

April 2024

Mosaic

by Pittsburgh Mennonite Church

PMC 2023: Year in Review

By Jaime Horst, Congregational Chair

As PMC's leadership groups recently gathered to reflect on 2023, we identified fresh energy and depth of connection as themes in the life of the church over the course of the year. We have much to celebrate! Many areas of church activity were vibrant and thriving in 2023 - participants were engaged and connected through small groups, music and worship, volunteering with kids and youth, fun fellowship events, and supporting peace and justice activities.

We welcomed many new attendees in 2023, and 5 people joined PMC as members after we ran an Identity & Discipleship class early in the year. We have a large number of children participating in the life of the church; on any given Sunday we often have at least two dozen kids ages 12 and under! We blessed and dedicated 9 children in December and January! We celebrate having excellent paid nursery staff who faithfully care for our littlest ones and assist with Kids Club each Sunday. Children's Worship and Kids Club gained renewed momentum in the fall thanks to a core group of volunteers. PMC's youth have benefitted from steady leadership for the past several years, and even with Ryan's move out of state, the youth group continues to thrive under

the leadership of Becca Cordes, CJ Swanson, and Will Penman.

In early 2023, we undertook a Pastor-Congregation Evaluation process, which provided helpful insight into where we are as a congregation, where we see Dave's areas of strength and growth, and how we see ourselves moving forward together. We subsequently affirmed Dave's contract for another three years as pastor at PMC. Dave spent a portion of the summer on a cross-country road trip as part of his sabbatical, and returned refreshed and reenergized. In late 2023, he assumed the role of president of Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), an unpaid position that is an extension of both his and PMC's commitment to social justice work and building leaders for local advocacy and action.



PIIN attending the Allegheny County Jail Oversight Audit Meeting and demanding better medical coverage for inmates.

Peace and Justice activities were an area of life and growth throughout the year. In February 2023 PMC hosted a concert and conversation with Tony Brown and other local collaborators (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1Hood Media). The Abuelas Responden group provided PMC ongoing opportunities to join in addressing the practical needs of refugee families and those recently released from immigrant detention centers. In recent months, the Peace and Justice commission gained new leadership in Dan Kornfield, bringing renewed energy and focus to the group's initiatives.

The Children and Youth Commission needs a chair and would benefit from additional volunteers to support our kids' ministries.

The Hospitality commission was another group that thrived in 2023, bringing to PMC numerous opportunities for deepening connection and enjoying fellowship together, including monthly potlucks, the winter cook-off, celebration meals at Easter and Christmas, and summer cookouts. Church retreat in September was a particular highlight, a life-giving weekend of conversation about communion, connection, and eating delicious meals and pies!

Worship is a consistent highlight at PMC, and throughout 2023, we valued the beautiful music, variety of voices in the pulpit, and even the technological capacity that continues to enable worship participation via Zoom. The building is in use by numerous groups beyond Sunday mornings, and thanks to special event rentals and office rentals, we continue to celebrate that the facilities budget remains self-sustaining. The Community Room renovation wrapped up just in time for our inaugural Advent Art Show and Sale.



With 2024 well underway, we are aware of several areas that will need particular attention in the coming months. We aim to provide better support for PMC's small groups and communicate more clearly how to engage with our small groups. The Children and Youth commission needs a chair and would benefit from additional volunteers to support our kids' ministries. The Peace and Justice commission is pondering how to build deeper connections with our local neighborhood and is excited for the Guns to Garden Tools event slated for Summer 2024. We further hope to finalize plans for the International Guest House funds that were gifted to PMC in 2022 (the committee has several good options to weigh). And of course we continue to press forward with maintenance and improvement projects for our building.

With gratitude, we celebrate God's work among and through us in 2023, and we commit to continue to follow Jesus, embracing God's purposes for us as a community. We commit to remain faithful to our priorities:

- Cultivate intergenerational, inclusive, supportive community.
- Pursue creative participatory worship.
- Support diverse paths of spiritual development.
- Build connections for peace and justice between the congregation, the local community, and the world.

