

# IN TOUCH



November is the month of celebrating plenty, the harvest has been gathered and the blessings of another year counted. (Though today our harvest may look a bit different than our forefathers.) Our Thanksgiving table groans from the delicious offerings of food that our harvest provides us. Then comes Christmas gift buying, but I won't go there, at least not directly....

But during this season of celebration, maybe we should entertain another thought—perhaps we actually have more plenty than is good for our souls.

Those of you who know me, you know that I (at least theoretically) aspire to tread lightly through life. Because I have moved about so often in my half century plus of life that task was often made easier. Who really wants to pack up and haul around junk with them? (Or worse yet—ask someone to store it for me?) But even so, when I looked around at my home and my possessions a few months ago with a new eye—Ouch! It was obvious that I still fall far short of the standard of simple living that I believe Jesus has called us to. (Thankfully we all are just works in progress!)

Consider these verses:

### **Matthew 6: 19-21**

19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### **Matthew 6:25, 26**

25 Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

26 Look at the birds of the air: They do not sow or reap or gather into barns—and yet your Heavenly Father cares them.

### **Jeremiah 45:5**

5 Are you seeking many things for yourself? Do not seek them...

### **1 Timothy 6:7, 9, 10**

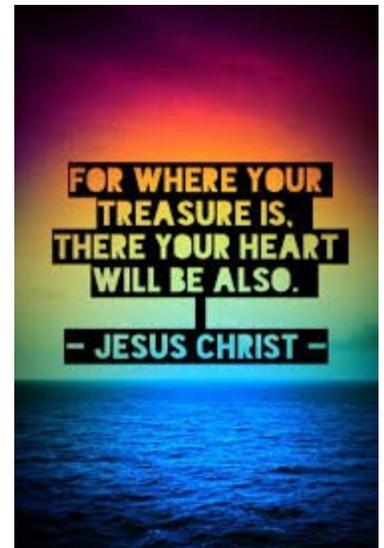
7 For we brought nothing into the world, and neither can we carry anything out of it...

9 Those who want to be rich, however, fall into temptation and become ensnared by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction...

10 For the love of money (and what money will buy) is the root of all kinds of evil. By craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

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**Luke 12:15**

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

**Matthew 6:12**

12 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

**Mark 10:21-24, 25**

21 Jesus said (to the rich young man) "Go, sell everything you have... and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

Just to throw in one statistic for shock value about the state of our culture: The self-storage industry has grown into a 24 billion dollar a year business, and that is despite the fact that North America has more than double their living space compared to just a few decades ago! (During that same time the size of families has decreased.) It reminds me a bit of the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21. Does today's storage unit equate with the farmer building the second barn to store his grain?

So I resolved to sort through my "stuff" with a bit more of a critical eye. I would keep only those things that passed a certain criteria. –In other words, each particular item (whose fate I am debating) must answer a resounding yes to at least one of the following questions:

**Does it bring me joy?** *An example, a 18" gnome that I knit for my son when he was just two years of age and it has traveled the world with us. The gnome, named Artie Sukula, was useful in his heyday, a constant companion for Nate when there was a lot of uncertainty in his life, but not now. But I do still smile whenever I see Artie, so he stays.*

**Is it useful to my life right now?** *For example, my garden hoe doesn't bring me joy, but as a gardener it is very useful. But another key word in this question is now, not ten (or more!) years ago. My ice skates that fit me in high school (a gift from my parents, and once were well-used on frozen Minnesota ponds) have got to go; their usefulness for me is gone.*

**And finally, if my house burnt down, would I need to replace it?** Self-explanatory.

I am moving right along in decluttering my home, though I far from done. MCC Connections has received a fair bit of my cast-offs, Lidia & Doug has graciously inherited many of my Bolivian artifacts (thank you for giving them a good home!) and some family history items have been set to one side for my daughter to pick from. Of what remains, I have thrown away whatever I cannot recycle. Or repurposed—many of my books have been given to Lou (SWAP) for the library down in Hindman, KY. Getting rid of our excess can be very therapeutic, a "less is more" sort of vibe. We are not going into a Spartan existence, I think of this purging not as downsizing, but rather "rightsizing." This looks different for everyone.

