



Augustana Lutheran Church

Proclaiming the Gospel, Growing in Faith, Ministering to All

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I, Pastor Reed Lee Pedersen, would like to address the Special Congregational Meeting Concerning the Church Parsonage. I will be including information on how we got to the meeting, the decision I made, as pastor, considering the vote at the meeting, and where we go from here concerning the church parsonage.

What happened at the meeting?

Following worship on March 21st, we held a special congregational meeting concerning the church parsonage. It was the intention of the council and me to have a vote at the end of the meeting to *a) sell the church parsonage* or *b) financially invest in the church parsonage and create a six-person subcommittee of the property committee to oversee all updates and caretaking of the parsonage.*

Many questions and concerns came forward. There were questions concerning how much it would cost to sell the parsonage or update it. The council did not have figures to answer that question in an honest way. Questions came forward about the possibility of hiring a property management company to be the landlord on our behalf. It was noted that we would still have to update the parsonage somewhat to do this, but that the idea was not fully looked into. Concerns expressed also included the council was painting a very negative picture of the church parsonage and not speaking to the positives of keeping the house. Multiple concerns included not being able to have control of the property or potential neighbors. Others shared concerns about affording the pastor's housing allowance without a revenue stream like individuals paying rent to live in the parsonage. Concerns were also brought up towards the finding of volunteers to look after and take care of the parsonage.

Many people felt it was not right that the vote was either to sell the parsonage or spend money on it. Due to this, we changed the second option to simply *b) keep the parsonage.* Stories including information about what it was like to tour and update the parsonage were shared. Tempers and emotions rose for people on both sides of the vote. Due to this, we had several members leave early over the discomfort brought on by the tense and combative climate that was forming. A vote was called and counted. The results were 23-18 in favor of selling the parsonage. Due to the climate of the meeting, I decided to throw out the vote until we can get more answers to questions asked and more people in the sanctuary.

How did we get to this meeting?

To avoid repeating myself I encourage you to read, “Questions and Answers Concerning the Church Parsonage”, which was previously posted on our Facebook group and website concerning how Megan and I came to buy our own place. Just know that by moving into our own place it brought up the question, “What do we want to do with the church parsonage?” The church council felt that this was a question that should be answered by the congregation rather than only the church council.

In October, the church council and I agreed on having it discussed during the annual meeting. Unfortunately, the positivity rate for COVID-19 increased in October and November, which led to mitigations from the Illinois Department of Health that did not allow us to meet in person with more than 10 people. In December, the church council and I felt that we could have the annual meeting with just the church council since the only thing needing an official vote was the budget. The annual report was included in the Spire and all people were encouraged to contact a council member.

Some, but not many, people reached out to different members of the council with thoughts and concerns about the parsonage and housing allowance. The discussion over the church parsonage was in depth and took quite some time. We were able to answer the few questions and concerns raised as a group and came to the unanimous decision that selling the church parsonage would be the best step forward. Those who had been approached with questions then went back and answered them to the people who asked them. We decided to post the minutes for the annual meeting in the February Spire and Facebook group. We then waited to see what people had to say about our vote on the budget and our suggestion to sell the parsonage. At our February meeting, it was asked if people had reached out or not. The only ones who reached out between the mailing of the Spire and the February 21st council meeting seemed to be those with a positive understanding towards selling the church parsonage. This gave the council the sense that the majority of the congregation agreed with selling the parsonage. Due to this sense of positivity, we decided to have a vote on March 21st on whether or not to sell the parsonage or invest in it. It was not until a few days before the congregational meeting that we then seemed to get serious questions and concerns from other members. To be forward, most of the people lifting concerns were doing so on behalf of other people who had concerns but did not speak to church council members.

Armed with hindsight and discussion with some non-council members after the meeting it seems that the sense of overall positivity was a false one. In a perfect world, the system we tried which included having parishioners contact a member of the council to voice their opinion so that they felt heard and part of the meeting would have worked, but it did not. It did not take into account those who felt uncomfortable speaking to a member of the church council. It also overlooked how much more productive and open an in person setting is when it comes to matters like this. Having a group conversation is different from sending in thoughts and questions. Therefore, it is my opinion and the opinion of the church council that the March 21st meeting should have been a discussion instead of a vote.

Why did I veto the vote to sell the parsonage?

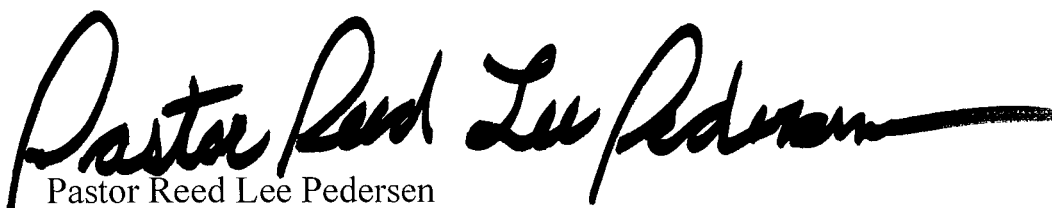
Tempers and emotions ran high, including my own. I could not in good conscience and in good faith to the congregation allow that vote to come through and the possibility of bad blood to follow. We are a church and we need to stick together. Legitimate questions and concerns were raised that needed answered before we went further. Because of that, I felt the church council and property committee could go back and find answers to the questions asked so that the church members have a fuller picture of what it looks like to sell the parsonage or to keep it. That is why I chose to dismiss the vote and move it to a later date. In addition, it would be the hope that we could have more people participate if we had another meeting later.

Where do we go from here?

The church council agreed with my decision to dismiss the vote. We then agreed on a plan to have a whole house inspection, Radon inspection, and mold inspection. We will also have an assessor come out to survey the property along with an official appraisal for said property. We will hold an open house sometime in the future for people to walk through the inside of the parsonage. The money required for the inspections will be covered by a recent life insurance policy entrusted to the church. Once the church parsonage has had all the inspections and quotes for updates and people are given the chance to see the inside of it, we will then have another congregational vote concerning the church parsonage.

I want to end by saying that the passion people showed on the March 21st meeting shows that we have people that care. I do not take that lightly and I hope you do not either. I want to encourage everyone to reach out to a council member with his or her thoughts and opinions about this whole matter. If you feel uncomfortable with that, I invite you to speak to someone you know who will speak on your behalf. Our church council members try their best to represent you and the entire congregation. If people are not telling them their stance on different things then the church council is ill equipped to make sure that the church council represents everyone. I pray for each and everyone one of you. God's peace be with you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In humble service,



Pastor Reed Lee Pedersen