



HICKSVILLE MENNONITE CHURCH Hicksville, Ohio

BY JAY MAST

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Reflections on God’s Work – Part 7

God is at work. In 2023, the *Beacon* feature articles will seek to capture a snapshot of the ways God is working in churches across our conference. We pray that these articles encourage your faith and spur you on to join God in the work He is doing in your local congregation.

~Kelsey Jurkovich, Publication & Literature Committee

Hicksville Mennonite Church, located in Hicksville, Ohio, was planted in the early 1960s with the goal of reaching the community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For over sixty years, the congregation has sought to be faithful to that mandate in this rural, uniquely named community located amidst cornfields in the northwest corner of the state. As I reflect on the thriving church community that I’ve been a part of for almost seven years, three words of description come to mind: faithfulness, collaboration, and children.

Faithfulness

The overall trajectory of our church throughout the decades reminds me of Eugene Peterson’s description of Christian discipleship, where he used Friedrich Nietzsche’s words: “a long obedience in the same direction.”* While not particularly glitzy or glamorous, we have sought to be obedient to Jesus over the long haul.

We are blessed with a number of older church members, some of whom were a part of the initial church planting team. They have modeled consistent discipleship throughout the years while creating a welcoming atmosphere of loving hospitality. We desire to continue this tradition of a “long obedience” even as the dynamics of the church continue to change with the addition of many younger families and a changing cultural context.

Collaboration

One of the blessings of living in such a small community is the opportunity to personally know most of the other churches and town residents. We maintain great relationships with the churches in our community and collaborate on various activities. We recognize the resources and gifts inherent in the different churches and work together to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and address the various needs of our town more

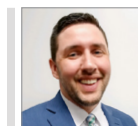
effectively. Some of our shared ventures are a Bible education program in our public school, a Christmas program at the historic opera house, a community Good Friday service, free community meals, lunches for the children during the summer, a food pantry, and other events, meeting needs as they arise throughout the year.

One example of this shared passion for the community is evident in a student ministry event that was held last year. Another organization was invited to conduct an assembly at the local public school and welcomed the students to our church gym for a Christian concert that evening. The concert was well attended, and many students made commitments of faith in Jesus. Other local pastors were present and able to connect with these students for ongoing discipleship.

Children

Over the last several years, we have seen exponential growth in our children’s and youth ministry as Vacation Bible School, mid-week Kids’ Club, Upward Sports, and junior high and high school youth groups are expanding. There seems to be a growing interest in God among the youth of our town. Several of the youth who most faithfully attend junior high and high school events did not grow up going to church.

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Jay serves as the senior pastor of Hicksville Mennonite Church. He and his wife, Renita, have a 3-year-old son. Jay enjoys extended walks with his family, disc golf, traveling, and finding cool tidbits of information on virtually everything.



Are You Up for a Challenge?

BY CALEB REED

Do you like doing things that are hard? Or when something challenging comes your way, do you want to run away from it? Different things come to mind when I think about this—things like working out, having a tough conversation with a loved one, or stepping out of my comfort zone. The reality is that most of us don't like doing hard things. There are various reasons we might have for this, but in my opinion, most of it revolves around fear—fear of failing, fear of what others might say, or simply just lacking the drive needed to accomplish what we may be stepping into.

Recently, I was helping my son with his 4-H project. He is currently raising two goats to show at our county fair. A lot of energy goes into raising his goats. He needs to make sure they are fed a well-balanced diet, have access to plenty of clean water, and a clean pen to live in. He also needs to train them to walk beside him with a halter and lead rope and make sure they stand in a specific way to show their skeletal structure and muscle mass. My son has done an amazing job at providing food, water, and a clean pen, but he has struggled with spending time training his goats for the show.

Let's be honest: goats are stubborn, and it is not always easy to get them to walk and stand. When I was helping him, he was getting discouraged and talking about how hard it is. He wanted to give up and quit, but I kept pushing and encouraging him. After we put the goats away, we sat by the barn and talked about how we will always face hard things in life. Whether it is at school, playing a sport, or working at a job, we will never get away from challenging things.


As we were talking, I changed my verbiage and started to help him think of it as a challenge. I encouraged him to look at the progress he has made. I told him that if he keeps working hard, he will begin seeing the results he wants. I noticed that when he thought of it this way, he seemed to change his perspective. We talked about his dream of owning a Lamborghini someday and his dream of playing in the NFL. I encouraged him to think about his dreams (the end goals) and the work he needs to put in to see them happen. Though there will be challenges, if he sets manageable goals, he can accomplish them.

