

Comprehensive Review Consultation questions for Congregational Panels with additional background information – May 17, 2013

The Comprehensive Review Task Group appreciates every participant in this process. In order to forward to participants a thank you note from the Comprehensive Review Task Group, and a brief post conversation survey, we ask that you forward the names and emails (with permission) of each participant. Please send this list to edge@united-church.ca and copy it to your facilitator.

Please note that: Some excerpts (without attribution) may be used to communicate typical or exceptional comments to the broader church.

1. **What is your current situation?** (approx. 15 min)
 - a. What are some words or phrases that come to mind when you think about your community of faith ?
 - b. What are the trends? What will your community of faith look like in 5, 10 years if trends remain the same?
 - c. What are the gifts of your community? What are its struggles? Opportunities? Threats or blocks?

2. **Where is God leading the United Church?** (approx. 20 min)
 - a. Where do you see vital ministry emerging (in or beyond your community of faith)?
 - i. What goes on and where does it happen?
 - ii. How does it touch the lives of people, the community, or the world?
 - iii. What made it possible?
 - b. If your dream for your community of faith came true, what would it look like?

Context Piece - Case For Change (please read before facilitated conversatioin)

Like many churches, The United Church of Canada is facing social, demographic, and financial pressures that are challenging us to live out God's mission in different ways than in the past.

You may be seeing some of these trends here in your own faith community: fewer people attending worship services; fewer young adults, youth, and children participating in the life of your faith community; overstretched volunteers spending more time on bureaucracy than ministry; and financial pressures that may make it difficult for your community to pay a full-time minister or maintain your building.

You are not alone. Many places across our church are feeling similar pressures as Canadian society becomes increasingly secular. In the past 10 years, United Church membership has declined by one-quarter, average Sunday attendance has dropped by more than one-third, and church school membership has plunged by more than 50 percent. Over the same period, 545 congregations across the country – or nearly 15 per cent – have closed. And while givings to Mission and Service, which supports our work as a denomination across the country and around the world, have remained relatively constant for about 25 years, rising costs have reduced our financial capacity on a denominational level by more than half over that period.

We are at a turning point as a church. Our financial and demographic realities mean keeping things the way they are is not an option. We cannot shrink away from making decisions, as we have in the past. Our church is changing and we have a clear choice to make.

We can resign ourselves to continued decline by shrinking dramatically within our existing structures and processes to live within our diminishing means. Most congregations will continue to struggle and many will close; our financial and volunteer resources will continue to be overstretched by our bureaucratic structures and processes; valued programs will be reduced or cut altogether; and our prophetic voice and capacity to live out God's mission in the world will diminish accordingly.

Or we can choose bold change that will free us to live out God's mission in new ways. That means looking for places where the Spirit is active, and realigning our structures, processes, and resources to nurture and support these vital ministries. It also means spending more time and resources on ministry and less on bureaucracy and governance.

Both options involve letting go of things we cherish. Both also mean that we will not look like we have in the past. But where the first option holds mainly loss and pain, the second challenges us to live anew our Christian story by inviting us into hope: the hope of resurrection and new life that comes when we listen to the leading of the Spirit and step into the future in faith and trust.

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As Ephesians 3:20 tells us, “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”

May God work in and among us as we move faithfully and prayerfully toward renewal and transformation.

3. **Given where we currently are and where God is leading us how best can we organize ourselves to get there as a church with a national presence?** (approx. 45 min)
 - a. Where have you seen structures or strategies that might help your community of faith live out vital, faithful ministry? (E.g. Things you are aware of in other denominations, your work place, corporate or other not-for-profit practices.):

 - b. How do church structures or ways (pastoral charge, presbytery, Conference, General Council) help or hinder living the dream? Comment on presbytery, Conference, GCO.

 - c. What kind of resources and support from beyond your own faith community would be helpful and worth investing money in?” (eg. Best practices, statements on global issues, connections to networks, emerging ministry stories, ways of connecting with other practitioners, assessment tools for mission planning, other ...)

 - d. What aspects of your ministry would you like more (or less) autonomy in, in relation to the broader church and compared to the current situation? (eg. Property development issues, personnel issues, salary, supervision, ordination/commissioning, other...)

- e. The heart of it: If your dream for the United Church of Canada came true, what would it look like?**
- i. What makes us the United Church? How is a national identity helpful?
 - ii. What is essential to The United Church of Canada's identity and calling?
 - iii. What can't we do without? What can we let go of?

Post interview with ministry staff: Approx. 20 min.

- 1) What would be helpful to you from the broader church to fully live out your calling in this ministry and in the world?
- 2) What challenges do you face?
- 3) What does effective support look like?