Phoenix annual meeting January 2022

Eric Mattila [16:09] The spiritual topic for the annual meeting will be “the role of the congregation board and caretaking.”

The spiritual responsibility of the board.

There are two areas of the board's work. There is a spiritual side and a temporal side. This presentation will focus solely on spiritual work. We remember the mission commandment of Christ. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world.” [Matt. 28:19-20] This commandment of Christ also belongs to the congregation board. This is the foundation for all the work that they do.

Serving God's Kingdom

A board member not only serves the local congregation, but wants to support all of the work in God's Kingdom. They should be in unity of spirit and understanding with the other congregation boards as well. It is also important that they support the work of the central organization. Board members need to be diligent to attend board meetings and serve as open epistles. Martin Luther writes in the small catechism under the table of duties: Ministers, teachers and church officers – “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” [Acts 20:28] Notice in this part of scripture in Acts: over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians in the same way. “God has set some in the church … with gifts of healings, helps, [administrating]” [1 Cor. 12:28]

This comes from the history book of the Laestadian Congregation of Phoenix. It was celebrating 50 years. “Dozens of individuals have served on the Phoenix board of directors over the years. The board of directors has served under the authority of the congregation throughout its history. It has directed the business property and temporal affairs of the congregation. However, the most important function of the board has been to provide spiritual guidance and Soul Care in conjunction with the ministers in the congregation.” In the Phoenix laestadian Lutheran Church Constitution Bylaws in Article 2 Section 2 it says: “The Board of Trustees shall consist of 9 elected individuals together with the pastor and the assistant pastor of the congregation. Trustees shall serve and hold office as provided by these bylaws. They shall assist pastors and preachers in their oversight of the spiritual affairs of the congregation.”

The watch man's Duty

Board members and Elders in the congregation have an important duty. God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel about sounding the trumpet. The Watchman who does not sound the trumpet and warn the people, defiles themself in their iniquities. But if the Watchman sees the sword

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come and blow not the trumpet And the people are not warned, If the sword comes and takes any from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity. But his blood will be required at the watchman's hand. Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way, and he turns from it – If he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity. But you have delivered your soul." [Ezek. 33:3-6] It is a very sober and important reminder for speakers and board members to take their job seriously. If they feel that there is some sort of spiritual [concern] in the congregation, they do their best to address it, to bring It forth and to deal with it. But I would also say. As board members and speakers, The main reason for motivation to do the work is not out of fear. But it is out of love for our brothers and sisters. Most importantly, we want to help and correct. We want to help each member of the congregation to make it to heaven.

What is meant by caretaking?

As believers, when we hear the word caretaking we think of fellow believers who have fallen into sin or over whom there is concern due to incorrect understanding in faith matters or where the fruits of faith are not evident. Caretaking is also thought of in the broad congregation sense where matters are widespread and more open and in common knowledge within the congregation. In either case, the sound of the trumpet must go forth.The matters must be addressed and spoken of in Christian love. The believers in the congregation frequently turn to the board for help. The board must openly and freely discuss these matters and respond [to them].

Remember [to have] patience.

Board members and speakers can grow weary and become impatient in endeavoring to perform the role of caretaking in the congregation. We are at times disappointed with the results of our efforts and we forget the words of the Apostle Paul: "I have planted, Apollos has watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." [1 Cor. 3:6, 7] When one becomes impatient, he can think of caretaking as discipline or punishment rather than a work of love – Which is humbling through the Holy Spirit. With prayer and unity, love, faith and good conscience [he] could be restored onto brothers and sisters [who is] affected by sin. Paul also writes to the Galatians: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." [Gal. 6:1]

Personal versus congregation matters

Board members frequently ponder how to approach matters that have come to their attention. Sometimes a troubled believer has come to a board member and poured out their heart and asked for help. At other times, a concern may arise with a speech made openly in the congregation. In whatever manner a matter surfaces, it is important that the board members freely speak of the matter. Matters must be spoken of openly on the board. And each board member must speak about how the matter seems to them. In this way, all of the gifts that God