Please continue praying for the movement of God in our life together at PMC in 2024!



UNDER THE COVER OF WAR IN GAZA



The Israeli military carrying out the demolition of Palestinian farmland in Husan, near Bethlehem, in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

By Bob Ross

I recently returned from a trip to Palestine/Israel, where I spent a week visiting with several organizations and communities across the divided land. I was traveling with a delegation of mostly Presbyterians, and the purposes of our trip were to express solidarity with all who are suffering and to learn first-hand what has been happening in Palestine/Israel since the war in Gaza began.

“Under the cover of the war in Gaza,” we so often heard, the situation for Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank has worsened. In Gaza and the rest of Palestine, there is a concerted effort by the Israeli government, military, and

settlers alike to eliminate Palestinians from their land. This process of ethnic cleansing has been going on for 76 years, but it has accelerated to unprecedented levels since October 7th. “While everyone knows about the genocide in Gaza,” a Palestinian woman told me just after I arrived in Jerusalem, “a smaller, lesser-known, genocide is happening here, in pockets, in Jerusalem and the West Bank.” In a scene that is happening on a near daily basis, Israeli settlers recently seized her family’s olive groves, driving them off their land and depriving them of their livelihood. Elsewhere in the West Bank, we witnessed, first-hand, Is-

raeli soldiers bulldozing Palestinian farmland while the owners of the land pleaded for them to stop. We stood with the farmers, filming the illegal seizure of the farm, until the soldiers pushed us, too, off the land.

We met with an elderly Palestinian man in the Silwan neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem, whose home had been demolished by the Israeli military the day before we arrived. Home demolitions, carried out under the premise that the Palestinian owners did not receive the proper permits to build, have reached unprecedented numbers since the war began, especially in Silwan, where the Israeli government is planning to build a national park.

We listened to family members and advocates of Palestinian prisoners who described the inhumane conditions of Israeli prisons since October 7th. Israel has detained 7,000 Palestinians, most without charge, since the beginning of the war. No one knows where they are detained, as Israel has prohibited attorneys, family members, and the Red Cross from visiting them.

We ate lunch with Palestinian Armenian Christians in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, where a radical Israeli settler



Fakhri Abu Diab, standing in front of his home in occupied East Jerusalem, which had just been demolished by the Israeli military.

organization was attempting to build a hotel on their land. The Armenians endured a daily barrage of spitting, cursing, threats, and violence from the settlers. We met with an Israeli family in Tel Aviv whose son had been taken hostage by Hamas on October 7th. Their pain and fear was palpable. And finally, we met with Palestinian Christians who had family members in Gaza. They had all lost brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles to Israeli airstrikes. The remaining Christian community in northern Gaza is huddled in a church surrounded by Israeli tanks and snipers. Through tears, one man told us about his 75-year-old music teacher in Gaza, who dared to leave the church one day. She was shot and killed by an Israeli gunman.

WE WITNESSED, FIRST-HAND, ISRAELI SOLDIERS BULLDOZING PALESTINIAN FARM- LAND WHILE THE OWNERS OF THE LAND PLEADED FOR THEM TO STOP.

Several Palestinians told us they felt abandoned by the West, especially the Church. We visited with many church leaders and Christian organizations who were dismayed by American churches' unwillingness to speak up against the genocide that is unfolding in Gaza and beyond. The Global Church, the Rev. Dr. Professor Mitri Raheb, said to us, needs to act boldly and creatively to end this genocide. "What mainline churches are doing is not affecting those in power," he said. He brought up the actions of American Mennonites as one positive instance of Christians taking a prophetic stance against Israeli aggression, but "you need to figure out how to take those protests and create real change." I'm eager to figure that out with all of you.



Nanaimo Bar Recipe

- 1 cup butter, softened, divided
- 5 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup white sugar
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 ¾ cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1 cup flaked coconut
- ½ cup finely chopped almonds (Optional)
- 3 tablespoons heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons custard powder
- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 4 (1 oz) squares semisweet baking chocolate
- 2 teaspoons butter

Step 1: In the top of a double boiler, combine 1/2 cup softened butter, cocoa powder, and sugar. Stir occasionally until melted and smooth. Beat in egg and stir until thick, 2 to 3 minutes.

