

MOSAIC

by Pittsburgh Mennonite Church

Get To Know WOCA



(left to right) Lynda Stucky, Cheri High-Beckford, Clair Cannon, Geneva Martin, Julie Swartzentruber, Carolyn Rickard, Delo Blough, Jen Seaman and Karen Howard

By Clair Cannon

WOCA (Women of a Certain Age) offers fellowship for any PMC women over the age of 50. We total about 16 and meet monthly at rotating homes with pre-assigned topics of discussion, often centered around the wisdom or questions we have at our new life stage. We share stories, support each other in difficult times and laugh a lot together.

Every October we pull ourselves away from busy lives for a fun and relaxing weekend retreat in the mountains of WV. We take walks, do puzzles, play games, cook together and have a short Sunday morning devotional led by our ever-faithful Geneva. This past October, 9 of us enjoyed stunning fall weather and a very fun time.



Photo by Joyce E. Wasser at Moraine State Park, New Year's Day 2023
Caption- Job 37:10 " Ice is formed by the breath of God and the watery expanse is frozen."

What's Going on in Our Facility?



John Davis and the Nick Dobratz have been working hard to spruce-up our Community Room. They've patched and painted and replaced old lights with LEDs.

By Dave Swanson

When PMC bought our building, part of the vision was for it to be an asset to the local community. This dream is coming true. We have five offices for rent at affordable prices, of which two are available right now. There are multiple on-going community events happening in our building. PIIN's E.X.P.O. program meets for Tuesday night classes in the community room. Vigilance Theater Company practices multiple nights a week in the fellowship hall. There are multiple private parties, weddings, and other events scheduled for 2023.

There is on-going work to make the building more beautiful and usable. Besides renovating the office spaces, we have replaced the fluorescents and old gym lights in the fellowship hall with LED fixtures and beautiful chandeliers. We are currently renovating the community room, with new LED lamps, repairing water damage (after fixing the leaks), painting the entire room, installing curtains, installing picture hanging molding on the walls so we can change artwork displays in the space.

John Davis and Derek Reiff-Swartz are both doing great work on renovation and the never-ending list of small jobs. Nick Dobratz has now replaced fluorescent lights with LEDs in the daycare, main kitchen, and community room at his own materials cost and volunteer time, saving us thousands of dollars on the work and more money on electrical bills going forward. It's an amazing thing to see this work getting done and making a beautiful home for us and our neighbors to use.

Good Friday and Easter Sunday in Palestine/Israel



by: Bob Ross

In January, I had the privilege of co-leading a group of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary students to Palestine/Israel. The goal of the trip was to learn from Palestinian Christians about how they exercise their faith in their context. We also met with Israeli Jews, Palestinian Muslims, and Palestinians whose religious identity never came up.

This was my fourth trip to Palestine in the past ten years. Palestinian Christians and Muslims have been living under occupation, ongoing ethnic cleansing, and institutional racism for decades. But it was clear to me from what I witnessed and learned on this trip that the context in which Palestinians (regardless of their faith) are currently living is now more oppressive than ever. Thanks to a new ultra-right-wing, openly racist Israeli government, the Israeli military, along with Israeli settlers, has escalated their attacks and human rights abuses against Palestinians across Palestine.

While we were in Jericho, another group of tourists who were accompanied by Palestinian guides were brutally beaten by Israeli settlers.

On the second day of our trip, a gracious young man gave us a tour of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem (known to Jews as the "Temple Mount"). His demeanor tensed when a group of radical right wing Israeli settlers surrounded by machine-gun toting Israeli soldiers, entered the compound. It is illegal, even under Israeli law, for Israeli civilians and soldiers to enter the compound. Yet there they were, chatting away with their American accents just fifty feet behind us. Such visits are the sort of provocation that would have made international news five or ten years ago, as they rarely ever happened, and when they did, they often led to bloodshed. But settlers and soldiers had been visiting the compound almost every day since the new government took office just about a week before we arrived. Our guide, the head of diplomatic affairs for the mosque, encouraged us to take our time as he walked with us toward the mosque. As we got closer, I noticed two things I had never seen be-

fore: there were Israeli soldiers on the roof of the mosque, and there were Israeli soldiers pointing their machine guns at every Muslim worshiper who exited the mosque. Behind the soldiers, a new group of radical settlers (surrounded by more soldiers with machine guns) strutted by.

