

April 11, 2024 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, part 2

Showing up and saying ‘yes’ is a major lesson in Christian hospitality, even when – especially when – we don’t know where that answer will lead

By Rev. Colleen Earp

HARRISONBURG, VA— In 2022, Massanetta Springs marked 100 years of Presbyterian ministry. A Centennial Committee was formed in advance to celebrate this milestone. The committee took the opportunity to recognize the past as well as to recommend intentional steps into our future. As this work began, not only was our world still grappling with the pandemic, but the names of individuals like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were requiring our nation (and denomination) to grapple with issues of race and injustice.



Earp (on right).

Amid so many difficult and important changes, the committee carefully discerned how to respond. It recommended committing to being a Matthew 25 conference center. The board of trustees affirmed this recommendation with a resounding yes.

We had no desire for this decision just to produce a certificate to hang on our walls or an emblem to post on our website. We had a strong desire to engage with the vision of the Matthew 25 movement in meaningful ways. Given the center’s long history of conferences and retreats, as well as youth ministry and leadership, the Centennial Committee recommended hosting a conference based on the tenets of Matthew 25. We had a strong desire to engage with the vision of the Matthew 25 movement in meaningful ways.

At the same time, I had my own yes to offer, as I stepped into the role of program director at Massanetta Springs — my first ordained call. Moved by the many stories I had heard from ministry colleagues about feeling welcomed and finding their own voices and callings at Massanetta Springs, I was honored and humbled to accept the position and get to work. I feel deeply rooted in a sense of hospitality — in a responsibility to welcome neighbors and strangers alike. I was not merely agreeing to my own specific and personal vocation; I was stepping into a community and moving forward with it. I was trusting the people who came before me as well as bringing in new ideas and leaders. I was called to be welcoming, as well as letting myself be welcomed.

The planned Matthew 25 conference was among the first tasks the board handed to me. My own yes was quickly strengthened by a chorus of others: six brilliant, thoughtful individuals willing to serve on the initial planning team to bring this program to fruition. CONTINUED

OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS

CLICK ON THE LOGOS

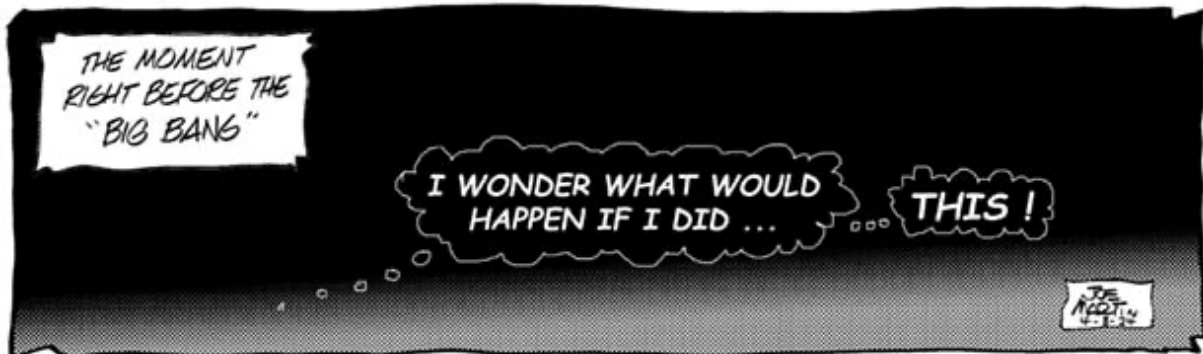


Music Notes for April 14.

We continue to celebrate the joy of Jesus's Resurrection during this Easter season. This week, the choir will sing Alleluia No. 1 for the anthem, composed by Donald Fishel (b. 1950). He was studying flute at the University of Michigan when he embarked on his career of composition and publication. Alleluia No. 1 was the first piece written by Fishel, composed in 1971 while a junior at the U of M. Fishel said the work came to him "rather quickly, in about an hour." Fishel's compositions can be found in hymnals in Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches.



Fishel.



The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, continued

I was grateful for the support from a team so diverse in age, race, church leadership roles, location and experience with Massanetta Springs. The team worked hard to brainstorm a new conference, and the members offered their own networks and experiences to bring in fresh leadership. The planning team thought through creative ideas for a new, different, radically welcoming program.



A breakout session at the Keep Awake! conference.

Photo by Samantha McNoldy

Early in dreaming up our new Matthew 25 event, we quickly realized that to seriously consider focusing on eradicating systemic poverty, we couldn't expect every congregation and individual to pay for the true cost of housing, feeding and programming for a weekend. With much prayer and consideration, we considered another yes: making this a pay-what-you-can event. This plan was a daunting one. Massanetta has always sought to reduce financial barriers by offering scholarships and assistance, this no-questions-asked model was difficult to plan and budget for.