Step 2: Remove from the heat and mix in graham cracker crumbs, coconut, and almonds. Press into the bottom of an ungreased 8x8-inch pan.

Step 3: For the middle layer, beat remaining 1/2 cup softened butter, heavy cream, and custard powder until light and fluffy. Mix in confectioners' sugar until smooth. Spread over the bottom layer in the pan. Chill to set.

Step 4: While the second layer is chilling, melt semisweet chocolate and 2 teaspoons butter together in the microwave or over low heat.

Step 5: Spread melted chocolate mixture over chilled bars. Let the chocolate set before cutting into squares.

The Egg Carton Limerick

Spring's almost here and your house isn't spartan?
 Start by getting rid of your egg cartons
 If you've got a whole stash
 Don't throw them in the trash
 Bring them to church for reuse to reduce your carbon!
 (Footprint)

By Becca Cordes



Reflections from a visit to a MCC warehouse

By The Youth Group (Roo, Adaline, CJ, Becca, Will)

The youth group decided we wanted to make a comforter to give out to MCC (Menonite Central Committee). They've given out comforters all over. MCC was actually started about a century ago by sending comforters to Ukraine! There were a lot of Ukrainian Mennonites.

Our comforter was a grid that Adaline designed. She carried the project, and Becca showed up with the materials. Then we probably spent 6 months making this comforter by hand. Ryan, the former youth group leader (who ditched us and moved to South Carolina), learned how to sew with a sewing machine. And Hannah Geiser did all of the backing. We sewed some of it with a machine. We finished it and it sat in the youth room for a long time.

There's one MCC in PA but it's 6 hours away, so we went to the Ohio one instead. On the drive, we accidentally "killed" the blanket by having peanut butter sandwiches in the car. (As the story goes, it went into anaphylactic shock because it had a nut allergy.)

We showed up and told Sarah, our volunteer contact, that our comforter was dead. She told us to put it in a box along with other comforters. It lived with the other comforters - "in a better place". They took them and put them in a custom-made baler for baling quilts! It squooshes all the air out of them to get them small and compact. We don't know where ours was sent. We also met Sarah's mom, who was volunteering separately from her daughter, and that was funny.

Sarah wasn't expecting her mom to show up!

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The drop-off location was at a thrift store. They sold woven rugs out of recycled fabric, and we bought one for the youth room. (It's all made from corduroy, and it makes a great ambiance.) Roo bought a shirt that says "Girl who loves goose." (Nothing came up on Urban Dictionary for that phrase, and they don't care if there's another meaning; it's just amusing!) The space was a community hub for quilting for Anabaptist groups and others - lots of (presumably) older people will come in and quilt every week. Their quilts looked a lot better than ours.

We volunteered packing school kits, double-checking that everything is right from what had already been sent in. After all, it was a big outing and we didn't want to drive 4 hours to just drop something off. We packaged 110 school kits - 10 whole boxes! Adaline had to sit in a chair



because it was a long time of standing.

The school kits will get shipped out to other countries. In some places, MCC purchases the school supplies locally, but in other places there isn't any infrastructure in place to reliably acquire the necessary supplies. School supplies for one child can cost like a month's salary for a family! The kits included a sharpener, eraser, four notebooks, pencils, and ruler in a reusable fabric drawstring bag. Roo loved packing them up. It was repetitive, but it tickled their brain. Everyone was really chill. We checked that the rulers didn't have metal but that the pencil sharpeners did, and that none of the bag designs would offend people here or overseas (religious symbols, pigs, weapons, scantily clad women, etc.).

On the return journey, Adaline did AP World History on her phone. We started "the three nice things" tradition from Sarah, since Roo has a mean streak. They're mean to Adaline, and so Sarah said that you have to offset one mean thing by saying three nice things. Then Becca accidentally made fun of Ryan, so we called him for them to say three nice things to make up for it. We also got Taco Bell on the trip back.



