

Healthy Start for Congregations

On a recent Saturday, nineteen leaders of our congregation – including Pastor Laura and members of the BLC staff, Congregation Council and Transition Team – participated in a retreat designed to help them get their new relationships off to a “healthy” start.

The goal of the Healthy Start for Congregations program is to:

- **Build and develop a spiritual partnership.**
- **Get better acquainted.**
- **Clarify explicit and implicit mutual expectations.**
- **Set initial goals for the first year.**
- **Establish four quarterly check-in dates for monitoring these expectations and goals.**
- **Plan for communication with the congregation.**

The retreat was facilitated by the Rev. Dale Sollom-Brotherton, founder of New Beginnings Consulting, who has been working with congregations and their pastors for over 10 years to help them clarify their mutual expectations — as early as possible — and take advantage of the excitement and energy that comes with a new chapter in a congregation’s life.

Pastor Dale led many interesting and lively discussions about such things as why people choose to attend Bethlehem, what Pastor Laura can do to help people grow in their faith and what the staff and members can do to support Pastor Laura in her new job. Other discussions developed ideas about what ministries, programs and activities might be implemented, improved or changed at Bethlehem.

Those discussions led to the development of a First Year Action Plan which identifies specific goals that the group believes can be accomplished in the coming year. The goals fall into four general categories: *Organization*, *Stewardship*, *Vision* and *Communications*.

- The *Organization* goals include looking at how and why we do things and whether or not we can make improvements. This will involve such things as evaluating current management and staff organization, examining the Council operation and structure, and developing some Standard Operating Procedures.
- The *Stewardship* goals include a program of education and action intended to increase the congregation’s giving and receiving of gifts of all kinds – spiritual, time, talent, financial and others.
- The goal of the *Vision* team will be to help clarify the ways in which Bethlehem wants to continue, improve and develop its many ministries and activities for both the short and long term.
- The *Communication* goals will be to improve and expand the quality and quantity of communication between the pastor, church leaders and congregation members – with particular emphases on improving and expanding our website, and reporting on the progress of the Healthy Start Program.
- Additional goals were also identified during this process, but determined not to be in the top four priority categories for the coming year. This does not mean those additional goals will not be addressed this year, just that there was no specific commitment to act on them at this time. Those additional goals include evaluating our future facilities and property needs,

developing new and existing ministries and programs, increasing our membership and member participation, and meeting future staffing needs.

Look for continuing updates and opportunities to participate in the First Year Action Plan. For more information, please contact the Council at blccouncil@blcenc.org.