

Embrace Action: Vision Document¹

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
Margaret Mead

June, 2016

¹ This document is the result of extensive consultation with EA Council Leads, Governing Council membership and other individuals. It was also shared and discussed at an April 10, 2016 Dialogue for Direction with the Fairlawn congregation. Feedback from this session has been incorporated into this document.

Purpose of this Document:

This document is intended to provide a description of the visionary role that the *Embrace Action* (EA) pillar will play in the desired future of Fairlawn Avenue United Church. It is intended to support the overall Fairlawn Call to be a Vibrant, Growing and Welcoming Church Community.

A vibrant, growing and welcoming church community



The overall intention of the EA activities is to help and enable us to listen and respond to our own and the broader communities' needs with our ears, our minds, our hands and our hearts. We will be led, find answers and be transformed by both our spiritual leaders and by engaging with the strangers in our "midst".

"Embrace Action" programs give us a chance to reach beyond our own congregation and local community to share our gifts, talents and resources with those in need. They also allow us to build relationships that have the power to transform our own lives. Current Embrace Action programs include Walk-In Support, Boarding Homes Ministry, the Christian Resource Centre (CRC) at 40 Oaks in Regent Park, Camp Scugog, Food Bank support, Refugee sponsorship and Social Justice.

Our EA actions are an integral and connected part of our faith journey. We believe that we must live out our faith in relationship, through love. In so doing, we will explore our spirituality, and be transformed. We believe that when we are transformed by love, we will reflect this love to others. Our EA actions also provide a way for us to experience belonging—in relationship with others. We understand that without love, we are nothing for as faith without works is dead (*James 2:26*), so "Christianity" without love is dead:

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

In this document, we will share the vision statement, mission statement and operating plan for the EA group at Fairlawn Avenue United Church.

Fairlawn Embrace Action Vision Statement

Our vision is rooted in our faith, and our actions are the way we live out our faith. Both are driven by the call to treat our neighbours as ourselves.² The following scripture passage provides our guiding principle.

1 John 3:17-18 If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? ¹⁸ My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.

Our vision statement is intended to provide strategic direction and describe what we want to achieve in the future. It offers a long-term perspective and is aspirational and challenging. Our vision is not something that can be easily met, and is intended to be general enough to encompass many program options over time. It is intended to motivate and inspire us towards a goal driven by our faith, by providing a clear guide for choosing current and future courses of program and advocacy action.

Fairlawn’s Vision Statement: Fairlawn will be actively engaged in positive social and economic change to those in need in our world, with our ultimate goal to support a just and sustainable world.

Fairlawn Embrace Action Mission Statement

Our mission statement is intended to articulate how we will meet our Embrace Action goals. As we evolve, so will our mission statement, so as to make sure that we stay current with needs that we observe in our congregation, our community and our world. The mission statement is intended to:

- **Provide direction:** to direct the EA Ministry teams onto the right path, by helping us make better decisions and plan for the future;
- **Provide a clear purpose to our work:** to remove potential ambiguities when we are making program and advocacy activity choices;
- **Keep us focused:** to answer the questions: “What do we do?”; “How do we do it?”, and “What value are we bringing?”

Our Mission is consistent with the focus of the United Church of Canada, which includes the following statements:

“Caring for one another was central to Jesus' teachings: Feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit those in prison.

We believe we strengthen one another to work, through God's grace, for a better world. To this end, we cooperate with other churches, faith traditions, and people of goodwill to eliminate poverty and protect those who are most vulnerable.”³

² This sentiment is encompassed also in Parker Palmer’s statement: ***“This man [living in poverty] and I sit at the same table and eat food from the same source. Our lives and fates are intertwined, and I must act accordingly.”*** — ***Parker J. Palmer, Healing the Heart of Democracy***

³ <http://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/what-we-believe>

Fairlawn's Mission Statement: in support of the United Church Creed we will work to bring about a just and sustainable world by developing and sustaining a portfolio of EA Programs that enable people to develop and live out their faith.

