



May 2007
Volume 13, Issue 4

Congregational Life

Congregational Life Centre — Consultants to Congregations 780 619-0386

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A Mission that Fits Today's Culture

A conversation with Norman Greene, Minister
North Bramalea United Church
Brampton, Ontario

We have continued to grow steadily, about 30% in the last five years or so. We added a third service at Easter 2006. This past year we recognized that our growth was slowed by a lack of staff and too small a facility. We developed a ministry growth plan which has four elements: developing new ministries by our people, developing leadership, adding staff, and expanding our building.

This growth plan grew out of our mission statement established in 1996: "To enable spiritually hungry people to share the life of Christ." We added a vision slogan in 2006: "Imagine God building better lives, better families and a better Brampton. We do." That vision slogan grew out of work that identified five basic components of vision: transforming people, building a caring community, reaching out to Brampton with emphasis on preventing families from falling into disrepair, and offering hope. We have a neighbouring Baptist church that has all kinds of programs dealing with addiction

and recovery. We don't need to repeat that. We aim to work upstream in the prevention areas. Those are the points of our vision that were developed by our leadership and focus groups of the congregation.

The church program that epitomizes our vision has turned out to be a summer carnival day. My colleague, Jamie Holtom's son Lucas was

killed in the Pine Lake, Alberta tornado several years ago. To celebrate Lucas' life, Jamie and Katrina and the Church organized an annual carnival for the neighbourhood. It is a free carnival that is attended by two to three thousand people. It has involved 250 volunteers from the church and neighbourhood. Reaching out to our neighbours like that has embedded an effective gospel vision and perspective for our City, in the Church.

I can't say there is a direct connection between this person or that coming to our church because of the Carnival, but it gives the Church a sense of being outward looking. It has attracted people.

Of course there are many other active groups and programmes in the Church that continue to work for each other and for our neighbours.

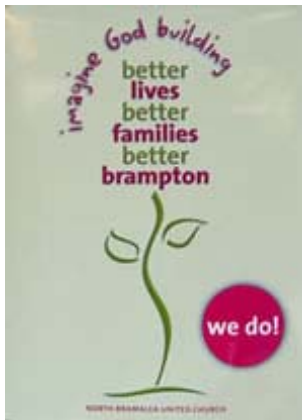
Our ministry growth plan includes developing ministries and leaders among our people over the coming year. Our Ministry Council has proposed a thematic goal of strengthening our core to receive new members through five areas of work: a belonging process, discipleship growth development, leadership development, discipleship of giving development and reworking our church government toward supporting mission. Recently we held a workshop with sixty leaders who brainstormed tasks and champions in these five areas.

Of course our standing operating mission teams - Worship, Discipleship Growth, Outreach (including Community Support Initiative), Welcome, Hospitality and Pastoral Care, Small Groups and

Continued on page 2

Norman Greene





Multiplying Leaders—continued

Resource Management - continue with yearly objectives.

With regard to adding staff, we just received Presbytery approval for a Joint Needs Assessment Committee report for adding a Children, Youth and Family minister. We are also looking at a part time church manager position.

We also received Presbytery approval in principal for adding 26,000 sq. ft. to our building, with a sanctuary that seats 500, and a basement under that with a number of rooms for doing the ministries we have.

We completed a financial campaign in mid-November through which people committed \$905,000 over three years toward staffing and building. That is the most recent figure. We hope eventually it will be a million.

Behind these recent initiatives lies a change in the late '90s. At that point we began to move from a middle of the road traditional United Church. We have a band now, with worship music drawn from a wide variety of sources. Our worship has become far more visual. Most of our service is projected. We have a lot of images, movie clips, etc. Our values are that we need to offer the good news of the gospel in the context of Brampton. That means a different style of music that fits the Brampton culture and far more visual projection - that's the culture these days. The image culture is very powerful.

Another cultural shift - we are quite informal. We have coffee before the service, and people bring their coffee into the church.

Our ministers wear street clothes. In terms of worship style, we have a lot more people up front, whether it is the band, the worship team, or people being interviewed or talking in various ways - talking about their faith. We want the people participating in the

worship to see their faith modeled up there. We need different styles of people, different kinds of people, different races - all that in the leadership reflecting the congregation.

We realize that changing with the culture requires a whole lot of other stuff. Leadership has become very important. First of all, we are cultivating leadership at many different levels in the church. We have a budget for training leaders, taking leaders to conferences, meetings with leaders to offer skills and points of view and encourage them to lead.

We have moved from a minister-centred church with committees to ministry teams. There has been a change in our governance. We don't have a Board with ten committees, we have a Ministry Council with six teams. We coach our leaders to encourage other leaders. Jamie Holtom and I intentionally offer leadership. If you ask where the vision of the church has come from, it has come out of our hearts - Jamie's and mine. We listened to people and then check with people in a number of ways, individual conversations, Ministry Council, focus groups, etc. The mission and vision comes from an interaction between minister and the grass roots. It is verbalized by the leadership, we check back with the congregation, and it gets crystallized. We try to promote that kind of leadership in each of the groups and ministries that we have.

