

First & Emmanuel Lutheran Church

church@firstlutheranbham.org

www.firstlutheranbham.org

*2057 Highland Avenue South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205-2497
(205) 933-0380*

*5227 Cahaba Valley Cove
Birmingham, Alabama 35242
(205) 981-7788*

*“For I know the plans I have for you,”
declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.
Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me,
and I will listen to you.
You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all your heart.”
– Jeremiah 29:11-13*

September 19th, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Back in January of 2007, Todd & Leigh Dorrough, Mike & Myra Grund, Krista Wanat, and myself (Pastor Nathan) attended the “From Embers to a Flame” conference at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. The premise of the conference is that it is God’s intent to revitalize sick or dying churches.

Both encouraged by the conference and alarmed by a slow but steady decline in our own vitality & numbers in ministry, First and Emmanuel decided to go forward with the revitalization strategy coming out of the conference, “Fanning the Flame.” Focusing not on gimmicks or techniques, but rather on eight scriptural foundations that a healthy church:

1. remembers the past.
(Deuteronomy 6:20, 32:&)
2. repents of its sins.
(Jeremiah 15:5-10, Daniel 9:1-19; Mark 1:14, etc.)
3. is Gospel-driven and Christ-centered.
(Matthew 28:19-20; Hebrews 12:1-3)
4. spiritually nourishes and forms people through discipleship.
(Matthew 28:20)
5. prays in all situations.
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
6. is built upon and empowered by the word of God.
(Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 8:24-27)
7. has a clear identity of its mission, vision, and values.
(Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 14:25-35; Romans 8:28)
8. develops and deploys leaders.
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

Over the period of sixteen months, starting in April of 2007, we as a church set out to seek God's will in how He would have us revitalize His church. We had retreat days, monthly implementation and review meetings, days of fasting and prayer, and a couple of very significant voter's meetings.

From the beginning it was clear that our greatest weakness was the structure of our church. While some of this difficulty was the result of a confusing and counter-productive governance structure, the greatest cause was the split of one ministry in two locations with not enough people (or pastors) to properly support healthy ministry. At a May 2008 voters' meeting we concluded that God was calling us to reunite the two congregations back at one location.

On June 21st, leaders from both congregations met to deliberate on where to reunite: at First; at Emmanuel; or at a third location. The leadership decided to recommend that we reunite at a third location in order to pursue the ministry to those we feel most passionate about and equipped for: families. Following a couple of months of deliberations and prayers, including two town-hall meetings and another day of prayer and fasting, we concluded voting on Sunday, September 14th, with the decision by almost two-thirds of the voting members that God is leading us to reunite at a third location.

What this means for the immediate future is that the now united church council is tasked with the responsibility of the sale of our two current properties, as well as searching for a new location to continue our more than one-hundred-and-twenty years of ministry.

Even as we look forward to what God has in store for us, we are confident that God is with us in today. Although we are looking for the best place for us to engage in the ministry He has called us to, we know that He has called us to ministry in our current situation. So we will continue to seek God's face, to discern where He is leading us, even as we move to implement new ministries in the here and now.

Whatever the emotions or agreements coming out of this process, my prayer remains the same: that we would seek and do God's will. I ask that it be your prayer for us as well, so that we might make, baptize, and teach disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Rev. Nathaniel Schuetze
Pastor, First and Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen