

# “The Ground has Shifted Beneath Our Feet”



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Sabbatical Report – A Version - Complete

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# Sabbatical Report: The Ground Has Shifted Beneath Our Feet

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## Forward

This report summarizes all that I learned during my three month sabbatical from June 1 to Sept 6, 2015. My research involved interviewing congregational leaders in three countries and across Canada. This was supplemented by a significant reading list, informal conversations, much prayer and deep thought about the state of the wider church, Fairlawn's particular situation and reflecting on my almost 30 years in ministry.

In this report you will find significant recommendations that could, if implemented, shift our church into some important new expressions of ministry. These are not 'magic beans' that come with guaranteed results and in some cases it may take a number of years to see the full outcome.

My core belief is that such a shift is critical for Fairlawn's long-term sustainability. In short, for the church in the Western world, things are in a real sense worse than I thought and changing faster than I knew. But I see this as a rich opportunity to shift course and meet the needs that are out there.

In the index, it is clear that there is a separate chapter for the recommendations. If this is your first time reading this, please read it through from beginning to end, not skipping to the recommendations. It's important to me that you understand the reasoning behind the recommendations and the research that supports them.

I want to thank the Executive Council, Ministry and Personnel and my congregation for this opportunity for discovery and reflection. It has been a rich and, I believe, critically important experience.

## Introduction



The pictures that are at the front of this report are from two ancient expressions of the Christian church. The first is from Inchmahome Priory in Scotland, which we visited this past July. It sits on an island in the middle of Lake Mentieth and was active for almost 300 years from 1268 to 1560. In its time it was a thriving expression of Christian faith and community, until it was swept away by the Protestant revolution. I chose it to show that while the Christian faith continues and will continue to exist, the form in which it exists, that is, the church structure we all know and love, is very much in question throughout the Western world.

The second is St Mary's Anglican in Putney, which is in London, UK, that I also visited in July. It has been a functioning congregation since 1302 and is still an active congregation. I chose this to illustrate that the church can adapt and remain a vital expression of the Christian faith despite the ebbs and flows of changing culture and history. But even they, after almost 700 years, are dealing with the very same issues that are affecting us at Fairlawn. We are living today in very different times, times that will require all churches to employ very different responses than we have utilized in the past, if we are to exist in the future.

## Chapter One – Themes that Govern These Findings

### The Spiritual Revolution

In order to understand the current state of the church we need to understand one core premise: we are in the midst of a Spiritual Revolution.

The very word ‘revolution’, may, I realize, be problematic for some people. It is easy to dismiss the term as hyperbole or an exaggeration. But I am using the term deliberately, and with great intent, for that is exactly what is happening and we ignore it at our peril.

This Spiritual Revolution is the fundamental reality that is shaping the life of the Western church today. It is a revolution of our and the wider public’s understanding of God, of the role of faith communities and of the church itself.

A revolution by its very nature is both destructive and creative, but nothing is ever the same afterwards and new norms emerge to displace what has existed before. It is extremely uncomfortable to live in a revolution. I, for one, have either been in denial or have not fully understood until now the full ramifications of what we are facing. When you are in a period of what appears to be simply institutional decline, you can utilize techniques and strategies to respond to these challenges. These can and should be effective to counter the decline and I have used many successfully for most of my own ministry. But if you are in a revolution, then those techniques and strategies will not create the hoped for results because the context has changed so dramatically. That is where we are today.

When I began this process I did not expect to end up here. I expected to return with a report only on team ministry, goals and supervision. But as I did my visits, my reading and my prayerful discernment, I realized that something else was happening that was central to our future. Part of why I/we have not fully grasped this yet is the phenomena known as the ‘frog in the kettle’. If you put a frog in a pot of hot water he will immediately jump out, but if you put him in a pot of cold water and then gently increase the heat he gets used to it until it is too late. All of us have simply gotten used



to our current reality, focussed on the immediate challenges and missed the signs of something bigger happening.

So what has caused this revolution? To understand this we must look at our broader society and certain key trends of the last 30 years. I see these as the central factors that have led to our current context.

### **The Technological Revolution; which has changed everything.**

Information is now available 24/7 on computers, phones and tablets. Whole industries are dying and new ones are being born almost daily. We are entering a period of technology replacing workers on an unprecedented scale, and the transition from a classical capitalist economy to what Jeremy Rifkin in his book '*The Zero Marginal Cost Society*'<sup>1</sup> refers to as 'The Collaborative Commons'. The consequence of all of this for the church is that we are no longer seen as a knowledge/wisdom center as we had been for centuries.

### **The Rise of Social Media**

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and blogs are creating whole new ways of experiencing and creating culture and some would argue community. Privacy has vanished and our lives are broadcast 24/7 in real time.

While there is much that is a benefit due to the pervasiveness of Social Media, there are issues that have an impact on the church.

New York Times journalist, David Brooks says the following about the impact of social media:

- 1) Communications have become faster and busier. It is harder to attend to the softer, still voices that come from the depths. Moments of stillness and quiet are more rare today. We reach for the smart phone.
- 2) Social media allow a more self-reverential information environment. We construct a culture and a brand about ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy, *The Zero Marginal Cost of Society: The Internet of Things, Collaborative Commons and the Eclipse of Capitalism*, St. Martin's Press, April 2014

3) Social media encourage a broadcasting personality. We are in a hypercompetitive struggle for attention and for victories in the currency of 'likes'. They feed our need for social approval and heighten our fear of exclusion.

### **The De-Institutionalization of Faith**

People no longer feel they need the church to experience and explore their spirituality. Not only are we not the default option, we are actually seen as a place where spirituality is not explored.

### **The Rise of the Scientific Narrative as the Defining Narrative of our Society**

While the Judaeo/Christian narrative has long been the defining narrative for our culture, the rise of the scientific narrative has supplanted it as the defining story around which our society is based. We have to date failed to provide a compelling narrative that is in harmony with it. Rather, we are simply rejected as a curiosity of the past.

### **A move away from Community to a Focus on the Individual.**

Robert Putnam in his book '*Our Kids, the American Dream in Crisis*'<sup>2</sup> writes:

"In the past half century, we have witnessed for better or worse, a giant swing towards the individualist pole in our culture, society and politics."

Journalist David Brooks refers to this as the transition from the 'Little me to the Big ME.'<sup>3</sup>

I would argue that the same transition has occurred in Canada. This has meant that communal institutions like the church, have lost their centrality due to this shift, as people simply no longer feel the need for them, rather they trust themselves and their immediate family.

### **The Rise of Institutional Distrust and the Decline of Institutions:**

All institutions from government, political parties, education, health and the church have been under the microscope in the past decades. The

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<sup>2</sup> Putnam, Robert, *Our Kids, the American Dream in Crisis*, Simon and Schuster, March, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Brooks, David, *The Road to Character*, Random House, April, 2015

revelations of corruption, greed and abuse (the legacy of residential schools for the church) has led to a deepening distrust of all institutions and a reluctance to believe what they say or purport to stand for.

