

When I recently read about the search for a Community Wellness person in the HSUC newsletter, my immediate thought was that our current church members also need to have the focus placed on their own emotional and spiritual needs.

As well, we have not had a long-standing minister in good health for some time. We have been losing longtime church members who are still in our community. Further, it is troubling to hear from people elsewhere that they have heard about the difficulties occurring within our church congregation. Our community is a small town and members of this congregation are generally afraid to speak out for fear of social rejection; leaving, for them is a simpler solution. Others seek the safety of being in a clique within the church and are therefore also reluctant to speak out.

Poor communications within this church are the root of some of our problems. Here at HSUC, I have noticed numerous Communication Blockers in play. For example, a person may be told not to speak to another person, no reply comes to an email or phone call, Council minutes are no longer printed and ready to pick up in the church, the words on a person's report may be changed, messages stating a change in time or day for an activity don't include all those involved in that activity, a member's message to be included in the newsletter may be ignored, or members are not welcome to attend a meeting in which they clearly have a stake.

The short congregational meetings we used to have after church to discuss an issue and perhaps vote on that issue have not occurred in a long time. The one congregational meeting we did have dealt with the idea of running a concert hall in the sanctuary. No business plan was presented and the congregation was told that a name and logo were already chosen. Effectively the congregation had no opportunity to submit their logo or name ideas, and there was no congregational vote. The danger with this lightning process is that if congregants feel their ideas and opinions count for nothing that frustration might easily be reflected in lower or no donations. Community members would not have to ask a church member why we have a logo on a sign on the church that looks like the Rogers logo.

Communication blockers do give some individuals in the church an unfair advantage in making church decisions. These people exert control over others. Are we not all equal members/volunteers?

Communication blockers also have a negative effect on volunteer work in this church. At times, working groups appear in the church without a call for volunteers. At other times, numerous highly skilled volunteers report their expertise is not respected and others with no expertise want to take control. All volunteers need to stay in their respective job lanes.

I have mentioned issues that friends and I have encountered. The rest of the church congregation will be able to add their experiences to the above list to more fully present a picture.

We are at the point where we need to bring in a facilitator familiar with church issues to sort out our current problems. The result will be improved physical and mental wellness for OUR congregation in addition to member/ volunteer retention. If we cannot sort out our own problems, it is pointless to worry about the difficulties in the community around us.

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