But we leaned into that yes. We asked for gifts and wrote grant proposals to presbyteries and our synod. We prepared ourselves – financially and mentally – as best we could in case it turned out that no one could pay anything! We felt it was important to ensure that would-be attendees would encounter no pressure, no requirements and no awkward conversations or assumptions, so that we could make this new conference as accessible as possible, especially for high-school youth and their leaders.

With the help of many, we survived the financial challenges just fine. And what came of such hospitality was incredible. Churches that had never previously brought groups to Massanetta Spring showed up. We had more than 200 participants for our first conference and nearly matched that registration count for our second. All kinds of people showed up as both participants and leaders: people of different races, different genders, different social and economic backgrounds, different regions, different generations, different languages and different experiences. Our participants represented 10 different presbyteries, including large, mid-size and small congregations from urban, suburban and rural settings.

The planning team decided to call the conference Keep Awake! – from Matthew 25:13 – to emphasize the urgency of this work. Workshops focused on leadership skills that participants could take home. Workshop leaders used art, improvisation, storytelling, discussion, team building, listening skills and even Presbyterian polity to help attendees use their voices and gifts to address the issues and goals of the Matthew 25 movement.

Not only did excellent leaders construct meaningful workshops, but the conference centered on worship as the main source of learning, rather than the traditional conference model featuring separate keynotes. Our planning team supported the conference preacher in developing a very full Presbyterian worship service, then dividing it into four parts over the course of the weekend: call to worship and confession on the first night, to set the tone; Scripture and message on Saturday morning, to center participants for a day full of workshops; Communion on Saturday evening, to celebrate and unite the conference; and finally a response and benediction on Sunday morning, to charge attendees to go out and continue practicing those leadership skills together. Bringing in new people was just the start. That affirmative decision brought about energy and ideas for justice and advocacy.

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The Hospitality of ‘Yes’, continued

The response was powerful. Conferees found new connections and purpose in worship. Our meeting space was filled with energy and meaning. Presbyterians from all backgrounds literally danced their way to the table together. Planning took over a year from the initial yes to the first Keep Awake! conference. Bringing in new people was just the start. That affirmative decision brought about energy and ideas for justice and advocacy. Teenagers departed workshops saying things like “I can’t wait to go back and tell session about this.” Really! People were connecting with neighbors in new ways. Massanetta Springs was getting to know and celebrate so many new partnerships — individuals and congregations whose experiences and talents we’ve been fortunate to lift up in other programs throughout our year.

Yes, and ...

“Yes” means so much more than just agreeing to do something. Hospitality means much more than letting someone come in. Trying something new carries all kinds of hopes and challenges, but it can be a faithful way to follow the Holy Spirit amid an established ministry.

“Yes, and” is the core tenet of improv comedy: “yes” meaning openness to whatever the improvisational partner has presented, followed by “and” to build on it. While we don’t do our ministry for laughs, we certainly infuse elements of joy and adventure by affirming new ideas and directions. Both our CWS partnership and our Keep Awake! conference required substantial work to recruit volunteers and leaders as well as manage the financial realities of each program. Had we said no, we might have saved ourselves some time and effort. But by saying yes! we welcomed the opportunity to continue learning, growing and following Christ in this particular time and place. *Rev. Colleen Earp serves as program director of Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center and has more than 20 years of camp and conference ministry experience. In her free time, she can often be found exploring nature, whether around the corner or around the world.*

To support the mission and ministry of Massanetta Springs, Click the springhouse below.



BOOKS AND MORE !!

Visit the Library Sunday after worship and pick up a book or two as we begin our spring cleaning - there will also be some computer cables and printers available.



This Week in History.



During the ere known as *The Anarchy* (1138-1153), the **Empress Matilda**, daughter and heir of King Henry I of England, secures the throne as the first female ruler of England. Barred by popular opinion from being crowned at Westminster Abbey, she instead adopts the title *Lady of the English*.

April 7, 1141



A Greek statue of Aphrodite is discovered on the Aegean island of Milos. It would be displayed at the Louvre as the **Venus de Milo** from 1821 to the present.

April 8, 1820



After the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her the use of Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. for an integrated concert, African-American contralto **Marian Anderson** gives a concert at the Lincoln Memorial for an audience of 75,000 people, while millions listen on the radio.

April 9, 1939



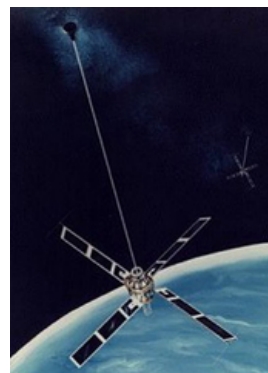
An estimated one million trees were planted in Nebraska on the first **Arbor Day**. Originated by J. Sterling Morton at the annual meeting of the Nebraska State board of agriculture., it would go national in 1907 with a Presidential Proclamation.

April 10, 1872



President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** dies in office; Vice President Harry S. Truman is sworn in as President.

April 12, 1945



The United States launches **Transit 1-B**, the world's first satellite navigation system.

April 13, 1960



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the **Civil Rights Act of 1968**, prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

April 11, 1968