

Nelson United Church Board Proposal to Build Our Congregation

A. Preamble:

The Rev. David Hart, a moderatorial candidate at this year's General Council and newly retired minister at Bedford United Church near Halifax, Nova Scotia, said (in his moderatorial speech) something to the effect that if his church can do it, all churches can do it. He was referring to being a vibrant and growing multi-generational congregation that invites people of all ages to explore how spirituality and life intersect. There are many examples across the country of growth and new life. David Hart's comments sparked an idea that we could take concrete steps to change our future.

These past couple of years we have focused on a process of creating a vision statement to guide both changes to our church building and to our programming. With the new lease agreement with the Nelson Food Cupboard, we have taken a first step with regards to our building. Over these past few years, the Board has also had a number of conversations about programming, ministry and what it means to be church in a rapidly changing society where church life seems not to have much meaning for many people. And so, this proposal is aimed at trying to get a handle on the programmatic changes we need to consider to be an "effective congregation in a rapidly changing society." (Cameron Trimble, Center for Progressive Renewal, at a conference in Victoria in 2013.)

As has been documented in numerous studies, newspaper articles, Observer articles and at workshops and conferences, The United Church of Canada (and liberal, mainline denominations) is in a slow decline. While we—as a congregation—are still near the top of the decline curve (see diagram at the end), if we do not do something with determination and intention, we will accelerate down the curve in the coming years. Engaging in an intentional ministry so that we can transition into new life makes sense for us while we are still near the top of the curve; **so, to this end, the Board is proposing a two-year full-time appointment to intentionally work on building up our congregation.**

The Board does not feel that we can adequately engage this proposal in sufficient detail and maintain our current work-load and our current staff responsibilities. This is a bold step in a time in the life of the church that requires courage (i.e. action with heart) and boldness.

B. Proposal: Two-Year full-time appointment

The primary focus of this position would be engagement with youth, young families, and young adults, communication about our values and beliefs, creating new relationships and partnerships in the community, and provide direct leadership to the creation of programming, ministry and potential changes to the physical building that we envision for the future.

We would create a project with clear guidelines, goals and objectives, apply for applicable grants, and strike an oversight committee to oversee the work. The candidate would be directly responsible to the oversight committee and thus to the Board and congregation.

C. Finances:

a. Current Assets:

\$113,750	Vision Fund
\$416,500	Trust Funds (at December 31 st , 2017)
\$ 28,000	General Fund Accumulated Surplus

b. Cost Breakdown for 2-year, full-time position

Salary:	\$55,000/year:	\$ 110,000
Salary Expenses:	\$11,000/year:	\$ 22,000
Program Support:	\$ 5,000/year:	\$ 10,000

Total \$ 142,000

c. Sources of Revenue

Learning Site Grant:	\$ 10,000
UCC Grants:	\$ 15,000
Surplus:	\$ 10,000
Special Donation:	\$ 7,000
Vision Fund:	\$ 25,000
Trust Funds:	\$ 75,000

Total: \$142,000

d. Notes:

- i. This position would be an internship for a candidate in the United Church; thus, our congregation would be eligible for a \$10,000 grant (for 8 months).
- ii. While the Board doesn't know specifically what grants are available from either BC Conference or the national church, the Board will apply for as many grants as possible. Most of the grants are for extra-congregational (and new) ministries, but there is some grant money available for an initiative such as is being proposed.
- iii. We would not use up all of our surplus.
- iv. People in our congregation could give directly to this project and the Board could, perhaps explore crowd-source funding.
- v. It is being proposed that we would use a portion of the principle of our Vision Fund and our Trust funds.

D. Other Details

The traditional ministries of Nelson United Church, and much of the United Church of Canada, are missing the diversity of age, energy and world view that people in their 20's, 30's and 40's bring. Our congregation has long been committed to welcoming people of all ages and embracing diversity, so being welcomed is clearly not all that is needed to connect people with Christ and community today. At the same time, we are confident that the church could have a different role to play in carrying the gospel to the world; that role will not look exactly like what it has been in our past traditions.

Studies are showing younger adults are facing higher levels of anxiety than previous generations. The Church has a part to play in this healing. As Christians we are called to address suffering where we see it, and to offer our peace to the world. As a church we are called to listen to the yearnings of young adults as they, too, seek life-giving experiences of love that transform their way of being in the world, and then to respond to what they say. We need to find ways we can join as co-creators with our missing generations, to be the body of Christ together in a new way for the coming age.

E. Goals to include (but not be limited to):

- a. To listen carefully to the spiritual needs of the community, giving particular focus to children, youth, young families and young adults.
- b. To take compassion and love out into the web of our community, with a focus on “journeying with” rather than “welcoming in.”
- c. To communicate the Christian message to those who have not heard it AND to change perceptions of Christianity with those who have heard a negative message about it.
- d. To create an intentional 3rd place¹ where people can explore and deepen their faith together.
- e. To join with those currently “outside” the tradition as co-creators of the changing church, a just peace in the world, fostering the practice of discipleship in new and authentic ways, and collectively transforming our way of being in the world.

F. Objectives to include (but not be limited to):

- a. Seek out younger adults where they already are and establish a relationship and/or forum for listening to occur.
- b. Actively listen to the concerns, interests and challenges of youth and younger adults and then discern how it is that the United Church can address these.
- c. Respond to what has been discerned and offer learning, worship, conversation, social and justice-creating programming.
- d. Assist younger adults in animating their faith to practice discipleship in ways that draw on their ideas and passions.
- e. Assist children, youth, young families and young adults in exploring and developing a spiritual practice.
- f. Actively communicate our own liberal, progressive United Church beliefs and values without using churchy language.
- g. Work with the Board and an oversight committee to integrate new programming and changes within our congregation.

¹ Third place refers to an environment that is separate from the two usual spaces that we occupy—home (1st place) and work (2nd place). Examples are churches, cafes, clubs, public libraries, parks, etc. Third places are places of engagement, learning, spirituality and peace with justice.

G. Church Growth (and decline) Diagram

Life-Cycle of a Congregation:
& Potential for New Growth