David Brooks speaks about this in his book 'The Road to Character'<sup>4</sup>:

"We like start ups, disruptors and rebels. There's less prestige accorded to those who tend to the perpetual reform and repair of institutions. This mentality has contributed to institutional decay. As the editor Tina Brown has put it, ***"If everybody is told to think outside the box, you've to expect that the boxes themselves will begin to deteriorate."***<sup>5</sup>

### **The Increase in other Faith Communities.**

The rise of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in Canada, to name but a few, has made the Christian church simply one of many religious options and not the default religious option that it was in the past.

Further, this has led to a rise in interfaith marriages (which has happened in our family). In many of those, 'no religion' becomes the default option. Couples find it hard to choose one and often opt to keep the traditions of both, but do not participate significantly in the faith community of either.

### **Changing Immigration Patterns**

The English and Scottish immigrants who filled our pews in the 50's and 60's and even very early 70's are long gone. We have failed to engage the other Christian immigrant groups and so most UCC's look ethnically the same as they did in the 1960's which causes yet another dissonance between culture and church. We do not look like every other part of people's lives.

### **Shifting Family, Work and Leisure patterns.**

In short Sunday is becoming more and more like any other day in the week with multiple options (including work) for individuals and families. Further, the long hours that people are working, combined with their jobs following them home through email, texts and the internet means that by Sunday

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<sup>4</sup> Brooks, David, *The Road To Character*, Random House, April 2015

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

people are exhausted and looking for a literal day of rest, or a faith experience that takes much less of their day.

### **The Growing Gap between Rich and Poor and the Fragmenting of the Post War Consensus.**

When Rob Ford was elected Mayor of Toronto, many people were shocked and saw it as an anomaly of circumstance and a fluke... it wasn't. Rob Ford and his brother Doug attracted hundreds of thousands of people who felt angry and disenfranchised from society. Even though the Fords were cutting services (like bus routes and their frequency) that these people needed most of all, they still got their votes. The reason is that since they felt completely betrayed by the establishment both economically and socially, they supported a candidate that was seen as against the current system. This phenomenon is repeating itself in the USA with the candidacy of Donald Trump who, at the time of writing, is leading the Republican Presidential candidacy race.

The poor and lower middle class who live with precarious employment are justifiably angry and so we will see more and not less instability in the years to come. It is getting increasingly harder to create a nationwide consensus due to the growing cleavages in our culture. The stats on the growing gap are irrefutable and if not checked will have a deleterious effect on our whole society. The mainline church is seen as part of the established culture and is being rejected by those who feel marginalized. The explosion of independent Pentecostal store front churches across the GTA are a sign of this.

### **The Rise of the Not-For-Profit Sector**

There are now 170,000 Not-For-Profits and registered charities in Canada. Of those, 85,000 are registered charities. They represent a myriad of good causes and social movements. Many of them use sophisticated donor engagement and tracking systems. They produce excellent communication packages and tell their story in compelling ways. People no longer need to give to the church to change the world for the better. In fact there is no-one, outside of church participants, who would even think of doing that.

## **The Missing Millennials**

For the first time in our history most of a whole generation is missing from the church. No organization has a future without generational succession.

## **New Understandings of God**

This is also a theological revolution as well. The old concept of a remote patriarchal God of the universe, separate from us is fading rapidly. In its place is a sense of God that is interconnected with us and with all of creation. This is a God who is alive through all we see, touch and experience.

In Harvey Cox's book *'The Future of Faith'*<sup>6</sup>, he speaks about moving from an *Age of Belief* that lasted for the past 1500 years until the early 2000's. This period was marked by doctrine and church structure. We are now in the *Age of the Spirit*, which is founded on faith, not belief. "Faith", Cox writes. "Is about confidence." He goes on, "Belief is about opinion". He considers the huge rise of people who identify themselves as "Spiritual not Religious" as a tacit protest against religion and a sign that the current system is simply not working as it once did. "But," he says, "There is also a great fluidity to those who see themselves as spiritual and, I believe, [they represent] an opportunity for the church."

This is, however, a huge shift and we have to ask ourselves, how does the language of our worship, and the words in our music address this transition?

## **Why is it a revolution and what does it look like?**

Let me share two stories from my visit to Forest Brook Community church. In June I was visiting this church which is in Pickering ON; their building has a park on one side and a public elementary school on the other. A Kindergarten class was walking back from the park when two of the children needed a washroom. They rang the church bell and asked to use the facilities. As they entered the building they looked around and all of them had a question. "What is this place?" "It's a church," came the reply. "What's a church?" they asked. Not one of those children had ever been in

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<sup>6</sup> Cox, Harvey, *The Future of Faith*, Harperone, September, 2010

a church or even knew what a church was. That is the world in which we now live. That defines the revolutionary moment, when we become invisible.

Their Senior Minister Kevin Armstrong also told me that. “Most Canadians don’t believe they need God in their lives.” If this is true and I believe it is, then we are in a whole new environment. It is not a case of inviting people to something they might be interested in, like a movie, a restaurant or a sporting event. It means inviting them to something that they are predisposed to reject or for which they simply don’t feel the need. This is another revolutionary moment for the church. We are not seen by many as an asset, but are looked at by most people with a mild curiosity that evokes simple disinterest. American church writers, Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian,<sup>7</sup> support this when they write, “Fewer people are attending worship today than ever before in the history of Western civilization and when they do attend they are mostly clueless about what it means to be Christian.”

Another example of this is seen in the changing attendance patterns. Most of the churches I visited reported slight but noticeable declines in attendance. In two cases the drop in weekly attendance corresponded perfectly with the rise in online participation in their Sunday service. The reason for this decline is clear. People are simply coming less often. Each of these churches reported new people joining, but worship attendance dropping.

When I began my ministry in 1987, a regular churchgoer meant that they attended three out of four services. Ten years later it meant that they attended two out of four. Now it can be one out of four or five Sundays. People also come in streaks and then vanish for weeks or even months at a time. Aside from high holidays, there is no longer rhyme or reason to attendance. My fear is that the reason behind this across-the-board drop is that for more and more people, church, as we know it is simply no longer a compelling experience in their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> Easum, Bill and Tenny-Brittian, Bill, *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches*, BakerBooks, 2012

As Forest Brook's Senior Pastor Kevin Armstrong put it most clearly: **"The ground has shifted beneath our feet."**

## Chapter Two: Now what? Central Questions We Need to Ask

When you combine all of these together we see the full impact of what we are facing. It is daunting, because as the writer Chris Hedges says, “We are living in revolutionary times.”<sup>8</sup> So what can we do? The rest of this report will attempt to answer this. There are recommendations throughout that will cost money. We are blessed with abundant resources and one of the central questions we face is the following:

### 1. Are we in the capital appreciation business or the mission investment business?

I argue that we are in the second and not the first and that the time is now to invest the resources that a past generation bequeathed to the church to do our best to create a sustainable future.

Since last spring I have been one of the readers for John Pentland’s just released book ‘Fishing Tips, How Curiosity Transformed a Community of Faith’<sup>9</sup>. The story of Hillhurst United is important for us. John’s staffing model has reversed the traditional model of growing a church and then adding staff to deal with the growth. Instead, he added staff **to grow the church**, and then the growth happened. I firmly believe that we need to continue to learn from this. We need to constantly work on the assumption that what worked in the past, what we think we know about how to grow a church, is no longer accurate. As a person who has been very successful throughout his ministry working on the old model, this has been an important and humbling learning.

