

Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship

NOTES FROM A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

November 20, 2010

Present: Chrissie Walls (facilitator), Sonya Stauffer Kurtz (facilitator), Walt Nickeson (facilitator), Kathy Kern, Teresa Nickeson, Mark Shelly, Kathy Shelly, Jen Carter, Bob Carter, Sue Klassen, Victor Klassen, Aaron Stuckey, Rachel Stuckey, Judy Bernhart, , Thom Metzger, Eileen Metzger, Bob Wright, Gail Ricciuti, Anthony Ricciuti, Anne Stuckey, Darren Calderon, Amy Durkee, Jason Poole, Nancy Price, James Walls, Drew Langdon, Roger Kurtz (note-taker)

Opening Worship

- Song: *Sing the Journey* #72
- Reading: *Sing the Journey* #124

INTRODUCTION

Chrissie opened the meeting with an introduction to the context and reasons for meeting:

The Leadership Team believes the congregation is not of one mind regarding leadership in our church. There are issues having to do with authority, hierarchy, structure, responsibility, trust, accountability, and participation that bear further discussion. In a practical sense, we find ourselves short of leadership, with participation in some ministries thin. Keeping the church going as a vital community is difficult without adequate leadership.

In the longer term, the Leadership Team is inviting an outside consultant/resource person, Alan Newton, to work with us to process what leadership means to our community. Today's meeting has a more immediate and focused goal, which is to look at our current structure and its strengths and weaknesses.

In 2007, when we moved into our building, we also changed our leadership structure to the present ministry model. Our current structure features five different ministry teams, and each of these ministries designates one person to serve on the Leadership Team. (Chrissie distributed a diagram of our current model, featuring a visual model of the various ministry teams.) Additional committees have also been formed for other tasks/activities: the MVS committee, the library committee, the minister-congregation relations committee, the treasurer/budget committee, the retreat committee, the hospitality committee, and the building cleaning crew. One of the challenges of our model is that it is quite labor intensive.

Today, a representative from each of the five ministries and the MVS committee was asked to bring a response to the following questions:

1. Who is on your ministry team right now?
2. What responsibilities is the ministry team working on?
3. What are the main concerns and needs of this ministry team?

After each ministry report, there will be time for questions and discussion. We are not seeking to solve our problems today or to create a new structure immediately. Rather, we are to discuss the strengths and weaknesses that we see and to begin a process of creative and open thinking. We should feel free to throw out ideas and suggestions, but we will not have time to debate or evaluate them today. We will be recording the ideas and suggestions, and we hope that our discussion will be useful background for our consultant as he helps us think about ways to move forward.

WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM REPORT (Sonya)

Current members: Sonya, Anne, Anthony, Victor, and Nancy.

Responsibilities: To find people to lead worship, to plan for and make available worship resource materials, to organize worship series and themes, and to evaluate worship.

Current concerns include the fact that there is not much feedback from the congregation (which is why the team has requested discussion of worship at the next congregational meeting). Also, Victor will be leaving the group in March. There is an ongoing need for worship leaders and participants in the various elements of worship. Challenges include working with a diversity of expectations and tastes regarding worship. The team would like a better feedback loop, a way for people to bring ideas and concerns to them. Otherwise they feel like the ministry team is in a good place, feeling adequately staffed and adequately engaged.

Discussion:

Walt: Is training leaders part of your charge?

Victor: It's an ongoing challenge. Worship overlaps with other ministries; it's what people notice first. Having quality worship is important for outreach and for our own nurture, for connecting with God. How can we help people be better worship leaders and create a better worship experience? Most of us are not good at giving or receiving negative feedback. Or positive feedback. We all need to work at this.

Aaron: Helping more people learn how to lead music would be a good idea.

Nancy: Laurelville retreat is very good training opportunity.

Anne: If there's interest, we could have an evening seminar/practice session on music leading.

Sue: I've seen worship team pair new worship leaders with veterans. I'd encourage more intentionality around that. Can we mentor individuals too?

Anthony: After Christmas, we are going to be having a series during worship and education hour, focusing on "Growing in Leadership."

Walt: If lack of uniformity in our expectations is a challenge, will that go away?

Sonya: No, that will not go away. That's normal. It's a fact of our life together.

Anne: The challenge is for us to know the varying expectations and work with them in a way that's meaningful for all.

Victor: Majority rule is not the way to follow the Spirit. Still, when we get feedback from an individual, how do we know if it represents a general feeling?

Sue: Can we hold our varying expectations together in light of our core values? It shouldn't be just about what we like or don't like, but about something deeper.

Anthony: Part of the challenge is not minimizing the diversity of our expectations about worship.

STEWARDS REPORT (Walt)

Current stewards: Walt and Aaron, with Bob as consultant.

Responsibilities: Now that building use is for the most part figured out, stewards are mostly doing maintenance of the physical plant and keeping track of things regarding the building and grounds.

Current needs of stewards are minimal. People are very generous in contributing to projects such as raking leaves.

Discussion:

Anthony: Is there snow removal in winter?

