



First Mennonite Church • Bluffton, Ohio • Vol. 66, No. 8 • December 2019

Advent Echoes

How will you observe Advent this year?

For about six years, while Ron Guengerich served as pastor at Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, he also served as my spiritual director. Each year as Advent neared, in one way or another, Ron asked the same question: “How will you observe Advent this year?” I guess asking the question itself became a habit, because it continues to return to me in a sort of echo whenever the air turns crisp and the leaves turn colors and flutter to the ground.

Our worship theme for Advent 2019, “What are you waiting for?” also echoes themes from past Advent celebrations. The strength of the repetition of the church year is returning to these themes that sustain us, that hold the possibility of transforming us, that renew our faith, and that nudge us on to growth and maturity of faith.

So, how will I observe Advent this year? How will you observe Advent this year? What am I waiting for? What are you waiting for? What are we waiting for?



This year I’ve chosen to return to a practice or habit that has been quite meaningful in the past, but that I have not practiced for some time. This Advent I’ve chosen to practice Evening Prayers. Some call it Vespers. Either way, these prayers at dusk or at the beginning of the evening time are part of the Liturgy of the Hours or the Divine Office. Most days I anticipate practicing this alone, wherever I happen to be as evening descends.

But on Thursdays in December, I invite anyone who wishes, to join me in the prayer room upstairs from 4:30-5 p.m. No preparation is required. There will be scripture, and some spoken prayer, but mostly there will be silence. It will be a time to wait, to listen, to pray. It will be a time to offer to God our hopes and deepest longings for ourselves and for the world.

Let me know if you have any questions. However you choose to observe Advent this year, may it be a sacred experience of the very presence of “God with us” here and now in 2019.

~ Pastor Wanda

Literature rack: Learn more about our connections

On the west wall of the fellowship hall next to the double doors, there is a wall rack filled with reading materials that are often ignored. Over the next few weeks, we'll be adding more labels to make items more easily identifiable.

Periodically, we add new items and replace back issues of materials such as the Central District Reporter and Focus. Some of the items relate directly to First Mennonite, while others represent outside organizations such as Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen, Betty's Farm, Mennonite Disaster Service, and Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio.

Please take some time to review the material, take those that interest you – you may be surprised!

Also, if you have materials you'd like to add, please bring them to the church office. We'll make the appropriate label and see that they are posted there.

They're graduating!

Touching base with FMC's high school seniors

Do you know all of the high school seniors at First Mennonite? In case you've lost track, we have six seniors this year, including Ana Neufeld Weaver, Grace Paquin, Jacob Biesecker-Mast, Patrick Estell, Sophia Gott, Grace Paquin, and Danielle Novak. Between now and graduation, we'll include a Q and A feature with each of the seniors. Keep reading to hear from two of them!

Senior: Grace Paquin

Parents: Walt Paquin and Rhonda Winstead

Plans after graduation: I am planning to major in environmental studies or biology. I have applied to four schools (Westminster College, Washington College, William Jewell College and Ohio Wesleyan College) but I haven't decided where I am going yet!

1. Describe yourself in 5 words or less

Hard working, kind, honest

2. What are 3 things you are grateful for in your life and why?

I am grateful for my supportive family (including my church family), my dogs and music.

3. What have you learned in your life that you feel will be the most useful?

I think that all of the skills I have learned from starting my own business will be very useful! I have learned how to manage money, how to market products and how to communicate with customers, all things that will continue to be useful to me.

4. What's a hobby that you don't currently do that you would love to learn? What's holding you back from starting?

Since I am homeschooled I am able to pursue almost all of my hobbies in my free time. I would love to become better at knitting!

5. Imagine you're the teacher tomorrow at school. What are 3 things you'd teach that you think would help make school more useful for one's future?



I think I would try to teach critical thinking skills, time management and how to have conversations with people that you don't agree with. These are things that aren't always taught in school but which are super useful in real life!