Fairlawn will enliven and enable this mission with the following actions:

- Share the program experiences and key learnings with the congregation and the community, helping all of us to discern what God is calling us to do.
- Communicate meaningfully 'beyond' the church using various communication mediums.
- Welcome new people to Fairlawn who are looking for a "good place to give back"
- Act in concert with the larger United Church of Canada social justice initiatives
- Guided by congregational resources and interests, keep open to other social justice issues that need our support over time.
- Support and advocate for policy changes that are led either provincially or federally, and – through our Mission and Service givings-also support efforts that address international needs
- Partner and support other organizations with similar goals so as to strengthen our collective efforts and voice.
- Track other organizations involved in social justice programs that address different issues and support congregants to connect with, and offer their gifts to, these other organizations if they are better aligned to that congregant's interests.

Operating Mandate:

Our current focus at Fairlawn is to work towards the eventual **Eradication of Poverty.**

To that end, we are currently actively engaged in programs- and are focused on supporting future programs-that contribute to this goal.

Rationale for our chosen Initial Focus:

We believe that this focused approach to social action is consistent with our fundamental Christian belief that we are all of equal importance in God's eyes, and that we should show 'no partiality' to others in our community. We have used a broad definition of poverty-- not focusing our efforts solely on poverty defined by financial wherewithal-- but also efforts to address poverty of body, mind and soul.⁴

In the short term, our EA activities will continue to support social policy that creates opportunities for all people to realize their potential; to strive to support those who falter to get back on track, and to care for those who need ongoing support with dignity and respect.

Why do we need to focus?

⁴ We acknowledge that this desired social focus is not a new one! In 1776, Adam Smith argued in *The Wealth of Nations* that poverty is the "inability to afford not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lower orders, to be without."

We believe that focus on one aspirational goal is important because:

- **Focus will allow us to do something really well.** . In the 1800's, the faith community supported the goal of ending slavery - not reducing it or making it better- but ending it. Two centuries later we are nearly there. At Fairlawn, we asked ourselves "Could the eradication of poverty be the faith community's next goal?" We certainly believe that our faith community has a role to play and a voice to use in ensuring that the need to eradicate poverty is kept on our greater social agenda; kept on the "front burner" and not ignored.
- **We can build on existing momentum and deepen our involvement in** activities in which our congregation is already involved. _Poverty exists in our city, our province and our country. Our work is needed. We can start with programs that address the needs of the communities we already know about and serve in our existing EA work.

Program Breadth: The "Needs Continuum"

Our Embrace Action programs will address both ends of the following "needs continuum":



Downstream Needs (also called "Charity" work):

This work focuses on dealing with the immediate symptoms of poverty, attempting to ameliorate them in some way ("*give a person a fish*"). This work won't "fix" or "eradicate" poverty. This work is intended to help those who suffer from poverty until it is eradicated.

This has been the key focus of most of the Embrace Action programs at Fairlawn to date, including Boarding Homes Ministry, Walk in Support, parts of our CRC involvement, Refugees, Scugog and Mission and Service.

Upstream Needs (also called Social Justice Work):

This work focuses on addressing the root causes of poverty by developing a deep understanding of the issues, and then delivering programs and advocating for change to address them.

It includes supporting programs that give training and tools to those who live in poverty to help them help themselves ("*teaching to fish*"). This has been the focus of parts of the Regent Park Christian Resource Centre, the Refugee project, the support for the activities of Mission & Service, and the Camp Scugog activities.

Perhaps even more importantly, upstream work involves advocacy for social policy that removes barriers to lifting people out of poverty and supports those who are most vulnerable in our society. This has been the focus of the Social Justice Team.

In the future, there will be an effort to both further support and learn from those involved in Downstream programs – such as the Boarding Homes Ministry- so as to help us to “connect the dots” between the needs we witness in the people we are supporting with our programs, and the systemic deficiencies that are creating the need in the first place. By creating these real relationships and beginning to understand the issues together, some EA volunteers will be compelled to raise a voice and advocate for change– to friends, family and elected officials. Ideally we will get “synergy” (1+1>2), with those working on EA projects-- working closely to learn from each other so that our downstream and upstream activities support and build upon each other.