We have tried to cultivate small groups. We are not very systematic about that, but we have a lot of teams or small groups working throughout the church's life. They have a good deal of freedom to lead and meet the needs of the particular people around them. We support them by budget, recruitment and as clear a vision as possible within which to work.

Our men's group of 35 or so meets for breakfast on Saturday morning once a month. The agenda includes talks from different guys in the church on spiritual questions, initiatives and interests they have found helpful. Some of the guys meet Wednesday mornings, have breakfast together, support each other and pray for each other.

The Women's ministry began more with small groups and an Annual Retreat and now has also taken up a Saturday morning breakfast. The groups tend to focus on

Greeter Pamela Gibson showed us where to hang our coats, helped get the grandchildren into their class, and talked about their plans to expand the facility.





On the way out, we were invited to help ourselves to a "Church Shopping Bag." It contained some information about the church and two DVDs, one a welcome to North Bramalea United and the other communicating what they believe as a congregation.

spiritual growth and learning. The groups do include a UCW and a Craft Group which also fund raise. All this comes under the umbrella of "Women's Ministry."

We have moved from an outreach emphasis on benevolence to something we call Community Support Initiatives. The significance of the shift has to do with a change from giving money to members being active in the life of our City in the name of Christ. We have, for example, an evening for cancer victims and their families. Out of this came a Regional Councillor's initiative to develop the Wellspring Centre, a centre for social and spiritual support for cancer victims and their families, here in Brampton. She convinced developers to donate a lot and a house, and she is well on her way to raising three million dollars in assets for that. The idea came from an Evening of Hope and she attributes the Wellspring development to God's work and the support of the Church. Needless to say, that's a very exciting outcome.

A single parent moms group has emerged. This group has a dinner a number of times a year so the women can have a night out and feel support. That group invites single Moms from the local shelter to their events as a way of extending the gospel to Brampton. Forty-five moms and children came from the shelter to one of their recent dinners and movie nights.

We have been heavily influenced by

Ginghamsburg United Methodist Church in Ohio and Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Our theology is significantly different at times, but we find their methods, their vision and their hope very enabling. We take 15 to 20 people down to their August leadership conferences, delivered here in Toronto by video cast. We also have participated in other conferences from both churches, for small groups or worship arts, for example.

The one single most important aspect that has contributed to our growth? It is hard to pick out one factor because it has involved a cultural shift. But I would say the key factor has been clarifying the mission and vision, and having someone to drive that.



Norm Greene was appointed by Dufferin-Peel Presbytery to develop the new congregation of North Bramalea United Church out of Harrison United Church members and others gathered from the north Bramalea area in 1983. He has served North Bramalea United Church since then. Visit the North Bramalea website at <http://www.nbuc.ca> for more information.

Congregational Life

is published by the Congregational Life Centre,
#1405, 5328 Calgary Trail, Edmonton AB T6H 4J8
Phone: 780-619-0386

Staff Team: Joyce Madsen & Clair Woodbury
E-mail: joyce@CongregationalLife.com
clair@CongregationalLife.com

Visit our web site: www.CongregationalLife.com

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

Register
NOW

Congregational Life

Small Group Ministry

Athabasca August 2007

This August, we are again offering a four day event at our retreat lodge in a woodland setting two hours north of Edmonton. We explore the steps to take in creating a small group ministry in your congregation — and give you an opportunity to enjoy the spiritual enrichment of being part of a small group.

We recommend this program for clergy and lay leaders who want to develop or strengthen small group ministry within their congregation.

Participation in this program will give you an understanding of the dynamics of small group ministry, experience in being part of a spiritually supportive group, and the beginnings of a plan to develop a small group ministry in your congregation.

Book now. We are limited to eight participants per session. Our 2,000 sq. ft. lodge is equipped with a modern kitchen and all facilities. A log cabin and modern trailer provide additional accommodation.

Some of the topics we explore:

- Why small groups
- Creating a circle
- Covenants
- Developing leadership
- Focus areas for small groups
- How to get started.
- The facilitating core group

For recreation and relaxation, the 80 acre wooded site is laced with walking trails. We relax beside the 25' swimming pool. Evening campfires provide time for talk and entertainment.

The cost of \$295 per person includes tuition, meals and accommodation. The event begins at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday & ends 2 p.m. Friday. The Athabasca Woods Lodge is 2 ¼ hours from Edmonton, 22 km north of the town of Athabasca.

For our newsletter articles on Small Group Ministry, see our Centre web site at:
www.congregationallife.com.

