



buzz

COVID Mutual Aid Updates

Thank you to those in our congregation who responded to an earlier invitation to give to a COVID-19 Mutual Aid Relief Fund at Waterford. To date, we have received more than \$6,000.

From this fund, we have allocated \$1,000 to our congregational Jubilee Fund, a pool which provides immediate emergency aid to those outside the congregation who stop at the church office seeking financial assistance.

We also contributed \$2,500 to a congregational relief fund administered by Everence. We and other congregations and individuals added to the \$800,000 given by Everence, Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service to provide help to more than 170 congregations affected by COVID-19, particularly those with smaller budgets and those made up primarily of immigrants and people of color. Additionally, an amount from the fund was given to Mennonite World Conference to help congregations internationally.

An Everence colleague called helping to administer this fund the most gratifying activity he has been a part of in more than 20 years of working with Everence. He has described the experience of a bi-vocational pastor returning home from a COVID hospitalization and pondering how to close the congregation because of a lack of funds. Receiving \$5,000 from the fund allowed his church to continue ministering in their community.

Finally, we recently contributed \$2,500 to the Center for Healing and Hope. In addition to its ongoing role in providing medical care for the uninsured and under-insured locally, CHH has played the key role in administering free testing to all, whether or not they have insurance.

See **Mutual Aid** continued on page 3

Beginning our COVID Action Plan

Back in October a COVID Advisory Team, formed by Ministry Leadership Council and the pastoral team, was announced to the congregation, and is composed of Jeremy Kauffman, Dr. Katie Michalczyk, Kent Myers, and Dr. Cynthia Bontrager.

The formalized plan developed by the COVID Advisory Team was announced to the congregation after being accepted by MLC. The congregation affirmed the plan unanimously. Positive comments were also received from the congregation regarding the COVID plan as set forth.

Elkhart County has recently been in the Red advisory level on Indiana's COVID-19 county metrics map. The WMC COVID advisory plan Red phase does not allow for any in-person activities. The next stage will be the Orange phase. The Orange phase will open 2 large rooms in the church (the sanctuary and the fellowship hall) and 2 smaller rooms in the nurture wing (Room 34/35 and Room 28/30). The capacity of each of these large rooms will be up to 11 households and for the smaller rooms up to 8 households each. This size of group allows for physical distancing and hearing of each other. These gatherings will allow small groups, Sunday School classes, and other groups to be together in as safe a way as possible. Advance reservations of these rooms will be required, as will be described in a future Buzz.

This way of opening up gradually will not allow all Sunday School classes to meet at the same time, nor allow classes with more than 11 households to all be together in person in our facility. With this action plan in mind, we invite small groups, Sunday School classes and Ministry Teams to begin discussing if/how they wish to begin meeting in person at church. More rooms will be available for group use when we move beyond the Orange phase.

See **Action Plan** continued on page 2

Are you getting the Vaccine? Would you like a blessing?

I recently stumbled upon an article where the interviewer asked multiple Jewish rabbis if they had a blessing for one who is receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. The Jewish practice of giving blessings is a prominent faith practice, and my curiosity was piqued as I wondered how these faith communities would respond. Their answers were clear and obvious, of course there would be a blessing for such a time as this. There is much excitement, trepidation, and hope surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine. It is the center of conversation, the content of social media, and the headlines of news reports. Surely such a milestone ought to be acknowledged by our faith community.

The more pressing question for these rabbis was: Which blessing? What could be said? How would one acknowledge God with awe and reverence in this moment? One common blessing was suggested: The birkat hagomel blessing (sometimes referred to as the bench gomel). Rabbi Emily Cohen explains,

“It is a prayer said by Jews who’ve come through a harrowing threat to life, like giving birth, a major illness or a car crash. It’s received by the congregation and responded to by the full community, each person asking for more good to come to the one who has survived.”

The birkat hagomel blessing:

recitation: Blessed are You, Lord our God, ruler of the world, who rewards the undeserving with goodness, and who has rewarded me with goodness.

congregation responds: May God who rewarded you with all goodness reward you with all goodness for ever.

In dialoguing with the rest of the pastoral team, we were drawn to this idea of a practice of a blessing each week for those who have received the vaccine. We would like to invite you to let us know when you have received a COVID vaccine and would like to be included in the blessing. Each week, beginning January 10, we will include these names in the bulletin. Then, during the pastoral prayers in the service, we will pray the birkat hagomel blessing for those who have been vaccinated.

We also invite you to take this blessing with you. It could be something you say when you are at the clinic getting the vaccine, or later that evening around the dinner table. It could be the words you include in your Facebook or Instagram post afterwards, or the reply you give to others’ posts. Perhaps sharing in this blessing will give us the language to remember God’s goodness with awe and gratitude.

