

## A "Pastoral Letter" from Pastor Bob

January, 2018



One of the factors that really excited me about our church when I first began to explore the possibility of being your senior pastor was the fact that some of our leaders had worked their way through a very important book entitled, *Pursuing God's Will Together*. I had read and digested the book a few years before and it profoundly influenced my philosophy and practice of spiritual leadership. Now that I have been with you for over six months, I know that some of the principles of spiritual discernment have taken root in our church's culture and that is very encouraging to me.

Now, we have an opportunity to test our ability to hear God's voice together. Earlier this week, I published a piece in our monthly newsletter detailing an opportunity that has emerged to partner with the Knox Prairie Community Kitchen (KPCK <http://www.knoxprairiekitchen.org>). Here's a portion of that letter:

During the Summer of 2016, our facility served as the preparation and distribution hub for feeding hundreds of needy children and families each weekday. Unfortunately, the Quad Cities Area Children's Food Program abruptly discontinued its operation because of mismanagement in The Cities. Galesburg's program was highly effective and exceeded expectations. The program's closure was a deep disappointment to us and to the local leadership.

But our successful venture with QCACFP raised the possibility of another community partnership that needs a new home in 2018: the Knox Prairie Community Kitchen (KPCK). Shortly after the children's program closed, the leadership of KPCK contacted us about using our facility to serve their twice-monthly meals. They are currently hosted by Central Congregational Church but anticipate that the venue will no longer be available by the summer of 2018. We have had very productive meetings throughout the fall to consider whether or not FBC should be the new home for KPCK. It could be that God is at work to open a door for us to share our hospitality with the community.

Since KPCK approached us, both the Ministry and Trustee Boards have discussed the topic and asked the Kitchen to secure an estimate of what the costs would be to renovate our facility in order to meet civic regulations and their needs. Lambasio Plumbing returned with an estimate of just under \$20,000 for the infrastructure alone (major plumbing and electrical work involving a large grease trap, enlarged plumbing lines, and other related costs). The estimate does not include the price of the equipment that would be needed: three-basin sink, commercial dishwasher system, commercial refrigeration, and other sundry expenses. The staff of the Kitchen have since revealed that the total cost may be as high as \$50,000 of which they would be able to raise \$10,000, leaving the funding requirement around \$40,000.

Wow! That's a lot of money.

If you're anything like me, and I suspect many of you are, you're conservative with your financial resources. When the initial bid was \$20,000, I thought, "OK. That's challenging, but I think we may be able to do it." \$40,000 may be another thing. I don't know. I'm wondering. I'm praying. And I'm talking with people.

I spend a lot of time reading books and blogs about leading the church in our contemporary American culture. From time to time, I'll even post things on FaceBook that I think may be helpful for you to digest

as well. Everything I read and all of the national buzz with leaders of evangelical churches like ours asserts **the urgency of the local church to turn its inward focus outward to the community**. That assertion resonates not only in my mind but also in my gut. The great majority of churches in America are declining. One of the most significant factors in reversing the downward spiral is for a local church to change from an inward to an outward focus. And it's not just talk. It has to be in all of our resources: time, energy, and finances.

That's why I'm excited about the question before us. I'm not pushing an agenda either way. I want us to pray, discuss, and discern together. I have honestly reached a place of holy indifference. I want nothing more and nothing less than God's clear direction on this issue. And we will discover God's direction through prayer and honest discussion together.

We've got to have faith. Yes! And we also have to ask the tough questions. Like...

- Does partnering with KPCK align with our mission and calling as a church?
- Will hosting the Kitchen help our church to grow? (It didn't for the current host.)
- Am I willing to give time and finances to this partnership?
- Can we pay for this out of memorial funds? (Yes, we can, in full or in part. But that will lower the principal of what we have invested and, therefore, our return. Is that prudent?)
- And, I suspect you would have more questions...

But I would also encourage you to carefully analyze the answers you might have to your questions. Our natural default is to resist change (true for everyone) and to balk at what it would cost me or the church. That's an inward focus; just the kind of thinking, if not challenged, that will keep us on a trajectory of slow decline. We have to shift our thinking outward, but we also have to be wise and prudent.

There's a lot of tension in this. And that's OK. If there weren't, then we wouldn't need God, would we? We'd just make a decision and roll with it. But we need to be guided by the Spirit in this question and we will find that guidance through prayer and honest dialogue together. It will take love-in-action and a bit of courage, but I think we are graced with ample portions of both.

In a discernment process, you keep your options open – not presuming on God. But this is how I see **the process moving forward** at this point. You now have a good deal of information. Feel free to discuss it – especially with church leaders. There's no secrets here. Pray about it – together and privately. We'll talk together at a congregational forum during our meal after the service on January 14<sup>th</sup>. The trustees will meet shortly after that and prayerfully discern how we should act, given the input from our discussion together.

Let us have faith and let us have courage to face this question openly and honestly. Let us have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church and a heart to follow obediently where he leads.

For Christ's Kingdom in all of us,

*Pastor Bob*

Pastor Bob Myers