



The Taftsville Chapel Current

God calls us as followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as a community of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to our world.

Caren Swanson, *Editor*; Carie Good, Janet North & Virginia Schlabach, *Newsletter Staff*

December 2010

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

Preparing for the Light

by Dave Swanson

A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ (Isaiah 40:3-5)

Welcome to the New Year! The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the new church year. The word “Advent” itself means “coming” or “arrival” or “beginning.” Centuries ago the church decided to start its year with this build-up to Christmas and the coming of the light of Christ.

Advent is the time in which we are called to “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40). This “making straight” and smooth is our preparation for Christ’s renewed arrival in our lives. It is a call to spiritual discipline in the midst of the “already” of the incarnation and Jesus life with us through the spirit, and the “not yet” of promises to come and the final making right of things.

Advent is an invitation into the disciplines of longing for, of waiting and watching for, and of hoping for the “not yet” of Christ’s promises—of the kingdom coming. It is an opportunity to prepare our hearts and minds to receive the fullness of abundant life. This advent we want to invite you and challenge you to let yourself register and feel those deep stirrings and desires for the completed work of Emmanuel, God-with-us. It is good to desire peace, justice, and wholeness within ourselves and in the world. We all long for this at a deep level. We make the path straight for the Lord by longing and waiting for promised consolation and consummation.

Allowing ourselves to feel and register our deep longings is not very practical. We can’t bring about the consolation of these desires. Only God can. Cultivating our thirst for God’s light, life, and spirit is an important part of preparing ourselves to receive these things.

We must not forget that we are also called to live into the “already” -to practice individually and together the life of the spirit that we have and know. This means practicing the fruits of the spirit and striving to embody justice, witnessing to the world. In living both the “already” and the “not yet” we prepare ourselves to respond to God’s spirit and the work God has for us. We also prepare something bigger than ourselves: We are making straight a path for the Lord—a little piece of the human community where God’s way is embodied and where there is fertile ground—a landing place—where God’s reign can take hold.

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Advent Memories - Virginia Schlabach

“Advent” was not a word that was part of my childhood pre-Christmas vocabulary either at church or at home. The Mennonite Church of my youth did not follow the liturgical calendar, and my memories of our family’s “waiting time” between Thanksgiving and Christmas center on baking cookies, making and buying and wrapping gifts, sending cards, going to Lancaster to see the train display at the Farmers’ Supply, decorating the Christmas tree, and hanging stockings on the bedposts. My brother Richard and I paid our annual respects to the Santa Clauses at the three Lancaster department stores, and we could recite “A Visit from Saint Nicholas” and sing “Up on the Housetop” and “Jingle Bells” with great vigor. Yet in spite of all that, the “true” meaning of Christmas was stressed in my family, and Baby Jesus always outranked Santa Claus in my childish affections.

I remember helping to set up our nativity scene each year; Richard and I would handle the plaster dime store figures with reverence as we placed them in a deep windowsill and surrounded them with angel hair. During December at our Friday family night programs, we sang carols (“Away in a Manger” was my favorite, and I still treasure the tattered, much-loved carol book of my childhood with its charming old-fashioned pictures) or listened to records on our Magnavox (“O Holy Night” and “The Star of Bethlehem” continue to thrill my soul). My parents read aloud the Bible stories of Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus, shepherds, and wise men and sometimes Richard and I would dress up in bathrobes and act out the Christmas story. We memorized Luke 2:1-20 in the King James Version, and one year Richard learned a poem by Christina Rossetti, which shows a child’s thoughts of what he or she could give to Jesus: *What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I’d give him a lamb. If I were a wise man, I’d do my part. What can I give him? Give him my heart.* I think I must have helped him learn this simple yet profound poem as I can still remember it 60 years later. This poem and “Why the Chimes Rang” (a sad charming tale of a child’s tiny but great gift given to the Christ Child), which our mother read year after year, still inspire me. I am grateful for a family that was able to enjoy tinsel and gingerbread and be-ribboned parcels but knew that stars and angels and the gift of Jesus - God-with-Us - were what Christmas really means.

One Christmas tradition I love is always decorating the tree with all hand-made ornaments, made by all the family members. The only store-bought decoration is the lights.

-Melissa Ayers

The performance of Handel's Messiah has kicked off my Christmas season every year since I first heard it in Boston 8 years ago.

Nick grew up with an advent calendar and his mom still gives us one each year.

-Heather Wolfe

At Advent I just like it because we just use candles. Because we are waiting for the Light of Christ. I think it’s really cool and fun to not use electric lights. And we sing “O Come, O Come Emanuel” every night.

At Christmastime I like to remember that Jesus was born and that we get presents.

