



Prairie Lane Press

April 2009

Inside this issue:

Council: May Planning Meeting 2

Council: Elder Family Home Visits 2

From the Prayer Room: **Sunday School** 3

April Council News 4

Information on our Church Council

Overview:

Just a couple of weeks ago (April 5), we had our congregational meeting and selected **Doug Pulscher** as the new elder and **Cheryl Yarboro** as the new deacon. The council serves the church by giving vision and direction, overseeing staff and special projects, and maintaining the business of the church so that it is done well and in good order. For example, in the past year, council came up with ideas on how to refurbish the old sanctuary, how to help the pre-school, and ideas to create a "safe-church" policy, a new church website, a church DVD, as well as other projects. Big decisions such as our building project or approving the yearly budget, are brought to church members for a vote, and not just decided by council.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that deacons are "jr. elders" or somehow less significant. The offices are different, but they are equal in importance. Each has a variety of tasks and responsibilities, but generally speaking elders assist the pastor in the work of Word and sacrament, member care and accountability. Deacons help promote mercy and social justice as they focus more on physical and financial items. Currently at Prairie Lane, we have 4 elders and 4 deacons. Ordinarily, council members serve three-year terms.

Our Voting Method:

Last year we changed how we select new council members at the church. At the time, we offered some explanation for it, but now a year has passed, and it's easy to forget why we made the change. At Prairie Lane we *usually* have good reasons for doing what we do—but we don't always do a good job of communicating those reasons to the congregation. So, in this newsletter I wanted to explain why council decided to use a combination of congregational voting with drawing names from a hat.

First of all, there are Biblical examples of making decisions by "casting lots". One notable example comes from Acts 1, when the disciples decide to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Among those who had been following Jesus during his whole ministry, two names were chosen. Then, they cast lots and it fell to Matthias, so he was added to the eleven.

However, people have also pointed out that after the Holy Spirit comes to the Christians in Acts 2, we do not see the method of casting lots used again. For example, seven deacons are chosen in Acts 6, but the group picks them without lots this time. So, some argue that since the Holy Spirit now resides in Christian believers, decisions should be made by believers, and not by random selection like lots. They point out that we do not make other important decisions this way—like when a church picks a new pastor, they vote on it, and they do not pick names from a hat. So, why should we select council members this way?

A CRC Synod looked at this issue, and decided that churches should not only use a selection method to pick new deacons and elders, but that churches could use a combination of voting and selecting. The underlying reasoning behind this is that when equally good options are presented, it could be appropriate to seek God's will through drawing names. So, by putting the top two vote getters into the hat, we as a church are saying that both these names would do a good job, and they both have the support of the congregation, so that we can't go wrong with either of the choices. We can't be sure, but perhaps that was also the mindset in Acts 1, when two good choices were presented, and then they cast lots between the two.

(continued next page)

Council Voting Method continued . . .

Using this system of combining voting with selecting does have some practical advantages over a straight up popular vote (like what we used to do). One example is how only the counters know which two names are placed in the hat. Any of those not selected do not know how many votes they received or if they came in first, second, third, fourth, etc. So, we hope it takes away any sense of discouragement for those who aren't selected. With just a popular vote, you could imagine a situation where a person is nominated several years in a row, does well, but is never voted in. Such a person probably would get discouraged and might not want to even try to run anymore if they keep "losing". And, some people might feel more comfortable allowing their nomination to stand if they don't have to feel like they are running against someone else. And it helps take away any pressure when the results are kept private.

A second advantage is this method could allow for a greater variety of people to serve on council. There could be many who would do a fantastic job in council, but because of a lack of experience or because they are less known in the congregation, they would probably not come in first place with a popular vote, but who do still have a majority of support, and could get picked as a #2 candidate. And, another advantage is this method still gives the congregation a crucial role in who gets selected.

3 names for 1 vacancy is the minimum we need for this method to work. If only two names were left to fill one vacancy (or 3 names for 2 vacancies) we would probably have to go back to a straight popular vote for that instance. So far in the last two years, we have met our minimums, but we would still like to see more people accept nominations. This year, after collecting ideas from the congregation, and looking over names of gifted and qualified people at a council meeting, we nominated 7 elders and 8 deacons, but were left with just three names for each. Even if we had 7 or 8 names to vote from, taking the top two vote getters and drawing a name out would still work well, so we want to continue to encourage members to accept nominations when they come and allow your name to stand for voting.

May Planning Meeting:

The May Planning meeting is the last official task for retiring council members (this year, Pete and Darren) and the first for the newly elected council members. At this meeting, we are also joined by the Ministry Team. The Ministry Team members help oversee specific programs in the church (the ministry team currently consists of **Jean Madden**—worship services, **Alicia Rist**—worship support, **Barb Meendering**—youth discipleship, **Mike Hostetler**—adult discipleship, **Mark Aman**—outreach, **Adriene Brummel**—fellowship, and the prayer team leader, which is currently vacant).

At this meeting, we spend time in prayer and look at the ideas and suggestions from the congregational surveys. We brainstorm goals for the coming year, as well as consider our plans for the future. In past years, some of this discussion included new building issues, but now that we have met that goal, we need to consider what are the next big steps for the church to take. This year, we will also take a look at a first draft of a church policy handbook we are putting together.

After this, the council and ministry team meet separately. Council has an orientation, and votes for President, Vice-President, Clerk and Chair of Deacons. The ministry team gets a first look at the volunteer side of the congregational surveys and starts to get an idea of where we could have vacancies or potential new volunteers.

