



# DOWNTOWN UNITED DISCERNMENT PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

SUBMITTED TO: Downtown United  
St Paul's United & Wilmot United Congregations

DATE: November 13, 2023

PREPARED BY: Cathy Stewart & Marijke Strong  
[cathy@credenceandco.com](mailto:cathy@credenceandco.com)  
[marijke@credenceandco.com](mailto:marijke@credenceandco.com)  
[www.credenceandco.com](http://www.credenceandco.com)  
50 Ottawa St. S., Suite 346  
Kitchener, ON N2G 3S7  
519-883-890

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary.....2

Introduction.....3

Background.....3

Project Goal.....4

Overview of Downtown United Process.....4

Recommendation 1: Vision for Downtown United.....6

Recommendation 2: Values and Considerations for Downtown United Collaboration.....7

Recommendation 3: Recently Launched Initiatives.....8

Recommendation 4: Collaborative Communication.....8

Recommendation 5: Reflection-Action Model for Ministry.....9

Recommendation 6: Three-Year Phased Approach for New Collaborative R-A Groups.....10

Recommendation 7: Staff Support.....11

Recommendation 8: Internal Review Process.....12

Insights Offered by Credence.....13

Closing Remarks.....14

Appendix A: TRENDS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY .....15

Appendix B: CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH LEADERS .....15

Appendix C: PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT.....17

Appendix D : RESPONSES TO MARCH WORKSHOPS 2023.....18

Appendix E : REFLECTION ACTION GROUPS .....20

Appendix F : LECTIO DIVINA IDEA FOR OPENING .....21

Appendix G : THREE ACTION PLANS.....24

Appendix H : IDEAS, DREAMS AND STRATEGIES– LEARNING FROM OTHER CONGREGATIONS.....27

# SUMMARY OF REPORT

**INTRODUCTION.** In 2022, the congregations of St Paul’s and Wilmot approved a proposal to strengthen the collaboration between the two congregations. The proposal intent was: “sustain and enhance the combined missions of service by both congregations within the Greater Fredericton community.” the Downtown United Project Committee (DUPC) contracted Credence to facilitate the work....

**BACKGROUND.** Between them, Wilmot and St Paul’s have over 400 years of ministry in Fredericton. Over time, the two congregations developed unique characteristics and missions of service. Both St Paul’s and Wilmot also face long-term challenges. Some congregants wonder about congregational survival. Despite the challenges facing them, both congregations affirm that whatever the future holds, they want to be “drawn by love” rather than to react in fear or anxiety to the new challenges the future will bring....

**PROJECT GOAL.** DUPC determined two goals: (a) a project that the congregations could “do,” and (b) a way of deepening relationships between the congregations so that they could be in loving community with one another, building a foundation for potential longer-term collaborative work in Fredericton. Almost immediately, there were signs that the relationship between the churches was strengthening....

**OVERVIEW OF PROCESS.** From January to June 2023, Credence engaged St Paul’s and Wilmot in a variety of ways, including: a survey, interviews, joint worship services, workshops, an interim report, congregational gatherings, meeting with youth leaders, a season of prayer, and a listening circle....

**RECOMMENDATIONS.** In Summer 2023, DUPC used data collected from the congregational discernment process to develop recommendations for moving the collaboration project forward.

- FOR IMMEDIATE ADOPTION
  1. Recommendation 1: Vision for Downtown United
  2. Recommendation 2: Values and Considerations for Downtown United
- SUPPORTING CURRENT INITIATIVES
  3. Recommendation 3: Recently Launched Initiatives
- FOR THE NEAR FUTURE, REQUIRING MINIMAL EXTRA EFFORT
  4. Recommendation 4: Collaborative Communication
- A MODEL FOR EXISTING GROUPS
  5. Recommendation 5: Reflection-Action Model for Ministry
- A MODEL FOR NEW INITIATIVES
  6. Recommendation 6: Three-Year Phased Approach for New Collaborative R-A Groups
  7. Recommendation 7: Staff Support
- SUPPORTING INTERNAL “BIG PICTURE” CONCERNS IN BOTH CONGREGATIONS
  8. Recommendation 8: Internal Review Process

**INSIGHTS & CLOSING REMARKS.** Credence’s observations about the congregations’ interest in collaboration and the joyful energy that was experienced throughout the process, as well as a strong theme for ministry that emerged. The model that has been discerned is a wonderfully collaborative and creative opportunity for transformation and a strong invitation to hope....

