

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

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New website

Our webpage is up and running.
Check it out. The address is

www.stmarkslutheranmiddleburgh.com

Prayer Ministry

You are invited to participate in a new prayer ministry. We meet on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. in St. Mark's sanctuary. If you are unable to attend and have a prayer request you would like lifted, please contact the church office or feel free to place your written request in the prayer box located in narthex.

Council has adopted a new policy for anyone that wishes to use the fellowship hall for an event. Going forward all requests are to be sent to Lisa Bartholomew. She can be reached at 231-9494. She will handle all the arrangements, scheduling, paperwork and payments. This will allow for a one point person contact rather than having too many people involved.

Prayers Concerns

Please lift the following people up in prayer:

Prayers for our new pastor
Jeff
Deb Brigadier's family
Stone and Decker families
Julie
Doris
Gene's mom
Dean

Upcoming Events

July 9 - Men's breakfast

July 11 - Council Meeting 6:00

**July 24 - Ecumenical worship
service front lawn of high school**

Speakers for our upcoming
July services:

July 3 - Pastor Dave Houck
July 10 - Mike Saccocio
July 17 - Pastor Dave Houck
July 24 - Worship service front lawn
of school
July 31 - Tom Hotaling

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Servers for July

July 3:

Acolyte - Dylan
Ushers - Sharon/Tom N.
Reader - Ethel
Greeter - Maurice
Prayer - Beth
Counter - Carrie

July 10

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - Gene/Chris
Reader - Ted
Greeter - Pat
Prayer - Ted
Counter - Debbie

July 17:

Acolyte - Dylan
Ushers - Dean/Lori
Reader - Sharon
Greeter - Janet
Prayer - Gene
Counter - Diane

July 31:

Acolyte - Dylan
Ushers - Dennis/Diane
Reader - Georgia
Greeter - Deb P.
Prayer - Ginny
Counter - Debbie

Virginia Peterson is now staying at the Northwood Rehab Rosewood Garden. If you would like to send her a card or visit her the address is 284 Troy Road, Rensselaer, NY 12144 or call her at 518-728-7696. I am sure she would love to hear from all of us!

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Happy Days !!!!!

Birthdays: July

July 7 - Terri Cronin
July 17 - Michael Harrison
July 22 - Janet Abrams

Anniversaries: July

July 10 - Jeremy and Jessica Gordon
July 21 - Terri and John Cronin

Zumba Classes will be
Thursdays at 9:30 in the
fellowship hall. Check the
calendar in the hallway for
more details.

Did you know St. Mark's offers
the following opportunities for
you and your family to
participate?

Phoebes - every Monday from 9-2 PM

Youth Sunday School - Held during
the worship service message

Adult Sunday School - Sundays from
9:15 - 10 AM (off for summer)

Prayer Ministry - every Thursday
night beginning at 5:30 PM

After School Program - every day
from 3 - 5:30 PM following school
schedule

Men's Prayer breakfast - second
Saturday of each month

Creative Women's Ministry - Fourth
Friday of the month at 7 PM

Dear God,
I am American,
What are you?
Robert

Call of a Pastor vs. 'Hiring and Firing'

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. — 1 Corinthians 1:1

Undoubtedly, I am writing these articles with an eye toward those congregations and pastors currently in the NALC Call Process. As this is one of my primary responsibilities as Assistant to the Bishop for Ministry and Ecumenism, I devote much of my time and energy to working with, listening to, and prayerfully guiding our pastors and congregations through the process.

One of the disappointments, however, in this work in the NALC is the realization that so many of our congregational leaders have little understanding of the "call" of the pastor, relying continually upon the mistaken notion that the council of the congregation "hires" their pastor. This naturally translates to the assumption that the council also has the authority to "fire" the pastor.

We could speculate upon the origin of such a mistaken understanding, but better that we simply acknowledge the reality, the harm that it does, and how we may more faithfully consider the call of the pastor, and so, the working relationship between pastor, council and congregation.