Your feedback is very important, and we want to get surveys back from all regular attenders 6th grade and up! The surveys are due next Sunday April 26. They are very easy to fill out, so please don't forget. Extra surveys are available on a shelf under the mailboxes if you lost yours. And, you can return them in Pastor Dan's office, or in the special mailbox on the right side labeled Church Surveys.

Elder Family/Home Visits:

A couple years ago, the elders made it a goal to visit with each family in their district at least once during their 3-year term. Since then, many families have been visited, but we know we haven't gotten to everyone. This last year it has been difficult because of new challenges in several of the elders' employment, plus Wayne's chemo treatments prevented him from doing many visits. We hope to recommit ourselves to this goal in the next year and make it a priority.

(continued next page)

Council Family/Home Visits continued . . .

Home visits should take between 30 and 45 minutes. Since the elders have responsibility for spiritual health in the congregation, these visits are an opportunity to show care, concern, pray with you, encourage you, and ask some questions about your spiritual growth. Just like it is wise to go into the doctor for an occasional check-up even if you feel ok, so also elder visits are a way to do a spiritual check-up, even when things seem to be going pretty smoothly. What is said at an elder visit is confidential. The elders do give brief summaries of visits with the other elders at elder meetings, but will not share sensitive information without your permission.

The CRC church order says that regular home visits should be made and that the purpose is to "encourage, strengthen and affirm members in their personal faith". Those visited can feel free to talk about PLC, but that is not the main point of these visits. And, they should not become complaint sessions or get bogged down on issues, but instead focus on spiritual health. If you do have issues or complaints or even comments and ideas, you should write them down, sign your name and get them to a council member (there are mailboxes for council in Jennifer office, plus elder/deacon slots on the right side of our new mailboxes with blue labels). We have made it our council policy that we will respond personally to any signed written communications we receive.

So, we hope you will make yourself available for a visit when an elder contacts you. And, we hope this can be another tool to show concern and care for all people in the church and another tool to help us grow in our spiritual lives.

**From the Prayer Room**

Each month a different group from our church will be sharing information with the PLC family on the bulletin board in the Prayer Room.

This month's group is:

Sunday School Classes**Please Pray for our Sunday School kids & teachers:****3 years-1st grade**

Sharon Maly & Susan Kuipers

- Hannah Vander Top
- Aubrey Beshlian
- Leah Hostetler
- Grace Moses
- Isabella Beshlian
- Pamela Reynolds

2nd—5th grade

Tammy Kramer & Lois Vander Tuin

- Cole Vander Tuig
- Dawson Kramer
- Dorothy Szto
- Valerie Aman
- Ryan Vandergriend
- Jesse Reynolds
- Anna Rietkerk
- Lucas Felger

6th, 7th & 8th grade

Mike & Gina Hostetler

- Kyle Rietkerk
- Natalie Kuipers
- Beth Vandergriend
- Alaina Brummel
- Rachel Stanley
- Autumn Kramer
- Emily Kramer
- Rebecca Madden
- Daniel Moses
- Dillon Felger

9th, 10th, 11th & 12th grade

Pastor Dan

- Megan Vandergriend
- Michael Slagter
- Marissa Horstman
- Sheldon Brummel
- Stacia Muilenburg
- Matt Maly
- Katie Moses
- Kristin Madden
- Elizabeth Slagter
- Jordan Brummel
- Danielle De Boer
- Zach Horstman
- Corey Muilenburg
- Caralyn Slagter
- Kaylee Vander Tuig
- Vadim Winsor

"The prayer team welcomes and encourages all people at Prairie Lane to join them for prayer on Sunday mornings at 9:30-9:45am. God works when we pray."



Council
News

APRIL COUNCIL MEETING

Darren Pennings opened with devotions and we began with a group prayer

Deacon Report:

- **The level of giving has been good the last couple of months**, and we have done some catching up, but are still about 4% behind expenses. The fiscal year ends at the end of June.
- **Council took a first look at the deacons proposed 2009-10 church budget.** The deacons goal was to keep the budget at the same level as the year before, since we are currently a bit behind, and also because the pledge drive will conclude in April 2010. The biggest challenge with this goal is that our ministry shares to the denomination have gone up quite a bit because of our increased membership. The congregation will be asked to approve the budget at a congregational meeting in June.
- There was some discussion regarding our **current policies of second offerings**, but no changes or decisions need to be made now.

Elder Report:

- Council voted to reinstate the membership of **Dave and Renee VanDyke** at their request. The VanDykes were members in the late 80's and early 90's, and then attended at Christ Community Church.
- Currently, Pat Durkee is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church, but he would like to be ordained in the CRC. His current ordination will expire, and in order to keep his position as an Air Force reserve chaplain, **we will help Pat pursue a ministry associate ordination** that would allow him to continue his chaplaincy work.

May Planning Meeting:

- Council discussed an agenda for the May planning meeting, and assigned various people to lead devotions and the orientations for council, elder and deacon.

Council Goals:

- The planning meeting coming up next month, and the installation of new council members, officially ends our 2008-2009 council ministry year goals. We reviewed our list and saw that there were several items we did not get to, but we were nonetheless pleased with the progress made. Transitioning to a new building and redoing the old sanctuary was not listed on our goals, but that did take up time, effort and resources. We are pleased with the new website, and we are excited about the church DVD from Brad Felger. We hope to have the first part on the church website soon, and show the four parts of the DVD to the congregation at a future time. We also developed a new assimilation policy and a "safe church" policy that will be included in our new upcoming PLC church handbook.

Review of Holy Week events:

- Pastor Dan sought feedback from our various Easter events over the last couple weeks including the egg hunt, prayer vigil, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter services.