

Vital Signs

Of Lombard Mennonite Church



Venture Club Lock in.

New Year's Lent Resolutions

—Richard Gehring

We've come to that time of year when many of our New Year's resolutions have fallen by the wayside. We started out with really good intentions. We planned to exercise more and eat better. Or we promised to get more organized and watch our spending. But after a few weeks, it becomes too cumbersome or time-consuming to stay with the plan. And so we fall back into our timeworn, comfortable routines.

It happens in our spiritual lives, too. We plan to have daily devotions. But soon there are so many other things competing for our attention that practices like reading the Bible and praying start to take a back seat. Or we vow to be part of a small group or attend Sunday school regularly or volunteer to serve on a committee. But eventually the demand of one more item on the calendar feels more draining than enhancing.

We will soon enter the season of Lent. This is a time when many Christians choose to focus on spiritual disciplines such as prayer or fasting. It is a fairly limited time—just forty days—when we can resolve to be more intentional about our spiritual lives.

Knowing that we are committing to certain practices for only six weeks gives us more freedom to experiment, and more incentive to persevere than with open-ended resolutions at the start of the year. And who knows, maybe we'll end up sticking more to the spiritual disciplines we discover during Lent than we did to our New Year's resolutions.

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Barb introduces our new covenant members on December 10.

Lent is Just Around the Corner

—Barbara Krehbiel Gehring

Lent and Easter come early this year. On February 14, we'll meet at the church building for our Ash Wednesday service. (Yes, this is also Valentine's Day.) Our service will likely last from around 7:00-7:30 PM. Everyone is welcome.

Our theme for Lent this year is "Christ Among Us." In the denominational resources for the series, the creators describe why they chose this theme: "These resources were written in mid-2023, and it's unclear where our denominations will be for Lent 2024, but Christ remains among us, and that is where we stand united."

They go on to encourage us to consider each Sunday, "What might Christ be teaching? What is God expecting of us? How does this enable us to live our Christian—and Mennonite—identity more fully, bringing glimpses of the new heaven and new earth into our communities? What is the journey showing us?"

Lent is a series of forty days, plus six Sundays, that guides us in a time of preparation for Easter. Holy Week and Easter bring additional special events. Look for more information on those in the next *Vital Signs*.



Children's story on December 17.

Remarkable Finish to 2023

—Jeremy Steelberg, Treasurer

The church's fiscal year ended on December 31. LMC finished the year with a truly remarkable and bountiful surplus. Praise God!

2; February 2024



Church retreat.

Our General Fund income was \$417,450. Our total expenses were \$385,094. The net income for the year was \$35,655. Giving to the General Fund was \$31,412 more than we had budgeted.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed their donations and prayers throughout the year and helped LMC finish with a generous surplus. A summary of the year-end results is below.

Ending Cash Position on 12/31/23

Cash and savings	\$303,260
Current Liabilities	42,576
Giving in 2023 for 2024	35,837
Subtotal	<u>224,847</u>
Designated Funds	132,977
Excess cash over liabilities & designated funds	\$91,870

2023 Income and Expenses Compared to Budget

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
General Fund Giving	\$417,450	\$386,038	\$31,412
Other Income	<u>3,299</u>	<u>2,417</u>	<u>882</u>
Total Revenue	420,749	388,455	32,294
Total Expenses	385,094	389,380	(4,286)
Net Income	\$35,655	\$(925)	\$36,580

Game Night Ahead

—Mona Richards

Come one, come all! Community Life is holding several fellowship events for all ages this winter and spring. Our first activity is a game night on Saturday, February 17, at 5:30 PM. We invite you to bring your favorite board games to play with your church family. We'll provide a meal of pizza (including gluten-free and dairy-free varieties), salad, and lemonade. Feel free to bring a snack to share. Contact Mona or Evan R. if you have any questions.



Be on the lookout for our next activity on Saturday, March 9, when we will be knotting comforters for MCC! Details coming in the next *Vital Signs*.



Pianists Karin & Mark Edwards (Redekopp & Edwards) will be performing a Valentine's concert on Sunday, February 11, at 3 PM at St. John's Lutheran Church in Lombard. The program will include light classical works for four hands at one piano by Gershwin, Bizet, Brahms, Poulenc and others, plus solos by Rachmaninoff. A freewill offering will be taken. All are warmly invited!

Seeking Peace and Justice With 2023 Mission Giving

—Jamie Huff

The LMC Mission Commission had an exciting 2023 as we joined in with the rest of the congregation to prayerfully imagine how we might more fully follow Jesus, seek peace and justice, and serve others!



We began the year by continuing our support of LMCers who are working domestically and internationally, including the Corpeño family, who are serving as mission specialists in Guatemala, and Eli R., who completed their final season of service in San Francisco with Mennonite Voluntary Service. We also reaffirmed our ongoing support for LOVE Christian Clearinghouse and PADS, two local organizations that care for neighbors in need of economic, food, and housing assistance.



