

RAMF Congregational Meeting

17 January 2010
111 Hillside Ave.

Present: Judy Bernhart, Michael Brennan, Darren Calderón, Bob Carter, Jen Carter, Amy Durkee, Sue Klassen, Victor Klassen, Roger Kurtz, Andrew Langdon, Ron Lugbill, Thom Metzger, Jason Poole, Anthony Ricciuti, Kathy Shelly, Mark Shelly, Sonya Stauffer Kurtz, Aaron Stuckey, Chrissie Walls, Anne Weaver, Jeffrey Weaver, Walt Nickeson (recorder).
Childcare provided by Maria Calderón, Bryan Shelly, and Aleta and Lydia Brown. Dishes cleaned by Teri Lugbill.

MVS Unit proposal

The following proposal was distributed as part of the agenda of the meeting:

Mennonite Mission Network has approved Rochester as the site of their newest VS unit, to begin operation in Fall 2010. We propose that RAMF adopt MVS as one of the ministries of our congregation.

As a congregation, we commit ourselves to:

- provide Local Leadership for the unit, including a six member board that includes several formation leaders who meet regularly with the unit
- \$1200 year financial support
- special offerings for special projects as needed
- welcome VS workers as part of the congregation, extending hospitality
- take part in the program as we are interested
- hold the unit in prayer.

Roger introduced discussion of the proposal with a short video

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifYmJNUzYvM>> made by Jubilee House, an MVS unit in Elkhart, Ind., intended to give us a little bit of an idea of what an MVS unit in Rochester might be like. Some highlights of the ensuing discussion:

- What are “formation leaders”? They are the members of the congregation most closely involved with the volunteers, serving as mentors and offering guidance as the volunteers work at building community in the Unit. At this time, Roger, Michael, and Jen are committed to being formation leaders.
- Do we have enough time, energy, people to do this? Now, yes; five years from now, we don’t know. Our initial commitment is three years (a probation period).
- What does “local leadership” mean? Local leadership is the liaison between the Unit and the administration in Elkhart. Local leadership finds housing and keeps the volunteers happy. When things happen in the Unit, local leaders are the first to respond. How much involvement is required by the leaders depends largely on the personality of the group that forms.
- Is RAMF supposed to recruit for the Rochester unit? Yes, especially in the early years. We were reminded that no volunteers came to the Elkhart unit the first year, and only two the second year. Now it’s a thriving community, even though Elkhart is not a “glamorous place to live.”

- What about finances? The Unit is supposed to be self-sufficient. Volunteers receive a small stipend, which is intended to be used to run the household. As part of the MVS system, our unit may receive help if it runs a deficit, and a surplus can be shared with other units. New York Mennonite Conference is ready to approve a grant of \$10,000 for seed money from a special fund set aside for non-Conference projects. We may wish to take a special offering to provide some money for recreation or personal enrichment. A possible additional cost: That of the volunteers attending our fall Retreat.
- How much say does the Board have in choosing employers of the volunteers? The initial screening of volunteers takes place at Elkhart, followed by our screening here, and finally the job site makes the decision about hiring.
- What drew the instigators of this proposal to the idea? The opportunity to be a blessing to youth seeking to serve, and to help them grow, as we have tried to do with the Brethren volunteers with PiRI.
- How will housing be found for the four to six volunteers we expect? Andrew's landlord has a number of properties in the 19th Ward that are possibilities, and he is willing to work with us to find housing.
- What sorts of projects will the volunteers do? There are "a gazillion" opportunities in Rochester. One way to prioritize them:
 1. Ministries with which we are already involved, such as restorative justice, health care, migrant workers.
 2. Ministries we feel strongly about, such as peace work.
 3. Work for which a volunteer has a particular interest.
- Who is on the six-member Board? Roger, Michael, and Amy, so far, with Kathy as treasurer. Others are highly interested. Will there be enough ways to involve everyone who has an interest?
- What is it that gives you pause about going ahead with this proposal?
 1. Setting up assignments for volunteers. But there are likely enough opportunities and enough people to help with this task that it might not be an issue.
 2. The problems of young people working at building community, and growing spiritually, psychologically, etc. as they serve can be scary. But these problems are not unknown to RAMF (many of whose members have lived in intentional communities of some sort) and we ought to be able to deal with them.
 3. An MVS unit will be like a second child to RAMF (after the church building). It may be a very good experience, but we should expect high stress levels at times.
 4. The unexpected will surely arrive, and cause stress. But the more work done setting up the project, the easier things will go after it starts. The volunteers will give back to us, and we can use the life they bring.
 5. Members of RAMF should only be involved as they feel called, and not as they feel obligated or duty bound.
 6. When the 3 AM telephone call comes, will those who have committed to help do what they have said they will? Or will local leadership dwindle down to only a few persons carrying the whole burden?

7. The fact that we are asking: Can we sustain this for five years? rather than: Can we try this right now for at least one year?
8. In some congregations, the constant tearing of relationships as volunteers came and went every year caused some people to withdraw from the project.

The proposal was accepted without opposition.

Budget

- The chief item of discussion was what to do with the surplus, projected to be \$4950 at the end of the month. The Budget Committee proposed to distribute it thusly:
 - \$1000 as an extra payment on the principal of our mortgage
 - \$2000 to NYMC specifically to support the ministry of Ephraim and Tadelech
 - \$1500 to pay next year's insurance, saving a quarterly finance fee and to place the entire bill in one fiscal year
 - \$450 to go into the general fund balance.

We agreed that the Budget Committee has authority to determine disbursement of whatever surplus we end up with.

- Flowers were presented to Kathy in appreciation for her many years of hard work as treasurer, perhaps most fully appreciated only by those who follow in her footsteps.
- Jen, as treasurer, asked: What kinds of financial reports do people want to see? While most people may not want to see frequent reports, Kathy noted that quarterly statements are helpful to the treasurer in imposing a kind of discipline. The most useful reports may be those giving current balances of lines for which we are asking for a special offering, such as when the Sharing Fund (which is being administered by the Pastoral Care Ministry team) needs replenishment.
- It was noted that in the fiscal year just ending, the amount budgeted to ministries and activities outside of RAMF came to 22% of the total budget, but the amount actually spent on those ministries and activities came to 30%. Hope was expressed that over the years we can keep increasing that percentage to come closer to what we spent before we built the church.
- The budget was approved as presented.