Later in the week, attorneys with the NGO, Military Court Watch, told us that raids of Palestinian homes by Israeli soldiers were increasing to unprecedented levels. On a nightly basis, soldiers were entering Palestinian homes and incarcerating someone—often a child—whom they suspected of throwing stones or engaging in political activity and put them in a military jail. One night while we were there, our host witnessed a man standing on the roof of his house after Israeli soldiers extracted the man's son. The boy's father—unarmed—shouted encouragement to him to be strong, as the soldiers took him away. Then an Israeli soldier shot the man dead. Soldiers killed at least one Palestinian almost every day



Key of Return shop in the Aida Palestinian refugee camp, near Bethlehem. The jewelry for sale is all made from tear gas cannisters that were fired by the Israeli military at the camp and, coincidentally, manufactured just an hour and a half north of us, in Jamestown, PA, by Combined Systems, Inc.



we were there.

During that same week, the new Israeli government ordered the military to confiscate any Palestinian flag that was flown in the country.

We drove by Israeli settlements under construction built on land confiscated from Palestinians, an international crime that even the United States has consistently condemned.

While we were in Jericho, another group of tourists who were accompanied by Palestinian guides were brutally beaten by Israeli settlers.

While we were in Jericho, another group of tourists who were accompanied by Palestinian guides were brutally beaten by Israeli settlers. Palestinians are regularly beaten up by settlers and soldiers (a group of kids and elders on the streets of Hebron told us that all of them, including the kids, have been beaten up on multiple occasions by settlers and/or soldiers). But tourists (as long as they are not Arab) have rarely ever been attacked.

One of our hosts from the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Omar, invited us early on in our trip to witness “not only the Good Friday of Palestine, but also the Easter Sunday” there. Indeed, we saw resurrection too—women in the Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem gave us cooking lessons, and I don’t think I’ll ever taste a better batch of baba ghanoush. With the money they earn offering such classes, the women provide for disabled children in the camp. While we ate lunch with a Bedouin family in their trailer, which Israel has slated for demolition, we laughed together as their children zipped in and out of the room with smiles from ear to ear. At the Tent of Nations farm, whose electricity and running water Israel has shut off, we learned to sing hymns in Arabic in a cave that was illuminated by lights running on solar energy. An Orthodox Israeli Rabbi who had years earlier participated in the sorts of night raids that we learned about, told us that he now advocates for Palestinian human rights

and a single, secular, democratic state for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Over and over, we also heard that it is our government that funds and facilitates the human rights abuses and violence against Palestinians. Indeed, the US government gives Israel about \$3.8 billion every year in military aid. It is therefore our responsibility as Americans, to advocate, at the very least, for a cessation of such funding. I hope you will join me in this task.



By Jane Dirks

“Is it morning for you yet?”

(This prompt and response from the “Let’s Write” group that meets every third Sunday during second hour)

It is morning for me, now. I feel my blessings daily. The blessing of enough. The blessing of relaxation into steady love. The blessing of a soft, brown dog, her tender eyes. Of children, adult now, and teaching me. The blessing of delight in new beginnings, and old friends.

But it is not morning for us, yet. The blessings I enjoy are not shared by all, or even by many. My morning cannot fully shine, when other mornings are dimmed. Morning is yet to come, in so many places, in so many hearts.

How can I share the blessing of my morning? How can I open to this tension, this imperative? May I become an instrument of reconciliation between my morning, and morning for all. May I join with others, learn from others, and help to bring the dawn.