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through his congregation has placed will be used. Also, in this way unity on the board is preserved. With sober minds and prayer-filled hearts [and] under the light of God's word these matters can be discussed. I can say during my short time here. My experience at the Phoenix board meetings – there is this kind of openness. I feel that all the members have freedom to share what is on their heart and mind. There are times that we come there with our own understanding. But throughout the discussion, it has been very evident that the Holy Spirit has also been there leading and guiding. We left every board meeting feeling very good. Board members must be careful to respect private matters and not to take any matters lightly. Oftentimes, many discussions are needed over a long period of time before a matter reveals itself. Also, just because a matter comes to the discussion of the board, it does not mean that there is need for caretaking. Some concerns that are raised may not be well-founded. Some concerns may just raise an area of awareness, and [there is a] need to be watchful..

Being sensitive to personal matters

The role of a caretaker is not necessarily one of rebuke, but teaching the correct way. On the one hand, we are sensitive to the fact that the matter is to be kept as small as possible [only to those believers who are directly involved]. On the other hand, we need to instruct that the matters need to be put away as far as they have reached. When a person comes to a board member with a matter that is personal nature [Between one person and another believer] we need to remind them of the church law Christ. The details of such matters need not [include] the congregation board, unless the meeting with one or two more is not fruitful.

Discussion on open matters

On open matters in the congregation, however, they need to be visited about openly. Such matters are not personal offenses between brothers, but they may be doctrinal differences or differences surrounding issues of our time. In these [situations], the board's role is to arrange for discussions on these matters [so] that sober discussions would take place and unity in the congregation would prevail. A congregation board may be asked to assist with family matters or personal matters. Even here, board members should freely help in instructing the correct way and preaching the gospel. Especially difficult are matters that come to the congregation board of which the board members have no personal knowledge. There is danger that these matters could be hearsay or rumors. Such matters need to be approached cautiously and carefully and from a standpoint of questioning rather than making assumptions. More information may be necessary before proceeding.

On the last couple of slides I have added what God's word says for board members and speakers. “Feed the flock which is among you, Taking the oversight thereof. not by constraint but willingly. not for filthy lucre, But of a ready mind. Neither being Lords over God's heritage, But be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a Crown of Glory that f~~ades not away [1 Peter 5]~~

~~God's word to the congregation members or the hearers of the word. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.[Heb 13:7]~~

~~Let the elders who rule well be accounted of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine . [1 Tim. 5:17]~~

~~Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you. [Heb. 13:17]~~

~~That is what I had in my short presentation . I can say when being here. I have felt that the board members have taken this responsibility seriously. They have struggled with their own weakness about how to handle matters. But yet they're wanted to be obedient to this calling. On the one hand, we want to help a member who is struggling in faith. On the other hand, we want to be diligent and caring for the congregation. Being there at the board meetings, I have experienced much prayer, tears, weakness and trembling. I have not experienced a boastful or a proud [mind] or a lording over the flock type of attitude. I will have to say, it has been very good to attend [the board meetings] and listen to the dear brothers share their psalms on the board.~~

~~So, with that I have prepared some possible discussion points. If someone has any comments or questions. I will give you a minute to get your thoughts together. If there are [no comments], we could continue on with our meeting. [30:20]~~

Keith Hillukka [40:44] … We have a hundred forty three members signed in. We needed 125 for a quorum. John, as a reminder, we could ask all of those who have not signed in to do so. On our agenda after lunch is the ratification of speakers. But if the congregation would desire to change that – I know that some people leave after lunch. If you would like to move that item up, we could do so with a motion. We could have an approval for that also.

Timo Sutinen? [41:36] I will make the motion to deal with the ratification of ministers right now – to preserve quorum.

Jari Marjanen [41:43]: I will second that.

Meeting chairman [41:52]: Any comments? We will move up the discussion of the ratification of Ministries. All of those in favor? Any opposed? The motion carries. Keith, for this will then pull up item 11? "The ratification of ministers. The Phoenix ministers are Eric Mattila, Rory Sorvala, Mikko Pasanen, Brett Rintamaki, Glen Wisuri and Lauri Nevala. The vote to retain Brett Rintamaki as a speaker, or not, will be made by ballot. Results of the vote to keep Brett as a

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speaker Will be announced during the ratification of the ministers With or without red as a result of the vote”

Roxy Sorvala [43:08]: It is actually number 9 on the agenda and not number 11.