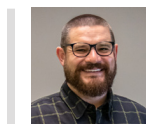
When I talk with people about church planting, one of the common things I hear is, "That's really hard; I'm not sure we

can do something like that," or "We don't want to lose people from our congregation! We just reached our target goal for members." People often begin thinking about losing church members, the financial commitment to launch a new church, the need to leave their existing community, and so much more. Church planting is hard, it involves so much, and there is a huge risk in it. What if we fail? What if we don't grow? What if we get it all wrong? You are creating a team from scratch, building something from the ground up, and trying to reach people who don't realize their need for Jesus. In just a few sentences, I have probably talked most of you out of getting involved in planting a new church. But let's look at it from a different angle.

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What if we look at it as a challenge? What if we think about the Kingdom impact that planting new churches would have? What if our first question is, "Are lives going to be transformed?" We don't want to plant churches just to plant churches; we want to see lives and neighborhoods transformed. When we look at it this way, there should be an excitement that rises up within us. There should be a passion to see transformation take place through new church plants.

We must be willing to put in the hard work to see results. We need to be okay with people leaving our congregations to start new ones. It won't happen by just sitting back and talking about it. If God is calling you to church planting, step into that calling. Don't worry about the challenges that will come your way. Instead, live in the truth that God will be with you every step of the way. Hebrews 13:6 says, "Since God assured us, 'I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,' we can boldly quote, 'God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?'" (MSG). 



Caleb serves as church planting catalyst for Rosedale Network of Churches. He loves a quality cup of coffee and spending time with his family. Caleb and his wife, Stephanie, and their two children live in Resaca, Ohio.



Bethel, Hillsong, and Choosing Worship Music

BY RBC

This month we asked a pastor and a worship leader to share how their congregations choose worship music.

Fairview Mennonite Church in Albany, Oregon

—Pastor Brandon Funk

Our church entrusts the selection of congregational worship music to a music committee that works in close conjunction with our church leadership. We have a diverse congregation in age and background, so naturally, there are varying opinions and preferences. While it is not a perfect solution, we’ve found the best path forward is to evaluate individual songs on their own merit.

Currently, it’s trendy to write off entire groups of musicians based on the publishing companies or churches they’re associated with. While this is certainly a simpler approach, I believe it is unnecessarily fear-based. Furthermore, such a black-and-white approach is inconsistent with how we select older music.

For example, how deeply should we dig into the history and source of every song we sing, including those in old church hymnals? Surely, all of us use resources in our churches and homes that are produced by creators and companies that hold vastly different worldviews—even ones in stark opposition to a biblical worldview. Yet this doesn’t mean that the products themselves cannot be used for Kingdom purposes.

In the end, I believe we need to be focused on our own congregations and what best serves them. Does our celebrity-celebrated culture prompt us to imagine ourselves as having more influence than we actually do? Might these worship conflicts exist because we’ve overemphasized the Sunday morning “production,” and underemphasized day-to-day Jesus following and discipleship?

I believe our churches will be healthier if we focus on the lordship of Christ in every area of our lives—including a robust theology of suffering for His sake—rather than on fearmongering watchdog YouTube videos and blogs. Pharisees are well known as those who focus more on what they are against than what they are for!

Our lives are to be lived and our churches saturated in the goodness of God, and perhaps singing about it is more edifying than dividing over who wrote the worship songs.

Oak Dale Church in Salisbury, Pennsylvania

—Worship Director Annette Miller

In his book *The Insanity of God*,* Nik Ripken observed that the resilience of persecuted peoples around the world grew from their impulse to sing “HeartSongs”—new songs to the Lord birthed in the furnace of affliction. Ripken concluded that the health of a church depends on whether or not it has embraced faith as its own and sings its own “HeartSongs.” *

In my role as worship director, I oversee a team of 30–40 musicians, singers, and audio-visual technicians. Together with four other worship leaders, we select new songs to introduce. I meet monthly with the preaching and worship planning teams and prayerfully consider what God is doing at Oak Dale and in this community.

We look for songs that are scripturally sound, congregationally friendly, and doable for our volunteer musicians. We mostly introduce “HeartSongs”—songs that flow spontaneously from our hearts, strengthening faith and witnessing to the reality of our resurrected Lord.

When I think about how best to pick songs to lead at Oak Dale, I look for “HeartSongs.” I identify these by cultivating sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and relationships with congregants. Members frequently suggest songs that have been meaningful to them, expressing what is in their hearts. These are their “HeartSongs.” Our Sunday morning worship flows from our worship throughout the week.

But what do I do if the “HeartSong” comes from a questionable source?

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RBC is the educational arm of Rosedale Network of Churches, helping students lay the groundwork for their future by providing two years of mentorship, community, and biblical education in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition.



Isaac & Brittany: Saying Goodbye

BY MADALYN

Last week, Rosedale International (RI) said goodbye to Isaac, Director of Short-Term Programs (STP), and Brittany, Executive Assistant. The pair, who married in October of 2020, conclude their time at RI with over a decade of service between them.

