

## **Fairlawn Avenue United Church Transition Team**

### **Report to Shining Waters Regional Council**

**February 28, 2020**

#### Executive Summary

The Transition Team believes that it has completed or set in process the steps to fulfill the transition goals mandated by Governing Council in 2018 and will be asking the congregation to dismiss us with thanks at its AGM on March 29, 2020.

This report provides a brief description of the work completed and identifies a new cycle of transition goals. The Transition Team further provided a recommendation to Governing Council, approved on February 25, 2020, to provide intentional interim ministerial support for this new transition work.

The recommendations include the establishment of a new Transition Team with the particular gifts that are needed for the new transition work.

#### Background

In February 2018, a Visitation Team from the then Toronto Southeast Presbytery completed a review of issues it determined were affecting the health of Fairlawn Avenue United Church and provided the congregation with sixteen recommendations for possible action. It urged the church to undertake a transition process to rectify what it saw as the most pressing issues facing Fairlawn.

On approval by the congregation, a volunteer Transition Team was struck in March 2018 and Intentional Interim Minister Rev. Douglas duCharme began his work with the Fairlawn community on April 30, 2018. His contract, initially 18 months, was extended to June 30, 2020.

We have been guided in our work by the Presbytery Visitation Team's Report and recommendations, the Governing Council's terms of reference for the Transition Team, the Transition Team's own re-working of those goals, and the tasks that the Governing Council and Transition Team then agreed to as the ways we could achieve that organizational work effectively.

However, the Transition Team initially needed to recognize that some important things went wrong at Fairlawn in 2016-2017, things that impeded our ability to grow into being a vital and open-hearted church community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

More fundamentally, as we look ahead to the probable next stage of our congregational life, we have also discovered that many of our core functions and capabilities have become dated, have lost their effectiveness or have come to demand too much effort for the benefit delivered. Our strategy, governance, volunteer development, staff relations, spiritual programming and more are no longer fit-for-purpose. We have begun to refresh and renew them to the higher, but simpler standard our future will require.

This has involved much hard work, not just by members of our Governing Council and our Transition Team, but by many other dedicated lay members. In this context, Douglas duCharme, our Intentional Interim Minister, has been an invaluable source of wisdom and advice as well as knowledgeable, energetic leadership. Amid all the change we are pursuing, the trust he has earned

is a vital asset for us to draw on. In close collaboration with Fairlawn's Executive Director, he has guided us to make considerable progress on our journey.

The Transition Team's focus has been to identify clear and necessary steps to provide Fairlawn Avenue United Church with a strategic direction that will equip us for future opportunities for ministry and community that can make a difference in the world while also ensuring our health, resilience and sustainability as a congregation.

### **SOME KEY ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR ON OUR TRANSITION JOURNEY**

- A comprehensive healing and reconciliation project involving those for whom the upheavals of 2016/17 were particularly stressful.
- Fairlawn's Guiding Principles were developed in collaboration with congregants. These Guiding Principles express our values as a church community and are intended to guide how we wish to be - with each other, with staff, and with the world around us.
- The laying of the foundation of a listening culture at Fairlawn.
- Work to renew the Ministry and Personnel functions of the congregation to more closely align with our staff structure as well as current United Church of Canada policy.
- Strategies to enhance communication so it is consistent and clear.
- Leadership development learning among members of Governing Council to build a stronger lay leadership model.

### **THE WORK OF THE TRANSITION TEAM**

**GOAL ONE: Help the congregation develop a more inclusive culture that truly respects the ideas and opinions of others and provides a sense of acceptance and belonging without judgment.**

#### **FOSTER A KIND AND LISTENING CULTURE**

##### **The Listening Project**

The Transition Team established the Listening Project to help all of us at Fairlawn become more connected with one another.

We held two events - an after-church workshop in November 2018 involving some 75 congregants to practice active listening; and as a result of feedback from that session, one-on-one conversations during the 2019 Mother's Day service to listen and share more deeply with one another.

The Guiding Principles congregational workshop held in the fall of 2019 incorporated listening exercises as part of developing initial thoughts about principles.

### **Fairlawn's Guiding Principles**

We held two congregational sessions to discuss how we would most like to relate to one another. We based our thinking on what we are like as a congregation when we are at our best. A further open meeting drafted some initial principles built upon this earlier work. Later winnowing brought us down to five draft Fairlawn Guiding Principles to be considered at the 2020 Annual General Meeting on March 29, 2020. At this time, Governing Council will seek provisional congregational approval both for our draft language and for our intended process of applying and testing these principles over a period of time.

