

**PARKMINSTER'S CONGREGATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

**REPORT
TO THE CONGREGATION**

March 3, 2013



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BACKGROUND

On Sunday, May 6, 2012 the Congregation of Parkminster approved the creation of a Congregational Development Team (CD Team) as a continuation of the work begun with the Congregational Gatherings in 2011. This was a bold move as the Joint Needs Assessment Committee was disbanded in favour of a more developmental and organic approach to assisting the Congregation to discern “**who we are**” and “**what God is calling us to be and do**”. This forward thinking approach has the capacity to help Parkminster evolve into a church of the “future” enjoying long term health and sustainability. At the May Council meeting, a slate of 11 volunteers was approved. The Team, Chaired by Lynn Harper and Nancy Schwindt includes Allen Switzer, Barb Wynne, Iso McGregor, Jeanne Foster, Rev. Keith Hagerman, Laura Muirhead, Les Robertson, Maureen Crawford, and Sheila Rule.

Working with Council and the Congregation, the Congregational Development Team’s purpose is to develop a “blueprint” to take Parkminster, all of us together, into the future. More specifically, the mandate of this group is to:

- understand the ongoing needs of the Congregation
- ensure that there is ongoing communication and involvement from the Congregation
- come to some conclusions on Parkminster’s identity, mission & vision for the next few years based on our collective understanding of what God is calling us to be and do
- research and assess models used by other churches in meeting the identified needs of the Congregation. This may include how to best structure ourselves
- further explore and develop ideas discussed in the Gatherings (as they apply)
- encourage the piloting of programs/projects that have been identified through the Gatherings for which there is energy and support
- revisit the EDGE proposal and assess whether to utilize their support and if so how
- make recommendations to Parkminster (Council and Congregation) with respect to programs (create a blueprint) that we should consider implementing to best support and meet the needs of the congregation and ensure long term health and sustainability.

ACTIVITIES TO DATE

Since June, the Team has had in excess of 23 meetings plus countless Working Group meetings and interviews. Early on we broke ourselves into smaller task groups to look at key areas of focus for recommendations – Mission and Vision, Partnerships, Other Church Practices, Small Group Culture, Leadership. In summary, the Team has:

- Researched and developed a new model to collect information from the Congregation called “Meaningful Conversations”
- Held two Meaningful Conversations resulting in 121 different people being involved
- Posted Conversation results in the gym so additional comments could be collected
- Prepared draft Statements (Who We Are; What God Is Calling Us to Be and Do) from Conversation feedback and presented them at the Congregational meeting Nov.4, 2012 and obtained essential agreement

- Collected and reviewed additional feedback relating to the Statements. Changes have been made and await final approval at the Annual Meeting March 3, 2013
- Partnered with Finance Committee on Feb. 3, 2013 to have Meaningful Conversations regarding financial sustainability (2013 budget and beyond)
- Attended (6 members) the “More Than Franchises” United Church National Conference and participated in 3 follow-up conference calls with other participating churches
- Participated in EDGE webinars
- Compiled an inventory of church activities, current partnerships and outreach
- Reviewed past Gatherings (Environics, Change, Natural Church Development, Church Size) and workshop information
- Explored how to institute a culture of small group ministries
- Explored Parkminster’s statistical trend information
- Contacted 15 plus churches, 5 were interviewed in depth and “best practice” information compiled
- Identified themes from each of the above noted sources of data

SIGNIFICANT LEARNINGS IDENTIFIED

The next section of the report identifies the overarching areas of discovery as of this time. The essence of these learnings has been woven throughout the entire report.

Diversity

We are a very diverse community of faith. We are diverse geographically, demographically, and in the understanding and practice of our faith. We have a wide range of passions, interests, opinions, talents, dreams, and priorities. We are a neighbourhood church for some and a destination church for others. So the very reason people attend Parkminster varies greatly. Diversity is our Congregation’s greatest gift and perhaps our largest challenge. As a result of our diversity, it is unlikely one project/type of session/workshop etc. will fit the needs of everyone. Even in the use of language we must remember that for each concept we may commonly use (i.e. pastoral, community, service), we have many different interpretations. As we continue to have conversations, we will continue to more fully understand each other developing our own common concepts and accessing the wealth of gifts that diversity can involve.

