to the Ministry Team for graciously engaging in conversation and making steps to dive deeper into where we are and where we are going.

Pray that we continue to have open, honest conversations that lead to action steps. Pray that each of us has the courage to join the conversation when the time comes. Pray that our focus remains on the church being God pleasing and not just people pleasing.

I've also been seeking Jesus. Despite having grown up in the church and surrounded by be-

lievers for most of my life, I have found myself seeking Jesus in a deeper way than ever before. He has given me a learner's heart and I am soaking things up like a sponge. I've heard His promises almost all my life, but now I am hearing them in new ways and with a new heart. I've had a Bible of my own since I can remember, but now the words are coming alive as if they have been spoken by someone I know. Praise God for His mercy and goodness and love.

While I do not at all consider myself a very Biblically educated person or qualified to teach, I do trust that the Lord has placed me exactly where I need to be - which right now is Discipling Commission. I recently gained a new perspective on the meaning of discipling. In Season 2 of "The Chosen," an episode includes a conversation between Jesus, Big John as he is called, and James. They have been staying in a dan-

gerous area for Jewish travelers, and the two disciples ask Jesus in frustration, "What are we doing here?" Jesus responds that they are planting seeds for future generations so that other people may hear the good news, learn the truth, and continue to spread the light.

I've taken this definition of discipleship to heart as I consider future plans for the commission and its role at West Swamp. As always, I welcome your input. What are your wants and needs for discipleship? Regardless of where you are in your faith journey, Jesus has shown me that He will continue to reveal Himself in new ways.

So let's keep seeking together. Consider watching and sharing this short video by the Bible Project: Gospel of the Kingdom, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-kingdom/>.

~ *Katie Mood*



Jesus converses with John and James as they travel through hostile territory. From the series *The Chosen*.

Community: Opportunities

It was nice to see many members stay after church to mingle during some recent Fellowship Hours with apple cider, spiced cookies, pumpkin dip and more. We would like to have at least one Fellowship Hour per month. If you are interested in helping or planning one of the Sundays, please contact one of the Commission members.

Once a month for the past two months, simple lunch meals of soup, sandwiches, fruit and cookies have been delivered to about 11 of our older members.

Thanks to those who have donated items. We'd like to continue this monthly, so if this is something you would like to help with, please contact Nancy Jacobs or Sue Gwilliam.

West Swamp will be participating again this year in the Christmas Carnival hosted by the Sal-

vation Army of Upper Bucks and the Quakertown Ministerium. We've been known for making some of the best Christmas cookies, so this is a call to all **"Christmas Cookie Bakers!"** There is a signup sheet in the Fellowship Room. If you are able to bake cookies, we would like them at the church by 7 pm on Friday, Dec. 9, when we will start packing the cookies. Feel free to drop off your cookies and stay to help package them!

Lastly, the poinsettia plants that were ordered will be available to be picked up on Sunday, Dec. 11 after church. Checks should be made payable to the church. There will be just a few extra plants available for sale in case you missed the order date. Proceeds will benefit Community Commission projects and the Prayer Garden project. Thanks to everyone who has supported these activities with your time, prayers and donations!

~ Nancy Jacobs



Stewardship: Moving on from 2022 to 2023

During the holiday season let's focus on a strong finish to 2022 as we look ahead to 2023. The latest month end financial report, October, shows the 2022 deficit at around \$15,000. The primary contributing factors of this are declining tithes and offerings (approx. \$12,000 less than 2021) and increases in certain expenses (Utilities/Fuel and Payroll up approx. \$13,500 from 2021).

As of this writing there are five Sundays remaining in 2022.

Let's make a prayerful effort to at least halve the deficit by years' end.

Our Annual Business Meeting is Sunday, Jan. 29, 2023. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend. This is an important time to come together as a Church family to reflect on the past year and plan for 2023. While the Ministry Team is still working on the agenda for the meeting, one important item will be the 2023 budget. Also, in light

of Pastor Michael's first three-year term recently ending we will be voting to approve a second term.

Finally, now is the time of year when you may be asked to serve as a Commission leader or member, so please be receptive to the prospect of God's calling or even reach out to someone on the Ministry Team and volunteer if you are ready to step forward.

