**Church Visitors Report to Classis Huron: Blyth CRC visit conducted on Monday Nov. 6, 2023**

**Introduction:** Blyth CRC ministers to a village of 1000 persons and the surrounding rural area. The church building is located on the main street of the village. The membership is 244 and regular church attendance, Sunday mornings, is about 150 persons. The congregation does not currently have a pastor with Rev. Van Leeuwen having departed in July after 10 years of faithful ministry to the congregation. We met with the church council, consisting of 6 Elders and 5 deacons. One elder and one deacon were absent. The opening devotions included a good discussion of “Kingdom Extension Church Health Devotional” which gave an indication of the council’s aspirations for this congregation.

**What does Blyth CRC aspire to be?** A body of believers that knows Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and has their hope and trust in Him. The congregation under the leadership of the church council seeks to share the gospel with neighbours, friends, and the community in general. It wants to avoid being an insular, complacent group that just coasts along. Blyth CRC is one of 3 Christian churches in the village but with the other two facing declining attendance it may, at some point, be the only church in the community. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

**Is Blyth CRC meeting the challenge to be an outgoing, vibrant, evangelizing church?** It is the judgment of the church visitors that it is meeting this goal only in part. A particular area of concern is the deficiencies in the youth program. The Gems and Cadet programs attract children both from the church and the community. The youth program is not what it should be. What the church needs is an enthusiastic energetic person to take ownership of the youth program and come up with things that interest young people. The congregation is currently renovating the church building so that the meeting rooms will be larger, more functional and appealing which should provide good space for a good youth program. One deacon mentioned that based on his personal experience the congregation could do more to make new members welcome and include new members in their social circles. Church attendance even before covid had been declining slightly and has not been picking up since restrictions ended. There are currently no adult bible studies. People say, “I will go to a bible study but won’t lead one”. Somebody has to take the initiative.

Blyth congregation could also consider developing at least a short term “Life Program” in which small groups meet twice a month to discuss the sermon, socialize and build community. Also, ministry skill development for the congregation’s members could help. CRNA’s Thrive program could work with the congregation at this.

The elders and deacons do take their roles seriously. Elders make regular home visits and the deacons provide benevolence to both the household of faith and the community.

**Calling a Pastor:** A Pastor search team is in place. There is some debate as to where the emphasis should lie in what strong qualifications a new pastor should have. Some emphasize preaching others pastoral care with the balance tilting to pastoral care. It is the judgment of the church visitors that the emphasis should be on a minister who can inspire the congregation to be active and enthusiastic members who will roll up their sleeves and get things done to be an alive church of Jesus Christ.

**Summary:** Blyth CRC is at a bit of a crossroads. It certainly has the vision. It now needs the implementation. It proclaims the gospel but it could do more to demonstrate the gospel.

**The church visitors were Rev. Ed Den Haan and elder Henry de Young. This report is respectfully submitted.**