

The Church Bulletin Board – such a simple thing. . . .

Rev. Bill was not only new to this particular church, he was new to ordained ministry in general. This was his first assignment after being ordained, and he was just a trifle nervous about it all. After a career of some two decades in the business world, Bill had heeded a call to ministry, and now here he was, right in the middle of it. He brought a lot of experience from his business days, and either a fresh outside perspective or a stunning lack of experience, depending on whom you asked.

One thing he noticed very quickly was that it was not easy to communicate with the folks in the pews. He could visit, of course, and did as often as he could, but that inevitably reached only a small group at any one time. Even Sunday morning services presented a challenge. He quickly discovered that an hour could disappear very quickly, and both he and the congregation didn't want to spend any more of that hour than absolutely essential dealing with "non-worship" stuff. And going longer than an hour was not an option.

So how could he get the word out about all the things that seemed to land on his desk? The notices from Conference (and Presbytery, and General Council), information about community events and opportunities, and a host of other things crossed his desk in a never-ending stream, and he sometimes despaired of ever being able to deal with them himself, let alone get the information in them out to the congregation. Yet he believed that this was part of what the church needed to be: a centre for exchanging information about and with the larger community, including the church but reaching well beyond the church walls as well.

One day Bill realized that the way he came to deal with much of this material was to spread it out on the floor, then group it in whatever ways seemed to make sense. This process made the sheer volume of material a little more manageable, and it also helped him to see possible connections. It was a short step from that realization to the idea of a bulletin board for the church. (The floor, after all, was just a bulletin board laid flat.) He gathered a couple of people from the congregation who had some interest in building, and before long, there was an elegant, free-standing bulletin board in the main entrance to the church. Bill was convinced that his communication problems were almost solved.

But it turned out to be a little more complicated. He began to hear comments like, "I didn't see that information. Was it on the bulletin board?" A little follow-up showed that there were a couple of problems.

Most people entered the church from the parking lot (through the back door), and never went past the bulletin board. As well, when a few people did cluster around the board to read through the many notices posted there, it was almost impossible for others to get into the sanctuary. The board quickly filled up, and it was more and more difficult to keep it up to date, and organized in a way that invited people to stop and look. It looked like a bulletin board might not be the perfect answer that Bill had been hoping for.

So Bill gathered a few folks who had gotten interested in the project, and they set out to refine their system. First, they spent some Sunday mornings just watching the people move in and

around the church. They realized that no single location for a bulletin board would reach everybody. They also realized that too much information was about the same as no information at all. When the board got over-full, people just stopped looking at it. Someone noticed (and the others quickly confirmed) that for older people, many of whom wore bi-focal glasses, bulletin boards were very awkward to read. As well, some of the notices and brochures were in a type size that was too small for many to read comfortably, if they could read it at all. Bill and his small group realized they had some work on their hands if they were going to get "this communication thing" up and running.

So they took stock of where they were, where they wanted to be, and how they might get from the one to the other. They all agreed that a bulletin board of some sort would be a part of the solution. They wondered if a few bulletin boards, supplemented perhaps by some brochure racks and spread around the available area, might be more effective.

Material could then be sorted and distributed to the various boards – one for social justice, one for church events, one for community events, and so on. An informal survey suggested that many (though not all) of the congregation had and used email, so that raised some additional possibilities. Someone pointed out that the phone company could help them set up a "group phone list" that could reach everyone in the congregation who had a phone, or selected groups within the congregation, or any combination of these. The possibility of a regular (or maybe semi-regular) newsletter was raised, one which could be distributed on Sunday mornings, and/or electronically, and/or by mail as a last resort. Local radio and TV stations offered Public Service Announcements; maybe they could be used for some things. And what about a new sign in front of the church? That was a busy street; why not reach out to the people walking or driving by?

And then one day someone said, "Isn't communication a two-way street? Do we need to be looking at how we get information too?" The question was greeted with several groans; surely they had enough on their plate already. But after a fast run to Tim Horton's for reinforcements, they began to realize that they really did need to look at what came in and how it got there. If something came via email, it could be easily "pasted" directly into a newsletter, a group email, a bulletin announcement, or other forms. It could also be edited quickly and easily. How information arrived had a lot to do with how – and if – it got used.

And so a Communication Committee was formally organized. They did find one person, a recently retired individual who had both some time to give and some experience in working with words, to serve as Communication Co-Ordinator. And they began moving all the pieces of this puzzle around, testing different fits and different connections. Slowly, a system did evolve that was well-suited to their particular situation. It didn't cover every possibility – some things still "slipped through the cracks" – but things were much better than they had been before that first bulletin board.

And Rev. Bill still sorts stuff out on his office floor. But at least now he has something to do with it, and a sense that it is usually getting out to those who need to see it. He also has realized that

no system is ever either perfect or finished; constant evolution and fine-tuning are integral parts of the process. But the church is a far livelier place than it used to be, as people explore and share new interests and possibilities. There is excitement and interest that extends well beyond the walls of the church. And that first bulletin board is still there, now part of something much larger.