### 2. The Church: Where Are We Today?

When Jesus was asked a question, he never gave a direct answer, he always told a story. A lawyer stands up and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus’ response is to tell the story of the Good Samaritan<sup>10</sup>. Others come forward grumbling that, “[Jesus] eats with sinners,<sup>11</sup>” and

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<sup>8</sup> Hedges, Chris, *Wages of Rebellion*, Nation Books, May 2015

<sup>9</sup> Pentland, Rev. John, *Fishing Tips: How Curiosity Transformed a Community of Faith*, Hillhurst United Church, August 2015

<sup>10</sup> Luke 10: 25-37

<sup>11</sup> Mark 2: 15-17



Jesus tells the story of the Lost Sheep<sup>12</sup>. A man asks Jesus to help him get his share of an inheritance and he tells the story of the Rich Fool<sup>13</sup>. Stories make the point in a way that other forms of communication do not. So let me start with a story to illustrate where I think we are at this present time.

### Desktop Fable

*Once there was a store that sold desktop computers. They opened their store very early in the technological revolution and caught the wave of explosive growth in computing. They were ahead of the curve and while the first few years were challenging, soon sales were growing, they were adding staff and then moving to larger premises. They not only sold desktop computers, but monitors, cables and software. They offered onsite repairs and everything to do with desktop computers was available at their store. It became a neighbourhood fixture. Everyone went there to buy or upgrade his or her desktop computer. Their name meant computing in their community and they were very successful. They had no reason to suspect that their future would be any different than their past. They knew what you had to do to be successful. They had the history to prove it.*

*But then things started to change. People started being interested in more mobile computing options. They started coming in and asking for laptops. But the store didn't sell laptops and wasn't interested in selling laptops and kept selling only desktops. Then phones changed. No longer were they just phones, but they also offered email and evolved into hand-held computers. The store's customers would come in looking for phones, but they didn't have any phones. All they sold was desktop computers. That's what they knew. That's what they were good at and that's what they stuck with. Then tablets showed up and still they didn't offer tablets or phones or laptops, just desktop computers.*

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 15: 1-7

<sup>13</sup> Luke 12: 15-21

*Sales started to drop, at first not alarmingly so and they were able to comfort themselves that it was just a temporary lull and soon things would get back to 'normal'. But year after year sales continued to drop and they responded by focussing on creating the best possible experience for their customers. They were sure that if they offered the ultimate customer experience, they could reverse the decline. So they greeted people at the door, offered them coffee, spent time getting to know them and their needs. They provided on-site visits and post-sale service.*

*People raved about the quality of their experience and told their friends, "If you want a desktop computer, these are the people to go to." They got some new sales, but they were losing existing customers for one reason. People just didn't want a desktop computer anymore. They did want computers. They even needed computers and computers were central to their lives, just not in the form that was being offered. But the store didn't see that and they kept trying to get better and better at something that fewer and fewer people needed or even wanted. Sales kept dropping. They laid off staff, moved to a smaller storefront, even amalgamated with another store. But still they offered only one thing, desktop computers and the decline continued...*

That, in essence, is where the church is today. We may be trying to get better and better at doing something that fewer people want or need. In a world where people have endless choices we, and many other churches, still offer one thing – Sunday at 10:30. In essence we are the Henry Ford of religion. Ford told the public that they could have his car, the Model T, in any colour they wanted...as long as it was black. We do the same thing.

*You want a spiritual worship experience?*

**We offer Sunday morning at 10:30.**

*That time doesn't work for you?*

**We offer Sunday morning at 10:30.**

*That day doesn't work for you?*

**We offer Sunday morning at 10:30.**

*Our style of worship doesn't resonate with you?*

**That's the style we have and it is Sunday at 10:30.**

We put massive resources into Sunday morning and it is time to realize that in this world of choice, we offer too little to people other than Sunday at 10:30.

That was more than sufficient in the time when the church was the only game in town on a Sunday morning. But the world has changed immeasurably. Let me use another analogy.

For many years Canada had a *de facto* policy of assimilation when it came to immigration. The expectation was that whoever came to Canada would become like the existing residents, adopting their culture and customs, which at the time were either overwhelmingly English or French. In 1971 Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau introduced for the first time a policy of multiculturalism. This policy, which was enshrined in law in 1988<sup>14</sup>, has two fundamental principles:

- All citizens are equal and have the freedom to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage.
- Multiculturalism promotes the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in all aspects of Canadian society.

In other words instead of becoming replicas of the existing culture, our country would now be changed and enriched by the different cultures that are a part of it. This was a huge cultural shift and led to the Canada we now live in, the most multicultural country in the world.

I would argue that while the country embraced this concept of transformation over the past 40 years the United Church as a whole has

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<sup>14</sup> <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/FullText.html>

not. We are still attempting to assimilate people into our church culture rather than being open to being changed and transformed by the presence of different peoples. Aside from a major culture changing shift towards the LGBT community, the church is essentially still using the assimilation model. We want them to be part of us, be like us and adapt to our church culture.

Have we been open to the spiritual gifts of new people and been transformed by them in the way that Canada has? I would argue that we have not and that we still want people to engage on our terms and assimilate into our current church culture. This has created yet another dissonance between the culture and the church. In other parts of society, people experience their gifts being celebrated and they experience change because of it. This continues until they come to church, where the unspoken model remains assimilation. The results are before us.

The truth is that we already know that this is a major issue for us. We know this because we keep using the term 'entry points', places to bring people into Fairlawn, other than worship, as ways to bring them into deeper participation. All of us talk about how hard it is to invite people to worship, how awkward and difficult these conversations are, which is a symptom of the revolution. Were these times in any other era of United Church history this would not be such a significant issue for us. It is like our mythical computer store offering workshops on the impact of technology on people's lives and then hoping that they would buy a desktop as a result.

We are creating 'special' services that are 'easy' invites, because we no longer think that our 'normal' services are sufficient. In other words, we recognize that the current system simply no longer works as it once did. It is as though we have lost faith in what we do every week. We no longer believe that on its own, our current worship will touch and enrich people's lives each week, hence the need for 'special' services.

But this is a symptom of a wider issue for the church, my belief that one weekly service alone is no longer sufficient. If we are serious about engaging the spiritually curious, about wanting to reach out to others and

being transformed by their gifts then we can no longer hold onto Sunday at 10:30 as the only time to worship.

We need to offer more than one opportunity a week. All the thriving churches I visited or spoke with (Hillhurst, Metropolitan Community Church, Wellington Square United in Burlington, North Bramalea in Brampton, Marble Collegiate in New York City) offer at least two and in some cases four weekly services.

## Chapter Three: Recommendations

### Recommendation One: Additional services – Sunday morning and Wednesday Night

**My first recommendation is that we add two additional services starting January 2016: one on Sunday mornings and the other Wednesday evenings that are significantly different than our current Sunday morning service.**

Why two additional distinct services?

I want to include emails on this issue from both Hillhurst and Wellington Square on why they do more than one service:

#### *Increases Attendance*

#### **The first from Rev. Orville James, Senior Minister, Wellington Square United Church, Burlington**

Our earlier service has doubled our attendance over the last 15 years.

