

St. John's United Church

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Embracing Difference. Making a Difference*



Our Faithful Future

A Second Interim Report from the Transition Team to the Congregation of St. John's United Church

September 17, 2017

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Our Faithful Future

Letter to our friends in Christ at St John's

This is our second interim report to you. Our final report will come at the very end of Martha Martin's interim ministry as required by Presbytery. But we are well aware that we – the Transition Team and the whole congregation -- are moving to a new stage, in section 4 of this report, we outline the formation of a Joint Needs Assessment Committee (JNAC), and a Joint Search Committee (JSC). The Transition Team recognizes the importance of continuity until the end of the Interim Ministry period, as planning for the future will shift towards these new committees (JNAC and JSC). The Transition Team will continue to meet and support Martha and the activities of these committees.

Thank you for putting your trust in us, and sharing your ideas, concerns, ambitions and inspiration with us.

This is what the Transition process taught us:

- Forging connection – we need to continue to reach out to other churches, other faith communities, and other community organizations to find new opportunities. These relationships take time to develop and it will be an important ongoing activity for the congregation.
- Church is not something that only takes place on Sunday morning. St. John's people are involved in faithful activities every day of the week. In our first interim report we highlighted the importance of "Being church" the rest of the week, through every meeting, connection and event.
- Grounding what we do – our relationships, our discussions and our decisions - in faith. This is what makes us a church and not a business, a service club, or a social gathering, although we incorporate elements of all of those in our work.
- The people of St John's are amazing – faithful, flexible, steadfast, generous, innovative and full of grace. We have a history we can depend on and a bright future we can build together.

When the Transition Team was first formed, St John's was adjusting to a new reality – one in which Spirit Place¹ was no longer present. It was natural that thoughts about a "permanent home" for St John's were uppermost in many peoples' minds.

¹ Spirit Place was the name of the hoped-for redevelopment of our old church building on Windsor and Willow, a new building to house a smaller church and supportive housing for seniors. Plans for Spirit Place were eventually rejected by City Council.

Correspondingly, the Transition Team set out to find a solution and believed it would be found quite quickly. We now know that (a) this will likely be an ongoing quest and (b) St John's is so much more than bricks and mortar. In section 3 we describe the investigations the Transition Team carried out. Two of these – a possible partnership with St Mark's Anglican Church on Russell Street and our relationship with the Maritime Conservatory – are ongoing and we look forward to having discussions with you about these.

Where do we all go from here? We anticipate that the JNAC and the JSC processes will take approximately eight or nine months. By June, 2018, we expect we will be getting to know a new minister. But, the life of St. John's continues and we have much to work on before and after that new minister arrives.

Through our work, we have been continually thinking about the needs of the church, below, we list (in no particular order) some of the elements we have discussed. However, the JNAC will want to hear your views on where we should place our priorities.

- Provide opportunities for everyone to explore and deepen our faith
- Continue to explore diverse worship and music ideas that deepen our connection to the divine
- Encourage and support ongoing small group development
- Build connections with the broader community
- Speak out for justice, locally and internationally
- Address our responsibilities to the Indigenous peoples of Canada and to the Truth and Reconciliation process
- Build a communication strategy, internal and external
- Develop a new approach to stewardship
- Support our children and young people, make St John's a place where they will feel wanted and powerful
- Connect with and look after each other, through social events and pastoral care
- Continue to seek opportunities to collaborate/share space with other faith communities or community organizations
- Work on the ways we organize and make decisions to use everyone's time wisely and efficiently, and encourage a participatory approach to governance
- Discuss our relationship with money – now we have some resources in the bank, what is God calling us to do with it?
- Develop leaders and leadership
- Find a new minister who can help us do all this and more!

The Transition Team thanks Martha for her energy and inspiration. She never lets us succumb to discouragement! As always we also appreciate the steadfast participation of Rick and Jeanne, our Presbytery representatives who have kept the faith and walked along side us on this long and winding road.

