

Northside Drive Baptist Church
Church Council Minutes
Monday, April 7, 2008

BUSINESS

Minutes: The minutes of the March 10, 2008 Church Council meeting were approved as presented.

Treasurer's Report: Carolyn fielded questions from the financial report that she provided for us.

Facilities: Dick reported that the leak in the pipe in one of the preschool rooms has been repaired.

Nominating Report: Syd reported that Jo Meeks has agreed to be treasury. Also, Lewis Baumstark will be next years Chair of Nominating Committee.

Signage Report: Syd reported that Mark 3 Signage Company will be the group that we work with for our signage project.

Conference: Mike handed out a flyer about a discussion being held August 3rd at the Shepherd Center on Acceptance and Inclusion. This is presented by the Interfaith Disability Connection, the Shepherd Center and the First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta.

Book: In talking about having someone (consultant who has expertise) helping oversee our thoughts/plans concerning church group, Liz suggested we read a book together. It was decided we should read *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60, Being Church To All People*. Mike will order the book and those who are interested will pay \$10.00.

Chapel: James suggested that we make a decision on meeting in the chapel during the summer months. **Motion:** Cathy Wooten made a motion that the worship service be in the Chapel from June 1st until sometime in August which would be at the discretion of the staff. **Motion** was passed.

James report is as follows:

**Pastoral Conversation with the Church Council, Part II—
Hope and Its Circuitous Route
April 7, 2008**

A brief review of the March meeting discussion.

I spoke of the invigoration I felt due to last month's pastoral conversation with the Church Council. I heard council members tell stories. We spoke of our progress toward

intimacy. We named the compelling capacity of our church's vision statement and the love we share for each other.

I see all of the above as a spiritual synergy that has been a result of the grace-gifting of God, and the relational yearning and work of many in the church. This is hopeful.

I spoke of hope as a sense of what could be, based on a sense of what is, and then knowing how the two might be bridged.

1. This is what I see:

I see several ways "God is bubbling up!" A Snapshot sampler includes:
The creation of the Green Group
The experiment of the Kid's Night Out
Ongoing yoga classes—providing a way to connect the spirituality of soul to our bodies.

The emphases of the Seeker Sunday School Class on justice issues, *Living the Questions*, and Jeremy Lewis' affirmation of the close-knit spirituality he perceives.

Our supple, responsive missions community—evidenced in the support and ministry of The Women of the Church and through the Missions Committee
The new 20/30's group that meets at Mike and Amanda Gregg's house.
The innovative, rotational approach to Children's Sunday School.
More creative energy between the Weekday Preschool and NDBC than ever.
The Farmers' Market.

I see that we are right on track with our church's vision—from liturgical traditions, to intergenerational friendships, to the intimacy of a loving congregation.

I also see and hear grief and fear. I hear people concerned about the aging of the congregation, contributions in jeopardy, worship attendance, new member numbers, departures of key families like the Kellers and Dorritys, comparisons with the other area churches, the loss of church image that is remembered from the 80's, and the changing loyalty to church structure (like the commitment of committees). Regardless of how many good mission and ministry things happen in and through our church, this cannot annul either the grief or the focus by some folk when it comes to attendance in worship and membership numbers. I and we must attend to this grief work.

2. This is what I suspect...a tale of two trajectories.

As we move into the future, we could approach it with "steady as she goes." Or, we could do more of an "intentional intervention." I believe a good future could be had either way—but both approaches will have many unpredictabilities. Even with "steady as she goes," I illustrated the disruption that can come by telling the story of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX. Though the church has claimed a progressive history, a controversy arose over the routine printing of the church pictorial directory as the church prepared to celebrate its 125th year. There were divisive opinions and membership losses regarding the family pictures of gay and lesbian families.

On the other hand, an intentional change initiated by a leadership group will be challenging, as well. It is common to "want things to be different...but not changed."

Given all the above, I believe we have been able to stay “on task” regarding our mission and our vision, remarkably well. And yet, our anxiety and concern about the future is something to which we need to pay attention. **The questions are: How can we faithfully live with hope in God and the joy of being an intentional church? But also, how do we prevent our fears from sapping our stamina and our capacity to change?**

New Talking Points from the April 7, 2008 Presentation

3. This is what I will do:

First, I will be the pastor. A pastor is a person called *by* God *to* a congregation, for the purposes of 1) attending to the congregation as they attend to their own lives; also 2) lead in equipping the congregation to live-out their spiritual lives in the community.

Examples of the “attending” part of this definition include pastoral care, praying for and praying with, teaching (e.g.: care-giving skills to the deacons, Bible study with the Wednesday morning study group), weddings, funerals, worship, counseling, and baptisms.

Part of my pastoral ministry is to be available to help you grow your lives. It is invigorating to me to work with people who are motivated to work on their own lives. The spiritual lives we lead grow in tandem with the emotional processes in which we participate. Pass along the word. Give me a call. I am honored to work with all who are ready.

