

Morgantown

Morgantown Church of the Brethren (& Sistren) (and others)

Life and Hope

When you are a church in a university town, people come and people go. Yet there remains a core group, those who have come and stayed. In our church, this core group has decided to love each other, and to extend this love to whomever comes.

We were without a pastor for more than a year and a half before Wes became our pastor in 2016. In addition to the work involved with the search committee (thanks for the help provided by Allegheny Conference!), the regular work of the congregation continued. We planned worship, taught Sunday School, cared for our facilities, gave sermons, found speakers from the larger Morgantown community, visited people who were ill and managed all the little details that a pastor helps keep track of. It was a tiring 18 months and probably not sustainable over the long term, but we discovered new gifts and skills present among us, and it helped prepare us to work with a part-time pastor after many years of employing a full-time pastor.

Part of the love we share is a willingness to say Yes to new opportunities and new ideas. When children wanted to color or play in the space at the back of our sanctuary during worship, we said Yes to this new way of welcoming children and making parents feel part of the worship. When outside groups wanted to use our building for meetings, we said Yes, sometimes even before we were asked. There is a spirit of openness that pervades our church life. This spirit has been noticed in our town and has made people curious about that little church that says Yes.

As a small church with many busy people, we focus on events rather than on programs. We have pie-baking evenings and salsa-making evenings and ice cream socials and retreats and softball games. These give us a time to connect with each other and our neighbors while not burdening us with the need to plan and sustain weekly programs.

Most Mennonite churches have the word Mennonite in their name and many of their members are born into the Mennonite church. Neither of those things are true for us and we don't even know how many people here think of themselves as being Mennonite. Our connection to Allegheny Conference is neither biological nor historical. Yet our connection to the Anabaptist flavor of Christian faith is strong and we appreciate the various resources and connections that AMC provides.

Sentence: “Some come; some stay; all feel loved”

Word: “Love”

Loss

In many ways, the losses and the joys at MCOB are part of the same reality: transition. People come and people go. This is especially noticeable in a small church, where every individual either adds to our time together or creates a void when they are absent.

The ongoing loss is compounded because new people obviously can't remember the people who have left. So the memories linger for some but not for everyone. You can tell how long someone has been at MCOB by how many people come up in conversation who used to be part of the church. How, then, do we tell those stories without alienating newer people? And how do we pay attention to the story and traditions of our church without being haunted by the ghosts of people long gone?

For some of us, this connection to the past extends to institutions. Few of us are historically connected to Mennonite institutions like Allegheny Conference or MCC. Some are connected to Church of the Brethren institutions like On Earth Peace. There is little shared institutional memory or identity at MCOB, which is another form of loss for those of us who grew up speaking fluent Mennonite.

The nature of our connection to the Mennonite world is further weakened by the ongoing transitions within Allegheny Conference and MCUSA. Why should we invest in starting or strengthening a relationship with a conference that may no longer exist in a few years? We don't need another set of transitions to add to our lives.

This summer we are saying goodbye to nine people at MCOB. That's a lot of people when you only have forty to start with. Likely some new people will come this fall, but people aren't plug-and-play technology. You can't pop one out and put a different one back in that spot. Each new addition and subtraction requires transition. Fortunately our existence as a stable institution is not our primary calling. It is only a means to our goal of being the body of Christ in the world. So we continue to focus on that goal rather than institutional maintenance.

Sentence: Some come, some stay: more transition.

Word: Transition

Comments Shared

-“Yes” What a beautiful identity!

- May you continue to find joy in the journey.

-Transitions in the community are hard. I feel that connection/loss with you.

-I pray that you can grieve losses in healthy ways and find new growth in these spaces people leave behind.

-Well done, good and faithful servants.

Scottsdale Mennonite Church – Stories for Allegheny Mennonite Conference
August 3-5, 2018

Some of our pain...

Scottsdale Mennonite Church (SMC) was formed in 2003, a merger of the former Kingview Mennonite Church and The Mennonite Church of Scottsdale, both with their own much longer storied histories. The decline in our numbers, the primary reason for the merger and primarily the result of a shrinking Mennonite Publishing House staff because of the re-formation of how denominational Mennonite Publishing would be accomplished, has caused much lamenting at SMC. Jobs were lost, persons needed to move to find work, friends were no longer present, lives were upended. Although not totally defining, this pain has been most impactful for us.

