



LIVING HOPE MINISTRIES WATSON, NY

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Reflections on God's Work – Part 10

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

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9 ESV).

While there are many words I could use to describe Living Hope Ministries, one that has been echoing in my mind is "perseverance." To help you understand how this word relates to the identity of Living Hope, I will give you a glimpse of our history:



In August of 1948, a summer Bible school was initiated in the Watson, New York, area. The following year, Pine Grove Community Church held its first Sunday school session. The church held Sunday morning services, Bible studies, as well as a summer Bible school program. During this time, the church was pastored by Leon Martin (1952-63), Vernon Zehr (1964-94), and Nathan Zehr (1986-2016). In the early 1990s, due to some practical reasons, the church needed to relocate and found themselves at the end of Van Amber Road in Castorland, outside of the community where the church had been planted. The church remained in Castorland until 2020.

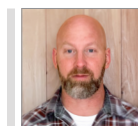
I was ordained in 2008 and began to serve as assistant pastor alongside Pastor Nate Zehr. As I think back on those first few years of pastoring, some of the images that have stuck in my

mind are the times of standing in the foyer after the service with Vernon Zehr. He would look me in the eyes and every time he would say, "Keep on keeping on." It wasn't until 2016 that I started to understand the vision in that simple statement. Pastor Nate was stepping out of his role as senior pastor and gave me a box of papers and items that he had collected over the years as pastor. In that box was the newspaper clipping on the left.

The words "plans to temporarily relocate" hit me square in the heart. Now I was starting to understand why Vernon gripped my hand and his almost desperate look into my eyes. Although I never asked Vernon what all was behind the statement "keep on keeping on," I'm pretty confident I know. Vernon passed on his love and vision for the Watson community to his son, Nate, who in turn gave that vision to the congregation. Pastor Nate would often say, "Watson is where I feel at home." That's why I am confident that the meaning in that statement, "Keep on keeping on," was "Persevere, don't give up on the vision, God has called this local church to the Watson community—that's still the plan."

In 2019, we changed the name of the church from Pine Grove Mennonite Church to Living Hope Ministries, and on the first Sunday of 2020, we stepped away from the facility in Castorland and stepped toward the community of Watson. That step landed us just outside of the town of Watson in Lowville, where

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Todd serves as pastor of Living Hope Ministries. Todd, his wife, Amanda, and their five children live in Kirschnerville, New York.



Thinking About the Church

BY DARREN PEACHEY

The title of this article is purposeful; it represents the content—simply some thoughts I have been reflecting on about the church. My thinking is not intended to be right or wrong, biblically exegeted, or an indication of personal preferences. Rather, it is simply some thoughts I have been pondering.

Over the past several years, there have been many conversations and debates, ideas floated, and books written about why people are “leaving the church.” These discussions lead me to think more deeply about how “we” view the who, what, and why of the church. I will go out on a limb and say the “we” represents many of us reading this article.

Some years ago, Mark Buchanan wrote a book titled *The Rest of God*, writing briefly about two words—liturgy and orgy—that I think may reflect some foundational ways we think about the church.

Buchanan writes:

In the days of the early church, orgy described a public event that produced a private, usually ecstatic, experience. It was the word pagans used for their worship, regardless of how many people were involved—and the more, the better—the emphasis was always squarely on the emotional experience of the individual. It was all about me.

Liturgy is done by me—I am invited, perhaps required, to play a role—but it is not about me. It’s about us. It is about the Other. Its purpose is to benefit the entire community—to provide protection or access to all.

But Buchanan goes on to say:

Liturgy is not law. This is important. Liturgy is a kind of choreography, a choreography for our dance with the things unseen, things ancient and things anticipated, things above and things below. Some things move through this choreography with light-footed elegance, others with flat-footed clumsiness. You can add your own steps and moves, ignore others, or sit it out entirely. No one will arrest you. But don’t you want to dance? Don’t you want to push

beyond mere idea and theory into the realm of the actual...? My dance will be similar and different from yours. It will echo yours, but with its own style, and rhythm, and pace.

I also recently read a little book published by the Mennonite Publishing House in 1934—*Instructions to Beginners in the Christian Life*. It was developed by a team of writers because “for some time past, brethren in different quarters of the [Mennonite] Church felt that there was need of more uniformity, in subject matter used and methods followed, in the instruction of applicants for church membership.” As I read through what the writers thought important for every Mennonite to do and know, it struck me that it all sounded very familiar. I had heard some of the same words both when I went through instruction class in the late 1970s, and when I was baptized. Oddly enough, it wasn’t all a good familiar.

As I think back over my lifetime in the church, I wonder if, at some point, our liturgy became law. Liturgy that became law didn’t offer us a choreographed invitation to live and dance, but rather, felt heavy, and stifled the very life it was intended to procreate. So, we began to seek life and its fullest expression in orgy...but the self-focus and emotional high in congregational life can only last so long, as it becomes too hard to get along when we are self-focused. So why bother? What’s the purpose?

I have been thinking about liturgy, liturgy that becomes law, orgy, and the church. I have been reflecting on how those dynamics affect our existing churches. Are they preventing new churches from being born and disciple-making churches from reaching each neighborhood? I invite you to think about the church. 📍



Darren travels extensively with his wife, Caryn, visiting churches in his role as conference pastor of Rosedale Network of Churches. They live in Belleville, Pennsylvania, and attend Locust Grove Mennonite Church.



