



FAIRLAWN

Moving Fairlawn Forward

Session 4: Telling Our Living Faith Story

(June 5, 2022) Summary Report

The fourth congregational conversation occurred on June 5, 2022. Although smaller than previous sessions, Session 4 had a good level of attendance and participation – 11 facilitators and 42 participants. 7 responses were given online.

As described in the [Session 4 backgrounder](#), the goal of the session was to review a [draft of Fairlawn's Living Faith Story](#), a document that articulates the beliefs, ministry needs, and financial realities of the congregation and is a key element of the Community of Faith Profile required to initiate a ministerial search. It tells prospective ministers – who we are, why we exist, and what future options might best serve our vision and purpose as a faith community.

For more information, please see the United Church of Canada's [Guidelines for a Community of Faith Profile](#).

Consultation Process

After a brief introduction to the draft Living Faith Story, participants were divided into five breakout groups to address the following questions:

1. Which section, words, or phrases do you appreciate being in the document?
2. Which section, words, or phrases do you find challenging to read but are glad to have included?
3. Is anything missing that is critical to who we are as a faith community that you think the Fairlawn Forward team should consider including?

As time allowed, participants considered an additional question:

4. What qualities in a minister does this portrait of Fairlawn (i.e., the draft Living Faith Story) suggest that we need?

Upon returning to the main session, a facilitator or scribe reported on what they had heard in each of the breakout groups.

Discussion Outcomes

There was some confusion in some of the groups about which document was being reviewed and not everyone had a chance to read the draft Living Faith Story in advance. Nevertheless, enough were familiar with the document to make the session productive and helpful to the authors and those participating in the session.

The following summarizes some of the key points made by participants. [Read the full summary of raw comments here.](#)

Question 1. Which section, words, or phrases do you appreciate being in the document?

Many commented that the draft was well written, provided an accurate picture of where we are and is commendable in its comprehensiveness, level of detail, and accuracy. The document is both aspirational and realistic. As one member noted, "It would give a prospective minister a clear picture of who we are and the sense that we've done much hard work in determining our options going forward." Many people expressed their appreciation to the team that developed it.

Because the document incorporated work from previous sessions, some of the feedback echoed comments from those sessions. For example, the beginning section that identifies our faith community as "a community of believers, seekers, and doubters" resonated with participants:

- "I like the generosity of that statement, and it makes me feel that I am part of this community, which is kind of important."
- "Seekers is a really good description for many of us."
- "I liked the opening piece, *Refreshing Our Call and Vision for Ministry*. Much of this language is from the appendix of the Song of Faith and it identifies us as an open congregation. This is important for an incoming minister candidate to know."

Several comments pertained to the description of the three purpose councils, including:

- "Affirmation of our 3 purposes. Always resonate with me."
- "The Embrace Action ministry list which is compelling and speaks to the energy of the church."
- "Think that they capture who we are and who we are striving to be as a church. These three pillars have worked well since we came up with them, in the Fairlawn Call."
- "Especially liked the Experience Belonging description.... valued and connected by love...as we emerge from COVID, the need for fun, belonging, and caring will continue to be crucial."

People also appreciated the section about "Our Current Realities" for being honest about our declining membership, lack of young people, our financial outlook. As one member noted, "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."

Additional general comments included:

- "Liked that it states that we are an affirming congregation."
- "I am excited with all three proposals, which will breathe new life into our future. For many years, the church has been a hub in the community. Now diminished to some extent, we will be able to bring back this concept of a centre of faith offering support services."

Question 2. Which section, words, or phrases do you find challenging to read but are glad to have included?

Many participants named the section on "Our Current Realities" as well as the financial outlook. They also stated that they were pleased both were included and supported the need to be transparent. One person commented, "I think it's important that these items be faced head-on...particularly for a candidate, considering the congregation."

The lack of volunteer capacity, as well as other key challenges, were emphasized by many participants:

- “The main challenge I see is volunteers. I’m glad it was included, albeit briefly. I think it needs to be a bit more central.”
- “The reality about the decline of volunteer resources, the building upgrades, refurbishment, lack of parking. These would factor into almost anything that we would do.”
- “I’m not sure why we are calling a new minister when we aren’t likely to have willing volunteers to form the necessary council to carry out the needed duties.”
- “It is important that we speak to our challenges and that we are authentic and candid.”
- “We should really convey to people that we are aware of our strengths as well as our weaknesses and we are not afraid of these challenges.”

Question 3. Is anything missing that is critical to who we are as a faith community that you think the Fairlawn Forward team should consider including?