# DOWNTOWN UNITED RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

In March 2022, the congregations of St Paul’s United Church and Wilmot United Church each approved a proposal to strengthen the collaboration between the two congregations, a relationship currently known as Downtown United. The proposal, which was accompanied by funding for the necessary consultation, expresses the intention as follows: “sustain and enhance the combined missions of service by both congregations within the Greater Fredericton community.” Three members of each congregation and the Minister of each congregation formed the Downtown United Project Committee (DUPC) to guide the process. The DUPC met from April to June 2022 to determine the scope of the process and in September 2022 contracted Credence as consultants to facilitate the work. The DUPC met with Credence regularly from October 2022 to June 2023 to plan and facilitate various events and gatherings to strengthen the relationship between the congregations and to discern a common mission for the congregations. In July 2023, the DUPC and Credence together used data collected from the congregational discernment process to develop recommendations for moving the congregations’ common mission forward. These recommendations have been gathered into this Report.

Note: Comments offered by Credence are written in *italics*. Documents generated during this process are attached as Appendices.

## Background

Between them, Wilmot and St Paul’s have over 400 years of ministry within downtown Fredericton, since 1791 and 1830, respectively. Over the centuries, the two congregations developed unique characteristics and missions of service. These have included various ways of addressing social and economic needs in Fredericton (housing, food insecurity, loneliness), providing venues for music in their beautiful sanctuaries, and supporting refugees. The two congregations currently collaborate on Holy Week services, summer worship services, a youth group, and summer Vacation Bible School.

Both St Paul’s and Wilmot, to varying degrees and in different ways, face long-term challenges associated with maintenance needs of the buildings, energy for the work of ministry and financial sustainability. Some congregants wonder about congregational survival.<sup>1</sup> Both congregations currently support outreach ministries, and while some see the current moment as an opportunity to revitalize the congregations’ missions, others express being tired and struggle to imagine taking on projects that involve more time and energy.

Despite the challenges facing Wilmot and St. Paul’s, both congregations affirm that whatever the future holds for them, they want to be “drawn by love” rather than to react in fear or anxiety to the new challenges the future will bring. In addition, the DUPC affirms that the churches’ spiritual foundation and practices are what distinguish the work of the church from that of other socially oriented groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> For Credence reflection about how these challenges are not specific to Fredericton or the United Church, see Appendix A.

Strengthening the congregations' spiritual foundations will give the congregations greater capacity to think imaginatively, creatively, humbly and courageously about the future. DUPC therefore seeks a collaboration that both develops the congregations' spiritual foundations and strengthens outreach.

The Downtown United project stands in partnership with other collaborations between the two congregations: The M&P committee at Wilmot has initiated collaborative efforts between the M&P committees of all the UCC congregations in Fredericton, to consolidate resources and strengthen communication. The same group has initiated meetings with the conveners of other committees (Worship, Faith Formation, Council/Board Chairs) for the purpose of developing collaboration. These initiatives strengthen the relationship between the two congregations, facilitate their missions and increase the likelihood of the Downtown United project's success. While some in the congregations would value exploring whether St Paul's and Wilmot should amalgamate, the Downtown United process as originally proposed is about collaboration, not amalgamation.

## Project Goal

In the spring of 2022, prior to engaging Credence, DUPC explored the desired outcome of this process. Was the process (a) a practical project that the congregations could "do," or (b) a way of deepening relationships between the congregations so that the two groups could be in loving community with one another, building a strong foundation for potential longer-term collaborative work in Fredericton?

The DUPC recognized both goals as important, so both influenced the shape of the discernment process. While DUPC embraced holding the two goals in balance during the process, it was determined that the primary goal was weighted towards building relationship and trust between the two congregations. With this in mind, Credence and DUPC shaped the process to maximize opportunities for the congregations to get to know one another through interactive facilitated conversation, storytelling, worship and community-building. In particular, the "Conversations that Matter" events in March were designed specifically to bring members of the two congregations into meaningful conversation with one another, in ways that would not normally occur in an after-church coffee hour.

## Overview of Downtown United Process

**Data Gathering, Conversation and Discernment:** From January to June 2023, Credence engaged St Paul's and Wilmot in a variety of ways. The purpose of this process was to encourage the congregations to reflect on their ministries, bring the two congregations into meaningful conversation with one another, and discern together how they might collaborate in ways that strengthen their mission. Steps taken during this time include the following:

- A survey for both congregations;
- Interviews with Staff, committees, and congregation members who indicated interest in an interview;
- Three joint worship services (March, May and June);

- Two workshops inviting congregants into “Conversations that Matter” and dreaming together (March 18 & 19, 2023);
- Compilation of the results of the survey and interviews into an Interim Report;
- Congregational gathering to review the Interim Report and introduce the process of discernment as distinct from decision-making (May 7, 2023);
- Interview with Youth Leaders, (as requested May 7, 2023). See Appendix B to this Report.
- A season of prayer supported by weekly reflections (May 7 – June 3, 2023); and,
- A Listening Circle to discern together directions gleaned from the season of prayer that will guide how the two congregations can move collaboratively into a renewed future. (June 4, 2023).

