

West Swamp News

Volume 10, Issue 6

October/November 2021

Catching up with our school students

Inside this issue:

Pastor's Corner	2
Commission News	3, 6
More West Swamp Students	4-5
Why me?	7

FYI

- Daylight Savings ends at 2 am on Sunday, Nov. 7. Don't forget to turn your clocks back Saturday night!
- October 11 is Indigenous Peoples Day. Why not honor it by taking time to check out the "Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery" at dofdmanno.org?

I don't know about you, but I definitely have had trouble keeping up with where our school students are at right now. I still picture

them as I last saw them—and for some, that means months ago. So I asked parents to send in current info, and if possible, pictures

of their students. Here are the answers I got:

~ Lynne Rush

(More on page



Jordan Husvar is in 9th grade at Palisades High School. She's #35 on the Junior Varsity field hockey team.



Kinsley Searfass is at Little Learners Daycare in the PreK class. She loves painting, music time, and being outside. "She is very excited about learning to write her name as well as other words," says Dana. "All around she is eager to learn everything which has been really wonderful to watch."



Pastor's Corner: Pursuing faithfulness

If you have been to West Swamp lately on a Sunday morning, you've seen that there are fewer people in the pews than before the covid-19 pandemic began. As I talk with other pastors, I have learned that this is true for all churches of all denominations. Some people are fearful of gathering because of the possibility of getting sick. Some people are watching recorded services online. Some people have chosen to attend other churches. Some people have fallen out of the habit of Sunday morning church attendance.

In spite of the decrease in attendance on Sunday mornings, I am full of hope for the future of our congregation. In recent months we have welcomed a new family and hosted several guests. We have a thriving Sunday School class that meets over Zoom. We also have a group that has met for many months on Thursday nights to learn about how we as a congregation can work for racial justice in our community. We are exploring new ways to

connect people in small groups. We are practicing good stewardship financially.

I am convinced that the best days for our congregation are in the future, not in the past, as we together pursue faithfulness to Jesus. I was greatly encouraged by the number of people who attended a congregational conversation to discuss our future as a church, and by the passionate opinions that were expressed.

As the ministry team and I process what was said at the congregational conversation and develop plans based on that feedback, I want to encourage each of you to do two things now to help us as a church move together into God's future for us.

First, pick up the phone and reach out to fellow church members, especially ones you haven't seen in worship. Enquire how they are doing, ask if you can be of any help to them. Tell them that they are missed.

Second, reach out to your neighbors who live on all sides of your

home. Ask God to show you ways to serve them in love. Make sure they know of your concern for them. Jesus tells us that our first priority should be to love God with our whole being, and our second should be to love our neighbors.

There will be lots of opportunities for us to do ministry together this fall: Equitable school funding needs to be advocated for. Families from Afghanistan will need help as they are resettled in the greater Philadelphia area. Families in Haiti will need help recovering from earthquakes and storms. Families in Quakertown will need help recovering from September's storms.

May God give us energy and vision to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the least, the last and the lost.

Know that you are loved and prayed for.

Peace,

~ Pastor Michael

Worship: Music groups starting up again

Chimin' In had its first practice. It was so good to hear those chimes ringing throughout the sanctuary and discover that the group has not gotten rusty during their long hiatus. There is need for at least one more player, but we can accommodate up to three more. If you are interested, contact Lynne.

Choir will soon begin practicing, but will not work quite the same—at least while there is still substantial to high spread of the COVID virus. We'll use a combination of small ensembles and full choir numbers.

For the near future, full choir numbers will be recorded at practice, and the video shown

during the worship service. (This is on the advice of health care workers in our congregation.)

Past choir members will soon receive a schedule of songs to choose to participate in. If you would like to be added to the list, contact Lynne.