Conclusion:

- As a diverse Congregation, no one project, program, service, or study is of interest to everyone. Moving forward, we need to change how we measure success by embracing Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (NIV)

Change

As society and society's values change, our church will be affected. Over the past few years we have focused on how society and churches are changing. For example; people born after 1964 have a different view of the world, today's worker has 10-14 jobs by age 38, and there are 31 billion searches in Google every month. Change is happening at a much more rapid pace than in the past. Decision making models in society have changed from authoritarian to a more collaborative approach and have shifted to more process oriented thinking. Change in our world is a challenge and an opportunity for growth. To be relevant into the future as a faith community we need to focus on relationships, process, empowerment and engagement. Current trends suggest that people are looking for an experience that is engaging, participatory, innovative and community building (E.P.I.C.).

The number of households attending Parkminster has grown slightly over the past 6 years. However, the number of members is declining. This trend speaks to the increasing number of households with singles. In 2012, sixty-two percent of households were couples and 38 percent of households were singles. One quarter of couples were over 60. The number of single households is increasing and will continue as our seniors age and spouses die in addition to the adding of new single members. The number of young couples (under 40 years of age) with children is growing.

Conclusion:

- On an ongoing basis, we need to pay attention to the details of how our Congregation is changing (i.e. aging, singles, young families) in order to provide programs and supports that are timely and relevant. We need to remember that in today's world feeling part of a faith community is often more important than formal membership. Ongoing changes to programming are also natural and normal.

Evolution

As a Congregation we are proud of our accomplishments. We are known for being an inclusive and welcoming place. We offer a variety of programs. We have a large number of dedicated people who lead and serve in many areas, both within Parkminster and throughout the community. Our list of assets is large and the number of items/programs on our "working well" list is long. We have collected this information and celebrate its abundance, diversity and depth. As a Congregation, we want to become more energized and engage more deeply in our spiritual development, care of each other, and outreach beyond our doors. This is not about starting over. Our focus is on growing, evolving, and building on our strengths.

Conclusion:

- To be a relevant and vibrant faith community in the future we need to continue to evolve and change. The work and recommendations of the Congregational Development Team are meant to provide direction for this on-going process. As we evolve we need to assess our programs/services, continuing where there is energy, and letting go where there is not. It is even more important that we are open and flexible in this work while celebrating our successes.

Meaningful Conversations

Margaret Wheatley's book Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future (2002) and Juanita Brown's book The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations that Matter (2005) discuss the importance of intentional conversation as a model to strengthen community, restore hope for the future, "release the energy" and engage talents. This conversational approach is being used by United Churches in Canada and other human services providers around the world. (www.theworldcafe.com) It creates collective wisdom, is inclusive and helps move people toward common understanding by encouraging dialogue, learning to listen more deeply, and allowing everyone to be heard. This process encourages everyone to build onto ideas and thoughts. This model is not a workshop, focus group, or survey. It makes no assumptions. This model helps people let go of the past so that the community works towards the future. The conversational approach does not presume anything and is designed with the intention to include adults, youth and children.

We have used this approach to collect information regarding our mission and vision as a church. Over 90% of participants involved felt it was a useful way to dialogue in our Congregation. At Parkminster, the conversational approach has been called "Meaningful Conversations". On February 3, 2013, the approach was modified slightly and used to facilitate a conversation about Parkminster's financial sustainability.

Conclusion:

- The conversational approach has proven itself to be very useful for both general and specific discussions. Meaningful Conversations release the energy of participants, generate new ideas and build community.
- Continuing with Meaningful Conversations is important to encouraging dialogue, allowing everyone to be heard, and helping us listen to each other.

Dynamic and Growing Churches

Members of our Team spent time collecting and collating information from other churches that had been labeled as having "best practices" by Hamilton Conference and EDGE and were "dynamic and growing" churches. Analysis identified these characteristics to be common among dynamic churches.