If you are unsure if you should get the vaccine, we invite you to reach out to a trusted medical professional in your life. If you do not have such a relationship, contact a member of the pastoral team who will help you get connected and discern next steps.

May God who rewarded you with all goodness, reward you with all goodness for ever.

—With love from Katie, Cindy, Neil, and Velma

Discover more about the birkat hagomel blessing at:

<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/florida-jewish-journal/fl-jj-blessings-vaccine-rabbis-guidance-20201223-c55ymyeb1bbh5ee3pcatx5urfu-story.html>

and <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/birkat-hagomel-a-jewish-prayer-of-gratitude/>

Action Plan (cont. from page 1)

When Elkhart County moves to the Orange advisory level, the COVID Advisory Team will review the current county statistics. We will not move to the opening of the church in the Orange phase until the county statistics seem to be stabilized and remain at the current level for at least two consecutive weeks. The COVID Advisory Team in discussion with MLC will notify the congregation of the movement to the next phase. This will be announced in the emailed Life Beyond Waterford on a Friday with an implementation of moving to the new phase on the Sunday after the Friday announcement.

The COVID Advisory Team appreciates the positive support we have received from the congregation. These are difficult times and we long to be together. We are eager to move forward with the plan as things become a bit safer.

—Cynthia Bontrager, for COVID Advisory Team



Waterford

Mennonite Church

65975 State Road 15

Goshen, IN 46526

p: 574 533-5642

f: 574 533-0879

office@waterfordchurch.org

www.waterfordchurch.org

Staff Team

Administrative Ministry

- Karen Hostetler
Secretary
- Elvina Schmidt
Bookkeeper
- Janet Shoemaker
Coordinator of Administrative Ministries
- JD Smucker
Worship Coordinator
- Mikki Bowman
Director of Children's Ministries

Facilities Ministry

- Jan Oostland
Facilities Manager
- Courtney Shetler
Custodian
- Irma Perez
Custodian

Pastoral Ministry

- Neil Amstutz
Pastoral Team Leader
- Katie Misz
Pastor of Family Life
- Velma Swartz
Interim Pastor of Senior Ministries
- Cindy Voth
Pastor of Community Life

The *Waterford Buzz* is normally published weekly for members of Waterford Mennonite Church. Items for inclusion should be sent to the editor by 5 p.m. Monday preceding publication.

Janet Shoemaker,
Interim editor
buzz@waterfordchurch.org

Mutual Aid (cont. from page 1)

Most of the money we have received for the fund has come from people making gifts from the “mutual aid checks” most of us received from the U.S. government in early 2020 as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Recently, Congress passed and President Trump signed a second stimulus package, which will provide \$600 to each qualifying adult or child. For most of us, these additional funds have either already hit or will soon hit our bank accounts.

Our household circumstances certainly vary within the congregation. Some of us continue feeling financial strain, perhaps exacerbated by the pandemic. If this is your situation, these funds can assist in many ways. In particular, if you have credit card or other debt, consider using the aid to retire some or all of the debt. Also, if needed, be in contact with a pastor about our Sharing Fund. Another resource is LSS Financial Counseling, which provides free, confidential help via phone and video counseling. LSS can be reached at 877-809-0039.

Others of us may be feeling on the edge, able to pay our bills but among the estimated 40 percent of Americans who would find it difficult to cover an emergency of \$1,000. For this group, the rebates may provide an excellent opportunity to enlarge or begin an emergency fund.

And for others of us, this may be “found money,” assistance that is not particularly needed. Our jobs may not have been affected, our investment income has returned after taking a significant dip in early 2020, or our expenses have actually decreased through less commuting, canceled vacations, less eating out or other circumstances.

In this case, consider sharing this “governmental mutual aid” with others. Good options include:

- A first-time or additional gift to our congregational spending plans (Operating Fund/Mennonite Education Fund/Either Fund), recognizing that some in our congregation may have felt the need to reduce their giving.
- A gift to CHH or other organization is helping to meet needs surrounding COVID.
- A gift to Waterford’s COVID-19 Mutual Aid Fund, used in ways such as those as described above.

Gifts to our Sharing Fund are also always welcomed. However, our current balance is quite strong, perhaps as large as it has ever been, so needs may be greater elsewhere.

If you have questions about these items or other mutual aid items, please contact a member of our Mutual Aid Task Force, including pastor Cindy Voth, treasurer Andrew Hartzler, Sharing Fund coordinator Michelle Horning, or myself.

—Lyle Miller, on behalf of the Task Force

Thank You

Thank you to the Waterford congregation for all the cards, prayers, and the plant sent my way at the time of my Dad’s passing. I really appreciate your support and caring.

—Irma Pérez