Most of the anguish has come not *that* the Publishing House was closed, but *how* it was closed. From the perspective of many employees, the unceremonious terminations, the disrespect for long-term service and discounting the significant role MPH has played in the history of the denomination by persons hired to accomplish the downsizing has been close to unbearable. The MPH building was sold to a fragile local congregation. They have not been able to keep up the building, which is in the process of coming up for tax and sheriff's sales. The building is in disrepair and an eyesore.

So, we not only live with memories of better times, not all that long ago, but we are constantly reminded of what has been when we walk or drive to worship each Sunday morning. We sometimes use words like "inevitable," but we also use words like "betrayal." There have been some attempts by individuals across the church to reach out in care and healing, but the biggest disappointments and anger have come from portrayals and characterizations in the Mennonite media insinuating that less than reputable decisions were made by key MPH personnel. We were compared to Enron. Many feel we were caught in a whirlwind, beyond our own making. We shed tears when we remember the way some were treated and the ongoing lack of memory from the denomination to whom contributions were made for better than a century from this small Pennsylvania town.

One sentence - Disrespect and betrayal were visited upon us by corporate America and our own denomination.

One word - Disillusioned.

Comments Shared

-My heart is broken for your communal pain. I grieve with you.

- May Jesus give you beauty from the ashes.

-I love the way you are engaging your community in new ways around the table! Sounds awesome!

-Your community partnerships are inspiring.

It takes hard work and intentionality to develop life-giving community connections.

-Creativity is alive and well! Your alternative to Sunday morning worship services is exciting and beautiful.

-Scottdale, we love our partnership and look forward to growth in partnership.  Laurelville

Philippi Mennonite Church

“Happy are those who mourn.” In true Biblical fashion, we find that our joys and sorrows are two sides of the same story. We find it hard to separate the sad and happy stories.

Over the years, relating to conference we have felt that our remoteness both physically and theologically has been both a joy and a sadness. We like the link that conference gives us to the broader church. We are proud of our stand of solidarity with Hyattsville. We feel that we give conference a broader dimension. However, we sometimes find ourselves world-weary with the polity (whatever that is).

In our own church life, service and mentoring has been and continues to be a vital part of our life. After 25 years of hosting a Service Adventure unit we grieve the end of this ministry. Each year we experienced both joy and sadness. As we anticipated new volunteers each August we were excited and joyful: Who would come; what would they be like; how would we mentor them? Then in June we were saddened as they left us. We had gotten to know and love them. Now we sent them out into the world, hoping that some of our mentoring would yield fruit.

Giving up Service Adventure was a deep sadness for us; both in giving up an important ministry in our community but also in the realization that we are aging and have decreased energy with which to host young people.

However, we continue to seek ways to serve and mentor. We build foundations for new homes in our community. We pack backpacks for foster children and hungry school children. We provide Teddy Bears for the first responders to give to children in crisis. We volunteer with MDS, MCC, and locally. Our vision is large (the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak). We are not satisfied with where we are now. We want to do more so we are on a new adventure. We are working with the idea of calling a part-time pastor and community worker.

Sentence: Happy are those who mourn.

Word: Adventure

Comments Shared:

-I hear: A church with a big 

-Laurelville wants to adventure with you.

-Standing with Hyattsville was more than symbolic – thank you for your courage!

-Depp gratitude for your solidarity with Hyattsville.

-Love that your loss/hope stories are one.

-Blessings to you all as you continue life together faithfully in the next steps.

-May the ripples of God's love in you spread far and wide.

-A journey of the parenting church. Growth, release, and then – reminds me of a garden – growth space and unexpected blessing you didn't even know you planted.

-Appreciate your solidarity with Hyattsville.

-I pray that God fills the emptiness left by the Service Adventure unit with something amazing and beautiful.

-“Hoping that some of our mentoring would yield fruit.” Yes, Lord, may it be so.

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Hyattsville

Hyattsville - Story of pain

At Hyattsville Mennonite Church we work hard to take responsibility for our own feelings, to listen to the pain that we each inevitably hold and to find ways to work together for healing, in ourselves and in the world.

