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Congregational Life

Congregational Life Centre—Consultants to Congregations 780 619-0386

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Gifts of Shared Ministry

by Dawn Rolke

For the past 8 years, as a United Church minister, I have made my way with three congregations in suburban Regina. I am called by Eastside United. We live and work with Bread of Life Lutheran, a large congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and with St. Philip, a mature, family-sized Anglican congregation.

At the **Living Spirit Centre**, we have three clergy (Anglican, Lutheran, United), three secretaries, an intern, a part-time United Church Christian Education person, and numerous laypeople who serve in key leadership roles. Each congregation has its own board, vestry or council which directs its ministry; and each congregation retains strong ties to its denomination. Together we have a Living Spirit Centre Council which, with joint committees, oversees life at the Centre. At weekly staff meetings, we discuss program, administrative and worship matters. Always, we ask the question: "Can we do this together?" If not, one group may pursue an idea on their own, or the idea may be dropped.

Space-wise, everything gets booked through the Central Office and the two full-time secretaries. Regarding worship, each congregation has a service on Sunday mornings, with the Lutherans and Anglicans sharing a service on Saturdays, too. We have mid-week Joint Worship during Lent and Advent, and other joint

services throughout the year.

Finances are managed separately, with each congregation contributing to joint projects, expenses, and the mortgage based on its membership. Each year, we do a member count and adjust contributions accordingly. In 2004, a building project increased the size of our facility, giving us two sanctuaries, a large narthex, and a lower level of classrooms and meeting space. In August, 2005, we completed an outdoor Cretan labyrinth, replacing the Chartres Labyrinth built in 1999.

On paper, it all seems very straightforward. In practice, it's not. Rather, we are "eternally becoming," part of an unfolding creation story.



Our theme this issue:

**Transforming your congregation ...
... by transforming your leadership**

Leadership that connects

Dawn Rolke is minister at Eastside United Church, Regina, and can be reached by e-mail at urbanspirit@sasktel.

Guides, Mentors and Models

Most ministers, I believe, long to be reshaped in the image of God. This, in fact, may be our central longing and why we place ourselves among life-long Christians and other seeking people. In Shared Ministry, I experience an abundance of mentors and guides. Significant among them are my two ordained colleagues, Jerry (Lutheran pastor) and Helena (Anglican priest). Jerry and Helena are fine pastors, servant-leaders, and communicators, and both were key in the formation of the Centre.

Daily, I appreciate my colleagues. Because of proximity, we borrow and share resources and books. We worship and pray together. We give and take, given personal strengths and weaknesses. We talk theology. As the youngest minister, I also observe the way my more experienced colleagues negotiate difficult people and situations. I am simply a different leader because of this ongoing apprenticeship.

As minister to a relatively young congregation, I also benefit from the wisdom of the lay elders at St. Philip and Bread of Life. St. Philip, especially, has leaders who ground us in tradition, while lay leaders at Bread of Life often call us into radical risk and trust. This leadership is felt throughout the entire Centre and has a vital shaping force

Cross-Fertilization

In any authentically shared setting, there is bound to be cross-fertilization. In 2005 Eastside United decided to use a very moving Marty Haugen (Lutheran) liturgy for our summer worship.

The Lutherans had purchased it, but as with everything, the resource was available for all. Using it, Eastside parishioners got a feel for *singing* a liturgy week after week; they also experienced weekly confession in a different and, perhaps, a deeper way. Similarly, over the years, Bread of



Life noticed the United Church passion and commitment to Justice and Outreach work. This created a push within their congregation for similar work and now, a Joint Outreach program is taking shape.

The Triple-Braided Rope: Balance and Stability

Tucked into the book of Ecclesiastes is an interesting passage: "A triple-braided rope is not easily broken" (4:12b). I find the triple-braid an interesting image for life at the Centre, where we often notice the moderating and balancing influence of three groups. In the beginning years, particularly, differences would often arise over God language and inclusive language, worship forms, and the place of gay and lesbian people in the church (among other things). Often, two denominational groups would be polarized, and the third would offer a way through the disagreement.

