

MINUTES – Woodlawn United Church Council**September 18th, 2019**

OPENING: Co Chair Peter Woods brought the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Peter circulated a schedule of Council Teams and the dates they would be asked to open and close the meeting with prayer. The secretary was requested to include in the agenda going forth the Team which would be responsible for prayer at the meeting. Keith Musselman, Admin & Mgt lead the meeting in an opening prayer

In Attendance: Barry Zwicker, Bob Watt, Brian Moors, Dennis Dean, Don Hill, Fred Evans, Grant Warwick, Kathy Dean, Keith Mussleman, Kerri Graham, Peter Woods, Ralph Sams, Rev Mary Lynne Whyte, Rev Phillip Kennedy, Shannon MacLean.

- **Regrets:** Helen Dixon, Adelia Holloway, Teri Giannou

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS: Co-chair Peter welcomed Rev Phillip back from his sabbatical leave and introduced Kerri Graham, the new chair of the Youth Team.

Peter asked that each member in attendance take a moment and share with the meeting something that occurred over the summer that made them pleased or proud to be a member of Woodlawn United.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: *The agenda, as circulated, was approved by consensus.* (Appendix A)
The meeting agreed to an adjournment time of 9:00pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: *June 18th, 2019 minutes were approved, as circulated, by consensus.*

CORRESPONDENCE: email - Head Office re: Edge, Embracing the Spirit (Received for information)
email - Don Trider – Resignation as Co-Chair M&P (Received for information)
email - Mark Hazen, United Churches for Dartmouth (Received with notice – Mark will attend and present at the October 16th meeting)

OLD BUSINESS & BUSINESS ARISING:

1 - Ad-Hoc Music Committee Proposal – Contracts for Organist & Choir Director - Finalized

2 - 135 Anniversary – Report from Chair of Stewardship Team (Attached) Fred Evans spoke on the arrangements being made for the October 27th celebration. Theme will be 'Past, Present, Future'. Rev Andy O'Neil, former member of WUC will be the guest preacher at the 10:00am service and there will be a Hawaiian lunch following. Rev Andy will be given a stipend for his service and be compensated for his travel. Button pins will be available as well as an opportunity to contribute towards the cost of the meal. A banner has been commissioned from Thomas Hue Signs for display and Trustees (Dennis) has indicated he will be available to install. Fred made a request for an additional unbudgeted \$643.00 to cover the cost of the event. Admin & Mgt indicated the funds could be available. ***There was agreement by consensus to allot Stewardship Team an additional \$643.00 to cover the cost of the 135 Anniversary.***

3 - Designated Funds Policy Review – Keith M reported on the progress of preparing the draft of the Designated Funds before they are released to Council for approval. Keith indicated they should be available before the next meeting of Council. **(Action – Keith)**

4 - Worship Team - Approval of Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages, Transfers and Record Keeping – Report from Chair of Program Team (Attached). The secretary (Bob) reminded Council that all baptisms, confirmations and transfers of membership are, according to the by-laws of the

Community of Faith, to be recorded in Council Minutes and that Council has not been made aware of, or recording, these events. Discussion, clarification, suggestions resulted with the recommendation, as per Worship Committee, that the Officer Administrator would be advised by the clergy when baptisms, confirmations and transfers occur. There was also discussion regarding the confusion, caused by the Privacy Act, of processing 'transfers in'. **It was agreed, by consensus, that Shannon would inform the Office Administrator (Shelly) that she was requested to inform the Membership Clerk (Joan M) and Council Secretary when she has been advised by the clergy of baptisms, confirmations and transfers. (Action – Shannon)**

5 - Governance & WUC General Policy Review and Update – Peter W reported on the work done by Stewart Sampson and Barry Zwicker on the rewriting of our 'Governance Document' and that it was still a work in progress and hoped a draft copy would be available at the next council meeting. Peter asked Bob to speak to the issue of 'policies'. Bob noted inconsistencies between the web site and the current list of policies, policies not approved, no reference to the origin of the policies, etc. Shannon indicated there had been an earlier attempt to address these same issues but because of timing and change of Council chair persons, no action was taken. Bob circulated a chart of the policies, as we know them, identifying the teams thought to have responsibility. **It was agreed that each team would examine the policies thought to be their responsibility, ensure they are in fact their responsibility, determine if they are current and bring to Council any changes, requests for 'approval' etc.** The secretary was requested to resend to all Council members, via email, the current collection of policies. **(Action – Team Chairs and secretary)**

