

NEWSLETTER

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This newsletter belongs to all of us. Your input is greatly appreciated. Please feel free to submit articles to the editor.

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Mission Statement

As we encounter God's heart of love, our hearts are made new by God's Spirit. We invite people to experience Christ's love, welcoming each one into a caring fellowship, serving Christ with our gifts and resources.


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THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION

BY PASTOR DAWN RANCK HOWER

We've been talking about preparation here at New Holland. Last month in my newsletter article I compared the work that we are doing in the congregation with preparing soil in a new garden that I'm creating at home. The key question that we are grappling with is how is God calling us to prepare the soil so that we are prepared for new growth.

I've been reading a variety of books on church revitalization, church renewal, church growth. Dan Southerland in his book Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change, says that "before we can receive God's vision for our church we must prepare for vision. A vision is a picture of what God wants to do."

Southerland lists 5 steps of preparation based on Nehemiah that I think are important for us to pay attention to.

Nehemiah is one of the most visionary leaders in the Bible. He pulled off an amazing project — the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem.

1 – Collected information.

Nehemiah understood that before he could set a vision he needed to fully understand the setting and issues. He asked questions of the people who had first hand experience about the conditions in Jerusalem.

What information do we need to have before we can set a vision? First, we need to understand the people that we are trying to reach. Those who don't know Jesus yet. Last week

Ryan Umble told us that the way to learn a language, is to do a lot of listening before beginning to talk. I think the same thing is true when we relate to others. We need to do a lot of listening before we earn the right to talk. Southerland writes, "do not make the mistake of thinking you know the unchurched people in your community. Chances are you might be surprised at what you find if you take the time to do the research." The second place we need to go for information is to study churches that are reaching unchurched people. The best way to learn how to do something is to be mentored by those who are successful at doing it.

Questions for reflection: What is the information that we need to be gathering about and from the people who live in New Holland Borough? Who are the people we need to talk to? Who are the churches that we need to learn from?

2 – Holy Discontent.

When Nehemiah heard the answers of the people who knew what was happening in Jerusalem, he sat down and wept. What he learned broke his heart and all that he could do was cry. Vision is usually birthed out of heartache and burden.

Questions for reflection: As we ask questions in the Borough of New Holland, what is it that breaks my heart and burden me to the point of tears?

3 – Fasting.

Nehemiah "mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." Fasting is giving up food or some other

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WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

BY PAUL MARTIN

LOVE MY NEIGHBOR—REALLY? MATTHEW 28: 20

—teaching them...” to obey everything I have commanded you.”

(Jesus’ final words to his disciples)

We must assume these are his words to us, his later day disciples, as well.

James calls these final words of Jesus the Royal Law....

“ love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

Lord, you aren’t hard to love, because you’ve proven that you first loved me.

The tough question is how do I love my neighbor? This is especially true if he/she is the unlovable sort and is prone to be critical and negative about nearly everything that goes on in the neighborhood. I find the NIMBY (not in my back yard) kind of person really selfish and hard to like let alone love. Lord, you aren’t hard to love, but that neighbor.... is a different category.

Lord, you didn’t seem to have a problem with the unlikable or unlovable. You listened to and understood them; and helped them to see themselves.

Help me, Lord, to listen and try to understand such persons rather than just sit back and be critical; and thereby only renew the cycle of community tensions. Help me to see when I should get involved and not sit back in smug satisfaction; glad you have helped me to... not be like that neighbor. AMEN

LEADERSHIP TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

BY JENN ESBENSHADE

Finances – Wade Esbenshade, Finance Chair, gave an update on the church finances. For the most part, line items are coming in below budget. Income is slightly above budget. There was a net income of \$674.07 in the first quarter. The majority of commission expenses were under budget. There was a meeting with the ELC in regards to the Memo of Understanding & how it can be updated.

MST Update - \$6983 of total support was given and \$2861.15 was donated for West Africa projects. NHMC will continue to collect all the money for Beryl and West Africa and then the money is disbursed by Ken Benner, power of attorney for Beryl, who gets the money to Beryl.

