

## JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Shalom Mennonite Church

December 22, 2021

### WORSHIP: Our relationship with God

Chair: Brittany Bither

**Last Sunday (12/19)**, was the final Sunday of Advent, and Brian invited us to "Dare to Imagine God's Face" - which can be intimidating in light of God's holiness and knowledge of us - and yet the Bible affirms that when we "face" God, we find not anger or disappointment but love.

**This Sunday (12/26)**, Christmas Sunday Craig will be preaching from Colossians 3:12-17 and how God's gift of Christ is the gift that keeps on giving.

**Next Sunday (1/2)**, we will be experimenting with a different type of virtual worship experience, in which Brian will lead us in a discussion of Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 and we will break into small groups a few times in the service to worship through conversation.

### COMMUNITY LIFE: Relationships at Shalom

Chair: Herb Troyer

## CALENDAR

**Sunday, December 26** at 10a - Singing at Shalom (see note below)

Singing at Shalom - The Worship Commission is going to offer one more opportunity for "Singing at Shalom" for this Sunday, 12/26 at 10a. People will be invited to come into the sanctuary - wearing masks and socially distanced - and sing Advent hymns and Christmas carols for 15 minutes. This singing will NOT be a part of the Zoom worship service (which will continue as usual) and it will not be recorded. At 10:15, when the singing has ended, all participants will go into separate rooms of the church to close the doors and watch the Zoom service from a computer or phone. Then, once the service ends, all participants will go outside, where they can socialize with others with masks and/or distance or go home. This plan has been approved by the Safely Gathering Committee.

If you would like to participate, please email Brian at [brian@shalommennonite.com](mailto:brian@shalommennonite.com) by **Thursday, December 23 (tomorrow!) at noon**. Please tell him (1) the names of everyone in your pod\* who would like to participate, (2) whether you have a portable device with Zoom capabilities that you feel comfortable running yourself, and (3) if you have any special needs (can't do stairs, need a certain type of chair, etc.). Then, on Friday, December 24, Brian will email everyone who signed up with a room assignment.

\*A pod is a group of people who have agreed to mask and socially distance around everyone except for other members in their group. A pod may consist of 2-3 households who follow these rules together, a single household, or a single individual. If you have questions about who is in your pod, feel free to contact Brian and/or the Safely Gathering Committee.

**Sunday, January 2** No Sunday School

**Sunday, January 9** at 9:30a - Sunday School class: The Bible Project, led by OlaJowon Turentine

## Celebrations

Sat, Dec 25 -- Carol Bither

Sun, Dec 26 -- Melanie Hernandez

Mon, Dec 27 Robert Love

**DISCIPLING: Growing in our relationships**

Chair: Martha Yoder

Last spring we had a Sunday school class on Dismantling Institutional Racism in Congregations, using an online curriculum from Widerstand Consulting. You should have received an email in March inviting you to participate in Niche Academy, which provided the structure for our participation. If you would like to review any of that material, or if you would like to see their material on how to do a congregational audit, your username is your email address and your old password should still work. If you have lost your password, you can click on "forgot password" to create a new one. If you need help, email Martha Yoder Maust at [yodermaust@gmail.com](mailto:yodermaust@gmail.com) and I can send you a new invitation. We have access to this material until the end of February.

**OUTREACH: Relationships beyond Shalom**

Chair: Zenebe Abebe

**SPIRITUAL GIFTS DISCERNMENT TEAM**

Chair: Joyce Troyer

Do you know your spiritual gifts, passions and personal style? One option for this discernment process is to participate in the Sunday school class for this purpose that will begin Sunday, January 9. At this time it is anticipated the class will occur via Zoom at 9:30 am during Shalom's regular Zoom Sunday school time.

The class format will be similar to a small group that meets during the Sunday school time slot. I (Joyce) will present some content, but the majority of the class time will be sharing personal life stories and responses to these stories. The duration of the class will depend on the total number of participants.

The text we'll be using is Network Participant's Guide (2005) by Bruce Bugbee and Don Cousins. The church library has these books to borrow. If you prefer to buy your own, it's available on Amazon and from a number of new and used book sellers. (On 12/5/21, Better World Books showed 4 copies in "Used very good" condition" for \$3.98 with free shipping.) But it isn't necessary to have or even read the book if you don't find reading helpful.

