

CHURCH RIVER

From Page 1A

grow with Elaine, and there's just no people around to draw from. The people who already go to church are already where they want to be," Williams said.

UCC trustee Charlie Stockland said lay ministers have offered help, and one trustee has talked to some young pastors just out of seminary.

"Just because the pastor is leaving doesn't mean the church is closing," he added.

Williams is unsure, however, where his family and other current Wakonda UCC members will go from here.

"We will attend church, probably, at the other Protestant churches," he said. "Some of those may come to Yankton, go to Vermillion. I don't know."

Phyllis Christiansen, a Yankton resident and 55-year member of the Wakonda church, said the congregation needs more time to make a decision.

"It's really a difficult thing to close your church," she said.

Christiansen, who was married in the Yankton United Church of Christ Church, started going to the Wakonda church when she moved to a farm with her husband west of town. One of their kids was confirmed there. She was the organist for the last 15 years.

Christiansen, and others with long ties to Wakonda's church, are trying to stay positive, despite many unanswered questions.

"Just hope for the best," she said.

While she intends on continuing her membership at the Wakonda church, Christiansen will probably go to the Yankton UCC church for the time being, she said.

Ganschow said she will also keep her membership with the Wakonda church.

"I like the United Church of Christ. There's a small one in Centerville and I'm thinking, while the weather holds, I might just drive to Centerville for now," Ganschow said. "There's another lady in town interested in going with me."

While this announcement has brought up several questions for the UCC church and the Wakonda community, some future plans have been set.

"We will continue to pay for the utilities and insurance from this point," Williams said. "There was some talk of taking (the church) down immediately, but that is definitely too fast."

"We will continue to contribute to the church even though we're not meeting regularly on Sunday. There's a few of us that are just going to have to step up," he added.

Utilities and insurance for both the church and the Parish Hall cost \$400-\$500 a month, Williams said.

A community Christian education program, which is held in the UCC Parish Hall, will continue meeting on Wednesday nights during the academic school year, at least through the next year.

Ruth Williams, one of the founding mothers of the "Kids Under Construction" school program said all five churches in Wakonda will continue their support to ensure the school keeps going, too.

"They send their children there and they (provide) support financially, and the church community provides meals for these kids every week," she said.

The school, which just finished its fifth year, runs from mid-September to mid-May and hosts between 20-40 kids. The school includes a light supper, music, crafts and Bible lessons.

Each church in Wakonda sponsors school meals on a rotating basis. Even though the UCC church will be in limbo for a year, Ruth thinks church members will still provide meals for their designated nights.

"I'm pretty sure I will continue to provide at least one meal a year, maybe two," she said. "I can't really speak for others, but I wouldn't be surprised if there might be another individual or two from our group who might continue to do a meal, too."

The Board of Trustees has also decided to keep the UCC church's artifacts, like a bell that was cast in the early 1900s and memorial windows, in the church at least for the next year.

"It's just going to stay the way it is," Williams said of the church and its belongings.

The church probably will be open for holidays and special events, too, church officials added.

While the Wakonda UCC church members still have many unanswered questions and options to explore for their future, the church's Board of Trustees plans to meet every three months for the next year. An all-congregation meeting is set for May 2011.

"We're talking of closing, but that's kind of a tough term. We may close, yes we may, but right now we're on vacation to evaluate our situation and see what happens," Williams said.

From Page 1A

the county, Raschke said. The board would change its make-up, which currently contains Hutchinson County residents Dave Bender of Menno and Clinton Bauer of Freeman.

And if a Hutchinson County opt-out takes effect before the end of the year, the JRWDD would lose all of the 2010 money collected from that county, Raschke said. "We would be spending dollars this year on projects where (Hutchinson County) is not paying into because they would not be part of the district," he said.

Hutchinson County has received a nearly 300 percent return on its investment from 1994-2009, receiving far more in projects and assistance than it pays in taxes, he said.

JRWDD board member Bob Rademacher of Huron said he supports a court challenge against SB 184. An opt-out should begin with a petition by the voters, not a resolution by county commissioners, he said.

"I don't object to the people voting on it," he said. "But I don't think the county commissions have the authority to bring this forward. I think it's totally out of their jurisdiction."

Rademacher fears the Hutchinson County Commission action signals just the beginning of similar moves. "Where can county

commissions go after this? Where is it going to stop?" he asked.

Bauer said his daughter-in-law, Betty Bauer of Freeman, was the only one of the five Hutchinson County commissioners to vote against the opt-out resolution.

"I was at the meeting, and I don't agree with it," he said, adding he supports citizens initiating an opt-out.

Bender believes one county shouldn't act on its own. "The whole watershed district should vote on this, not just let Hutchinson County opt out," he said.

County commissioners and citizens may not realize the benefits from belonging to the water district, said JRWDD board member Curt Hart of Alexandria. "Do they realize the rate of return, what

they are getting for the dollars coming in?" he asked. Offering a comment from the audience, Yankton County Commissioner Allen Sinclair suggested the JRWDD board and staff regularly attend county commission meetings. In that way, the water district gets out its story and heads off any problems, he said.

"You need to tell the public what you are doing to benefit that county now — not 2, 3 or 5 years ago," he said.

The JRWDD also needs to use media coverage to tell its story, Sinclair said. "The media is real good about covering these meetings," he said.

Bender noted the JRWDD rotates its meetings among Yankton, Mitchell, Huron and

Aberdeen, providing access to the public.

After the meeting, Raschke commended Sinclair's idea and said he tries to attend as many county commission meetings as possible. In addition, the JRWDD holds its meetings on Thursdays so county commissioners — who usually meet on Tuesdays — can attend the water district's meetings, he said.

The JRWDD's ability to tell its message will prove crucial in a Hutchinson County opt-out election, Sinclair said.

"You need to keep yourself in front of the problem," he said. "All politics is local, and people need to get to know what you do for them on a regular basis."

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