College Funds – The LT is working to update the scholarship fund for those attending Mennonite schools as well as for ELC scholarships.

Elder Update – There were 42 votes. All 42 were yes for Ruth while 41 yes and 1 no were for Wade (vote of no was concern over Wade doing too much).

Conversation with Lancaster Conference – Jenn met with Dale Stoltzfus from Lancaster Conference to have one last follow up in regards to the pastoral transition. Dale issued an apology for our congregation getting caught in a tumultuous time for the Conference that had to do with another situation. He explained his views of how events transpired and gave context to why events played out the way they did. It was a healing conversation and explained why there was so much conflict around the pastoral transition.

Child Protection Update – All volunteers with children are now mandatory reporters for child abuse due to new laws. Conse-

quently the church needs a new child-protect policy and updated volunteer information. Lancaster Conference has a “Safe Group Process” that walks churches through every update that needs to be met in order to meet these new regulations. There is a new group beginning in May and it would be half price to join. Peg Jackson and Bryan Hower will take the lead in updating our church’s safe church policy through Lancaster Conference. They will attend the meetings and take care of the process. Nancy Hoober and Jenn Esbenshade also said they will help in any way needed.

Summer Sunday School – Chuck Holt from the Factory Ministries will do poverty training seminars during the Sunday School on June 7 and 14 and also do an hour of training after the monthly fellowship meal on the 7th.

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EARLY LEARNING CENTER NEWS

BY JEN MORALES

The months of March and April have been very busy. We focused on the theme of community and community helpers, began a soccer training program and celebrated the national holiday of the week of the young child. We had many visitors because of these events and kept quite busy.

Each Tuesday morning for 9 weeks we have a group called "Soccer Shots" working with some of our children on soccer skills. This was an optional program so not all of the kids had to participate. It has been a great addition to our emphasis on physical activity and healthy habits. Each day we have been striving to have music in movement time for the kids also. As a whole center we set apart this time to dance and exercise.

Multiple days each week community helpers visited us or we visited them. We were exited to offer a teddy bear clinic where we could bring our bears into an emergency room worker who bandaged them up after we indicated their injury. Nicole Martin, a patron here at the center, provided this clinic. Nelson Horst, also a patron and local owner of Horst's Tree Service, brought out his bucket truck and talked about tree care. We visited Garden Spot Fire and Rescue where we climbed through the trucks, learned about fire safety and saw a fire fighter in full uniform. Aida May, patron, brought in a cat and talked to us about pet care and her job at the Humane League. Officer Zimmerman and Officer Bitner from the New Holland Police visited us, showed

us their cars and even turned on the lights and sirens. Pastor Dawn talked to us about being a Pastor and left us each take a turn using the microphone. Dr. Wolfe, New Holland Medicine and Grandparent, talked to us about being a doctor. We also walked to New Holland Autocare and learned about fixing cars. It was great time learning about the community around us.

The week of April 13-17 we celebrated The Week of the Young Child. Our theme this week was Camping. We had tents, a fire circle, trees and even bears! Miss Amie talked to us about camping, the supplies you need and animals we may see. She also helped us make s'mores with Miss Mariana and myself. That was a yummy but sticky treat! Mr. Lichtry, from Hinkletown Mennonite School brought a bearded dragon, corn snake, fire bellied frogs and hissing cockroaches for us to learn about. He left us touch them and hold some of them. We had a great time "camping" and culminated the week with a Parent/Grandparent luncheon. This is always an exciting event for all involved.

As we move into the month of May we take a deep breath and look forward to June where we will once again be very busy with our annual "Fun" raising weekend and Summer program. Please plan to join us on Friday June 12 and 13 for our Chicken Barbeque and Car Cruise and Yard Sale. We are in need of items for our yard sale. Please bring in any items you would be willing to donate. We are accepting clothing, household items, books, DVD's, and toys. If

donating furniture please call the office, 354-4440 or see Jen to set up a time for those items to be delivered or picked up.

(LT Highlights Cont. from page 2)

The other Sunday Schools in June and through July will be presented by Anthony Ulloa. There will be no Sunday School in August.