It is attended by ALL ages - grandparents bring their grandkids (including Russ Jackson, the former CFL football player - brought his grandchildren and he never misses). It is also attended by every age from late teens thru 80's, but the MAJORITY are 'young parents between 30 & 45. They bring their kids, who attend 'GraceLand' and it averages 120- 150 kids and teens per week.

There are MANY who attend who would NOT go to the 11a.m. 'Traditional service'.

Because we're 15 years into the development of this, many of the newcomers are now well integrated into the life of the congregation and are regular and generous givers. Not all - there are 'seekers' who haven't committed heart or treasure, and that's fine. We're happy they're here listening, and soaking in a spiritual atmosphere.

If we dropped the two services and just went to one, we would LOSE both attendance numbers and revenue. When you offer two options, you ALWAYS get more people net, than if you have just one service. They have a choice in both Time and Style of worship, so more people can and will attend.

**John Pentland, Senior Minister, Hillhurst United, Calgary**

...We added a service and the OVERALL attendance rose, so we were sitting at 240 and added and now we are 400...

...So it isn't that you don't have space, you do, BUT it is about an expanded market of people. I would ask 30 people to pilot it, to commit to it and it will grow with time.

9:05 to 10 is what we did, stream lined, didn't stay that way.

But who will come?

- People who want an early service
- People who are up and want to get on with the day
- Young mothers, babies
- Some seniors
- Or people who know that if they go at 1030 it requires all morning to go so they don't go.

It will be smaller, for sure; that's fine but the total will be more.

Resources can be limited – you and another music person or two?

We did take higher staff time to start it. We committed to try and of course it remained.

Don't over think it.

You don't know unless you try.

The bonus for you is a 'run through' and a smaller, more intimate, and a different spirit.

You are adding another plate to the table and saying, " Come eat with us."

**Marsha La Poy, Hillhurst United**

When the 9:05 started, it was to be simpler service, and very staff-led...meaning music, minister etc. plus greeting, coffee and collection/communion, etc. The 10:45 am volunteers/partners did

NOT want to take on additional duties for the early service.

Example...Collection plate was left at the entrance, as we didn't take collection for a while. The intent at the beginning, I think, was to have two distinct-feeling services, one short, quieter, more casual, and the 2nd service more traditional. We now have some people who are now more committed to this service, (but it has taken some work) and will to help with the worship flow.

The feeling was to grow this service and take the growth off the 10:45...(and we didn't have the heritage room available for overflow until the renovation)

Pam Rocker was communications at that time, and she was forceful on how this service was to be marketed.

Now it seems the growth is at both, and some people come to both, or switch depending on their day.

A personal observation is lots of our growth is from the GLBT community. Whenever Pam hosts an event, we have people coming to HUC after. This is in addition to families, single parent families, same-gender parent families, and single person family.

It is interesting during the summer, when we have the one service, that we have new people attending, and it is a shock for them to see the number of people attending the 10:45am service in the fall.

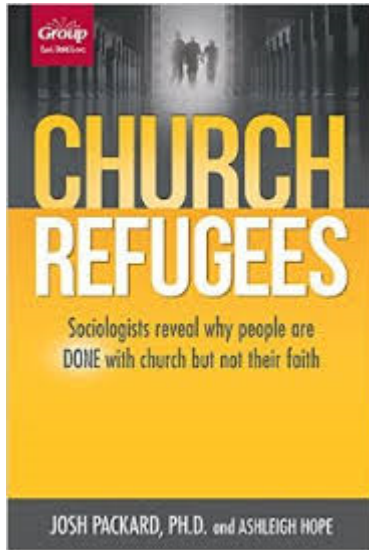
The key learning for me is, that in today's world, churches that offer choices to people are the ones that have the best chance to build a sustainable future. We need different types of worship which is why we need to offer a different style of music at an early Sunday service and hire accordingly.

I also realize that this will mean we need to have a different understanding of community and church. We will need to see the church not as being all together in one service, but rather a church that serves and honours different needs and expressions all week long.

But there is another very compelling reason to offer more options:



## *The Chance to Retain “The Dones” who are “Done” with Church*



Of all the books I read during this Sabbatical *Church Refugees* haunts me the most, because it struck a most uncomfortable chord. This book outlines the growing trend of committed church people who have simply left church because it no longer works for them. They are not angry. They are simply *done* with church. I can name four members of Fairlawn that I know of right now who are on the verge of joining the Dones. I strongly suspect that everyone reading this report can name a couple of people they know who fit in this category. It is important to emphasize that they are not done with God or with faith. They are simply done with church. A glance at their website<sup>15</sup> would be helpful in understanding what is happening.

There are a number of points that the author of ‘*Church Refugees*’ sociologist Josh Packard makes that are extremely important for us to hear:

- People leave because they think that churches are increasingly focussed on their own survival and are looking inward and becoming simply irrelevant in the lives of outsiders.
- People are leaving not because they are mad, but because they are simply uninterested.
- The most important thing that people want out of church is a community of people who are experiencing God together.
- A church that has a sense of family, or becomes ‘our family of choice’, as Marble Collegiate’s Michael Brown puts it, is incredibly important.
- Community is people’s primary connection to God and provides a fundamental understanding of God
- People are drawn to churches that allow communities to flourish and where relationships were available
- People are increasingly interested in dialogue and conversation, not a lecture.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.thedones.com/meet-the-dones/>

- People are not looking to have their questions provided with ultimate answers, but rather they simply want to live with the questions in a community.

### *Have our Budgets Truly Reflect Our Priorities*

“Do our churches produce a product to be consumed or is it a place where the people become the producers and makers?”

Most churches spend 60% of their budget on Sunday morning and little on community formation, which is the exact opposite of what people need.

Rev. Kevin Downer, from Metropolitan Community Church<sup>16</sup> echoed this to me. As he put it, “The old model is investing in the Sunday show. We should be resourcing other parts of the church the way we do Sunday morning.”

So what can be done to counter this? For Packard<sup>17</sup>, Churches who wish to reengage the Dones or those about to join the Dones should do the following:

- **Invite Participation:**

Identify key ways people can participate meaningfully with no barriers to entry. Provide them with resources and little or no oversight, trust your community.

- **Undermine Bureaucracy:**

Put timelines on some positions and committees so that they dissolve when the timeline ends no matter how well or poorly things are going.

- **Be truly relational:**

Devote staff time and resources to knowing and supporting people rather than creating and maintaining programs. Do things with congregants not for congregants.

- **Impact your community...and be impacted.**

Be involved locally, need and unfairness are everywhere, work to be a change agent. It is not something that “we” do for “them”. Instead allow

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<sup>16</sup> Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto

<sup>17</sup> Josh Packard, co-author of Church Refugees

the celebrations and struggles of your local community to shape your church.

- **Use asset based community development**

Using asset-based community development<sup>18</sup>, focus on the gifts, skills and abilities of the congregation. Ask people what they are good at, what they do in their free time and what gets them out of bed on Saturday mornings when they don't have to go to work.

### Recommendation Two: Small Group Ministry

**My second recommendation is that Fairlawn implement a Small Group Ministry within the year, facilitated by the Congregation Engagement Manager.**

**Josh Packard says, “The power of relationship is much greater than the power of service.”<sup>19</sup>**

If what Packard says is right about the power of relationships, and I believe that he is, then we need to refocus the congregational coordinator's position. If Packard is right about connection and community, then that position should focus on creating opportunities for community. Currently, we see it as engaging new people and keeping current members engaged. But what if we are trying to get them engaged into a system that no longer works for more and more people? We need to engage in small group ministry.