The NALC Manual on the Call Process states on page 9:

Calling a pastor is not the equivalent of "hiring an employee." Many in the congregation will be tempted to think in terms of secular employment: develop a pool of applicants, interview them all, select the best one, and fire them if they don't work out. The call process is much more relational and covenantal. Calling a pastor is much more like a marriage, and the call process more similar to finding a mate for life. In this sense, going slowly and intentionally, seeking God's will, and developing a relationship are more important than lining up skills and needs.

We all realize, I trust, that there are certain aspects of the calling of a pastor that relate to employment: the congregation votes to extend the call; the council, with congregational approval, is



Ministry Matters

Pastor David Wendel

Assistant to the Bishop
for Ministry and Ecumenism

responsible for setting compensation and benefits, reporting payment of compensation to the government, etc.

We are not arguing here that there are not some ways in which the congregation is employer and the pastor is an employee. The point being made, however, is that thinking of the pastor only as, or primarily as, an employee is detrimental to the relationship of pastor and congregation and will often lead to a deterioration in this relationship. Why?

First, the pastor, while acknowledging the aspects that have to do with "employment," understands himself or herself as called by God to this congregation. The action in the call of the pastor is first and foremost the work of God through His Holy Spirit leading and guiding the process. The congregation and the pastor are seeking God's will and once convinced that God intends for this congregation and this pastor to serve together, the congregational call indicates their acceptance of God's will.

In other words, when the congregation becomes convinced that God wants them to call *this* pastor to be their pastor, the congregational vote is an expression of "Thy will be done!" The ordination and installation rites reflect this understanding. We acknowledge, together, that the call comes from God, even as St. Paul understood his call as coming not from men but by the will of God.

This is important as the pastor must speak God's Word and God's will, even when it may make the hearers uncomfortable. When the pastor preaches

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God's Word, saying, "Thus says the Lord," the preacher must never say, "Thus says the Lord if it is all right with you, and you don't mind me saying it since you've hired me and I must please you." This does not provide the preacher with freedom to push his or her own agendas or wants or desires, but should free them to preach God's Word powerfully and boldly, in its fullness in both Law and Gospel.

Second, an attitude of "hiring" and "firing" the pastor is destructive to the relationship because it leads council leaders to think of themselves as "boss" of the pastor. This necessarily leads to an adversarial relationship, rather than a relationship built on trust, care and love for one another. It's in this way that we describe the pastor-congregation relationship as relational and covenantal, rather than employee-employer.

I believe the marriage image helps us to appreciate this. No marriage will survive and thrive if husband or wife thinks of himself as "boss" of the other. Together with the instruction in Ephesians 5 for the husband to be head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church, Paul also calls for husband and wife to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the Church, wives respecting their husbands.

Paul explains that within this essential relationship within God's order of creation, there is to be mutuality, respect, honor, love and trust. What's more, however, and what is often missed, is that St. Paul concludes saying, "This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church." (Ephesians 5:32 RSV).

Just as no healthy, sane man or woman considers that they are "hiring" a spouse whom they can "boss" around, no council or congregation is well-served by thinking they are "hiring" a pastor of whom they will be "the boss." Entering into a covenantal relationship of mutuality, respect, honor, love and trust will serve pastor and council well and finally will build up the Body of Christ as a whole and foster unity, harmony and peace within the congregation.

But — I can hear some council leaders protesting — how can we hold our pastor accountable?

Shouldn't there be accountability, goal-setting and evaluation? My simple answer is "Yes, and it goes both ways!"

The most unproductive process in most congregations is the anonymous congregational survey evaluating the pastor, or the annual review in which the council or executive committee sit the pastor down and hand the pastor a list of all the things he/she hasn't done in the past year.

Consider how that would be received in a marriage! This strategy for evaluating and holding the pastor accountable rarely achieves the desired outcome and often leads to an early departure of the pastor, often to the consternation of a majority in the congregation who may love and appreciate their pastor and won't understand the laundry list of complaints compiled to present to the pastor.