We expect that this particular transition initiative will have a long-term impact on how we treat one another, both inside and outside our faith community. This will not only help ensure that we learn from some of our past sources of internal tension, but also prepare us to gracefully support each other through change in the coming years.

## **HEAL WOUNDS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES FROM 2016-17**

Over the past year, the Intentional Interim Minister invited individual members of the congregation to meet with him in confidence to discuss concerns about the events of 2016-17. Extensive interviews with those directly affected by the events have been completed and a final report presented to Governing Council with suggestions on how to enable the congregation to use the findings.

This work has resulted in the beginning of healing for those who were hurting and the lessons learned by those involved can carry over to the larger congregation. The report is an essential document for Fairlawn and provides options for action that we might take as individuals and as a church.

## **STRENGTHEN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

Congregants were invited to complete an online survey to determine what the congregation wants in the way of communication.

Using feedback from the surveys, the task group developed a number of recommendations for Governing Council's review. They include staff profiles to encourage a better understanding of how Fairlawn staff members serve the church and help to move our goals forward, and regular highlights of Fairlawn's three purpose councils: Explore Spirituality, Experience Belonging and Embrace Action to enable the congregation to understand what is going on in the church and provide an opportunity for Council Chairs to ask for help. Other recommendations include ideas to improve the website, such as setting up a private members area to provide opportunities for congregant dialogue and creating profiles of our community partners to illustrate the diversity of our church community.

**GOAL TWO: Rethink the way we set goals for our work as a church.**

**DEVELOP NEW FORMS OF LAY LEADERSHIP AND LAY LEADERS**

A series of discussions were held over the summer of 2019 with the Intentional Interim Minister and members of Governing Council to learn about alternative ways to provide leadership in a changing church environment. Much work and learning took place under the leadership of the Rev. Douglas duCharme including book study sessions with Governing Council to explore *Leadership on the Line: staying alive through the dangers of leading* by Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, a book about adaptive learning. Adaptive learning is a new concept for many and one that will continue to be explored through the application of this approach to issues faced by the Council.

**AGREE ON A OUR MISSION**

The review of Fairlawn's current Mission has been put on hold until the results of the Taking the Call Forward Research project report, expected to be released by spring 2020, have been reviewed. Work on reviewing and refining our Mission will take time as the research is absorbed, considered and interpreted.

**REVIEW AND REFINE GOVERNANCE/WAYS OF WORKING**

Governing Council is in the process of re-framing how it can work to allow for deeper deliberations of issues affecting the church.

The Council is exploring the possibilities of an approach to governance/ways of working that reflects possible changes in the function and process of leadership. This approach concentrates on developing policy and supporting the health of the church rather than, or in addition to, day-to-day management. The goal is to move to an executive council and policy board.

**STRENGTHEN CAPABILITIES, CAPACITIES, AND RESOURCES WHERE POSSIBLE, AND BRING CLARITY TO LIMITS (PROPERTY, STEWARDSHIP, ETC.)**

This work has been put on hold until the results of the Taking the Call Forward Research project, expected to be released by spring 2020, have been reviewed. Work on reviewing and refining our capabilities, capacities and resources will take time as the research is assessed and its insights incorporated.

**GOAL THREE: To assist as appropriate in the ongoing development of the staff team.**

**STRENGTHEN STAFF, TEAM-BUILDING**

Fairlawn has successfully created a robust and full strength staff team and substantially increased the depth and breadth of staff capacity and capabilities.

To foster a strong team, staff members have weekly check ins to discuss top-line Fairlawn business and connect on a personal and professional level, which helps to nurture relationships. They also have weekly individual status meetings to review projects, timelines and to trouble-shoot, as necessary. They have completed federally and provincially mandated certifications (e.g. AODA, WHMIS, Health & Safety and Violence and Harassment – Bills 168 and 132). Staff members are recognized when they have gone above and beyond; and they enjoy two off-site meals annually to celebrate each other and their work.

To foster a collaborative environment we have introduced a respectful culture supported by an open-door policy. We ensure that management wholly supports decisions made by staff; encourage staff feedback and use a pro-active approach to conflict management.

