



Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship

September 2020 Newsletter



The Board Report

Hello Folks! It's been a long time since you've heard from us. But despite COVID, the church closing for a time and not having the technology to keep in touch with one another, the Lord has been at work in our church in some exciting ways.

After our dear friend, mentor and prayer warrior Jo-Ann Swenson died last summer, the Board began seeking the Lord on what He wanted for the future of Bethlehem. We set up a "What is the Future of BAF Committee" comprised of Karin Regher, Jeremy Zehr, Alan Edward and myself; all of us attenders at BAF. What we thought would be about 4 meetings turned into a nine month journey.

We started out seeking input from our congregation. What was important to them about BAF? If we closed, how would that affect them? If we stayed open, what would they like to see changed? Then the committee set about looking at their answers, seeking the Lord for scripture and examined where we were at as a church. Throughout many meetings, we considered all possibilities. We gathered together to seek the Lord on each option with an individual prayer time first, then coming together to share.

At the beginning of each meeting each of us spent time relinquishing what we wanted and also what we didn't want in order to hear what the Lord wanted. This was a very important part of the process and not always an easy one.

In time, unanimously we felt the Lord wanted us to stay open. From a human viewpoint, this seemed a silly decision as we are so small. But we weren't responding to a human viewpoint. Then the process began of what we were to look like, what needed

to change if we stayed open? Again after much relinquishing and prayer we unanimously felt the Lord was leading us to hire a part time pastor. But who? For the last 7 years we had wanted to hire a pastor but had more or less given up as we couldn't find anyone for the position.

Then, somewhat like our eyes were opened, one of our own came into view. He has quietly attended the church for years, has some training, has volunteer pastored at some Main Street mission churches as well as some others and has preached for us a few times. Most of us did not know him very well. After a series of interviews where he shared about his life and how recently he felt the Lord was prompting him to something new but didn't know what, we invited him to be our pastor for 10 hours a week. (all we can afford at this time), conditional on the congregations' approval. The church family agreed with this suggestion with much handclapping and hollering!

Lyle Blackbird is indigenous, (our congregation expressed the desire for more indigenous leadership), spent some years growing up in Winnipeg's North End and experienced some turbulent times in his boyhood. He understands the pain and brokenness of the people in our community. He is able to contextualize this in his sermons and in caring for our people. We are excited to have him as our pastor, even though it is just for 10 hours a week. His main job will be to preach on Sundays so that we have continuity. But he has a huge heart for outreach so we will see where the Lord leads us with that. We have much for which to thank the Lord!

Beth Wilton for the BAF Board



Meet Lyle Blackbird, Our New Pastor

Here is a brief interview with Lyle:

Tell us a bit about your childhood: I grew up in the North and West ends of Winnipeg which included a CFS group home for a few years. I often went to the reserve in summertime to be with my grandparents as it was a safe place. My mother was a residential school survivor. She had struggles with alcoholism and led a dysfunctional life that was the residue of that "legacy". That sometimes made home life chaotic with its violence and alcohol.

Continued on next page...

Make a Donation

If you are interested in making a donation to Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship, you can donate safely online through our website, or see other options on our Giving page. www.bethlehem.ca

YFC Summer Work Force Update**

Any time you can run an entire summer youth program during a pandemic, I'd call it a success. Two weeks have passed since our last day of programming without reports of any positive covid-19 test results. I can now say with confidence we made it without spreading more than the gospel! Pandemic aside, this summer was memorable for a number of reasons. Forty-five students registered this year with 25-30 actively involved each programming day. Youth worked at different businesses and for residents in the area. We distributed over \$5000 in honorarium cheques over two months of programming clearly showing that the youth, local businesses and residents were on board and ready to work together. The summer staff seemed handpicked by God. Each performed admirably, not only caring for their particular responsibilities with excellence, they did it while forging meaningful relationships with the youth. Each leader brought to the table unique giftings. This year's theme was the often confusing notion of the Kingdom of God. Each week a different leader taught on the what, who, where, why and how of the Kingdom, making it clear Jesus held the keys offering full access to all who would trust and follow his steps starting now and for eternity! Although there were no first time decisions to be Christians, the evaluations the youth filled in clearly indicated the lesson either made them think or encouraged those who already believed. Either way, the doors were definitely opened to continue the dialogue!

Thank You Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship for your prayers and constant support!

Ian Croatto, Work Force Director

** Work Force runs out of the church building and although BAF isn't involved with them, we are impressed with what they do with the youth of our community!



Meet Pastor Lyle, continued...

How did you become a believer: My fiancé started to go back to church and invited me. I went out of curiosity. By then I was struggling with alcohol and wanted to stop. I asked the minister to pray for me to stop which he did. A few months later I realized something had happened but I couldn't explain it. The desire to drink was totally gone. It got my attention that the Lord would touch me in this way. That drew me to continue attending church at the Indian Metis Pentecostal Church on Main St and I slowly got into the church culture.

How did life change: I began to teach Sunday school, helped out with Bible Studies and filled in when the pastor wasn't there. Then I became an assistant pastor. So I started to preach when I was 30 years old at various churches. Now I am 56. I got married to Nancy and had a family. We have 2 grown boys, 3 teenage daughters and 2 grandsons. I was drawn to ministry but struggled with that because I often felt that ministers were cut from a different bolt of cloth than the rest of us. I thought I wasn't good enough for that. I also had a full time job so had to work at balancing that with full time ministry.

How did you end up at BAF: A number of years ago we moved close by the church and I started to attend. Four years ago I started assisting with the men's Bible study at BAF and gradually took it over. In the last year or so I have been a guest preacher on Sundays as well.

Lately I'd felt a strong push from the Lord to be in ministry with the people from the neighbourhood but I didn't know where or when. Then I got a call asking if I'd be interested in the part time pastor position at BAF. About the same time, we found out we had to move – in 3 weeks. I prayed that if God wanted me in this position then he would open up a place for us to live in the neighbourhood as I felt that was really important. Three weeks later we moved into a really nice apartment in the neighbourhood! After talking a few times with the committee, we felt this is where I was to be.

What now: It's been 3 months since I started and it has been a very positive and supportive environment. But it is also heart breaking because of the condition of the community. There are a lot of addictions, drugs and poverty and everything that goes along with that lifestyle, not the least being how it humiliates people. My dream for the church would be that we all become full participants of the gospel in serving our neighbourhood.