Pastor's Update



By Dave Swanson

The highlight of the last few months for me was Advent. The whole season was filled with light and hope, even as we acknowledge the dark, which reminded me that that is how God works - Light in the darkness.

The Art Show in early December was nothing short of inspiring and astounding. It's not that I forget how wonderfully talented the PMC community is, it's that I don't get to see it all in one place at one time. That was the magic of the show for me. It was a wonder to see so many, startling, beautiful, wild paintings by John Lee. John Davis's reworked photographs with old school plastic labeling and stamped letters for words alternately hit me as haunting and breath-taking. The subtle found art Nativity and smooth finished candle holders by Paul Nelson drew me in.

Lauren Wolcott's kinsuke jar with the golden cracks reminded me of the broken beauty in all this world and each of us. Joyce Wasser's photos transported me around Pittsburgh in both time and space. Karen's poetry brought me

to a full stop with its power. Kristina and Delo Blough's swirling colors on pottery and serving boards entranced me with their invitation to bliss and the paintings jarred me into awakesness. CJ Swanson's paintings caught my heart with their deep and vivid colors.

Singing songs of hope together after church on December 10th left me with such warmth lingering in my lungs and limbs. The Christmas banquet was as celebratory and luxurious as ever! Thanks to Sarah Kremer for the new White Elephant tradition!

The throughline of the Advent season were worship services that were so beautiful they brought me to tears with their lament for our violent world, with their wild hope of God's in-breaking power, and the promise of Mary's vision of the world turned upside down by God's peace and justice.

For me, beyond my normal weekly routines of administration, study, worship preparation, and writing, the past few months have been full of a lot of community outreach work through PIIN (Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network). PMC also had a great joint leadership retreat in January where we brought together our ideas and thoughts for the coming year. It was inspiring as we took stock of where we are and registered the life and joy that are moving us right now and dreamed together and claimed some promise and hope for a great 2024.

My weekly rhythms are carrying me through. I am averaging 53 hours a week of work. My time priorities so far in 2024 are, from greatest to least: Administration (emails, business calls, meetings), Worship and Study, Outreach (peace and justice), Pastoral Care, Continuing Ed, Facilities, Self-care. I am grateful to all of you for continuing to support me in all the phases of my work as your pastor.



Everence for Everyone!

By Julie Swartzentruber

When you think of Mennonites and money, the first thing that comes to your mind might be church budgets and offerings or maybe donations to charitable organizations like Mennonite Central Committee or Mennonite Disaster Service. Everence encourages you to think bigger.

Everence (everence.com) serves Mennonite and other Anabaptist Christian individuals, organizations and congregations that share the stewardship principle that “all we are and all we have are from God.” Their stated goal is helping their members practice financial stewardship that aligns with their faith and values.

Because you (if you are reading this) are affiliated in some way with Pittsburgh Mennonite Church (PMC), you are eligible to take advantage of all the services that Everence offers. Some examples:

- credit union banking services (checking/savings, loans, mortgages, credit cards);
- socially-responsible investments (annuities, mutual funds);
- grants and scholarships;
- retirement and end-of-life planning;
- charitable giving and asset management;
- budget and debt counseling;
- informational podcasts and webinars

One of the many ways PMC has benefited from our association with Everence is through the Sharing Fund grants. Since 2008, Everence has given out over \$13.5 million in matching grants in total, and a very rough estimate would be that PMC has received at least \$18,000 of those matching funds to help members of our church community meet their basic living expenses or special needs.

Multiple PMCs are Everence Credit

Union members and/or work with Everence financial planners to manage their finances, and several have participated in informative webinars and listened to the podcast, “Smart Living, Simple Money.”

We’ve used Everence-created educational materials for second-hour discussions and worship services and have had guest speakers from Everence. You might also remember links in our Wednesday emails to the quarterly Toolkit newsletter. And if you’ve ever attended the Allegheny Mennonite Conference celebration at Laurelville in August, you’ve enjoyed the Everence-sponsored ice cream socials!