- strong leadership who can nurture the vision but also get out of the way when necessary
- collective understanding that everyone is involved in ministry
- creative ministry staffing models (paid and volunteer) including some specialized roles (e.g. communication coordinator, volunteer coordinator, rental coordinator and various other part-time positions)
- lack of bureaucracy allowing things to happen quickly without being bogged down in layers of approval
- priority given to developing and supporting great websites for facilitating communication and transparency

- very succinct set of values which clearly and simply describes who they are (e.g. Radical Hospitality – Spirituality – Social Justice (Hillhurst UC, Calgary))

Conclusion:

- Reviewing the practices of other dynamic and growing churches is an important practice to continue.

RECOMMENDED ACTION PLAN

The Congregational Development Team was mandated to “make recommendations to Parkminster with respect to programs (create a blueprint) that we should consider implementing to best support and meet the needs of the Congregation and ensure long term health and sustainability”. The following Action Plan items have been identified by the CD Team as priorities.

Parkminster’s Statements: “Who We Are” “What God Is Calling Us to Be and Do”

Using the feedback gained through Meaningful Conversations, the Team prepared draft statements entitled “Who We Are” and “What God Is Calling Us to Be and Do”. These were presented to the Congregation at their meeting on November 4, 2012. At that time, essential agreement was obtained. From November 4 until January 15, 2013 additional feedback was collected. On January 24, 2013, all feedback was carefully reviewed and the statements were refined keeping in mind that the people who didn’t provide feedback were in essential agreement with the draft statements as presented. On February 7, 2013, the Team reviewed the statements and approved the final draft. Each person who provided feedback was contacted sharing with them how their input was considered. The revised statements are as follows and approval of them is essential to providing a concrete vision for our journey into the future.

Parkminster is a theologically evolving community of faith that:

- *Celebrates the rich heritage of our Christian faith*
- *Takes seriously the spiritual search as believers, questioners and questioning believers*
- *Celebrates music as a key expression of the Spirit*
- *Nurtures children and youth in their spiritual journey*
- *Is welcoming, open, inclusive*
- *Respects our diversity as we seek unity in the Spirit*
- *Has a wealth of gifts, talents and passions*
- *Practices our spirituality by serving others and reaching out to the community beyond our doors*
- *Demonstrates a strong sense of fellowship and commitment to caring for each other, and our world*
- *Embraces the sacredness of all life and the living earth.*

God is calling us to be an evolving community of faith inspired to embrace our future as we:

- *Deepen our commitment to each other*
- *Nurture our spiritual vitality and growth*
- *Live a life of loving influence in the world.*

Recommendation:

- That Parkminster approve the statements of “Who We Are” and “What Is God Calling Us to Be and Do” and use them as a foundation for our work

Support and Caring

In our research, we came to the realization that caring begins when someone visits our church for the first time and continues in various ways until they leave. This ‘**continuum of caring**’ encompasses children, families, couples, singles, seniors at all stages of their life and journey at Parkminster.

Our Congregation consists of people in many different stages – of spiritual journey and life with all its challenges and joys. To best walk/journey/pastor, a process of caring must exist at every stage. We do a great job at support and caring however we acknowledge that we could improve on what we do. We are welcoming to new people, however; we could do a better job at supporting new people to integrate into the life of the church creating new and deeper relationships. We have an aging community and with that more resources will be needed.

In order to deepen our commitment to each other, the CD Team recommends implementation of a full continuum of support aimed at deepening relationships that moves from welcoming to belonging to caring to spiritual support. This continuum of support will help us to be sustainable into the future. (Ministry of Caring) As part of a community of faith, we all must take responsibility in this caring ministry. Times have changed from when visiting and pastoral care were the sole responsibility of the Ministerial staff. Aging populations, fewer staff, increasing diversity of demands means that pastoral care can no longer be the sole responsibility of staff. Pastoral or spiritual care needs to be redefined – seeing the caring of lay people for us as ministry.

To augment the current work of 2 by 2 visiting and paid Ministerial staff we suggest adding trained, skilled lay leaders. There are a number of models to train skilled lay leaders which should be explored. One that the CD Team has become aware of is Stephen Ministry. Ministerial staff must be able to support this type of training and the trained lay leaders.