Let us know what you think about the ideas in this report. Speak to any member of the Transition Team, send either of the co-chairs an e-mail², or wait for the congregational conversations to be organized shortly. We are grateful to you for your patience, honesty, and generosity of spirit, time and talent. Exciting times ahead.

With blessings
The Transition Team
St John's United Church

² Lesley (Lesleygriffiths77@gmail.com) or Katherine (k.harman@dal.ca)

Our Faithful Future Report

1. Transition Team Activities

To recap, the Transition Team was appointed in December, 2014. We were given three main goals for the period of Interim Ministry:

- i) reassess and resolve the options for use or sale of our church property
- ii) confirm our future mission and direction as a vibrant United Church on peninsular Halifax; and
- iii) move forward to call a new full-time Principal Minister.

In September 2016 we presented our first interim report to the congregation, "*Called to BE the Church...*" In that report we suggested "being the church" does not depend on pouring increasingly scarce resources into traditional bricks and mortar, but rather, investing in people to fulfill our mission and passion as agents of Christ's love in our community. We recommended that, with respect to a possible new home for St. John's, shared space was probably the only way to proceed. Since then, we have explored a number of shared space possibilities.

Appendix A continues the Chronology provided in our previous interim report and describes the work we have done in the last year.

Highlights of the Transition Teams' work:

- Supporting Martha by acting as a sounding board to help identify priorities for her time, and offering practical support where we can. In turn, Martha helping us to understand the interests and concerns of the congregation, as she is in contact with a wide range of individuals and groups.
- Discussing issues such as governance, staffing, stewardship and communications.
- Encouraging feedback on the First Interim Report. We appreciated the contribution of all those who came to the discussion groups before church.
- Continuing research on opportunities for shared space and partnerships. (section 3)
- Making better connections with the Official Board. The chair, Jim Sharpe, attends many of our meetings, and the co-chairs of the Transition Team (and one other member) are now part of the Executive of the Official Board.
- Supporting Martha's initiative (also part of her training as an Interim Minister) to involve congregation members in examining conflict management approaches. The message was: "we have had conflict in the past and should be prepared for it in the future. It needn't be a negative thing, though we often treat it that way."

- Continuing our connection with Corrymeela and with Paul Hutchinson (former leader). Martha led a small group of St. John's members to Corrymeela in May and Paul visited us in June, leading a session with the Transition Team, and co-facilitating a talking circle for members of St. John's (and others) with Cathy Martin, Mi'kmaw film-maker and educator on Aboriginal Sunday.

2. A Home for St John's

St. John's has now been in the Maritime Conservatory building for eight years. We have a two-year lease that ends in 2019. Because of the possibility that we would not be able to renew the lease at that time, the Transition Team has continued to put considerable effort into identifying and examining possible opportunities to create new partnerships and provide access to the spaces and facilities we need to pursue our mission.

Our relationship with the Conservatory – where we are now

Although our formal relationship with the Conservatory is as tenants, we are a steady and predictable presence in the building. Our staff and the Conservatory staff have good working relations. For example, when something arises at the last minute and we are looking for a meeting room, it is quite common to be assigned one, and without additional fees charged. The GO Project for young people took place in the Conservatory in July; rooms were made available to us and the participants reported really enjoying the space. However, we have an ongoing concern is that our minister does not have a private office and it is recognized that a solution to this is needed.

Worshipping at the Conservatory provides St. John's access to the Lillian Piercey Music Hall, with excellent acoustics. Given that the congregation places high value on the St. John's music program, this is a major benefit. The additional space that St. John's needs to support its operations (offices, meeting rooms, practice space, kitchen and storage as well as non-Sunday times for services such as weddings and funerals) is sometimes constrained. However, we have managed to successfully run our programs in this space for eight years.

We do not have access to a full kitchen or a large area for community suppers, which some members of St John's really miss, but we have successfully hosted lobster lunches and other social events. We have started this September, regular after-church lunches to help people connect.

While we were renting the Conservatory from year to year we now have a two-year lease. In late August, the Chair of the Official Board asked the chair of Conservatory Board about the possibility for a longer term lease from the Conservatory. In September the Chair of the Conservatory Board responded that within two years the Conservatory will be making substantial renovations to the building and they are not willing to make a commitment beyond two years at this time.

