

**Highland Hills Pastoral Charge Planning Group Meeting Notes**  
**February 15, 2016, 7-9pm**  
**At Zion United Church, Carnarvon**

**Attendance:** Andy Cooper (chair), Michelle Wolfe Miscio (minutes), Charlene Cooper, Albert Carpenter, Judy Carpenter, Beverly Upton, Allan Upton, Jack Cox, Mary Jane McMullen, Ross McMullen, Debbie Sherwin, Barbara Walford-Davis, Fred Chapple, Joan Chapple, Nancy Ballantyne, Don Ballantyne, Janet Heffer, Dave Wilson, Lois Deacon, Pat Thornett, Gail Flook, Jim Hicks, Mary Hicks, Barbara Braker, Walter Braker, Max Ward

*NOTE: These notes were taken during a fast-paced and lively discussion session. They are an accurate record of the discussion, but they have not been checked, formatted or reviewed.*

- 1. Opening:** The meeting was opened with a “popcorn prayer”. Everyone had a chance to offer one word to describe what they were hoping for in this meeting.
  
- 2. Review and Update:** Andy briefly reviewed what the group has discussed thus far, including the proposed changes in the United Church of Canada and the status reports of each church in the Highland Hills Pastoral Charge. See minutes from January 25, 2016 for more details. Andy once again suggested we take the time to review the 16 page comprehensive review report on the following website:  
<http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report>
  
- 3. Input from Group Members:** The group was then asked for thoughts and ideas about next steps for our pastoral charge. What do our congregations want? Several themes arose and many themes overlapped with each other. Don Ballantyne started with a list of questions to consider (see attached). Many of his questions were reflected in the themes of the evening.

**THEMES:**

A. Our church values: Our values are important. As the United Church, we share specific values. As a pastoral charge and as individual congregations some of our values differ (between members and between congregations) but there are overall values which we share. It is important to act on our values and to recognize and develop our shared values moving forward. Some examples of shared values that came up in this meeting: *Fellowship* and seeing the people in church as “*Family*.” Many people come to church for the fellowship. We have a wonderful group of people in our 3 churches. There is also a *strong energy* when all 3 congregations come together for a service or an event, and people leave feeling “*alive*.”

B. Attracting younger people to the church: How do we define “young people”? People in their 20’s-40’s? Or new retirees moving to the area (who are most likely 50+)? Are young people looking for/interested in church or are they looking for something else? The younger generations also have competing priorities and demands on their time. They may feel overwhelmed by the thought/request to participate in the “work of the church.” They may not be able to commit to the time and energy it

takes to keep our churches running. Society has changed. Many service groups have difficulty attracting new volunteers and the younger generations; it's not just churches who are facing this problem.

C. Format of Services: Some people prefer a more traditional format for worship, including more traditional hymns. Other people like to try new things and enjoy variety. Does changing the format attract new people or younger people? Does changing the format alienate some of our current members? Someone had attended a meditation group on a Sunday morning and found there was a large turnout, particularly of the "younger" demographic. What might happen if we offered a variety of worship formats, such as meditation?

D. Theology: Our pastoral charge is generally seen as more "progressive" in our theology than some other charges in Haliburton County. Yet, within our charge, there is still diversity in what people believe. Max's sermon series, which started this week at Minden and Zion (and will start next week at Maple Lake), reflects a more progressive theology. Does this perspective deter/upset some people? Does it draw/attract/fulfill others? What is the overall effect on our membership?

E. Here and Now: Why are people currently not attending our churches? In some cases it does appear to be the format (eg, hymns chosen) and theology (the church's position on specific issues). Having one service as a larger congregation on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday (4 times per year) can result in lower attendance from the other churches and therefore lower revenues. There is also huge competition within the county: there are approximately 35 churches in Haliburton County. Other themes also overlap with this theme.