Rosedale Network's "Liturgies"*

BY RBC

This or That? Part 9

This concludes RBC's series of articles showcasing a variety of practices encountered among Rosedale Network congregations. We hope these articles have promoted thoughtful discussions and sparked new ideas about the differing ways our churches are faithfully seeking to honor Christ as His Body.

I grew up hearing that Mennonites were "non-liturgical" and "non-creedal."

So, in high school, I decided to visit a liturgical church.

We were a wee bit scared of the Roman Catholics. They'd killed our ancestors back in Europe. But I plucked up my courage and visited a Catholic church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Cross yourself. Kneel. Sit. Read this. Kneel. Stand. Recite the creed. Everyone automatically knew how to perform the holy ritual. The mass. But I was lost. Then suddenly it was over, and everyone left. Abruptly.

At my Mennonite church, there was also a pattern, even though I hadn't noticed it: Devotional. Sunday School. Youth up front. Two acapella hymns in four-part harmony. Kneel backward for prayer. Offering. Sermon. Benediction.

Then fellowship. Children ducked under benches and played tag in the basement. And maybe there was a potluck and a baby shower.

Like the Catholics, we were about the vertical—hearing from God in the music, words, and prayers, but there was a very strong horizontal—bearing each other's joys and sorrows.

Yet it never occurred to my adolescent mind that we had our own "creed" and "liturgy."

When missionary anthropologist, Don Jacobs, returned to East Africa to visit the Tanzanian Mennonite churches he'd helped to found years earlier, he was surprised to see congregations continuing to follow the form of worship used by the early Mennonite missionaries—devotional, two hymns, sermon. This order of service was taped to the pulpit of every Tanzanian Mennonite church.

The East African Mennonites were surrounded by Anglicans reading the same Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* used in England. Tanzanian Mennonites used the "liturgy" they had "inherited" from their founders.

Later as East African Mennonite youth were influenced by charismatic renewal, it was common to hear elders critique

the youth with statements like, "Mennonites don't raise their hands in worship." "Mennonites don't say 'Praise the Lord!'" These new "Spirit-filled" behaviors were not part of the old Tanzanian Mennonite "liturgy."

For the past eight months, we've looked at the "this and that" of our Rosedale Network "liturgies."

Today I attend a Rosedale Network church that doesn't sing hymns or kneel for prayer. We don't have Sunday School, take up an offering, or dismiss with a benediction. And when I visit Ethiopia or Tanzania, their colorful choirs dance and sing original music that doesn't come from a hymn book.

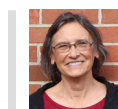
Anglican and Catholic churches continue with their recognizable, time-honored liturgies. They've worshipped in nearly identical ways for hundreds of years.

But Mennonites? Have we retained the "basics" of a "creed" while contextualizing our "liturgies" to different settings and eras? And what are the basics?

We've said that the basis of our faith is following Jesus daily—as shown to us in the Scriptures and agreed upon by our community. Our communities have coalesced around agreed-upon appropriate ways of acting, speaking, and dressing as we've sought to love God and neighbor. We've tried to live "more-with-less;" to not swear oaths, carry arms, or sue; to dress modestly and help with "barn raisings" and "church plantings." The Sermon on the Mount was our "creed."

We expressed our beliefs with great physicality—not so much in kneeling and hand raising, but through organizations like Mennonite Disaster Service. We "hammered and quilted" our theology.

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Jewel serves in development and communications at Rosedale Bible College. She loves the gracious pursuit of truth that happens at RBC and in the broader Church.

Living Hope Ministries *cont'd from page 1*

we started meeting at Abundant Life Community Church. Three months later, we were able to purchase land in the town of Watson and shortly after, started having services under a tent at the property. For about two and a half years, we met under the tent in the summer and at Abundant Life in the winter. On the first Sunday in October of 2023, we had our first Sunday service in the new building. We were back in Watson!

Living Hope has seen tremendous growth in the past three years, and I am convinced it is because of the many faithful men and women who did not grow weary of doing good and did not give up. I still scratch my head at times and wonder how 30 years can be a “temporary relocation,” but realize that when we persevere, “in due season we will reap.” I believe we are entering into that season at Living Hope because we “Keep on keeping on!” 🙏

Rosedale Network’s “Liturgies” *cont'd from page 3*

But does that make it easier for us as Mennonites to just “hammer and quilt”—but forget why we’re doing it? We love the Book of James even though Martin Luther, with his fresh understanding of Reformation grace, didn’t. We know that “faith without works is dead.”

But what are works without faith? Do we non-creedal Mennonites have a shorter step to apostasy?

How many children in our communities daily recite The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and stand respectfully to sing the national anthem, but never recite the Apostles’ Creed, or sing “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow”?

What we believe, confess, and act on shapes us profoundly.

If we’re going to last another 500 years, we need a sound, inlaid faith that involves head, heart, and hands. That three-fold “liturgy” is not easily broken! And that’s what makes a Mennonite Christian on any continent. 🙏

** Liturgy: the form according to which public religious worship is conducted.*

Note: Please visit our blog at <https://beacon.rosedalenetwork.org/> to view this month’s article from Rosedale International.