3. Explorations

We have continued to meet with potential partners and explore other opportunities through our networks and suggestions from members of the congregation. In the process we developed a checklist to help us carry out a preliminary evaluation of opportunities. This is in Appendix B.

St. Mark's Anglican Church (Rev. John K. Morrell- 5522 Russell St.)

We have met with St. Mark's staff and congregation leaders on several occasions. Through the discussions we found common ground in terms of the outreach potential. We moved into more specific conversations about shared use of the space available, and found them to be flexible and agreeable to our many suggestions. We have made no commitment to St. Mark's at this time and have worked hard to manage expectations.

So far, discussions have focused on how we might share the worship space (access, timing of services, facilities) and our other space requirements for offices, meetings, storage, events, suppers and so on. We have not engaged in discussions about financial arrangements including any leasehold improvements, or about the long-term sustainability of the congregation of St Mark's.

The next step is for our congregation to learn more about this possible option and to discuss what we already know, and what we will need to know before making a decision. The Transition Team will be advising the Official Board on the best way to have these discussions.

Universalist Unitarians (Rev. Norm Horofker - 5500 Inglis Street)

The Unitarians are interested in entering into partnership with other faith-based groups. They have decided to stay in their current location and work with various partners to build a new facility for various uses. Although our meetings were very positive and the Transition Team felt there was potential for a faithful collaboration, the Transition Team decided not to actively pursue this possibility. Location was the main reason. If we relocated to the south end of the city, the United Church

would no longer have a presence in the north end of Halifax, and we would be physically close to two other United Churches: St Matthews and Fort Massey.

Northwood (2615 Northwood Terrace)

Northwood has its roots in social concerns involving seniors in Halifax. They are the largest not-for-profit continuing care organization in Atlantic Canada (<http://nwood.ns.ca/about/>).

Although we had several meetings exploring possible shared space, they were unable to meet the needs for a variety of spaces and facilities, currently provided by the Conservatory. One critical problem was parking. The Transition Team decided not to pursue this option.

Former Knox Presbyterian building (Rev. Michael Koslowski, 5406 Roome Street)

Some time ago two Presbyterian congregations amalgamated and now worship at Calvin Presbyterian on Bayers Road. The former home of Knox Presbyterian is being rented to another church. We do not know whether the current tenants will wish to continue their lease when it comes up for renewal in 2019.

The space has been renovated and upgraded and includes a bright, modern worship space seating for about 120, meeting rooms, a hall, and an institutional grade kitchen. There is no parking lot but it is on a dead-end street and there have been no community-based concerns about on-street parking. The two major drawbacks are (a) we do not know whether the space would become available, and (b) the estimated rent and operating costs would exceed our current budget by a significant margin. We would therefore need to find another faith community or community organization to share the space. St John's would also have to be prepared to resume responsibilities for the maintenance of a building again. While this option has a number of uncertainties and drawbacks, the Transition Team recommends that St John's keep in touch with Calvin Presbyterian to see what unfolds.

St. Andrew's United Church (Rev. Russ Daye - 6036 Coburg Road, Halifax.)

St. Andrew's is currently holding a series of Community Engagement sessions to explore future use of their space. From the invitation to community stakeholders: *"...our faith community has developed a vision of a new 'third space' for our city: a space that opens itself to all people and groups; a space for deep interactions across the social boundaries that often divide our city; a space for leadership development; a space for connecting spiritual growth and the pursuit of justice right in the heart of Halifax."*

Potential options for space use being explored include (any combination of) the following:

- Office rentals to allied organizations
- Meeting room, temporary work space, event space rentals
- Sponsoring/hosting our own events, workshops, gatherings
- Open Community hub/3rd space
- Social enterprise incubation
- Direct community services
- Housing

Discussions are being facilitated by Common Good Solutions Halifax. Any future development is at least 4-5 years in the future. St. John's will continue to be part of the conversations, and encourage others to participate (<http://www.standrewshfx.ca/>).