We also found that congregations who thrive do so by making the best use of the talents and skills available within the congregation. Research suggests that the continuum of belonging (which used to be “believe, behave, belong”) has shifted such that people first seek to belong and as they become part of the community their belief grows. To address this new reality, we need to strengthen our approach to help people deepen their connection to our community.

Parkminster has an abundance of gifts and talents that are not fully engaged. We struggle currently to fill all the roles needed to further the work of our Congregation. We have tried to do this as volunteers but more concerted time and effort is needed. A Gifts and Talent Coordinator could help in this work by connecting people with common interests, identifying various skills available, and helping people become involved. This position would help forge new friendships and help new people move into the work and social life of the church. This position would connect people within the Congregation and provide a resource to explore the better use of the passions, time, professional and non-professional skills of the members of our Congregation. Having a Gifts and Talents Coordinator would streamline the process for gathering people around an issue/task/project.

The caring continuum must also support our children. We recommend that active roles be provided for children and youth in the worship services. (e.g. choir, ushers, lay readers) and that we continue with an active and imaginative Sunday program. It is important to create opportunities for the youth and children to interact with senior members of our Congregation for both support and education. The Gifts and Talents Coordinator would be involved in recruitment for all programs and all ages.

Recommendations:

- That Parkminster investigate the possibility of adding lay leaders with special training in pastoral care to augment the current complement of paid Ministerial staff and 2x2 visitors

- That Parkminster support a new role of a Gifts and Talent Coordinator

Spiritual Growth

In our research, the CD Team has discovered that in order to care for and encourage the spiritual development of our diverse Congregation we need to connect with each other in small settings.

Nurturing our spiritual growth is a priority for members of Parkminster. Given we are a diverse community, it is important that all members take responsibility for their own spiritual growth including defining needs, talking to others, and perhaps starting something new. No one program fits for all so the CD Team suggests that the following areas be continued, explored, and/or piloted.

- Alternative ways and times of worship (i.e. messy church, varied worship at different times, bar church, small group ministry)

- Small group ministry for friendship, support and spiritual growth (youth and adult)

- Expansion of current small affinity groups that are based on friendship and support such as Movie Group, Men's Group, Bridge Group etc.

- Innovative services led by Parkminster Ministerial and Lay Leaders that embrace the use of innovative music, instruments, sermons and readings to nurture everyone

- Funding for Ministry staff to attend retreats and ongoing development programs

The CD Team feels that the creation of a Small Group Ministry Team (SGM Team) to further explore and pilot small group ministry for friendship, support and spiritual growth should be a focus. A member of the CD Team will be part of this group. The mandate of this Team would be to further develop a culture of small groups including; review of our current small groups, identification of gaps, creation of new small groups, and leadership development. Support for this intentional small group process would be required from our Ministry staff who will be involved in helping to train/coach the spiritual component.

Recommendations:

- That Parkminster embrace the concept of small group ministry for the purposes of friendship, support and spiritual growth
- That Parkminster initiate a pilot project for this purpose in 2013.

Outreach and Partnerships

Parkminster, collectively and individually, lives out its faith. Currently, there are many outreach activities and partnerships. A list has been developed to catalogue this. Once again, we are a diverse group with interest in social justice, local outreach, and international outreach. It is important also that we celebrate each of these activities and ensure members know how to become involved. New partnering initiatives could be financial, sharing staff, service work, program specific, social, etc. More investigation is required and the CD Team recommends that Parkminster further explore partnership opportunities.

Recommendations:

- That Parkminster continue and expand our involvement and outreach in the wider community where there is interest and energy
- That Parkminster look for natural ways to partner with other congregations and community organizations as opportunities come along.