When the conference decided in 2005 that how we live our Christian life together at HMC was wrong and sinful, we experienced a range of emotions that coincide with the stages of grief. We bargained with the conference for more than two years leading up to the vote. We tried to explain our life together as a faithful response to our congregational context. In return, we were likened to a cancer that needed to be excised. We were shocked at the injustice of the conference's decision. We were pained by what felt like an intention to dismiss and cut us off. We were angry that the church would operate out of what looked to us like fear. Many of us felt depressed and despondent that the church had failed to live up to what it preaches about justice and peace.

As individuals, we carried the pain and anger but we tried not to let an external decision dominate our internal worship and work together as a congregation. We were grateful to discover that we were not alone in our grief; others came to stand with us. In fact, we grew in numbers and in spiritual understanding during the years we were under discipline. We grew in our awareness of what it means to experience "persecution." Straight people in the congregation got a small taste of the structural inequality and injustice that LGBTQ people regularly experience. Even in our pain, we expanded our understanding of what it means to offer hospitality to whoever comes through the door. We grew to understand in new ways the healing powers of love.

We do not ever wish for pain as a path to growth and love. Yet, we discovered that as we tended our own congregation, we used what others thought was disposable, and turned refuse into life-

giving compost. We nurtured our life together and found that perseverance led to new identity and clarity of purpose.

Sentence - Despite feeling dismissed by the larger church, we persevered and found new clarity as followers of Jesus.

Word - Clarity

Hyattsville - Story of Hope

In our mission statement, we describe ourselves as a congregation committed to making Mennonite traditions and beliefs relevant in our cultural context of Washington, DC. Over the past decade, we have grown to understand the ever expansive lens of hospitality as a rich way to view our faith. Welcoming each other and welcoming the stranger are not mutually exclusive. We have grown to understand that LGBTQ people are only one of the groups of people that have felt marginalized by the church. Many people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds are hungry for what the church has to offer. We are finding that openness to questions, varied gifts and diverse life experiences enriches us all.

Since 2006, we have had three pastoral transitions, welcomed dozens of new members, said farewell to dozens more and marked the death of important members who guided us in various ways. After 20 years of discussion, we rebuilt part of the church making the building accessible to all so that our theology and architecture are finally cohesive.

Our challenges with the conference and the larger church helped us to learn resilience in the face of difficulty. We found new strength to live out our faith. Our prayer life has deepened. We are more open to the use of silence as a congregation and have held three silent retreats with small groups. Our commitments to worship that connects the bible with our own experiences in the world are solid. We have increased our use and appreciation for visual art and worship arts as a means of encountering the Holy among and around us.

Our connections with the local community continue to grow and expand. While our traditional “service committee” folded for lack of interest, we have new energy in a group that reaches out to refugees. Another group works to support immigrants that are threatened with detention and deportation. We are finding new ways to open our building to the community. We now host English and baking classes in cooperation with the local community college. An inter-racial women’s choir rehearses in the building weekly. A small congregation of Central American immigrants meets twice a week for worship. A fathers group meets each month to learn parenting skills.

The new life we have found as we create a space of hospitality for each other has helped us to see that hospitality, love and acceptance are needed in the world by many. We are grateful for the renewal we have experienced as we share love and acceptance. Following in the way of Jesus has brought God’s renewing energy to all of us.

Sentence - Following in the way of Jesus, sharing love and acceptance, has brought God’s renewing energy to all of us.

Word - Resilience

-I love that your building is a place of learning, growth, connectedness, and community.

-Sorry for your pain!

-I appreciate that during those “discipline” years you stayed with us. You exemplified grace.

-It is encouraging to hear that outcome as also seeking clarity and purpose.

-Over the years I have appreciated your steadfast faithfulness, but giving up on who you are, who we can be.

-Thank you for turning your pain into truth and beauty.

University

University Mennonite Church experiences pain and brokenness in our congregational life. We are generally a congregation of problem-solvers so when life unfolds in ways that we do not expect it can result in emotional pain.

Some of our pain over the past five years comes from watching too many of our teenagers and young adults move away from organized church, the experience of divorce in some of our relationships, and the reality that our congregation is aging. This last reality has meant a rise in health issues and an increased awareness of our own mortality, both as individuals and as a congregation.