Developing and Evolving EA Programs in the Future:

Each program will need a Lay Leader (a Champion), surrounded by a Lay Ministry Team (LMT). This Champion and LMT will work with EA Council⁵ to develop programs that fit as many of the following criterion as possible. To the extent that many programs are identified by Champions, EA Council will choose between programs and provide support based on an assessment of the “program fit” with these criterion, and available resources.⁶

Fairlawn EA programs and activities must be designed to meet the following criterion:

1. **Fill a Need:** each program will be responding to an identified need. Ideally, we will have done research to understand the need. This research can include information from people with “lived experience” i.e. people who have experienced need and received help from a similar program, or have delivered help through similar programs, and see positive outcomes but still see gaps. This research will help the LMT to understand the need and design programs that can respond effectively to it.
2. **Fit with The Fairlawn Call. Help achieve the Desired Future; A Vibrant, Growing, Welcoming Fairlawn**
 - a. **Vibrant:** helps get people MORE engaged, by engaging more Fairlawners in EA work.
 - b. **Growing/Welcoming:** helps get MORE (new) people engaged in Fairlawn

Implications: this means:

 - Making EA at Fairlawn EASY to get involved in for people both inside and outside Fairlawn (opportunities well communicated, no cliques, etc).
 - Fairlawn is known as a “good place to give back”. Fairlawn’s research shows that there is a niche of people in our catchment area who are feeling the need to give back at this

⁵ Participation in the Embrace Action Council (EAC) will be open to all champions who are running, or proposing a program.

⁶ We are limited by resources (time, energy, people and financial). Over time, congregants may bring forward program ideas that address needs in a different focus area. If sufficient resource exists to begin such a program, it is proposed that the EA Council will take these forward to the Governing Council as part of Fairlawn’s program portfolio.

point in their life... people like John Ryerson who said “*The social justice team at Fairlawn is my anchor for working to make the world a better place*”... surely there are others, in our 20,000 nearby households who would feel similarly, if they could be introduced in some way to the people and programs of EA at Fairlawn.

3. **Fairlawn congregants Involved:** programs are preferred where the Champion can show that other Fairlawners are interested in being involved.
4. **Opportunity to live our Faith and be transformed:** we have resources of time, money and wisdom that we use to live out our Faith. (“*Being an active part of Fairlawn’s social justice ministry is at the heart of my faith journey*”, Jannie Mills). Programs are preferred that involve learning and growing in our faith and understanding. It is important for all those involved to understand and experience that the learning and growing “goes both ways”. We are transformed by those who are living on the margin, when we come into true relationship with them.

Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks--we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.”

— Parker J. Palmer

5. **Focused:** We must do few things very well. By focusing, we build capacity – knowledge and networks - to be more effective. EA programs should do the following:
 - a. Focus on Poverty (“of Body, Mind and Soul”);
 - b. Set clear goals so we know we are succeeding in making a difference;
 - c. Ensure that Fairlawn’s contribution of volunteer time and/or money to outside organizations is significant to their operation.
6. **Inspires Others to get involved:** Ideally we would like our efforts to inspire others with time and money to be brought to the problem. It will be easier to do this if the work chosen is: -“*Topical, relevant, newsworthy, and exciting*”. (e.g. the Refugee project).

Indicators of Success:

The overall aspirational goal for our EA activities is that we have had an impact on eradicating poverty of mind, body and soul. Our goal raises many questions, such as: “*what does ending poverty look like?*” and “*how will we know when we have reached our goal, or had an impact?*”

We recognize that we must define what “success looks like” so that we can modify our programs over time to maximize their impact. We believe it will take many, many small actions to eradicate poverty—just as it did when slavery was ended. We need each program to contribute in a meaningful and ideally measureable way.

We expect that we will refine our success metrics over time but, for now, we have identified the following success metrics.

