



First Mennonite Church

Midweek E-Newsletter

December 6, 2023

To All Brothers and Sisters In Christ:

Next Steps in our Journey - *Latest leadership plans and decisions*

Hi friends,

Don't tell anybody. I found several waffle makers in the youth room. And a soda stream machine. Shhh.

The webinar we attended last week described a three-part model for **healthy congregational culture**: Relationships (people, trust-building), structure (process, method), and skills (practicing listening methods, stopping to inquire rather than assume, etc.). To make any change, you need two of the three components. Since I'm new, I use structure and skills to make up for the fact that my relationships with you are in the early stage. Come see the hanging mobile in my office! That's structure/process.

Meanwhile, I invite you to **Blue Christmas**. In a season of BUSY, this is a time to rest. In a season of HAPPY, it is an opportunity to let sad come to the surface. In a season of EXPECTATIONS OF PERFECT it is a time to let imperfect be OK, "because human" or "because reality" as the kids might say. In a time of PEACE, (again) war is raging. Blue Christmas, Wednesday December 20th at 6:30pm. No preaching. Blessings. ~Pastor Kristine

- **Ministries Council:** Team meeting next week Wednesday at 7 pm. Preparing for the Annual Congregational Meeting on January 14. Council leaders - have your yearly reports to the office by "midnight" December 11. ☺
- **Worship/Nurture/Vision:**
 - 2nd Sunday of Advent this coming week.
 - Sunday School at 9:30am – Advent video on "Incarnation" and discussion
 - Spirit 'N Celebration will sing during our worship service.

- Carry-In meal to follow. Plan to bring extra food to share with our guests!

Verse for Pondering: Colossians 3:15 (TLB)

“Let the peace of heart that comes from Christ be always present in your hearts and lives, for this is your responsibility and privilege as members of his body. And always be thankful..”

Among Our Friends and In Our Prayers

- Pray for one another through our directory!
- Pray for **our relationships** during the stressful time of holidays.
- Remember **students, teachers and all school personnel** as they finish the semester and prepare for a break. Pray for children who will miss the structure and love of their teachers, college students overwhelmed with projects and finals, teachers struggling to grade fairly with balancing grace and truth, etc. May Jesus shine His light to all!
- Pray for peace for all families **grieving**.
- Pray for **WDC’s Ministerial Leadership Commission** as they meet this week, and as they provide support and resources for credentialed ministers in our conference.

Upcoming Events

- **Tonight! 1. Prayer** - 7 pm.
2. Choir Practice – 7:30 pm. We will sing in worship on Dec. 17 and 24th.
- **Blue Christmas: December 20, 6:30 pm.** We offer Blue Christmas as a time to acknowledge the griefs, hurts, and disappointments that aren't easily compatible with the world's expectation that we're supposed to be happy at Christmas. If you're grieving a hurt or a loss, come. There will be music, but no singing expected. There will be scripture and poetry and blessings that name the pain of loss. If I can manage it, there will be candles to light, or some other way to participate without speaking. Please come and invite anyone else.

Other Announcements

- **Invitation for new members:** We had the welcome of new members several months ago, but not everyone who wanted could participate. We'll do it again soon! If you haven't already spoken to administrator Sue or pastor Kristine, please do so by this Sunday December 10th. Our next welcome Sunday is tentatively scheduled for January 7th, 2024.
- All are invited to the Annual **Christmas Brass Choir Concert** at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church on Sunday Dec. 10 at 7pm. .
- **Main Street Ministry Need:** size 5 diapers. Bring them to the church office if you would like to donate.
- **Need gift giving ideas?** Check out MCC's "5 special Christmas gifts you can't pull from a shelf" in their monthly newsletter [In Touch](#).
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=wm#inbox/FMfcgzGwHxtktNXGDbWXnFStBZTzHTDz>
- Interviews for the 2024 **Summer Staff at Camp Mennoscah** start over the Christmas/semester break. Want to be involved or know someone who might?
- **A reflection from our conference minister:**

No Christmas in Bethlehem This Year

Christmas 2005 was like no other for my husband and I. His brother had been diagnosed with ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease in early December. I was so grateful for online shopping. I was done with buying Christmas gifts in an hour and they would all be auto-shipped to our loved ones. Cookies and other baked goods we could do without. Everything tasted like sawdust anyway. We never even got the tree out of storage. We just didn't have the energy to celebrate Christmas, at least not the traditions that had been layered on top of worshipping God-with-us. As a pastor, God granted me the energy to lead the congregation in the only part of Christmas that really matters anyway. We told the story of Immanuel. We were clear that on the night Jesus was born, God came to earth to be with us sad, desperate humans to offer peace, love and hope where there is none.

There will be no extra Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem this year, either. The Palestinian Christians of every persuasion are too traumatized to try to "make merry" in the midst of the overt violence in Gaza and across the region. So many of them have lost family members and friends in Gaza that they just cannot hide that under a layer of wrapping paper, tinsel, and tiny lights. So, instead of all the glitter and sparkle of a huge Christmas tree and other decorations in Manger Square, God willing, there will be worship. In Bethlehem, and around the world, Christians will celebrate again how God came to the rescue of our human race in the form of a tiny baby. May that be enough.

-Kathy Neufeld Dunn, Associate Conference Minister