

The LCF Connection

April 2024



40 Years and Counting

by Phyllis Swartz

We were young in years and few in number. And undoubtedly naïve, thinking we knew more than we did.

But it was the age of planting churches in our conference

denomination, and so we did what we thought God asked us to do. And on Easter Sunday in 1984, we held the first service of what was then called Shalom Community Church.

We met in a living room, maybe 25 of us—a few young families, voluntary service workers, and two older couples, who saw we could use some guidance and wisdom. On weekdays, this living room was the hangout for the voluntary service workers who staffed the daycare in the basement below it. But each Sunday we hauled in chairs and a pulpit and an overhead projector and held church.

We dreamed of a church building of our own, of Sundays free from wresting chairs out of their stacks and lining them into straight rows. And so we saved money. And looked for property. After four years, we found 14 acres just one mile northeast on Route 42.

By then we were a group of perhaps 50. Buying land and constructing a church daunted us, especially since we were nearing the end of the gradually-diminishing funds Rosedale Mennonite Missions (now Rosedale International) provided to launch us. How could such a small group support a pastor at ¾ time and construct a church building and maintain it?

One evening leaders from our group met at the McDonalds near Route 70, trying to decide whether to buy the land. As they wrestled with the decision, a woman approached their table.

“I’ve not done something like this before,” she said. “But I felt God asking me to come talk to you, to give you his blessing and to ask you to take courage.”

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This woman had been traveling east on Route 70, headed for Portland, Maine, when she felt prompted to stop at the London McDonalds and then found our group huddled over paper-strewn tables.

“Portland, Maine,” Steve said, as she was about to leave, “I have a sister who lives in Portland, Maine. She and her husband pastor at Church of the Servant.”

“Jewel Martin?” the woman asked.

They were friends, it turned out, good friends.

But even after such an unexpected confirmation, this was a particularly disconcerting time for Steve and me. One year into this church plant, we had both left professional jobs to move to London so Steve could pastor it. We had two young children and few financial reserves, having just come out of college and graduate school and voluntary service. But to our faithless surprise, the church stayed financially afloat.

It was while we met at this second building, that younger leaders, including Rob Swartz, emerged,

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God's Faithfulness

*A Message from a
Turned-Out-to-Pasture Pastor*

by Steve Swartz

Back in 1985, when we were called to be the pastor couple at the newly-planted Shalom Community Church, Phyllis and I were all of 30 years old. Brimming with plans for success, we adopted the then-popular church-growth model—a seeker-sensitive worship service, marketing the church to the community, and following up with visitors. We emphasized conversion and discipleship, experimented with small groups, and plotted ways to maximize growth. We believed bigger was better.

But we learned that success in God's kingdom has different measures. God taught us that his plan is to make disciples, disciples who trade self-will for obeying Christ, who bask in God's love, and who turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance. As a couple, Phyllis and I learned to serve as ministry partners, merging our different gifts. We learned to balance "being" with "doing." We learned that church members are partners in ministry, not tools for meeting goals.

But all this learning was hard. Sometimes people left the church. Sometimes people were embroiled in conflict with me or with each other.

I remember one year when I prayed Psalm 13 over and over.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. Psalm 13:1-4

These verses described how I felt that year.

But I found hope in the rest of the Psalm.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has been good to me. Psalm 13:5-6

Gradually, I learned that my identity was not in my pastoral role. It was in Jesus Christ. And this alone brought me peace. ■

Elders' Notes

by Jeremy Hisey

The Elders met on Wednesday, March 6th, at the home of Rob and Doris. Those attending were: Rob and Doris, Reuben and Vicki, Gideon, Abraham, and Jeremy, via Zoom due to illness.

Gideon opened our time in prayer. We began with sharing updates, praises, and prayer requests, and then proceeded to talk about various things in the life of the church, such as the following.

