

Reaching the Next Generation

September 4, 2016

Psalm 78:1-6 calls us to consider our ministry to the next generation: “My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old— things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. **We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.** He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”¹

This morning, I'd like to tell you a story. It's a story that comes out of the history of our church; the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji. Well, we used to be called the Carr Lake Bible Chapel. But, I don't have time to tell you the whole story. Nor can I give you as much detail as I'd like to. But, let me share part of our story; a few select details that are pertinent to our focus this morning. Here we go.

A long time ago in a place not very far away, our church made a decision. According to our written history, the decision began at least as far back as 1948; that's 68 years ago. That's when our first fulltime pastor, Robert Page, and his wife, Helen, began more fully developing our church's ministry. They decided to add several things to our church's ministry focus: one of them, was a decision to add... a youth group!

That sounds pretty commonplace to our ears today. But, back then, it was something new and somewhat revolutionary. This decision to emphasize ministry to youth and children continued to strengthen under godly leaders throughout our church's history.

In many ways, Scripture teaches us that passing on the faith to the next generation is primarily the job of the parents. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

Discipling the next generation of believers does continue to be a primary role for parents. However, our church recognized long ago that the church's youth ministry can be a huge asset and a helpful ally to families during their children's growing up years. It also recognized that many children and youth do not have the benefit of being raised in a Christian home. And so, we have a responsibility to disciple not only our own children, but to reach out to the children in our community as well.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 gives us our mandate to reach out to people of all ages: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

And so, far back into our church's history, we recognized this mandate to be Christ's ambassadors and part of our focus was on young people. The young people were active in the life of the church, including in its fundraising efforts to add onto the building. Some of you already know the story of “Profit the Pig.” Back in 1951, one boy bought a

¹ All Scriptures are from the NIV 2011 unless otherwise noted.

little piglet, named him “profit,” and watched him grow and put on the “pounds of profit” as he ate greedily. I really wish we had a picture of that!

Even back then, our church came to realize that young people are not intended to be part of the church in the future; they are part of the church now. 1 Tim. 4:12 makes this plain: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” If we under-challenge young people, we fail at a critical stage of discipleship! And this is just as true for us adults. If you don’t get out and practice your faith and live out your life on mission with God, you’ll never grow into the mature follower of Christ that God intends.

“In the fall of 1962 the Carr Lake people called John and Charlotte Kerth of Chicago to be their new pastoral family...The Kerth’s put special emphasis on working with the youth of the community...Bruce Van Wyk filled the position of youth pastor; the only time this role has been used in the church’s history to date.”² As we can see, the history of our church having a Youth Pastor position continues today.

Therefore, our church had its first Youth Pastor 54 years ago. Pastor Mike Neumann turns 32 this month. So, our church had a Youth Pastor position ~22 years before he was even born. Isn’t history fascinating to think about? God is at work all over the world in ways we can’t even begin to imagine. And, in His providence, He is weaving together a beautiful tapestry of connections for His purposes and His glory. In a word: Awesome!

In 1967 Pastor Roger Adams was called and he encouraged more participation by the young people in music and in the church services. And, life went on; ministry continued. But, the church then ran into a rough patch. By 1974 we were seriously considering closing our church down. Only 17 people showed up for the vote; 6 voted to close, 11 voted to stay open. By a pretty narrow margin, we stayed open.

In 1975 Pastor Dave Hathaway came and things began to turn around a little. Part of that was a discussion of possibly joining the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji (EFCA). One reason listed for joining the EFCA was knowing that we needed help in finding a new pastor.

By 1976 our church was identified as the EFC of Bemidji. In 1978, with the help of the EFCA, we hired a young rookie out of Indiana name Frederic Meeker Martin (9/23/52). He was just 26 years old.

By 1984 the church had grown from under 100 to just over 200 people. But there was a problem: the need for more helpers and more financial giving. Our church conducted an appraisal and found that 10% of the people were doing 90% of the work. One particular need that was pointed out was the need to hire an Associate Pastor to help Pastor Fred.



The church continued to do lots of great ministry, including a focus on global ministries. But, local growth plateaued. 1985 proved to be a disappointing year in several ways including the shortage of help with youth ministries.

In 1986, “Don Emery was chosen as Pastor of Discipleship and Visitation and Pastor Martin was grateful for the relief of some of his work overload.”³ Pastor Don gained a reputation for “hundreds (literally) of visits and phone calls.”⁴ Part of his role also included helping with Kids Club and the College & Career Group.

In 1989, the long range planning committee made a report which included hiring a Youth Pastor soon. That’s actually where one of our church history documents ends... In another document⁵, you’ll see that in 1993 we had Matt Sconce as our Pastor of Family Education. By 1996 we had Mick Marino as our Pastor of Christian Education

² This sermon is based heavily on the information from *History: Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji, Growing Together for God’s Glory*, Charissa Grover, October 1989, p. 2 and others. We owe a huge debt to Charissa’s hard work and diligent recording of key points in our church’s history.

³ Grover, p. 8

⁴ Grover, p. 10

⁵ EFCA Yearbook Directory 1975-2015 statistics for EFC Bemidji

and Youth. In the year 2000 Pastor Mick transitioned to Associate Pastor and Jerry Johnson, that's me, was hired as Pastor of Youth and C.E. For 16 years I served in that role before transitioning to Lead Pastor this past spring.

Obviously, I skipped over a lot of our history this morning. We don't have time to give the full history of our church. But, I thought it was important for us this morning, to recognize, that over the years, we've made decisions. We voted "yes" or "no" on various issues that have impacted our ministry direction for years to come. And now, as a church, we are searching for a Pastor of Youth and Young Adults. We'll vote today on Pastor Mike Neumann. We are prayerfully seeking God's leading in this next chapter. The vote is at 12:15 p.m. today. And that vote could impact our youth ministry for years to come.

There are copies of the job description available. The title is "Pastor of Youth and Young Adults." The qualifications and ministry responsibilities are all laid out in that document. The principal function of this position is to, "Oversee the church's discipleship ministries from birth to 25 years old, with a focus on youth in grades 6-12 and young adults."

Pastor Mike Neumann is the candidate being recommended to our church. We'd like you to hear his heart and to get to know him a little better as a person this morning. We've invited him to share his story of faith and call to ministry with us this morning. Pastor Mike, we welcome you to come now and share your story with us...⁶

Psalm 33:11 reminds us that the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, The purposes of his heart through all generations. And so, we trust in God to lead us in each decision we make. Amen.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on September 4, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

⁶ MIKE SHARED for about 15 minutes. Visit www.efcbemidji.org to hear his audio. We do not have it in transcript form.