~ Randy Rush

Worship: Restoration is near!

This year's Advent-Epiphany theme focuses on restoration. Restoration happens in our bodies when we heal. Restoration happens when our communities handle conflict well and promote justice. Restoration can happen in relationships between people; it can happen between us and God. Jesus himself was restored in the resurrection. Our world longs for restoration, and God acts to bring it about.

Fundamentally, restoration is a *process*: it is a labor that happens over time through God's effort and our participation. Look for themes of *our* action and *God's* action woven throughout this season.

- Restoration is a process of *renewal*: bringing back to newness what has been broken, damaged or worn.
- Restoration is sometimes a process of *assembly*: bringing different pieces together as they should be to create a beautiful whole.
- Restoration is a process of *transformation*: sometimes the restored object needs to be overhauled or rebuilt to be fully restored.
- Restoration can include a process of *sorting*: removing what no longer serves

and reorganizing or refreshing what remains.

- Restoration is certainly a *creative* process: reimagining wholeness is a messy situation, creating something that was not there before.
- Restoration often requires *outside action*: we participate in the process, but it is God who is our restorer, the one to whom Psalm 80 is addressed: "Restore us, O God: let your face shine that we may be saved."

Advent and Christmas are active seasons. Advent itself means "coming." The primary actor is God, emptying Godself and being born in human likeness. But humans have their share of action in

the stories surrounding Christ's birth: angel visits, travel, pilgrimage and escape.

And we are active in our time too: longing, seeking, reconciling. In these weeks of Advent and Christmas, together we will cry out for restoration. We will watch for restoration to take place among us. We will join in the restoration process with all creation.

A note of interest: The worship planning team that wrote this year's materials is from southeastern PA and includes familiar names: Charlene Smalls, a pastor of Ripple Church, Allentown, and Nathan Good, pastor of Swamp Mennonite, is well known to our congregation.





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mennonite
church**

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Reflecting God in our
living, loving and serving



December

12/1 Pauline Stelmach
12/4 Dennis Wieand
12/7 Debbie Bauman
Wayne Moyer
12/9 Penny Rice
12/11 Jasper Riley

12/15 Louise Butcher

12/16 Sue Gwilliam
Brent Rice
Seth Rice

12/17 Madison Mood
Evan Wieand

12/19 Bill Grube
12/20 Ossie Myers
12/21 Kim Witt
12/23 Barb Moyer
12/24 Elliana Kirkpatrick
12/26 Glenn High

12/27 Bob Leber

Elaine Propst
12/29 Charles Spiess
12/31 Kevin Huff

January

1/5 Jamie Smith
1/11 Tom Mood
1/27 Jessie Keller
1/28 Brent Keller
1/29 Katelyn Opdyke
1/30 Rod Rush

Jesus' Birth Word Search

E	R	T	Y	M	T	H	U	J	K	I	O	L	P	E	D	I
E	L	I	Z	A	B	E	T	H	L	O	K	J	H	F	D	N
M	B	V	C	R	E	D	S	W	D	F	H	J	K	O	U	N
P	O	K	J	Y	S	A	I	R	A	H	C	A	Z	C	F	K
A	S	D	R	G	H	J	J	I	O	O	L	N	N	L	P	E
L	C	A	E	S	A	R	A	U	G	U	S	T	U	S	G	E
P	O	K	H	G	Y	G	N	R	D	V	B	N	M	O	Y	P
L	J	O	S	E	P	H	G	L	J	S	P	H	E	M	H	E
K	O	G	Y	J	K	L	E	E	D	J	E	S	U	S	J	R
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G	N	R	L	W	R	J	S	H	E	P	H	E	R	D	S	K
F	N	D	A	B	G	B	I	A	E	D	S	B	L	O	U	J
D	H	E	A	F	R	F	G	T	Y	H	J	I	K	M	N	U
S	J	G	O	D	G	D	O	K	I	U	Q	A	D	F	H	H
E	L	Z	D	E	R	G	B	N	U	D	F	J	O	N	H	F

JESUS

ELIZABETH

SHEPHERDS

MARY

JOHN

INNKEEPER

JOSEPH

ZACHARIAS

ANGELS

GOD

GABRIEL

CAESAR AUGUSTUS