Some of the problems in tracing original policies etc. has been caused by the lack of committee minutes. Committees had in the past been requested to forward minutes of their meeting to the Officer Administrator for safe keeping and historical purposes. Committees have not been following this request. **It was agreed, by consensus that the Team chair persons emphasise to their committees the importance of record keeping and that, going forward, all committees submit copies of minutes, on a timely basis, to the Office Administrator. (Action – Team Chairs)**

NEW BUSINESS:

! - Council Retreat – Chair Peter introduced the idea of holding a 'Council Retreat', maybe a Saturday morning. There was interest and discussion around benefit, format, content, facilitator etc. It was agreed that the co-chairs of Council delve further into the idea of holding a retreat and bring suggestions to Council.

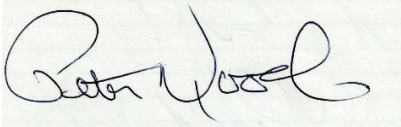
2 - Steward request for funds – Addressed in Old Business

Before adjournment Bob W spoke to the problem of developing and releasing a timely agenda due to the lateness of receiving 'reports' which are intended to be included with the agenda. There was general agreement that there was value in including reports for information. Bob requested 'reports' that are to be included in the agenda be received by the Saturday before the Council meeting, and an email from each Team chair indicating, if it be the case, there would be no report.

NEXT MEETING – October 16, 2019, 7:00 p.m.

CLOSING PRAYER – Keith Musselman lead the Council in a closing prayer.

ADJOURNMENT: At 9:05p.m. chair Peter sought consensus for adjournment.



Peter Woods – Co-Chair of Council

Submitted



J Robert Watt - Secretary, WUC Council

ADDENDUM TO THE MINUTES: The following Reports were received and are attached as ADDENDUM.

**A&M Receipts & Expenses Community of Faith Profile United Church Women
Region 15 Representative Admin & Management Youth Report
Stewardship Report Sabbatical Leave Report**

Woodlawn United Church Council - *AGENDA*

September 18th, 2019

7 PM - MEETING ROOM B

Call to Order - Co-Chair Peter Woods

Opening Prayer

Welcome and Introductions – Keri Graham (Chair Youth Team); Rev Phillip

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes of June 19th, 2019 (With corrections (spelling and attendee) as circulated.

Correspondence: email - Head Office re: Edge, Embracing the Spirit (previously circulated)
email - Don Trider – Resignation as Co-Chair M&P
email - Mark Hazen (United Churches for Dartmouth)

Old Business & Business Arising:

- 1 - **Ad-Hoc Music Committee Proposal** – Contracts for Organist & Choir Director - Finalized
- 2 - **135 Anniversary** – Report from Chair of Stewardship Team (Attached)
- 3 - **Designated Funds Policy Review** – Report from Chair of A&M
- 4 - **Worship Team - Approval of Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages, Transfers and Record Keeping** – Report from Chair of Program Team (Attached)
- 5 - **Governance & WUC General Policy Review and Update** – Chair

New Business:

- 1 – **Council Retreat** -
- 2 – **Stewardship request for Funds** (as per Stewardship Report)

Next Meeting Date – October 16, 2019

Closing Prayer

Adjourn

Reports:	A&M Receipts & Expenses	Community of Faith Profile
	United Church Women	Region 15 Representative
	Admin & Management	Youth Report
	Stewardship Report	Sabbatical Report

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Houle, Lori <lori@edge-ucc.ca>
 Date: Wed, Aug 21, 2019 at 11:45 AM
 Subject: Embracing the Spirit
 To: office@woodlawnunited.ca <office@woodlawnunited.ca>

Embracing the Spirit (formerly known as Chasing the Spirit) is a new learning network and innovation fund to help spur innovation across the entire United Church of Canada.

Want to learn about new ideas or start brainstorming? There are resources and events that spur innovation. Looking for some inspiration? Some Hope? Curious what others might be up to? Want to get the latest news right to your inbox? Subscribe to the latest the newsletters, which will automatically send the details to your inbox.

<http://www.united-church.ca/newsletters>

Have an idea but not sure if the idea is going to fly? Why not try it? Innovation Grants are all about experimenting. Embracing the Spirit understands not every idea will succeed but should still be given the chance.

