

The Messenger

November 2018



Reflections

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, greetings.

We live in broken times. As I write this, families are still reeling in shock from the synagogue massacre by a white supremacist in Pittsburgh on October 27, 2018. We've almost already forgotten reeling in shock from the appointment of a drunken sexual aggressor to the Supreme Court. Soon we will have forgotten Pittsburgh as a "caravan of immigrants" approaches the U.S. border, to which more armed forces are being deployed. And this is just a three-week snapshot of the times in which we are living.

More and more people I talk to in my work are completely at a loss as to how to make sense of their neighbors', coworkers', and family members' political beliefs and actions. We are drifting further apart from one another. And church denominations are following the trend; splitting apart over this or that theological difference; following us into our distant, recessed, increasingly isolated communities of sameness.

As the world seemingly becomes less stable, more divisive, and more threatening, we seek safety in numbers. We want to be around people who look like us, think like us, behave like us. Sameness feels secure. Of course, you need a certain amount of sameness to get things done. People all need to agree to stop when the light turns red and go when it turns green in order for us all to get where we're going safely. In order to be successful in executing its mission, all of the members of an organization need to be close to the same page with the vision and mission of the organization. Cities, towns, villages, food supply chains, travel, clean water, human civilization would be impossible if we didn't all share some minimum amount of common interest with one another.

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Vision: Healing & Hope

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

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Pastor Matthew Yoder

But may we never make “unity” into a golden calf in whose worship dissenting voices are silenced under the banner of sameness. May we never settle for the comfortable sameness of race, culture, class or ethnicity. May never settle for the easy sameness of thought and belief. Rather, let us seek that higher kingdom; let us strive with all our strength toward that much deeper like-ness of shared identity in the One in whose likeness we are all created.

This like-ness, the one way in which we are all – in our vast diversities of life and being – alike, is not rooted in sameness of skin color, race, culture, class, ethnicity, or gender. It is not rooted in having the same thought or belief as someone else. The likeness we all share in the midst of all of our vast diversities is rooted in Christ. For God so loved the *whole world and everyone in it*, that God sent God’s only begotten son, Jesus Christ, that *whosoever* believes in him will have eternal life.

You are bought and paid for. You are Christ’s. You belong to him. You were purchased and the price was high indeed. You were not purchased for your skin color. You were not purchased for your knowledge or skill or strength or acumen. You were not purchased because of your family name or your culture or class. You were purchased because of the abundant overflow of God’s love for you. For the love of God, Christ owns you free and clear. You are his. And this is the comfort; that when we look at the one to whom we all belong, when we look for the one who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron, we don’t see a roaring lion. We see a lamb, standing although slain. And the lamb is the lion. But first he is the slaughtered lamb.

The thing that we see, this Great Anxiety that hems us in all around, this is not the thing itself. It is only the fire and the heat of the forge. You, sisters and brothers, are the thing itself. You are the ore. On the other side of this brief and passing season of testing, may you shine like gold.

Pastor Matthew



November 2018

Sunday, November 4

Practicing Faith—"Fasting"

Pastor Matthew Yoder

Scripture: John 6:27-35

Sunday, November 11

Practicing Faith—"Celebration"

Pastor Matthew Yoder

Scripture: Luke 15:25-32

Sunday, November 18

Mission Sunday

Guest: Mary Raber,
mission partner

Sunday, November 25

"Why Do Bad Things Happen
to Good People?"

Pastor Matthew Yoder

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
1 Thessalonians 5:18



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Fall 2018

Dear Friends:

Nearly six months have passed since I last wrote—too long. I apologize for the silence. Thank you to everyone who has stayed in touch with me in other ways.

Lavern H. Raber (1926-2018)

Much has happened during these weeks. The biggest change is that my dear mother (see photo) died at home early in the morning on June 8. She was 91 years old.

While I was in Ukraine during the spring, she fell and broke her hip. Although she recovered well from surgery and made some headway in rehab, she came down with pneumonia and then a secondary infection set in. After that, too many things went wrong at once. At last, we enrolled her in hospice, and she slipped away so quietly two days later that we don't know exactly when she left us.

