

Bahia Vista Mennonite Church
Overseers Update to the Congregation
August 25, 2013

1. The Overseers met on Tuesday, August 20, 2013.
2. Carol Vaught was appointed to complete David Ray Miller's term on the Finance Committee and Dennis L. Yoder was appointed as David Ray Miller's replacement as a corporate member to Sunnyside Village.
3. Approval was given to the sister Spanish Church to hold two fundraiser meals for their building project each calendar year.
4. Mike Christner, Co-chair of the Master Planning Committee (MPC), shared an update from the committee. The Overseers took action to call a congregational meeting in which Pastor Roger will re-present the vision for the congregation and as appropriate present the work of the MPC.
5. Pastoral Report: Pastor Roger Shenk
It's been a full summer so I'd like to highlight some events and thoughts that I've been chewing on.

VISION MEETING. On June 23 I called a meeting to talk about the vision and to listen to the congregation. It was interesting how naturally people talked about BV as being "two churches"—meaning the two worship services. There is a strong desire in both groups to see us be united in essence (which we are), while affirming the distinctions of each culture (which we do). I think this is good clarity.

BIENNIAL CONVENTION. Nineteen of us from Bahia Vista spent the first week of July in Phoenix for the Mennonite Church USA Biennial Convention. It was good to meet new people and renew old connections. It was also a sobering reminder that the representative body does not always reflect our congregation's values. I invite Bahia Vista to join me and other concerned pastors in praying for our denominational leaders as they make decisions (and non-decisions) that affect what this eleven-year old denomination will become.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING. On August 8 and 9' six of our seven ministers were able to attend this year's Global Leadership Summit hosted by Abundant Life Church as a video simulcast from Willow Creek in Chicago. There were about 175,000 people in attendance worldwide!

NEW PROGRAMMING. On August 14, we started another 21 Days of Prayer emphasis. It is leading up to a renewed emphasis on Wednesday night that we're calling "242 Night" based on the picture found in Acts 2:42. We are creating an opportunity to encourage connection among those who consider Bahia Vista their home church. We will be eating together, and then breaking into small groups and classes where we will learn and pray together—all for the sake of building up the church family.

ATTENDANCE TRENDS. Our winter numbers inflate our average in a way that dilutes attendance shifts in our year-round crowd. But if we look at the median annual attendance (the middle number between our highest and lowest Sundays) it gives a different sense of where we are. Two weeks ago our office compiled the attendance numbers back to 1982 and it confirmed what I had suspected: Bahia Vista experienced a steady twenty-year decline of about 5% each year, from 1989 to 2009. During that time there were three short-lived growth periods, and now a fourth:

1. In 1995 there was one growth year of +3%, but it was preceded by -4% and followed by -6%.
2. In 1998 our median attendance dropped by -29%, followed by a growth of +12% in 1999 and then another decline of -20% in 2000. When people tell me Bahia Vista's story they refer to this period as the "mass exodus," and describe tension between leaders with a liberal theology and members who were more conservative. I believe there's reason to interpret it as somewhat of a territorial battle, although it would not have been overtly described as such.
3. 2004 was Larry's first full year and we grew by +8% followed by +5% in 2005. But then we saw four more consecutive years of decline (2006-2009): -12%, -5%, -4% and -2%. As I have listened to the stories, there was a mild theological tension, but the primary conflict was around scope of vision, mission, and strategy. During this conflict two of three pastors resigned, and by the end of 2009 our median attendance was one-third of its peak in 1989.
4. When I came in 2010 we saw +38% growth, followed by +8% in 2011. But in 2012 our median attendance dropped by -9%. I believe this was the result of our summer experiment of one blended service, followed by the reinstallation of "Traditions" with a less-than-optimal start time.

Our goal is to bring people in to friendship, not send people away from friendship. So, anytime we decline it should be a concern. But we also need to keep an eye on the overall trend. It's easy to tell the stories of 1998-2000, or 2006-2009, or even of 2012. But what really scares me is that Bahia Vista experienced a twenty-year downward trend without being able to correct it! And I want to make sure that the growth years of 2010-2011 are not just another blip—an anomaly that will eventually be chalked up to increased interest around a new pastor or whatever.

