

## JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Shalom Mennonite Church

December 15, 2021

### WORSHIP: Our relationship with God

Chair: Brittany Bither

**Last Sunday (12/12)**, was the third Sunday of Advent - which places an emphasis on joy - and Sabrina preached on the MennoMedia Advent theme "Dare to Imagine God's Song" Scripture Texts: Psalm 137:1-4, Zephaniah 3:8-20.

**This Sunday (12/19)**, is the fourth Sunday of Advent, which places an emphasis on love. Brian will preach the final sermon in the "Dare to Imagine" series about "Daring to Imagine God's Face," with Psalm 80 and Luke 1 as Scripture texts.

**Next Sunday (12/26)**, is Christmas Sunday. Pastor Craig will deliver the sermon.

### COMMUNITY LIFE: Relationships at Shalom

Chair: Herb Troyer

### CALENDAR

**Sunday, December 19** at 10a - Singing at Shalom\* (see note below)

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

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

**Singing at Shalom** - The Worship Commission is going to offer two more opportunities for "Singing at Shalom" for this Sunday, 12/19 and next Sunday, 12/26, in which people will be invited to come into the sanctuary at 10am on Sunday morning - wearing masks and socially distanced - for 15 minutes of singing Advent hymns and Christmas carols. 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 16 (tomorrow!) for the 12/19 service or Wednesday, December 22 for the 12/26 service. 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 17 and Thursday, December 23, Brian will email everyone who signed up for those weeks' instructions and a room assignment. Update: As of 12/15, we still have plenty of rooms available, so please email Brian if you are interested!

\*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.

### Celebrations

Friday December 17 – Aliyah Wigginton

Saturday December 18 -- Laura Harms & Erik Rosales

Tuesday December 21 -- Solomon & Sheila Y. Abebe

Wednesday December 22 -- Frank Kandel

### **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. We have access to this material until the end of February so if you would like to review any of that material, or 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.

### **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

### **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>.

#### **Vacation**

Pastor Craig is on vacation Monday December 13 through Sunday December 19. Please contact Pastor Brian if you have any concerns during that time at [Brian@shalommenote.com](mailto:Brian@shalommenote.com).

**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

### **Give gifts of comfort and joy with MCC!**

Delight your loved ones and share God's love with our global neighbors this Christmas. Choose from unique gifts such as goats, clean water, fruit trees, books and many more. Give at [mcc.org/delight](http://mcc.org/delight) or call 888.563.4676.

In addition to our podcast, Shalom now has a **YouTube channel**, and many of our Zoom Sessions including 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, 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 now compiling *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 now 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**

Having now spent nine years at Shalom, I've learned that one of the topics that we avoid discussing in the Mennonite community is Christmas presents. There are some among us who have made the courageous and counter-cultural decision not to buy presents for their friends and family members on Christmas. Those of us who have made this decision have a hard time squaring the consumerist practices of buying unnecessary gifts with Jesus' call to "give all you have to the poor" and don't want to contribute to the social and environment damage that holiday shopping has on our fragile world.

On the other hand, there is more to gift-giving than sheer materialism: gifts are often symbols of our love for people and express the extravagant love we have for them. We don't want to make the same mistake as the disciples who criticized a woman for pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet – which could have been sold and given to the poor – when she had simply intended to do a beautiful thing for Jesus. So how can we continue to be extravagant in our giving without falling into the pitfalls of consumerism?

There isn't an easy answer for this. Each household at Shalom has to figure it out for themselves. Rather than offering a solution, I would simply offer the following guidelines for consideration:

1. Set some boundaries around buying gifts. While it may not work for some of us to give up the practice of gift-giving altogether, we can all make an effort to set some boundaries around the things we buy during this time of

year. Perhaps we can set a limit on how many gifts or how much money we will spend on loved ones. Perhaps we may make a decision not to buy from companies that mistreat their employees or destroy the environment. Or perhaps we will only choose to purchase gifts that offer healthy and wholesome forms of entertainment. I would encourage all of us to regularly consult with the Holy Spirit on this, so that we can be good stewards of our resources without falling into a legalism that makes gift-giving out to be a fundamentally bad thing.

2. Find creative ways to express extravagant love. Even those of us who choose not to purchase physical gifts can appreciate the love that is behind gift-giving and find other ways to express that love. For example, if you don't give someone a physical gift, perhaps you offer words of affirmation or acts of service. Or, if it is important to give something, there are some people who chose not to give physical gifts but who set aside time and money to have meaningful experiences with their loved ones. These expressions of love are good Christian practices – modeled after the Magi, who brought extravagant gifts to Jesus. If we are creative enough, we can find ways to do this that align with our ethics.

3. Challenge and re-write social expectations. The reason why it is so hard for us to create boundaries and look for alternatives to consumeristic gift-giving is because there are so many social expectations tied to it. Whether we are asked to participate in a Secret Santa program at work, or we hear from kids about what everyone else is getting at school, or we are pressured by relatives to offer them gift ideas, we are constantly faced with the prospect of hurting people's feelings if we don't participate in these rituals. The best way to deal with this is to tackle it head-on. Tell our loved ones about our boundaries in advance, and ask for their ideas about how we could express love in other ways. Plan ahead and stay faithful to the expectations we set, so that we won't feel as guilty about not doing enough – or doing too much – on Christmas day. Besides, it never feels good to buy gifts just because there is an expectation that we should, not for the giver or for the receiver. So let us ensure that love is the force that guides any gift-giving we do, so that we really can give and receive in the spirit of Christmas. ~ 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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