

RAMF Congregational Meeting

Friday, 16 October 2009

Present: Sonya Stauffer Kurtz (facilitator), Michael Brennan, Jen Carter, Kathy Kern, Roger Kurtz, Andrew Langdon, Nancy Price, Kathy Shelly, Mark Shelly, Walt Nickeson (recorder).

1. Communion

The Worship Ministry team presented the following proposal as a guide to help worship leaders invite participation in communion when it is part of the service:

Should you choose to lead communion, the invitation to communion should include words to this effect:

“All who have chosen to follow Christ in life are welcome. Grapes are available for those not yet ready to take communion.”

The idea was to put onto parents the burden of deciding whether their children could take communion, and some of the parents affirmed that the proposal made it clearer for them.

The proposal was adopted as presented.

2. Disposal of budget surplus

RAMF has often ended its fiscal year (on Jan. 31) with a surplus, and the question of how to deal with that extra money has not always been easily solved.

- Customarily we have given it all away in a lump sum in a decision made at the end of the fiscal year. While this action feels like allowing the Holy Spirit to move us, there have been times when trying to agree on a single means of disposal of a surplus has been painful
- The other option that has been suggested is that we can decide beforehand to spread the surplus around in a manner that might better reflect the priorities of the church (since our budget may not always completely reflect those priorities), such as allocating certain percentages of the money to certain targets as a default
- These two options are not mutually exclusive
- We usually know by January 1 what our surplus will be, and often we can know earlier. It is not clear yet whether we will end this fiscal year with a surplus
- The process might be made easier if the decision were arrived at earlier, such as in October.

The Budget Committee was empowered to bring a proposal on how to disperse a budget surplus to the budget meeting, typically held in January.

3. Special offerings

Our monthly special offering was described as “limping along.” Some problems with our current practice were identified:

- New families don't know what to do and are puzzled
- The receiving agency needs to be meaningful to someone or the collection won't be *special* (or even remembered). However, some of us no longer feel much of a connection with some of our previous or regular recipients
- In some recent cases the amount collected has been so low the offering has not been sent, so as not to embarrass us by what may seem to be a lack of generosity (even though to some recipients, no amount received would seem too small)
- Although the special offering can be contributed to throughout the month, it is usually announced during a worship service at the beginning of the month, and when visitors are present for that announcement, it may be uncomfortable if few people bring forth their offering at that time.

Some responses:

- One family regularly designates a percentage of its monthly offering for the special collection, increasing the percentage in a particular month if the recipient is meaningful to that family
- Other churches may have their special offerings *pro re nata* (a fancy way of saying “as needed”) rather than every month, as RAMF has done for many years
- People generally like the idea of a special offering; the suggestion was made that perhaps it could be done less often than every month
- The special offering is not just about collecting money, it’s about a need for which prayer also is appropriate; thus, more strongly integrating awareness of the need into the worship service would be a good thing. The worship leader would bear some responsibility for including this in the service, such as by a special prayer.

The Outreach Ministry team has the task of choosing the recipients of our special offerings, and therefore should have the responsibility of explaining in greater depth (appropriate for worship) the need being addressed. This is in addition to the written announcements about the special offerings that have appeared in the worship bulletins. Kathy Kern was designated the person to do that, as she is the member of that Ministry team on the Leadership Team.

Some other thoughts about offerings in general came up during the discussion:

- Allowing offerings to be made electronically (e.g., through the RAMF web site) is an option to be explored. This might allow people who don’t come to our building, such as relatives or friends, to contribute to RAMF. However, if fewer people are putting something in the basket on Sunday mornings, our worship service will change (although some electronic donations produce a receipt or other paper that can still be offered in church). The act of putting something in the basket is important to some people
- Using small envelopes to collect the offering would help ensure anonymity.

4. Voluntary Service Unit (report by Roger)

The decision on Rochester’s becoming the 21st VS unit in the U.S. was to have been made in September, but is still under consideration. Because applications are generally down, Mennonite Voluntary Service is hesitant to open a new unit, and wants to do some testing to see if people are really interested in coming to Rochester. Hugo Saucedo, Director of MVS, believes the decision will really be made in November.

Roger is of the opinion that even were we to be turned down, we could still go ahead and support a VS unit on our own, and it could be ready to go in the fall of 2010.

- \$5000 in seed money is recommended for startup (if we end the fiscal year with a budget surplus, it could be directed to helping start the VS unit)
- Each volunteer needs to bring in \$500–\$1000 per month for the unit to be self sufficient
- There may be a large pool of candidates from which to recruit in the state, including at local colleges like Houghton (Connie Finney at Sojourners would be the person to spread the word there) and Roberts Wesleyan; youth groups in the Mennonite churches are also a likely source. MVS may be overlooking this pool. Jeremy Krempf is in charge of recruiting at MVS; Roger is waiting to hear from him on recruitment ideas
- We would miss some support from the national office if we started our own unit, such as financial help and crisis intervention; insurance also would be a big problem
- We will need to add a line to the budget for the unit, and probably do some fundraising.

It was pointed out that RAMF has not yet formally approved supporting a VS unit. Submitting our application may have been tantamount to saying “yes,” but we agreed that for the significant question of whether we want to support a VS unit, approval needs to be given by the whole congregation by means of our traditional decision-making procedure.

Questions remain and were not answered:

- If MVS gave the go-ahead to our unit in November, would we wait until our January congregational meeting to finalize our approval? Or, with a two-week lead, could we make a decision at a meeting following church some Sunday? Should the Leadership Team make that decision?
- If MVS does not approve the unit, how then will we proceed?

5. Community garden (report by Nancy)

Nancy thought the garden was a success. The hardest part was getting it started, but after that, maintenance was not a big issue. The neighbors did some weeding and picked all the produce. For Nancy, a highlight was the testimony of an old woman in a wheelchair that the garden was a blessing for her children. Unfortunately, Nancy's pictures of the garden were deleted from her computer, or she would have shared them.

6. Education Ministry

- Chrissie's accomplishments as Sunday School superintendent were lauded
- The adults need help in leading the study group so Mark doesn't have to do it all the time
- We are encouraged to give the Bible more prominence in worship, by bringing our own Bibles and using them during the service. In addition, when we read from the Bible to the congregation, it would look better if we used a book, rather than reading from slips of paper.

7. Worship Ministry

The Worship Ministry is thinking of ways to make leading worship less difficult, including encouraging sharing of the burden by joint leadership. Special things happen when a group gets together around the Biblical text that don't happen for an individual, and the Ministry team wants to help this happen more often. The Sojourners fellowship, it was reported, is good at doing this.

8. Preaching Institute

This example of seminary education from Eastern Mennonite Seminary coming to the conferences begins Sunday, Oct. 18. Several people from RAMF have enrolled.

9. Migrant workers Christmas collection

Collecting clothes and other things for migrant workers has worked well in the past. Catherine Brennan Burke asked, through Michael, if RAMF would like to continue the offering this year (those gathered said "yes"), but wants to increase her lead time so she can deliver the donations earlier. It was noted that monetary gifts are welcome also.