

## Bruce Presbytery project renews energy for leadership and ministry

### Inside this issue:

This issue highlights important work that looks to the future of the United Church. Read about the HelPR project in Bruce Presbytery on p.1. On p. 4 our President reminds us to “trust God; trust the body” as we explore future possibilities for our communities of faith. Peter Hartmans invites you to consider becoming a Commissioner to the 42nd General Council on p.5, and you can read about a significant proposal from the Comprehensive Review Task Group on p. 6

### Please copy and distribute it to your congregation.

We encourage Presbyteries, pastoral charges and Hamilton Conference mission units to submit narrative stories about their life and work. Electronic photos are welcome.

Please send submissions to Barbara Hampson at [bhampson@hamconf.org](mailto:bhampson@hamconf.org).

Something different is happening in Bruce Presbytery, something new, something with possibility and hope. And what is that something new? It is an initiative called HelPR and its main goals are to encourage effective congregational leadership (that's the 'el') and to support healthy pastoral relationships (that's the 'HPR'). While HelPR is only in Bruce Presbytery now, others may find inspiration and direction from the work being done there. As you read on, you may recognize the energy that comes with the Spirit of God and see promise for our church that is changing.

### Background

HelPR began with work that has been done by the General Council of the United Church. Over the past decade, several issues involved in healthy pastoral relationships were studied by General Council committees and task groups. Some of these issues are isolation of ministry personnel, the need to support pastoral charges with issues of compensation and benefits, the effective oversight of pastoral charges and ministers, the support of ministry and personnel committees, and the mounting task of dealing with unhealthy pastoral relationships and renewing lost vitality in congregations who were struggling with conflict or broken trust. The various studies can be found on the

United Church web site for those interested in the research (<http://www.united-church.ca>).

There needed to be a response to the issues that were emerging and the General Council created the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships initiative that was approved at the meeting of General Council 41. Each Conference was invited to develop and test ways to support effective leadership and to improve the health of congregations. Hamilton Conference took on the challenge and through its Executive, created the HelPR project.

### About HelPR

The Hamilton Conference HelPR project has two teams of 5 people each, with the addition of staff support. One team is called the Implementation Team. Its members are Heather Davies; Barbara Fullerton; Patricia Greig; John Hurst; Peg Turner, Chair; Lorna MacQueen and Kim Uyede-Kai, Staff Support. Their focus is two-fold. The first is encouraging leadership towards vital mission in congregations. The second is helping Bruce Presbytery to be a community of collegiality and support for its member congregations as they live and share the love of God in the world.

# Contact

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## DEADLINES

Sept. issue—Aug. 15  
Nov. issue—Oct. 15  
Mar. issue—Feb. 15  
June issue—May 15

For a PDF version of this document, Conference information and highlights, visit our website at:  
[www.hamconf.org](http://www.hamconf.org)

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The second team is called the Leadership Commission. Its members are Rick Chambers; Deborah Deavu; Deanne Dickson; Meg Grieve, Chair; Marianne Leach-Hoffer; and Jenny Stephens, Staff Support. Like the Implementation team, its work is two-fold. The first agenda is the vocational support of ministry personnel. The second is to manage serious discipline issues that have, in the past, taken the time and energy of the Presbytery. Each team has its own focus, but both are working toward vital ministry and vital mission.

## Implementation Team

The Implementation Team has the task of working with Presbyters and congregations who, in partnership with Bruce Presbytery, are seeking to fulfill God's mission of compassion and justice. Because the church and the world are changing, this mission focus requires imagination and resourcefulness. It also requires a clear sense of congregational identity and the support of Bruce Presbytery itself. With the more difficult pastoral relations concerns in the hands of the Leadership Commission, both Presbytery time and Presbytery energy have been freed up for re-missioning.

To this end, the Implementation Team met with Bruce Presbytery at its November meeting. The Team facilitated a conversation about the "Angel of Presbytery." Who is this angel, and what might its role be in facilitating change? It was clear that there was renewed hope that Presbytery can become a source of support and education for the congregations within its bounds.