-Clara Swanson



Advent Resources

Here are some books and websites that might inspire you in your Advent observation this year:

Watch For the Light compiled by the Bruderhoff Community

Selections from the world's greatest spiritual writers provide inspiration for the most widely-celebrated holiday of the year. Writers include: Johann Christoph Arnold, C.S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Philip Yancey, Madeleine L. Engle, Henri Nouwen, Kathleen Norris, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Annie Dillard, Dorothy Day, and many others.

Living the Sabbath by Norman Wirzba

In *Living the Sabbath*, Norman Wirzba leads us to a much more holistic and rewarding understanding of Sabbath-keeping. Wirzba shows how Sabbath is ultimately about delight in the goodness that God has made—in everything we do, every day of the week. With practical examples, Wirzba unpacks what that means for our daily lives at work, in our homes, in our economies, in school, in our treatment of creation, and in church.

Action In Waiting by Christoph Blumhardt

Given the number of people who've been "saved", you'd think the world was becoming a brighter place. It could be, too, if more people would grasp the joy of losing themselves in service to God and each other. People like Christoph Blumhardt, who, in his quest to get to the essentials of faith, burns away the religious trappings of modern piety like so much chaff. Blumhardt writes with unabashed fervour, but his passion encourages rather than intimidates. His witness influenced theological giants like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. But *Action in Waiting* is not theology; it is too blunt, too earthy, too real. Its "active expectation" of God's kingdom shows us that the object of our hope is not relegated to some afterlife. Today, in our world, it can come into its own - if only we are ready

Hundred Dollar Holiday: The Case For A More Joyful Christmas by Bill McKibben

Environmental author McKibben (*Maybe One; The End of Nature*, etc.) makes an impassioned plea for a less consumer-oriented, more meaningful Christmas celebration. But this book is more than just an echo of the recent vogue for simplicity. McKibben avoids the trap of nostalgia for a nonexistent time when Christmas was free of commercialism or drunken reveling, but he recognizes the current holiday frenzy, dread and depression as symptomatic of "the underlying discontent in our lives." He offers thoughtful "new forms of celebration" to fill the cravings for "silence and solitude," "connection with each other and the natural world" and "some relationship with the divine" that plague these times. McKibben also blasts "those relentless commercial forces" that lead Americans to annual overspending. Instead, he suggests making the holidays as much fun as possible, filled with song and food, creativity and connection. One hundred dollars, McKibben says, is not a magic number or even the point, but rather a simple reminder "to give things that matter." Begun as a project for the author's rural Methodist church, this slim book offers us tips on giving one another the priceless Christmas gifts of time, attention and fellowship.

The Advent Conspiracy (www.AdventConspiracy.org)

Advent Conspiracy is a movement calling us to proclaim Christ in how we celebrate Christmas. Advent Conspiracy was started in 2006 by five pastors who decided to make Christmas a revolutionary event by encouraging their faith communities to Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More and Love All. The response was overwhelming and the Conspiracy was born. When Jesus loved, he loved in ways never imagined. Though rich, he became poor to love the poor, the forgotten, the overlooked and the sick. He played to the margins. By spending less at Christmas we have the opportunity to join him in giving resources to those who need help the most. When Advent Conspiracy first began four churches challenged this simple concept to its congregations. The result raised more than a half million dollars to aid those in need. One less gift. One unbelievable present in the name of Christ. For more information, including some videos, be sure to visit www.AdventConspiracy.org.

Please Note: Each week of Advent a list of scripture verses will be e-mail prior to Sunday's service for meditation and study.

*** Taftsville, we have so much to be thankful for! ***

*...Waking to the pale apricot glow of the sunrise sky and watching it change to pink and blue... * ...Our new woodstove... * ...The Gospel sung and told with humor and energy (high school performance of Godspell)... * ... My cat asleep and warm in my lap... * ...Fresh eggs... * ... A clump of golden larches glowing in the sunshine amidst bare gray and black trunks and branches... * ...Sisters... * ...Hot coffee on a cold morning... * ... Birds at the feeder... * ... A wife with whom I am deeply unified... * ... For the sound of my daughter's breath as she sleeps... * ...A part-time job I enjoy... * ...Safety on the icy roads... * ...Hot running water... * ... Coming home to a healthy home-cooked meal... * ...For abundance, enough... * ... Enough stacked wood for the winter... * ... For a table large enough to seat many friends and loved ones... * ... Good work... * ... Volunteers who help at work... * ...The light weight carpet sweeper saving my sore arm... * ...For a job I enjoy and am good at... * ... Kisses from my cat... * ...Open water... * ...The full moon rising from behind the ridge... * ...For red wine and blue cheese... * ... Snow flakes on my car... * ... The home I have now... * ...For being able to hold my grandson and feed him ... * ... I'm grateful for time with my dog on my front steps ... * ... For being able to have Thanksgiving with my sons in Virginia... * ...To see a beautiful sunrise... * ...For shelter as I listen to the rain on the metal roof... * ... The new moon in a clear sky ... * ...Good water to drink ... * ... The sight of birds at our feeder... * ...A dependable car... * ...Electricity... * ...Fellowship of friends... * ...Chickens... * ... Families that love each other... * ...Nourishing food... * ...Cinnamon toast... * ... A husband's hug... * ...My wife...*

