

The Fairlawn Call Q&A



What is The Fairlawn Call?

The Fairlawn Call is the name given to a process through which Fairlawn Avenue United Church will decide what it must do to be a vibrant and sustainable church in the years ahead. We are calling it a journey of reflection and discovery.

Who is part of The Fairlawn Call?

All of Fairlawn's congregation are part of The Fairlawn Call. The Rev. Christopher White last fall invited us all to participate in discussions that will address who we are as a church and who we want to be. The call is to each and every one of us as Christians to help shape the future of Fairlawn. We respond with God's guidance to serve the common good.

Beyond the congregation itself, we invite those in the broader community who may not attend Fairlawn currently but who might be interested in what our church does or could provide to also participate in our discussions. We have information on our website as one way of inviting them to participate.

Who is leading The Fairlawn Call?

We all participate in The Fairlawn Call, and we jointly will decide what God is calling Fairlawn to be now and in the foreseeable future. But in order to move the process forward and to coordinate the logistics necessary to have an organized and fruitful process, a group called The Fairlawn Call team was established. Led by Christopher White, Greig Clark and Derek Wishart (now Chair of Executive Council), the team has been in place to organize the meetings and communications that will, we hope, help the process along. In a covenanting service last fall, the Fairlawn Call team committed themselves to the task.

Why is The Fairlawn Call necessary?

While Fairlawn is currently working from a position of significant strength, we need to acknowledge that churches across North America are dealing with unprecedented challenges. The United Church of Canada is currently closing roughly one church per week (see [United Church Observer article](#)). Fairlawn is not immune to these trends and we need to be proactive if we are going to create a sustainable future for the church that is our home.

Bottom line: If we don't take action now to build on our strengths, Fairlawn will probably cease to exist within the next generation.

To secure that place in the future, we will need to do two things:

- Engage current congregants more in the discussion and planning for our church's future
- Attract new people who do not come to Fairlawn regularly (we have called them 'the Curious').

Focusing on these two goals of engaging congregants and attracting new people to Fairlawn will be an investment in our future health. The idea is that in every program Fairlawn offers – may it be the soup ministry, a faith and spirituality discussion group or a family event such as a summer picnic – we will develop and build it with two objectives in mind: what role it plays in engaging current members and in attracting new ones.

How have people participated in The Fairlawn Call so far?

A major part of The Fairlawn Call is engaging people in dialogue about Fairlawn and about the kind of church they imagine Fairlawn could (and should) become.

That discussion began with a series of Sunday offerings where the congregation provided their heartfelt comments and ideas on special yellow cards handed in during the service.

The three Sunday Offerings answered three questions. The response was great, and you can see summary lists of those comments:

- What is church for you?
- What do you dream our church could become?
- What role can you play?

These comments helped inform the areas of discussion we engaged in during a congregational meeting on November 17, 2013. At that meeting, people had group discussions about the key areas of church activity as identified by the yellow-card Offerings:

- Promoting spirituality
- Fostering community
- Inspiring faith in action

The groups also discussed Nurturing congregational gifts – in other words, considering how individuals can realize and contribute their own talents, interests and experiences in support of those three areas of spirituality, community and faith in action.

What are some key findings coming from the November 17 meeting?

Here are some key reflections, organized by the four topic areas listed above:

1. Spirituality

- People looking for reverent, relevant participatory worship and music
- Many love music but would also like more ability to feel involved and a desire for more contemporary music to help them connect to the spirit
- People want chances to be engaged directly
- Time for meditative prayer, calm quiet time
- Love it when the sermons connect to relevant current themes
- There is a big desire for more faith development opportunities, especially as they apply to adult education
- Looking for small group discussions where people can learn and share and explore together

2. Community

- We have lots of “small ministry teams” that work very well (for example, Soup Ministry, Social Justice, 40 Oaks/CRC, Green Team, Boarding House Ministry, Camp Scugog) but there is some confusion in the congregation over what all these things are, how they ‘fit together’ and how people can join. People would like a menu of what we do in all areas of activity.
- There is big support for being an Affirming Church
- There is desire for a more systematic way of being a welcoming church (from greeters through to engagement)

3. Faith in Action

- People are very proud of all the small ministry teams (mentioned above) that are doing great work in outreach
- Some proposed that having a focus on one big project would be a good idea for the future
- Perception of the role of Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre in conjunction with Fairlawn not clear, or not realized to full potential
- Fairlawn is a good place for people to do their “giving back” work

4. Capabilities (nurturing individual gifts)

- People are unclear about the roles of various councils and committees, teams and staff members
- There is confusion about what staff does versus what lay people (volunteers in councils, in specific projects) do
- Communications is an area where improvements could be made (both internal and external to the broader community)
- Need to fit people’s gifts with where they are needed
- There are areas where training would help people do their job (from staff and volunteer perspective)

How has The Fairlawn Call team communicated these findings?

We have posted information on The Fairlawn Call web page. Greig Clark has made various presentations at Executive Council meetings, to the congregation, and to individual committees. Information sessions were held in November 2013, on January 12, 2014 and again on March 23, 2014. Online forms on the web site are available for additional input from the congregation and from the community.

What are the next steps for The Fairlawn Call?

The Fairlawn Call Team will continue to seek input from those who were unable to attend the congregational meetings, and will report back to the congregation.

What does The Fairlawn Call need to accomplish?

The Fairlawn Call team has been very pleased with the engaged response we have had from the congregation. The input via the yellow-card Offerings and through participation in the congregational meeting has been instrumental in helping us understand what people are envisioning for our church and what we need to do to make sure that The Fairlawn Call process – this journey of reflection and discovery – satisfies people’s expectations and is productive in coming to conclusions and plans that will truly make Fairlawn a vibrant and sustainable community of faith.

Many questions about The Fairlawn Call have been discussed, such as

- *What kinds of things could we contemplate that would bring about that more ‘relevant, reverent and participatory’ worship some people are asking for?*
- *What would the future of music at Fairlawn look like?*
- *Are there elements of Sunday service that will need to stay the same? What changes need be introduced?*
- *How might people in the broader community who are looking for a home to explore their spirituality be attracted to Fairlawn?*
- *How might Fairlawn’s faith in action programs look like three years from now? What approaches should we take to developing our ‘faith in action’ even more?*

What is perhaps most important right now is that people feel comfortable with, and familiar with, The Fairlawn Call process. There will be more clarification and context , and the Fairlawn Call team will be putting in place other information sessions. More to come!

As always, thank you for your interest and your passion in this journey we are on.