Theological Call to Oneness

I remember well a comment made by a United Church person after our first summer in Shared Ministry (1997). Because we were a small group that summer, we decided to worship with the Lutherans for two months and share resources. At the end of the summer, one member said, "We may not know what we are, but we're not *that*." I found the comment delightful and honest, but I'm not sure we would hear such a comment today. Though many members still prefer a United Church way of doing things, many also consider attendance at joint functions, worship, and learning events a deep part of our call at the Centre. That call is to know each other more deeply, to challenge ourselves on the edges of what isn't quite comfortable, and to validate the many expressions of faith and worship. Many parishioners appreciate that we stay in Shared Ministry not just out of need, but out of a gospel call to "be one."

More ...

This is a small taste of life at the Living Spirit Centre. In closing, I offer words spoken by our Moderator, The Rev. Peter Short when he visited us in Nov, 2004. "Connection is not something we have to create; it is something we have to remember." At LSC, we are trying to remember.

Congregational Transformation

By Elizabeth Short

Congregational transformation can be an exciting time of growth. It also requires tremendous commitment and fortitude.

I am employed in a parish that is in the midst of transformation. I know that if true transformation is to take place ...certain elements need to be in place:

- ◆ Passionate and effective leadership is absolutely crucial. A reason for the transformation and a vision for the future have to be understood and embraced by the leadership, and constantly communicated to the congregation.
- ◆ Opportunities for community and intimacy are always an important element of a healthy parish. In times of growth and change they are paramount.
- ◆ Passion for the parish and its vision needs to be present throughout.

Society has radically changed over the last twenty, even ten, years. Congregations can't follow old patterns and norms and expect to be relevant to this changed and changing society. Recognizing a need for change is only the beginning. There needs to be willingness to change and an understanding of the type of change required. It is not good enough to say, "We want our numbers to grow." It is better to ask, "What is the reason for our church in this place, at this time?" A parish should have a vision that people understand and are excited about.

In my parish transformation process, we read books, sought out consultants, and held meetings and focus groups. A vision and mission statement was produced and an extensive ministry plan put in place.

One thing that was obvious was that the building had become too small. In order to grow, space was required. It was decided to move to a larger building. The present building was given to a senior's care home for use as their chapel and a church was purchased. The congregation is meeting in a school gym while they await their new church. We have likened it to "wandering in the wilderness".

This in-between time is an important time of self-discovery:

- ◆ Without a building, who are we?
- ◆ How must we cooperate to do all that is required to set-up and take-down each week?
- ◆ How do we let people know where we are?
- ◆ How do we create "sacred space" in a school gymnasium?
- ◆ What do we do to provide a "home" during the week?
- ◆ How do we continue to feel a sense of community and intimacy as a very small congregation grows?
- ◆ How do we communicate more effectively as we grow?
- ◆ Remind us – why are we doing this?

We are constantly reminded of our mission statement – we read it, pray it, and print it. We look at our ministry plan regularly and "check-in" as to how we are progressing. We have consultants we use constantly. We are always reading and learning. Although we are moving to a new facility, that is not the main goal, but rather a step along the way to reach our goals.

Leadership is Key

Leadership is key through all this. The person "at the helm" must be passionate, knowledgeable and have the ability to lead others, allow others to lead, and infect others with his/her passion. Her/his primary goal is to serve Christ first. Our priest is constantly "mining for gold". He gets to know people, discovers their gifts and talents and then gives them the opportunity to share these gifts and talents in the life of the parish. He is building up a core of leadership that is excited about the parish, its potential and its vision.

Many people are excited and enthusiastic about

*Leadership
that is
passionate*



Elizabeth Short (left) with parishioner.

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(Continued from page 3)



this place. There have been others who have resisted change. They have seen their old ways of matriarchs and patriarchs disappearing and they have feared a loss of identity and control. They haven't wanted to grow. They liked the small, social

group they had in the old church.

In this situation the leadership must remain faithful to the vision. As we have persisted in moving towards our vision in this parish, we are finding that most of the people who were resisting change and at times trying to sabotage it are now "coming aboard". In the end they don't wish to be left behind. As they begin to integrate into the emerging parish they are greeted with love and acceptance.

A good leader *models* good leadership. A good leader is in the trenches, serving. A church leader is a servant of Christ and is faithful to that calling. A church leader is constantly listening to and connecting with God.