If you take nothing else away from this Ministry Matters article, then please remember this and share it with your congregation or congregational leaders:

Accountability and evaluation within the congregation should be mutual, respectful and aimed at how pastor and leaders can more faithfully and effectively build up mission and ministry within the congregation.

What does this look like in the congregation?

1. Each year, in a council retreat or other context, work together as pastor and church leaders to develop goals and strategies for implementation. Ask together, what will make our mission and ministry better, more faithful, more effective? Assign tasks and responsibilities that can be evaluated, adjusted and shared with others in the congregation so that all know what the "leadership team" — pastor and church leaders — will be working on in the coming year.
2. Work together to maximize strengths of the leadership team. Not every pastor or layperson has all the gifts needed for ministry. For example, if the pastor is not particularly skilled at financial oversight, form a finance team of skilled persons who will have primary oversight of finances.

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3. Every quarter, at least, take time at council meetings to review the goals and strategies, allowing every member of the leadership team to reflect on how they are doing individually, as committees or task forces, and as a team as a whole. The question should be, "How are we doing, together, to make mission and ministry happen in this place?"

4. Foster a cooperative, communicative environment among the leadership team (pastor, staff, elected council persons) where regular and expected evaluation and assessment happens with respect, honor and trust as the leadership team understands that a congregation's mission and ministry doesn't stand or fall because of the pastor alone, but that all share in faithfulness and effectiveness. Remember, any council or individual church leader who blames stagnation or decline of their congregation on the pastor solely isn't looking honestly at themselves or the council or the congregation. As in a marriage, both parties bear responsibility for the breakdown of the relationship — the pastor and the council and the congregation are responsible together for the health, vitality and fruitfulness of ministry.

5. Finally, when a council understands itself to be hiring a pastor, it will follow that at some point, they may decide it is their responsibility to fire their pastor. We all understand that there are times of difficulty and decline in congregations, and pastors have faults and shortcomings, as do we all. However, the act of a council to fire their pastor never achieves the desired outcome, as stated above. It always creates distrust, anger and bitterness within the congregation as a whole, and results in loss of members, loss of income, unhealthiness in the congregation which will surely be passed on to cloud and infect the next pastor/congregation relationship. Although council leaders may believe they are doing the right/righteous thing to "save" the congregation, this is never the case.

How does the council address situations without resorting to "firing" the pastor?

Follow the above suggestions, proactively, to avoid arriving at such a situation. Create a climate of

health, cooperation, communication and trust from the start of the pastor/parish relationship. Contact resource persons within the NALC, from outside the congregation to assist, guide and help find resolution and positive ways forward. The bishop's office exists to provide such assistance and support — one of the blessings of the NALC as a church body. Deans are currently forming Pastoral Care and Transition Teams (PCAT Teams) to be first responders within Mission Districts to provide early assistance and support, rather than when the situation has reached crisis level. Don't ignore issues, difficulties and tensions. As in marriage, the earlier we address complications in our relationships, the better chance for a fruitful outcome.

Please know that the positive energy and effort invested in the relationship between the pastor, the council and the congregation will not only help those involved in the leadership team, it will bear good fruit within the community as a whole and witness to the world how we Christians love and care for one another! It is, finally, all about our witness to a dark and unbelieving world, that Jesus Christ is the Light and that we, the baptized children of God, seek to "let His light so shine in us that others see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven!" (Matthew 5:16 and quoted in the LBW rite for Holy Baptism)

May God bless our pastors and congregations in developing and modeling healthy, strong and deepening relationships that give glory to God as we seek to follow Jesus Christ, together, as His disciples!

NALC congregations seeking pastors

The updated list of NALC congregations seeking to call pastors is available online at <http://thenalc.org/pastoral-vacancies>.

Full profiles of the congregations are available online on the NALC Network — nalcnetwork.com — in the Congregational Profiles group.

The online list is updated each month.