But here’s the catch: Some of those benefits, especially the Sharing Fund matching grants, are only available if we have a designated Everence Stewardship Partner. Fortunately Victoria Foley recently volunteered to fill that roll for PMC! Talk to Victoria to learn more and watch for announcements about how Everence can help you on your stewardship journey.



Victoria Foley, PMC’s Bookkeeper and Everence Stewardship Partner



Our Conference and its Minister

By Dave Swanson

Since its inception in 1968, Pittsburgh Mennonite Church has been part of Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC). The conference has gone through numerous seasons; there have been times of stability and even prosperity. Some of this was tied to the conference being an important hub within the Mennonite Church. AMC was home to Herald Press, the Mennonite publishing house, for decades and this institution gave AMC a kind of gravity that drew people to the conference.

Before long, the conference was struggling. The conference minister had been called elsewhere, many congregations had left, the financial situation was dire and the pain of rupture marked every gathering.

Much changed for AMC with the creation of Mennonite Church USA in the early 2000s, including moving the publishing house elsewhere and adding the “Membership Guidelines” document to the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective (1995), a founding document for the denomination. Among other things, the membership guidelines threatened pastors who performed queer weddings with censure. In Allegheny Conference the guidelines were used to justify penalizing a congregation. In 2005, the conference suspended the membership of Hyattsville Mennonite Church, a congregation near Washington, D.C., that had been actively welcoming and affirming LGBTQ people since the

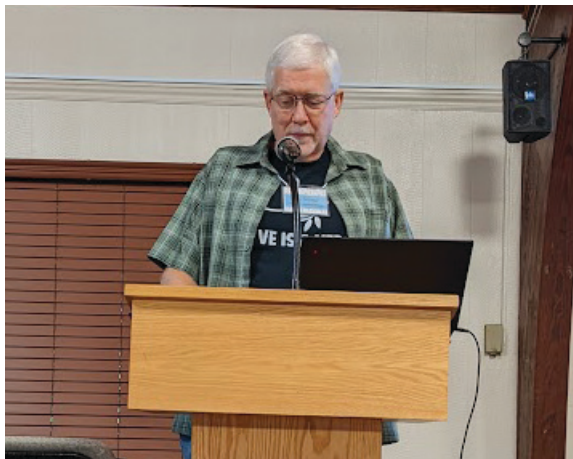
early 80s. Though perhaps some may have expected Hyattsville to leave the conference in the face of this punishment, they stayed and continued to support the conference financially as if they had retained full membership.

In 2013, our previous Conference Minister, Donna Mast, courageously initiated an effort to resolve the theological and political limbo in which we had left Hyattsville. A group consisting of people of differing viewpoints on LGBTQ inclusion, some from Hyattsville, met over two years and concluded that we either needed to end Hyattsville’s membership in AMC, or change how we viewed the Confession of Faith. At a meeting in March of 2015, the Conference met and chose by two votes to render the Confession of Faith a guiding, not disciplinary, document and reestablish Hyattsville’s full membership in AMC.

Before long, the conference was struggling. The conference minister had been called elsewhere, many congregations had left, the financial situation was dire and the pain of rupture marked every gathering. On July 1, 2016, just over a year after that meeting, Dave Mishler became the new conference minister. I interviewed him in February of this year to review his time in this role. When he retires on June 30, it will be eight years to the day since he began his journey with us. When we spoke, he and I reviewed much of the history laid out above and remembered what it was like for him to come into our conference in the midst of such upheaval.

“I’m not really a visionary,” Mishler said when I asked him how he was able to guide the conference forward during and after such difficult times. “I just tried to find what was here and identify where the life was and go with that.” He also noted how important Central District Con-

ference was in helping us find our way by their example and partnership. It was not an easy entrance into the work. “The money situation was bad,” he said, “we were living off of reserves and more congregations were still in the process of leaving. But I had a sense that if we could pull ourselves together, good things would happen.”