SABBATICAL AND EVERYTHING AFTER

By Dave Swanson

Last summer I took a two month Sabbatical with the blessing of the congregation. I had plans to work on an interview project with other pastors and church leaders, plans to do lots of gardening, and really rejuvenate. I want to share with you the fact that my sabbatical did not go according to plan. It did, in a surprising way, lead to rejuvenation, but the time itself was an emotionally difficult one. I recognize that it can be difficult for a congregation to hear about its pastor struggling, but I want to share with you because I know many of you can relate, because I want to bear witness to God's grace through some real difficulty, and because I trust you all to listen as I share something of my journey. There is no need to "do" anything.

Soon after the break began, I had a kind of emotional crash - feeling exhausted, depressed, anxious, and stuck.

Reflecting on my sabbatical, the emotional quality of the time stands out. Soon after the break began, I had a kind of emotional crash - feeling exhausted, depressed, anxious, and stuck. Soon I was in a deeper funk than I could remember. And then I was double stressing about the anxiety itself and the things I was not getting done. It was not fun.

But somewhere through the journey, I found myself able to accept what I was experiencing and breathe a bit - to let go of some of that second tier frustration and find a little space for reflection. And as the sabbatical ended I started to understand the summer shutdown as my body and soul trying to get my attention. They were prompting me to ask, as one of my old pastors was known to, "So, how's that working for ya?" Something wasn't working well, but what?

Through a lot of good work in partnership with important people in my life, I came to see a certain kind of emotional weight I had been carrying - a pressure to do more, be more, do better, and help make things better. This was particularly the case around trying to help the church recover and rebound from the pandemic.

As summer moved into fall, some additional space to think and breathe opened up and I found myself returning to a place of greater balance and freedom, seeking, on an emotional level, to hold only what is mine, and let others carry what is theirs. I found myself able to be more present to others. I found myself clearer in my thinking and slower to react. I began to learn an enigmatic truth: that the true gift of being in relationship is to be present in oneself, as oneself, with an other or in a community. Love, I was learning, is not carrying the emotional weight of everyone and everything but walking attentively alongside, willing to respond authentically. I began to think that this emotionally balanced way of relating is part of what loving my neighbor as myself could mean.

Throughout this learning process, I was thinking of Jesus, and his willingness to be with others in deep fellowship

and even to suffer. What I began to see was the power of doing so, not from an automatic sense of obligation and weight, but in freedom - bringing thoughtful attention and careful intention to bear on life and relationships.

And now, looking back, it is fascinating to see that all the things I was putting pressure on myself to make happen at PMC last year, have actually happened this year, when I was not nearly so pressurized internally. Life and energy have returned in a major way in our community. The wind of the Spirit is blowing week to week. For me, this is a wonderful turn of grace, I would say the past six months have been some of the best of my life as I have been carried, along with the rest of you on God's fresh movement. I can't claim credit, but I can be grateful. Thanks be to God.

MIRACULOUS POWER



PIIN holds a prayer service in October at the County Courthouse to protest the 17 recent deaths of incarcerated people in Allegheny County Jail.

By Dave Swanson

One of the beautiful things PMC has commissioned me to do over the years is put time and energy into working for justice in our local region. This is both something I want to do as an expression of my own values and a way of extending PMC's mission of building bridges for peace and justice in the broader community and world. Personally, my commitment comes 1) from a conviction that the Gospel of Jesus contains within it a vision of equity, 2) from my belief and experience that living into this dream (the Kingdom of God, as Jesus called it) with others creates more space for all of us to thrive in a more beautiful community and 3) from the fact that my life

is better when I can see and acknowledge my own instincts toward and practices of violence. This kind of learning comes more often, for this white guy, when I work in relationship with people who are willing to tell me when I am living more from my own racism, sexism, classism and other personal brokenness, than from my best self.

Most of my work happens through the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, a grassroots community organizing network focused mainly on issues of systemic racism whose base is comprised of faith communities, individuals and organizations. Two years ago, the PIIN board asked me to chair the Spiritual Leaders Caucus (SLC). This was an intimidating assignment because the SLC had not been functioning through COVID and because I was unsure how organizing across racial and faith lines would go for a white protestant Christian guy. But, I accepted.

