



Toronto Conference
The United Church of Canada

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October 12, 2011

Duncan Holmes
c/o Trinity-St. Paul's Pastoral Charge
Trinity-St. Paul's United Church
427 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1X7

Dear Duncan -

We want to thank you for receiving our team and for our time together. These visits are meant to assist congregations to reflect on their ministry and their life together as a community of faith and to look toward their future ministry. It is always wonderful to meet committed faithful members such as we found at Trinity-St. Paul's. We trust this report celebrates your strengths and gifts, while at the same time identifying areas for growth.

As you consider this report, members of the visit team would be happy to make themselves available to explain or elaborate upon points that they have made or recommendations they have offered. Please contact Anne Shirley Sutherland asutherland@united-church.ca or 416-241-2677 ext.252 if you wish to invite them.

We would also like confirmation that your Board/Executive has received, reviewed and signed off on the report. This may include corrections of any inaccurate facts. If corrections are necessary we are happy to make them and will return them to you before they become an official part of the congregational file. We would also be helped by knowing if or in what ways the report was helpful to you.

Thank you for your response and your feedback.

Blessings and best wishes in your ministry.

Gretta Vosper, Oversight Visit Team Leader
Mark MacLean, Chair of TSP Pastoral Oversight

The mission of Toronto Conference is to strengthen Congregations, Pastoral Charges, Outreach Ministries, and Missions to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.



**Report from Pastoral Oversight Team Visit
Trinity St. Paul United Church
April 26 2011**

Team Members: Greta Vosper, Michael Cottrell, Anne Shirley as observer.

The Visit.

A Pastoral Oversight team arranged to meet with the official board of TSP. The invitation was extended from the board to the congregation. (Approximately 30 people for the congregational meeting)

The visiting team had arranged to meet with staff prior to the congregational meeting. We met with Vicki Obedkoff and then Hans van Nie.

Meeting with Vicki

When exploring the culture and structure of TSP Vicki expressed that the work is collective, partnered and highly consultative. Consultations are happening regularly between staff and congregation. TSP dynamic structure is one that makes every effort to be inclusive and collaborative.

The culture of TSP is described as being a faith community of friendly intelligent people who are engaged in issues of faith and theology

The core members are trying to expand their leadership. This is challenging because TSP has a high turnover of new members. (people moving for employment, students)

A challenge for expanding the use of technology in the building was identified. TSP has no designated tech person. As the congregation explores more partnerships from the community current technology will prove to be an asset.

Meeting with Hans

Hans experiences the culture and structure of TSP as one that is in a creative tension between liturgical and laid back. The congregation’s structure is one that is idealistic, and theologically grounded. TSP also experiences the reality that more people attend worship irregularly. This pattern challenges what one can do during worship from week to week.

Fatigue in the core group is a concern. Recruiting new leadership is a challenge. What happens is the same people keep getting recycled into roles of leadership.

There is awareness within the congregation of an evolution of the understanding that there is only so much money and resources. Members are evolving to be less driven.

Administration structures at TSP need strengthening. It is easy to make a booking for space but begins to break down around information of resources that are needed for a booking.

Team Ministry.

TSP has done an exceptional job in creating a highly functioning team ministry between Vicki and Hans. This is something to be celebrated throughout presbytery. The selection began with a strong search committee and followed up with strong leadership from M&P.

The team was led through facilitated team building. They were also given several months of orientation to the key groups at TSP. The team worked on building the broader team of congregation and staff.

How the two staff makes it work is that they have a good sense of what each other is doing. The job descriptions are well defined. They are well connected and supportive of the ethos of TSP.

The search committee chose two individuals who were of similar ages and experiences. This pairing although stylistically very different adds depth and dimension to not only the team but also the congregation as a whole.

Meeting with the Board and Congregation

The board gave the invitation to the congregation and approximately 35-40 people were in attendance. The group represented a good cross section of the life and work of the congregation.