Common Good Solutions Halifax

Common Good is a social enterprise network dedicated to “bringing together people and organizations from across sectors to make social, cultural and environmental change through business..... by helping entrepreneurs, non-profits and cooperatives start and grow social enterprises”. We were put in touch with them by Carla Leon from EDGE, the United Church initiative that is working to create a learning network for faith communities across the United Church of Canada. Common Good was originally looking for office space for their own operations and were interested in sharing space. They ultimately found the space that they needed, which they are sharing with a community-based daycare on Cunard Street. We have had good conversations with them and feel that it would be beneficial to maintain this contact. We hold similar values and they may be able to connect us with potential partners in the future.

Other Contacts

Recently the Transition Team made contact with St. Matthews United Church (hoping to redevelop part of their site) and Fairview United Church (having to make a change to a part-time minister) to see if there were opportunities for collaboration. None were forthcoming at this time.

The Transition Team also received suggestions that we investigate the possibility of renting space at either the Ummah Masjid mosque or St. Antonio's Orthodox Church, given that they are so close. One of the important criteria the Transition Team has used when exploring shared space opportunities is the need to support our mission

as an Affirming congregation. So we are not pursuing this possibility at present. St. John's remains committed to seeking opportunities to partner with our neighbours in different ways however.

The Transition Team has explored potential partnerships and shared space, following up leads, and used our individual networks. We anticipate holding conversations with the congregation about both the Conservatory and St. Mark's in the near future. Other opportunities could emerge at any time. As directed by the Official Board, the Transition Team will continue to work on this in the short term but, as St. John's re-visits its governance structure, it will be important to establish a task force to continue this work on an ongoing basis.

4. The Joint Needs Assessment Committee and the Joint Search Committee

When a congregation decides that it needs to declare a vacancy for a paid ministry position it is required to complete a needs assessment. The pastoral charge asks Presbytery to establish a Joint Needs Assessment Committee (JNAC)³ to carry this out. The task of the JNAC is to study the personnel needs, find out the views of the congregation through meetings or a survey, and create a report that includes:

- A profile of the pastoral charge
- A description of the ministry of the pastoral charge
- A description of the position being created
- The required skills and knowledge
- The terms offered (salary, benefits, administrative support, etc)

When this report has been accepted, a Joint Search Committee (JSC) is appointed to conduct a search for suitable candidates and carry out interviews. Again, Presbytery establishes the committee in response to St. John's request and elects two members of the JSC.

The first step has been taken, we have requested that a JNAC be struck. A few people have indicated their willingness to serve on this important committee, but we would be happy to hear from others. Please give your name to Jim Sharpe, Chair of the Official Board.

³ A full description of the role of both the Joint Needs Assessment Committee and the Joint Search Committee can be found at http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/handbook_pastoral-relations-engaging-supporting.pdf

5. Some Thoughts about the Joint Needs Assessment Committee

Both the JNAC and the JSC processes work independently of the Official Board and the Transition Team. Nonetheless, the Transition Team would like to make the following observations for consideration by, as appropriate, the Official Board, the JNAC and the JSC.

Transition Team and JNAC Overlap

It would seem very appropriate for perhaps two members of the Transition Team to sit on the JNAC to provide some continuity. If this is not possible, the Transition Team would be interested in having some meetings to enhance communication between themselves and the JNAC.

The Needs Assessment Process

Without wanting to curtail the work of the JNAC in any way, the Transition Team hopes that this part of the process will make use of the extensive work done by the Transition Team and others, particularly in terms of the participation events. In this way, we would hope that the needs assessment can be completed in a timely fashion.

Governance review

The Transition Team recommends that efforts continue to review and adjust our governance structures, with input from all interested parties, before we call a new minister. A complete overhaul of governance is not necessary because there have been gradual changes made over the past two years. But there are things that we can certainly do better. One element that has been a concern of the Transition Team for the past few years has been the need for stronger communications internally and externally.