Why small groups? Simply put they are the best way the church has developed to create intimate community.

Again, I go to author Harvey Cox<sup>20</sup>, when he writes about the success of Saddleback and Willowcreek churches in the US:

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<sup>18</sup> Snow, Luther K., *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act On Its Gifts*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, April 2004

<sup>19</sup> Packard, Josh and Hope, Ashleigh, *Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why people are DONE with church but not their faith*, Group Publishing, June 2015

<sup>20</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith*, Harper Collins Publishers, October, 2010

*“Their real secret is that they are honeycombs of small groups, hundreds of them, for study, prayer and action... many join them because they are searching for community and are interested in deepening their spirituality. These small groups are redefining the sacred.”*

But what about churches in Canada?

Rev. Orville James from Wellington Square United Church in Burlington wrote me about why they do small groups:

“ We do small groups for several reasons:

- Learning and spiritual development
- Bonding and assimilating newcomers into the congregation
- Community building, and helping people develop close relationships

Our small groups have been a great 'gateway' for visitors and newcomers to begin to belong and connect. They do increase engagement and connection.

I do think there is a strong correlation between small group involvement and giving and participation. As people become known in a group, they begin to feel an emotional attachment to the faith community. They often get involved in other ways - volunteering, or in servant leadership.

One of the ways we do small groups beyond education is through serving. We will get people to join a serving team (for our community dinner, or our house-building mission trips, etc.), and they get a sense of purpose, and satisfaction, as they are working with others and building a relational bond.”

Rev. Jamie Holtom from North Bramalea adds the following:

This past year we have made it a focus again in order to try to help more people experience authentic community and intentional discipleship growing in Christ with others. We have found over the

years the people who are most clearly on a path of growth are usually in a small group. We are hoping this will be one step of many that will help us “integrate” people better and “close the back door a little tighter”. Recently we had 2 people (both men as it turns out) who were reaffirming their faith and both had their small group join them on the stage – it was a Holy Moment and Wow!! Made us all realize again the power of God to work through these kinds of groups.

Emily Scott is the pastor of St Lydia’s dinner church that I refer to in more detail in my next section on Millennial ministry. She has created a worship experience that absolutely would resonate with the Dones. As she says:

**“Be a participant in worship, not an observer”**

This is why it is so important that we create a midweek worship experience that is designed with the Dones and soon-to-be Dones in mind. I believe that if we introduce a Wednesday night service that is interactive and discussion based, led in part by the very people I know are close to being Done, that we can counter the drift away from some of our most committed people.

### Recommendation Three: Half-time Minister of Millennial Engagement



**My third recommendation that we create a .5 ministry position called ‘Minister of Millennial Engagement’ with the mandate to work with and create experiences for the Millennial generation and the church.**

**“I want something that feels like the rest of my life”**

For the first time in our denomination’s history almost a whole generation is missing from our churches. In Fairlawn’s case, the only millennials who attend regularly grew up with Eleanor Daley, in our choral music program<sup>21</sup>, and are in the choir. Otherwise we see them only occasionally or during the high holidays. Do we see this generation supporting the church with their time and resources the same way that the builder and boomer generations did? My belief is that unless we do a much better job connecting them they

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<sup>21</sup> Directed by our Director of Music, Eleanor Daley, Fairlawn’s choral music program consists of a Junior Choir for children, an Intermediate Choir for female youths, and a Senior Choir (for adults)

will not. If that is the case then we are simply buying time for the church, not creating a sustainable future for the congregation.

While we have made a major step forward through Spirit Space in addressing the needs of those with children, there are still significant steps that we need to make.

In her paper 'Millennials and Meaning'<sup>22</sup>, former Hillhurst staff person Joanne Anquist makes a compelling case for the church to change direction. In both her work in ministry and through her research she believes that for Millennials, church is simply off their radar as a place of engagement and meaning. "The youth group model failed to create engaged Christians who learned how to do ministry. Instead it provided entertainment experiences without spiritual formation," she told me. Author Brian McLaren quotes a conversation he had with a minister in the UK:

"A pastor in London said to me that if he were to go up to a young adult and ask them to become a Christian, it is 'like I am asking them to become an Aztec, it's just not seen as a living religion anymore."

If we are not seen as a living religion then where does that leave us?

My professor of New Testament at Emmanuel College, Heinz Guenther<sup>23</sup> once said, "Christianity succeeded because it answered life's most fundamental questions. When it no longer does that, then it will fail." Are we now at that point with this emerging generation?

For Anquist, there is hope, but only if we show the capacity to shift from one generation to the next. In an interview she bluntly said that this can be a challenge as it can't be "your grandmother's church and it can be a tough battle with those who want the church to be a museum."

When I spoke to my own daughters who are 24 and 27 and about as churched as you can get, while they both enjoy our current worship, they

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<sup>22</sup> Sent to me privately

<sup>23</sup> Professor, Dr. Heinz O. Guenther, Professor of New Testament and Hermeneutics at Emmanuel College,

also both expressed a desire for something that is more participatory and feels less like being in an audience. In my eldest daughter Sarah's words,

**“I want something that feels like the rest of my life.”**

That phrase should be seared into our brains, because what she is telling us is that the current church does not feel like it connects to the life she is living.

But Anquist believes that there is hope. Millennials, she says are looking for what she terms 'authentic experiences' where they can experience 'love and acceptance'. For them as a group, doctrine is not important, it is definitely 'belong before believe'. They are looking for a place of 'connection and conversation, where you can be yourself and not hide behind the delete button.' They are looking for a loving and accepting community, with real life experience and real life community that is a source of 'unquestioning support'. They are not looking for us to strip away our rituals or traditions, simply present them in a way that resonates with their generation. This means worship that is much less formal and much more conversational. Anquist believes that we need to be able to shift and change and constantly test and find different ways of doing things. 'We are laying new track here' she told me 'we need to take risks and go to the edge of faith and culture.' The quote that struck me most deeply from her paper was when she wrote:

**“For too long we have been concerned with survival, looking inward and forgetting our mission to the next generation.”**

What could that look like at Fairlawn?

My very last church visit during my sabbatical took place in Brooklyn New York at St Lydia's Dinner Church<sup>24</sup>.

We arrived at 5:30 to a storefront in a residential/commercial section of the city. When we arrived we were welcomed by their pastor Rev. Emily Scott

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<sup>24</sup> <http://stlydias.org/>



and Community Coordinator Rev. Julia Stroud, given name tags, and put to work. I helped out in the kitchen making dinner, while Wendy set tables.

Just after 6:00 pm, Emily, as part of a team, led us in a sung worship liturgy that succeeded in being both ancient and modern. Bread was broken and shared before we ate dinner. Then about 40 of us at three tables sat down to eat. We were the oldest there by about 25 years, not a common experience in the church!

After we ate, we returned to a sung liturgy and time of reflection. We were given Psalm 147 (a psalm of gratitude), which we sang and then it was read aloud. We were invited to speak about what touched us in the psalm and were then given 8 minutes to write down what we were grateful for in our lives and then the cup was poured and shared.