When asked to describe in words the overall culture of TSP they shared that they were a congregation involved in social activism, inclusion, affirming, a biblical community, theologically liberal and evolving. The example given of evolving was the Centre for Faith Justice and Arts.

When asked about structure in TSP members of the group described the structure in a diversity of was such as hierarchical, conciliatory, complex, evolving and holding tension between the old and the new. The challenges were also identified as a congregation that is over wrought in both human and financial resources. More than half of the budget goes towards community activity.

Administration was identified as a challenge. Needed information is hard to access. Someone pointed out that they don't have benefits a central location for congregational records, which leads to a feeling that they have to start every project from scratch.

Exploring the work of the Circles.

The group identified that the work of the Public Witness Circle is engaging in the public world. They spoke of the work of TSP is in the world. TSP is involved with KAIROS. They have offered experiences in sustainable food. As issues arise TSP public witness responds. The circle understands the integration of public life into worship life.

The people on the street come to know the work of TSP through the various events; ecofest, the now annual bicycle blessing. Simple interactions even while doing the landscaping engage the members of the congregation with people passing by. More people find the way into TSP simply by chance. The congregation is intentional about reaching out and has a ‘welcome table at all events.

The impact of the Nurturing Community and Discipleship Circle on integrating and retaining new comers is that they are having more success at meeting new people. New people are intentionally included into a newcomer’s dinner. That being said, the work of the circles does not necessarily retain new comers. New comers witness the daunting tasks of operating TSP.

Again the high turn over is a challenge for the circles. Young university students arrive and then move outside of the city. Families have also become more transient which leads to irregular attendance.

There are two other circles, Worship and Faith Formation Circle and Stewardship of Resources Circle

Resources

TSP is a congregation that is proactive rather than reactive. They know what issues will arise concerning the building. That being said, someone identified that the congregation has serious illusions around sustainability. The financial increase needs to be \$100,000. per year in order for TSP to sustainable. There are massive amounts of money going towards the upkeep of the building. The congregation has grappled with issue of sustainability. The building is weighing too heavily on the energies of the community.

With the advent of the economic crisis in the world the joint venture (Trading Places) between TSP and Tafelmusik has been put on hold. This was a creative and exciting prospect that had been well planned. The depth of partnership would have seen the burden of costs of the building lifted off of TSP.

Exploring the expansion of other partnerships is a challenge in that the question must be asked. How do we determine what kind of rental income fits the model of partnership in our vision of a Centre for Faith Justice and the Arts. Which lens do we use to fill the space?

Centre for Faith Justice and the Arts.

The Centre Faith Justice and the Arts at TSP is an evolving continuation that originated at St Paul's. The idea was brought forward when the two congregations amalgamated. There is still much discussion around whether the name is TSP and CFJA or TSP, CFJA

A separate board may have to be created to govern CFJA. TSP would have membership within the board along with other partners. Are they one and the same or two separate entities?

Recommendations

Church administration was identified as a challenge in all three meetings. The involvement of the clergy in certain aspects of church administration seems to have developed by earlier cost cutting of TSP budget.

We recommend the Board and M&P to explore concerns around administration and Human resource areas. This would free up both staff and volunteers to carry out their responsibilities.

The work of the M&P committee and the prior JNAC and search committee is to be celebrated. You have created a healthy working environment with a highly functioning team ministry.

Our recommendation would be that TSP be open to being a resource within the presbytery when another congregation is exploring team ministry.

TSP is challenged financially to be self sufficient within the present building.

Our recommendation is to continue to seek out partnerships that might lift some of the financial burden in the short term

Projecting into the future it will be imperative that the United Churches in the Bloor Street corridor begin a serious dialogue around the life and witness of the United Church of Canada in this area.

With financial shortfalls, declining membership on top of environmental concerns the maintaining of congregations and separate buildings is simply not possible. Our recommendation is to continue conversations about ways to share ministry along the Bloor street corridor and the annex neighbourhood.