



FAIRLAWN

Turning Transition into Transformation: Our Living Faith Story

June 2022



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Refreshing Our Call and Vision for Ministry

We are Fairlawn Avenue United Church – a caring community of believers, seekers, and doubters, concerned more with thoughtful questions than simple answers. While we honour our historic Christian traditions and texts, we do so with a twenty-first century perspective. We take the Bible seriously, but not literally, looking for the lessons that it offers for today's challenges and opportunities. We also draw wisdom and inspiration from philosophers, scientists, ethicists, social commentators, writers, and poets, as we explore life's sacredness, mystery, and wonder. We welcome all who wish to join us, wherever they are on their life journey.

We challenge and inspire and learn from one another. We create space for people to come together and have conversations that matter – about our relationships with God and with each other, about life and death, about diversity and inclusion, and about what it means to lead a “good” life in a complex world. We work for change, social justice and peace in partnership with others.

Our Call

We are not alone. We are connected to God and each other by love. We seek to connect with what matters in life by providing a safe place for everyone to:

- **Explore Spirituality** by asking life's big questions of God and ourselves
- **Experience Belonging** by building community and connection with others
- **Embrace Action** by helping to create a society where all can live in dignity

Our call as a faith community reflects our core purpose for ministry – to support transformation in each other and those around us in practical and spiritual ways. We aim to do so with curiosity, creativity, and courage in uncertain times.

Pathway to Our Vision

We are on a pathway to a new vision, seeking to discern where God is calling us next by identifying community needs that we have the resources, energy, and passion to serve.

We trust the Spirit to guide us through the challenging space between where we have been and where we are going as we strive to bring God's vision for our world to life – a vision of abundance, equity, and reconciliation.

Our Guiding Principles

The ways in which we engage with one another, our staff, and the wider community are an important expression of who we seek to be as a community of faith. We commit to:

- care for each other with kindness
- encourage dialogue by listening to learn and speaking to foster relationships
- value and support the richness that comes with our differences
- work together collaboratively to find creative solutions
- support each other in times of change and transition

About Us

Fairlawn Avenue United Church is a 107-year-old congregation in north Toronto with a small core of committed lay leaders and a compassionate, educated congregation. We have conducted two successful amalgamations, demonstrating our willingness and ability to build a unified new community while honouring each partner's history.

Fairlawn is comprised of 223 households (160 member households and 63 attendee households). 110 of these households include active members or attendees. Approximately 40% live within walking distance of the church. We are well served by public transit and easy highway access.

Fairlawn is part of [North Toronto Cluster of Churches](#), a group of United Church congregations sharing in events and initiatives that bring us together.

Affirming Statement

Fairlawn became an [Affirming Church](#) in 2015, committing to be fully inclusive in all aspects of our life and work of all people of all ages, abilities, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

Our Staff

Fairlawn is currently supported by an Interim Transition Minister (until June 2023), contract Associate Minister (until June 2023), Director of Music, Church Administrator, Caretaker, and Executive Director (on leave). We also have two active Voluntary Associate Ministers.

Our Governance and Committee Structure

Governing Council

Fairlawn is governed by a volunteer executive committee mandated with overseeing ongoing operations and shaping the future direction of Fairlawn. Our Governing Council's goals are to:

- foster relationships and connections within our community
- attend to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the congregation during/post COVID-19
- manage church resources to address community needs
- continue as a sustainable congregation with shared purpose and resources for a broader ministry

Councils and Committees

- 3 Purpose Councils:
 - Explore Spirituality
 - Experience Belonging
 - Embrace Action
- Property Council
- Human Resources & Relationships Council (formerly Ministry and Personnel Committee)
- Re-entry Task Group
- Finance and Stewardship Council
- Board of Trustees

Explore Spirituality Ministry

Worship

Fairlawn has a traditional sanctuary and service framework, with a long history of creative and dynamic approaches to in-person and, more recently, virtual worship. Our worship services often incorporate multiple art forms, such as poetry and liturgical dance.

Music

Our long-time music director, Eleanor Daley, is an internationally renowned composer and choral leader. Eleanor leads three choirs (senior, intermediate, and junior), providing incomparable musical training for all ages as well as playing an essential role in worship at Fairlawn.