Walt: Someone is hired to plow the driveway and parking lot. Shoveling and snow-blower use are on a first come, first served basis.

Judy: Do the stewards have legal responsibilities?

Aaron: We have 3 trustees.

Bob: Stewards do serve as liaison with neighbors, city, others who need to communicate. These are infrequent.

Walt: Part of the task overlaps with outreach.

Kathy S: The stewards are also the contacts for building use.

Kathy K: How much income do we get from renting the building?

Jen: Very little, above what PiRI gives us.

EDUCATION MINISTRY TEAM REPORT (Mark)

Current members: Mark, Chrissie and Sue

Responsibilities: Mark noted that the Education Ministry has come up with a vision that includes the idea that all members of the church will grow in knowledge and understanding and in their ability to articulate their faith. It has also has a mission statement, which emphasizes developing an atmosphere of openness to inquiry and acceptance of differences; to find, encourage, and support teachers of our children; to provide quality curriculum; to make resources available; and for educational experiences to carry over into other ministries.

Current concerns: The mechanics of these responsibilities get done, but it's hard with just 3 people. We need more energy and ideas, especially with the library discussion group that meets during adult hour. We'd like 5 people on our committee. We also see ourselves as related to the library committee, but that's separate.

Chrissie added that Sue will be leaving the committee, meaning that only 2 people will be left on the committee—herself (covering children's education) and Mark (covering adult education). The logistics may get done, but they would like to work more with ideas and big picture stuff. It feels odd to have only two people working at this.

Discussion:

Anthony: Would it be helpful to have someone from the library discussion group be part of the ministry?

Chrissie: Yes, definitely. It's a key gap.

Walt: It's interesting to note that religious education is actually quite low on our list of core values.

Roger: This is true, although education seems to connect with all of our values in one way or another; it's infused throughout. Also, the education ministry should be affirmed for their work, since both the children's and the adult education seems to be thriving at the moment. There are good things happening in this area.

Mark: We've dealt with important things in our education sessions: peace, church and state, ministerial leadership. One of the problems or frustrations is that the adult hour doesn't include everyone, so we can't use it as a forum to discuss issues that the whole congregation should be part of; this is a tension.

Victor: An example of this is the way MCUSA sends us materials to use in a coordinated worship/education program. If there's low participation in the education portion, that doesn't really accomplish the intent of those materials.

James: I want to validate the solicitation for more help. There's a lot of responsibility on just Chrissie and Mark right now. What if they want to be more involved in other things?

Gail: Drew and Kathy K and I signed up as being interested in helping coordinate the library discussion group during adult hour. Should we have one of us meet as part of the education committee?

Agreed: Yes. They should contact Chrissie and Mark.

Amy: A follow-up to Victor's point—If I were aware of the connection between education and worship, I'd definitely like to be part of the larger group. On those times, we can have both adult hours be coordinated, although this still leaves out the children's Sunday School leaders.

Chrissie: Communication is a challenge. How do we facilitate a way to get everyone involved in a topic? We don't want to mandate things.

PASTORAL CARE TEAM REPORT (Kathy S and James)

Current members: Kathy S, Teresa, and James.

Responsibilities: Pastoral care focuses on needs of congregation. Provide resources for physical needs, support for emotional and spiritual needs, and caring for one another. Recently, there has been renewed interest in building community and starting small groups.

Current concerns: 3 members doesn't seem like a sustainable group. There's constant need for pastoral care. We need more help. (James noted that he does not feel as connected as he might be, because of his work schedule.) Pastoral care also administers the sharing fund, and has been discussing how to organize that.

Discussion:

Roger: Do you need more people, or something else?

James: Tasks don't take precedence over needs. There is a challenge in integrating pastoral care with other things.

Sonya: Do you want people to contact you? Should we advertise your role? Do you see your job as getting together to talk about people, or do you see yourselves as being available for people to contact when they need something?

Kathy S: I see the role of a pastoral team as not just talking about people, but talking with people. In the past we talked about setting up a clearness committee for people who wanted it. But one of the problems is, our role is fuzzy and overlaps with other ministries. Expectations are unclear. I would like to see us help each other discern our gifts.

Teresa: There's a missing piece. Thom and Eileen were vital members, and when they were active we scouted out needs of congregation. Now that it's just the three of us, we're kind of lost.

Walt: Does the team see itself as needing or sharing training?

Eileen: We did do some book study as a team.

Bob: When we first formed these teams, there was a lot under pastoral care that was administrative, but the people on the team then didn't see that as their gifts. But I can envision that it would help the pastoral team if they were a bit more involved in organizing events (e.g., retreat, snow day). Then they would be more visible in the congregation.

Jason: Maybe we have too many committees. Should we consolidate and delegate more?

Kathy S: Yes. We need to balance this with the advantages of working in a more narrowly focused set of tasks.

OUTREACH (Kathy K)

Current members: Drew, Kathy K., Judy, Roger, Jeffery.

Kathy K. declined to address the questions but noted the following: Areas of my life have caved in since I agreed to join and later lead Outreach. I've decided to get off Leadership Team. I find that the new Leadership Team is missing some sort of dynamism compared to what we used to have, perhaps related to the structure.