Since that time, I have been building relationships with clergy and community leaders around the city and helping PIIN rebuild its organization and focus its energy. One focus that emerged six months ago is the project of organizing for change in the Allegheny County Jail, where an intransigent administration oversees brutal treatment of incarcerated people that regularly results in human degradation, injuries and death. Right now, a group of PIIN folk are working strategically to build relationships with the Jail Oversight Board, coming alongside them, encouraging them to do their job and hold the prison warden and staff accountable for the toxic and deadly culture they have overseen for years. We are building toward a coalition on the board large enough to get meaningful policies of accountability to pass. It is slow hard work, but we are seeing movement!

Another powerful program PIIN has created in partnership with West End Power is the Colorful Backgrounds/ E.X.P.O. program. E.X.P.O. stands for Ex-incarcerated People Organizing. It consists of a 12-week program for people coming out of the prison system aimed at giving them training and tools to make it in the world. E.X.P.O. also holds a monthly organizing meeting where formerly incarcerated folks and their communities of support work together to educate themselves on issues and build power to speak back into the system and the political bodies that govern it.

Both of these efforts have afforded me the opportunity to get to know incredible people. Some of them have spent decades behind bars in some of the most toxic conditions imaginable. The fact that they have found ways to stand tall despite the dehumanization of their experience seems nothing short of an exercise of miraculous power. When I talk and work with them, I learn what deep courage and a grounded sense of mission really look like.

I want to invite any PMCers who are open to entering into this hard, beautiful, and transformative work to reach out to me. Right now the E.X.P.O. cohort meets in our community room and needs two more volunteers to help set up and break down, work with folk in the classes, and build relationships. Additionally, there are opportunities to get involved in the County Jail work as well. It's an incredible opportunity to learn about how to make a faithful difference in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Email me if you are interested.

Olutosin

God Be Praised

Who were the first singers?

Would you like to guess?

All had voices

But birds sang best.

Trees and flowers

Sing in the wind.

Why did all this

Singing begin?

In the beginning,

Song was raised

For joy in life

The Lord

Be praised.

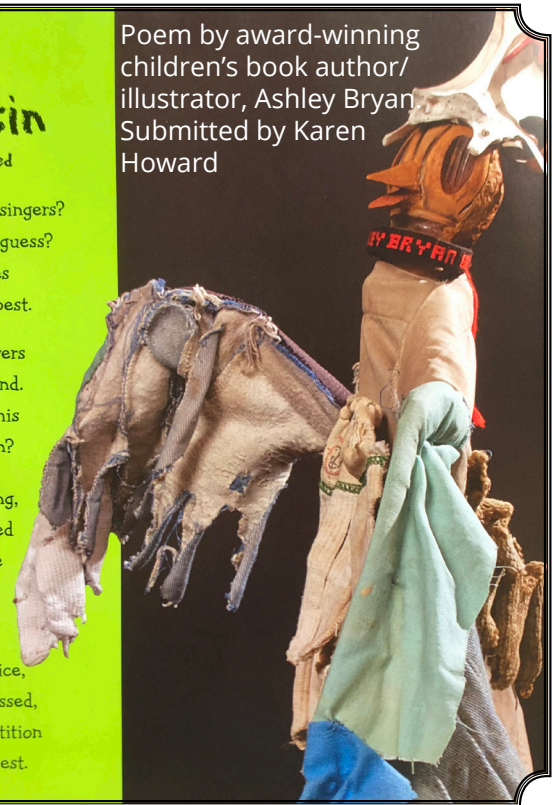
All singers rejoice,

All songs are blessed,

There's no competition

But birds sing best.

