

Bahia Vista Mennonite Church
Overseers Update to the Congregation
May 18, 2014

1. The Overseers met on Tuesday, May 13, 2014.
2. Report of the SCS Student Tuition Assistance Task Force
The Overseers accepted the recommendation of the SCS Student Tuition Assistance Program Task Force to replace the existing SCS Student Tuition Program with the SCS Scholarship Fund and asked the Finance Committee establish to a plan with SCS for implementation of the scholarship program.
3. SCS Student Financial Assistance Request
The Overseers approved SCS student financial assistance for a BVMC family who has a student attending SCS. Gene Yoder will contact SCS to determine the financial need level, and the Finance Committee was authorized to make a final decision for financial assistance based on the SCS recommendation.
4. Pastoral Report: Pastor Roger Shenk
The Pastoral Report is attached.

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

PASTOR'S REPORT TO OVERSEERS

May 13, 2014

Renewed Call

Recently, I took the Pastoral Team to *Exponential Conference 2014* in Orlando, and was reminded of how clear the call was that brought me to Bahia Vista.

When I candidated in August 2009, I came with a clear picture that God had given me during my discernment about whether I should make myself available to Bahia Vista. It was a compelling image of a new plant growing out of an old branch. On that Sunday, without any prior knowledge of my vision, Treva designed the newsletter with an image of new growth sprouting from an old stump. And if that wasn't enough, that same weekend we visited an old friend's house who showed us a bunch of dead tree branches that he had cut off and stacked in his backyard a few months earlier, and one of the dead branches had a new branch growing out of its side. I believed God was telling me, "I'm not done with Bahia Vista! I want to do a new thing here! I want to grow a new plant out of an old plant, and I want to use you to do it." Two weeks later the church called me as pastor. Wendy and I accepted, and within a couple months we were here.



The following April, we attended the *Exponential Conference 2010*, along with several from the pastoral team and elder board. One of the speakers said something I didn't like, but knew to be true: "No matter what great work we're doing we're always going to have critics... The only way to avoid criticism is to not do anything significant with your life... People who criticize us rarely do so overtly... I promise you, there's someone in your team who has a different mission for your church than you do." He cautioned us against "vision hijackers" who undermine or sabotage vision, and he reminded us that "programming is part of your vision." He said that "some people will never get the vision, no matter how hard you try." And often such people leave and flourish elsewhere, which is okay. He told us to "confront mission drift quickly." He said to "protect the unity of the church by handling conflict Gods way." He encouraged us that, "Finishing the great work will require courageous conversations and decisions [but] don't spend too much time responding to your critics." It is eventually necessary to say, "I love you, but we just can't have this conversation again."

We left that conference energized for how God wanted to do a new thing at Bahia Vista. But it wasn't long before I was hearing that I shouldn't use language like "planting" or "revitalizing" or "new church." Some felt that it discredited the existing church. They also told me repeatedly (in a variety of words) that I wasn't brought here to do a new thing, but rather to get new people to join what the church was already doing. Furthermore, at a 2011 volunteer appreciation banquet, I spent a half hour talking about our opportunity to reach our neighbors, how we should do it, and what we can expect Bahia Vista to look like when we are succeeding in that. I wrapped up my thoughts with a prayer and, as soon as I said Amen, someone spoke up and said that this was very discouraging to her. She accused me of saying that I don't want the church to befriend seniors, which is the farthest thing from the truth! Unfortunately, some people believed her.

Today, I see how reluctant I have been to deal directly (even if gently) with resistance to this call and vision, and I believe it has magnified the distress in our church. I have asked God's forgiveness. And today, I ask your forgiveness. I regret how long I have shied away from more meaningful efforts at replanting or revitalizing Bahia Vista. I am humbly asking God to help me correct this.

Going Forward

This month begins a new season for Bahia Vista. It carries with it the sorrow of lost friends, but it also has the joy of a new tomorrow. I know people are waiting to see what will happen with our traditional worship service. The plan is to:

1. Continue to provide traditional (as well as modern) worship services that attract and inspire people of all ages to the worship of Jesus Christ as Lord.
2. Develop a team of volunteer song leaders to fill the gap in the traditional service while we honor Larry's severance. (I will personally coordinate this service, as long as necessary.)
3. Hire a new part-time music director (2015) for the traditional service, just like we have had for the modern service these past four years. Ideally this person will also be able to direct a seasonal choir, or possibly a year-round, multi-generational choir.
4. Simplify and repurpose our entertainment programming so that it directly serves our mission of befriending people with the love of Christ through community, worship and service.

Mortality + Immortality

I'm always aware of our mortality as a church. We have buried seven people this year, and the last five of those were in a span of four weeks. Last year we averaged one death every 24 days. We are a grieving church. I'm thankful to Shirley Good for her assistance in caring for these families.

Because of God's grace, each death of our brother or sister is a reminder that heaven awaits us too. But because of God's love, we're also reminded that there are thousands of people of all ages, just a few breaths away from spending eternity without God. And we are equipped and called to save them from that! We need to reach them! This is the conviction of our Gospel! And, I believe that, if it is the conviction of our church, we must replant ourselves into this community. We need to become a new, old church that loves disbelieving, disillusioned, and distracted people so much that we do everything we can to "proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end we strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in us." (Colossians 1:28-29)

If we apply ourselves to this, some people will leave. If we don't, other people will leave. Let's do what we can to create a beautiful faith-community at Bahia Vista, where people come to faith here, and grow to maturity here. The greater the work, the greater the opposition will be, and the greater the determination needs to be. But accomplishing a great work is closer than we think. We just need to commit to working and praying hard.

If we are indeed facing our mortality, let it be said of us as it was said of the ancients in Hebrews 11:13, "All these people were still living by faith when they died..."

Pastoral Team

I am excited to begin working more collaboratively as a team, even looking at how responsibilities might be redistributed, which I believe will make us better.

We are looking at some other changes as well. Zack told me in February that he feels called to pastoral ministry beyond youth ministry. He is actively discerning this, and is in open conversation about it with the pastoral team, as well as with Southeast Mennonite Conference minister, Marco Guete. (See letter of explanation from Zack, attached.) It looks like we will need to find a new youth minister before the beginning of next school year. Please be in prayer for wisdom and discernment. God will provide; he always takes care of his church.

Area connections

Among my other connections in the larger church community, I am enjoying getting to know Howard Garver, the new transition pastor at Bayshore Mennonite. Likewise, I recently met with Shawn Otto, the new pastor at Bethel Mennonite.

242 All-Church Family Events

Next month our 242 Meals will take a break for the summer. We will, however, continue meeting as groups through the week. But we are also planning several monthly big events designed to bring us all together for an evening of just enjoying each other. The first of these is a “Beach Party” at Siesta, Wednesday evening, June 25.

Humbly submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Ross".