

“Road Work Ahead”

“What’s happened to the church, Pastor? Why aren’t more people coming?”

That’s not a simple or easy question to answer. Attending Sunday services has, sadly, become only ‘one choice among many’ for people, rather than the *first* choice that it should be for those who claim to believe in Jesus. Perhaps we’ve given in to the world’s view and assumed it’s okay to skip church once in a while (though “once” very quickly becomes “more than once” for many). Perhaps we’ve taken our constitutional “freedom of religion” for granted, and assumed that the church will always be there for us whenever we want it.

Years ago, I read a story about a Jewish family who slacked off in their attendance at their synagogue. Some time later, friends of theirs visited and wanted to go with them to services on the Sabbath. Well, they all got into the car and drove there, only to find the synagogue closed, the doors and windows boarded over. That congregation had ceased to exist because too many of its members “assumed” it would always be there for them.

It’s true that we have the freedom to go or not to go to church. Sunday attendance is not a law or demand of God (though it should be something we eagerly desire if we stop and think about where we’re going, what we’re getting, and Who is giving it to us). But turn the situation around for a moment. What if someone got in your way? What if someone wouldn’t let you go to your church on Sunday morning? How would we handle that sort of obstacle?

I got to thinking about all this when I learned that the members of St Paul’s are going to be facing a “little obstacle” over the next few months. Soon after this month’s Village Picnic, Portage County crews will begin rebuilding County Road P/Main Street in Junction City. During this construction, County P will be closed to thru traffic (a detour will be provided around Junction City via the new Highway 10). The work is currently scheduled to begin in mid-July and to be completed by November of this year. County Highway department reps have promised that access will be provided to local residents and businesses as much as possible during this construction project.

I, for one, greatly appreciate the County’s plans to rebuild the road rather than just resurface it. When it comes to work like this, lasting repairs are better than temporary patch jobs. That being said, I also know how, in spite of the best intentions, construction can go ‘other than planned,’ and present more obstacles than expected. That’s why I also like contingency plans.

St John’s 8:30am services will proceed as normal, but if our access to St Paul’s is blocked off for a weekend during this road construction, our plan is to move our 10:15am Junction City service to a 10:30am service at St John’s in Dancy. (The extra 15 minutes will allow those who “forgot” or visitors who find their way blocked additional time to get to Dancy for service.) We’re going to line up a small group of volunteers to help telephone the members of the congregation (much as we’ve done when services have been cancelled during the winter due to snow and ice).

I hope that this little bit of advanced thought and planning will allow us to overcome whatever construction obstacles may get between us and God’s Word and Sacraments. Perhaps a little bit of advanced thought and planning can also help each of us to make attendance at church services our *first* choice for Sunday mornings, so that we can continue to gather together and grow together in Christ.