There are lots of ways to get involved from simply sharing your story, becoming part of the network, or even volunteer as a mentor to help one of the ideas get off the ground.

Learn more at <http://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/embracing-spirit>

Do you have an idea and are ready to apply? Contact Carla Leon for assistance. carla@edge-ucc.ca

Here is the link for the small grant for you :

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/wjjviilpbn2f8pr/Prototyping%20Grants%20-%20Easiest%20Grant%20Application%20That%20%20You'll%20Ever%20Write.docx?dl=0>

Here is the link for the large grant for you;

<http://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/how-grow-your-idea>

Social Enterprise Webinars

The EDGE Network and Small Business Solver is excited to offer free Social Enterprise webinars, aimed to support and offer resources to social innovators. This series draws from the experience of experts in the field, offering tools on a variety of topics from technology to fundraising, from sales to accounting.

Questions? Want to learn more?

: <http://edge.united-church.ca/webinars/?s=social+enterprise+webinars>

Find additional recorded webinars here: [www.smallbusinesssolver.com/small-business-](http://www.smallbusinesssolver.com/small-business-advice-)

[blog/Inhttps://edgeucc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6e3c2380aa1143258e22762352717641](http://edgeucc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6e3c2380aa1143258e22762352717641)

Interested in seeing what is happening right across Canada? Check out this interactive map!

<https://edgeucc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6e3c2380aa1143258e22762352717641>

From: Houle, Lori <lori@edge-ucc.ca>
 Date: Wed, Aug 21, 2019 at 11:30 AM
 Subject: Sustainability Gathering
 To: office@woodlawnunited.ca <office@woodlawnunited.ca>

Sustainability Gathering

Yes! We've started a gathering of people from United Churches across Canada who care about (financial and other) sustainability and are willing to share their stories, things they've tried, and hopefully learn from you too.

- Date: September 17th, 11:00am – 12:30pm EDT
- [Zoom Conference](#)

We'll be discussing a lot of different topics each month; from volunteer capacity to partnerships to grant writing and new revenue streams!

Can't make it? Join us another time! We will connect monthly as follows:

October 15th

November 19th

December 17th

[RSVP to Carla.](#)

From: Don Trider <dtrider72@gmail.com>

To: Helen Dixon <55dixonh@gmail.com>

Cc: Kevin McTaggart <kevin.a.mctaggart@gmail.com>, margo macleod <margomacleod@hotmail.com>, catherine kay <kayclynn21@gmail.com>, Kathy & Dennis Dean <ddean@ns.sympatico.ca>, Peter Woods <commonkore@gmail.com>

Date: June 20, 2019 at 8:43 AM

Subject: Resignation

Good Morning Helen:

Last evening Council approved my membership on the Community of Faith Review committee that is being established to assess our congregation, its needs, and its viability. While i am uncertain what the Church Manual says, it is my personal opinion that members of this committee should not be members of Council; consequently, I am resigning as Co-Chair of M&P. I will continue to serve as a member of M&P.

Regards

From: mark hazen <mghazen35@hotmail.com>

To: "office@woodlawnunited.ca" <office@woodlawnunited.ca>, Murdock Morrison <murcon@eastlink.ca>

Date: Tue, 03 Sep 2019 22:58:28 +0000

Subject: Presentation on UCFD to congregational Boards

The Jun meeting of United Churches for Dartmouth tasked the Chair (me) with looking into opportunities to discuss with the Boards of the Dartmouth United Church congregations what UCFD is now, and could be.

As such I would like to inquire about the timing of your next Official Board meeting and if I could have 10-15 minutes to talk to the Board about UCFD?

Mark Hazen

Report from A&M Financial

**WOODLAWN UNITED CHURCH
RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES
FOR THE 8 MONTHS ENDING Aug. 31, 2019**