Dave Mishler

Mishler clung to his sense that underneath all the pain, there was a core that was still living and set himself the task of allowing that life to emerge. In a relatively short time the conference named itself as “Jesus-Centered. Collaborative. Committed to Place-Based Ministry.” This language reflected a sense of shared responsibility to one another and to God, while also recognizing diversity and the callings of each congregation in their unique local existence. “It was a step toward creating a climate in which we would work together and affirm one another’s paths, even when they differed,” Mishler said.

In the midst of all this was the delicate and important work of affirming, welcoming, and celebrating Hyattsville’s membership in the conference after ten years of questioning their calling. Part of that was licensing and then ordaining Michelle Burkholder to their ministry as Associate Pastor at Hyattsville. Burkholder had

been working in this capacity for a few years, but Hyattsville had not sought licensure or ordination for them due to its suspended membership and AMC’s opposition to queer ordination.

Mishler said, “Licensing and ordaining Michelle was an important way to practice our commitment to place-based ministry as well as affirm Michelle’s calling which had been discerned in that community.” In our conversation we agreed that it was a tangible way to affirm Hyattsville’s legitimate reentry into the conference. And beyond this, it was also an important marker that we had moved away from some “safe” middle where everyone had to leave the truth of their particularity at the door. It was a move away from an illusory “unity” that was really a capitulation to the status quo. Since those early years of Mishler’s time, AMC has improved its financial situation, welcomed five new churches, and found itself once again to be a joyful community where laughter is as common as the hard work of mission and ministry.

Mishler and I wound up our time together reflecting on the role of Conference Minister itself. “First and foremost, I’m pastor to the pastors,” he said. “There have been seasons where I’ve done that well and others where there has been too much other pressing work.” He reflected that the most important change he made was bringing all the pastors together on a regular basis. “The pastors meeting together became a way to hear from the various communities within the conference in a less formal, more conversational context. Then I could take that to the Leadership Council and help us move forward having that guidance.”

He said, “Beyond working with pastors, the conference minister oversees administrative work, supports congregations when they are searching for a new pastor, and comes alongside congregations in times of conflict or when

a pastor is accused of wrongdoing.” As his time as AMC’s minister comes to a close, Mishler reflected that one of the things he is most proud of is that our small conference has become a model in the denomination as proof that we can grow, learn, and move into the new spaces God is creating for us without being destroyed. “And the fact that other congregations and conferences continue to seek us out is, I think, a sign that God’s doing something good here.” Amen to that.

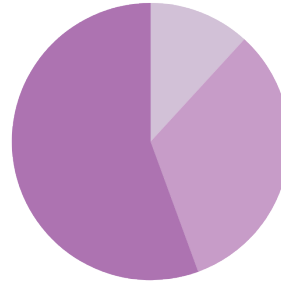


Dave Mishler (far left) at the Allegheny Mennonite Conference at Laurelville

Treasurer’s Update

By Jordan Shoenberger

The 2023 year ended well financially for the church; we broke even, operationally for the budget. Looking ahead, larger-scale facility projects are on the horizon, with the roof being the most emergent. We were able to secure a \$10,000 matching grant from the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. We matched that amount with some gifts from PMC members. Fixing a roof isn’t the most exciting use of funds, but it is something we need to do to be good stewards of our space!”



2023 Year End Expenditures

Programming.....12%
Facilities & Office.....33%
Pastor & Staffing.....55%



68%

of revenue comes from congregational giving

2023 End of the year financials	
Revenue	
Congregational Giving:	\$ 178,989.42
Tenant/ Event Rentals:	\$ 64,482.01
Mutual Aide/ Special Projects	\$ 20,988.25
Total Revenue:	\$ 264,459.68
Expenditures	
Programming:	\$ 28,130.47
Facilities and Office:	\$ 77,852.32
Pastor and Staffing:	\$ 132,615.67
Total Expenditures	\$ 238,598.46
Net Revenue (from Unrestricted funds)	\$ 25,861.22*

*much of this revenue is designated for roof repair project