As long as Shalom is meeting via Zoom, the class will be 9:30-10:30 on Zoom. When Shalom returns to meeting in person, the worship service will be at 9:30 and Sunday school will follow. If Shalom returns to meeting in person for worship and Sunday school while we are having this Sunday school class, we'll keep a hybrid Zoom option for those unable to attend in person.

Please email me ([troyers\\_hj@hotmail.com](mailto:troyers_hj@hotmail.com)) if you wish to attend, have questions, or would like information on alternative methods of discerning your spiritual gifts.

Joyce Troyer

## **Vision and Accountability Team**

Chair: Cheryl Martin

**Vision and Accountability Team questionnaire:** At the May 5, 2020 meeting of Commission Chairs Team, the Administrative Commission and the Worship Commission asked for help in discerning if and when it might be appropriate for the Congregation to begin meeting in person again. At that meeting, the Safely Gathering Committee was formed to advise the two commissions and the VAT. Since then, the Safely Gathering Committee has been taking the responsibility to determine when it is safe for our congregation to meet. However, at the December 5, 2021 Sunday school discussion, it became clear that many in the congregation believe that the church should resume in-person meetings and allow individual attendees to decide whether they want to take the risk of coming in person or participating virtually. Following that meeting, the Safely Gathering Committee sent a message to the VAT indicating that they preferred to not continue to make those decisions. The VAT met on December 6 to discuss this and decided to survey the congregation.

After consulting with the Administration Commission, it appears that using the format for a hybrid service as was done during the summer is not feasible. So, if we were to resume in-person services, we would stream the service live for people who wanted to watch from home, but they would not be able to have a live interaction with the people worshipping in the sanctuary. The recorded version would continue to be available as is currently.

At this time, the VAT, which is the congregational governance board, will assume responsibility for the decisions about the worship format. The Safely Gathering committee will continue to advise the VAT and congregation regarding cases, infection rates, and other data to help in decision-making. Please send your answers to these questions in an email to Cheryl Martin at [1cmm@att.net](mailto:1cmm@att.net) or by phone at either 317-885-0004 or 913-375-6264 by the end of Wednesday, December 29. Your answers will be kept anonymous and will be tabulated in aggregate. (See attachment for questions). Cheryl Martin

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Christmas Eve service:** First Mennonite Church will be hosting a Christmas Eve service on December 24 at 7p, which Shalom members are invited to attend in person or online. Their address is 4601 Knollton Road, Indianapolis Indiana, and the service can be streamed at <https://youtu.be/otr31cijya8>.

**The Repentance Resolution** - As mentioned at church this past Sunday, our church belongs to a larger church network called the Mennonite Church USA, and this May, MCUSA's delegate body is going to be consider whether to bring a resolution called "A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation" (linked [here](#)) to the denomination for a vote at the July 2023 convention. This resolution is unlike anything that has come to the Mennonite Church conventions before. It addresses the subjects of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, asking the church to repent for its past mistreatment of LGBTQ+ individuals, calling on us to abolish church policy that prohibits LGBTQ+ exclusion, and demanding LGBTQ+ representation on all future boards and programs sponsored by MCUSA.

Shalom Mennonite Church has never taken an official stance, one way or the other, on LGBTQ+ issues, nor have we had much teaching or conversation about these issues. In light of this development, Shalom's leadership teams have decided that it is time for us to broach these issues through a Sunday school class in January and February and some congregational conversations around that same time. We are not planning on making any statements or taking any action during this first phase of our discernment, but we invite everyone to prayerfully participate so that we can hear the Holy Spirit guide us as a body. In the spring, we will shift our attention to the anti-racism audit, but we intend to come back to the Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation conversation before the summer of 2023 with some goals that will be shaped by our conversations in January and February.

**Dear Shalom Mennonite Church Members,**

The past couple of months you have heard me speak about and request prayers regarding the war in Ethiopian's northern region. The war continues and extreme devastation the war has caused is beyond belief. The number of displaced people keeps growing, the famine and poverty situation is getting worse by the day.

Many Ethiopians in the U.S and around the world are pulling their resources to help the people in the war affected region. I hav'e spoken to the staff at MCC here in the states, as well with those on the ground in Ethiopia. The MCC staff informed me that they are already working at finding resources to help with the crisis. They also suggest to send donations through the MCC office in Goshen.