Poem by award-winning children's book author/illustrator, Ashley Bryan. Submitted by Karen Howard



rewind

by Aubrey Parke

scatter concha crumbs back on the scratched table and re-hang the curtains Brenda stitched from blue tablecloths

perfume the kitchen with the musk of simmering rice and stale coffee
refill the translucent green juice cup and return it to Ariel's nailbitten hands

breathe hot air into the rattling lungs of the A/C unit
reopen the sunflowers

spray mud onto Luna's silk-white paws
fill up the river so it sings between the stones

catch the coalblack truck as it turns the corner
shove it back into the gravel driveway

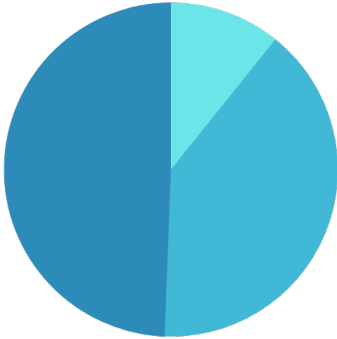
hear the pebbles pop like pop rocks
keep that porch swing creaking

let there be hair in the sink and rust on the toilet and chipped ceiling pieces falling like snow
let there be paint on the floorboards and toys on the stair-well and a loud bang
when the wind tugs at a door that is never closed

let there be James with his toolbox and Ali eating chips like his life depends on it
let there be a blanket spread over the stain on the couch and a half-dozen books splayed open
and one hundred fractured crayons and joy
and joy and joy

Treasurer's Report on 2022 Finances

By Jordan Shoenberger



2022 Expenditures

Programming.....11%
Facilities & Office.....40%
Pastor & Staffing.....49%



60%

of revenue comes from congregational giving

2022 End of Year Finances	
Revenue	
Restricted Funds:	\$ 42,119.00
Unrestricted Funds:	\$ 240,401.45
Total Revenue:	\$ 282,520.45
Expenditures	
Programming:	\$ 25,393.23
Facilities and Office:	\$ 93,965.19
Pastor and Staffing:	\$ 116,517.26
Total Expenditures	\$ 235,875.68
Net Revenue (from Unrestricted funds)	\$ 4,525.77

My experience working at PMC



This is from one of the times Benny brought *ME* a treat. Then, like clockwork, she asked for the tablet so she could play Roblox for 15 minutes.

By Sarah Kremer (Communications Coordinator at PMC)

One of the first questions Dave asked me when I interviewed in late 2021 was whether I would be okay with the church's supportive stance on LGBTQIA+. I'm sure my sigh of relief was audible. There are plenty of churches that don't appreciate diversity and inclusion so I was thrilled to find that this one does. I immediately knew PMC would be a wonderful place to work!

There were a lot of new computer programs and applications to learn as well as just random information. Thankfully, because of Dave's patience and support, it was a fun learning experience instead of just being overwhelming. Once I got the hang of things, I got to be more creative with my ideas and designs. The April Fools jokes in the weekly news last year was a particular favorite of mine. I've had a lot of fun designing this Newsletter as well, so I hope you enjoy it.

Many of you probably already know this, but my favorite part of my work day is when Pastor Dave's seven year old daughter, Benny, comes into my office after school to grace me with her presence. I keep the fridge stocked with juice boxes and snacks and sometimes I have an additional toy or treat for her. Usually she sticks around and plays games on my tablet until I go home. Needless to say, she's gotten a bit spoiled, but it's my favorite part of the day so unfortunately it's probably not going to change any time soon. Please pray for Dave, Caren, and Clara. And the monster that I've created.

In the summer of 2022, I was fortunate to attend the retreat at Laurelville with many of you. And Boy was that a great experience! I had such a great time getting to know everyone, although my anxiety and awkwardness prevented me from getting to know as many people as I would have liked. Being able to put faces to names was invaluable. Getting to splash around in the pool with all the kiddos was priceless (thanks Kim!), and resulted in my being added to the daycare staff.

Now I'm coming to Potlucks, Games Group, and joining meal trains. Oh how I have become ingrained! No complaints here, though. I have truly loved joining this community. You've all welcomed me with open arms and I so appreciate it. God has really blessed me. Thank you all so much!