"If the only
prayer you say
in your life is
'thank you,'
that would
suffice."

-- Meister Eckhart--
Christian mystic from the
12th century

I travel a lot for my business--and am gone for long marathons of time--which would not be possible, were it not for the generosity and tender care of my wife. She packs up so many good things for me in terms of creature comforts--clean sheets, organic food and healthy drinks (San Pellegrino is a real favorite, as well as Italian organic apricot nectar), freshly baked cookies followed by many emails over the days of our being apart. I am truly a blessed man to have such a loving woman in my life and heart--for whom I thank God very day.

George

**For all of this and more,
we thank you most gracious God!**

"In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

-- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), German Lutheran pastor, theologian and participant in the German resistance movement against Nazism

Church Life

Candlelighters:

- All church ladies' (Candlelighters) are invited to Richard and Ruth Ann Glick's house on Sat. Dec. 11 at 10 am for food and fellowship. Please contact Ruth Ann to let her know what food you would like to contribute to the brunch.
- The January 15th Candlelighters meeting will be a baby shower for the Pregnancy Center in West Lebanon. The items that they like to give to new moms who have completed a program are as follows: any color clothing sizes newborn to size 2, bibs, bath towels sets, booties, shoes, newborn hats, receiving blankets, and baby board books. All items need to be new.

Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) becomes Everence

MMA has recently changed its name to Everence. For those of you having accounts with MMA/Everence you have already heard about this.

Why did MMA change its name?

- To create a joint identity. MMA and Mennonite Financial came together to share a joint name. We can now offer seamless services to people.
- To reach new communities and generations. The name Everence Financial was chosen to

communicate clearly who we are and what we do, particularly to younger adults and families.

- To provide more room for diverse denominations we serve. Everence serves more than 20 denominations with Anabaptist faith traditions. Some have Mennonite in their name, some do not. We want all to be comfortable as members.

Everence Sharing Fund

Everence is incorporated as a fraternal benefit association and as such can help members with funds that would have been claimed by taxes if not for the tax-exempt status. From educational resources to sharing fund grants to college scholarships, these benefits are made possible by member participation and the corporate title.

The Sharing Fund provides matching grants to be used to help members or community people in financial need or providing assistance for church projects that help people with basic financial needs.

In 2010 Taftsville Chapel was able to obtain \$1,000.00 as matching funds from the Sharing Fund in grants to our Good Samaritan Fund.

Allen Guntz
Everence Advocate

Join us at Bethany Birches Camp this winter!

<u>Session</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Ages</u>	<u>Cost</u>
December Connect	Dec 11-12	9 th -12 th Grade	\$ 30/\$40
Bobcat Snow Camp	Jan 14-16	3 rd - 6 th Grade	\$70/\$85/\$100
Lynx Snow Camp	Feb 18-20	5 th - 8 th Grade	\$70/\$85/\$100
February Connect	Feb 26-27	9 th - 12 th Grade	\$30/\$40
Family Fun Day	Feb 26	All Ages!	\$15/person
April Connect	Apr 2-3	9 th - 12 th Grade	\$30/\$40

** Go to www.bethanybirches.org for details on each program/ pricing or call 802-672-5220

There is much excitement at Bethany Birches Camp! We're planning for winter camps. Campers have the opportunity to return to the hill (or come for the first time) for adventures in tubing, broomball, animal tracking, scavenger hunts, indoor crafts and games, relationship building, small groups, hot chocolate and yummy food. Amidst all the wintry fun each camp will work with a theme as a platform for discussion and teaching about Jesus and what it means to follow him. Bobcat and Lynx Snow Camp will focus on themes of "*Winter Survival*" while Teen Connects will look at "*Connecting with the Kingdom.*" Please join us in encouraging youth to come to the hill for a weekend and if you're seeking an adventure for yourself, adults are welcome too! There are numerous opportunities to help with cooking, camper supervision and shepherding. Join us in helping youth develop their relationship with God.