~ Lynne Rush

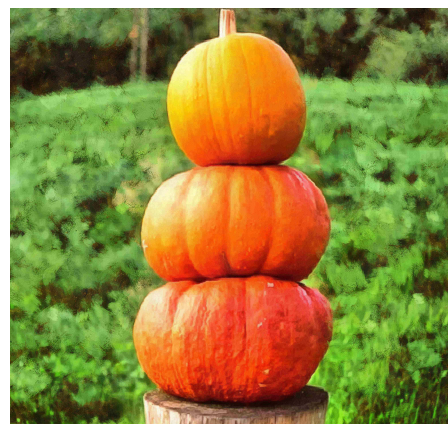
Community: Keeping in touch

The Community Commission is planning Fellowship Hour snacks for one Sunday each month. October's theme will be pumpkin treats! We hope everyone enjoys this time of fellowship following the worship service.

We are also trying to keep in touch with members who are unable to attend on Sunday morn-

ings. Cards and phone calls are always welcome! We encourage everyone to check in with members of our church family, and if there are any needs to please relay these to the pastor and ministry team members.

~ *Nancy Jacobs*



DISCO: Forming small group connections

The Discipling Commission has been discussing new small group possibilities and have been reaching out to West Swamp members to see if there is interest. Our goal is to get members connecting with each other and building relationships. If you have not received a call, you can expect to receive one shortly.

We are hoping to have some small groups formed and meet-

ing within the next few weeks. We know that some people are ready to meet in person and others are more comfortable meeting through Zoom or another online option. We will work to accommodate both comfort levels. Feel free to contact Lori Farrell or Pastor Michael if you are interested or have questions.

The Bible Project Sunday School group continues to meet every

Sunday morning at 9 am. We are halfway through Mark and are enjoying thought-provoking conversations. You are welcome to join us either via Zoom or by meeting in-person at church. Let Lynne know if you are interested or if you need help with how Zoom works.

~ *Lori Farrell*

Ministry Team: Evaluation time

As we cross into October, we will mark two years of Pastor Michael's pastorate here at West Swamp. In the interest of the Church's and Pastor's spiritual health and growth, a review of Michael's job performance will be undertaken.

I believe the last time West Swamp did a formalized pastor review was about ten years ago when Pastor Kathy was at her two-year anniversary. I have been reaching out to former pas-

tor search committee members to work with the Ministry Team to oversee this performance review. This process will include a written survey of the Congregation.

The work of the ad hoc committee will be to update/revise the basic survey questionnaire used ten years ago, disseminate to, and solicit response from the congregation, then summarize the responses. The involvement of our Mosaic conference mentor

Pastor, Randy Heacock, is at this point undetermined.

Finally, we will be communicating with Michael and the congregation the results of the surveys in an effort to reinforce and strengthen our fellowship here at West Swamp. More to come on this important endeavor in October.

~ *Randy Rush*
Moderator Deacon

West Swamp Students



McKenzie Huff is a senior at Quakertown Community High School. She is in Marching Band, Varsity Singers, and the Hounds of a Baskerville play. She is in the National Honors Society. She works at Alcamos restaurant on Sundays and volunteers at a cat shelter in Lansdale when she has free time, ("Ha, ha!" April adds.)



McKenzie Huff is a sophomore at Quakertown Community High School. She is in Marching Band, Varsity Singers, and Jazz Band.



This is the 6th year of homeschooling in the Opdyke household. **Kyleigh** (left) is in 5th grade. She really enjoys math, but is not a fan of her writing curriculum. However, she's doing her best to stay positive while she works through it.

Kimberly (right) is in 2nd grade. She likes everything about school; her favorite subjects are math and reading.

The girls are signed up at the YMCA to begin gymnastics this October.





Michael (left) is in 1st grade. He loves science and says he wants to be a scientist one day when he grows up. He also really enjoys math. Michael is signed up to begin karate in October.

Matthew (right) is in preschool. He begins kindergarten next school year. He enjoys everything he does but also misses being able to ride his bike all day.

“This is our first year back to our co-op since COVID. The kids take extra classes here with other homeschool students once every two weeks. They’ve made tons of friends through this group and really enjoy it. They are also all signed up to take a sports frenzy class where they will be able to play a variety of sports weekly. Since everything shut down they haven’t been able to play sports, so they are looking forward to things starting up again!”