It was conversational and invited participation. I loved it and realized that if I was looking for a church, I would rather have this model of participation and conversation than being part of an audience. This clearly has worked for this generation and they have grown from a house church to their current location with two dinner churches per week.

This is an example of successfully reaching out to the millennial generation.

#### **Recommendation Four: Explore Establishment of an Immigration Ministry**

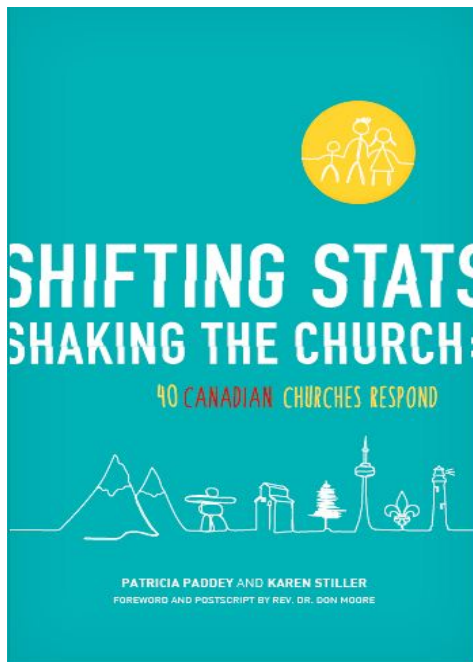
**My fourth recommendation is that we establish a three person, plus one staff person, working group to examine options for the creation of an immigrant ministry. Further that two of the three are to be new immigrants themselves.**

About two years ago I had the opportunity to attend a World Vision Event called 'Shifting Stats Shaking the Church'. At that event they repeated all the grim statistics that we face. But out of it came a book by Karen Stiller<sup>25</sup> and Patricia Paddey entitled, *Shifting Stats Shaking the Church, Forty*

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<sup>25</sup> Stiller, Karen, Paddey, Patricia, *Shifting Stats Shaking the Church, Forty Canadian Churches Respond*, World Vision Canada, 2015

*Canadian Churches Respond*, filled with stories of hope. This summer I had the opportunity to interview Karen Stiller, one of the books authors, for the United Church Observer<sup>26</sup>. I believe that it is important for us to hear what she learned:



### **How did this book come about?**

“World Vision had organized a series of workshops across the country called ‘Shifting Stats Shaking the Church’ which demonstrated the sea change that Canadian churches were experiencing. Out of that Don Moore from World Vision received many stories of churches that were being daring and innovative and approached me and my coauthor Patricia Paddy to put some of these together in a book.”

### **Where did the stories come from?**

“They gave us 200 stories to start with that came out of the workshops, and we worked with our own church networks to find

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ucobserver.org/interviews/>

others, then we winnowed them down to 40. We wanted to make sure that we were denominationally diverse, and represented churches of all shapes and sizes and to make sure that we were geographically balanced across the whole country. I was particularly interested in what small churches were doing. It was a fun project.”

### **What surprised you the most?**

“In terms of content the story that surprised me the most was in Prince Edward Island and the story of Cornerstone Community Church. I didn’t realize that Charlottetown was a center of immigration, but really what better place is there to settle than PEI? The way that church responded was by going to the government immigration office and offering to help with immigrant families and the immigration office said yes. It was a great example of a church that said ‘use us, we are here to serve’, I loved it. They offer conversation circles so new immigrants can practice their English and they partnered with the Salvation Army to make that happen. They meet people where they are at, not only in terms of physical needs, but spiritual ones without trying to convert anyone.

I believe in the church and I was pleasantly surprised that churches were not rolling over and playing dead and that the vast majority of churches are in it for the right reasons, they are there to serve their communities in the right way.”

### **What were the things that you learned for yourself?**

“The power of immigration to enliven the Canadian church was one of my biggest learnings. The church can serve the immigrant community and the Christian immigrant community is very interested in being in community with the church, it’s a win/win. I was also reminded that small churches can do great impactful things. Meadowgreen House for All Nations church in Saskatoon which was our smallest, works out of a store front and partners with a number of different organizations, they are small but mighty. Their neighbourhood consists of new immigrants who are 80% of their community. The

church offers language training, cross cultural awareness events, youth gatherings and nutritional and basic health skills. It has been transformative for them. We need to listen and not come in with preformed answers and I think that churches are on top of that.”

**If you look at the statistics and future trends for the mainline church they are pretty horrible, what would your message be to the United Church in our circumstances?**

“I would never presume to offer the United Church an answer, we both grew up in the United Church and love the church. It gave us pleasure to feature United Churches in the book and it wasn’t hard to find these two great stories from Trinity in North Bay ON and Woodlawn in Dartmouth NS. Both are doing great things. Trinity has reinvented family ministry by recognizing the needs of time strapped contemporary families and its helping to reverse the aging trend the church is facing. But I think that service speaks volumes to our community. Our game is not to lure people into our church to keep our church alive, I don’t agree with that. But we are to serve because we are followers of Christ. If we do that then I do believe that things will turn out ok.”

**In serving the community as these churches did was there an impact on the worshipping community?**

“Yes, there were a couple of churches that really mentioned that. Our faith is meant to be lived out and when we do that our faith grows. An example of this are the youth group stories like the Anglican Church of the Resurrection in Grand Bay Westfield in New Brunswick. Their youth serve a homemade meal to about 60 people who are struggling and need a sense of community. There is Compass Church in Regina, where they said we aren’t going play games anymore, we aren’t going to pamper Christian children, instead they will serve and be in ministry. At first people left, but the youth really grew in their faith and had an impact. It was the same with First Baptist Church in Lloydminster, they too gave up games and shifted to a model of

ministry and at first lost half their youth group. But by the second year they had surpassed their original numbers, because youth were experiencing genuine spiritual growth. I think our faith is meant to be lived out, when people actually live it out their faith grows. What we did not hear was that our churches were exploding with growth on Sunday mornings because of these new initiatives.”

**There are a lot of barriers that churches have to overcome today. Did you see that these churches were breaking down the barriers of suspicion that can exist between the church and the communities in which they live?**

“Yes, we saw that in many cases. One example is Evangel Church in Gander Newfoundland, who has an amazing furniture ministry that has made an impact on the whole community. People in need have had their whole apartments furnished down to the cutlery, its changed people’s view of the church. Evangel’s pastor Ralph Benson says that ‘ **people still believe in God, but they don’t believe in the church.** We need to change that perception.’ There are lots of stories across the country about how service has overcome suspicion. I think we can get too caught up about worrying what people think about us and being relevant, we simply need to be salt and yeast. I did a story on Woodlawn United Church in Dartmouth which was my home church growing up. I was back for a family funeral and the minister Philip Kennedy (who is in ministry with his spouse Valerie) did a great service and I saw how they were ministering to families. I spoke to him about it and he said that 11:00 am Sunday is convenient for us (the church) but might not be for others. So what they did was create Open Table, a monthly Saturday night gathering that is an alternative meeting of church, it’s a place to discuss theology and the world, designed for people for whom Sunday morning no longer works. It’s another way of breaking down barriers, offering options to experience church.”