See you on the Hill!

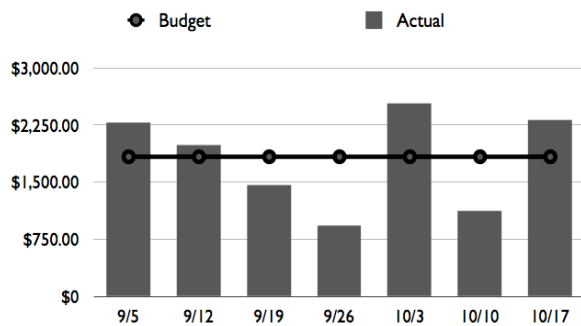
Treasurer's Report

We've been doing well so far in November, but we had a low month for October. Combined with our previous shortfalls, our year-to-date total is very low, and we are missing our budget goal by about \$2,800. Although we're not in any immediate danger of being unable to pay our bills, please remember how much every week counts! Let's consider how we might be able to make up this gap. *Thank you!*

Our spare change offerings for South Africa have been great! In total we've raised over \$480. Praise God! Also, our Thanksgiving Offering was tremendous, totaling almost \$2,300. We'll be sending the majority to the Haven, as we did last year, with a portion going to assist Young Life.

Finally, we are making good progress on the Roof Fund! We only have about \$3,600 left to raise in order to replenish what we borrowed from savings. *Thank you!*

Weekly Offering



Please note: These graphs show our weekly offerings for 9/5-11/21, as a treasurer's update was not include in last month's issue.

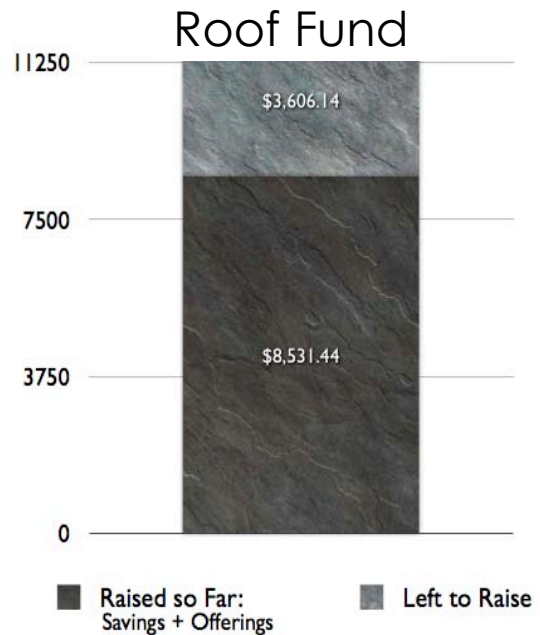
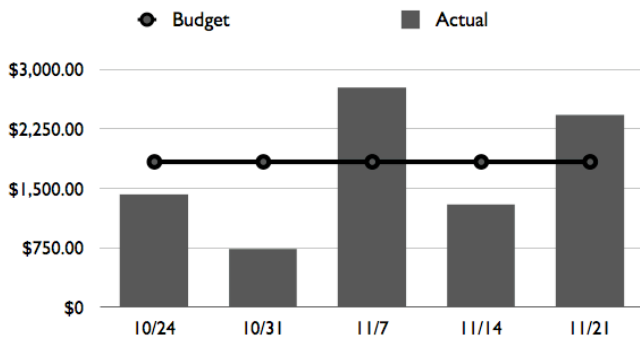
OFFERINGS:

Weekly:
 10/24 - \$1,423.00
 10/31 - \$735.00
 11/07 - \$2,770.00
 11/14 - \$1,296.00
 11/21 - \$2,425.08
Weekly Target - \$1833

Total:
Budget - \$9,165.00
Actual - \$8,750.08

Year-to-date total:
Budget - \$38,493.00
Actual - \$35,648.18

Weekly Offering



Total Cost: \$12,137.58

An Update from the Outreach Coordinator

Please take a few moments to look at the bulletin board display in the Millen Room. It is a visual representation of Taftsville Chapel from Monday through Saturday—showing where we live, work and go to school.

I signed up to be the Outreach Coordinator this year at Taftsville. There isn't much of a defined job description for this position. I hope to initiate some mission fundraising projects such as the children's offering that we have taken for the Mennonite Mission Network project on South Africa (Kids' Clubs). I also want to encourage us to think that our greatest outreach opportunities are here at home where we live and work. The people that we affect most are the people that we see in our communities and at our jobs.