Today, I am coming to ask you to continue to pray for peace, and as you are able to give money to support those affected by the war. If you are willing and able to donate please do so by writing your cheque to:

**MCC Great Lakes Region**

**1013 Division Street**

**Goshen, IN 46239**

**Please write in the Memo Section "Ethiopia (Tigray Crisis)"**

Or you can also read more on how to donate posted by MCC Canada in the attached link.

[donation page for Tigray, Ethiopia relief](#)

Thank you for your consideration. Zenebe Abebe

**Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence** newsletter is attached

**Natasha Diener's** December newsletter is attached

In addition to our podcast, Shalom now has a **YouTube channel**, and many of our Zoom Sessions including the sermons in the "Story of the Bible" sermon series and the "Facing Hard Questions" sessions - can be found there. This is an easy way to share the good news with church members past and present, visitors and newcomers, and even outsiders. Check it out at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEn30AED17Q\\_ReoskuxUXA!](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEn30AED17Q_ReoskuxUXA!)

**Video recordings** (MP4) of our Zoom worship services are available online. A link to the worship service recordings is on the Member's page of our website.

Sam Bixler manages our church directory, email address list, and telephone numbers. You can email changes or additions to the office at [office@shalommennonite.com](mailto:office@shalommennonite.com) or [bixlersc@gmail.com](mailto:bixlersc@gmail.com).

Craig Oury is compiles *Journeying Together* each week. You can continue to send information to [office@shalommennonite.com](mailto:office@shalommennonite.com) by 5 pm on Wednesday. Craig is managing our Zoom calendar, church calendar, and uploads minutes on the church website. If you need to schedule a meeting using the church zoom account or have minutes to upload, you can email the office at [office@shalommennonite.com](mailto:office@shalommennonite.com) or [craig@shalommennonite.com](mailto:craig@shalommennonite.com).

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

The Scandal of Christmas

*"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved is the power of God... Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." - 1 Corinthians 18:18, 22-24*

As Bing Crosby famously sang, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere you go." I don't know about you, but I can say that this accurately reflects my experience. Although Christmas is first and foremost a

religious holiday, it is by no means limited to the church. It has become a broader cultural phenomenon, celebrated by people of many different faiths and of no faith, capitalized on by businesses - especially the retail industry - that make their biggest profits during the "Christmas season," and even recognized as a national holiday in more than 160 countries of the world.

Because of this, most people in Western society know what Christmas is "all about:" they know it celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. And most people - whether they are Christians or not - are happy to celebrate this. You may see non-Christian neighbors or even secular businesses set up nativity scenes or hear Christian songs like "Joy to the World" and "Silent Night" on the radio. In some ways, this is a blessing but in other ways, it's a challenge. It's challenging because Christmas is so widely and casually celebrated that we might take its central claim for granted and fail to see how startling and controversial it is: that God *became* a human being and was fully embodied in Jesus Christ.

Although the Scripture passage I cited at the top of this reflection mentions the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it applies just as much to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The idea that God - the transcendent, invisible, incomprehensible force that created the universe - was fully embodied as a particular human being is really difficult for human beings to accept. After all, how could a human being *be* God? Aren't humans inherently finite while God is inherently infinite? How presumptuous of it is for us to claim that our religious founder is the universal deity? These are valid questions, and although I spent several years studying Christology, I don't have completely satisfying answers to them.

However, I do *believe* that Jesus is God incarnate by faith. In fact, that is the basis of my faith. And this is unavoidably a religious claim, which doesn't quite translate into all of the cultural and economic appropriations of Christmas. So I encourage us to remind ourselves of it as we celebrate this holiday. Although many people may be giving lip service to the claim that "Jesus Christ is born" on Christmas day, only some of us are radical enough to affirm the deeper implications behind this: that the Word of God became flesh on that day and made his dwelling among us. So while the Christmas holiday has been trivialized and commercialized by our larger society, the central claim that we make about Jesus has not, and let us take time again this year to wrestle with that startling claim that Almighty God became one of us. ~ Brian

Journeying Together is a weekly email newsletter of Shalom Mennonite Church: 6100 E 32nd St, 46226; (317) 549-0577 [shalommennonite.com](http://shalommennonite.com)

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