Staffing

Along with the governance review, we believe that St. John's needs to review all of its staffing needs, as part of the context needed to know where we want our new minister to focus their energy. Page 3 of the introductory letter for this report list various ideas and visions for St. John's – to be discussed and amended as you all see fit. Where we choose to put our emphasis has implications for the staff we need and what we ask them to do, so it would be helpful to have this in place as we begin our search for the new minister.

Our wish is that the JNAC and the JSC would feel supported by the congregation to step out and be visionary. We feel that the core of our faith community is very strong and a good platform for future greatness.

With newly articulated governance and staffing structures that will support our renewed vision, a call to a minister will be the next logical step.

Appendix A: Continuing the Brief Chronology of the Transition Team’s Work

The following chronology picks up from where we left off in the first Interim Report. This chronology is not complete but should give a flavour of what we have been doing, with much help from others.

2016	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Interim Report is presented. • “The Parade of Dreams” service organized by Transition Team – • More conversations with the Conservatory about our future • Martha’s conflict management project begins
	October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the five Sundays of October members of the Transition Team meet before church with anyone who wants to share their responses to the Interim Report. Much useful feedback is given.
	November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing whether we need to extend period of Interim Ministry • First meeting with St. Marks
	December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue continues with St. Marks; Transition Team develops key questions to be explored with them. • Ongoing contact with Unitarians
2017	January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extension of Interim Ministry was requested because of the time lost due to Martha’s injury. Passed by Official Board. • Discussed results of Martha’s research on conflict management and how to build them into governance and relationships at St. John’s • Conversation with Fairview United about their future plans • Celebrated publication of Martha’s book and completion of her Interim Ministry training • Conversations with St. Matthews • Transition Team members attended Fishing Tips Workshop (John Pentland) • Prepared evaluation checklist for shared space options
	February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began discussion about governance • Reconnected with previous potential partner contacts
	March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions about new approaches to stewardship • Meetings with various groups at St. Mark’s to discuss use of the sanctuary and other spaces, and ways to build relationship • Visited former Knox Presbyterian building • Prepared a “good news” slideshow for AGM to show all the ways that people in the congregation contribute to the life of St. John’s • Presentation at AGM and received feedback – how are people feeling about our situation now?

	April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed purpose and outline for second interim report
	May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued discussions about governance issues and the current state of discussions with St. Marks • Contacts with Northwood • Many discussions about best way to continue gathering information about possible St. Marks option
	June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Hutchinson visited Halifax, and the Transition Team had a facilitated a discussion about where we are now. • Cathy Martin and Paul Hutchinson celebrated Aboriginal Sunday
	July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summertime! (Some people stayed busy though.)
	August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More summertime!
	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed draft of the second interim report and discussed the JNAC and JSC processes and requirements • Recommended to Official Board that a JNAC now be appointed.

Appendix B

St. John's United Church - Transition Team - Shared Space Checklist

- **Location** – where on the peninsula? (e.g., consider location of other United Churches)
- **Space Requirements for shared space** –
 - **Offices** – 3 (3m x 3m) offices plus boardroom to fit 20 people.
 - **Worship Space** – Seating for 150 people, open layout, chairs vs pews. Ability to convert to performance space / dining area.
 - **Rehearsal Space** for choir and bells.
 - **Kitchen** + space for dinners (if not above)
 - **Accessible building and washrooms**
 - **Adequate storage space** (e.g., bells, seasonal decorations)
- **Parking**
- **Visibility of site** – Required for outreach? Programs, store-front
- **Other features:**
 - **Being an affirming church is welcomed**
 - **Green building**
 - **Natural Light**
 - **Acoustics for music**
- **Amalgamation vs. partnership** – Consult with other Peninsula United Churches. Is this an option TT should pursue without Congregational approval?
- **Sustainability of Lessor** – what is the life expectancy of lessor?
- **Rent** - \$\$\$\$\$
- **Compatibility of shared space use (e.g., values, mission)**
- **Potential for collaborative social justice work (e.g., being a “hub” or collection of groups)**