

HALTON PRESBYTERY

“Strengthening Congregations to be Christ for the World”

Along with all other presbyteries across the country, the “big ticket item” of the past year was working on an effective discussion and comfortable decision for each of the Remits. We feel that Halton achieved that; all proposed Remit changes were approved with the exception of “one order of ministry,” which was not ratified.

The **Education & Students** team continues to support two candidates for ordained ministry and two inquirers. Presbytery time was spent in a worship format, to reflect on the theme of call and to invite all to recognize the stirring of the Spirit. Before the dissolution of presbytery on Dec. 31, E & S is also working to have all policies and procedures reflect current practices around lay preachers, and student grants.

The **Pastoral Relations team** has been supporting a high number of congregations in transition. We are finding that as churches seek to be creative about future ministry, there is no “one size fits all” process to support them. Thankfully, with a dedicated committee, and Rev. Jeff Werner hired part-time, specifically as support to Pastoral Relations, we have been able to help our congregations discern the most faithful way forward. In the fall, we'll be seeking out ways to reassure congregations who will still be in transition when the new model is put in place, and to prepare them for the new policies that will be coming.

Our **SMDC** team (Strategic Mission Development Committee) plays a vital role in developing forward thinking amongst congregational leaders. There continues to be a hope toward hiring a part-time mission development support person, to continue helpful project work with at least 15 congregations. Along with Edge, and through the support of a Glenco grant, we are walking with these teams in the “Loving God, Loving Neighbourhood” program and other relevant avenues to meet the changes of church in society.

Glenco grants have also supported ministry initiatives for “The Annex,” an innovative worship community at St Paul’s, Milton, AND for “*Ministry in Motion*,” a conference for the inspiration and education of church leadership. We are grateful.

As noted above, we live in changing times. What is most concerning is the hard reality of decline. The Church is shrinking— has been since 1965 (50+ years). Here, in one of the most densely populated and affluent areas of Canada, we are closing churches, and cutting ministry. Also, as noted, a rising number of pastoral transitions (due to retirements & moves) seems to be leading to a possible shortage of clergy being experienced. Search committees are taking longer to find acceptable candidates.

In response to all of this, some have adopted the mantra that “God is doing a new thing”; but others see that response as merely “whistling in the dark,” ignoring or denying reality. The elephant in the room is the hard truth that, in over half a century, we have not, as a regional or national church, truly named and addressed the need for energy and training to be focused toward witnessing, faith sharing, evangelism, and congregational renewal.

As a successful transition is achieved into the new Regional structure, the Church would be wise to immediately adopt a new mission agenda, involving reaching out to the spiritual yearnings of the Canadian public. The early community of Christ swept through the ancient world, attracting and embracing large segments of the population in a society already saturated with many religious affiliations. Jesus’ team can do it again, in Region 9, and across the restructured United Church of Canada. The Lord be with us in that mission.

Submitted by Orville James