**STRENGTHEN MINISTRY & PERSONNEL ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS**

With a newly appointed Project Team Leader, the M&P Refresh Committee coordinated discussion to re-establish a revitalized M&P that reflects the changed staff structure. Terms of Reference for this committee have been drafted and members are being recruited. The implementation of the new directions for a revitalized M&P will take time to complete over the coming year.

**Statement of New Challenges**

The Transition Team believes that more remains to be done before the way forward is clear. It is that discernment of next steps that the Transition Team and Governing Council still need to do as we look at 2020 and beyond. The work of transition in specific areas such as Fairlawn's Guiding Principles and Governance are taking longer than originally anticipated as we uncover essential steps along the way that need to be taken to complete the process successfully. Other goals including mission and capacities and resources will form key implications of the community research project, Taking the Call Forward. These are addressed in our new transition goals identified below.

While the remaining current transition goals have been completed, the work of the two-year Taking the Call Forward research project will identify a number of strategic directions and next steps that need to be reviewed and addressed to ensure a stable and positive future for our church.

**Transition Goals for Transition, Phase Two 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2022**

## **1. Spirituality: listening to deep yearning**

Spirituality in our society, and also in our congregation, is an area of a great deal of searching and exploration. How we express and experience innovative approaches to worship, music, prayer, meditation and other practices that reflect a range of spiritual types among members of Fairlawn and the community generally is an area for priority investment. This goal underlies and supports our work on our other goals.

## **2. Our Mission: clarity and strategy**

From the research project narrative we will identify who we are as a church and what is around us. Once we have a clearer understanding we will move to the development of a strategy from which our mission will evolve. The work is anticipated to start in late fall 2020 with a potential approval of a new mission at the 2021 AGM.

## **3. Leadership Development in Evolving Organizations**

The challenge for Fairlawn is to maintain stability while equipping lay leadership to manage the changes. Included in this longer term task of approximately 18 months will be providing support for risk taking approaches, identifying what the new lay leadership will look like and what is needed to develop a rich volunteer development programme that ties into the new form of leadership.

## **4. Building Sufficient Lay Capabilities**

We will create a sufficiency of skilled resources for the priorities we are setting. The long arc of community research will take time to translate into meaningful outcomes and opportunities. The ultimate goal will be to achieve a clear understanding of what initiatives we can take on, given both our current resources, and those we will develop. It is anticipated that this work will be part of an overall strategic plan to be presented to the congregation for review in mid 2021.

## **5. Staff Development**

With a full complement of staff on board and the development of the Executive Director's position the emphasis during the final six months of 2020 and into 2021 will be an examination of and development for the pastoral and strategic partnership between the Minister and the Executive Director. This work will be key to setting out processes and ways of working that can then be transferred to the new Minister.

## 6. Explore a New Form of Governance

To provide focus for Fairlawn's future, there is a need to re-frame how the church's leadership can work to allow for deeper deliberations of issues affecting the church while simplifying our process of governance.

Over the next year, the Council plans to explore with the Intentional Interim Minister the possibilities of an approach to governance that reflects possible changes in the function and process of leadership and concentrates on developing policy and supporting the health of the church rather than day-to-day management.

## 7. The Fairlawn Culture

Some work was done during the initial transition period discussing the values of our church through the Listening Project and the development of Fairlawn's Guiding Principles. Time and effort must be spent determining more specifically what our culture is and what it could be. We want to utilize the *Listening and Learning: Healing and Hope* report which provides us with lessons on communication, the importance of trust, and creating space for managed risks. We want to identify from the research project surveys how we are perceived by the wider community and how that fits or doesn't fit with what we want to communicate. And of great importance, we want to develop and apply deliberately designed activities, workshops and exercises to embed Fairlawn's Guiding Principles in our church life. We anticipate this work will begin in 2020 and take us well into 2021.

These new goals for Transition Phase Two will warrant the formation of a new Transition Team with differing skills and experience to carry the work forward.

Fairlawn Avenue United Church Governing Council has seen this report and approved the seven goals as noted above at its meeting on February 25, 2020.

## Recommendation

The Transition Team recommends a continuation in Rev. Douglas duCharme's relationship with Fairlawn Avenue United Church as Intentional Interim Minister for the period from July 2020 up to the end of June 2022. This is to develop and work toward the achievement of Fairlawn's goals related to its future mission and ministry and to accommodate what needs to be done through to the hiring of a new permanent Minister. If a permanent Minister is found in the second year, Rev. duCharme will terminate his position as Intentional Interim Minister, upon a minimum of sixty days' notice.