An Exciting Place to Be

A parish that has shared ministry, vision, and leadership is one that is enabling itself to grow and transform. It is an exciting and fulfilling place to be. People are given a variety of opportunities to discover who they are and want to become. They begin to understand what it is that makes them a unique and special gift to the community they wish to serve. They encourage others to use their gifts and talents. Bill Easum speaks of "permission giving" leaders:

Today's leaders focus on permission giving rather than control or managing. They are both individualistic and collaborative. They network individuals and teams through a shared vision of a preferred future. They facilitate ministry in others. ... Their passion is to develop other leaders who will develop other leaders.

People hunger for community and intimacy. Many are looking for moments to

find peace and a chance for reflection. As a parish grows, it must seek ways to engage people in ways that allow them to feel accepted, part of things, *known*.

Elizabeth Short is a member of the staff at All Saints Anglican Church, Cochrane, Alberta. You can contact her at elizabeth.short@shaw.ca.

Small Group Ministry Training

4 days

at the Athabasca Lodge

August 14—17, 2006

Set aside the time for the Athabasca Retreat Centre four-day Small Group Ministry event.

We experience the support and spiritual renewal that comes from being part of a small group, and explore the theory and dynamics that make small groups such a dynamic means for growth and enrichment in the church today.

If you can, come as a team. Each congregational team develops a plan for instituting small group ministry in their congregation.

The session starts on Monday 10:30 a.m., and concludes Thursday at 3 p.m. Registration is limited to 8 persons so register early. Cost: \$250 per person includes tuition, meals and accommodation. Call the Centre to register a team from your church.



Facilitators Joyce Madsen & Clair Woodbury

The Committee Conundrum

Reader Responses



Are committees disappearing? Should they disappear? Last issue we brought attention to the number of people “playing down if not outright denigrating the role of what was once the quintessential heart of congregational life — the standing committee.”

We quoted authors like Edgar Stoesz, whose book we review in this issue: “Committees ... kill more ideas by their cautious scrutiny than they generate.” A local pastor, Marv Ziprick, told us: “They are called standing committees because they stand in the way of good ideas.”

We received three responses.

Since meeting John Carver in the late 80's (when he was still affordable), being enthralled by his model, I have guided a few organizations through the conversion process to a Policy Governance model. Although Carver has strongly advocated for adoption of the whole model, my experience is that the principles do not play out the same way in every case. Which, actually, is hardly surprising.

It is appropriate — imperative, even — to always question our structures, which too quickly take on lives of their own, often to the detriment of the purpose they were created to serve. The article's quotes and comments about standing committees are true, but not necessarily all the time. I am now working in a small organization that moved to a Policy Governance model 5 yrs ago, and is now, thoughtfully and carefully, returning to having a few standing committees. The key, of course, is to remind ourselves of what purposes we are trying to achieve and what kind of structure (committee, task group, etc) is most suited to the job, and not to elevate the structure to an unquestionable status.

Larry Derkach

My perspective is currently from that of a United Church of Canada Presbytery standing committee — the Finance, Property and Development Committee. Our committee is able to give more detailed consideration to a matter than would be possible at either

Presbytery Executive or Presbytery itself. We provide considered reports and, judging from the comments I have received, these are valued by both the Executive Committee and Presbytery.

I think the key thing is that the Committee realize, if another committee has said this should happen, that its role is to describe how it could happen (rather than debating whether it should or not). That's not always easy but, if you remember what your Committee's role is, you'll be able to fulfill your responsibility without killing creative new ideas.

Tom Forgrave, Chair
Finance, Property & Development Cte
Edmonton Presbytery

For about five years now I have been standing on my soap box telling all who will listen that we should eliminate committees. The biggest problem with committees is that they relieve individuals of responsibility for doing something. Someone has a good idea. Instead of running with it, they hand it off to a committee. Then they sit back and wait for six months. When nothing happens, they complain about the committee.

