



Transition to Transformation: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do we need a time of transition?

At Fairlawn, we have invested in hopeful new directions in ministry and programming over the past five years, through The Fairlawn Call, becoming an Affirming congregation, creating Spirit Space for Kids, and much else. Our ambitious dream was to create a successful new Fairlawn model for the 21st century. We do a lot of good work, which we are proud of, and we know there is much more to do. We still need to tackle and resolve several emerging challenges involving our finances, staffing, leadership model, and governance in order to live our faith in the world. Our organization is not yet fit for our new purposes.

These pressures and challenges are far from unique to Fairlawn. Many churches and ministers have had similar experiences recently. So, we are taking this as an opportunity for learning, organizational renewal, and moving forward together.

Toronto Southeast Presbytery, Governing Council, the Transition Team and you – by working together – have identified a number of areas where we need to repair and strengthen our capacities for (ordained and lay) ministry within our congregation and in our wider world.

2. What have we accomplished since the transition process began?

Initially, the transition work has been guided by Rev. Douglas duCharme as Transition Minister, along with the members of the Transition Team and Governing Council. Together, we have maintained our active congregational life and ministry while working to rebuild trust and bring forward new leadership from the congregation. We have also strengthened our stewardship of financial support of our volunteer time, and we've seen an encouraging growth in regular worship attendance.

Governing Council has spent time rethinking its leadership approach and what this will mean for the church. Communication between the Council and congregation has increased as Council has worked to be more transparent about its workings. We have been developing a focused effort on listening more deeply to our fellow congregants in order to enhance the experience of church. Meanwhile, a major research project is equipping us to learn about those we would serve and understand their unmet needs.

In the next phase, more of the transition leadership will belong to, and rely on, leadership from the congregation. To support and facilitate this, we have begun detailed planning for three workshop-style discussions – each aimed at organizational renewal. Each of these sessions will provide an opportunity for members to offer ideas and input and take ownership for building our future. We look forward to your participation.

The first workshop will develop language describing how we should treat each other, through some combination of principles, values, and behaviours. A second will explore how we mobilize our resources, set priorities, and build capabilities to ensure that we do our work well. The third will address what words we should bring to our mission as a congregation.

3. What is the work of the Transition Team?

Most of all, the Transition Team's responsibility is to support the Transition Minister in all that he does. Initially, this meant telling him about our history, strengths, successes, and struggles. We got him up to speed as rapidly as possible. We also spent time, under his guidance, understanding the forces that are shaping churches, ministers, and society at large in order to guide our contributions to the transition efforts. We have been a sounding board as he has developed his

observations about what is going on at Fairlawn and how he can make a difference. We have identified the many bodies of work that need to take place before we move to call a new minister. In recent weeks, we have also helped to design initiatives, such as the three workshop-style discussions, to underpin Fairlawn's transition progress.

4. In what ways is the congregation involved in the transition process?

The congregation is key to the success of the transition process. With that in mind, the Transition Team has put together several opportunities for active involvement in planning and taking part in the three workshops taking place this fall and winter.

These will be followed by congregational meetings where the congregation will be asked to make crucial decisions arising out of these workshops and other aspects of transition work that has been underway so that we can shape our future, in faith, together.

5. How will we know when the transition work is completed?

When Governing Council believes that we have sufficiently progressed through our transition work, we will draft an online profile of our congregation and the full-time ministerial role that we will be seeking to fill. We will then let the (newly formed) Shining Waters Regional Council, which oversees Douglas's work with us, know that the transition work has been accomplished and we will seek its permission to begin the search process. At that point, the Transition Team will be dissolved.

There are no hard and fast objective measures to prove that we are ready. This will be a judgment call by our Governing Council, with the input of the Transition Team.

We do know that our transition work must progress enough that the right candidate will be keen to join us on a journey that is well underway. He or she will see widespread contributions from our members and staff to our ongoing renewal. The next minister will not be expected to 'save us' alone. Nor will we have progressed so far that there is little scope for that minister to help to guide our journey.

6. What if we can't find a minister when the transition work is finished?

Yes, we will be competing for the right candidate from a small pool of suitable individuals. In past, a candidate's question was: "Is this an attractive pulpit for me?" Today, the question a candidate will pose is more like: "Is this an appealing church community on the move, with wonderful, talented people who have a clear sense of Christian purpose and vision?" We feel sure that the answers that potential candidates glean by looking at Fairlawn Avenue will be much stronger and more compelling due to the transition work we are doing.

7. Why can't Douglas stay?

Transition ministers are uniquely-trained specialists who provide congregations with a bridge to help them discern the meaning of their past and progress toward their future. They can help us face into our weaknesses, build on our strengths, and learn how to adapt to a changing world. They can take risks that permanent ministers would find harder to do. We owe a debt of gratitude to the other churches in which Douglas has learned his craft. Eventually, we must free him to apply what he has learned at Fairlawn with other congregations in need.

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**Compiled by members of Governing Council
and the Transition Team**

