

RAMF Congregational Meeting

19 April 2002

Present: Thom Metzger (facilitator), Judy Bernhart, Jen Carter, Joanna Heatwole, Kathy Kern, Nathan Klassen, Sue Klassen, Sylvia Klassen, Victor Klassen, Roger Kurtz, Nancy Price, Eloise Schrag, Kathy Shelly, Mark Shelly, Sonya Stauffer-Kurtz, Walt Nickeson (recorder).

Introduction: As in the previous meeting, we will conduct this meeting as worshipful work—the work of discernment. We will expect that God will guide us; we will be willing to listen; our spiritual practices during the week will help us now. We know that we can move ahead even if the way is not entirely clear, trusting in future revelation for guidance.

1. Summer schedule proposal

It is proposed that we follow the same summer schedule as last year, which is to say that Sunday School classes will be suspended and all services will be intergenerational, except for two Sundays, one in July and one in August. We will poll people on their travel plans to determine the specific dates for the “regular” Sundays and the number of Sunday School classes needed.

- The only concern voiced was about lumping together too many ages in the classes.
- The proposal was accepted.

2. Proposal to initiate a building fund

It is proposed from our last congregational meeting that we initiate a building fund for future expenses related to the costs of acquiring a meetinghouse. We propose putting into this fund \$13,500 from our savings account; this amount was determined by multiplying \$150/week (the budgeted amount we are saving on facilities costs by meeting at Strong Ties) by the approximately 90 weeks that we have been meeting there. In addition, we have already received an outside anonymous donation to the fund. Those who have made pledges toward the building fund could make their contributions at any time, as they see fit.

- This proposal is to clarify what money has been designated for whatever building we might choose to buy or build. Because it is money with strings attached, complications could arise—such as, what would happen to money in this fund should we decide *not* to use it?
- The Fund could grow by additional pledges and gifts, as well as by our continuing to add to it regularly.
- Rather than create a new account, we could simply designate a portion of our regular savings account as the Fund. At present, the proposed initial amount is about half of our savings.
- The anonymous donation was \$5000.
- The proposal was amended to provide for the Fund growing at the rate of \$150 per week as long as we continue to meet at a place that does not charge rent. The amended proposal was accepted.

3. Proposal to seek properties to buy

It is proposed that the Location Committee look for plots of land to buy, on which we might build a new meetinghouse. Until we actually purchase a plot of land, it is agreed that we are not eliminating the possibility of buying an existing building, should a suitable building become available.

Before the proposal was debated, a general discussion raised these points:

- It may be a very difficult process to find a new place if suddenly we were required to leave Strong Ties. Although it is certainly not perfect, another facility with its good points will not drop in our laps every day. The Search Committee has noted that a great many ugly or otherwise undesirable buildings are readily available.
- It might be much easier to find a suitable plot than to find a suitable building.
- The proposal seems to commit us to seeking to build, although not all of us want that.
- At the last congregational meeting, there was a preponderance of opinion favoring purchase of a building.
- Opinion seems to be tending toward encouraging our looking for buildings that have been used as churches, rather than as bars or factories, for example. Those latter kinds of buildings are more likely to be unsuitable or unworkable, or too costly to renovate.
- Some interest was expressed in a new idea—looking for a house (i.e., a residence or domicile).
- It was noted that at the previous meeting no one supported a proposal to place an offer on the Sanford St. property. Some of us took that lack of support to mean that we are really looking to build a new structure, rather than to buy and renovate one already standing.
- We might find it helpful to set a deadline for finding a building: if nothing has presented itself by that deadline, we would end our search. September 2002 was suggested; however, the objection was raised that that date would not enable us to begin building by summer 2003, a time already felt by some as a deadline for the beginning of construction.

After this discussion members were polled specifically for reactions to the proposal. Some of the reactions included:

- Some members are very excited about the prospect of finding a plot of land and building a new structure, and the sooner the better: delaying it too long could lead to discouragement and waning of enthusiasm. A vision that has been set forth, to which it is important to respond.
- Others are strongly committed to continuing to search for an existing building, as a better use of resources.
- Breaking “virgin” (i.e. previously undeveloped) land is troublesome.
- So is the financial risk.
- Involving the Ethiopian community is important; it makes the whole project less about ourselves.
- Some members simply want RAMF to take action soon; some are supportive of whatever decision the group makes.
- Some members are content to wait. We don’t want to impose deadlines on God.

The proposal, amended to remove the passive voice where possible, was accepted.

4. Location priorities

The Location Committee seeks guidance from the congregation regarding the parameters of the geographical location(s) in which it is to look. In this brainstorming session about what to look for in a piece of land, a list of desirable features, or criteria upon which RAMF must make crucial decisions, was drawn up:

- Urban/suburban
- View (i.e., what would we see looking out the window?)
- Centrality (is it still important to find a meeting place close to the geographic center of the group, which is still, more or less, the Can of Worms (where Interstates 490 and 590 meet)?)
- Type of neighborhood
- Accessible to Bethsaida members
- Not breaking virgin (i.e., previously undeveloped) land
- Close to interstates
- Easy to give directions to
- Cost
- Size
- Whether or not it has utilities
- Safety
- Level of difficulty in dealing with zoning ordinances

It became clear that many of these criteria need clarification, such as what “urban” might mean (within the city limits of Rochester?), and what zoning requirements we have to consider. Still unresolved by meeting’s end was how we could refine and define these parameters.

It also became clear that including the Ethiopian Mennonite community in our vision is somewhat problematic.

- We don’t really know what their requirements might be (e.g., what “accessible to Bethsaida members” really means).
- Cultural differences between the two groups could make it hard for us to work closely together.
- Bethsaida members like their present meeting place (Trinity Covenant Church), although they are interested in sharing.
- They have their own vision of a church building; any union of our efforts is likely to be temporary.
- The recent meeting between the Leadership Team and Bethsaida leaders was actually at the initiative of Conference Pastor Milton Zehr, not of the two congregations.
- The relationship could become one of dependency.
- Is it impolite to ask them for their input when we may end up making our own decisions anyway?
- A majority of RAMF members favors cooperation with Bethsaida, and some members would identify that cooperation as a calling. Joint efforts to date, including our providing Sunday School teachers, have been rewarding. However, there was widespread cognizance of the notion that whatever its rewards and worthiness, close cooperation will be difficult, challenging, and possibly even painful.

Then followed a brief and open-ended discussion of the suitability for our purposes of a property on Cobbs Hill, near Tay House (where we have been holding the annual Mennonite Picnic for the past few years), and the process of buying land. Questions raised included: Could a bid be placed on a part of a property? Could an offer be made contingent upon getting any special use permit required?

The meeting was then adjourned.