In order to provide support, there needs to be a fresh clarity about who congregations are and what their mission might be. To this end, the

Implementation Team is encouraging the creation of an "essence document." The essence document is a brief statement of who a congregation is and what its gifts are. It defines the heart of the community and articulates its reason for being. This clarity about identity and core beliefs will facilitate relationships between ministry personnel and congregations, between congregations and their neighbours, and between congregations and Presbytery.

Because the Implementation Team has a strong commitment to these essence documents as a key component of renewed mission and healthy relationships, their creation is a first priority. In light of this high priority, and enabled by a Glenco grant, Hamilton Conference has sought and found a facilitator to offer workshops for congregations in Bruce Presbytery that will assist in the documents' creation. Chris Grose is the person who has been contracted to do this work. The expectation is that there will be a number of workshops offered in late spring and early summer and that the majority of congregations will have an essence document by the fall of 2014. These workshops will not only facilitate the completion of the writing task, but also build collegiality among congregations and create opportunities for neighbouring churches to learn more about one another.

The Implementation Team has requested of Bruce Presbytery Executive a time for Chris Grose to lead the Presbytery itself through an essence document process. This time will allow Presbytery to grapple with its own questions of identity and purpose. Why does Presbytery do what it does? Who is Presbytery, anyway? What is the essence of our ministry as a court of the church? There are also plans for a spring

retreat day for lay Presbyters to engage the conversation.

## **Leadership Commission**

The Leadership Commission is in partnership with Bruce Presbytery's ministry personnel. It has two main areas of concern. The first is the vocational support of ministers in Bruce Presbytery. The second is to provide leadership in any matters of discipline that might come before the Presbytery. Providing leadership in discipline matters leaves the Presbytery more time to partner with its congregations around renewed mission and healthy pastoral relationships.

*Providing leadership in discipline matters leaves the Presbytery more time for renewed mission and healthy pastoral relationships.*

The Leadership Commission began its work by doing an inventory of its own members' gifts and skills, and by establishing values that would shape its work with ministry personnel. It is important for the Commission to celebrate the gifts of Bruce Presbytery's ministers, to listen deeply to what they say they need in order to be effective in their work and healthy as individuals. The Commission chose to see ministry personnel as whole and complex people and to take seriously spiritual support as a key component of vocational support.

Having clarified the values that would guide their work, the Leadership Commission met with Bruce Presbytery ministry personnel in September and November, 2013. The following priorities emerged in those face-to-face conversations. The first was to support the South Learning Circle. The second was to support the re-energizing of the North Learning Circle. These circles were funded through Learning in Community through the General Council but that is no longer possible. Participants found them of great benefit so we are deploying part of the money from our Glenco grant to enable this to continue. A third focus was the initiation of deep conversation with ministry personnel at the invitation of the

Leadership Commission. These conversations would be for support, for theological reflection, for conversation about the 'fit' of ministry personnel with the congregation/pastoral charge, for thinking about future directions and strategies, and about plans for continuing education. The fourth priority is to host a retreat in September, 2014, on themes suggested by ministry personnel. The retreat would provide time for spiritual renewal, for learning, and for strengthening relationships in the group. We hope there will be a healthy measure of good food and good fun.

A further component of the project is to provide Joint Search Committees (JSCs) administrative support from the Conference Office. There are currently four searches in process with Sue Duliban, Hamilton Conference Administrative Assistant, providing co-ordination with those ministry personnel interested in the positions and the JSCs. Jenny Stephens has provided some training and conversation with three of those JSCs and continues her usual role of ensuring eligibility of the chosen candidate.

## **Conclusion**

Both the Leadership Commission and the Implementation Team are grateful for the welcome offered by Bruce Presbytery, ministers and lay Presbyters alike. The Executive has supported the HelPR project and this support has been a great asset. It is not easy being the church in a time of challenge and change. Partnership makes all the difference.

