**Open to God: Exploring our Gifts ~ Reflections from Retreat**

We had a delightful, even though cold, wet, rainy, snowing weekend, at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp this past weekend at the MCEC Jr. Youth retreat. The theme for the weekend was ‘Open to God: Exploring our Gifts’. What an interesting topic to explore with youth in grades 6-8.

Throughout the weekend, Jonathan Brubacher walked us through his own journey, as well as the journeys of various biblical characters, as they tried discovering their gifts. It isn’t always an easy journey. We can often look at others and easily name what their gifts are, but don’t have quite the same ability to name those gifts in ourselves. How true is this, not only for youth, but for us all!

What become evident over the weekend was that not only is it sometimes hard to discover our own gifts, it is also very awkward and uncomfortable to name them. It certainly doesn’t fit with our ‘Mennonite humility’.

One exercise was to go out into nature (in this case indoor nature due to the SNOW?!?!) and reflect on three excellently phrased questions:

1. What are you passionate about? Sometimes what we are passionate about lead us to finding our gifts.
2. What are you concerned about? Sometimes what we are concerned about leads us to using our gifts.
3. What are your gifts?

It became extremely clear as groups debriefed and shared their thoughts after this exercise that they were much more comfortable talking about their concerns than about their passions or even their gifts. It is easy to name the concerns of war, climate change, poverty, natural disasters, and injustice in the world. We are surrounded by it, even these young youth and teenagers are surrounded by it.

But there is hope. There is hope in the fact that we are each gifted. We are each passionate. And we share many of the same concerns. There is hope that God is walking with us, transforming us, and helping us to be agents of change. That is where our gifts come into action.

My prayer is that we all continue to be Open to God, and continue to explore our gifts; when we are able to do that, we will be helping to usher in the Kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

*Pastor Sara Erb*