For nearly the last four years of her life, she was on kidney dialysis twice a week, a regimen that was hard on her nerves, although she was known among the technicians for her smile and cooperative attitude. We found that singing familiar songs helped to calm her and anchor the mental wanderings of dementia, and so it became our custom to sing the Doxology as we drove away from the building when dialysis was over. During the last few restless minutes in the dialysis chair, I often encouraged her by saying, "Hang on, Mama—we'll be singing the Doxology soon!" It makes me happy to think that now she's singing it—or something like it—all the time.



Lavern Raber



Retreat Friends

Light of the Gospel Retreat—March 20-27, 2018

I had the opportunity to hear many stories about the ambiguity and anguish of life in the militarized zone of eastern Ukraine in March at retreat for pastors and their wives from the church association "Light of the Gospel." They came together for a week of rest in the Carpathians, partially funded with a grant from Mennonite Mission Network. I was one of the "resource people" and presented a series of brief historical sketches entitled "Hard Times."

I've been acquainted with some of the participants since the 1990s. A group photo is attached. Circumstances have forced them to become heroes, as they continue to minister to their congregations and community. Depending on the need, they shelter refugees, run soup kitchens for hungry neighbors, and drive people away from shifting battle zones in their own cars.

Their presence is not necessarily understood or appreciated. One pastor told about watching four barefoot women straggle across the railroad tracks near his church building on a hot summer morning in 2014. There was fighting a few kilometers down the road, and they had obviously escaped with just the clothes on their backs. The women asked for food. Having donated supplies at hand, he cooked a big pot of potatoes and cabbage, and they ate eagerly. As they were finishing, one of them wiped her mouth, leaned back, and asked, 'So, whose side are you on?' 'I'm on the side of Jesus Christ,' the pastor answered, 'If I wasn't, I wouldn't have fed you!'"

The war drags on with no resolution in sight. The challenge for our friends is to persevere in witnessing to the love of God in Jesus Christ. I was greatly moved by their joyful sense of God's presence and guidance. They were delighted with the retreat and are hoping for another next February, this time closer to home to save money. They have invited me to participate again.

Future plans

With my mother gone, I am no longer tied to St. Louis. I am looking forward to returning to Odessa, but not as soon as I had hoped. My present plan is to apply for temporary residence status in Ukraine, a long process which is better to begin after the winter holidays are over and I can count on bureaucrats being back in their offices! Please pray with me for patience and wisdom as Odessa Seminary staff and I deal with this complex and possibly frustrating undertaking.

Until December I expect to be in St. Louis, continuing to translate *The Slavic Bible Commentary* into English and supervising students on-line.

Everything around me seems to be changing quickly and I am sometimes fearful. Please pray that I would be able to hear what God is saying and grasp the new opportunities that increased freedom will bring.

I hope you will continue the journey with me. Thank you so much for your interest, your prayers, and your generous financial support.

With peace,

Mary Raber



Thanksgiving Bake Sale—The Service Group of the Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio will be holding their annual Thanksgiving Bake Sale on Friday, November 16th. The bake sale will feature a variety of home baked goods including delicious cinnamon rolls, cakes, cookies and breads. This annual event will be held in the Mennonite Memorial Home lobby from 9:00 am—2:00 pm. Be sure to come early for your Thanksgiving baked goods!

“News Among Our Members & Friends”

HAPPENINGS IN AND AROUND GRACE.....By Shirley Sommer

Sunday, September 30th – Sermon title was “**Gratitude**” in Pastor Matthews series on Practicing Faith. Scripture was **Luke 17:11-19** (titled “ten healed of leprosy). Started with a quiet time to clear our minds from all the things we had to handle during the week. **Pastor Matthew** mentioned **Jesus** crossed the borders to heal the 10-leprosy he saw. **Jesus** sent them to the priests and they were cleansed. One of them turned back and thanked Jesus at his feet – he was a Samaritan! **Pastor** also mentioned that **Luke**, the evangelist, was the **ONLY** one who called him, “Master!” **Pastor Matthew** ended the sermon stating that it is important that Christian’s practice “**Gratitude**” which will open the gates to **Jesus Christ**.