A key reality that several suggested is not expressed strongly enough is the diminishing volunteer capacity of the congregation. The concern is reflected in the selected comments below:

- “It does refer to volunteer shortages, but I don't think it does adequately enough. Because, in fact, if we can't mount the volunteer resources to do some of the elevated things that we're thinking of with partners, we're dreaming.”
- “I don't know how we can go forward given that the Chair of Governing Council doesn't have a replacement and we have to look at the burnout or the commitment that this group of people have invested much time and energy and their lives may be moving on.”

Some people suggested including more information about the three purpose councils:

- “The Embrace Action section should explain our recent past Social Justice (advocacy) committee's activities but acknowledge that it has run out of steam.”
- A participant suggested that the Experience Belonging section should be expanded to “provide context for the different programs we support”. Another person recommended expanding it to “really impart the message that we're not an inward congregation, that we really do go outward, and here's who we help and why”.
- “Under Explore Spirituality, I wonder if the section can be expanded to reflect the inclusivity of the congregation and the efforts to highlight the diversity of the congregation, and those to whom the ministry responds.”

A potential missing topic was our special focus on music, including “more detail about our senior choir to convey the important role music plays in our worship services”.

It was noted that the document does not include information about the ‘geographical hinterland’ around the church (i.e., expensive housing, families cannot afford to live in the area) as well as demographic data.)

Others felt the impact of COVID should be mentioned: “We need to explain clearly that COVID-19 hit and delayed things that Fairlawn wanted to do in planning for its future. This is why we have had Douglas for four years.”

Some also wanted to include further information about the three proposals explored, and to note that amalgamation may still be a consideration.

Question 4. What qualities in a minister does this portrait of Fairlawn suggest that we need?

People think it is important to call a minister who is collaborative, inclusive, a good facilitator, and who can identify and mentor people with skills in the community. Being inspiring and a deep thinker with a

demonstrated commitment to social justice were also mentioned. Some qualities mentioned more than once include being flexible, inclusive, compassionate, energetic, creative.

Some practical skills that were identified include being technologically savvy and social media literate. Others suggested the minister needs to be future focused, and to “be comfortable in their own skin” because “we are a congregation of strong opinions”.

A few people were reluctant to name qualities because they do not think we should be calling a minister until we know our plans going forward or they would “prefer to merge with another congregation while we’re still as strong as we are”.

There were cautions that one person is unlikely to embody all the qualities that were mentioned. A facilitator observed that “we will support the minister and do this work together, but we are not expecting them to do everything”, and a retired minister noted that he was pleased that the document does not “include the ‘Walking on Water’ clause” where you expect the minister to be able to work miracles.

[Read the full summary of raw comments](#)

Next Steps

Over the summer, and into the fall, the Fairlawn Forward team will continue refining the Living Faith Story and continue to develop and validate the [three draft proposals](#) presented on May 14, incorporating your input and perhaps investigating other alternatives proposed by you. If you are interested in participating in this exploratory work, please contact gc@fairlawnavenueunited.ca.

The ministerial search committee, led by Doug Crozier, will populate the rest of the Community of Faith Profile in collaboration with our regional council representative.

The Community of Faith Profile, including an updated [Living Faith Story](#), will be presented to the congregation for approval on **Sunday, September 25** at a formal congregational meeting.

Once approved by Shining Waters Regional Council, the search process can officially begin, with the goal of having a new minister in place by summer 2023 who can join us on our journey of discernment around our potential future options.

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.

Appendix: Comments from Fairlawn's Shining Waters Regional Council Representative

Our regional representative noted that one of the most challenging parts of Living Faith Stories is discussing the viability of the church. "As faithful community members, we worry that our portrayal of our situation may look desperate, but we want to create transparency in these documents, as well as a realistic portrayal of our situation."

He further commented that "You're not giving up and I think there are two aspects of the 'not giving up' part: One is that you do have plans, and you don't necessarily have to enumerate all of them in a financial way like this. But I think you have to show some resolve as a congregation that you've got this in hand, and that you're dealing with it."

He suggested that every minister 'worth their salt' expects challenges, and it is part of the call for them to have the ambition to solve problems. But they do it alongside the congregation and "that's what you want to illustrate: we're transparent – we can share this challenging news and we are resolute in dealing with it as a congregation."

He also commented, "From my little experience with all of you I think it's a story you could confidently tell. You don't have to put all the details out there up front; some of the details you can take up in the interview and it can be part of the conversation you have with prospective candidates."

"What I find compelling in this is the balance being aspirational with being realistic about where you're at. I think puts you in a good place for both expressing yourself and galvanizing yourself around what you're going to do going forward as well as being able to be make a compelling case to a potential minister."