	Aug. 2019		Aug. 2018		8 months Budget 2019
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REVENUES:					
Operating Receipts - Offerings	\$ 216,797	A	\$ 198,878		\$ 207,844
Other Operating receipts	<u>36,328</u>		<u>37,335</u>		<u>31,412</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 253,124		\$ 236,213		\$ 239,256
EXPENSES:					
Salaries & benefits	191,416		192,703		197,243
Building upkeep	56,728		47,668		53,795
Teams/Committees	8,783		8,209		9,892
General Office - supplies, telephone, etc..	13,247		14,008		13,621
Denominational Assessment	10,410	B			10,410
Presbytery Annual Assessment			<u>10,533</u>	B	<hr/>
Total Expenses	\$ 280,585		\$ 273,121		\$ 284,961
Operating Expenses exceed Revenues by: (Deficit)	\$ (27,461)		\$ (36,908)		\$ (45,705)
Receipts for:					
Mission & Service	\$ 36,254		\$ 40,360		
Accessibility	\$ 68,091	C	\$ 56,318		

NOTES:

A - Offerings over Budget by \$9,000

B - New United Church structure, replacing Presbytery.

C - Bonds matured, some proceeds donated to Accessibility.

Report from UCW – September 2019

UCW Meetings have started for another season. Some units are finding it more difficult to prepare monthly meals for Margaret House and staff the Dun-Gen, so we will be looking at ways to address these challenges this fall. **Upcoming Events:** ***Marian MacDonald Card Social* on Friday, October 18, 2019 *** Annual Fall Craft Show and Luncheon* (Ralph and Friends) on Saturday, October 26, 2019 9-2pm. ***Annual Turkey Dinner* on Saturday, November 16, 2019. Coordinators are Beth Udby and Teri Giannou this year. One sitting at 5pm and Take – Out Dinners. With rising costs, the price will be \$17.00. ***Annual Meeting and Potluck* on Sunday, December 8, 2019 at 2pm.

Submitted by Adelia Holloway/Bev Lynch

Report from Region Representative

REGION 15 COUNCIL

Since the forming of Region 15, Jan 2019, There has only been one meeting being the annual general meeting held in Sackville NB last May. As part of a regular church service I reported through Mary Lynne my thoughts and experience attending the meeting in Sackville. While elements of the conference were very interesting and inspiring, the Council meeting per say was not.

There was much business attended to including where next years meeting would be held and if it would be held in conjunction with our former Maritime Conference members. The final decision after secret ballots was to hold the next mtg back in Sackville and meet with the former members. Made me wonder about the process we went through to split the Maritime Conference and the support for this split from Halifax Presbytery.

An annual budget was approved that was presented as a balanced budget but in fact was not when we finally had a chance to review it. The budget was presented at 9:00pm on Saturday night and was not circulated in advance. Instead we received a presentation through power point ,on screens in a rink, with very little time to consider. Not what I would consider an open process. The budget was approved as presented with only a few of us voting against it.

The executive of Council was presented and ratified. This is when I learned that our Shannon was on the executive. As a rep from Woodlawn it would have been much better to have known that Shannon was running for this office versus learning about it in Sackville.

The new President was elected. Janet Sollows of Yarmouth was elected to serve for the next year. Janet is formerly Janet Dillman of Woodlawn.

Since the meeting I have communicated with Janet about the business of Council and how we might be involved to help/participate. This is when I learned that Council will only be meeting annually and other than any committee we might be on there is no other work for Council reps. This new improved trimmed governance model seems to have sacrificed participation by individual congregations. It seems that the fact that Woodlawn because of our size is entitled to four members you have to ask yourself for what purpose.

So other than the above there really isn't anything to report in terms of activities, decisions, actions etc. Janet has told me the executive will have its first meeting in early October. Maybe we will hear something then.

Respectively Submitted

Barry Zwicker

Report from Community of Faith Profile Team

COMMUNITY OF FAITH PROFILE TEAM

Sept. 18,2019

The Community of Faith Profile Team (CFPT) has held its first meeting of the church season after a busy summer for each of us individually. During the summer we exchanged a few emails with relevant material for each of us to review and consider. After opening with prayer we spent a few minutes to get to know each other a little better by sharing the highlights of our summer.

As part of the catching up process we reviewed the intent of our work, the goals and how we will achieve the objectives/goals. We dealt with some logistics in terms of next meeting date, setting a regular time, secure storage of our working files, communications with non team members etc. Several of our members will be away for several months so we discussed the need if any to bring in additional folks to help. We decided not to seek additional help at this time. We discussed time frame of our work and concluded that a full all encompassing conclusion will be very time consuming but well worth the dedication. Everybody on the team confirmed their commitment to the process ahead of us.