I hope you will take the time to absorb some of the information on the bulletin board. It shows the far-flung geographical nature of our congregation both in the distances we live from the church and also in the distances some of us travel to our jobs. We live in thirteen different towns and work and go to school in seventeen additional towns. Our small congregation has interaction with people in thirty different towns on a daily or weekly basis! That's not counting those whose jobs take them to a variety of locations.

I have considered what it means to be the "Outreach Coordinator" at Taftsville. We support local organizations with our special Thanksgiving offering. Past offerings have been given to The Haven, The Fold, SEVCA, Good Neighbor Clinic, etc. People regularly donate food to be given to The Haven and sometimes we all donate food at Thanksgiving. Special children's "Penny Power" offerings happen periodically for MCC programs such as seeds in Africa or clean water in Central America or MMN mission work in South Africa. We have collected money for CareNet and some have attended their fundraising banquet. We have raised funds for Bibles and assembled school kits for Leah Beidler to take to Haiti. We have assembled layette bundles for MCC. At Christmas we always donate hats and mittens to PATH. Individuals work on helping people out with construction projects for neighbors, friends and members of the congregation. The list could go on. All this happens on a regular basis. It is above and beyond the budget. Usually all of it happens without the Outreach Coordinator ever lifting a finger. I couldn't have signed up for a better job.

-Elinor Shattuck



Half of our Thanksgiving offering for the Haven on Sunday, November 21st.
Thanksgiving Offering for the Haven and Young Life: Total - \$2,289.00



Dave with the Mitten Tree.

Franconia Conference Assembly, November 12th + 13th, 2010

Taftsville Chapel is one of 45 churches and two-dozen related para-church ministries that make up the regional assembly of Franconia Conference. Aware of the turmoil, tensions and confusion in the Conference over recent staff/board communication and decisions, Randy and I ventured to Conference Assembly, held on November 12 & 13, not quite sure what to expect. Ervin Stutzman, executive minister of Mennonite Church USA (our denomination), was this year's speaker. He began by reminding us that growth in God's grace usually comes about by humbly facing real need and depending on God. He challenged us, as a Conference, to recognize and confess the real need we are experiencing during this time of pain and trouble among us, and to be willing to be humbled by it, allowing "growth in grace". Randy and I both felt encouraged and refreshed by the lively worship and by Ervin's message.

Our new Conference moderator and assistant moderator, John Goshow and Mim Book, also talked openly of the situation, affirming hurt and hope. With the new board, they are ready to work as a team to continue the ministry of the Conference. The 142 delegates had time to confer and respond, offering affirmation, suggestions and challenges. Newly credentialed leaders were welcomed, as well as a new multi-ethnic congregation near Pittsburgh. We enjoyed connecting with Marty & Ron Kolb-Wycoff, our previous pastor at Taftsville; Gay Brunt-Miller, our conference liason; Jon Moore of New Beginnings Church; and Donella & Wayne Clemens and Hubert Schwartzentruber, previous conference ministers relating to Taftsville. We even had the unexpected joy of worshiping with Abner and Virginia at Perkasio Mennonite Church on Sunday! We appreciate so much being a part of this large family reaching beyond our own community.

-Carie Good

Taftsville Tidbit Trivia *Do you remember when...*

40 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 8, 1970

A unanimous vote was given for a person outside Taftsville congregation to be considered for the new minister. Brother Yoder will be asked to speak to Aarden Godshall about considering the possibility of leading this congregation.

December 8, 1970

It was decided that with all the other activities planned and also because of lack of time, we would not plan for a Christmas program this year.

35 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 14, 1975

Cliff and Zelda Knisley will present their Christmas slide show at 4:00pm.

December 31, 1975

There will be a New Year's Eve Party with communion held at the church. Joanna and Ruth Ann are planning the activities.

30 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 21, 1980

The committee for planning a candlelight service is Dennie and Marie Hackman, Vera Fogg and Darlene Snader.

December 23, 1980

Mary Alderfer, Cindy Zook and Melinda Alderfer shared Instrumental Selections at the Christmas Service.

December 23, 1980

Candlelighters had a sock and mitten tree once again this year. We collected 22 socks and 9 mittens, which were sent to Northern Light Gospel Mission.

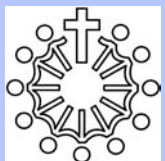
25 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

December 8, 1985

The men of our congregation will get together to make wooden toys for the Christmas project in White River Junction.

Taftsville Chapel Mennonite Fellowship

Located in the village of Taftsville, VT, one block south of Rt. 4 on Happy Valley Road.



Randy Good, Pastor

<http://www.taftsvillechapel.org/>

Send your contributions for the Current to:
carenswanon@yahoo.com or contact a
Newsletter Staff member: Carie Good, Janet
North & Virginia Schlabach