**What were your ‘take aways’ from this not only as a writer but also as a committed church person yourself?**

“I was encouraged that I am a part of something that is so much bigger than me or any individual church or denomination. I was truly impressed by people who are really trying to serve their communities because that is what we are asked to do by Jesus. Also the idea of partnering together and with other organizations without being competitive with other churches was very hopeful. I hope that lay people read this book. It’s really about and for them and their call to ministry. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel; this is really about good old-fashioned service. It’s a reminder to the church to stop worrying about our own survival, it just gets very boring when we do that, go out and serve because that’s what we are asked to do by Jesus.”

This is the third time that different authors have told us to stop focussing on our own survival and to live out our faith. Equally there is a consistent message that people still believe in God, just not the church. Clearly there is a message here.

Churches are busy reinventing themselves and offering choices to their community. They are recognizing that we need to respond to the times in which we live. The learning opportunity for us lies in my following statement:

**“The power of immigration to enliven the Canadian church was one of my biggest learnings. The church can serve the immigrant community and the Christian immigrant community is very interested in being in community with the church, it’s a win/win.”**

With the arrival of our Syrian refugee family this fall or winter we now have an entry point into the Syrian community, many of whom are Christian. This is an opportunity to reach out to create a relationship of mutuality and learning with an immigrant community. Both they and we could be enriched by this.

Another opportunity lies with the over 100,000 Latinos who live in the GTA. Not one United Church has a ministry to that community and we already have some of that community in our own congregation.

## Recommendation Five: Re-examine the Role of Staff in Building an Effective Church

**My fifth recommendation is that staff, M&P and Executive Council all read 'Effective Staffing for Vital Churches'<sup>27</sup> and begin a conversation as to the role of staff in building an effective church.**



When I consulted my colleagues as to staffing models, goal setting and supervision there were many consistent themes that you will read of in the write-ups on my visits. Staff met in a retreat setting, they set team and individual goals based on the identified needs of the church. These goals were reviewed during the year and then evaluated at years end. Everything, from 360's to personal conversations, was used as evaluation tools. There was little that struck me as unique or particularly different from what we are currently doing. I would say that every church I spoke with would see this area as a constant work in progress.

The only exception to that are two questions I would like to make:

***Question One: What is the value of strategic planning when the shifts in context are so great and so frequent?***

The first is that at Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto, they are questioning annual goal setting and traditional strategic planning. They are questioning whether these methods are viable in the ever changing context

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<sup>27</sup> Easom, Bill, Tenny-Brittian, Bill, *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches*, Baker Publishing Group, November, 2012

of today's church. A goal in January may make no sense come June. Also strategic plans that go 3-5 years into the future may find themselves being overtaken by events.

*Question Two: We are looking at Fairlawn as an organization. But what if it is also an organism, with its own ecology based on interconnected and balanced relationships that have evolved over decades? Would that change how we see ourselves and organize ourselves? I believe that is worth further reflection.*

One of the writers whose books I have read deeply this past summer is Diana Beresford-Kroeger. She is a scientist, a botanist and an environmentalist. She has done groundbreaking work on the importance of the northern boreal forest (*The Global Forest*<sup>28</sup>) and has written extensively on gardens (*A Garden for Life*<sup>29</sup>) as part of the solution to climate change. Her latest book '*The Sweetness of a Simple Life*<sup>30</sup>' is one that is worthy of study in the church. She writes about the eco-system and the impact of climate change in a very positive manner.

Central to her gardening thesis to combat climate change is the creation of what she calls 'the bioplan:

"The bioplan is the blueprint for all connectivity in nature. It is the fragile web, which keeps each creature in balance with its neighbour. It is a Divine contract to all who share this planet."

It is, in other words, a web of complex, inter-connected relationships each integral to the other and if thrown off balance the whole system will fail to function as God designed it. The church also depends for its health upon the ecology of human relationships that have been formed over years to

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<sup>28</sup> Beresford-Kroeger, Diana, *The Global Forest: Forty Ways Trees Can Save Us*, Penguin Reprint, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Beresford-Kroeger, Diana, *a Garden for Life: The Natural Approach to Designing, Planting and Maintaining a North Temperate Garden*, University of Michigan Regional Press, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Beresford-Kroeger, Diana, *The Sweetness of a Simple Life: tips for Healthier, Happier and Kinder Living from a Visionary natural Scientist*, Vintage Canada Press, April 2015

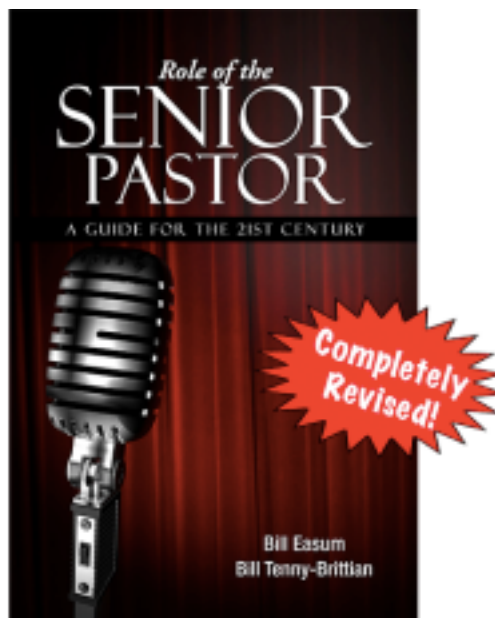


remain healthy. Treating the church only as an organization may overlook its essential ecological framework.

And if we look at the church as an organism, then we can understand its need and capacity to adapt and evolve depending on the circumstances it faces. History is littered with organizations that no longer exist because their structures became too rigid to cope with rapid change. Organisms, that are in harmony with their surroundings, flourish. In the case of the church it must be in relationship with the city, the neighbourhood, the congregation and with God – in essence, a theological bioplan.

### **Recommendation Six: Plan for Role of Executive Director**

**My sixth recommendation is that Fairlawn plan to create the role of Executive Director.**



The chief advantages and opportunities arising from this are:

#### **Getting the Best Value from Staff Roles**

Three of the churches I visited had either an Executive Director or an Executive Minister/Pastor. These roles evolved to meet the needs of their churches. For Brent Hawkes it was a question of burn out, but also an appropriate use of resources.

“Visionary pastors should not be administrators, they are no good at it and need to be freed to do what they are good at”, he told me. His words are echoed by Bryce Paton, Hillhurst’s Executive Director. Bryce describes his role as “helping other people do their best work.” He keeps administration and building issues away from John Pentland so John can “do his best work”. As you can see from my lengthy interview with him later in this report he sees his role as critical to Hillhurst’s

success. This role can also protect the Senior Minister from spending excessive time in areas that do not give the church their best value.

### **Clarity Between Pastoral Interactions and Those of Accountability**

Marble Collegiate in New York hired an Executive Minister (EM) for exactly the same reason. Michael Brown says that as a supervisor he tends to err on the side of being pastoral to those who report to him. In their new system, program staff report to the EM and the EM reports to Michael. It is the EM's job to hold staff accountable for their goals. While Michael still gets involved in staff matters as Senior Minister, the weekly reports and day to day staff issues are dealt with by the EM. This is the model that churches with an EM use. This frees up the Senior Pastor, but still gives them overall authority in the running of the church.

