

# Food for the Flock

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## *Shepherd's Thoughts*

*"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."*  
-Romans 12:11

Every year about this time, I start my annual visits to my various medical specialists. The dermatologist comes first in February. I've got to keep an eye on my skin thanks to that nasty melanoma I had the other year. Next up are visits to another specialist and my family doctor. They both like to keep an eye on my blood work, weight, and blood pressure.

This year, I thought it might be good for us to do a little self-examination too. Last year at this time we were challenging one another to "follow our passions" in serving God and serving others. Our motto became (and I hope it still is), "If God has given you a passion, then He has given you a mission." We were challenged to look at our passions and gifts to see if we are Artists, Activists, or Adventures, or, more than likely, a combination of several of these. Then we were called to action – to take our passions and start using them to build relationships with other like-minded individuals and see how God might work to help us introduce those people to Him.

So . . . how's it going?

This isn't meant to make you feel guilty, or add additional stress to your already busy schedules, but to see how you can continue to do what you already enjoy doing and use it to serve Jesus and other people.

Let's ask ourselves a few questions. What passions has God given to me? How have I pursued them during the past year? Have I been able to use them to build relationships with other people who like doing the same things I do? What about 2017? How can I continue to pursue my God-given passions to build relationships, serve God, and introduce other people to Jesus?

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It has been a joy to watch many of you accomplish these very things this past year. You've gone on mission trips, touching people's lives through medical and construction ministries. You've helped people navigate through difficult financial situations by giving sound counsel and financial assistance. You've pursued your passions for the outdoors, for animals, for refugees, for sewing, and used them to touch people and God's creation. You've baked cookies for prison inmates, packed Christmas boxes for children around the world, handed out food and drinks for bicyclists raising money for cancer research, and read books that you never would have read unless your crazy pastor encouraged you to do so. You've led people deeper in their relationship with God, and some have gone on the adventure of spiritual direction. You've prayed, wept, rejoiced, played, encouraged, baked, shared meals, watched children, decorated, sang, taught and generally accepted the challenge of being the Artists, Adventurers, and Activists that God created you to be!

So, what's next?

Keep doing what you're doing, and if you haven't taken up the challenge yet, jump in! You won't regret it and neither will the people whose lives you touch. Maybe you plan on continuing to follow a passion you followed last year. Great! Keep up the good work, and perhaps there is something else you are passionate about? Why not look for ways to pursue it, enjoy it, and serve God and others through it. Let's accept Paul's challenge from Romans 12:11, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

It has been fun to follow my passion for animals, and I am excited about seeing the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual "All Creatures Great and Small" weekend take shape for the second weekend in October. It has also been fun to see the Rabbit Room (our monthly reading group) and the Bunny Burrow begin to take shape. I love animals and I love books! Why did I never think of serving the Lord by following my God-given passions? My only regret is that I waited so long to do so.

You see, serving God was never designed to be a chore; we simply did it out of duty. It was designed by His creative genius to be something we enjoy doing with passion, zeal, and fervor!

I can't wait to hear your stories about how you followed your passions in serving the Lord in 2016. I can only imagine those stories are going to be even better regarding 2017, because you will have seen how exciting it is to serve God and others doing what you already enjoy doing. You will be motivated by His Holy Spirit to keep following those passions He placed in your heart.

Remember . . . if God has given you a passion, He has given you a mission! Pursue it with zeal and fervor!

Blessings,  
Pastor Jim Schwenk

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Nursery Schedule</u>
Feb 5	Barb Turley & Diane Garrett
Feb 12	Diane & Audrey Hoover
Feb 19	Gloria Frey & Heather Schwenk
Feb 26	Diane Garrett & Elaine Freed

## Rabbit Room

We will meet on Monday February 27 at 7:00 p.m. to discuss [A Dog's Purpose](#) by W. Bruce Cameron. Read the book, see the movie, join us for good conversation and good tea. Don't forget the Lebanon Valley Council on the Arts is now located at 770 Cumberland St, Lebanon.

## Mid-Week Lenten Service

This year we will be marking the season of Lent with our brothers and sisters from other Annville area churches. Services will begin at 12:00 and will be followed by a light lunch. The schedule is as follows:

March 8- Gingrich's Mennonite Church  
March 15- St. Anthony Coptic Church  
March 22- Annville Church of the Brethren  
March 29- Lebanon Valley College  
April 5- St. Paul the Apostle  
April 14- Cross Walk

## LMC Highlights

As you know, the last year has been quite challenging as LMC implements the plan to terminate our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA. Most LMC congregations were quite satisfied with the decision. However, throughout the year we have been working with congregations engaging in discernment about their ongoing relationship with LMC. So far, seven congregations have decided to transfer to Atlantic Coast Conference, five decided to remain with LMC and five more are in various stages of discernment. In each of these congregations, there are people who are disappointed with the outcome. So it has been painful time in these settings.

At the same time, there are more positive developments that bring hope and encouragement. Although space does not permit much detail, a summary of those developments includes:

- Throughout the year, we have been in conversation with congregations that are attracted to LMC's vision and mission. So far, 13 congregations have joined LMC with a number of other still in discernment. To better serve these congregations LCM created new districts in Western Maryland, Western PA and in Eastern Ohio. These new congregations boost total LMC membership to approximately 170 congregations.
- LMC's Spanish Council made a decision last November to expand its organization circle to include congregations in Mexico, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and other parts of the USA. There are clusters of congregations in Uruguay and Argentina also asking for connections to LMC.
- Since LMC's decision to disconnect from MC USA, I have been invited into conversations with leaders from Mennonite Brethren, Brethren-in-Christ, Conservative Mennonite Conference, and other groups seeking new ways to walk together to support our shared vision and values.

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- LMC's church planning initiative has taken on fresh energy with the recent appointment of Pastor Omar Guzman as the new leader of LMC's church planting work, called Church on the Other Side. Omar is very eager to work with all LMC districts to inspire a vision for congregational multiplication.

I'm also encouraged by the work of a task force the Board of Bishops recently commissioned to help discern what God has in store for LMC in all of these changes. This team, called the *Strategic Directions Task Force*, will help the Board of Bishops address important, big-picture questions about what LMC is called to become in the days ahead.

I invite you to keep LMC in your prayers. We need the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for these challenging times. Please pray for the Board of Bishops, the Conference Executive Council, and the task force noted above.

L. Keith Weaver- Moderator