We are also aware of some pain that comes from a decline in Sunday morning attendance, and an increasing awareness that we struggle with how to share our unique congregational identity with those beyond our walls. During the past year we've also felt the pain of saying goodbye to our most recent lead pastor, Marv Friesen. We feel some pain and anxiety that our new 3rd Way Collective campus ministry has yet to find sustainable financial support from beyond our walls. We also feel the pain that our own discernment in becoming an inclusive and affirming congregation toward LGBTQ individuals has been a challenge for some of our members, while also being a catalyst for other churches to leave our conference. We lament that we struggle to know how to reach beyond our walls to share our unique faith with the broader community and welcome people in.

All of these things make us wonder how our congregation will change or should change, moving forward, and that is unsettling. We are a congregation that wants to feel comfortable as a community when we gather, and change can be disruptive to that experience.

One sentence - We feel the pain and brokenness related to the suffering in our world, and our questions about future identity, changes, and attendance of our congregation.

One word - Uncertainty

University Mennonite Church experiences joy and hopefulness in both personal ways and in congregational ways. We are a congregation that enjoys sharing in each other's joy and celebration, and this practice provides us with hope for our future as a congregation.

Some of our joy over the past five years comes from the participation of new families and new endeavors. One of the challenges of our college town is its transient nature. While we have said many goodbyes over the past decade, we have also welcomed in many new families and individuals who have made this church their home - even if just for a season while passing through. We have experienced new life from children being born, and have celebrated a few marriages during this time.

Our congregational joy and hopefulness comes from new initiatives and endeavors. We are excited to be welcoming Kate Heinzl as our new lead pastor in September and are looking forward to the new life she will bring. It has been a joy to watch 3rd Way Collective take shape as an extension of our congregation on campus at Penn State University. Campus Pastor Ben has been affirmed as a community leader who has worked to build connecting points between our congregation, the campus, and the community. We have also helped to guide the birth of a permanent Ten Thousand Villages store here in State College which will open later this fall. This feels particularly satisfying for those who have volunteered many years at our annual Ten Thousand Villages sale in our church building.

We celebrate that we are a diverse congregation with respect to theological views, political preferences, age differences, educational achievements, ethnic backgrounds, etc. Our challenge therefore is how to meld these disparate aspects of who we are into a "body" that reflects the Body of Christ.

We continue to find joy in being a congregation that stands up for issues of peace and justice in our community - both on an individual level in our daily lives, as well as our collective voice as a peace church in our town.

One sentence - We feel the joy and hopefulness of the anticipation of a new pastor, the continued growth of our campus ministry, the opening of the Ten Thousand Villages store, and the new life being lived out each day in State College.

One word –Transformation

Comments Shared:

- Our God is powerful and he is there for everyone.
- You are “aging” with grace and there is so much newness being created!
- The fire of the Holy Spirit is in you.
- Finding joy in the midst of a transient congregation is a challenge that Pittsburgh Mennonite can relate to (also a university town). May we support one another in this unique opportunity and challenge.
- I’m eager to “come and see” what God is doing in your midst!
- The liminal space is sacred space. Hope and strength in your journey together.
- He will call; you will do so.
- I appreciate your imagination and boldness.
- I felt hope when I read about who you are together. Beautiful.

Crossroads Community Church

Sharing our pain through our journey.

The events that have brought Crossroads to the place we are right now in this time of history may share some similarities to others but are more than likely very different than any other congregation.

Since the invitation to share “our pain” we have wondered and asked how productive is it to dig up the hurts from the past 5 to 10 year and revisit situations that may not even have the same players at this point in time. Many congregations have decided to sever ties with AMC and a few have remained. All of us do not carry the severity of wounds as others, but we hope that we can support each other and pray for healing without rehashing and reopening old wounds.

With that being shared, this is some of our pain from our history. Our story at Crossroads has a wonderful beginning, some tragic chapters in the middle and a glorious continuation. We have a long history of people’s lives being transformed with good Bible teaching, a productive Bible school where children from the community were hearing and learning about Jesus.

Then there were the problems of an aging, dwindling population and conference asked for younger families to make a commitment to Weaver Mennonite and this infused new life into the church. During this time Conference was a huge help to us and we prayed for more people and people came and with that people with different backgrounds, different worship styles and different ideas came with them.