6. If you could travel back in time to 3 years ago, what advice would you give yourself?
If I could talk to myself before my freshman year, I would definitely tell me to be homeschooled! It has made such a huge difference in how I view education (I enjoy it a whole lot more!) and has given me time to pursue so many other passions.
7. What is the achievement you're most proud of and why?
I am most proud of starting my own business! I am proud of this because it is something that not many teenagers get to do, and I absolutely love it!
8. If you had no physical, financial or other obstacles, what skill would you like to have?
I would love to be able to be able to compete with my dogs in dog agility more regularly and at a higher level.
9. What (or who) has had the greatest impact on your life, good or bad, and why?
Honestly, our three dogs have had a huge impact on my life. They inspired me to start a business, have pushed me out of my comfort zone in ways that make me a better person so many times, and are always there to make me laugh. Training Nova as a guide dog brought me in contact with so many people who I would have never connected with otherwise and I am very thankful to her for that.
10. If you could eat dinner with 3 people you don't know, who would it be and where would you go?
I have met so many interesting people online in the service dog, dog training and online shop community. It would be fun to get together with some of them. We would probably go to a local coffee shop or small restaurant and talk for hours.
11. Where in the world would you most like to live? Why?
I would love to live somewhere with easy access to the mountains and hiking but also near a beach! I would like to live somewhere like this because I love getting outside and being in nature, especially in the mountains and places with beautiful scenery.

Ana Neufeld Weaver

Daughter of Laurel and Paul Neufeld Weaver, Granddaughter of Richard and Margaret Weaver

Plans after graduation: I am planning on studying Music Education and minoring in Spanish and/or Music for Social Change at either Goshen College or Eastern Mennonite University.

1. Describe yourself in 5 words or less
I am musical, compassionate, extroverted, intelligent, and curious.
2. What are 3 things you are grateful for in your life and why?
I am grateful for my family because they have always loved and supported me and have been tremendous role models. I am grateful for my friends because they are always there to laugh with me, cry with me, and support me in everything I do. I am grateful for my nephew, Logan, and niece, Zoey, because they always are there to light up life with a smile or a hug.
3. What have you learned in your life that you feel will be the most useful?
I feel that learning Spanish will be the most useful to me in life as it will allow me to communicate with people from many different cultures and countries.



4. What's a hobby that you don't currently do that you would love to learn? What's holding you back from starting?

I would love to learn how to play guitar. I know a few chords but I don't have enough time to really learn guitar when my time is spent practicing other instruments.

5. Imagine you're the teacher tomorrow at school. What are 3 things you'd teach that you think would help make school more useful for one's future?

I would teach nonviolence, to give kids tools to use against bullying, geography, so that kids have a better picture of other countries, and a foreign language, because learning a language also helps kids understand other cultures.

6. If you could travel back in time to 3 years ago, what advice would you give yourself?

I would tell myself to be less self-conscious and more confident because you miss out on life when you are afraid to stand out or try different things.

7. What is the achievement you're most proud of and why?

The achievement I am most proud of is playing piano and taking piano lessons for 13 years because my 13 years of hard work and practice have allowed me to play amazing pieces and create beautiful music.

8. If you had no physical, financial or other obstacles, what skill would you like to have?

I would like to be able to dance well in different styles such as ballet or Latin dancing.

9. What (or who) has had the greatest impact on your life, good or bad, and why?

Music has had the greatest impact on my life. I have grown up surrounded by music and have learned to turn to it in times of sadness and joy. Singing in choirs, and playing musical instruments takes up most of my time, making it impact my life every day. As a music education major and teacher, music will continue to be the focus of my life.

10. If you could eat dinner with 3 people you don't know, who would it be and where would you go?

I would eat with Julie Andrews, Ben Platt, and Emma Watson at an elegant New York City restaurant near Broadway.

11. Where in the world would you most like to live? Why?

I would most like to live in Guatemala because I fell in love with Guatemala when I lived there for 9 months.