Sunday, October 7th – Today we had a guest speaker, **David Stamile**. He is a certified **Enneagram** teacher at **Baylor University department of Medical Humanities**. He held a retreat on Saturday with others from First Menn, Bluffton and our members. One thing was mentioned is that we all are different: hair length, eyes, personality, ages, girls, boys, women and men. **God** doesn’t care who we are – **He** loves us all as we are always! Scripture was **Galatians 3:26-28**. **David** is married to **Erin** and has a son, **Benjamin**, and lives in Waco, Texas. (If you want to read about **Enneagram**, go on the internet and you can read about it. A little too much to type about it all.)

Sunday, October 14th – **World Communion Sunday** (celebrated a week late). Sermon title was “**Hospitality**” with scripture being **Luke 14:7-14**. **God** had the first act of hospitality with **Jesus** had the twelve disciples together for the **Last Supper**. In the scriptures, **Jesus** explained to the guests how to pick places of honor at a table with a parable. When invited to a feast, you don’t take the honor place but a lower seat. **Jesus** told them who humbles himself will be exalted. **Hospitality** is a celebration of giving and receiving. Following the sermon, a **Communion Service** was celebrated.

Sunday, October 21st – Scripture was **John 5:39-40** with the sermon title “**Scripture**.” **Pastor Matthew** started out with a question, “Why is it important to read the **Bible**?” Some suggestions were the more we read scriptures, the closer we are to **God** and learn to know him better. Also, regular reading does something to us, makes us feel completely different about our world and to us. We were also told that scripture is an important step to be a faithful follower of **Jesus Christ**.

Noon, a pot-luck was held for the university students and the congregation in the fellowship hall. As always, a nice assortment of food for everyone to enjoy.

Sunday, October 28th- “**Friendship**”, was the sermon title with **Ruth 1:15-18** as the scripture. **Pastor** stated that “**Friendship**” requires companionship which is an excellent opportunity for Christianity. Here one often shares or supports the friend in activities or when needed. **Jesus** also needed support by picking out 12 disciples to help him. Friends can be many different things to us such as our peers, companions, mentors, coaches, a community, and church family. The song following the sermon truly fit right in with the message, “**Somebody prayed for me.**”

OTHER NEWS ITEMS INVOLVING OUR CHURCH FAMILIES:

--**Threads of Grace** (womens’ sewing circle at church) will have a comforter knotting **Friday, November 9th from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.** You may come at any time to help or the whole day and will enjoy a potluck lunch at noon.

--Our youth have been busy with school activities in October. **Dalton Clum** (son of **Brent & Heather**, grandson of **Tim & Brenda Byers**) was Senior attendant at Allen-East Homecoming in September. **Sophia Smucker** (daughter of **Steve & Judy**) a Junior at Bluffton H.S. was on the girls’ Honorable Mention Soccer team plus the team was 2nd in their

conference. **Jackson Steinmetz** (son of **Joel & Teri**) a Senior, made second team of their Soccer conference. Bluffton placed first in Northwestern Conference (w/5-0-0 record in the Conference.) Overall record was 10-2-4. **Congratulations** to these three students with their accomplishments in school---sports and social activities.

--**Congratulations** also to **Steve Smucker**, Bluffton H.S. boys soccer coach for receiving the "**Coach of the Year**" in the Northeast Conf. – his fourth consecutive award. He received this in October.

--Sunday evening, September 30, a group of members of the **Today's Disciples S.S.** class, met in the Fellowship Hall to see pictures and hear about **Arman & Sue's** summer vacation in the **Scandinavian and northern Europe area**. Finger foods were enjoyed. It was quite a trip and one they'll remember for some time. **Thanks** for sharing!!

--**MYF Salsa** has been on sale for the month of October. They have a variety of mild, hot, and hallelujah hot for **\$10.00 a jar**. If interested, you could call **Justin & Karen Byers**, youth leaders, at **419-957-2173 (a cell number)**.