To assist in our work we undertook a “Holy Manners” process lead by our Region 15 liaison Rev. Linda Yates setting some basic rules of order and how we will make decisions, respect each others opinions and communicating with non team members.

Before our next meeting each member is completing a “Power Analysis Worksheet” and reviewing a “Sample Living Faith Story Template”. Next meeting is set for Sunday Sept 22nd. We are anxious to get and stay focused on our mandate.

Respectively Submitted

Barry Zwicker

Chair

Report from Admin & Management

A&M Report to Council September 18, 2019

A&M met September 10th following our summer recess of July and August. The financial results for the 8 months to August 31/19 were presented by our Treasurer and should be in the hands of Council members prior to the meeting September 18/19. The results to August 31st are encouraging.

General givings up \$9,500 over budget and \$18,500 over last year.

Rental revenue up \$3,400 over budget and \$2,245 over last year.

The operating deficit to August 31/19 is \$27,793 under the budget figure by \$17,912 and

\$9,115 less than last year at this point in time.

The eventual final payment of the accessibility loan and the necessary contact with PAR contributors is being planned. Joan will require about 60 days advance notice to organize her mailing.

A&M have had no further communication with the auditors related to the 2017 audit. It was agreed we would close our file and if no further billings are received the amount now sitting in accounts payable will be written off at year end.

Discussion led to A&M wishing to see a review audit conducted annually. I understand a “review audit” is not as comprehensive as a “full audit” and much less in cost.

Rental inquiry from the Kiwanis Music Festival was noted and may materialize if price and dates coincide.

Keith is working on the final draft of the designated fund policy but will not have it ready for the council meeting September 18/19.

Grant Warwick, co-chair A&M

Report from Youth Team

Woodlawn Youth Committee Report

September 2019

Woodlawn continues to be very fortunate to have Shannon MacLean’s outstanding dedication and vision for youth programming at Woodlawn. The Youth Committee would also like to express gratitude to Sue Cuthbertson, who faithfully served as the Youth Committee chair since 2013. Kerri Graham is the new chair and looks forward to serving the Youth of Woodlawn. Other members of this committee include Diane Avery, Jaime Avery, Sue Cuthbertson and Shannon MacLean.

On September 13, the first Youth Retreat of the new school year was held with 15 youth in attendance! This retreat provided the opportunity for fellowship amongst young people in our church, as well as a group fundraising project—making soup for *Souper Sunday*. This fundraiser was highly successful, raising a profit of \$405.90 for the YAYA account, while also raising the visibility of the youth in the church and supplying delicious meals for congregants!

Plans are beginning to get underway for the Santa Breakfast to be held on December 8. Volunteers from the congregation will be sought to help with cooking and clean up. This is a wonderful way to get to know the young families and youth in the church and foster inter-generational relationships.

Overall, youth programming at Woodlawn continues to be very successful. After seeing several youth graduate from high school last year, as well as many youth making the transition this September from Sunday School (up to grade 5) to Youth Group (grade 6 and above), we are expecting exciting times and lots of new ideas to share!

We all know that youth are the future of the Church (at Woodlawn and beyond), but tremendous leadership potential exists now. Youth look forward to leading worship services and serving within the broader community.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerri Graham

Report from Stewardship Team

ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

We are excited to announce our upcoming Annual Golf Tournament on Sunday September 29, 2019. This is a fellowship event only, not a fundraiser.

Join us for nine holes of golf followed by a chicken or steak BBQ at The Links at Montague. Golf will start at 2:00 p.m. followed by the BBQ.

Pricing: Golf and dinner \$48.00 per person; If you are interested only in playing Golf, the cost is only \$23.00; and should you simply wish to come for dinner, it can be purchased for \$25.00. All prices include taxes and the fee can be paid to Montague directly upon arrival.

Kindly RSVP Jennifer Taylor at jktaylor@eastlink.ca or (902) 434-1912 by September 22, indicating your menu selection, and your choice of golf and dinner, golf only, or dinner only.

135 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ON OCTOBER 27TH/19

Plans are being finalized for our 135th anniversary. We have sent over 20 invitations out to former ministers of Woodlawn to invite them to come and help us celebrate. Andy O'Neill is our guest speaker at our regular morning service and this will be followed by lunch which will be a Hawaiian beef casserole, rolls and an anniversary cake. Will put out a donation basket for those that can help to offset the cost of the food.