Getting to know ... Joan Diller

By Joanne Niswander

Joan Diller's ties to Bluffton stretch back to before she was born, since her parents met at Bluffton College. Her mother, Lorena Birky, grew up in Hudson, IL, and she was a cousin of BC's president, Lloyd Ramseyer. Joan's father, Harold Reusser, was born in Berne, IN, and met Lorena when they were BC students. Both held a lifelong love for Bluffton and shared it with their three children (all BC alums.)

"Bluffton was a mecca for me as a child," Joan said. "As a family, we visited often and my dad was always telling stories about the place." Joan's siblings include an older brother, Jim, now deceased, and an older sister, Ann Shumaker, who lives in Bluffton.

When Joan was born, the family was living in Columbus since her father was minister of music in a large Presbyterian church there. However, Joan was born in Berne, IN, where their physician practiced.

At the time of Joan's baptism, the family was living in Newark, where her father was minister of music at a Methodist church, so Joan was baptized Methodist. The family later moved to Williamsport, PA, where her father continued his church music career in a Presbyterian church.

Bluffton continued to be her mecca and she earned an elementary education degree from BC in 1959 and she and Sam Diller married that year. Joan and Sam settled in Bluffton, with Sam earning a law degree and working for Lima's Buckeye Pipeline - his employer through much of his early career. Joan taught second grade at Bluffton Elementary for three years before starting a family.

Sadly, Joan had three miscarriages within those first few years so they decided to adopt. Two-week-old Sarah joined their family in January, 1962. The following December, they got a phone call saying "We have a little boy for you" so Peter, two months old, joined the family.

Joan and Sam had a successful pregnancy 1 ½ years later and daughter Rachel was the result. There were 28 months between those three children. One more child, Andrew, was born to Joan and Sam a few years later after they had moved from Bluffton.

The move had come in early 1967, when Sam's company needed him to work in New York City. The family found a home in Westfield, NJ, a suburban commuter town, where they enjoyed their new community and attended a large Presbyterian church. The move proved to them that there were good communities to be found elsewhere than Bluffton. Though the surroundings and customs were different, there were good neighbors there, too.

After three years, they moved to Emmaus, PA, where Andrew was born. While in Emmaus, the family attended West Swamp Mennonite Church in Quakertown.

They returned to Bluffton and First Mennonite in 1971, moving into the large white house on Bentley Road, just next to where they live now - a good house for raising a family.

Three of the children were in early elementary school at the time of the Diller's move back to Bluffton, so Joan enjoyed several years of Bluffton motherhood before thinking about a "regular job." In 1982, she began her 20-year employment at Mennonite Memorial Home – first as a nurse aide and eventually as activities director. "I thoroughly enjoyed all my jobs at MMH," she said.



Joan and granddaughter, Abby

During this time, Joan was also active in various organizations including Telesis Club. Volunteer work included serving on the Bluffton Public Library board and the Easter Seal board. She enjoyed singing in church choir (something she has enjoyed since a young girl.) "I miss it when the choir isn't singing," said Joan, who has also taught Sunday school and has served on various church commissions. She is still active on Caring Concerns committee and helps with bulletin folding.

Joan's eyes light up when mentioning children and grandchildren. Sarah, a teacher with four children and two grandchildren (which gives Joan and Sam two "greats") lives in Norwalk. Peter is in Chicago, Rachel in Kitchener, Ont., with her husband and three children, and Andrew lives in Dunkirk with his wife and four children. One wall in Joan and Sam's dining area showcases them all.

After retirement, Joan renewed her interests in flower gardening, bird watching and preparing for the yearly return of the monarch butterflies. There is a large patch of tall milkweed – food for the monarchs – growing by the patio just outside the window.

The year 2004 brought on another change in plans for both Sam and Joan, as Joan's heart attack and open heart surgery challenged life again. But they met that challenge with grace and faith. And, with Sam's retirement, as well as recent surgery, they are now adjusting a little more to life in the slower lane.

Says Joan, "Throughout my life, I have been blessed with a loving family and a caring church family. God has sheltered me in his arms."