--Weekend of October 13th & 14th, **Keith Sommer and Terry Schey** attended **Men's Retreat at Camp Friedenswald**. Had attendance of 35 for the retreat with **Steve Thomas**, speaker. He spoke on the topic of "Healthy Masculinity: On Being a Man," based on who we are as beloved sons of **God**, and reconsider the marks of good men and explore our part in building **God's** peace. **Keith** had a display of samples of roofing material with roofing tools and equipment for the afternoon FREE time to enjoy along with a Nature Hike, pontoon boat ride, splitting fire wood, make walking sticks, or play different game tournaments.

--Sunday, October 7th, the Et Cetera Shop, Ten Thousand Village, and Book Reviews held an OPEN HOUSE (2 hours) as a token of their appreciation to all supporting churches. I was told they all did very well with lots of guests attending who took advantage of the "special sales." Thanks for all who support these stores and volunteers that work in the stores.

--Rehearsals for the **123rd performance of Handel's "Messiah"**, Tuesday evenings, Oct. 16th thru Dec. 4th in Gilliom Room of Mosiman Hall from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The concert will be held at **Yoder Hall on Sunday, December 9th at 2:30 p.m.** One will need to get a ticket for the program at Marbeck information desk or email (tickets.bluffton.edu). Tickets are FREE and available beginning November 1st.

--The **University** has had wonderful musical performances in October for the public to enjoy! The **Concert Band** performed on the 14th directed by **Dr. Roy Couch**. October 21st, the **Choral and Camerata Singers** sang and was directed by **Dr. Bo Young Kang**. Again, **Meghan & Eddie Gibson-Martin** were involved in the band and choir. If you have a chance to go and hear the students on December 2nd, at 2:30 p.m. at Yoder Hall, **Holiday College Concert**; I'm pretty sure you won't be disappointed.

--For the month of October, we again had some of our church family in the hospital or with other health concerns. They are **Rachel Kantner** still with seizures; **Gail Neff** starting another round of chemo; **Guy Verhoff** had a tumor removed but saved the kidney and is now waiting to take care of a thyroid problem; friend of community, **Destini Fenbert**, serving time in jail; family members of **Dan Amstutz** who passed away on October 15th from complications related to a fall; and last to all the others from months ago listed for our support. As mentioned before, **prayers** are always welcomed and helpful



Save the date!

**Christmas craft day
& soup luncheon**

Saturday, December 1

11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

All supplies will be provided.

Luncheon donations will support the MYF.

Come for crafts or just for lunch.

on the calendar

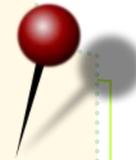
Friday, November 16—9:00 am—2:00 pm
MHC Bake Sale

Saturday, November 17 8:30 am—1:30 pm
Annual meeting Western Ohio Unit of Mennonite
Disaster Service.

Sunday, November 18—Mission Sunday Guest
Speaker Mary Raber, our mission partner.

Thursday, November 22—Thanksgiving Day

Saturday, December 1—11:00 am—1:00 pm
Christmas Craft Day and Soup Luncheon



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Keith & Shirley Sommer November 1

Justin & Karen Byers November 21



November Birthdays

Ivan Friesen	November 3	Brent Clum	November 14
Nancy Suter	November 3	Jim Kempf	November 14
Russel Suter	November 4	Esther Nafziger	November 14
Amy Diller	November 6	Sarah Sprunger	November 15
Connor Clum	November 7	Ted M. Diller	November 17
Jon Diller	November 7	Steph Meyer	November 17
Blake Clum	November 8	Kelly McCarthy	November 18
Liz Suter	November 8	Luxi Diller	November 21
Bill Suter	November 8	Brett Prothro	November 22
Becca Peckinpaugh	November 9	Jared Byers	November 23
Logan Nussbaum	November 10	Lane Suter	November 23
Adalie Hanefeld	November 13	Amy Sprunger	November 28

Deadline for the next Messenger is November 26, 2018