Growing pains produced divisions that we did not handle well. Disagreements became splits; we were not working with Jesus as our center we were not committed to each other or discovering peace. We asked for help from conference, but very little help was given, it felt as if we were in this struggle alone. Since then we have realized however that intervention was not going to help us at this point.

This season at Crossroads brought much pain. If our story can be helpful to the condition that conference finds itself now, it would be that during our splits everything we had known as our community changed. Many left and those that stayed had to work hard to focus on where the Lord wanted to take us rather than where we had been. We realized that we had operated out of

our pain, our loss, and our desire to be right and justified and that is not a good place to be operating in.

One Sentence: We realized that we had operated out of our pain, our loss and our desire to be right and justified and that is not a good place to be operating in.

One Word: Overlooked

We have become a community of believers that is very aware of God's "second chances" in our lives and we have shared this message with the community around us. We no longer focus on who we were but who we are. We are redeemed people.

We are also restored people. When we think of Peter getting out of a boat we quickly think of him stepping out onto the water and losing his focus when he looked down and started to sink. Jesus rescued the sinking Peter as He rescues us when we are sinking and have taken our eyes off Him.

There is another time that Peter got out of a boat. A quote from Max Lucado is "The most difficult journey is back to the place where you failed." After Peter denied Jesus even though he is back with the other disciples he went to the tomb when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, Peter felt separated from Jesus and announced to the others, "I am going fishing."

We focus on the person on the shore telling them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and the net was full. We at Crossroads try and focus on the part of the story when Peter realized that it was Jesus on the shore. HE JUMPED IN THE WATER to get to Jesus quickly. The others came to shore and also got to eat with Jesus, but Peter wanted to be with Jesus so much that he couldn't wait to be with Jesus. Peter was restored to fellowship with Jesus and prepared for the ministry that was coming. We have been given second chances to be restored so that we can be used.

It has been a long journey to move beyond the pain of the past, but we have. As most congregations we have went through times of pain and sorrow and loss, we are also a congregation made up of people who have been through pain as well and some who have caused

pain to others. And they have shown up on our doorstep wondering if what they have heard about this Jesus is true. Does this Jesus really offer a second or third chance? Does this Jesus really heal my brokenness? Does this Jesus really have a place for me? Our answers, our ministry has been to say yes. Our focus has been to meet people where they are and journey along with them. This has brought so much JOY to the congregation and has made us who we are today.

One Sentence: Not through any merit of our own, but like David and Peter, we disappointed God by our actions and choices and YET while we were still sinners, He chose to redeem us from our sins and restore us to right relationship to Himself.

One Word: Redeemed and Restored!

Shared Comments:

“Renewed energy for missional opportunities.” Praise God!

-Thank you for you ministry of reconciliation.

-Your reminder of Peter’s second instance of stepping out of the boat moved me to tears last night. The Holy Spirit was speaking powerfully through you to exactly what I personally, and our congregation in Pittsburgh, needs to hear right now. Alleluia and AMEN.

-Thanks for also “taking in” and welcoming Service Adventure!

-I value your choice to answer “yes” and to meet people where they are.

-“Overlooked” is a really tough concept – hold onto the joy!

-One of your gifts is to articulate that working out of pain and justification does not produce Spirit fruit.

-I love that you can see the redemption and restoration that have come out of your pain and brokenness.

Stahl

PAIN AND BROKENNESS

To be humans is to have pain and Stahl Mennonite congregation is no exception. Times of transition are stressful, especially with a pastoral transition. A recent pastor brought new ideas and personality that challenged some of the previous ways of “doing church”. Some felt like they were being “pushed out” by these new ideas which they felt were contrary to their previous Biblical understanding. At the same time this drew in new people who were looking for a fresh perspective on Scriptures.

Overall the size of the congregation, like many others has been in decline from the attendance of prior decades. What is described as most painful about this decline is that people left before trying to work out the differences that were emerging. This felt like the previous relationships that had been built, were no longer valued. There was resentment that they were not seemingly willing to “put the work into” it or even give words to why they left. They simply stopped coming and disappeared from congregational life.

One lay leader, courageously, admits there were times of great discomfort during Sunday morning worship services and the challenges that came through sermons. Yet, this Leader also admits that the greatest personal spiritual growth happened when they left uncomfortable and needed to process more deeply what was heard.