Approximate cost of the meal will be \$200 (feeding 120 people)

Buttons (samples) will be made available on the anniversary table that will be set up in the new narthex within the next couple of weeks. A small box will be put there if anyone would like to make a donation to offset the cost of them. Thanks to Kelly MacNeil, Shannon and Julia for their work on these.

We will have a sign up sheet for those who plan to come for lunch so we know how many to prepare for.

A picture frame that matches closely to the ones that we have already of former and present ministers has been purchased and Shannon MacLean's picture and Rev. Mary Lynn's will be the first two pictures to be added. This has been donated.

We are looking into a banner to go over top of the glass doors outside in the new narthex (white part) from Thomas Hue Signs. Banner will be 36" x 14' and will say,

135th Anniversary Service
Sun. Oct 27th 10 am. All Welcome!

This has been discussed with Dennis (Trustees) regarding the installation of it. We are hoping to use it each year just by changing the numbers on it. Cost of this sign is \$343. Also will be on the lit sign and will be advertised in other ways as well.

We are asking for \$600 to help finance our anniversary event. Sorry did not plan for this when doing the budget last year.

Also would like anyone that is available to help with the anniversary event, please let us know. Thanks!

Teri & Fred on behalf of the Stewardship Team

Sabbatical Report from Rev Phillip

2019 Sabbatical Report

August 8th, 2019

Rev. Phillip Kennedy

My Sabbatical this year was different in some ways from the one 6 years ago.

The first goal that I stated for this time period was to replenish my spirit after a time of mental and spiritual fatigue.

I believe that I have reached that goal with the help of the Spirit and in just being away from the day to day needs and decisions of being in ministry. I removed my church email account from my iPhone so as not to be tempted to "keep up to date" with what has been going on.(and my fellow staff members have been good to not talk about church things when we would see each other). This break from normal routine has been beneficial for me. (What it does mean, however, is that you can't assume that I know everything that has happened while I have been off.)

I attended worship at Cole Harbour Woodside and Stairs United churches pretty regularly when in Dartmouth and benefitted from the view from the pew. It was great hearing different people preach and meeting new and old friends.

The second goal was to step back and get a more universal view (like the astronauts in space. It was a time to look at the bigger picture and ask myself the big, foundational questions like: "What is the meaning of life?" and "How does church and faith fit within that meaning?"; "If I wasn't the minister, would I attend worship and join a church community?" If so, "why?"

Thirdly, it was also a time of personal discernment about my future after the end of June 2020. Do I continue to feel called to ordered ministry either full or part time or retire fully? Will I get more involved with the political process either federally or provincially? How would Valerie and my family feel about any of these options?

For clarity, my current thinking is that I will not retire from ordered ministry in June 2020, at least not fully. (but I will be leaving Woodlawn after being one of your ministry team for over 12 years).

These were some of the things I had a time and privilege to think about while driving many kilometers this summer. People tease Valerie and I all the time about never putting the radio on in the car and driving in silence; just dreaming and thinking without outside stimulus or interruptions.

To help in this discernment, I have read three books in this time period: One on the state of the North American main line church called "Be Not Afraid " by Frederick M Roberts

A second was on Testimony: learning how to help lay folks talk naturally about God and faith to others by Tom Long.

And the third was the story of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer- a German theologian and pastor during the rise of Hitler who was killed by the Nazis about two weeks before the end of WW2. That one in particular impressed me about how similar the threat of racism is in our time. Not only in the USA but in Canada!

With the evangelicals in Canada organizing politically to support right wing candidates in the upcoming election, it is all the more imperative that a different version of being Christian become part of the public awareness in an assertive voice.

As Canadians who are very polite and as United Church folks, whose denomination was founded in a spirit of unity and overlooking differences, it may be hard for us to follow Jesus in this regard.

support for their hatred, violence and exclusion. We need to name it as wrong.

It occurs to me, that almost every religion, including Christianity, has at least two versions of it: one that proclaims that God sides with the oppressed and another that claims God endorses oppression, wealth and power. There is no such thing as political neutrality and if you take no interest or action in politics, you end up with Hitler or Donald Trump!

Another thing that I have been thinking about is how to preach this last 10 months with you.

While I have, and always will be, mostly lectionary based (because the set readings tell the story of Jesus through the Holy Days of the church year), I thought that this coming year I would be more "topical", at least some of the time. For example, I would like to do a service on the centrality and importance of the Bible as our basic text and give some keys for interpretation. Another service might focus on forgiveness and reconciliation and how my theological reflection has evolved over time on this.