Children and Youth

Many of us have fond memories of a church with a bustling Sunday school. That is no longer a reality for Fairlawn, despite sustained efforts backed by generous investment. From 2016-2019 our spending on children's programming totalled \$193,000, while average weekly attendance went from 25 to 7 (excluding summers). Our experience is not unique, and we continue to seek ways to support children and youth.

Explore Spirituality Programs

- In-person and online [worship](#)
- Mid-Week Prayer
- Special Music Sundays
- Social Justice Sunday^[1]_{SEP}
- Truth & Reconciliation Sunday
- Pride Services
- Spirituality Groups and Discussions
- Christian Meditation group
- Special Prayer Vigils

Experience Belonging Ministry

The care provided by our Experience Belonging support ministries reminds members of the Fairlawn community they are valued and connected by love. The work of these groups makes a profound difference in the lives of many. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for fun, belonging, and caring will continue to be essential.

Experience Belonging Programs

- Pastoral Visitation team
- Telephone Ministry team
- Breast Cancer Friends
- Widowers' Group
- Postsecondary care packages
- Prayer shawl knitters
- Quilters
- Book sale (paused for COVID-19)
- Zoom social and small group ministries:

- Sunday Coffee Chat
- Basketball, Broadview Discussion, Craft and Chat, Men's Discussion and Tuesday Lunch Crowd, Trivia Night, Mental Health, Grief and Gratitude, Celtic Spirituality

Embrace Action Ministry

At Fairlawn, we have a long history of embracing action, and a passionate commitment to social justice. We strive to understand the barriers faced by those who are marginalized and build relationships to become effective and supporting allies.

Embrace Action Programs

- Re-vitalized Affirming Church commitment
- Gender and Sexuality 101
- Change from Within series – Conversations about Equity, Equality, and Inclusion
- Refugee Program
- Boarding Homes Ministry
- Walk-in Support
- Camp Scugog Support
- Roehampton Basket Drive (NTC Cluster)
- Red Door Gift Drive
- Embrace Action Fund
- [Gibimishkaadimin](#) Canoe Trip for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth (paused for COVID-19)

Our Building

Fairlawn is blessed to have a large, well-situated church building with an accessible sanctuary that can accommodate 525 people. At the same time, our building is old and was built in sections over many years. While lovingly cared for, it will require refurbishment and upgrading if it is to be put to productive use in the future. Before making significant investment in the building beyond ongoing maintenance and repair, we need to determine how the building will serve Fairlawn's vision going forward.

Current Realities

Like many mainline congregations, Fairlawn faces the challenges associated with the increasing secularization of our society, the changing spiritual focus of youth and young adults, and the fragmentation of our communities. Fairlawn's aging congregation, a period of internal conflict, the closing of co-located anchor tenant Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre in 2015, and declining volunteer resources have all impacted Fairlawn's activity and attendance levels, which have dropped significantly over the last five to seven years.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation became even more complex. It also became rich with opportunity, catapulting Fairlawn into the future. The closing of the church to in-person activities and the subsequent transformation to delivering services remotely has consumed much of our energy. On the upside, these changes led to the development of new skills, such as online worship, and to the discovery of unexpected sources of personal and organizational resilience and creativity, such as the growth in adult learning and small-group ministries on Zoom.

Financial Outlook

Fairlawn is a financially stable community of faith in that we had unrestricted trustee funds valued at \$1.8 million at the end of 2021. 2021 was a good news story financially, due to favourable market conditions, federal wage subsidies and some non-recurring large gifts. However, we were averaging operating deficits of more than \$130,000 for five years before the pandemic began, and we expect this trend to continue.

91% of donations to operations in 2021 came from those over age 60, and 73% from those over age 70. Barring an influx of new, younger members, we anticipate declining donations as our membership ages.

Based on the status quo, we forecast that operating deficits will continue to grow each year from \$193,000 to \$290,000 between 2022 and 2031. There are many scenarios that can be envisioned, using many different assumptions. The key message is that, based on how we operate today, we expect significant continuing deficits that will eventually deplete the funds held by the trustees.

While challenging, these numbers provide us with a genuine opportunity to explore how we can best steward our resources – people, passion, skills, building, financial – to serve our mission.