Questions for the season of prayer and the Listening Circle as well as Notes from the Listening Circle are included as Appendix C.

### **Impact of Process Thus Far**

Almost immediately, DUPC began to see signs that the relationship between the two congregations was strengthening. At each joint Sunday event, members of the two congregations joyfully shared meals together, talked in small table groups and shared in large group conversations. Participants expressed enthusiasm for the discoveries they were making through these conversations. The energy was palpable. Several said, “We need to do this more often!” Another added: “This kind of listening is the work of the church!” One participant declared that the meeting of the two congregations was a “historic event”. Others commented on how blessed they were to hear personal stories from the other congregation. Still others began to think about ways to stay connected in the future. Words mentioned to describe the workshops in March included: hopeful, envisioning, possibilities, collaboration, mission, encouraging, desire, faith, city-wide, joy, growth, change, energy, enlightening, caring, and gratitude. Through the interactions in March 2023, the two UCW groups, of their own initiative, began to plan collaborative events. *Please see Appendix D for an excerpt from the May 3 report for more details about the comments arising at this gathering.*

DUPC is encouraged to see how readily the two congregations embrace the opportunity to build relationship with each other, thus fulfilling a key goal of the process.

### **Congregational Capacity**

The congregations’ energy levels and capacity for additional projects is a large concern for the DUPC in their process of weighing and deciding between the many projects that are possible for the congregations’ future. The challenge is: how to develop goals that energize the congregations but do not overwhelm or overtax people to the point of burnout? DUPC decided to start small, choosing a model that will both serve the congregations’ already-existing commitments, and create the possibility of growing over time to encompass additional areas of interest.

**Development of Recommendations:** In Summer 2023, DUPC used data collected from the congregational discernment process to develop recommendations for moving the collaboration project forward. DUPC identified: a) a vision for Downtown United distinct from the visions of each congregation; b) key values and considerations by which to assess possible avenues of collaboration; c) a model for developing these ministries collaboratively; d) three areas of ministry that would be suitable potential starting points for collaboration; e) suggested action plans for each ministry focus.

Over the course of DUPC's conversations in September 2023, the shape of the recommendations shifted, given emerging needs in the congregations. Both St Paul's and Wilmot began to recognize the need to address pressing questions about the shape of their own future ministry. DUPC is mindful that these pressing questions impact the congregations' capacity to consider any new form of ministry. At the same time, because both congregations are engaging similar questions at the same time, this emerging urgency may provide a further avenue of collaboration. The Credence work that began in the Fall of 2021 involved asking some "big" questions. DUPC believes that asking these big questions has provided a foundation to support the conversations that are emerging in each congregation about their own internal needs. Please see Recommendation #8 for a proposed structure to support internal conversations that are taking place about each congregation's needs.

## Recommendations from DUPC

DUPC offers 8 recommendations, ordered in a sequence:

- Recommendations for immediate adoption (Recommendations 1 & 2)
- Recommendation that supports current initiatives (Recommendation 3)
- Recommendation for the near future that requires minimal extra effort (Recommendation 4)
- Recommendation of a model for existing groups (Recommendation 5)
- Recommendation of a model for new initiatives (Recommendations 6 & 7)
- Recommendation to support internal "big picture" concerns in both congregations (Recommendation 8)

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ADOPTION

#### 1. Vision for Downtown United

##### **Vision Statement for Downtown United**

DUPC recommends that Downtown United strengthen the outreach ministries that are integral to the congregations in such a way as to ground the ministries in their spiritual roots and to nurture ministries toward growth and flourishing. In other words, the congregations are encouraged to integrate spiritual formation, love and action, so that Downtown United follows Jesus in expressing "**love that works.**"

While each congregation has its vision and mission, the collaboration of the two congregations also has its own vision, specific to the two groups working together rather than separately. The DUPC has articulated the vision for Downtown United as follows:

## VISION

**As Downtown United we share a commitment to live out Christ's ministry. We choose to create and seek opportunities to worship, serve and learn together, building on each other's strengths, together creating a community where love works.**

The vision statement is inspired by the following two quotes:

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”  
(Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*)

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” (Howard Thurman, *The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman: A Visionary for Our Time*)

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul's receive the vision of Downtown United as a shared vision for their work together in Fredericton: **“As Downtown United we share a commitment to live out Christ's ministry. We choose to create and seek opportunities to worship, serve and learn together, building on each other's strengths, together creating a community where love works.”**

## 2. Values and Considerations for Downtown United collaboration

DUPC identified the following values and considerations as a lens through which to discern potential avenues for collaboration:

- **Drawn by Love (rather than anxiety)**
  - Question: Is the proposed action motivated by love? Does it result in a more loving world?
- **Moved by the Spirit**
  - Question: Is there a synergy/creativity/beauty in this initiative that connects us with something larger than ourselves?
- **Engaging Youth (Youth includes anyone under 50)**
  - Question: Can young people be consulted, engaged, and/or given leadership in this?
- **Radical, Reciprocal Hospitality**
  - Question: Can this ministry strengthen our capacity to think and act with mutuality, equality, reciprocity and respect rather than us/them ways of doing things? (Doing *with* rather than doing *for*.)
- **Encourage Growth and Courage**
  - Question: Does this initiative move us beyond our comfort zone? Does it encourage our transformation both personally and spiritually?
- **Combine, Conserve and Catalyze our Energies**
  - Question: Does this initiative combine and redirect our existing energies more than add to our workload?



- **Of Interest to Both Congregations**
  - Question: Is this focus not already a “speciality” of either congregation, so it could be equally collaborative from the start?
- **Of interest to multi-Generations**
  - Question: Does this focus hold interest across the generations, so it would bring together people of diverse ages?
- **Engage with the Larger Community of Frederickton**
  - Question: Will this theme connect with interests, needs, and groups within Frederickton and the larger community?
- **Inward, Upward, Outward**
  - Question: Does this theme have the potential to focus inward, upward, and outward movement (nurturing relationships within the group, fostering spiritual formation, and resulting in concrete actions that impact the larger community)?

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul’s receive the following values as the lens through which to discern future collaborations: (1) drawn by love rather than anxiety, (2) moved by the Spirit, (3) engaging youth, (4) radical, reciprocal hospitality, (5) encouraging growth and courage, (6) combining, conserving and catalyzing our energies, (7) of interest to both congregations, (8) of interest to multi-generations, (9) engaging with the larger community of Frederickton, (10) focusing upward/inward/outward movement.

### RECOMMENDATION THAT SUPPORTS CURRENT INITIATIVES

#### 3. Recently launched initiatives

DUPC supports and encourage the two initiatives that have emerged in the last year: joint UCW planning, and the collaboration between the two M&P committees. DUPC recommends that these collaborations continue.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul’s encourage continued collaboration between the two UCW ministries and the two M&P committees as a model for other committees to consider future collaboration.

### RECOMMENDATION FOR THE NEAR FUTURE requiring minimal extra energy

#### 4. Collaborative Communication

DUPC supports the suggestion raised at the June 4, 2023 Listening Circle that each congregation share its electronic communication (e.g.: enews, announcements, websites) with the other congregation. This will increase the flow of information between the two congregations. Additionally, DUPC recommends that each electronic communication contain a section for Downtown United information. The more information is shared, the greater likelihood that collaborative planning will emerge. If the creation of a support role (recommendation #7) is approved, the staff person may also be responsible for a collaborative DTU communication.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul’s share their electronic communication with each other, consider adding a DTU section to each electronic communication, and consider a future shared DTU communication.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR EXISTING GROUPS

### 5. Reflection-Action Model for Ministry

DUPC believes that one of the most urgent needs in both congregations is a model for ministry that grounds the “outward” actions of ministry in spiritual roots. DUPC recommends a model that will serve all existing committees of the congregations, as well as new collaborative groups that may later form. As each congregation adopts this model within their own congregation, it will provide a common basis for possible future collaboration.

The Reflection-Action (RA) model is a variation on the idea of “Passion/Mission” group that has been adopted in other congregations across North America and which was suggested in the Listening Circle on June 4, 2023. This variation is based on observations of other congregations’ experience where the effectiveness and sustainability of our passions benefit from structures that ground us in our deepest values and are supported by others groups following the same structure.

The RA model is distinguished from small groups or study groups in that it has an Inward/Upward/Outward focus of: (a) authentic relationship-building, (b) spiritual formation and (c) missional action. This model creates opportunity for a variety of commitments within the congregations, (it can be used by existing committees), will aim to empower people, to consolidate energy (momentum already exists in a person’s area of gifting/passion or commitment), and to avoid creating extra committee work.

**Internal structure:** The model is guided by three foci: *Inward* (nurturing relationship & caregiving within the group); *Upward* (spiritual formation); and *Outward* (action in the area of group’s shared work/passion).