Communication

Dynamic churches do a really great job at communicating. Internal and external communications are a top priority. We are a diverse community and not everyone comes to church every Sunday so communication within our Congregation by a variety of means is very important. Specifically, the CD Team encountered websites that were: user friendly, current, informative, attractive (i.e. pictures that scrolled, current pictures, music), inviting, and they included recorded sermons, directions, staff listings with email contacts, calendar, Board listings, volunteer opportunities, announcements, donation button, subscribe and unsubscribe options, committee descriptions with contacts, policies, private congregational section, links to other services and information. Also noted was that many of the churches reviewed had “tag lines” that described them (i.e. The People’s Church, The Golden Rule Church) and members were very clear on the vision and mission of their church. Communications flowed in all forms

and celebrated both the church's accomplishments and individual member accomplishments. This provided consistent, integrated communication.

While Parkminster's website has undergone significant change and it is a huge step in the right direction, this is only one tool within an overall communications strategy.

Critical to moving forward is the development of a strategy and process which would integrate internal and external information in all forms including written (newsletters, updates), verbal (voice mail, announcements, news, advertisements), electronic (email, website, newsletters) and social media (Facebook, Twitter). The strategy would include communication schedules, content guidelines, tools, target audiences, resource requirements, best practices and ongoing evaluation. The Committee would also explore use of the website as a place to post congregation only information. The overall strategy would reinforce "Who We Are" and "What God is Calling Us to Be and Do".

The communications strategy would allow us to advertise and celebrate being an open and affirming community, celebrate the achievements of individuals and groups for their work inside and outside the church, and provide critical and timely information about activities and opportunities. The result would enable Parkminster to further its ministry. In addition, increased access to operational information such as agendas, minutes, policies, and updates would enhance transparency of decision making. Enhanced communication processes will help people feel more connected, and allow for external agencies/services to link with us in partnership. Part of the communication strategy would be to lead a process to come up with a "tag line" to describe our community of faith.

Recommendations:

- That Parkminster approve the formation of a Communications Committee with a mandate to develop and execute a communications strategy
- That Parkminster contract with a trained communications specialist to help facilitate the creation and implementation of the communication strategy (i.e. Government funded student, co-op student, volunteer)

Leadership, Structure and Empowerment

Research indicated that dynamic, growing churches have a strong vision coupled with a lack of bureaucracy resulting in a community that is focused and excited. Decision making was nimble, clear and transparent. Research indicated strong Ministerial leadership that championed the vision was a key component. Another key component was the encouragement and support the Ministerial leader provided to lay leadership. It was also interesting to note that each Minister had their own style of leading within their congregational setting.

Structurally, it was observed that all churches contacted had small boards of less than 15 members. These boards did not necessarily include all committee chairs. The leadership was focused and spent more time on strategic items than operational items. As leaders in the congregation their spiritual development was also an integral element in their work.

Parkminster's current structure is a 36 person Council which includes all committee chairs, designated committee elders, Presbytery representatives, representatives of men's, women's and youth groups in addition to executive officers. The work at this level is primarily operational in nature and decisions are made with input from all persons attending at that time. The Executive does not meet outside of Council meetings. There are currently 12 Committees charged with carrying out the work of the Council on behalf of the Congregation. Currently, the role of Nominating Committee is to support the Council structure by finding volunteers for leadership and committees.

The CD Team believes that it is time to develop a model of a smaller board structure. As we do this, it is important to create a decision making process that is empowering and transparent for all. Use of a process approach will also be important as we move ahead.

It is expected that the work involved in selecting and moving to a smaller board structure will take some time. While that work is underway it is recommended that a review of current Committee responsibilities/descriptions to address overlap, clarity in decision making (Committee or Council), and Committee relationship to staff positions be completed.

Developing lay leadership is very important to our long term sustainability. The CD Team advocates fostering a culture of lay leadership that includes consistent leadership principles, supports and encourages new leaders, provides leadership training, and has a budget for ongoing education. This culture of lay leadership is intended to empower all lay persons to become involved.

Finally, it is important to review current policies as opportunities present themselves ensuring that our policies support moving towards our vision of the future and the potential new structure. If the reason for the policy is "because we have always done it this way" then this is our time to reassess.

Resources

We need to look differently at how we fund the work of the church through stewardship of the resources and talents we have. We need to appreciate our abundance and use it wisely. Our Meaningful Conversations on finance started this new journey. The CD Team supports further exploration in this area by the Congregation. This could include; exploring leveraging property assets, revenue generation ideas, education programs, sharing of resources and/or staff with other congregations etc.