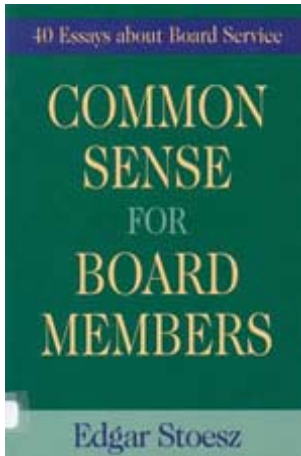
Having said all that, I have been part of committees that have been very effective in getting things done. Looking back, I note that some of the characteristics of those committees were similar to the characteristics we strive for in small groups — a common interest and support for each other. The Stewardship Team I am currently part of is like that. This group generates its own ideas and then acts on them.

I think we need balance. We need groups of people who manage the routine stuff — running the worship service, maintaining the building. We also need a culture where anyone can take an idea and run with it. In a perfect world, the creative folks will come up with an idea and generate some excitement around it. Then they will find some of us planners to help to carry it out. Just don't call this synergy a committee.

Linda Paddon

*Leadership
that makes
it happen*

*Thoughts on
the subject of
committees?
Go to the blog
on our web
site and share
your feedback.
www.
congregational
life.com*



Common Sense for Board Members

Book Review

This little book (91 pages) contains exactly what the sub-title says, 40 short two-page essays that cover just about everything you need to know about creating an effective efficient board.

The author, Edgar Stoesz, served for years as chair of the Habitat for Humanity International board. His insights come from first-hand experience. A board's primary

role, he maintains, is to determine the ends for which an organization exists, and then to make decisions to guide the organization along those lines.

His book follows the Carver model, where the board's role is to set policy that the staff then carry out. In the church setting, he knows many board members are also volunteers teaching children or leading small groups. The point is not to confuse roles. When members sit as a board, they make policy. When they appear as a volunteer, they carry out that policy with the support of the ministry staff.

All too often boards become so involved in what Stoesz calls housekeeping that they neglect their planning and policy making duties. He reminisces: "I enjoyed telling the Habitat board when chairing the meetings, 'My job is not to build houses. It is to build an organization that will build many houses.'"

His definitions of vision and mission are very clear:

- ◆ VISION is what an organization wishes to *become*.
- ◆ MISSION is what an organization commits itself to *do*.

Without a clear and compelling sense of purpose, he insists, a congregation wanders, remains tentative and lacking in focus. "When an organization clarifies its purpose and commits to it," he assures us, "its limits will be determined only by the energy it can give to achieving that purpose."

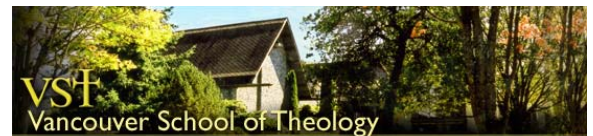
Stoesz recommends planning at two levels — a long-range plan and an annual work plan. The book has helpful chapters on delegating, dealing with board-room bullies, handling that inevitable crisis, and the importance of reporting back to the membership. People want to know what has been accomplished and

how effectively their funds are being used by the organization to carry out its mission.

Lastly, says Stoesz, serving on a board should be fun. "Board meetings fun? Yes, fun! Directors should be able to look back on a year of board service and say, 'I liked that! Let's do it again.'" His simple advice: "If it isn't fun, don't do it." Great advice. I say amen to that.

Edgar Stoesz, *Common Sense for Board Members*. 40 Essays about Board Service. Inter-course, PA: Good Books, 2000. ISBN: 1-56148—319-2. \$12.95 CDN. Review by Clair Woodbury.

Leadership with a clear and compelling sense of purpose



BUILDING SUPPORTIVE AND CHALLENGING TEAMS

July 3-9, 2006 in Vancouver
with Joyce Madsen & Clair Woodbury

Building a team that instills confidence and encourages learning requires a foundation of shared vision, a strong sense of identity, open communication, and an effective support system. We will share our more than 10 years experience of working in a team, and provide a wealth of insights and resources to enhance your work as a team. Come as a team and leave energized. Register with VST online at www.vst.edu. Or info from Joyce and Clair 780-619-0386.

What's New at the Centre

By Joyce Madsen

Many of us grew up in a world that believed in a "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" philosophy. That is not the world that we live in today. Today we see Tim Horton's introducing new sandwiches and drinks every month; we watch shopping malls renovate to change their space; we have cars available in many, many sizes and models. We live in a time when we need to respond to changing needs.