*By Meg Grieve and Peg Turner*



# A Message from the President:

## Trust God; Trust the Body



Greetings sisters and brothers,  
We trust in God.

These words are at the heart of *A New Creed*. These words are at the centre of our life together. We trust in God.

Trust is not easy. It develops over time and takes intentional work. We do not give or gain trust lightly. When we recite *A New Creed* together, we may need others to say these words for us sometimes. Trusting God is no solitary act; we trust in community. We trust because we belong with others who are trying to do the same.

Thomas Merton wrote a prayer in his little book, *Thoughts in Solitude*. It has come to be known in some circles as “The Merton Prayer.” The prayer begins like this, “My God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.”<sup>1</sup>

This prayer seems like a good one for us to be attentive to these days. We have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead. I do not hear a great deal of certainty among us. There are more questions than answers; more concerns than clarity.

We trust in God.

We may not know or have clarity about the future, let alone the present. And yet, this does not need to render us immobile. Passivity in the face of uncertainty runs counter to the Gospel. Trusting is not inactive. In reality, trusting God means that we act with confidence. By confidence, I am thinking of the root meaning of the word *con* – with *fide* – faith. To trust is to act with faith.

We as a United Church have a long history of acting with faith. Working because of our faith. Remembering and moving forward in faith. Taking care with faith. Our unfolding story informs our present reality which summons us to trust with confidence.

We trust in God.

God continues to be at work in the world. God’s mission has a Church. It is a great privilege to be part of that ongoing revelation. God makes visible ways for us to participate in this mission. The challenge for us is to notice them. How we do that may take time and energy. It may require us to pay attention differently than we have before now. To notice these ways of God will also ask us to listen, to really listen. We do this together. We need each other in order to listen, to

notice and to pay attention.

Trusting in God may be a solitary act at times but it is fundamentally a community posture. We trust in God together. We do not trust in the same ways. Some will be able to help us along the way when we cannot do it ourselves. You may be a source of confidence for a person in their own fragility. We need each other in order to trust in God.

We trust in God.

Can we also dare to imagine that God trusts us? God trusts you and me. God trusts the United Church of Canada. God trusts that we will find a way together. What that way is, I’m not sure God even knows! But God believes in the Body of Christ. God desires the Body to be one. In our unity as part of this Body, we can trust God. We can dare to trust God because God dares to trust us.

God takes enormous risks over and over for the sake of the world. We may call them risks but God calls it love. God pours out that love for the ways of justice, peace, right relationship and oneness. God’s ways in Jesus orient us toward life, hope, forgiveness and being close to those who are vulnerable. God trusts us

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, (Image Books: New York, 1956) p.81.

with this work as part of the Body.

We trust in God.

Toward the end of his prayer Merton writes, "Therefore I will trust you always though I may be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

God is with us. God is always with us. We

are not alone. Those whose cry we hear are not alone. Those who live in life's shadows are not alone. We belong to one another and in this belonging we have confidence. God is up to something.

Can we trust God?

*By Keith Reynolds*

## **Hamilton Conference needs Commissioners for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council in Corner Brook, Newfoundland**

The 42nd General Council will be taking place General Council in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, at Memorial University, Sir Wilfred Grenville College and the adjacent Pepsi Centre. This will be the second time General Council has met in Newfoundland. The face of General Council in Newfoundland will include about 350 delegates from across Canada, many volunteers, and lots of conversation. Elected Commissioners at General Council consider the work of the United Church of Canada and Commissioners are made up of members of the United Church across Canada.

In the case of Hamilton Conference, we elect two ordered and two lay Commissioners from each of our six Presbyteries. Interestingly, lay representatives do not need to be a Presbytery representative or Conference representative to become a Commissioner; they just need to be a member of the United Church of Canada and be nominated and elected at our Conference Annual meeting in May. (Contact your Presbytery Secretary for more information). Commissioners are elected to serve a three-year term.

