

**Transition Report
June 2010
First United Church
Rev. Judith Perry**

Goals of First United Church for the Interim Ministry and beyond:

- Improve communication between members and committees of the Church
- Improve the politics and structure of the Congregation
- Organize a follow-up to the members who leave the congregation
- Encourage volunteer participation in church maintenance
- Determine our needs in ministry personnel

My ministry at First United began in November 2009. Following the initial transition and the Christmas season, the work with the Transition Team began in earnest in January. For the past five months we have moved remarkably quickly. The Team had put in a great deal of effort and had laid a solid groundwork before I arrived. We began with the first two goals. Firstly I shall address the second goal.

Improve the politics and structure of the Congregation

The Team surveyed the various governance structures in the United Church Manual and determined that a Church Council would best meet the needs of First United Church.

An Official Board model was in place, which had developed in some cases into four tiers of committees, each seeking approval from the superior committee. Additional committees had been added to the system. This had led to time lapses in the decision making process, as well as considerable frustration. In addition, primarily due to the large size of the committees, particularly the Session, it was often difficult to reach a quorum. This was most noticeable in the Official Board. Lines of communication had not been established between several of the committees. As per the Manual, the stewards and the elders operated independently and without reference to each other.

The Team outlined the Council model and then spent months working on job descriptions and parameters for each committee and position. Once an outline was in place, the Team sat down with each existing committee to seek feedback. All the suggestions that were offered were incorporated into the Council plan, and a broad ownership was achieved. In addition, bulletin inserts were presented at each step of the way. The response of the congregation was overwhelmingly positive. Finally, one of the regular monthly workshops dealt solely with the proposed Church Council. This all came to fruition on June 6 when, at a congregational meeting, the Church Council was accepted to commence in September. A Nominating Committee was approved and has begun its considerable work.

This fall as the new Council gets underway, I shall be present at the various meetings to provide guidance or assistance if required. Further, we shall hold a retreat day for the members of the Council at the beginning of October. There will naturally be some stress and uncertainty as the congregation embraces the new system, and so, of course, there will be a shakedown period. As the Council system has been received with good will and anticipation, this should not prove to be too onerous. The overwhelming congregational support of the Church Council points to a unity and a willingness to move into renewed considerations of mission and ministry.

Improve communication between members and committees of the Church

The new council structure should greatly improve communication. Several key crossovers between committees have been set in place, as well as the use of electronic reports. A new Communication Committee has been created with a seat on the Council. During this new period, we shall continue to monitor communication issues to see if further adjustments are in order.

However, I believe that the greatest contribution towards meeting this goal has been the conduct of the Team under Bob Jordan's leadership. They met and listened to each group. Almost weekly reports were put in the Sunday bulletin. They initiated a monthly "Tea with the Team" after church, beginning before I came, in which all questions and concerns were addressed. In short, they modelled good communication. There is an excellent staff meeting each week. When the staff communicates well, it sets the tone for the congregation.

Organize a follow-up to the members who leave the congregation

This goal has been deferred to this summer, when with more time I can begin to look at the issues which have caused some members to leave. If people could speak to me about folks known to them who have "left", that would be a help. I plan to visit some of these people this coming summer. However, it is very difficult to erase past issues, and people who have left seldom return. What can be done is to note what has caused people to leave the church and learn from any mistakes that the congregation might have made in the past.

An organized follow-up campaign could be arranged once the congregation has put together its blueprint for the future, in order that we have may something concrete to present.

Encourage volunteer participation in church maintenance

One attempt in the bulletin to solicit volunteers resulted in one participant. An insert was placed in the bulletin and respondents were asked to put it in the offering plate if they thought that they could contribute to the maintenance of the church and grounds. We are repeating this request. While encouraging volunteer participation in church maintenance may be a stated goal, it is clearly not a congregational priority.

Determine our needs in ministry personnel

This has been a contentious issue in the history of First United. The numbers from the 2009 statistics, 1513 people under pastoral care, clearly indicate that this is a congregation requiring several clergy. As a general rule even with half that number under pastoral care, two ministry personnel are recommended. The congregation has one ordered minister and a half time minister of visitation.

With increased contributions we shall be prepared to call new ministry personnel to meet the stated needs of the congregation with a particular emphasis on commitment to seniors, programming and outreach to the larger community.

I have presented a series of monthly workshops, following the Sunday worship services, which have been well attended. (Having a lunch provided was a plus – thank you to Bob and Audrey Jordan and the Transition Team.) These workshops have laid the groundwork for the congregation to consider its mission and the staff considerations that need to be set in place to achieve them.

Several things have come out these congregational deliberations:

1. When examining the congregation's personality a certain rigidity was acknowledged. The following statement was developed by those in attendance: "Personality type – cold as ice - nice when you get to know her - open to challenge but rigid - likes to be right all the time - great with close friends"
2. While the congregation is large enough to follow the corporate model, the program church model was preferred, if there was sufficient ministry personnel for programming to be a major element in the job description.
3. In terms of the congregational life cycle bell curve, the congregation recognized that it was in the redevelopment/revitalization phase. The impetus had turned towards maintenance and preservation. More time and energy would be required than if it was simply renewing their ministry. Redevelopment would necessitate more ministerial hours than one ministry personnel could possibly provide.

In September I shall present a workshop on becoming a “Green” Church. However, beginning at the October workshop, we shall need to consider the mission statement. With the exception of the Church Council Workshop, at every other monthly workshop that we have presented, the issue of the present mission statement was noted by members of the congregation. It was stated that First United has not lived up to the goal of being an inclusive congregation. The congregation needs to formulate a new mission statement and decide whether or not this will continue to be an element. With a new mission statement, the congregation will then be able to consider what staffing needs to be set in place in order to achieve it. The task of the Transition Team will be to provide guidance and information.

The Transition Team will establish a working model of staff job descriptions based on the Council plan. Clear boundaries need to be set in place.

Through the adoption of the Church Council model First United Church has moved together in a spirit of community and solidarity demonstrating a commitment to working together. Unity in the congregation will enable it to make the necessary changes to work towards redevelopment. Establishing a model of team ministry between myself and the Reverend Roger Moore, who is beginning his ministry as the Minister of Visitation, will provide a working model.

Conclusion

With the unity presented in the acceptance of the Church Council model, we shall now move forward to examine the staffing issues as well as creating a new mission statement. When these are in place, we can proceed to requesting Presbytery to create a Joint Needs Assessment Committee.

I am very gratified at the speed and the direction taken by the congregation. The Transition Team has worked both hard and well, and the congregation has been very supportive.

Thank you all, and may our journey together continue to be blessed.