I have also been thinking about church growth in a time of decline and where we should focus our efforts in meeting the spiritual needs of our members and the community.

The June Broadview (formerly the Observer) article I read suggested that in a survey of USA church people, when asked why they attended church, they gave these top 10 answers:

1. Become closer to God 81%
2. Sunday school 69%

3. Become a better person 68%
4. Comfort in trouble or sorrow 66%
5. Sermon 59%
6. Community 57%
7. Family tradition 37%
8. Religious obligation 31%
9. Meet new people and socialize 19%
10. Please family spouse or partner 16%

I'll come back to this list and maybe add a few more to it later, but overall, these are pretty good reasons, especially the higher percentages.

I have also been reflecting on why people attend a church and then stay.

I know that what I have been looking for myself in the few times in the last 35 years when I haven't been serving as the minister and I was church shopping. It was a "good sermon" that made me think, feel and moved me to action. And it also depended on the kind of welcome I received when I attended worship both from minister and lay folks.

In fact, I think that there are at least three stages to attracting and keeping new members.

1. Attracting them: the number one way people become attached to church is by someone inviting them "to come and see"; by personal testimony or witness of a member to a non-member of what God, Jesus and / or church means to them and that the other person should check it out. (If you don't feel comfortable doing that, simply ask yourself "why do I come?" What does God mean to me and my life journey? "Why am I a part of Woodlawn United church and the United Church of Canada?") In Tom Long's book on testimony, he suggests that saying the answers to these questions out loud makes it real, not only for others, but for ourselves as well! Also important to "attracting new people" is the need to increase our social media presence and maybe ever more pointed use of the church sign in naming spiritual needs like love and trust over fear and anxiety; hope, promise of God's kingdom and comfort for those struggling with despair and sorrow; god's constant presence for those dealing with loneliness, and more. I have started to have a bit more engagement with twitter, but I confess that I probably never will be very good at it. Perhaps your next clergy team will be!

Another question I have been asking is "attracting WHOM?" Who is our target audience? And who isn't?

While EVERYONE is welcome to attend worship and we go out of our way to be accessible and inclusive, I don't feel bad anymore when everyone doesn't choose to join us.

Theologically, the United Church does NOT believe that if someone is not part of the UCC or ANY church, they are going to hell or damned.

Nor do we believe that a person needs to be "churched" to be a good person or change themselves or the world for the better.

This viewpoint should help us relax a little when not everyone wants to be part of our or any community of faith.

In addition, not all worship is the same. If you predominately want a quiet, contemplative experience, you probably won't choose to "celebrate God's presence" our dominant way. If, like some of those who have gone back to the RC church or Anglican Church, you need to have communion/the Mass in every service, we wish you well. If our music is not to your taste, again we wish you well in your search (although we have a pretty good variety over time).

In fact, if your word view doesn't include God, you have never experienced the presence of God and have no desire to, then we wish you well!

We think you are missing out on a wonderful relationship with a loving God, but that is your choice and we respect it.

The fact is, church has never been all of society. As someone said, “we are called to be the leaven, not the whole loaf!”

So..., who IS/are our target audience?

I would suggest that while everyone is welcome, our faith directs us predominately to those who believe in and know their need of God or are searching; who are interested in transforming themselves and the world through following Jesus as his disciples. We are also directed to reach out to those in need; those who have been wounded, those who are oppressed mentally or physically, those who are disrespected and excluded.

I think that “accessibility” in terms of physical access is also a great metaphor for other groups of people as well.

You should know that both Port Wallace and Cole Harbour United Churches are now officially “affirming” of LGBT+ folks. In 2012, we voted to offer same sex marriages and our web page and name tags and posters proclaim welcome, but for many LGBT+ folks searching out a new congregation, the “Affirming” designation is significant and we can’t put it on our website until we are.

It means that we are not just tolerant of differences, but actually affirm and celebrate them.

My hope for you is that when you get your new leadership in place, they will begin the process leading to becoming officially Affirming and that you will consider embracing it.

Another group of folks that excite me are those who want to speak out for justice and against message of hate and exclusion. How can we encourage prophets and social activists to join us? The hope that Jesus gives of the kingdom is a powerful antidote for despair and burnout for activists for social change.