In the spring we awarded matching grants to Radical Hospitality, Ten Thousand Villages, Corazones Conectados (Hearts Connected), and Menno Haven Camp. These grants strengthened people who are committed to ensuring fair wages for artisans around the world, to sustaining spaces for retreat and enjoyment of God's creation, and to caring and advocating for the wellbeing and rights of incarcerated persons. In the fall, we supported Simon M. (another LMCer!) and his work with AMEXTRA, an organization that promotes the integral transformation of marginalized communities in Mexico.

For the Advent giving project, we worked with Laura L. to support the migrant ministry of St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy and St. Giles Parish in Oak Park. LMCers were especially generous in donating winter clothing items and \$2,950 to support the provision of warm clothing, personal essentials, and a hot meal to newly arriving migrant families. Thanks to Katharine R.'s leadership, the Mission Commission also received a matching grant from the Everence Sharing Fund to give an additional \$1,500 to the migrant ministry.

To close out the year, we allocated additional monies (\$500 each) to the 2023 matching grant recipients and to LOVE Christian Clearinghouse and PADS. Finally, the Mission Commission gave \$1,000 to MCC's aid and relief work on behalf of people impacted by violence and displacement in Gaza and Palestine.



stgilesparish.org/migrant-ministry





“WE not ME” at the VC Winter Retreat

—Alice Kabira and the Venture Club

The Venture Club spent an exciting weekend at the middle school Menno Haven Winter Retreat the weekend of January 19-21. The theme was “WE not ME,” discussing how we work together as a team to complete our goals and how we are better as a group than as individuals. Everybody has their own unique set of skills and attributes they bring to each team they are on, whether it’s family, friends, clubs, etc.

The VCers’ biggest takeaways from the worship series (four sessions in total), were that “a team has to work well together to achieve their goals” (Olivia), and “it is important to encourage people because it helps them grow” (Gray).

The Venture Club enjoyed numerous activities throughout the weekend in addition to the worship. Their favorites were tubing, ice skating and/or walking on the frozen lake, playing Harry Potter Clue, and meeting kids from other youth groups. Simon participated in the volleyball tournament with another youth group and won second place! The youth encourage you to ask about their experience and their existential thoughts on juice.



January 16 Day of Action in Washington, D.C.

—Vina A.

On Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, Nathan, Dave M., and I drove to Washington, D.C. to join with other Mennonites and friends for Mennonite Action’s D. C. Day of



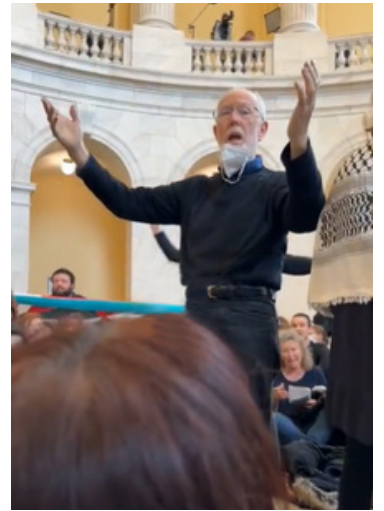
Action. The goal was to take peaceful public action to demand a ceasefire, an end to the US-funded occupation of Palestine, and the release of all hostages, and to build for lasting peace that honors Palestinians and Israelis.

The action consisted of two coordinated



Peace service outside the capital building on January 16.

groups. The first, including Nathan and Dave, chose to participate in peaceful civil disobedience through hymn singing in a federal building. I was part of the second group. We sent the first group out under a blessing of song and anointing oil, and then held a simultaneous peace service outside the capital building, all the while praying and supporting those inside. After the peace service, and seeing our friends get zip-tied and arrested, we hand-delivered petitions with 5000 signatures to congressional offices including those of Illinois Senators Durbin and Duckworth. All those arrested were released the same day.



Why would nearly 350 people choose to join in nonviolent action? The answers were similar—their hearts were broken over Gaza and they felt compelled to act. Nathan, Dave, and I also shared that same feeling, a response to a small voice within. Some shared how that voice also wanted to change the narrative of Christian North Americans. Others cited their faith or the traumatic images on social media.

Almost everyone also spoke about how their parents or other family members marched for civil rights or protested the Vietnam War. As a mother without that kind of family history, those testimonies impressed upon me how impactful our choices are to our children, and how, somewhere along the line, it started with one person listening to that small voice within. I think about the civil rights movement and what went into each individual choice, organized action, small role, and step of faith that led to very big change.

May we encourage each other to discern, act, and join in the swell to bring big changes for peace and justice for the people of Palestine, Israel, and the world. Learn more and sign the petition at mennoniteaction.org.



Chicago Binational Day of Action in December.