World Conference – On July 26 there is the possibility of hosting a group from Mennonite World Conference for church. More details to follow.

Pastoral Vacation – Dawn's vacation is planned for May 7-11 and June 16-21.

Congregational Next Steps – Dawn posed some important questions for us to consider. Why do we want to grow? What do we mean by growth? Is it only numbers or is it also spiritual? What word describes how we are feeling right now about NHMC? How do we collect information from our community and get to know them? Who would we talk to about this? Who are the churches that are reaching out to the un-churched and how do we learn from them?

The Importance of Preparation (cont. from page 1)

activity, not merely to give it up, but to give it up in order to devote serious time and attention to prayer.

Questions for reflection: What am I willing to give up in order to devote serious time and attention to prayer, to search for God?

4 – Prayer.

While Nehemiah only fasted several days he prayed several months. One problem that many of us have in receiving God's vision is that we aren't ever still enough to hear God's voice. Psalm 46:10 says "Be still ... and know that I am God." It's a simple concept, the more time we spend with God the better we know God. Vision is usually given to those who pray until they get it. We must pray if we want to know God's vision for God's church — because God gives vision to people of prayer.

Questions for reflection: How much time am I spending in prayer, learning to know God, listening for God's voice?

5 – Waiting.

Nehemiah waited. The wall of Jerusalem had been down already for 70 years. Even after Nehemiah understood his vision, it was 4 months before he began. Nehemiah waited. Isaiah 40:31 tells us that "Those who wait on the Lord ... shall renew their strength."

"A key truth," writes Dan Southerland, "is that rushed preparation results in sloppy vision. You must collect information about your community. You must develop a holy discontent with the status quo in your church. You must fast and pray in order to seek God. And you must wait, and wait, and wait ... Time spent in deliberate preparation is never wasted time."

Questions for reflection: Is waiting for God's vision hard for me? Why or why not?

During Sunday's congregational meeting we will dream ideas about how we might collect information from our community and from other churches. Then as we collect the information, each of us will need to pay attention to what tugs at our hearts.

In the meantime, will you join me in fasting and prayer? Giving up food or some other activity in order to create time to pray and ask God to give our church a vision for the future. Ending each time of prayer with the prayer of Jesus "Not what I want, but what you want."

BOOK EXCERPT

BY BERYL FORRESTER

Excerpted from *Animist to Anabaptist*.

From Chapter 6: The Gospel is Cross Cultural

In my years of preparation for a return to Africa the thought would occasionally flash through my mind: What if, when I finally arrive in Africa, the Africans do not accept me? What would I do then?

We all have a kind of innate fear of cultures and places different from our own. A deep, intense fear is called xenophobia. Because that fear dominates many Americans, relatively few travel overseas, even for a vacation, let alone live abroad as a long term missionary. Imagination can suggest all sorts of cultural barriers to leaving the homeland shores: Over there it's not safe, the food is bad, people aren't friendly, I will get sick, maybe even die, I can't speak the language, I need to stay here with my family and on and on.

In contrast, Jesus talks about leaving familiar territory for the sake of the Kingdom as if it is the norm for anyone expecting to participate in God's Kingdom, present and future: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:29).

The Gospel of God's Kingdom, is itself, a cross-cultural phenomenon. God's covenant with Abraham was a promise to bring blessing to all people groups through the descendants of Abraham. And the word of the prophets through the centuries before Christ, announce a Messiah who would bring God's salvation to all peoples. When Messiah Jesus finally was on the scene, his ministry was not chiefly at Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, but out in the mixed area: Galilee of the Gentiles. Through his ministry, Jesus made it clear that he had come as Messiah for all peoples who are ready to faithfully follow him. That's the first reason why it is easy, natural and even mandatory for Christians to have a significant cross-cultural worldview.

The second reason is "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). And Paul reminds us that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). In this life, Christians are already cross-cultural creatures. Our passport says Guinea-Bissau or U.S. but our first loyalty and our manner of living say that our primary identity is the unbounded Kingdom of Heaven.