Senior Minister White Paper #8

A Vision for Pastoral Care and Fellowship

**Pastoral Care**

**Where We Are Now:**

Attentive readers might have noticed that in the paper dealing with church-wide mission no mention was made of three things all church do: worship, pastoral care and fellowship. This was not an oversight. The core mission area concept presupposes making decisions among a wide range of possible ministry activities FCCB could decide to do. There is no such choice with worship, pastoral care and fellowship; these three activities are essential to any meaningful understanding of what a church should be. It is simply silly to try to imagine a church that does not worship God; does not provide a means for its members to associate with one another; or makes no effort at all to look after its members in times of difficulty. In addition to its obvious centrality to the life of the church and its members, an effective pastoral care ministry can also be a useful outreach tool, as both research and anecdotal experience support the idea that many people outside the church are looking to become part of a caring, responsive community, the sort of community the offers outstanding pastoral care to its members.

At present FCCB has a number of groups and individuals with some responsibility for pastoral care. Groups involved include the Deacons, the Stephen Ministry, and the Friendly Visitors; individuals include all three of FCCB’s ministers. In addition to that, many FCCB members do a wonderful job of keeping in touch with those they know and care about in our congregation and reaching out to them in difficult times. So there are many at least potential
resources for pastoral care here at FCCB, but FCCB’s pastoral care ministry faces its challenges as well.

**Where We Can Go From Here:**

One of the challenges FCCB’s pastoral care ministry faces is that many members are probably unaware of the groups responsible for much of it. Everyone is aware of the Deacons, of course, but I don’t think most FCCB members have much of a clue about the Stephen Ministry (beyond knowing that it exists; that there’s usually a Stephen Minister at the piano following the 10:00 service; and that they have something to do with talking and praying,) or the Friendly Visitors. We might be able to raise the congregational awareness of these ministries by having a special “Pastoral Care Sunday,” or something like that, where pastoral care is the theme of the day. Such a day would include a special fellowship hour where the Stephen Ministry and Friendly Visitors could set up table displays, talk to people about their ministries, and try to solicit support and volunteers, with a higher congregational profile.

An additional challenge FCCB’s pastoral care ministry faces is one that should be familiar to those who’ve read the previous paper on youth and family ministry: a lack of coordination between semi-autonomous organizations. At present, I am unaware of any ongoing communication between the Deacons, Stephen Ministry or Friendly Visitors so addressing pastoral care issues can sometimes be a bit like playing “button, button, who’s got the button”. One thing that might help clarify the lines of communication would be arranging a “pastoral care summit,” if you will, where all of the groups and individuals involved in pastoral care get together for a day (perhaps at Killam’s Point, and maybe with hamburgers, Italian sausage, grilled chicken, potato salad and coleslaw,) and tried to achieve three things: first, simply introducing themselves to one
another, so everyone involved in pastoral care knew who the players were; two, defining responsibilities among groups and individuals; and three deciding on a means of organized communication about pastoral care issues. Another way to address this communication challenge would be to include the Stephen Ministers and the Friendly Visitors in the formal administration structure of the church. This was a point I discussed in the board and committee consolidation section of the paper on church-wide mission. Readers may recall that I suggested assigning the responsibility for overseeing the Stephen Ministers and the Friendly Visitors to the Diaconal Ministry Team.

A third thing that might be done to strengthen FCCB’s pastoral care ministry would be to restart FCCB’s Interfaith Caregivers group. Presently these are many FCCB members who would benefit from the sort of things Interfaith Caregivers do, and such a group would be a valuable addition to the church’s pastoral care program. This would be particularly true with regard to the pastoral care of FCCB’s most senior members, many of whom have mobility, health, and other issues that limit their ability to participate fully in daily life, let alone church life. (And let me add as an aside here that the pastoral care of seniors is an issue that all churches, not just FCCB, face, and as our national population ages is going to be an even more important one, and one that will require a rethinking of pastoral care ministry in ways that I don’t think anyone has fully considered yet—and that includes me.) In the meantime, we’ve discovered a terrific website called “Take Them a Meal.com,” which is a scheduling website for, well, taking meals to people. People who just got home from the hospital, people who are recovering from accidents, people who can’t get out of the house for other reasons—all sorts of people. Taking someone a meal is a remarkably important way of caring for one another, and this website makes doing that extremely simple. You’ll be hearing more about this coming September and October when people are back.
A final way to strengthen FCCB’s pastoral care ministry (at some point in the future) would be to create a full-time position for an associate minister with overall responsibility for pastoral care. FCCB’s present associate minister who specializes in pastoral care does a terrific job, but she is only scheduled for 15 hours/week, and that is probably not enough time to effectively lead and develop FCCB’s pastoral care ministry, particularly if we envision a larger Stephen Ministry or Friendly Visitor ministry since those will require more coordinating as they grow. And what’s more, as things stand now that person also has responsibility for worship leadership most weeks and preaching about once a month, which takes a lot of those fifteen hours. Do we have 40 hours/week of pastoral care work that needs to be done? Perhaps not, at least not right at the moment, but a full-time associate minister of pastoral care would also have worship and occasional preaching responsibilities as well, so if FCCB had, say, 20 hours of pastoral care leadership that needed doing and 5 hours of worship responsibilities, that would bring the weekly time commitment for an associate minister for pastoral care up to 25 hours/week, with an additional 15 hours/week of time to further develop FCCB’s pastoral care ministry (perhaps by developing a program for pastoral care for seniors, or pastoral care for people going through traumatic life changes like divorce, death, or other serious family issues. Or, perhaps some of those hours could be invested in developing FCCB’s fellowship ministry, a point to which we shall now turn.