- We noted the proposed final copy for the updated Constitution that Keith Scheffel emailed to us. We will all review it and come prepared to discuss it at our next meeting.
- We are thankful that Jodi Traverse has expressed interest in the Administrative Assistant position. She has interviewed with the council and with Rob. They are recommending her for the position. We affirmed their recommendation and gave our approval for the council to continue with the process and offer her the job.
- We discussed potential candidates for the Children's Ministry Coordinator position. Rob will follow up and see if we can find someone with a vision for Children's Ministries who is willing to serve in this capacity. Please join us in continuing to pray for this need.
- We hope to offer several Adult Discipleship classes at LCF this fall. We realize there are some logistical challenges to work out, but we are committed to helping our people grow in their knowledge and understanding of God's Word. We will continue to discuss plans for this in our upcoming meetings.

We scheduled our next meeting for April 17th. Reuben closed our time with prayer. ■

Council Update

by Jim Jones

The Council met via phone on Tuesday, March 19th.

Doris Swartz will be retiring the end of April after serving a little over 30 years as LCF's administrative assistant! Please join us in welcoming Jodi Traverse as our new administrative assistant. Jodi has a wealth of experience and organizational skills as an office manager. She has over five years of accounting and payroll experience, computer programming, accounts payable/receivable, and a diverse background of multitasking, as needed, in their family business in Plain City. She will officially start on-the-job-training with Doris on April 1st and overlap with Doris for the first month. Welcome, Jodi! And thank you, Doris, for your incredible dedication and remarkable selflessness!

We are grateful that for the month of February our income exceeded our expenses. In addition, March income-to-expenses are projected to be positive, as well. The council approved payments to Rosedale International, the Masts, and Rosedale Bible College for February and March. The quarterly payment (for March) to Rosedale Network will also be made. That will catch us up completely YTD, for missions and ministries. The proposed 2024 LCF Budget was unanimously approved by the congregation.

The combined classroom conversion will be used primarily for the youth group but will also need to be shared space at times for Sunday school and other events/activities.

Jodi Traverse made a suggestion to purchase a paging system for the nursery. It is the type that is used in many restaurants and should meet our needs. It is relatively inexpensive, approximately \$130 (Amazon). The council approved the purchase.

Our next meeting will be on April 16th. ■

Getting to Know...*Alexa Miller*

by Annika Miller

You probably know my brother, Cody, who plays guitar on the worship team and helps run sound here at LCF. Hopefully, you've had a chance to meet his new wife—who is also now my sister-in-law! I hope this interview will help you learn a bit more about her.

Tell us a little bit about yourself! Give a brief background of your life so far.

I am the youngest of four kids, and I have 10 nieces and nephews. Ohio is the 4th state I've lived in, though the majority of my life has been in southern Michigan. My dad was a lead pastor for the first several years of my life, and after that he and my mom remained heavily involved with church work—and I think this instilled in me a deeper respect and appreciation for the church.



How did you and Cody meet? ☺

Cody and I met in my first year at Rosedale. And though we never attended the school together, Annika (Cody's sister) and I did, and we became good friends. It was through Annika that Cody and I became friends, and in April of 2022 we began dating, were engaged August 4th of 2023, and got married January 6th, 2024! ☺

What brought you to RBC in the first place?

Several years ago I came to the Rosedale/Plain City area for a friend's wedding, and she had arranged for me to stay with a family she was close to while I was here. While visiting Ohio, Erin and Ericka made sure to tell me alllll about RBC, to which I gave many excuses and maybe internally rolled my eyes. But a couple years later, in October of 2020, I was driving home from work contemplating my life and I so strongly felt God saying, "Rosedale." I was annoyed because I did not really want to go at the time. I listened anyway, and the following September I was pretty excited to be going back to school, and in May of 2023 I graduated from RBC. There is not a single regret for me going to RBC; it just took a while for me to get there. ☺

What are your plans now that you live in the area?

I'm still trying to figure that out, but for now I've found a job at a coffee shop, and I am really enjoying that so far.

What are some of your hobbies?

When I have the time and the energy I really enjoy cooking and baking. If I don't have much going you can probably find me in the kitchen. I also enjoy doing simple art/creative things, but probably most of all I enjoy hanging out with friends.

What would you say is one of your greatest dreams/passions in life?

It sounds so simple, but I love helping people.

What is one thing you could easily talk about for hours?