The RA model serves three inter-congregational purposes:

- a) Provides a practice that is common for members of both congregations.
- b) Deepens spiritual roots;
- c) Deepens interpersonal relationships,

The order of a typical committee/group gathering is as follows:

**Inward:** Check in to build authentic relationships

**Upward:** Devotion, reflection and/or exercise that supports spiritual formation

**Outward:** Education, planning and/or hands-on action around the given focus of the group

**Closing:** Silence, centering, blessing

NOTE: DUPC believes that the RA model has potential to address concerns that have been raised about (1) congregational overwhelm, (2) the need to consolidate resources, and (3) the need to move forward boldly. The RA model can be adopted by any already-existing group as a way to revitalize the group. It

offers a structure for a group gathering that does not add significantly new expenditure of energy, but rather creates time and space for other values that are often overlooked such as personal relationships and spiritual grounding. This model offers a way to become more focused with existing resources. DUPC believes that given the concern for the congregations' sustainability, this model guides congregants to our deepest source of sustenance and boldness, which is the Spirit.

Further information about RA groups and resources for developing the "Upward" focus is found in Appendices E and F.

**Recommendation 5:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul's approve the Reflection-Action ministry model (using the upward/inward/outward focus), as a way for *current committees and groups* to shape their meetings and gatherings.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR NEW INITIATIVES

### 6. Three-Year Phased Approach for new collaborative RA groups

DUPC recommends a three-year phased approach in the formation of several new collaborative (inter-congregational) RA groups. These groups would be made up of members from both congregations and would use the RA model for structure.

The congregations are encouraged to begin with one pilot group, with the intention of phasing in a second group the following year, etc.

In order to help with the implementation of this model, DUPC suggests several possible themes for the initial pilot group(s). These are developed from interests expressed by participants at the congregational discernment events, and were assessed for their potential to support the goals and values DUPC identified. The themes of Environment, Mental Health and Inter-generational activity sit "close to the heart" of many members of the congregations, as well as in the larger Fredericton community. One or more of these themes would be ideal beginning themes around which collaborative groups could gather.

- a) **Mental Health:** Through their outreach ministries, both congregations are aware of the mental health needs of those who access their services. DUPC is also aware of mental health needs within the congregations, as well as mental health needs that are hidden behind the walls of long-term care facilities and retirement homes. Mental health is a concern across the generations.
- b) **Intergenerational Relationships:** DUPC is aware that many in the two congregations are concerned about the decreased number of youth participating in the congregations. (For the purposes of these recommendations, "youth" refers to anyone under 50.) DUPC is also aware of the needs of Seniors. At the same time, DUPC notes a longing in both the congregations and in the larger community for intergenerational connections—spaces where people of different generations can find common ground, learn from one another, and create a sense of belonging. For this reason, DUPC has chosen to recommend focusing not on one demographic, but on the weaving together of generations. The Church is one of the few spaces in our current social context where multiple generations engage one another. As such, the Church offers a unique gift to both its members and to the larger community of Fredericton.

- c) **Care of the Environment:** DUPC believes that this theme is of key importance to the Church given the congregations' faith conviction that "The earth is the Lord's and all that is therein" (Psalm 24) and that people of faith are called to be stewards of Creation. DUPC is aware that people of every demographic are concerned about climate change and the environment, and though some individuals offer leadership within their own congregation, there is no group spearheading this focus. This focus would benefit from collaboration and would also connect with other groups in Fredericton.

It is important to note that the suggestion of these three themes is not meant to limit the possibilities. Nor does this model for collaborative groups need to stop at one, two or three small groups. The RA Group model can expand into a network that attracts congregation members as well as people from the larger community and includes other areas of passion and outreach (e.g.: Affordable Housing, Civil Discourse, Community Art, Elder Care).

### Action Plans

DUPC has developed sample action plans to serve as a starting point for the "outward" action steps of the pilot group(s), depending on which theme the group chooses. The intent of these plans is to give ideas for the groups, supporting their formation and direction. If groups form around different themes, these action plans could serve as an example for how to plan.

Three Charts are included in Appendix G. They offer: a) rationale and anticipated outcomes for each focus area; b) goals; c) concrete steps; d) pinch points (practical implications); e) details regarding the chosen actions.

**Recommendation 6:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul's implement a three-year phased approach to the formation of collaborative RA groups, possibly beginning with one of the three themes identified in the discernment process.

## 7. Staff support

DUPC believes that the success of the development of the RA model and the groups that follow the model would be heightened by a **shared staff person** devoted to animating and supporting group initiatives.

At first, the support may focus on the work within the congregations, with existing groups that begin to adopt the model. The staff role will then support the formation of one or two new collaborative RA groups. If/when the number of collaborative RA groups grow, the staff person will support communication between the RA groups, and between the groups and the congregations.

**Network structure:** If a network of groups forms, DUPC recommends that a designated leader is appointed for each group, and that group leaders meet together at regular intervals.

**Recommendation 7:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul's create a shared staff role to animate and support RA group formation, support and communication.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR THE CURRENT “BIG PICTURE”

### 8. Internal Review processes

DUPC was aware from the outset that the two congregations were entering the current Credence process with different needs, expectations and recent histories.

