



A Publication of **Muskegon County Cooperating Churches**
Convening the Community of Faith
to serve the needs of the people of Muskegon County for over 70 years.

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MCCC is a non-profit ecumenical organization serving all faith congregations in Muskegon County

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What's Happening at Cooperating Churches?

Remember Muskegon County Cooperating Churches in Your Year-End Giving

This organization is totally funded by you. It is your membership fees, donations, and year-end giving which sustains us and keeps us going. We provide communication to faith organizations in the greater Muskegon community about opportunities and resources the churches and the community provide. We provide weekly on-line communication and quarterly newsletters. We coordinate the Feeding America Mobile Food Pantries in the greater Muskegon area. Beginning in 2022 we will be providing a monthly blog on Peace and Justice issues. Remember us as we promote the congregations' involvement in the community and the communities involvement in the faith organizations. Join us in our efforts.

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Gleanings by Tom Wagner



October 2021

Water Connections

There is an old joke in my faith community that if you give a Dunker preacher any biblical text, he or she will find a way to address baptism. The quip dates from a time when sectarian debates served as popular entertainment on the American frontier. This was also an era when many historic Dunker congregations borrowed their names from local rivers and streams. Two examples near my eastern Pennsylvania childhood home were Little Swatara and Tulpehocken. Both the faith communities and their namesake waterways played significant roles in my family history since 18th Century settlement. However, by the time of my own baptism over 50 years ago, my home congregation had ceased performing the rite in Tulpehocken Creek. Rather the pastor and deacons borrowed the indoor baptismal pool of a neighboring congregation. A few years earlier, Brethren labor activist and academic Kermit Eby, Sr. (1903-1962) commented on that trend, "...I sometimes wonder if our faith has not become as tepid as the water we are baptized in." While Bro. Eby likely offered the remark tongue-in-cheek, I find great value in connecting our spiritual practices to the broader context of God's creation.

As a child, I played in tributaries of both creeks. One ran through a neighboring cow pasture. The other ran behind an uncle's home east of Myerstown. I often tossed twigs, wood chips or leaves into these streams and watched them float out of sight. In those days, I didn't think much about where the water had come from or was going. Only much later did I realize we had lived on the divide between two major east coast watersheds. Tulpehocken Creek flows southeast into the Schuylkill River, which in turn joins the Delaware River at Philadelphia before reaching the Atlantic Ocean. The name comes from a Lenni Lenape word for "land of Turtles". Little Swatara Creek joins the main branch of Swatara Creek, which flows southwest, emptying into the Susquehanna River south of Harrisburg on its way to Chesapeake Bay and eventually the Atlantic. The name of this creek comes from a Susquehannock term for "where we feed on eels". The survival of these names reminds us that Native Americans have been attentive to their surroundings. We would do well to follow their example. That awareness and responsibility goes beyond the local. Water doesn't just come out of a faucet. Moreover, it requires consideration of how our actions effect lives downstream. Pondering my past proximity to watershed sources impresses that responsibility on me quite personally.

A story, told in two 1980s French films, addresses both the basic need for water and human relationships. In *Jean de Florette*, a soldier named Uglin Soubeyran returns to his Provence village following World War I with a dream to grow carnations for a living. After his first efforts prove profitable, his aging bachelor uncle César suggests buying a neighbor's farm for expansion. Though the land appears dry, César recalls, a spring on the property that overgrowth long has hidden. The neighbor refuses the offer, but soon dies. Following the funeral, the Soubeyrans find the spring and plug it so they can buy the property from his heirs for a lower price. The heir turns out to be César's old flame Florette. She too dies not long after her brother, making her son Jean heir. Jean is a hunchback, who until now has worked in Paris as a tax collector. He moves to the farm with his wife and daughter fully intending to work the land, foiling César and Uglin's plans. Jean and family scratch a living from the farm, but water remains a problem. They are unaware of the plugged spring and César uses his influence to keep local villagers from befriending Jean as an outsider. In a desperate attempt to access more water, Jean dies from blasting through bedrock to dig a well. Circumstances force Jean's widow to sell the farm to Uglin. That very day he and his uncle unplug the spring, but Jean's young daughter, Manon, witnesses the action. She immediately understands their responsibility for her father's suffering and death.