“**Jonathan**, although not in school, is our little distraction all day. We also have another little distraction coming this January. A little girl, named Grace! Our family is keeping busy during these times. Hope everyone else is doing well!”



West Swamp students not pictured:

Ethan Farrell goes to Pennridge High School. He is in 12th grade and is taking Diesel Technology at the Upper Bucks County Technical School (UBCTS).

The Mood Family: **Eli** and **Paige** go to Quakertown Community High School and are also attending UBCTS. Eli is a sophomore in the Small Engines program. Paige is a freshman studying Health Care Services. **Olivia** is in 7th grade, studying at home through the PA Cyber Charter School. **Case** is in 5th grade at Pfaff Elementary.



Aly Riley is in 5th grade and **Jasper** is in 3rd at Tinicum Elementary School in the Pali-sades district. They both do karate, Aly is a Jr black belt and Jasper is a blue belt. Aly plays the flute and viola and Jasper is going to start playing the Cello this year. Aly likes school and loves to read, Jasper says he just likes to go to school to see his friends.

Misson: Buckets of Thanks

Do you have much to be thankful for? Express your thanks by giving the gift of basic hygiene supplies! When you collect basic hygiene items to make a Bucket of Thanks, you provide valuable supplies to families whose lives have been disrupted by war or disaster.

A Bucket of Thanks is a container filled with essential hygiene items intended for a family of four. MCC distributes these buckets to people around the world. Every bucket makes a difference to someone in need!

What goes in a Bucket of Thanks?

- 4 large bars bath soap (leave in wrapper)

- 1-2 bottles shampoo (totalling more than 600 ml; place in a resealable plastic bag)
- 4 large bars laundry soap (such as Sunlight®, Fels Naptha®, or Zote® brands)
- 4 adult-sized toothbrushes (in manufacturer's packaging)
- 4 new bath towels (medium weight, dark or bright colours; approx. 75 cm x 150 cm)
- 2 wide-toothed combs (15–20 cm)
- 1 nail clipper (good quality)
- 1 box adhesive bandages (minimum 40, assorted)
- 1-2 packages sanitary

pads (thin, minimum 28 pads total)

Last year MCC shipped 21,791 buckets to Honduras, Jordan, Syria, Ukraine and Zambia.

Start collecting items and watch for information on dropping off donations and a bucket-packing party in future bulletins.

~ *Glenn High*



Exciting news from Crossroads Community Center!

Thanks to a former board member, Crossroads is purchasing a house located off the back portion of the existing center's property. This will allow Crossroads to better serve the community in their mission to "evangelize, disciple, and demonstrate the gospel in word and deed to the people of the Fairhill community and beyond."

Currently, because of COVID, it has been difficult to have different age groups meet at the same time at the center. This new purchase will give them the space to host multiple groups. The new house will also increase their storage space for their food distribution ministry.

The third floor of the house will be converted into an apartment for short term housing for people in need, such as women fleeing domestic abuse or citizens returning to the community after incarceration. When not in use, it will be available for volunteer housing.

While funding for purchasing the house has already been raised, money is still needed for renovations. If you would like to contribute toward this project, please give your donation to West Swamp, designated for Crossroads House Renovation. Then our church will send the total to Crossroads to take ad-

vantage of a matching grant offer from Mosaic Conference.

Another way to contribute toward the project is to donate time and labor. If you are interested in volunteering to work on the renovations, contact Rod Rush. He will help make that happen.

Prayers, of course, are always appreciated for this new project and for Crossroads many ministries. When renovations are complete, let Rod know if you'd like to see them. He is always ready to take people to the Center for a tour.

~ *Rod Rush*

Why me? (Reprinted from Mosaic News, Sept. 23)

Staff blog by Sue Conrad Howes

As a hospital chaplain, I often encounter people on the worst days of their lives. As I sit with people receiving difficult diagnoses or needing to make challenging decisions, I am often asked, “Why is this happening?”