Pre-Covid, Wilmot’s congregation engaged in an extensive visioning process involving interviews, focus groups and congregational meetings. This process identified a direction and priorities for ministry and led to a number of new commitments, including the renovation of affordable housing units. Wilmot is now becoming aware that pre-Covid predictions about costs of building maintenance and work are no longer relevant. The congregation is now facing serious questions of priorities and direction.

St Paul’s circumstances in recent years focused on transitions that required significant energy. The Credence process revealed a sense of fatigue about purpose and direction, as well as a desire to engage in congregation-wide dialogue about the future. The need for clarity around direction, along with concern about energy levels impacts St Paul’s capacity for collaboration initiatives, including those developed as part of the most recent exercise. Thinking about St. Paul’s future seems critical.

As a result of the questions regarding the future of both Wilmot and St. Paul’s, the joint St Paul’s/Wilmot DUPC recommends that both congregations engage in an internal process that facilitates conversation about the congregation’s identity, purpose and mission. This type of process can help the congregations explore a range of possibilities regarding the future and clarify their involvement and intentions in collaboration. While some have immediately turned to the idea of amalgamation as the logical way to address current needs, there are many other options to explore in order to discern the appropriate path for each congregation. Please see Appendix H for ideas other congregations have considered.<sup>2</sup>

DUPC suggests that each church consider these questions for internal review (many of which surfaced in the collaborative discernment process):

1. Why do we exist? What is our mission and vision?
2. Should we continue doing what we are currently doing?
3. Are we capable of doing this on our own? What resources do we need to serve our ministry?
4. Who do we collaborate with?
5. What should be done with our building?
6. How do we look at the future? Where do we go from here?
7. What do we need to give up? What are we moving toward?

**Recommendation 8:** That the congregations of Wilmot and St Paul’s each conduct an internal review that facilitates conversation about the congregation’s identity, purpose and mission. The reviews should consider (but not be limited to) the seven questions suggested by DUPC.

---

<sup>2</sup> Credence has developed a resource for congregations titled “Ideas, dreams and strategies” that outlines a variety of ways congregations are exploring their future given the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. Please see Appendix H.

## Insights offered by Credence

*The two congregations of St Paul's and Wilmot have functioned independently, for the most part, for over a century. Some observe that though the congregations are different, there has never been a strong resistance to collaboration; rather the obstacle has been the energy, or necessary leadership and organization for a concerted coordination. At the "Conversations that Matter" meeting in March, many participants expressed great delight in getting to know people from the other congregation. While the impetus of the current collaboration may have been prompted, at least in part, by anxiety about the future, the energy in the process has proved to be joy. Joy is a wonderful motivation and impetus for any form of collaboration and outreach mission.*

*Credence observes a third thread that intertwines with anxiety and joy: the willingness to engage with "the other" (a person or group that is different from ourselves, or traditionally held at arm's length from society). This theme underlies both the collaboration process itself, as well as the direction of the three potential RA pilot group themes, which are all oriented towards connecting with an "other".*

*We live in a world that is increasingly fraught with a polarizing "us vs them" dynamic, where the "other" is regarded with suspicion and even hostility. In this cultural context, for two congregations with distinct characters and histories to choose a collaborative model for ministry is a gracious alternative to approaching differences. The three ministry areas offered also focus on bridging an "us/them" divide: Intergenerational ministry seeks to bring together people of different generations. The Mental Health ministry seeks to engage needs that have, until more recently, been neglected from public discourse and stigmatized. The Environment ministry addresses an "us-it" dynamic, the way people tend to treat the earth as something to use, rather than a living entity in which we are an integral part.*

In multiple ways, and on various levels the proposed collaboration between two congregations contains, both intentionally and perhaps unintentionally, kernels of hope and meaning for the city of Fredericton. The following statement is a collaborative effort (DUPC and Credence) to summarize some of the themes that have run through the process and which express the vision.

### **WHERE LOVE WORKS**

In a world that is quickly changing, Downtown United offers a chance to practice Spirit-led change.

In a world polarized around "us vs them," Downtown United seeks to build on each other's strengths, creating together an "us *and* them".

In a world that promotes entitlement, Downtown United trusts in Christ and seeks to practice the humility of "letting go".

In a world entering uncharted waters, Downtown United sees the opportunity to practice openness and welcome discovery.

In a world clinging to the safety of the familiar, Downtown United seeks to explore the gifts of diversity.

In a world that values self reliance, Downtown United looks for ways to pool resources so that we may learn from one another.

In a world caught in fear about the future, Downtown United is determined to be led by love, together enjoying a community where LOVE WORKS.