SGM is the way
of the future—
the way to
growth, energy,
commitment, &
spiritual depth.

August 7 - 10,
2007

Athabasca Woods
Lodge

Facilitators
Joyce Madsen
&
Clair Woodbury
Congregational Life
Centre staff

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Centre at
780-619-0386
or
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to register.



Putting Small Group Ministry Techniques to Work for You in Your Congregation

St. Peter's Anglican Parish Edmonton

Although I have not succeeded in establishing intentional small group ministries in the Parish, I have incorporated many aspects of the small group culture into gatherings and projects here. In particular I have begun to design most of my parish gatherings (involving fewer than 12 people) with seating around some devotional centerpiece so everyone can see everyone else. I have included more time for 'checking in', mediation, and prayer. I include food in these gatherings. I express the purpose for the gathering and invite everyone to share their gifts and experience in helping us to find satisfaction and encouragement in being together.

People have responded with increased honesty and more active participation. These are small steps, but I feel they are important in helping people in the Parish begin to become more open to each other and to God. The prevalent culture has been resistant to personal disclosures and genuine shared learning so I am grateful for the progress we are making.

Rev. Stephen Hallford

Cold Lake United Church Cold Lake

I've learned a lot about small group ministry this past year.

I believe that the small group format has helped our Hospitality & Welcoming Team to have meaningful conversations about our local church – why would someone attend, why would they come back, how are we different from a community group, and what would interest people who have not had any church experience? At a meeting about church vision this past spring, the work of our group was named as one of the best things that has happened in our church recently!

We set three goals for our group and we partially accomplished the first! Yet I view this as success, as throughout the year we continued to check in as a group as to whether

we were doing what we wanted to do.

As we were finishing the work during our last meeting we reminded ourselves that we agreed to meet only for this church year. Our group, with these specific members, having completed this particular task, will cease to exist after our celebration.

Often when we find a 'good worker' (or group) we work them so hard (and tell them what to do!) that they burn out. I believe that setting the duration of the group, the commitment expected from each member, and encouraging the group to discern it's own tasks, helps to generate new and creative energy for the work that the group has come together for.

When that time is over it is important to honour the intent of the original commitment so as to free that energy for new endeavours. What's more, it will allow me to share small group ministry with a new group in the fall!

I have shared the small group format and the ROOTS principle with many people this year; twelve people from our pastoral care organizational meeting last fall who were the initial 'guinea pigs', eight on the Hospitality and Welcoming Team, six on our Session Committee, and six from a new leadership team that is being developed for another church in our pastoral charge. My daughter (age 16) used it in her youth group (6-8 kids), and for confirmation this year (3 kids). In fact, I now refuse to be part of any church group that does not meet using this format. This fall I hope to help lead a group that will study Marcus Borg's book, *The Heart of Christianity*, using it.

Sharing this format at my church has helped me to bring people together to talk about what is important to them in an honest and respectful manner, to encourage others to lead by helping them to learn these methods and to get us to share our spirituality with each other (surprisingly easy with this format). And while I was busy doing this work I became a leader myself, without really meaning for it to happen!

Sandy Godel



Stephen Hallford

The

ROOTS

Principle

- A Small Group is:
- ✓ Relation building
 - ✓ Outward looking
 - ✓ Task oriented
 - ✓ Spiritually alive



Sandy Godel

United Church Regional Gatherings

By Centre Staff



Dan Hotchkiss

This year the United Church is holding three Regional Events rather than one conference gathering. We attended the Northern Event at Leduc and the Southern Event in Lethbridge. The Central regional Event will be June 2 & 3 in Wainwright.

Theme speaker at the Northern Event was Dan Hotchkiss, Senior Consultant with the Alban Institute. He recommended the book *Christianity for the Rest of Us* by Dianna Butler Bass. She has the positive message that there is an opportunity for mainline Christianity at this time — provided we realize there is a cultural trend towards more choice in our society. That means we have to be willing to provide more varieties of congregations.

There are congregations that are declining, but also some that are rapidly growing. It is not that conservative churches are growing and liberal congregations are declining, but what distinguished thriving congregations is they all have a clarity about who they are.

Dan Hotchkiss feels there is wisdom about leadership coming from secular non-profit organizations — wisdom that congregations could well make use of. One example is “The Drucker Tool” available through the Peter Drucker Foundation. It consists of five key questions:

1. What is our mission?
2. Who is our customer?
3. What does the customer value?
4. What are our results?
5. What is our plan?

Personal Sharing

Hotchkiss told a story of a congregation he served choosing as its mission “turning people into Christians by training them to care for the needy.” The way they put this into practice was that they never wrote a cheque for a mission project without arranging to have their people directly involved in that project.

What is it like to be leaders in a congregation when the world has changed? The key is that you have to take action, even at the risk of dividing your congregation.