To live with the diversity that has emerged within the congregation while transitioning into the future and staying alive as a congregation, continue to be potential opportunities for more pain even as they allow for our greatest future hope.

Pain and Brokenness in one sentence: Pastoral transitions and new understandings of how to be church have led some to leave the congregation while others remain feeling hurt and sometimes uncomfortable wondering what will come next.

Pain and Brokenness in one word: Separation

JOY AND HOPEFULNESS

Despite the pains of decline and transition, Stahl Mennonite finds a great deal to be hopeful about. Even as numbers decline they have come to appreciate more, those who have remained. The gifts each one brings are valued when individuals step into roles and tasks they may never have thought they could do before. With this also comes less critique and criticism of “how it is done” because each one knows those who offer gifts are fewer and must be affirmed. Even though there are fewer people, more are involved in the day to day life of the church.

With new people comes new life and new perspective on what it means to be a Mennonite Anabaptist congregation in an ever changing cultural landscape. It has meant branching out into communities in the Johnstown area and disrupting the closer tight knit family names by learning some new names and new locations and what they bring to the body. This has brought a renewed energy for missional opportunities.

There has also been appreciation that participants can come to a Sunday worship and not have a “Hallmark Sermon” but are left challenged to continue to work at their Christian faith. This has increased the personal spiritual growth of many participants. The Wednesday Soup Night continues to bring many from the community, both Stahl participants and others, into the building to fellowship and share around a hot bowl, or two... or three, of soup at no charge with no political or theological strings attached. We are reminded that despite our differences we can still sit together around the table and enjoy what we have been blessed to receive.

Joy and Hope in one sentence: Stahl Mennonite participants have learned to step into new roles and have a greater appreciation for the gifts each person now brings to the congregation.

Joy and Hope in one word: Opportunity

Comments Shared:

-Thank you for being brave and growing.

-There is a myth that one person can do everything right in a relationship and it will work. This is a myth because relationships are at least two people. Embrace the chaos as you can. Hold close to

the hope that is our God. And when in doubt, come to the table-soup bread, wine, we sit with you and hold you close as church. Love!

-I appreciate your openness to transformation and the new life that you are finding with a smaller group that is engaging in new ways.

–Hooray for soup! And the relations built at a common table by sharing care and joy.

Springs Mennonite Church

Joys and Hopefulness

We find Hope:

- In our having taken time to discern our congregation's affiliation, instead of making an impulsive decision, after some members raised concerns about the reinstatement of Hyattsville and credentialing an openly LGBTQ pastor.
- In recognizing that throughout our sometimes-painful discernment process we have continually seen some members expressing compassion and deference towards others.
- In our times of fellowship outside of the church such as: rides with our pastors in a classic red Cadillac (there's a bit of a backstory) and a last minute "flash mob" meeting at a congregant's local ice cream shop.
- In the expressed desire of many to live with our diversity of opinions as we firmly believe Jesus Christ is our center.
- In our acceptance of a female pastor.
- In the publicly stated commitment by several members that they will maintain their relationship with Springs Mennonite Church no matter the outcome of the conference affiliation decision.

We find Joy:

- In our gathering for a time of fellowship over breakfast every Sunday morning before Sunday school and church.
- In Sunday school classes' love gifts toward community projects.

- In our youth's participation in the broader church through Laurelville, Mennonite Church USA Conventions, and Youth Cabinet.
- In our support of missions, through projects such as the World's Attic, Tri-State Relief Sale, and Daughters of Dorcas (sewing circle), as well as sending and supporting members in programs such as Mennonite Disaster Service, Service Adventure, and long-term missions through Mennonite Mission Network.
- By engaging children in our worship service by having them collect My Coins Count offerings during our worship.
- In our various forms of community outreach including: sponsoring a community picnic, hosting a free community Thanksgiving dinner, and holding a "free" yard sale.

Comments Shared:

-I love hearing about your creative community engagement and congregational life!

-Thank you for your honesty. May God be present in the chaos& possibilities for new life – that you can't imagine now.

-Thank you for your solidarity

-Thank you for honestly sharing your pain and struggle. I pray for a spirit of peace to prevail. It sounds like there is good community coming from life thriving in moments too!