I generally just enjoy engaging conversation. If there is a topic that someone other than just me can also get excited about, then that is so much more fun.

What has been one of the best things about moving here and one of the most challenging things?

Well, the best thing is that I can be with Cody in person instead of long distance! -☺ The most challenging would be trying to find my place here in Ohio and adjusting to a new normal.

What is a piece of advice that has stuck with you?

Uh...*instantly forgets anything anyone has ever said to me.*

What is one Bible passage/verse that has been challenging you the last while?

Seeing the heart posture of the authors of Psalms has been pretty challenging to me lately. The way they are so honest towards God is really beautiful and some days pretty convicting for me.

How can LCF support you and pray for you in this new season of life?

Prayers would be appreciated for me as I am still in a season of transitioning to life here, and that I could have wisdom and direction when it comes to pursuing dreams for the future.

Cody is not the only one who is glad you married him and moved here to central Ohio! We are glad you're here, Alexa, and will be praying for you in this transition. ■

Reflections

From Over the Years

by Phil & Lucy Elfrink



Phil: I have so many wonderful church memories from over the years! My baptism was an unforgettable day! Knowing the guy who helped me in my spiritual walk was the one baptizing me made it even more special. When Lucy and I dedicated our son, Derek, to the Lord, I had tears of joy and comfort. Teaching children's Sunday School classes made me feel alive as I got to know God more while teaching the students.



One of the greatest joys for me was when we would join our LCF family at the corner of Main and Second street to sing Christmas carols at London's Old Fashioned Christmas. Sometimes it would be so cold that we would hop into some shops to warm up and grab a cup of hot chocolate and then, often, would end up at Steve and Phyllis' home for cinnamon rolls and hot drinks.



Being at LCF has been such a blessing over the years. It is where I was saved and baptized, given the opportunity to serve and continue to grow in my relationship with God. Thank you for welcoming me, along with my wife and son, and for allowing us to be a part of this wonderful church family!

Lucy: When I reflect back on my journey over the past 18 years, I am reminded of the story of Ruth. When Phil and I started dating, he was in Ohio and I was in Indiana. Sometimes people ask how we started dating when we lived so far apart. Basically, we were both praying for a spouse and God answered. During our courtship we made many trips back and forth to visit each other. Often when I visited Phil, he would introduce me to his family and his church family. I grew to love the hospitality that I experienced here, from both young and old, and came to feel like Ohio could be my home.



I remember Phil asking me, if after we would get married, if I would be comfortable making what was then called Shalom Community Church, my home church. I didn't know anything about Mennonites. I remember telling him that if they worshiped the same God that He did, then that would be fine with me, but I just needed to know if I would have to change my way of dressing at all. Of course, that tells you how little I understood about Mennonites. ☺



When you love somebody, you will go to any length, without even really understanding what all it could mean, to be with them. I was willing to leave the people I knew and embrace the unknown, like Ruth said to Naomi in Ruth 1:16: *"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."* Since then I have made so many new relationships and gained so many dear friends here at what I proudly call my family. We are truly blessed to have such a loving and caring family and home at LCF! ■

40 Years...continued



that Steve accepted a position at the office of our church conference and resigned after 17 years of pastoring, and that the name of the church changed from Shalom Community Church to London Christian Fellowship.



After about a decade of meeting in what at first had seemed a spacious facility, we needed more room—more Sunday school classrooms, more seats for worship, a place to eat together, and a foyer that was larger and more welcoming. After too many starts and stops, a plan for our present building was approved. And we built again.



And here we are. Forty years is a long time, almost half a century. These have been decades of human effort and mistakes and also years of divine faithfulness. I am grateful for a God of grace, who invites us all to participate in bringing tastes of his kingdom in heaven to people on earth. ■

We invite you to join us on Sunday, April 21st, for more reflections from the past 40 years and a potluck meal.

The LCF Connection

A monthly newsletter designed to enhance communication at London Christian Fellowship

What did you think? If any of the stories in this Connection sparked an idea or opinion you'd like to share, email us at secretary@lcfweb.org. Editors: Theresa Hennis, Elisabeth Yoder, Annika Miller, and Doris Swartz