Examples of the “leading” part include *Pinnacle* articles and preaching that remind the church of our vision and the values we have stated that we share in common. Also, I work with groups and committees as they attempt to lead and serve. For instance, I am working with the Membership Development Committee/Community as they reexamine their tasks and how to invite and involve the congregation.

Second, dove-tailing off the above, as pastor, I will lead the congregation as it does the awkward and holy work of being a congregation. A congregation is not an audience. It is an organism, a community. We’ve chosen Baptist congregational polity which requires of us spiritual discernment. As we deliberate and make choices, one of my jobs as pastor is to continually ask, “How might God be at work in our lives through this process right now?”

Third, I will do research on other churches in the area. Each time I’ve heard from folk concerned about our membership numbers (such as the Dinners for Dreaming and from the Personnel Committee), comparisons were made to the other steeples around the corner. Thus, I thought it prudent to research these churches. (However, what I heard from the Church Council conversation this evening was that this was unnecessary. The request was for me to focus more on our congregation and facilitate what makes NDBC come alive.)

4. This is what I would like to see:

First, I’d like to see us continue to think through our existing structure and see if it matches our available resources. For instance, if Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers consistently don’t choose to be active on committees—are there other ways of doing church that

accesses their generativity? Marks of the “emerging church movement” are flexibility and porosity. How might knowing this trend inform us?

Second, I’d like to see us become more of a “learning church.” That is, I’d like us to be a place that is more welcoming to seminary interns, clinical pastoral education students, and seminarians seeking mentoring. There is grant money available for internships—but usually it is matching money. Thus, we would still need to attend to personnel costs. Also, though these students would impact our children, youth, and recruitment programs, it would not be directly. Probably (though not exclusively), their foci would be in pastoral ministries. We would be giving this as a gift—but in the giving there would be a receiving of creativity, energy, and learning. Seemingly, Peachtree Road Baptist Church is doing this pretty well. The pastor tells me, “Seminarians bring energy; and our church needed that.”

Third, I’d like to see the Church Council become more of a leadership body, rather than a management body. I celebrate that we’re doing a much better job of communication and keeping all interested people informed; however I’m asking the Council to be more “directional” in its approach. This would include giving committees (or sub-groups of the Council) assignments.

If I heard correctly, the Council is choosing the “intentional intervention” style of addressing the future. This will require *more discernment and decisiveness* from the Council as it takes stands regarding our church’s direction.

I applaud the Council’s clarity regarding the decision to meet for worship in the chapel for the summer. We discussed it one month, then decided the next. That is good practice in the direction of discernment and decisiveness.

5. This is what I ask you to do...

Though time ran-out to discuss these notions, I mentioned them as future talking points:

First, trust God. It will be great leadership for the Church Council to demonstrate this to the congregation.

Second, lead the church in “loving ourselves as we are,” rather than focusing on what we aren’t. Be ambassadors of morale. I told the Zeke DeLozier story of when he confronted a minister with her fears. “You already are that!” he said, “but the issue is-- learning to love yourself as you are.”

Visitors can smell a church’s anxiety that needs people to join so that the church will feel better about itself.

Third, I suspect we will need to learn to live with less money.

Fourth, all people concerned about church numerical growth—get on the Membership Development Committee immediately.

Fifth, focus on what we do well, not on what is missing.

Sixth, though Mike and I aren’t ready to flesh-it-out yet, my hunch is that we will ask the church to offer a Saturday or Sunday evening gathering opportunity for Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers. It would involve music, silence, prayer, and Bible Study. Ask, “How can I help?” when it comes.

Conclusion

I believe this may be our finest hour. I'll email a list of "things I suspect." This may further help you know what I am thinking about hope...and prompt your own thinking.

Extra attachment: JB sent out an email that did not get to all the current Church Council Members. I was asked to send it out with the minutes. The following email is from JB:

April 11, 2008

Church Council Members:

After several days of reflection, I am embarrassed by my behavior at the last meeting. My anger has passed and I have been trying to understand it. I regret my actions, because they were not presented in a thoughtful, caring manner. Please forgive me for my outrage.

I have mistrusted the Personnel Committee. These are fine people who care deeply for our church and want it to improve and grow. Kay Braswell sent me a very thoughtful, caring response shortly after the meeting. It has helped me to understand the actions of the committee and the current direction of the council. Please forgive me for my mistrust and misunderstanding.

I also have found fault with myself. I want to be intentional, thoughtful and caring. I do not like being angry, but I sometimes am. Over time and with reflection, I sometimes see the "log in my own eye". I will continue to reflect and ask God to help me with obstructions in my vision.

Asking for forgiveness,

JB Gilbert

Round table discussion.

Adjournment.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kay Braswell, Church Clerk