Now is the time to act, while we have the energy and financial viability to choose our future options.

Moving Fairlawn Forward

Fairlawn has been on a journey of transition since 2018, following the early conclusion of the previous minister's pastoral tie with Fairlawn.

The reasons for the breakdown in the pastoral relationship were complex, and the situation was handled confidentially, as was appropriate. The Presbytery recognized that a disruption of that kind can create lingering problems in a congregation if not handled constructively. Therefore, Fairlawn was given an opportunity to work with an experienced Intentional Interim Minister, Reverend Douglas duCharme, to pause, to reflect on recent experience, to learn, and move on afresh.

A comprehensive report in February 2020 confirmed with what is now Shining Waters Regional Council that this work had been fully engaged in by Fairlawn, and that the congregation was in great shape, having taken the opportunity to learn through this difficult experience.

Concurrently, a [Community Research Project](#) with Nayar Consulting was completed, which provided an opportunity to renew and refocus Fairlawn's energies going forward. Because of time lost to COVID-19, that work will now be completed by June 2023, and a new minister will be called to support Fairlawn's future direction.

We are calling this phase of our transition work **Fairlawn Forward**, as we envision our next steps and future options that will best serve our vision and purpose as a faith community.

Using our [Guiding Principles](#) to shape the conversation, we have tried to trust the process and remain open to where God's spirit may lead us and help us to lead.

Congregational Conversations

Between March and June 2022, four virtual consultations were held with the congregation.

Session 1: Setting the Stage

The first session provided a brief overview of the external and internal forces at play as we look to the future and prepare to call a new minister. This session was an opportunity for all of us to acknowledge

and celebrate our faith community. It was a reminder of where we have been, and an opportunity to express hopes and reservations about where we are going next.

Session 2: Refreshing our Call and Vision for Ministry

In Session 2, we reviewed a draft call and vision statement for Fairlawn. A revised version incorporating congregational feedback can be found on page 2 of this Living Faith Story. We have called it a Pathway to a Vision because we believe that we need to work together to best identify our future direction, in collaboration with our next minister. We also looked at our ongoing activities to consider how they align with our sense of vision and purpose and some of the realities that we're facing.

Session 3: Assessing Our Future Options and Directions

Our goal for this session was to explore what future path(s) we could pursue in the next phase of our church's life. Three strategic proposals were shared in advance by [video](#) and will be analyzed further in the coming months. Each option will likely require a refurbishing of our property to make it fit-for-purpose, while providing space for worship-related activities. These ideas can only succeed if many of us can identify ways to volunteer or benefit and are willing to contribute financially to building them.

Session 4: Telling our Living Faith Story

In this session, we shared a draft of this document, our Living Faith Story, for input. The story articulates our beliefs, ministry needs, and financial realities and is a key element of the Community of Faith Profile needed to initiate a ministerial search. It tells others – including prospective ministers – who we are, why we exist and what future options might best serve our vision and purpose as a faith community.

Next Steps

Our consultations to date have affirmed that the organizing framework of Explore Spirituality, Experience Belonging, and Embrace Action includes the key components of what we believe to be our purpose. The pandemic has reinforced how important those three ministries are to Fairlawn and those we serve, and we are looking within that framework for new opportunities to pursue.

Our plan and intent is to continue consulting with the congregation and bring our Community of Faith profile forward for approval in September 2022. At that time, we will launch our search for a new minister to join us on our journey to develop a renewed future vision that we can rally around and in which we are called to invest our energy, money and commitment. Throughout, we will share our work, listen to feedback, and refine our conclusions.

We have been – and must continue to be – courageous and active! We have changed, yet remained ourselves, in the past few years. We can take comfort in the fact that we will continue to evolve, and yet remain the essential Fairlawn, as we step into the future. We are a strong, loving, and connected community of people excited to discover where God is calling us next.

More About Us

- [Fairlawn website](#)
- [Fairlawn Forward](#) documents
- Community Research Project ([executive summary](#) and [full report](#))
- [Annual Reports](#)
- Video links:

- [Three Draft Proposals for Renewing our Focus](#)
- [Worship services](#)
- [Gibimishkaadimin 2019](#)