-May you always sense God's presence.

-Nothing is lost on the breath of God.

-The Holy Spirit be with you.

-Go on now and make disciples of all nations!

Pittsburgh

Our Lament

PMC has experienced real pain over the previous decade and a half. Our relationship with conference has at times been part of that struggle.

The general pattern of transience among the PMC congregation has been difficult as we see initiatives wax and wane as passionate individuals pass in and out of the community and as relationships grow and then fade as people move on. Our transition from small family church to a mid-size church that is both organization and relational community has been difficult one.

At the same time we have struggled to define our relationships in Allegheny Conference due to the lack of consensus in AMC regarding how to live with differences in theological convictions, due to the treatment of Hyattsville, and due to the trauma of having the vote to discipline Hyattsville take place in PMC's building.

As PMC's culture and theology shifted toward welcoming of LGBTQ persons, the community felt isolated from the conference.

After the purchase of our new building, its physical size and the economic commitment required to maintain it have put a strain on the PMC community. It is troubling to weigh the sense of too many of our resources going toward maintaining it against the pressure we feel to make good use of this massive structure at the center of the Swissvale community to the benefit of the neighborhood.

Our Mission and Service Commission has felt the brunt of the church wanting to be active in mission and yet not having a consensus regarding how and where to invest our resources. This dynamic has created frustration and pain for members of the committee.

Going through a honeymoon period with a new, young pastor and coming out the other side with a clearer view of his strengths, weaknesses, and limitations, and having to reckon with different emphases than some expected and the disappointment of expectations unmet, has been challenging.

We experience pain in trying to negotiate a world that seems to be falling apart around us and not knowing how to bring light into that or bear witness effectively.

Despite PMC's effort and desire to become inclusive racially, including more African Americans especially, we have failed to do so. This has been a source of pain and disappointment.

One Sentence -It has been a discouraging to deal with the differences between our hopes and dreams and our reality

One Word - Struggle

Our Joy!

Babies! Suddenly PMC is home to about 30 kids age 4 and under. What a lot of celebration!

The new building has also been a source of life and the continued work has lent a sense of steady improvement as we have worked tirelessly to make it a useful, beautiful, safe, and inclusive space. The journey is ongoing.

The Grow Group! Over the past four years, the Grow Group has turned our landscaping into a series of vibrant explosions of beauty and edible goodness. If it won't help keep your body alive, it will probably expand your imagination with its beauty and color! This has been joyful again and again.

Each Lent, instead of sermons, we have 3 or 4 people tell first-person stories from their lives, constructed in response to a weekly theme. Each week's theme is tied to our overarching Lenten theme and that Sunday's scriptures. It has been a joy to diversify the voices we hear in worship and learn about the amazing things that have made people who they are. A beautiful thing in PMC's life has been the way we have been able to learn each other's passions, interests, and activity and to mutually support each other in our endeavors.

Several families in and connected to PMC have chosen to care for and adopt foster children. Seeing these children and their family relationships grow and supporting the parents on their journey is one of the deep joys we participate in together.

Our annual yard sale, which we've done three times now, is a great thing for us, one in which neighbors and friends come into our space and enjoy the bounty that the community has produced.

Church Retreat has been a wonderful way to spend time and build relationships together each fall as well as work towards common vision and deepened fellowship.

SLED has a source of joy and support to those in student debt

The beginnings of the neighborhood community's use of our facility has been a source of hope.

We are very excited to host our 50th Anniversary celebration next weekend!

Last summer we were able to purchase a lot next to our church that had an abandoned building. We had to tear the old building down, but today sunflowers stretch ten feet into the sky. That is joy!

One Sentence – New directions and new life have cropped up again and again in ways we never expected.

One Word – Adventure!

Comments Shared:

Thanks for naming some very difficult things honestly!

-Spirit of healing come meet you in your journey. Hope, presence, and peace in the days ahead.

-It is a great gift to honestly name the hard work of balancing hope/dreams and the reality that is present.

-Have patience...the Spirit will reveal your best service opportunity at the right time.

-Thank you for your willingness to hire a “young” pastor and for imagining church in new ways.

-Happy anniversary. Blessing on 50 more years of faithfulness.

-Thank you for your love and partnership. -Laurelville