We try to stay in touch with the changes that are happening around us and explore some of the ways to adapt to these changes.

Our Website

Younger people are very much at home communicating via the Internet. This is one of the reasons why an effective website is important. We totally revamped our website last summer to try to make it more relevant, easier to navigate, and easier to maintain. Our usage has climbed to 1,500 visits in a month, or 50 every day. We want to continue to have a relevant resource so your suggestions are always welcome.

If you haven't got a website, or you haven't looked at yours through the eyes of someone investigating your congregation, we invite you to make that a priority. Young people today use the web!

Newsletter

Communication is a problem areas we hear most congregations talk about. We keep in touch with our membership base as often as possible; at minimum we send out 4 newsletters every year. Last year we went digital and our distribution has more than doubled. It is interesting how many people share digital newsletters with friends and others, and then these people ask to be added to our list. Our network of connections just keeps growing. Are you increasing the number of people you communicate with – or are you worried about saving postage?

Resources

We try to meet the ever changing needs of congregations by providing resources and adapting our processes and methods.

Through St. Stephen's College we offer our on-line course, *Congregational Transformation*, which was developed from our book *Wings Like Eagles*. We also taught a successful one-week intensive course on *Managing Personal and Organizational Transformation*. In May we are again facilitating a one-week *Science and Theology* Course. We invite any of you interested in exploring these areas to consider joining us.

This summer we are delivering a Team Building program at VST. We invite you to consider bringing your team and participate in a week of learning and playing together.

(Continued on page 8)



A course that will make a difference for your ministry...

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN DIALOGUE

May 10-14, 2006 in Edmonton

Clair Woodbury and Joyce Madsen lead this one-week intensive course that explores the way our current culture is asking questions that both challenge our faith and enrich our understanding of God. This is a journey of spiritual exploration filled with new insights and excitement.

Call the Congregational Life Centre at 780-619-0386 for more information or St. Stephen's College at 780-439-7311 to register.



Our Small Group Ministry program will be held in Athabasca again this summer. This is a four day program designed for congregational teams to explore and develop a plan to introduce a small group ministry in their congregation. We make the material relevant and

you have to share – and then you find out who is in the community you serve. Are they young families, single adults, married with no kids, blue-collar workers, professionals, sports fans, or fitness gurus? Your ministry has to connect with the people you serve. What are they missing in their lives that you can provide?

Get creative about meeting their needs. Run a PD program so parents have a place for their kids when the teachers take a day off. Provide a way for families to come together over dinner. Offer muffins and meditation at 7:00 in the morning. Offer a tutoring or reading program for busy families. In other words, do whatever it takes to become a place where people feel they belong.

You have to be prepared to prune – sometimes significantly, and then you have to nurture the new life. It is risky business because sometimes the tree will die in spite of all your best efforts – but continuing to do what you are currently doing in a declining congregation will only result in more decline.

Are we only serving those who have supported our churches for years. Frankly, their needs are being met. There is no evidence that Jesus was concerned about those attending synagogue. It was those with no spiritual home, the poor, and the outcast that had all his attention.

Meeting the needs in your community is the challenge for a congregation today. It requires confidence, a willingness to work hard, the courage to confront naysayers, and being prepared to take the risk.

provide an authentic small group experience for the participants.

Some of you may be familiar with the resource we published in 2004, *Prisms*. Over the summer we spent some time editing the questions used in building a profile and have developed a 6-8 week *Prisms* study guide, *Shaping Your Deep Gladness*. This is a resource for small groups who want to explore their gifts and their ministries as they prepare to respond to God's call.

Consulting

We have been consulting for more than 11 years now. Congregations today say they want to grow, more often than not so they will have more income to meet their growing expenditures. They look at what we call the flavour of the month or the program of the year as a quick fix for their decline. Transforming a congregation is not about fixing the financial problems or adding a new and innovative worship service, or even updating your programs – it IS about finding a new way to be the church in your community today.

There is no quick fix. You begin with what you have done in the past, what gifts

Leadership that is about a new way to be the church

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The Congregational Life Centre is a not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to assisting congregations to be more effective in their ministry.