Hotchkiss shared the two rules that are

guaranteed to produce a dying congregation:

1. Dying congregations will do almost anything to avoid making a decision.
2. Dying congregations would rather talk than make a decision.

The result of following these rules is a congregational culture where leadership is not encouraged.

Substantial change requires a break from the ethic that we are always “nice”. Our virtues — wanting to be loved, showing respect for everyone — can stop us when a congregation needs strong leadership. Leadership means taking action that will break the congregation’s ties to the past, to the way things have always been done. There will always be complaints. That is the best evidence there is that the leadership is being effective in working towards changing lives.

Music

Music leadership at the Northern Event was supplied by the musical team rEvolve! Julian Pattison, a hot man on the keyboard, is part of the music team at Highlands United in North Vancouver. Gord Oaks put drums and beat behind each song. Blaine Gregg joined in with his violin.

We had some real toe-tapping get-up-and-move singing of songs from the new *More Other Voices* book. No doubt, the music was one of the highlights of the event.

The Southern Event

The wind was blowing full force when we arrived in Lethbridge for their “Blessed are the Restless” event, and it was blowing just as strongly when we left. This event brought together United Church people from the three southern Presbyteries, along with a number of Presbyterians and Anglicans.

The keynote speaker was Kirk Hadaway, author of the book *Behold I Do a New Thing*. He feels the church is in a tenuous position. Only 15% of Episcopal churches in the US are experiencing sustained growth, while 85% are either plateaued or declining. For



Julian Pattison



other mainline denominations, the picture is not much brighter.

There are two possible reactions. Many congregations prefer to “ride it out and hope for the best.” The results of this approach are generally right up there with the person who was

told “Cheer up, things could be worse.” He cheered up, and sure enough, things got worse. The other approach is to accept that a congregation is a living thing, not a machine, and encourage the vitality and energy that leads to growth.

It is important to realize that a congregation is designed to give the results you are getting. Attacking the problem won't work — that only activates the checks and balances built into every system to resist change. If you want a different result, Dr. Hadaway emphasized, you have to redesign the system.

Profit vs. Non-Profit Organizations

It is very important, Kirk Hadaway emphasized, to distinguish between profit-making and non-profit organizations. The aim of a profit making organization is to satisfy people. People buy a theatre ticket or a lawn mower in order to meet their need for entertainment or an attractive lawn. Satisfaction guaranteed is what people want — or they have a right to a refund.

The aim of a non-profit organization, on the



Dr. Kirk Hadaway

other hand, is to change lives. A hospital changes ill people into those who are well. A church, if it is doing its task, changes lives that lack meaning or anchor into those that have purpose and a sense of connection to the whole. A church needs to be in the business of transforming lives.

Churches that try to satisfy people by proving a “more enjoyable worship” or “more services” are putting the emphasis on supplying a better product. There is too often an attempt to attract people so we can train them and use them to meet our needs. The task of a church is to invite people into a community that has the capacity to transform them into people who see differently and act accordingly. The true church wants to empower people and draw out their gifts.



The Congregational Life Centre was present with a display suggesting “Making a difference ... by doing things differently.”



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Congregational energy low?

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There are solutions ...

SOLUTIONS

OUTCOMES

to helping new people find a space to belong in your congregation.

Small Group Ministry can provide spaces for new people.

There will be spaces and places where people feel they can connect and belong.

to making church shoppers feel welcome in your congregation.

An Intentional Welcoming program includes every member of the family.

Every newcomer feels like an honoured guest in your congregation.

to the challenge of leading a congregation today.

The skills to lead a congregation in the information age.

An understanding of the role and dynamics of leadership today will lead to thriving

to the challenge of honouring individual gifts.

Building and maintaining a team culture creates spaces for individual creativity.

Effective teams are places where synergy happens between lay and clergy.

to the challenge of being the church for the 21st Century.

Ministry that is relevant and inclusive.

A congregation with a focus and a plan to share God's love

First and Second Impressions – A workshop that designs a process that will truly welcome and integrate new people.

Small Group Ministry – Workshops that focus on Where to begin, Training the facilitators, Growing this ministry. 4 days in Athabasca can provide a foundation for a successful ministry.

Leadership in the 21st Century Church – What are the skills required? It begins with knowing yourself and then deciding how to lead in your environment.

Becoming a Team – Creating and maintaining effective teams requires a commitment to putting the team first and then learning how to work together effectively.

Transforming a Congregation – This is a process that will take time and commitment. It requires knowing your gifts as a congregation, understanding who lives in your community, and discerning what God's call is for you.

Coaching – We provide individual and group coaching for leaders who are working to make changes in their communities.

Learning Circles – This new learning style is supported by the UCC. Circles of people who are exploring and learning together provide both opportunities for growth and accountability.

780 619-0386 (Clair) or 780 438-6016 (Joyce)