

PROPOSAL FOR SHEPHERDING PROGRAM ST. PETER LUTHERAN CHURCH

WHY DO WE NEED A PROGRAM/

With all the other programs being pushed in our congregation, why should we take on another one?

My understanding of the challenge to provide ongoing spiritual care to the members of St. Peter led me to suggest, in the fall of 1986, that St. Peter Church Council organize a Shepherding Ministry for the purpose of providing for the general spiritual oversight of the members of our church. At that time the Church Council did not think such a program would be necessary or feasible.

I still believe that the need for such a program still exists at St. Peter. I base this on the following observations:

1. The Church Council has struggled to arrive at a method of monitoring the worship attendance of our members. It is generally understood in church work that attendance at worship is a prime indicator of spiritual health. At the present time there is no reliable way of monitoring the worship attendance of our members.
2. The active membership of St. Peter is spread over an area covering about 300 square miles. Our members go to hospitals in Streator, Pontiac, Bloomington, Eureka, and Peoria on a regular basis. This means that a great deal of time is spent on the road. If the congregation were divided into small units with a responsible member of the congregation given general spiritual oversight we could beat the "distance game" and do more effective ministry among our members.
3. Assimilation of new members is a difficult process in congregations as established as St. Peter Lutheran Church. After the initial "flush" of adult confirmation and new members reception, new members stay active when they are able to establish a significant relationship with an established member of the congregation. New members could discover such a relationship in small groups designed to provide "first line" spiritual care.
4. St. Peter Lutheran Church has a rich resource of people who are willing, have the time, and possess the gifts for performing caring ministry among our members. At the present time many of these fine Christian people are praying for and calling on the members of St. Peter. But these efforts have no support system and are totally unorganized. A Shepherding Program would provide support, organization, and recognition to those members of our congregation who are continually caring for our members.

These general observations remain a daily concern in our ministry at St. Peter. It is my belief that our congregation could derive great benefit from organizing itself into small groups to provide general spiritual oversight among the members.

Many congregations have tried shepherding programs, some successfully, some not. The program is better understood by taking a look first at what Shepherding

is NOT designed to do, then at what it IS designed to do.

IS NOT:

1. The Shepherding Program is not intended to replace the regular visits of the pastor in the congregation.
2. The Shepherding Program will not reduce the pastor's visiting load. When the program is properly used, and information is forwarded to the pastor from small group Shepherds, pastor's visits will increase.
3. The Shepherding Program is not intended to be an evangelism effort. Small groups will be made up of active members of the congregation.
4. The Shepherding Program is not an effort to offer personal counseling to congregational members. While these matters may arise in the course of visiting, these matters should be referred to the pastor.

IS:

1. The Shepherding Program is aimed at getting one responsible person in touch with 10-12 families of the congregation for the purpose of general spiritual oversight.
2. The Shepherding Program will be concerned with maintaining attendance at worship and Sunday School.
3. The Shepherding Program is intended to pass on to the pastor such information as he may need to provide for the deeper spiritual needs of the members of the congregation.
4. The Shepherding Program will provide group leaders with the training necessary for the fulfillment of their responsibilities.
5. The Shepherding Program will be the responsibility of the Board of Elders, together with the pastor, who will provide for its organization and ongoing support.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The membership of St. Peter would be divided into groups of 10-12 households. This could start with the total membership or a pilot of 6-8 groups to get the program started.

Enough Shepherds would be enlisted in order to have one Shepherd for each group. Ideally, these Shepherds would live in the same area as their group.

Each Shepherd would be responsible for attending an orientation session. This orientation would give the Shepherds an overview of the program as well as some Biblical foundations.

In the first year, each Shepherd would visit every household in their group. This would most likely be a get-acquainted visit, but Shepherds should be aware and sensitive to the needs of their groups and communicate these to the pastor, if the occasion calls for it.

As the Shepherds become acquainted with their groups, they should become aware of their worship habits. If a member of the group is absent from worship for an unknown reason, the Shepherd should telephone and express the fact that they were missed at worship. Practical pointers for making these calls will be covered in the orientation session for Shepherds.

As the Shepherds become acquainted with their groups, it is hoped that the groups will meet at least once a year for the purpose of building group identity and support. The occasion for the meetings may be set by the Shepherd or reached by group consensus. Suggestions for group meetings and their purpose will be covered in the orientation session for Shepherds.

The Shepherding Program, as it grows in the life of a congregation, presents many opportunities for expanded ministry among the members of the congregation. The Shepherd Groups could possibly become Bible Study groups or groups organized for church or community projects. If there is interest in deepening the role of the Shepherds in the program, additional training in Christian Caregiving could be offered. Such training would allow our Shepherds to offer spiritual care for the members of the congregation.

Shepherding is a practical, organized way of expressing our care for each other in the Body of Christ. It is my hope that the St. Peter Church Council will recommend its use for our congregation.

In Christ's Service,

Pastor Joseph Bleakley

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