This is our watch and we must solve the problem! Until we see sustained success at genuinely befriending new people, the trend has not gone away; it has only been interrupted again. To really change it will require hard work, discernment, wisdom, and the courage to make difficult decisions—decisions that would not have been made during the past twenty years.

With all that said, I am excited about what I'm seeing here at Bahia Vista. A number of us keep sensing in our prayers that God keeps saying to, "Stay the course." I believe that means to keep making the loving, firm, gentle, difficult decisions to revitalize and renew Bahia Vista. And I believe God will honor it.

LEGACY. Finally, this end-of-the-summer report would be incomplete if I didn't acknowledge that we've had to say final goodbyes to some wonderful people this summer. I was surprised to count that over sixty people in our immediate and extended church family have passed during my time here. Because of their faithfulness, it has often been a celebration of joy alongside the sorrow. But it has also had a sobering effect, reminding us that death awaits each of us.

And so my thoughts turn to "legacy" where I am challenged to make sure that "Life" is always being passed on to those who come after us. My heart hurts for those who are just "one arm's length away" from us: our friends, neighbors and family members—who have little or no hope in Jesus. We need to remember that, for those of us who die in Christ, the time is long—eternal glory awaits us! But for those who are living apart of Christ, the time is short! The time is now. We must do whatever we can to bring as many as we can into genuine friendship with Jesus and his Church.

COMMUNITY

- We are involved in a church-wide experience of 21 Days of Prayer. We have 21 consecutive prayer meetings from 7-PM in the Fellowship Hall being led by each of the pastors. We also have a prayer room available throughout the 21 days.
- We're excited about 242 Night. The goal of this is to increase connectedness among those who attend Bahia Vista. The programming will include eating, learning, praying and spending time in fellowship together. A designated team will focus on creating a hospitable environment. We will also be offering a number of new classes, most on Wednesdays, but will be offering some on other days as well.
- We are having a 242 kickoff party on Wednesday, September 4, with lots of games and activities, to highlight and introduce 242 Night. Regular programming will begin the following Wednesday.

WORSHIP

- This summer we responded to the typical lower attendance by roping off the rear pews, to which people have responded well. The greater density makes for better singing and togetherness in our worship.
- During the summer months so far (June to date) we have averaged 273 (60% Family, 40% Traditions): a 3% increase over the same period last year when we experimented with one common service.
- Under Larry's leadership the ushers in the Family service have gained unity and are becoming an inviting presence with their new shirts.

SERVICE

- We had scheduled a morning workday at Queena Phu's house on July 27th but they made a last minute change of time that they were available so we had to cancel.
- Family Promise was here the week of June 16 and is scheduled again the week of September 8.
- We are planning a workday at Pine Ridge Mobile Home Park.

CHILDREN

- The "Christmas in July" VBS program that we developed in house was a hit, with registration of 98 kids, and around 200 people at the Friday Night Snowball Fight. A couple families came back on Sunday morning.
- Starting September 1 kids will have a full service on Sunday morning where they can sing together and learn from skits and sermon-like lessons. Several youth will be helping to lead this.
- We are inviting the VBS families to join us on November 13 for an all-church Operation Christmas Child packing party.
- The fifth graders have moved up to sixth grade now and are attending youth group. Several of these youth will be serving as Little Eden helpers on Sunday mornings.

YOUTH

- Starting Wednesday, September 11, there will be separate middle and high school programs.
- There is a Monday night Bible study for students who are interested.

ADMINISTRATION

- We have been working to bring "brand" continuity to all areas, including: Signup sheets, Sunday AM announcements, weekly e-news (468 recipients weekly), social media, BV website and the print newsletter and bulletin.
- June and July AM offerings are encouraging. But we still project that \$40,000 will be needed from our money market reserve account to carry us in to the fall.
- We are considering reducing costs by closing the office at noon on Fridays.

Nancy I. Yoder, Chair
Nancy B. Yoder, Secretary