## Closing Remarks

*It has been a joy for Credence to work with the congregations of St Paul's and Wilmot over the past year. We have been especially glad to be with you in person and we offer appreciation for how you have warmly welcomed us. Your two congregations hold so many gifts and possibilities. Credence offers our sincerest hope for deepening strength, wisdom, courage, and grace as together you seek to follow Christ into the uncharted waters that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church is navigating. We believe that the model you have discerned together is a wonderfully collaborative and creative opportunity for transformation and a strong invitation to hope. May you be greatly blessed as you enter this next chapter of life and ministry together.*

## APPENDIX A: TRENDS IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*Many churches today are wrestling with small numbers and an aging demographic. While it is tempting to wonder what has happened internally that has led congregations to this place, and while such an exercise has value, it is also true that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has impacted many churches in this way. For a variety of reasons (e.g., changing norms, shifting worldviews, rise of technology, etc.), rates of church attendance have declined significantly over the past thirty years. Some churches have responded to this situation by radically reinventing themselves; others have simply tweaked their way of being; some have remained committed to their time-honoured traditions; and still others have shuttered their doors altogether.*

*While these trends and challenges can be frightening, they also represent a tremendous opportunity for the Church. Decline invites churches to re-ground themselves in their faith commitments; it encourages creativity; and it opens doors to listening for how God is leading the Church during this time. It also invites congregations to listen anew for the needs in the world at large. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has evoked a renewed and urgent longing for meaning, purpose and belonging in the wider community. The Church today is invited to listen for how it is uniquely called to speak into this need.*

## APPENDIX B: CONVERSATION WITH YOUTH LEADERS

### Interview with Youth Leaders St Paul's & Wilmot May 2023

Credence interviewed two leaders of the Joint St Paul's/Wilmot Youth Group on Sunday May 21, 2023. They were both from Wilmot. Rev Mary joined for part of the time. The leader from St Paul's reviewed this report.

In recent years, when there were 2 ministers at Wilmot, one minister resourced the Youth ministry. This provided continuity, as the minister (Ellen) was able to cultivate relationships over years as children grew up into the Youth group. The current leaders are Amy Foster-McAllister (as part of her paid position at Wilmot); Bethany (Young) Pohl (volunteer leader for last 5-6 years), and Erin Hayes from St Paul's. Amy's role at Wilmot also includes leading children in worship and Godly Play. Bethany's role will come to a close this summer (2023) as she moves to Halifax.

Pre-covid, there was a core group of 12 people that met on Sunday evenings, with an average of 5 people/week attending. There was also a class for Youth that met on Sunday mornings at worship time. During covid, the group met by Zoom. Post covid, the group meets twice/month. The loss of routine during the pandemic has impacted participation.

In the fall of 2022, there were 5-6 attending; in the winter there were 2-3. While there is a leader from St Paul's, there are currently no Youth from St Paul's. The age range in the current group is from 9 – 20.



## Factors impacting the program

- Youth have many demands on their time.
- Stability of leadership is very helpful; Amy is new as a Youth leader and though her primary skill is with younger children (as a primary school teacher) she connects well with older Youth as well.
- The main goal currently is building relationships with Youth.
- Various transitions take energy to navigate: new Minister, new Youth position; new program (Godly Play)
- Certain kinds of events (overnight outing at Oromocto Lake) have contributed to bonding in the past.
- Some lack of clarity or consensus on how to approach questions of spirituality with Youth; Youth leaders do not necessarily feel trained to tackle some of the big questions Youth may have; there may be a diversity in faith perspectives among leadership.
- The challenges of the larger Wilmot/St Paul's conversation are also reflected in the Youth programming. The leaders from the two congregations do not know each other well.
- Wilmot & St Paul's together offered Friday evening Messy Church in 2021. Messy Church is an all-generations program which was led by the Minister, volunteers from Wilmot, and the Youth Leader from St Paul's. It came to a close because of conflicting commitments for families/Youth. There were no Youth from St Paul's.

## Ways the congregation can support the ministry of/with Youth

1. Provide rides to and from Sunday evening meetings. Currently Bethany regularly picks up 3 Youth for Sunday evening meetings.
2. At Wilmot: Support for Youth Sunday School on Sunday mornings (volunteers needed)
3. At Wilmot: Volunteers for Godly Play on Sunday mornings
4. Provide a physical space designated for Youth, which they can decorate themselves.
5. Include Youth to participate in worship e.g., readings, Youth services [Note: Youth have been invited to participate in worship at Wilmot, but have mostly declined because of other commitments, which are heavy particularly in fall and winter.]
6. Invite Youth to share their talents (e.g. dance)
7. Create a link between Youth and other groups in the church e.g., worship planning, outreach planning.
8. At Wilmot, occasionally the Minister and other members of the congregation lead the Young at Heart at Wilmot. If this were expanded to include other members in the congregation, it would build links between children/ Youth and members of the congregation.
9. Congregation show interest and support (build some links?) for what the Youth members do outside of church (theatre, sports), to build connections.