After years of being present with people through sudden deaths, extreme physical pain, or unimaginable trauma, I have yet to have an answer to the question of why.

When life feels so illogical, it is logical to want a reason or explanation. When the world around us feels anything but clear and simple, any sense of clarity is desired. I get it.

A couple of months ago, I was diagnosed with leukemia. Seven years ago, I battled leukemia and after chemotherapy, fortunately entered remission. My doctors told me that my leukemia was not curable but treatable, so the chances of recurrence was extremely high. Most people experience recurrence within one to five years, but I was told, if I pass the five-year mark, my chances of experiencing a longer remission (10-20 years) is very high. When I reached my five-year anniversary of being cancer-free, I had a party, with a cake shaped in the number “5.”

So when my leukemia returned a few months ago, seven years after remission, I was shocked. In fact, I was even more shocked



Sue Conrad Howes received chemo for leukemia in 2014. Photo by Michael A. Howes

and angry than when I initially was diagnosed. I thought I had beaten the odds. This was *not* what I expected. My anger manifested into depression and bitterness to the world around me. It was not fair.

I processed my anger and grief with close friends and a counselor. For years, I sat with people as they processed their traumas and disappointments, asking, “Why is this happening to me?” Now I was the one asking the question. Of course, no one had any answer. Nor should they. I am grateful no one said, “Everything happens for a reason,” because **that is not true**. Sometimes awful things happen, and there is no reason.

Eventually I asked the question differently, “Why should this *not* be happening to me?” Why did I think I was any more special than anyone else? Sometimes things happen that we

have no control over. No matter how well we live or pray or how many casseroles we take to our elderly neighbors, life can throw us a huge curve ball combined with a sucker punch. We don’t need to be happy and upbeat when bad things happen, nor do we have to figure out the “why”.

I began thinking about other things in my life. I didn’t ignore my leukemia, but I realized I never asked why something is happening to me when things were going well – like when my leukemia went into remission seven years earlier, *before* all my chemo treatments were completed, or when we sold our house, the buyers offered to pay us \$25,000 *more* than asking. I didn’t ask *why* either of those times, but I celebrated and gave thanks.

Is it possible to not ask why with bad things in the same way I don’t ask why with good? Am I able to honor both? Am I able to say that I am no better or worse than another person, but that my life circumstances are different?

How I accept and strive forward with those circumstances is what makes the difference. Now I spend time asking *what am I going to do about this* rather than asking why is this happening. Suddenly, the question now gives me an opportunity to give an answer, rather than saying, “I don’t know.”

Now I know.



west swamp
mennonite church

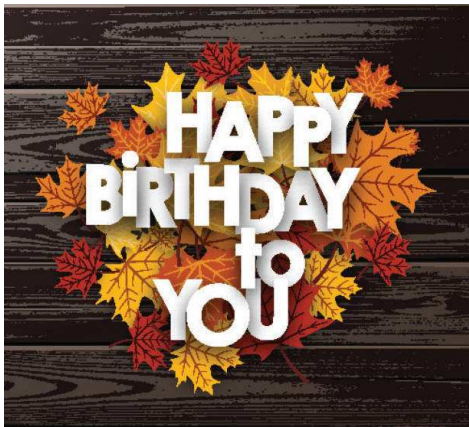
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Reflecting God in our
living, loving and serving



October

10/6 Matthew Opdyke
10/7 Deb Stevenback
Jan Wieand
10/14 Don Rosenberger
10/17 Case Mood
10/18 Paul Heimbach
Casey Parzych
Joann Rush
10/20 Amanda Wieand
10/21 Randy Rush
Sue Shelly
10/25 Corinne High
10/29 Dale Loch

November

11/3 Nancy Jacobs
John Riley
11/05 Olivia Mood
11/06 Jordan Husvar
11/08 Alex Parzych
11/18 Andrew Spiess
11/19 Pam Grube
11/20 Don Butcher
11/21 Bernice Keller
11/26 Les Rice
11/28 Kitty Stauffer
11/30 Mary Bittenbender