So my modest proposal to you in a season and country of plenty and in the light of the gospel:

**Own only what you practically need, rid yourself of excess.** *Even in a cold Ohio winter, do I really need five pairs of gloves (not counting mittens)?*

**Stop buying more stuff.** *Such a beautiful, festive Christmas bowl, we can serve the chips and dip in it, we must have it! Do you really want to take care of and store an item to use just a few days of the year? Use a bowl that is beautiful year around.*

**When you do buy something, debate its quality and lasting value in your life. Consider what activities bring you the most satisfaction and joy.** *Do you love picnics? Rather than buy a cheap chest cooler that doesn't last, purchase one that is built to last and be used for decades. You can afford it because you've stopped buying other passing desires that end up neatly (or not so neatly) stored in your garage or basement and rarely see the light of day. (Continued on Page 3)*

**Consider spending more of your money on experiences rather than possessions. Memories are what are truly meaningful and last.** *Instead of buying a new lampshade, invite friends or family to go bowling, take a peaceful walk in the woods, or a bike ride along a scenic bike path or roadway. Host a rousing game night with popcorn and apple cider around the kitchen table (Dominoes anyone?), roast marshmallows over a campfire while sharing stories and singing songs, or try out a new recipe for fried salmon-potatoes patties with sour crème-dill dipping sauce on willing dinner guests. Try out a yoga class, sing in a choir, run in a half-marathon, attend a Rubber-Ducks ballgame, or organize a comforter knotting party at MCC Connections. You have memories to treasure rather than a treasure you have to store, dust & polish, protect from thieves, or update. Trust me, life-affirming experiences are more satisfying to the soul than a new lampshade any day of the year.*

Forty years ago the Mennonite world was defined on the world stage by valuing a mindset of “More With Less.” To switch the word order is just as potent—Less is More. Does this still describe us? Let us decide together not be caught in the cycle of consumerism, and seek first the kingdom of God. Build community rather than a larger pile of stuff. ~ Marcia Lewandowski, Missions Communicator

### Central Christian School Announcements

- **Christmas Madrigal and Feast**, presented by Central Christian School Varsity Singers, Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6:00 p.m. Vocal and instrumental works will be presented in old English tradition. Drama, costumes, fanfares and delicious food will be enjoyed by all who attend. Reservations are required.
- **Central Christian Elementary School** will present a Christmas Concert, *Christmas Hang-Ups*, on Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center.
- **Central Christian High School choirs and instrumental groups** will present an evening of worship at the Christmas program on Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center.
- **Alumni Night**, December 23<sup>rd</sup>: Smoked Pork Dinner for all, 5 – 7:00 p.m. by donation in cafeteria. Varsity girls' basketball at 6 p.m. and Varsity boys' basketball at 7:30 p.m. vs. Mansfield Christian. All alumni get in free and will

**Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes is seeking a Program Director.** The person who fills this role will be responsible for the direction and oversight of MCC Great Lakes programs. The Program Director is expected to connect with constituent churches and groups, as well as partner organizations, to work together and advance the mission of MCC. This position also explores ways to further develop relationships between program staff and partnerships within the Great Lakes region to reflect the commitment to diverse constituent churches. To see a full job description and apply, visit [mcc.org/gl-program-director](http://mcc.org/gl-program-director) or contact Amber Falcón at [574-534-4133](tel:574-534-4133).

**You are invited to hear Handel's Messiah** performed by Oak Grove Mennonite Church, 7843 Smucker Road, Smithville on Sunday, December 11, at 2:30 p.m. This 83rd rendition will feature soloists, Lara Troyer, Hannah Miller, Brian Keith Johnson, and Jack Lyons; an eight-piece orchestra with concertmaster Amy Glick Helmuth, and 100-member choir directed by Brian Wiebe. If you would like to join us in singing, please come to rehearsals on Friday, December 9, at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 10, at 4:00 p.m. For more information, please call the church at [330-669-2697](tel:330-669-2697).

**The 28<sup>th</sup> year of “Search for the Christ Child” will be held at Oak Grove Mennonite Church**, 7843 Smucker Road, Smithville, OH, on Sunday, December 4, 2016 from 5:50-7:30 p.m. This is an indoor-outdoor walk through experience of what the first Christmas may have been like. Dress warmly! Handicap accessible. Admission is one article of canned food or toiletries for “People to People Ministries”. Everyone is welcome.

**Camp Luz will be hosting a retreat for Mother and Daughters** January 20-21, 2017. Rhoda Steiner will be speaking on the topic “Radical Faith from a Resting Place.” Visit [www.camluz.com](http://www.camluz.com) for more information and registration forms.

**Mennonite Church USA Convention 2017** is coming up July 4-8 in Orlando, with the theme “Love is a Verb.” One way you can show love: Consider donating to the Convention Scholarship Fund or partnering with a congregation that can't afford to send people on its own. Learn more at <http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/registration/> or find the convention on Facebook or Twitter.