### **Support for the Board Chair**

Another big advantage for the church in having an EM/ED is that it takes a significant workload off the Board chair. That makes chairing the board much more manageable for someone who is working full time. Further, given the complexity of managing not only staff, but relationships like the Neighbourhood Center, having a person fill this role would help to better fulfill our mission. Over the past two years (aside from staff supervision) Greig Clark has filled a significant part of this role. Not simply through the creation of the Fairlawn Call but in his role as Vice Chair. He has done this role for the church and we have benefitted greatly from it. But, when his term as Chair ends in 2018 we will lose this valuable resource. We need to institutionalize the role.

### **Getting the Best Value from Me**

I say this for two major reasons. The first is that FAUC will get its best value out of me not by having me in the office working with staff, but by my being out with the congregation and the wider community. I have grown greatly in my role as supervisor, but I see my role and gifts as a visionary pastor, more than a supervisory one.

## Recommendation Seven: Role of Staff in Empowering the Congregation to Transform the Community

**Recommendation Seven: I recommend that we study how the focus of key staff members could emphasize more the mobilization and empowerment of the whole congregation for the purpose of transforming the surrounding community and world.**

In their book 'Effective Staffing for Vital Churches' authors Bill Easum and Bill Tenny- Brittian make the following statement:

*"The primary focus of an effective staff is the mobilization and empowerment of the whole congregation for the purpose of transforming the surrounding community and the world."<sup>31</sup>*

These authors call upon the church to adopt a 'radical paradigm shift', in essence moving staff into a role of recreating ministry, becoming mentors and replicating themselves:

*"We define leadership as what a person is able to achieve through other people instead of what they are able to achieve on their own."*

They believe that the whole church must be focussed not on the needs of those who are in the church, but rather on the needs of those who are not yet there. And further everything we do should be focussing out into the community rather than into the church.

They also believe that the Senior Minister needs to spend most of his/her time with people **who are not church members**. This is a very different way for staff to function and requires some significant thought.

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<sup>31</sup> Easum, Bill and Tenny-Brittian, Bill, *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches: The Essential Guide for Finding and Keeping the Right People*, Baker Books, 2012

## Chapter Four - Concluding thoughts:

***“The storm is upon us and is going to get worse, the church will need to reinvent itself.”***<sup>32</sup> (Rev. Peter Holmes)

***“The measurement of effectiveness shifts from ‘how many in worship?’ to ‘How much difference is the church making in its efforts to transform the city?’ Today’s church must think outward rather than inward.”***<sup>33</sup> (Easum and Tenny-Brittian)

As Kevin Armstrong from Forest Brook Community Church said to me, “The ground has shifted beneath our feet.” In other words everything is now different.

The Fairlawn Call is a tremendous document, one that reflected huge amounts of work. As a person who contributed blood, sweat and tears into that many-person process, I was sure that it was all that was needed to guide Fairlawn into the future. However, what I had failed to take into account was how fast the world of the church was changing. What I also didn’t fully consider was that it was primarily an internal conversation. We were, except for two focus groups, talking with and among ourselves. In previous times, that would be more than sufficient. It is no longer sufficient today, not in the midst of a Spiritual Revolution.

We are measuring a number of things as we attempt to move our congregation forward, we need to add to that list:

- *How is people’s spiritual growth being enhanced?*
- *Are all generations growing in their relationship with God?*
- *How is their faith developing?*
- *How are their relationships with each other deepening?*
- *How are they growing in compassion and generosity?*
- *How is our community / city a better place because of what we are doing?*

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<sup>32</sup> Rev. Dr. Peter Holmes, Senior Minister, Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Toronto.

<sup>33</sup> Easum, Bill and Tenny-Brittian, Bill, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies*

These I believe are the key measurements to focus on. If all of us are growing in these areas, then our church cannot help but succeed.

### **Further Explorations**

This report has contained some significant recommendations that, if adopted, essentially shift the course of the church. I have some other areas for us to explore:

- Create a culture of mentorship, where new participants have a mentor that walks the faith journey with them.
- Create a path of spiritual growth that all of us can follow throughout the year
- Develop life skill seminars that run throughout the year in consultation with the Fairlawn Neighbourhood Center
- Develop interfaith liturgies and worship opportunities designed specifically for interfaith families. Using the Open Church<sup>34</sup> as a possible model.
- There is a hunger for spiritual conversations about the unspoken issues that our culture does not speak about, such as dying and life after death.

All of these together are, I believe, the best way to ensure a thriving and joyful future for Fairlawn. It is not a question any longer of simply attempting to maintain the status quo. That ship has sailed. The only question is:

**'How will we make it through the storm that is upon us and the greater storm that is to come?'**

I want to close with the words from my favourite hymn; "I Feel the Winds of God."<sup>35</sup>

*I feel the winds of God today; today my sail I lift,*

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.theopenchurchmd.org/>

<sup>35</sup> Words by Jessie Adams, Voices United Hymn # 625

*Though heavy, oft with drenching spray, and torn with many a rift;  
If hope but light the water's crest, and Christ my bark will use,  
I'll seek the seas at his behest, and brave another cruise.*

*If ever I forget Thy love and how that love was shown,  
Lift high the blood red flag above; it bears Thy name alone.  
Great pilot of my onward way, Thou wilt not let me drift;  
I feel the winds of God today, today my sail I lift.*

I have great faith in our capacity to not only weather this storm, but to find ways to grow from it. Ships are not designed to stay in port, but to sail in all weather. Churches are not designed to stay the same or to look after themselves, but to give themselves away in joyful, God-centered ministry.

May it be so for our whole church!

## **APPENDIX ONE: The Research Process**

### **Research Questions**

1. What is your church's mission?
2. How are staff and committee goals aligned with the mission of the church?
3. What and how do you measure to know if you are being effective?
4. How does staff set their goals? Who performs staff evaluations and how are they done?
5. What is your staff team structure and who reports to whom?
6. Do you have an Executive Minister position and if so, when did you add it?
7. What is that person's role in relationship to the Senior (Pastoral) Minister?
8. Could you share with me the stories of the last three new people to come to your church? Who they were and what brought them? Why do you think they stayed?

### **People Interviewed or Whose Worship I Experienced**

Rev. Ailsa Newby, Senior Rector, St. Mary's Parish Church, Putney, London, UK

Rev. Sue Genge (Coordinating Minister), Kingsview United Church, Oshawa

Rev Louise Sams (Associate Minister), Kingsview United Church, Oshawa

Rev. John Pentland, Hillhurst United Church, Calgary

Rev Dr. Brent Hawkes, Senior Pastor, Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto

Rev. Kevin Downer, Executive Pastor, Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto

Shelly Morris, Executive Director, Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto

Rev. Kevin Armstrong, Senior Pastor, Forest Brook Community Church, Ajax/Pickering

Rev. Dr. Andrew Stirling, Senior Minister, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, Toronto

Rev. Peter Holmes, Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Toronto

Rev. Dr. Orville James, Wellington Square United Church, Burlington

Rev. Tim Westermeyer, Senior Pastor, St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Minnesota, USA

Rev. Dr. Jamie Holtom, North Bramalea United Church, Bramalea, Ontario

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