A significant piece of work being considered at the 42nd General Council will be the Comprehensive Review. This will be an attempt by the Church to reconsider its vision and structure. Those involved with

preparing the Comprehensive review have said on many occasions that the work of General Council 42 may be the beginning of the biggest changes to the United Church of Canada since our Union in 1925.

If you would like to know more about becoming a Commissioner, our current commissioners for 2012-2015 are:

Patricia Bean	Leslie MacDonald
Diane Blanchard	Kellie McComb
Stephen Cobbold	Christina Paradela
Lewis Coffman	Barry Pridham
Judy Culp	Keith Reynolds
Thom Davies	Greg Smith-Young
Donald Glennie	Miriam Spies
Lynn Godfrey	Catharine Stewart-Savage
Patricia Greig	Diana Stewart
John Hurst	Pat Tooley
Amber Ing	Garry van Bruchem
Heather James	Rose Ann Vita
Orville James	Robin Wilkie
Lark Kim	Sybil Wilson
John Lawson	Yvonne Wright
John Lohead	Lyn Workman

*By Peter Hartmans*

***“The work of General Council 42 may be the beginning of the biggest changes to the United Church of Canada since our Union in 1925.”***

# “Fishing on the Other Side”: What does the future look like for the United Church of Canada?

We’re all inundated with information these days and it can be hard to find the time to read another multi-page document. But what if we told you there is a document that contains the seeds for the biggest change to affect the United Church of Canada since union in 1925? Have we got your attention yet? The document in question, “Fishing on the Other Side,” has the potential to have an enormous impact on Presbyteries, Conferences, and the whole structure of our church. It was born out of important conversations about the vision and future of the United Church.

So how did this process begin and why? The 41<sup>st</sup> General Council in 2012 directed the General Council Executive to appoint a task group to examine the vision and circumstances of the United Church and to develop a report and recommendations for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council in 2015. Through the nomination process a group of seven United Church members from across the country, including our Moderator, Gary Paterson, were appointed to the Comprehensive Task Group. As the Chair of the Group, Cathy Hamilton, wrote in her introductory letter in December 2012, “The immediate impetus for our work is the pressure our church is experiencing: declining membership, diminishing resources, and changing priorities and patterns of behaviour that mean many Canadians choose not to participate regularly in a faith community.”

The Task Group consulted with over 600 communities of faith throughout 2013 and the results of these facilitated conversations are summarized in the “Comprehensive Review Consultation Report”: <http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/comp-review/consultation-report.pdf>. In addition the team consulted with committees and other groups that have responsibilities and expertise in key areas, conducted research about organizational models in other denominations and sectors, and examined research and work that others in our church have undertaken.

“Fishing on the Other Side: Seeking the Wisdom of Presbyteries, Districts, the *Consistoire*, and the Synod” (<http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/comp-review/>

[crtg\\_fishing.pdf](#)) contains the Task Group’s vision and preliminary structural concepts, developed from its conversations, research, and thinking so far. It is meant to be a conversation paper—the beginning of serious discussions about how the United Church can move forward with a sustainable future that doesn’t drain volunteer personnel as well as financial resources to the point of no return.

So what are the next steps? The Comprehensive Review Team is turning to Presbyteries and Conferences, requesting time at Presbytery and Conference meetings to discuss the ideas in the document, and seeking the feedback and the wisdom of these bodies. The key points on which the team is seeking feedback are Property, Oversight of Communities of Faith, Oversight of Ministers, and Connectional Space. Appendix A of the document offers a helpful summary of the differences between the current structure and the proposed new model. It’s important to remember that this is only a proposal—an invitation to begin important conversations before General Council meets in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, in 2015. (See page 5 of this publication for information on becoming a Commissioner to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council!) If General Council decides to make major changes to the United Church *Basis of Union*, remits to congregations and Presbyteries would follow.

What is the future of the United Church of Canada? We invite you to read the report and the proposal and to add your voice this important discernment process. You can also participate in the online forum, “United Future: Join the Conversation”: <http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review/conversation>. There are more resources and information on the Comprehensive Review process available on the General Council website: <http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review>.

By Barbara Hampson