One of our strengths as the United Church of Canada has been being in the forefront of social change, even when it is not popular. It’s always easier to be prophetic when you have a community of support or to use a metaphor: “If you are going to buck the flow of traffic, organize a convoy!”

Another particular group to target our welcome might be what I call religious refugees.

These are folks who have been hurt by church in the past; who need help removing obstacles in their thinking so that they can enjoy a personal experience with a loving God and others.

This is what the UCC was for me in 1980 when I joined it. I loved the fact that in the United Church, questions and doubts are welcome and that faith doesn’t mean holding fast to beliefs you think are not true! If Jesus really is the Way, Truth and Life, he can handle our doubts and questions.

2. WELCOME: Once you have figured out your target audience and attracted their attention, the second piece is the welcome they receive when they first meet us.. I have been to churches, (EVEN THIS SUMMER!) where I have walked in and out of church and no one has even looked at me. And you know that I’m not an introvert trying to hide from people!” Welcoming” is EVERYONE’S job, not just our wonderful welcome table folks. We probably can fine tune our welcome and do other things as follow up to Sunday morning worship welcome, but we are doing better than many! I look forward to how our new ambassador program will be received.
3. RELATIONSHIPS: The third piece has to do with relationships. People may come to worship out of curiosity, but they will stay for relationships. This has to be more than the Sunday morning hour. Woodlawn has a multitude of programs and small groups and that is where loving relationships are built and maintained.

It reoccurred to me that of all the relationships we have in church, relationship with God is the most important. People are part of all kinds of groups and relationships, but our niche in society is a transforming relationship with a loving **God**.

There are groups for fellowship everywhere, there are sports and entertainment programs everywhere. There are other buildings that people can walk through and be welcomed.

Relationship with God is where we need to focus our energy because God does make a difference and not everyone offers God. This is our niche offering that makes a difference.

Even among churches, the character of the God offered is not always the same. We have a treasure to offer!

People spend their time with things that make the most difference and are distinctive.

And I think most of you agree!

Look at the number one answer of why people attend worship; 81% want to become closer to God.

The final piece that I want to share with you are my answers to the question I think that all of us need to answer:

What difference does God make in my life? I'm hoping that some of you may have the courage to share your answers to this question in worship this year. It's not always easy at first, but I think that learning how to do it is the key to the future.

1. The first answer that comes to me is not a head answer, but a matter of the heart and religious experience. I was lucky enough to grow up in a very loving home and experience unconditional love from my aunt and uncle. But I still had an empty space in the depths of my heart that could only be filled by Christ's presence. In my teens, I invited God in Christ into that space and it transformed my life from longing and fear of rejection to a peace that passes all understanding and a freedom to fully live life as a response to God's love in Christ. That knowledge and presence of God and God's unconditional love for me and everyone has never left me and given me a firm foundation.
2. As a result, fear and anxiety while sometimes present, do not overwhelm me.
3. Despair is counteracted with resurrection hope and the promise that life will have the final word.
4. I don't need to be perfect to be loved and can freely admit my failings, be forgiven and move on.
5. As an imperfect disciple of Jesus, life has a purpose and meaning and mission (and a 2000 year old international organization called church to be part of in carrying it out.)
6. God continues to guide me daily as I try to understand my story in the Biblical story. It both comforts and challenges me. As Karl Barth said, "We need to hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other".
7. Last Sunday in worship I realized how important worshiping God is to me. I think that all of us have something that is our "ultimate concern"; that rules and shapes our decisions and attitudes. Only the God of love and freedom can fill that place in our hearts for us to live happy lives. Worship reminds me again and again how I bump God from my heart, my centre and adopt idols in God's place. Worship of God reorders my life. Some of these idols include a) our own selves(Trump is the poster boy for this one but he just an extreme example); b) survival at all costs (either literally or financially); c) being loved or famous at all costs; d) power, e) pleasure; not ever feeling bad. The Bible is good at naming our many Golden calves and the Way of Faith is one of falling off the wagon or road and getting right back on.

Many of these things I already knew. But the Sabbatical has allowed me to see them again more clearly and systematically and I thank you for the sabbatical opportunity.

For this next 10 months, I promise to give you my best and help you get ready for what I next. May God bless, guide and empower us all as we seek his kingdom...