

## October 2011 Cottage Meetings Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Introduction

Over the past 5 years, New Heights (NHLC) has undergone significant change. Throughout this time, your Vision Team (Church Council) has continued to focus on how we as a faith community can best fulfill the mission God has for us. As we make this journey together, we want to be as healthy and vibrant as we can be. Recognizing that extensive change creates tremendous stress in any faith community, the Vision Team has spent the past six months doing much reading, researching, discussing, and most importantly, praying to discern how we can best move forward in fulfilling what God has planned for New Heights. As a result, the Vision Team gained insight into the current status of our church and clarity on where we go from here. Cottage Meetings were held during October to share this with the congregation. The following FAQs summarize the key information shared at the meetings.

### **The Church in Transition – New Heights is currently a ‘Transitional Church’**

#### **1. *What is the difference between a “pastoral” and “program” size church?***

The pastoral size church has an average worship attendance (ASA) of 75 – 140. The pastor’s role is central and functions primarily as a chaplain, fostering relationships with all the members. The ministries focus on the needs of the members (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.).

The program size church has an ASA of 225 – 400. The pastor’s role is still central, but shifts. Ministries and programs address the needs of not only members, but also reaches out into the community. There is an organized paid and volunteer staff to address the various ministries and programs. The church has a “matrix” organization – members don’t know everyone, but continue to have relationships with group(s) that they have something in common with.

#### **2. *Why is NHLC considered to be a church in “transition”?***

NHLC had an ASA of 130 in 2005. We have grown to as high as 190 and are now around 175. That puts us right in between the “pastoral” and “program” size church. In fact, we have been there for the past five years.

We are seeing some things have changed from the experience we are used to with the pastoral size church. We don’t know everyone anymore and the pastor isn’t doing all the things we are used to a pastor doing. On the other hand, however, many members are looking for programs and ministries (typical of the program size church) that we are not able to offer. Both are symptoms for a church in transition.

In some ways, we’ve been trying to act like a program size in a couple of areas. One example is the Visitation and Befrienders Ministries we have put in place to help with pastoral care. We’ve tried some part-time paid staff positions, the most successful being children’s ministry. Early on we decided that was one area we needed to focus on and decided to invest there. We had 8 children attending Sunday School in 2005 and have seen that number grow to over 100 now attending each Wednesday night.

However, we don’t have the staff or systems to support all the ministries and programs that are needed.

### **3. *Why can't we stay where we are at?***

Not having the staff or systems to support the program and ministries puts significant stress on the pastor and the leadership. We are trying to do a lot of things, but don't have sufficient staff or systems to support them. Things don't get done as well as they should and we are not able to offer the new programs and ministries that are called for. This is not a healthy environment for either the pastor or the church leaders. It is not sustainable and burn out of those key resources will occur.

A church cannot stay in the transition state for too long or they will start seeing people leave. We've started to see this already – our ASA has declined from 190 to 175. Some that left have been willing to share why – and there is a number of reasons. Some have felt the stress of this transition state and others have elected to go where there are the programs they are looking for.

### **4. *Why isn't going back to the "pastoral" size church an option?***

The pastoral size church is not sustainable. There are several reasons why we are seeing a decline in the number of these churches.

The cost to keep a pastor is prohibitive. A pastoral size church generally finds they are hiring a pastor right out of seminary and/or at a reduced schedule.

The demographics are mostly older adults. The healthy, sustainable church includes members that are multi-generational. Without the younger generation, a church will die a slow death.

Generally, Boomers and young adults are looking for more program offerings than are available in the pastoral size church. In addition, they aren't bound by denomination and are not held by community boundaries. They are willing to travel to go to the church that offers what they are looking for.

We believe God has plans for New Heights to meet important ministry needs in the Wisconsin Heights area for generations to come. In order to fulfill that mission we need to be a church that has the resources to still be here and be thriving. The pastoral size church will be here for a while, but eventually will not be sustainable.

### **5. *What is the council's recommendation?***

So the council was faced with a big decision - do we make changes to sustain and grow our church and ministry to a healthy 'program size' church – or go back to where we were at as a 'pastoral size' church. The council decision was unanimously to grow so that God's work here could be sustained and thrive.

The focus then shifted to how we make the resources available to sustain and grow our ministries and to lay out a clear direction for fulfilling God's mission at New Heights.

## **Three Year Goals**

### **6. *What are the three year goals and where can I find them?***

The three year goals include a ministry plan, staffing plan and faculties plan.