F. Competition and working together: Within our pastoral charge, we need to be working together more. For example, other pastoral charges have combined UCW and fundraising activities. Coordinating activities between churches, so that events at different churches in the charge are not happening on the same evening, could result in better turnout for events and strengthen our relationships with each other. It is difficult for our minister to attend all events in the charge if some are scheduled on the same dates/times. In many ways, we already are a great example of 3 churches working well together. See theme "restructuring" as well.

G. Restructuring: It is clear that restructuring (in some way) is necessary, for two primary reasons.

-First and probably the most pressing reason is our declining **human resources**. The amount of "people power" required to maintain our 3 churches at the current level is not sustainable. There is a decline in numbers as well as a decline in the abilities of our people. For example, each church has a council and several committees. There is also a charge council and charge committees, all requiring people to attend and take leadership role. It is hard to find people for all of these positions. Also, providing 3 worship services in one day is taxing on our minister.

-The second reason for restructuring is **financial**. Although our churches have some financial resources to draw on (property, trust funds), we have been running deficits or breaking even. That will not be sustainable over the long term. If we continue on this path, we will eventually run out of money and "phase out". Are people OK with that? Or do we want to do something differently to prolong the life of our church and leave something for future generations? What is the best way to use the resources we have?

***There were several thoughts about restructuring. These included:***

-in order to "survive" restructuring is necessary, sooner rather than later

-decreasing the number of councils and committees and UCW so that there is one for the

charge, rather than one for each church and the charge.

- all 3 congregations meeting in one location for worship (one service per Sunday-we can keep our minister for the entire service, enjoy the energy and fellowship of a larger group)

- location could be an existing church (Zion, Minden or Maple Lake) or a new space

- new worship space could be a new building or renting space (for example an auditorium)

- selling our current assets to finance a new multi-purpose building (for examples, with a theatre, community centre, gym, housing) that could attract more people and also produce income from rentals.

- partnership with another community group to build a multi-purpose space (eg, seniors housing)

- Some participants had visions that involve selling our church's assets and building a new worship space. A new space would be a fresh start for all 3 congregations.

- There were several ideas of locations we could rent for worship—either for the winter or as a more permanent plan, and examples of other churches who have done this. This would significantly decrease the amount of financial and human resources needed to sustain our church.

- Review the Mission, Vision, etc of all three churches and find a way to combine them to create one Mission/Vision for the Highland Hills Pastoral Charge

- Consider experiences of other congregations that have amalgamated and the sense of loss and grief that comes with leaving/moving from your "home church"

- If any 2 of the 3 churches are ready to move forward with a new way of working together, perhaps they could go ahead and the other church could join when its congregation is ready.

- Consider that some people may seek out another church, rather than attend joint services in a new or existing location.

H. Attachment to our church buildings: It costs a lot of money and takes a lot of people power to maintain 3 churches. Because we have put so much energy into "loving and feeding" our church buildings, has that taken us away from the important value of "loving and feeding" our people? How attached are we to the buildings? What is more important? The fellowship of being together, or keeping our buildings?

I. Fear: People have a fear of change and a fear of the future. We need to find ways to ease those fears in this process. Communication is important. Baby steps will help. Having a clear plan will help. It was suggested that a "retreat day" for our congregation could be helpful for people to express their feelings and fears about moving forward, the future of our church, and make a plan, so that we don't "leave people behind."

J. Communication: It's important to communicate so that our members all have accurate information about these discussions and any plans going forward. This will help to decrease fear of change and fear of the future. Good communication will also decrease the chance of misinformation being passed along. Written communication, such as an email or written summary could be sent out to our members. Communication early in the process was strongly recommended.

K. Presbytery Dues: Clarified that our churches are now charged presbytery dues based on a portion of our operating expenses, not on membership.

**4. Next steps:** *"Pulling Together"*: Andy asked everyone to think about how we and our friends/colleagues from each of our churches would like to move forward. A plan with a clear timeline is important, as is recognizing that change is hard.

*Communication*: It is important that we communicate with all the members in our congregation about these discussions. It was suggested a summary could be sent out to church members.

**5. Closing:** Reverend Max closed the meeting with a prayer.

**6. Next meeting:** Monday, March 7, 2016, 7pm at Zion UC.