

**Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.** (1 Peter 5:2-3)

That is the mandate given to the pastors and deacons of this church. The mandate occasionally requires that the Board of Deacons make hard decisions. They have made such a decision, which they announced two weeks ago.

BVBC has not been able to fund fully the ministry programs and the salaries of its employees going back to 2007 before building this new sanctuary. In 2010 all employees took significant pay cuts, and three staff positions were eliminated from the budget because of new building expenses and because of the economic recession. Many of you have experienced the same where you work.

Now, three years later, it has become clear to the board that staff obligations the church assumed when money was plentiful in 2003 are not sustainable in our leaner and uncertain economic times. So, the board will recommend in the May budget meeting to eliminate one part-time administrative staff position and three pastoral staff positions from the church's 2014 budget. Many of you have experienced the same where you work.

### **Anger and Sadness**

The decision affected two people on the Pastoral Staff: Dianna Shatley, Director of Missions, and Mark Smith, Teaching Pastor. The board has asked them to look for new jobs, starting now. Their departure from the staff with generous severance packages hit some people very hard. They didn't like the decision or the way it was done. The emotions I have seen were anger and sadness.

Christians are ambivalent about anger. We are supposed to love each other and be at peace with each other. Anger can violate that in disturbing ways. So, let me offer some guidance: anger is okay in this church. After all, Jesus Himself showed anger on more than one occasion. There must be an appropriate way to be holy and to be angry.

The Apostle Paul actually called on Christians in Ephesians 4:26 to be angry, and in the next breath he put proper boundaries around anger. He said: **In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.**

Anger has a proper place in the moral behavior of Christians, but we have to guard against our anger becoming sin. The easiest way that happens is by what you say or write in anger. You can't take it back, no matter how much you hurt someone else or how much you regret it. That's what makes us ambivalent about anger: we know it can do great harm in an instant.

As we share Communion, take stock of your anger over the past two weeks. Did you hurt people by what you said? Do you have regrets? As you hold Christ in your hand with the bread and cup, be transparent with Him about your answers to those questions.

### **Could I Be Wrong?**

Now, I need to ask you a different kind of question. If you don't like the board's decision, would you entertain the possibility that the board's decision is best for the church?

That's hard to do.

Before you say you can't do it, think about something. Many people participated last Sunday in the town hall meetings with Brett Dorsch and Craig Montgomery, the chairman and vice-chairman of the board. They were on their feet for five hours, listening to your concerns and explaining the board's decision. How did they handle that? In the words of 1 Peter 5, did they lord it over you, or were they examples to you of courtesy and restraint? Did they strike back? Did they demean your questions and emotions? Did they ever say to you, "We prayed and deliberated, and the decision we reached is the will of God, and you need to fall in line, or you are out of the will of God?"

The board unanimously believes it made a good decision. It also knows that the wisdom of a hard decision may not be clearly seen for take a long time. The deacons recognize that time could prove them wrong. Will you do that too?

As you hold Christ in your hand with the bread and cup, ask God to help you to entertain the possibility that the board's decision might be the best thing for BVBC.

### **The Future**

I need to propose one more matter for your consideration. Do we have the leadership to guide our church into its future? If you participated last Sunday in the town hall meetings with Brett Dorsch and Craig Montgomery, how do you think they handled the withering cocktail of anger and sadness they faced for five hours? Would you like to do what they did? Brett is 50. Craig is 36. They are the tip of the iceberg. There is an astonishing body of teenagers, 20-, 30-, and 40-somethings whose capacity for leadership right now takes my breath away. These men and women can build the kind of church BVBC needs to become in the next ten years. Don't let anger and sadness about the board's decision blind you to this human treasure Christ has given our congregation.

As you hold Christ in your hand with the bread and cup, pray for these young, emerging leaders, and ask God if He would permit you to be part of what He is about to do in this church.

### **Communion**

If anyone is thinking, "I didn't come to hear this kind of sermon," I can sympathize. You are a guest. You have your own problems. You may not like church politics. But maybe what you've heard tells you something important about this church. We can make tough decisions. We listen to each other. We can handle anger and sadness. We care for each other. We can get through this together. And what better place to say all this than here with the cross above us and the Lord's Supper in our midst to unite us.

"Before us the table is spread. Here awaits the wine. Here awaits the bread. Here, where our souls are fed." Our souls are fed here, because the bread and wine, which we can hold and taste, reassure us in a material way that God is merciful to Man. If you have confessed openly that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then, come, eat and drink the Supper of the Lord, and be at peace.