Congregational Development

Churches must evolve if they are to meet the changing needs of their congregation and the larger world. Parkminster will need to encourage a culture of learning, changing, growing, and seeking. To do this, we need to foster a culture that is open to possible improvements, consideration of new ideas and creation of pilot programs in our current environment. It is important that we foster a culture that understands and celebrates we are a diverse group of people looking for unity in the Spirit.

Critical to Parkminster's evolution, is that the Congregation "**release their energy**", using their talents and abilities to become more involved in the life of our community of faith. Dialogue through Meaningful Conversations is key to our ongoing development.

The CD Team realizes that current Committees and Council may not have the time, energy, and/or resources to explore new ideas as well as the ideas outlined in this report and support them as required. The Recommended Action Plan, that the CD Team has developed, identifies some large pieces of work including; structure, leadership, continuum of care, spiritual development and partnership exploration. This next phase of congregational development will need leadership and support.

Recommendations:

- That Parkminster approve the formation of a Ministry of Possibilities Committee (as an outgrowth of the Congregational Development Team) with a mandate to further the work of the Action Plan and to explore other areas of Congregational interest and need as they arise
- That the Ministry of Possibilities Committee share information gathered by the CD Team with Committees, Council and the Congregation as appropriate
- That the Ministry of Possibilities Committee be initially chaired by one member of the current CD Team to aid in the transition process. It is suggested that this team be made up of three to four people who would act as a steering group that would draw upon Congregational expertise and knowledge for specific projects and other activities as they arise. This Committee would report to Council
- That Parkminster continue with Meaningful Conversations as the primary model for congregational input and to build community
- That Parkminster set aside funds annually for congregational development

Joint Needs Assessment Committee

The information gathered by the CD Team and resulting report forms the basis from which the Joint Needs Assessment Committee will do its work. The Congregation has provided input using Meaningful Conversations. From its findings the CD Team recommends the following:

Recommendation:

- That the Joint Needs Assessment Committee explore ministry to include both Ordered and lay persons

Recommendation:

- That the Joint Needs Assessment Committee explore and make recommendations regarding staffing structure including:
 - A staff leadership model that defines roles and expectations
 - Staff roles that are structured to allow for timely decision making and communication
 - Clear responsibilities, roles and accountabilities for all staff positions, avoiding overlap
 - Job descriptions that define relationship to lay leadership (identification, support and training)
 - Support for lay roles involved in small group ministries and pastoral care.

Recommendation:

- That the Joint Needs Assessment Committee explore and consider in their recommendations creative ways for filling staff positions including:
 - The possibility of a Gifts and Talents Coordinator position
 - The possibility of a contract position for communications
 - Support for the small group ministry process from Ministry staff as they will be involved in helping to train/coach the spiritual component
 - Explore various ways of leading Christian Education/Development (adults and children). For example using part-time (paid) lay staffing for a variety of roles including Sunday school, support for small group ministries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONCLUSION

This report represents the time, talents and wisdom of many deeply committed people. The CD Team would like to thank all who participated in Meaningful Conversations. Your ideas, honesty, energy, hope, and encouragement was tremendous. We look forward to the continuation of this process of engagement into the future. We would also like to thank the many people who provided feedback to the draft statements helping tremendously in the refinement process. Many of you gave time and energy helping us to collect the substantial amount of information considered in this report. Thank you for sharing your wisdom.

The CD Team would also like to express our thanks to the various churches that we contacted while collecting information. The time and effort that Ministry and lay leaders offered to us was amazing. Sharing our journey with these communities was truly a gift.

The CD Team is excited about the future of our faith community. Our Congregation has dared to stop and evaluate 'what God is calling us to be and do' with a mind to looking into our future. Our church is not broken and does not need to be fixed. In fact, the list of activities presently taking place is wondrous and we don't celebrate them enough. We have a vibrant community of faith engaged in a process of renewal allowing us to evolve into the future with long term health and sustainability. We are living in exciting times! Blessed Be!