Discussion:

Judy: One thing I wanted to work on, on outreach, was the idea of open community meals that were not potluck.

Drew: I realize that I'm still very much an evangelical. I have this intense need to spread the good news, whatever that might mean. We have a unique message, and it's not being heard in the community. The outreach community can amplify our voice.

Walt: What would it take?

Drew: Well, we need to meet. Just getting a meeting is hard.

Roger: My original understanding was the outreach doesn't create its own program, but rather that it supports activities and ministries that individuals in the congregation wish to pursue.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Current members: Sonya, Chrissie, Walt

Responsibilities: Organizing congregational meetings, meeting with Rochester area leaders, contacts with the conference and larger church, coordinating our congregation's ministries, maintaining the vision and goals of our church. Walt, as church administrator, tends to many logistical tasks.

Current needs: Sonya—At the moment, 2 of the ministry teams (Outreach and Pastoral Care) are not represented on Leadership Team, which leaves a gap. On the other hand, a smaller group pulling together is maybe better than a larger group working at cross purposes. We have recently been working on finding an outside facilitator to help us with our issues regarding leadership.

Chrissie—Facilitating this current process is taking a lot of our time. This makes it challenging to get our other work done. The fact that there's not a lot of process in place is a challenge. For instance, when no one stepped forward from the ministry teams to be part of Leadership Team, we didn't know what to do. We asked people individually if they would be interested in joining. But is that the right way to do it?

Discussion:

Amy: Could you use additional ad hoc members? Are there other ways that we could do what needs to be done?

Walt: Mechanics are the easiest: calendar, special offerings, gift pledges, etc.. The hard things are not a factor of numbers. We don't have a vision statement as a church. We have core values, but they're not defined. We've looked at vision in bits and pieces, and it's hard to have a sustained look.

Sonya: We did receive some ideas from Ron, who is unable to be here today: Do away with Leadership Team, and just have committees and congregational meetings. Or call the Leadership Team servant leaders. Or have a self-perpetuating group, and when one person leaves, replace them. Perhaps by vote? Or have one member of Leadership Team someone who is not in our congregation?

Chrissie: All Leadership Team members do double duty, because they are also on a ministry team. Should we have people on Leadership Team who are not part of another ministry?

MVS Program (Roger)

Current members: The entire congregation has been involved and supportive in many ways. There was a founding group of about a dozen who began meeting almost two years ago to do the initial planning and visioning. Now, there is a group of 5 people (called the Local Leadership committee): Amy, Kathy S., Jen, Michael, Roger.

Current needs: Things are going well. The MVSers feel good about their household and about our congregation. We are working on quarterly reporting and also on thinking about programming for next September. We would love for the congregation to continue supporting the MVSers through social events, inviting them into their homes, and relating to them in these ways.

Discussion:

Chrissie: Do we need replacements for the 5?

Kathy S: Not right now. We are checking with people who were originally involved in the founding of the group to see what their level of interest is.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Walt: I would be interested in hearing from anyone who hasn't spoken yet. Do those people have any comments or questions?

[Silence.]

Jason: Amy and I are each on a committee, and that's enough committees for our household, but I do have energy and want to give, but I hate meetings. Is there a way to use people the way they are able to be used? Can we be involved without doing meetings? For example, 9 a.m. is a tough time, and it's a big deal for me to be here at this meeting.

Jen: Thank you for being here, but you should know that it's a big deal for all of us.

James: There's a lot to be done, but maybe not a lot of energy. I also don't like meetings, but I want to contribute. When we have a passion to make something happen, it will happen.

Kathy K: There's a lot of anger in this room, but also a lot of love. We need to remember that we are the beloved community, an organism that sees beyond ourselves. We've accomplished things that no church our size should be able to accomplish. If this were the 1960s, I know we would all be on board supporting civil rights in Rochester. We need to hold on to the love that we have for one another.

Sonya: I see a lot of commitment here. I see a lot of Christian commitment, that we're trying to make our lives make sense with our Christian faith. Regarding our current issues, Leadership Team has sensed it is time to get some outside help. We met once with Marcus Smucker, who has consulted with other NYMC congregations, but working with him is a problem because he comes from a distance. We also met with Alan Newton, executive minister with the area American Baptist church. He's local and seems like a good person to work with, very process oriented.

Chrissie: He can teach us how to work toward consensus and listen. He sees this as his calling. He does not charge for this service.

Eileen: I've participated in a peace circle with Alan Newton, and also in Ignatian exercise with him. His spirituality is deeply real, so I recommend him highly.

Walt: One of his priorities is that he wants to make people feel safe.

Sonya: As a congregation we would not have a formal meeting with him until after Christmas. He might worship with us before then.

Chrissie: Leadership Team will set up a process for moving forward with him, but we as a congregation will need to agree to do this.

Eileen: I hope we can address the question, "What does leadership mean in this group?"

Chrissie: Yes, that is what we want him to work on with us.

Closing Song: *Sing the Journey #73*