Chairman: Thank you.

Ryan Koivisto [44:40]: A couple of things. First of all, it was printed in the agenda that the vote would be by ballot. We now decided to do it by hand. I think it would be good – we had a lot of discussion a few weeks ago. If there are any comments that people have before we take a vote, I think it would be good to allow for some discussion on it. [45:05]

Aaron Niemela [45:35] Unfortunately, I was not able to be at the meeting when they announced this discussion about Brett Rintamaki. Since I was not at the meeting, I do not feel comfortable raising my hand either yes or no on that vote without understanding … [how] the congregation speaks on that. I wasn't at the meeting. I know that there was already discussion about that. I would just like to understand why [we are having this vote].

Mary Hillukka [47:38] Our congregation had a discussion about sending ministers to Minneapolis [Wolf Lake?]. At a later time, we discussed sending ministers to Minneapolis. I felt that the congregation clearly spoke. Brett was not in unity with those decisions. So, that to me is very, very concerning that we have a speaker brother who is not in unity with the congregation on a very important matter like that. [48:13]

Cheryl Simonson [48:35] I was at the meeting but my memory is not so good. I can only go by how my spirit answered. At that meeting, my spirit answered to the majority of the congregation’s feelings that we would no longer have Brett speak. However, there are many other members, board members and speakers that are here. I would like to see if someone is willing to take the mic and kind of encapsulate what all has been going on for the benefit of Aaron [Niemela] and others that may not be aware. I agree with Aaron. I don't think that he should take a stand on something that he is not sure of. Is there someone who would be willing to give the Readers Digest version? [49:36]

Roland Simonson [49:43] Just one thing for Aaron's benefit. It was recorded. He could listen to it after the fact, if he wanted to hear all of the discussion.

Eric Mattila [49:57] It is hard to recap the whole meeting. It was a long meeting, maybe five or six hours. Maybe we could say that the concerns started, from my understanding, after a meeting that took place in Monticello. It was acknowledged that there were two spirits and two sides at that meeting. I don't believe that Brett [Rintamaki] was in agreement with it. It was noticed that a change happened with him after that meeting. He has not felt free with the board members. He stopped coming to board meetings. I don't know the exact date, but it was probably around a year ago. It was felt that he was not on the same page and not in the same unity. I can say from my own personal experience. I also had the same question that you had

Aaron [Niemela]. Before we had a congregation meeting, I wanted to visit with Brett personally and ask him how he believes. I wanted to hear it from his own mouth and not from someone else. So, we went to visit. I think we were there for five hours. We spoke much about the current situation and the battle in Zion. I will have to say that [the visit] was very eye-opening. I went there with many doubts and fears. But I went there hopeful that we would at least find some common ground and be able to agree on [some] things and build from there. But during our entire discussion, I do not think that we agreed on anything. When Katrina and I left, we felt that we do not believe anywhere close to Brett and Marita. We visited the MBMAC letter that was sent from the Minnesota congregations. We visited Warren [Raisanen] and Eric's [Skoog] letter. We visited Wolf Lake having Bible class with heretics. The list went on and on. We had a completely different understanding of everything that we discussed. It was very evident and clear to me that Brett is in that sort of situation that he is confused and not able to see where God's kingdom is. How can he be a public servant [and] help anyone find God's Kingdom and where to go if he cannot see it himself. Then we had our congregation meeting. Many, many brothers and sisters poured out their hearts. There were some people like Mike Riutta who came and didn't even know what the meeting was about. He had such a beautiful speech. God gave him nice words. And our dear sister Cheryl [Simonson] and others who were not directly involved spoke. We said amen. I thought for sure that now Brett will see, he will step down and take care of his manners, whatever they may be. But again, he resisted any attempts for help. He kept a long speech/sermon at the end. He in a way accused the board of lying or [spinning] the truth in some ways. He defended his actions. It did not feel good. It was so clear being there that evening. You could feel the Holy Spirit speaking so lovingly to Brett. But since then, it feels like there has not been any change. It fell on deaf ears. [54:00]

