

Church Visit Report – Bethel CRC - Princeton, MN
October 26, 2009

The Council of Bethel Church welcomed church visitors Don Mulenburg and Jerry Van Someren to their meeting and invited them to join in a time of prayer. After the season of prayer, Jerry reviewed the reasons for church visiting, thanked the council for including them in their meeting and asked Don to read from scripture. Don chose to read from 1 Peter 5:1–11 which contains Peter's advice to church leaders about how they ought to conduct their lives.

Because the prayer time seemed to flow so naturally, Don asked the council about the prayer life of the church. As the question was answered, the visitors got a feel for just how important prayer is to Bethel. There is a recognized prayer coordinator who assembles a prayer guide for each day of the month. The prayer concerns include local needs, needs of the people of the congregation and needs of people from the community. The prayer guides are available to everyone who attends Bethel. It is a successful way of drawing the community into the church and moving the church into the community. Church leaders strive to be examples to the congregation of what a prayer warrior is.

In answer to Don's question - What are the responsibilities of the council? The first response was –

- A strong prayer ministry – prayer, it was reported, helps the council keep up with what is happening in the congregation and they feel more closely involved with the many ministries of the church when they are praying for them.
- Having the right people in the right places. The church has been blessed with an active Administrative Assistant. She has a natural way of making people from the church and the community feel at home. It is not unusual for people from the community to stop by the church during the week, and when they do, there is someone there to greet and welcome them. Many return to participate to worship or to be involved in one of the ministries like Coffee Break or bring their children to Cadets or Gems.
- All council members actively participate in the program offerings of the church. Some assume leadership roles while others show their support by their attendance.
- People from the council make an effort to encourage one another. This spirit is contagious and encouragement is seen happening between members of the congregation and attendees from the community.

When asked about frustrations –

- The council members cited aligning new people with one or more of the offerings of the church as being a challenge, and they see getting new people involved in one of the various ministries of the church as very important. The leadership of Bethel is convinced that introducing new attendees to one or more of the functions of the church is key to keeping them coming back. Finding the right program for a person who is not well known to the congregation presents a challenge.
- Getting regular church attendees to become members of the church. There seems to be a resistance to making the commitment to join the church. These same people serve enthusiastically on committees and participate in functions, but don't want to step over the threshold into membership.

Bethel Church is a very busy place. The back of their church bulletin lists no less than 18

different ministries that the church offers. Some of the programs are traditional CRC – Coffee break, Sunday School, Gems Girls Club, Cadets Boys Club and Friendship (renamed “Just for You”). But the list also includes interesting names like BAC2ONE, Good News Club, IGNITE Youth Group, Hope Builders, and Village Schools of the Bible to name a few. BAC2ONE is an Art Camp where students participate in things like drama, drawing, painting, scrapbooking, jewelry making and cake decorating. Good News Club is an after school Bible study for students

An interesting men’s ministry is Men in Action. This group gets together twice each month to not only study the Bible but also to do things for people in the community. When someone from the community calls with a special need like building a fence or raking leaves, the Administrative Assistant picks volunteers from her list of Men in Action and dispatches them to the needy person’s home to complete the project. These kinds of actions are talked about in the community and that “word of mouth” brings people to church.

In this age of instant communication, Bethel leaders see their web site as being an important tool with which to reach those who otherwise may not come. Some of the regular attendees cite the web site as what first introduced them to Bethel.

Another idea that helped community people find the church (and those of you who drove to Classis this Fall know how hard Bethel is to find) was to pass out stickers at community functions that asked the question – Where is Bethel Church? Included with the stickers was a map with directions to the church. Community people came out of curiosity, and some of them stayed.

Pastor Cal’s messages are appreciated by the council and congregation. Recently he completed an interesting series on “life issues.” He also uses the Heidelberg Catechism as a resource for some of his messages.

The elders are involved in all aspects of the church including the youth. One of the council members is an artist and is deeply involved in BAC2ONE art camp. They make it a point to visit classrooms while classes are in session to become better acquainted with the youth. Some are Sunday School teachers while some find rewards in mentoring children. The Elders also invite interested youth to participate in Praise Time during worship services.

Pastoral care is seen as the duty of all council members. The Administrative Assistant keeps track of the congregational needs and notifies the correct people (both council and non-council members) to respond to the need. The Elders have a goal of bringing back family visiting.

The Deacons report that the declining economy has hit Bethel too. Budget cuts have had to be made and at times money has been borrowed from the building fund to pay the monthly bills. The Deacons rejoice that the money is coming in as good as it is and they trust that things will turn around.

Our time together was too soon over. Jerry closed by reading from Galatians 6:9 & 10 – about not becoming weary of doing good and closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Muilenburg & Jerry Van Someren
Church Visitors, Classis Lake Superior