



A Year in Review

Luke 2.22-32

By Pastor Greg Laszakovits

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A LOOK BACK...

As we pastors thought about what we might share this morning by way of A Year in Review, the list got long quickly. So here goes fast, fun, inspirational, and admittedly incomplete, a quick review of 2017 and the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren's quest to follow Jesus and practice peace, service and openness to all.

Whether caring for the world or caring for one another. The ministries of this place are amazing. We lift one another up when times are difficult. For example, our Deacon ministry is amazing. Families are supported during illnesses and difficult life situations. Meals are lovingly cooked and home delivered, hospital visits, support visits are made to those unable to get out of their homes, communion delivered, funeral meals are prepared for hundreds to nurture family and friends sharing with one another. Our Deacon body grew in number this year and is strong.

Our Officers and Board gave us forward-looking leadership. Our Board and Commissions provide the skeletal framework for all we do. **Expressions** undergirds our worship, **Nurture** helps us connect, **Resources** does more than just keep the lights on, it manages a complex building and building staff, **Witness** has represented us and helped us reach beyond ourselves locally and globally, **Christian Education** forms our faith individually and together.

Just think of all of the ministries:

- Brethren Buddies, Junior and Senior High events
- 50+ group up and going again
- We know how to eat too: Church picnics, potlucks, fundraisers, Lenten home groups
- We held events to support immigrants and educate ourselves meeting Dreamers in Fellowship Hall, we hosted a legal advice event
- We volunteer at the winter shelter
- Faith formation opportunities are ever-present
- We give refugee resettlement and support, sponsor the Run For Peace, celebrate at our Golden Age Dinner
- We send video to Partner Congregations in Cincinnati and DC, and this ministry is poised to grow to include more partner congregations in 2018.
- Again, I know I've missed things

Whew....All of this and We live in troubled times. It seems that 2017 saw our nation become more divided, less civil, and perhaps a little meaner. Racists are becoming bolder. Anti-immigrant groups more vocal. Anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish sentiments are running as high as I've seen.

Our congregational response has been firm and determined resistance to this hatred, while consistently based in Jesus' love. We will continue to speak for, and stand with, those who are threatened and even acted upon because we know that they are among those who Jesus would name the least of these.

Shockingly, this straightforward care and love for the least of these has made us Newsmakers—We are now one of the preeminent religious voices for peace and justice in the county. When mosques and synagogues were sent threatening letters and we sent open letters of support, when we did the simple act of loving our neighbor by selling yard signs that said so, when racists and Nazis marched in Charlottesville, ***we made news***. When we spoke on behalf of an immigrant unjustly arrested, we made television and print news. (I think the Lancaster Newspaper Faith and Values Section editor has us on speed dial). Our denominational news outlets have also recently taken notice as of late. We pastors are proud to be part of a congregation willing to speak out about that which is important.

It's also worth noting that you continue to take good care of us, your pastors. You value our contributions; you empower us to keep growing professionally and personally, you encourage us to be healthy here in our ministry and in our homes and personal lives. Notable in 2017 was Pastor Pam's Sabbath Rest, where she and Dave were able to travel to Nigeria to be of support to the Church of the Brethren there. For all of this we thank you.

We continue to reach out in Worship. Our goal is to have a worship experience that enables *everyone* to participate and find God, across generation and religious background. Musical highlights include soaring organ pieces along with hip-hop originals and youth choir pieces. We are keeping Brethren practices like Love Feast alive and well. We've hosted some esteemed preachers like President of the Nigerian Brethren Church Joel Billi, David Radcliff, and J Daryl Byler. Our worship series are meant to inspire and teach and help us grow as followers of Jesus. Some of those have included: Movies that

Inspire, texts of terror; Re-gifting; Remembrance Sunday. Yes, we lost some important members of the congregation this year. People who have been like bricks and mortar here. We look forward to seeing who will step in and fill their place.

In all of this that has been mentioned—really because of all of that has been mentioned—we have continued an essential discussion about a building renovation and addition. This building is aging, it supports all of the ministries already mentioned, continues to host hundreds of local families and children 6 days a week providing a safe place to children to learn and grow and play. If not now, when? If not us who?

Apologies for the notable things we haven't noted. But in this moment may we all give thanks for this place. And for what God is doing with us here.