Fellowship

Where We Are Now

The term “fellowship” has frequently been applied over the centuries to describe the church; in fact it goes back to the New Testament. In the book of Acts, for example, we read that the Jerusalem church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” And for his part, Paul reminds the church in First Corinthians that God
has called them into “the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” So fellowship is clearly part of what the church is about. But what is it? Well, Dictionary.com variously defines fellowship as “a community of interest, feeling, etc.,” “friendly relationship; companionship,” “communion, as between the members of the same church,” and as “an association of persons having similar tastes, interests, etc.” All of these certainly apply to the church, and the thing they all have in common is the idea of relationship. So fellowship is that part of a church’s ministry that seeks to build relationships among the church’s members. And those relationships can be built in all sorts of ways, on both large and small scales. On a large scale they can be built through all-church dinners, picnics, cookout, concerts, movies and things like that. On a smaller scale they can be built through small-group activities like reading groups, prayer groups, or groups of people who get together to share a meal or an interest shared in common with others.

The problem with all of this, at least for FCCB, is that we currently don’t do much of either large scale or small scale fellowship activities. We have a monthly book group, and our Knitting, Purling and Praying group, and we have a couple of large group activities over the course of the year (things like the Christmas Pageant and the Keltic Kick concert back in the spring) but FCCB doesn’t do much to promote relationship building on a regular basis.

**Where We Can Go From Here**

There are, of course, any number of reasons for the paucity of fellowship activities here at FCCB. To name just two, people, both laypeople and staff people, are extremely busy, and there isn’t always time for organizing yet another thing. Large scale activities like dinners and concerts also require a substantial initial investment, and in a time when the church budget is tight it may seem like spending money on a dinner or concert isn’t a wise use of the church’s funds. While I
certainly have plenty of sympathy with the first of these arguments, I’m not so sure I buy the second one, for if building relationships is part of what the church is all about, is that not an activity worth investing some money in? So one of the ways we might encourage fellowship in the church is by creating a line item in the annual budget for larger scale fellowship activities and then making that money available to people and groups who might be interested in organizing such activities for the entire church.

Another possible way to encourage larger, all church kind of fellowship activities would be to create a group to coordinate them. This group wouldn’t be a committee that had to meet every month, keep minutes and all that sort of thing. It could simply be a group of three or four people who were charged with coordinating two or three all church sort of fellowship activities (and who could be given discretion over the budget I mentioned above).

As for smaller scale fellowship activities, these needn’t require much official coordination at all, all these sorts of activities need are people interested in getting together and doing things. Is there anyone here at FCCB who would like to be part of a Men’s Fellowship? Then get a couple of guys from church together and start meeting at the Parthenon for breakfast once a month. How about another book group or two? Then get some people together, figure out what kind of books you want to read, and ask Julia to find you a room once a month (but don’t ask for a room on Tuesdays or Thursdays, there’s simply no room at the inn). Do you know people who are interested in quilting, cooking, painting or motorcycle repair? Then get them altogether and quilt, cook or fix motorcycle (just keep the motorcycles themselves outside, please). The point is, anyone can start a smaller sized fellowship group, you don’t have to wait for the church staff or some board or committee to do it—you, yes, you, can do it all by yourself.
Now where we might need a bit of higher level leadership at some point would be in coordinating things among a dozen or so smaller scale fellowship groups, and that brings me to a longer-term suggestion about fellowship—FCCB might at some point, hire a staff person to serve as an Associate Minister for Fellowship and Small Groups, or something like that. That person would have responsibility for overseeing and developing a comprehensive program of both large scale and smaller scale fellowship groups and activities. Clearly the church doesn’t have the financial resources to do that at the moment, but in the longer run, it would be a smart investment that would pay off in a church whose members were continually becoming more closely bound together in the sort of relationships that support the larger communion and mission of the church.