Manon des Sources, commences several years later. Now a young woman, Manon has remained on a remote part of the farm with an elderly squatter couple. She makes her living by foraging and herding goats. One day Manon overhears two hunters discussing how many villagers knew of César and Uglin's treachery, but said and did nothing due to the Soubeyran family's prominence. While rescuing a stray goat from a cave, Manon

Continued on the next page

discovers the source to the whole region's water supply. She takes her revenge by blocking the hidden source, creating a crisis for the entire community. Unaware of the exact cause of the water failure, villagers believe it is divine punishment for the Soubeyrans' actions and their own complicity. Testimony of a previously unknown eyewitness confirms Manon's public accusation of César and Uglin. Manon reluctantly agrees to lead a religious procession around the village fountain acknowledging the community's injustice to her father. With the help of her love interest, Bernard the young schoolteacher, she returns to the cave and releases the water. Water dramatically arrives at the village fountain during the procession. After the young couple marries, Delphine, an old mutual friend of Florette and César arrives and chides César for not responding to a letter Florette had sent while he was away in the army, informing him that she was pregnant. Sadly, César never saw the letter and Florette married a blacksmith in a neighboring village. Only then does César realize Jean was his only child and Manon is his granddaughter. He learned too late our mutual connections to creation and each other.

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren (Dunker) and serves MCCC as clerk & archivist.

NEW NEWSLETTER FORMAT: The format of this newsletter is going to be going through some changes. We will be looking to tell stories about our area faith organizations. If you would like your story told in this newsletter in the year to come please send us a publishable article. What are you doing? Tell us about your worship and mission activities. Muskegon County Cooperating Churches would love to hear from you. The public will love to hear from you, as well. If you have something you would like to share, please e-mail us at: office.mccc@frontier.com. Attn: Branches. Please include pictures and/or your organizational logo. We can't wait to hear from you!



Peace and Justice Committee

Beginning in January 2022 MCCC will be publishing a monthly peace and justice blog. In a time when it is difficult to gather people to discuss the important topics of the day we will widely and thoughtfully address peace and justice in a world sorely needing thoughtful and thought provoking discussions virtually. These blogs will be sent from our mail-chimp account. They will also be posted on our Facebook page and website. If you receive this newsletter via-email you will be receiving our blog in the same fashion. If not, go to our Facebook page or website. At some point you might want to contribute to this blog. If so, please send any contributions to office.mccc@frontier.com to be screened for publication.

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches Resolution
from the Peace and Justice Committee

We the Muskegon County Cooperating Churches, an entity representing the love and compassion of God, resolve to encourage and support members and friends as we adopt three guiding principles as we move forward into this new phase of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

1. We resolve to love God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.
2. We Affirm All truth is God's truth. We urge everyone to do their best to use the most current guidelines from the scientific and medical communities about masking, vaccination, and physical distancing as individuals and congregations make decisions about corporate worship and public events. We encourage each decision to be made based on what is best for our neighbor and community as we follow resolution 1.
3. We recognize that loving our neighbor means taking into consideration what is best for the most vulnerable among us. As we have resolved to feed our neighbor, we also resolve to extend love and charity by our words, actions, and behavior.

The most up to date information about our situation locally can be found at <https://www.co.muskegon.mi.us/1611/Coronavirus>

Respectfully submitted by: Tim Vander Haar, Cindy Barnum-Steggerda, Lily Marx, John Parker, and Delores Cole

THANK YOU!
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We would not exist without your generous support. Contributions have been received during the last 4 months from the following individuals, churches and organizations.

Crestwood United Methodist Church.

Church of the Brethren

First Presbyterian

Sacred Heart

First Congregational UCC

Dale Ertzinger

Peggy Jensen/Gerald Nehra

Margaret Buggs

Donna Lachniet

Vikings Linne' Lodge

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Muskegon Co. Cooperating Churches

Annual Meeting

January 31, 2021 at 6:00 pm on Zoom
Invitations will be coming soon!