Doug Mattila [54:15] At the last meeting where we discussed this, to me the majority of the congregation was asking Brett to step down. In his speech at the end, [Brett] basically said that he would not step down unless the congregation told him not to speak. To me it seems like we will have to vote. It is the only way that he will give that position up. Another thing that I find very troubling. I heard that Brett is not even a paying member of the Phoenix congregation. I was really surprised. I don't know if it is true or not. I went to check the roster. His name is not even on it. So I question, do we have a minister who is not even a member? [55:25]

Andy Kesti [55:44] I also feel that the dissension and the nervousness that is going on in the congregation regarding Brett serving – to me as a congregation member, I feel like It would be best if Brett would not serve our congregation anymore. My prayer would be for Brett, and for all, myself included. That God would keep our eyes open to the beauty of God's Kingdom. We could attend church here in Phoenix and listen to services with confidence that God's word is being preached correctly and the minister who is serving us is striving to follow how the Holy Spirit guides. It is the same prayer that I have for friends of mine who I feel are confused and wandering and have left this pathway – and that they would personally be able to see their matters that need to be cared for and return to God's kingdom as a humble believer. [57:10]

Bert Raisanen? [57:24] Aaron, I was at the meeting a few weeks ago.. Before the meeting, some of us went for dinner. We were all kind of wondering what this meeting was going to be

[about]. There was trepidation going to the meeting … Many people did speak from the heart. At the end of the meeting, as Eric [Mattila] mentioned, there was no hearing from Brett … After the meeting, people were around me and people who were at the dinner before the meeting said that now it is clear. I can't describe it. It was a tough meeting. There were a lot of loving messages. … I don't know what it is. It is a feeling. [59:00]

Mark Young [59:20] For the sake of moving on with the meeting, if someone here is not sure or does not understand how they want to vote on the matter, they can abstain. One is not forced to vote. [59:40]

Timo Sutinen [1:00:29] I make the motion to have the vote. The vote [motion] is to remove Brett Rintamaki as a pastor.

Male?: I'll second it.

Roxy Sorvala [?]: Who seconded it.

Lee? [who?]

? [1:01:09] I noticed that Brett's name is also on the list as a Bible class teacher. That needs to be ratified, as well. I wonder if that motion could be modified, too? Remove them from being a Bible class teacher, as well.

? [1:01:29] I think we have to deal with removing Brett first and then go to ratify the ministers …That is my understanding.

Meeting chairman [1:01:42] Any other comments? The motion was put forward and then seconded by Nate [Skoog?], by a show of hands to remove Brett as a speaker. Those in favor, raise your hand. Those opposed. The motion carries.

We will go back to the ratifications by the Board of Trustees. The board meeting synopsis. The summary of meetings is attached to the agenda .. Congregation is to ratify the board's actions.

Cheryl Simonson [1:02:55] We did not ratify … [the ministers].

Meeting chairman: Thank you. Cheryl pointed out that we did not ratify the list of ministers, we only had a vote on Brett. We need to have a motion and have it seconded. Then have a vote on the ministers.

Dave Forstie [1:03:23] I think that we would just go back to the agenda, because the pastor's report before that – people want to hear [the rest of it before we continue on …

Meeting chairman: I don't know the rules on that. We voted …

?: Ratify …

Cheryl Simonson [1:03:59] I make a motion to ratify the ministers.

Darlene Sutinen ? I'll second it.

Who seconded it?

Darlene

Meeting chairman [1:04:09] We have a motion and a second to ratify the ministers. Any discussion? Those in favor, raise your hands. Any opposed? The motion carried.

Let's break for lunch.

Meeting chairman: Are you ready for lunch?

Female: Lunch is ready.

Meeting chairman [1:04:42]: We will break for lunch and sing song for 484. All voting ballots need to be turned in following the song. The ballots will be closed. We will resume at 1 p.m.

[1:05:13] Song begins