Isaac joined RI in July of 2019. As director, he provided guidance and leadership for STP staff and yearly interns as they ran a tightly packed two months of City Challenge and disciplined young adults through the REACH program. Under his leadership, four classes of REACH participants underwent discipleship training and outreach—a total of 66 young adults, who traveled to 11 different locations around the world.

It is impossible to speak of Isaac's tenure without mentioning COVID-19, which largely defined the beginning of his time at RI. As borders closed around the world, STP scrambled to bring REACH teams home, and the next year saw a reduced number of applicants and stateside-only outreach. Still, Isaac led the team with a strong, yet gentle hand. "He cared for our team deeply, and it showed through his interactions with each of us," shares Hannah, STP Administrative Assistant. "I appreciated how intentional he was to check in on us and encourage us."

"He really gave me room to figure things out and learn what I bring to the table." ~Kara

Appreciation for Isaac is a common theme among his co-workers. "Isaac was very persistent in...challenging us to create healthy boundaries around our work and social life," says Phil, Programs Facilitator. "I felt God work through him to create...a common vision and goal that we could all work toward. He encouraged us to step into our giftings and take on the leadership roles that we were placed in." Kara, Personnel Facilitator, agrees. "He didn't try to exert himself as an imposing authority, and he didn't micromanage our work...I felt very empowered in that. He really gave me room to figure things out and learn what I bring to the table."

"Through watching Isaac, I continue to see the power of advocating for the people you lead—making sure they are cared for, being heard, and taking time to rest. It was always

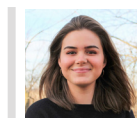
a comfort for me to feel like my supervisor actually had my best interests in mind and wanted to see that I was healthy," Kara continues.

Every Rosedale Network church benefited from her dedication.

Brittany began employment with RI in 2016, serving as STP Administrative Assistant until she left in 2020. In 2021, she returned to RI in a new role. As executive assistant, she supported Joe (RI President), Mike (Director of Partner Development), and the Communications Team in daily tasks and many projects. Her attention to the smallest detail was a valuable, much appreciated resource. An integral part of the team, she coordinated behind the scenes to plan and execute RI events, including quarterly board meetings, Ride for Missions, and Rosedale Network's annual Multiply Conference. Whether through church visits or prayer card distribution, every Rosedale Network church benefited from her dedication.

"As the new guy and rookie in the Rosedale International world, working with Brittany was an absolute joy," expresses Mike. "She was helpful and taught me so much about navigating this world. Brittany, I was always impressed by how creative you were and how you brought any display table to life. I will miss your positive attitude and crazy fun ideas."

Isaac and Brittany deeply blessed Rosedale International staff, interns, and program participants during their time with us. We honor them for their commitment to our mission to bring Jesus to the world. While we are sad to say farewell, we also rejoice with them as they move further into God's calling on their lives—and as they prepare for the birth of their daughter later this year! Please join us in praying blessings over them as they make this transition into a new season of life. 🙏



Madalyn serves as media coordinator for Rosedale International. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, and attends Shiloh Mennonite Church.

Hicksville Mennonite Church cont'd from pg 1

The junior high youth group recently invited me to attend their Bible study to answer some of their questions about God. One student mentioned that he has recently been entertaining thoughts of the afterlife. For most of his life, he assumed that we simply cease to exist once we die. But the longer he dwelt on this thought, the more he became convinced that life would become utterly meaningless if there was no afterlife. His search for truth led him to the junior high Bible study, where he could explore his questions with other inquisitive young minds. What a wonderful opportunity we have, to provide counsel to him and other students during this formative time and lead them to the Word of God—where they can find all truth. 📖

*Peterson, Eugene H. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Marshall Pickering, 1989.

Choosing Worship Music cont'd from pg 3

The corruption of the worship music industry is both heartbreaking and enraging. Hillsong, Bethel, and Elevation have all become global phenomena. Every time we play songs from Hillsong and the like, we are supporting a questionable industry, riddled with scandal.

With an amazing plethora of independent artists and worship groups producing quality worship music, I rarely feel the need to introduce songs from more troublesome sources. While I am not categorically against such music, there are many good options that do not carry the baggage of questionable theology, sexual abuse charges, and the commercialization of “worship.” However, we do not automatically cut out all songs from questionable sources.

We sing hymns, like “It Is Well With My Soul,” aware of the questionable theology the writer espoused later in life. We also sing hymns that were originally secular tunes. We sing all these songs, believing that the power and significance of worship lies not in the composer or organization producing the songs. Worship songs and hymns are not mere incantations. We are not wizards reciting spells. The significance of the music lies in the hearts of the worshippers and the transforming power of the God we worship. True worship flows from the heart: “HeartSongs!” 📖

*Lewis, Gregg, and Nik Ripken. *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*. B&H Publishing Group, 2014.