Goal #1: Fairlawn is MORE engaged in Embrace Action:

- a. ***With our money:*** in 2014 we spent \$1 (20%) on others for every \$5 we spend on ourselves⁷. By 2020, we would like to see this grow to \$ 1 (33%) spent on others for every \$3 spent on ourselves.⁸
- b. ***With our current congregants:*** EA work at Fairlawn appeals to those who want to make a difference. By 2020, we would like to see our volunteer surveys show that 20% more congregants are actively engaged in EA work at Fairlawn than in 2015, AND that they find participation in projects meaningful and rewarding.
- c. ***With new people becoming engaged at Fairlawn because of EA:*** Fairlawn is known as a “good place to give back” and EA attracts new people (20 new members by 2020).

Goal #2: Our Attitudes to Embrace Action have shifted:

We will strive to include learning opportunities in our services and events at Fairlawn and invite people from the programs we support –such as the boarding homes or Regent Park- to come to meet people at Fairlawn. We will also create testimonials and stories about the programs that we offer, and communicate them widely, through earned and free media, social media and within our congregation. In this way, we will create a greater common understanding of those who are living in poverty. With greater understanding, we can refine our program and advocacy activities to address systemic issues, and strive to dispel the stereotypical understanding of poverty. We hope also to become more cognizant of some of the key philosophies of EA such as:

- a. The need for a full program suite (to meet both upstream and downstream needs).
- b. That giving and learning “goes both ways”. We acknowledge that we will be transformed by coming into relationship with the ‘other’-i.e. the recipients.
- c. To acknowledge that supporting the broader community is a key part of our faith journey and activities at Fairlawn.

Goal #3: Our Reputation has grown by virtue of our activity and success:

- a. We have actively participated, and been recognized as a leader in raising issues related to our mission in the public arena. (e.g. media coverage of the Refugee process issues in the Fall of 2015, EA interviews for the United Church Observer and Mandate magazines,)
- b. We have hosted three education sessions per year, and advertised them in the community and in our congregation on topics of relevance to our program and advocacy areas.
- c. We have been active participants in legislation and regulatory policy discussions (e.g. past examples include the minimum wage campaign 2013/14, Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (ongoing), rooming house bylaws and inclusionary zoning (ongoing))

⁷ we spent \$95,000 on Embrace Action activities, and \$495,000 on our church Operations

⁸ We acknowledge that our EA programs can only be fully supported and successful because we are part of Fairlawn Avenue United Church, and rely on the building, the staff, and the “brand” to gain entry to events, to attract funding and other resources; and have a credible voice to advocate our positions. We must therefore continue to support the FAUC institution, financially, and ensure that our EA funding does not jeopardize the operating funding to the church itself.

- d. We will be acknowledged in and sought after by the geographic community, by Toronto residents, and by wider faith and secular communities, as a good place to do, support and partner on Embrace Action work.
- e. We will attract and acknowledge resources, better enabling the work that we do to achieve our overall goal.

Financing Embrace Action:

To adequately finance EA activities, we have consolidated the former “Outreach Fund” into the new “Embrace Action Fund”. We will strive to continue to communicate our program initiatives to the congregation so that they know what they are supporting through donations to the Embrace Action Fund. We will strive to reduce the need for special fundraising appeals to support our work.

The Embrace Action Fund will support both:

- Fairlawn-led EA programs, and
- External agencies that meet the following criteria
 - They have a connection with someone at Fairlawn
 - They have a poverty-focus
 - Fairlawn’s contribution (financial and/or volunteer support) is significant to the operation of the organization
 - It is ideally an organization with whom we might build a larger relationship (e.g. CRC).

The pledge form for the annual Stewardship Campaign (and envelopes) will have two boxes. The second box will include two sub sections:

1. Support Local Church programs (including Experience Belonging and Explore Spirituality) ____
2. Support to help others:
 - a. Fairlawn managed programs (i.e. Embrace Action Plan) _____
 - b. United Church of Canada Managed (i.e. Mission and Service) _____

At the annual pledge time, congregants will know

- The total dollars being requested for EA for the coming year
- The estimated budget for Fairlawn’s internal programs and external agencies.
- When and what kind of special fundraisers are anticipated.