The ministry plan addresses the three areas that make up our mission statement – worship, serve and grow. The twenty four goals listed lay out what we need to do to grow into a healthy sustainable program size church.

The staffing plan looks to put in place a staffing plan that supports our pastor and future growth. The immediate focus is to add a new position as described in the next section.

The facilities plan for the next three years is fairly simple – pay off the land and put a plan in place for building. More about that below as well.

Copies of the three year goals are available on our website and also in the entrance areas at both church buildings.

## **New Staff Position**

### **7. *How is the new position funded?***

We were delighted to find that the ELCA offers grants for churches like New Heights – churches in transition. They recognize that it is hard to get out of the transitional state without some help with the resources it takes to get there. The grant is a tiered grant meaning that we get around \$30,000 the first year, \$20,000 the second year, and \$12,000 the third year. The intent is that as our congregation grows, we will be able to fund the position on our own.

We are under no obligation to continue the position after the grant. If we find we cannot afford to fund the position on our own, we have no obligation to continue with it. Of course our hope is that as our church family continues to grow we will be in a position to continue with this ministry.

### **8. *What will this new position be accountable for?***

When we looked at our mission and the three year goals, there was one area we did not have staff focused on – that is “Serve”. It fell on Pastor Rob’s plate, but with his focus on Worship and Grow it wasn’t getting the attention it needed. The new position will focus on welcoming and shepherding guests, helping all members to identify their spiritual gifts, and then connecting people to ministry and volunteer opportunities.

### **9. *Who did we hire and when does she start?***

Jane Mount has been hired as the new Connecting Ministries Coordinator and will begin this new role in January 2012. However, you may have already seen Jane around. She and her husband, Ken, have started attending worship and other events to start getting to know our church family.

Jane did go through the formal interview process and the interview team unanimously agreed that she was the right one for the job. If you haven’t heard the story yet, ask Jane or Pastor Rob how she found her way to New Heights. We are absolutely thrilled to have her on board.

## **Centralize Worship**

### **10. *Why is it necessary to move all worship services to the same location?***

Moving the worship services to one location is one of the goals identified in the worship plan.

Moving the traditional service over to the Black Earth location will allow that service to grow. We feel there are many people that like to be part of that worship experience but aren’t for various reasons. For the non-regular church-goer, the Mazo location feels like it’s at capacity. That statement is grounded by research that shows that a church “feels” full when 75-80% of desired seating (e.g. not the front row) is filled. It just is not comfortable for many to squeeze into a full pew or to sit up front.

In addition, moving the traditional service will make both a cry room and staffed nursery available to families with young children. There are young families that would enjoy the traditional service but may not attend because of feeling uneasy with noisy children.

Having both services at the same location will provide an opportunity to do some special events between the services. This may include a bible study, special hospitality, events targeted for a specific group, congregational meetings, etc.

It's been three years since we merged to become New Heights Lutheran Church. Sometimes we can easily see and feel like we are one – especially on Wednesday nights. On Sundays, however, it still feels like we are two separate churches. Sharing one space for worship will help us to think and act as one.

Another important reason for having the worship services in one location is the new staff position. Much of what Jane will be doing as the Connecting Ministries Coordinator is on Sunday morning – before and after the worship service. She will not be able to support both services if they are not at the same location.

**11. When will this happen?**

The traditional service will be moved to the Black Earth location in January 2012.

**12. Does this mean we are closing the Mazo building?**

No, not at all. The worship service will be moved to the Black Earth location, but the Mazo building will still be available and used for other events.

**Facilities Plan**

**13. When will the existing church buildings be put up for sale?**

We are looking at putting both buildings up for sale in the Spring of 2012. No exact date has been set. Putting the buildings up for sale will allow us to take a look at what opportunities are out there. We are not obligated to accept an offer and have the option of declining an offer that is not acceptable.

**14. What authority does the council have in selling the buildings?**

The church council can put the buildings up for sale, but cannot sell the building without gaining congregation approval via a congregational vote.

We have worked hard to ensure these FAQs accurately reflect the information that was communicated at the cottage meetings. However, as with all written material, it is subject to interpretation by the reader. If you have any questions, concerns, or need clarification on any points, please reach out to Pastor Rob or any of the council members. We sincerely look forward to working together in our continued journey in God's mission for New Heights.

God's Blessings,

*Pastor Rob  
Ginger Shomberg  
Tricia Passage  
Don Wallace*

*Kim Amundson  
Michael Roesch  
Ginny Nelson  
David Seymour*