## Ideas:

- Exploring faith/spirituality in different faith communities. E.g. sunrise service w Indigenous
- Focus on values such as joy, social justice.
- Inter-generational activities e.g. Youth could collaborate in baking pies.
- Shift activity out of the building e.g., participate in Pride Parade
- Each committee in congregation identify one way to include Youth and take the initiative. E.g. Housing First took initiative with Youth
- Repeat the "Hide and Seek" in sanctuary 😊 (maybe inter generationally?)
- Youth do volunteer hours at the church.

## APPENDIX C: PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT MAY/JUNE

### Questions the congregation held in prayer:

1. **Drawn by love:** What kinds of things that we do now strengthen our awareness of God's creative presence here right now, and strengthen our trust in God's loving purpose for the future? What further (specific) steps could we take that deepen our relationship with God and give us courage to trust God's leading? If we were rooted in love and drawn by love, what would we keep doing? What might we stop doing? What might we start doing?
2. **Outreach:** What are some possible (specific) ways to focus the energy of our two congregations and build on these strengths to focus our mission in Fredericton? What type of mission initiative for the city of Fredericton can we envision? What are some innovative ways to sustain hands'-on work while taking into account our waning energies?
3. **Building relationships:** What are some specific ways to strengthen the relationship between the two congregations that build on this energy and are "drawn by love"?
4. **Youth:** *What needs to be true about us if we want to be the kind of church that invites and engages youth? What specific changes are we willing to make?*

### Questions for June 4 Listening Circle

- What was it like to be in prayer for St Paul's and Wilmot? What did you sense or notice that surprised you? If you did not engage in the prayer exercise: How have St Paul's and Wilmot been in your heart and mind over the past weeks?
- How are we, as St Paul's and Wilmot, being called today?
- Balcony view: What surprises you about what you have heard today? What inspires you? What has changed for you since we began this process in January 2023?
- Final question: Complete this sentence with a few words: "Let's do . . . [what?] "

### Notes from June 4 Listening Circle

The following themes were raised at the Listening Circle, in approximate order of frequency. Comments that were offered by only one person are not included.

- Practical needs in Fredericton: continue to attend to these, through programs such as Wednesdays at Wilmot, "Love Fred", strengthening this work through more integration of services offered, so people do not need to move to multiple sites to access the assistance they need. One way to build on the congregations' strengths could be to join the two Outreach committees.

- Demographic groups of both Seniors and Youth. Seniors in places like long-term care facilities need worship services; seniors need groups for social support. We would like to support Youth, including Campus Ministries.
- Consolidate resources through the initiatives of the two M&P committees; these initiatives are helpful and would benefit from some coordination through a hired staff person.
- Climate change is of importance to young people and all future generations. We need to make our own buildings greener and we need to do advocacy work.
- Advocacy work on issues of social justice: this is of interest to Youth, and the congregations have resources for such work. This may be uncomfortable work but it will also be transformative, as the work of social justice challenges us to consider our biases and privileges.
- It is important to be intentional about continuing communication. A few concluded that it would be relatively simple to either do a joint newsletter, or even simpler, send out each congregation's newsletter to both mailing lists.

**Quality of Collaboration:** A number of participants did not offer specific programmatic ideas but offered insights on qualitative criteria for collaboration. These included: mutuality (learning together and from each other more than “giving to”); gentleness and kindness; promptness; intentionality; building on existing interests and passions.

## APPENDIX D: RESPONSES TO MARCH WORKSHOPS 2023

### March Congregational Workshops – Hopes and Dreams

On Saturday March 18, 2023, congregants from both churches met at St Paul's for a congregational discovery workshop. On Sunday, March 19, the congregations gathered for a joint worship service at Wilmot, followed by a second congregational discovery workshop. During the workshops, Credence guided congregants through a discussion of the Interim Report-(Part One), and a dreaming session about hopes for the congregations' future.

Workshop participants engaged the conversation with warmth, curiosity, openness, honesty, humour, hospitality, and hope. Many commented that their conversations with members of the other church were rich, and that sharing stories and listening to each other's perspectives was a great gift. Several said, “We need to do this more often!” with another saying, “This kind of listening is the work of the church!” Another participant declared that the meeting of the two congregations was a “historic event” that needed to be shared within the wider church.

When giving feedback on the report, participants expressed excitement regarding the following:

- surprise and delight at the similarities between the two congregations;
- an affirmation of older, smaller congregations (“sometimes smaller and stronger is better than bigger,” and “there are good things going on, given our age!”);
- a shared sense of mission with a distinct call to serve the community;
- an appreciation of the two churches' beautiful, historical buildings;

- a strong focus on affordable housing;
- a deep love of music.

Participants agreed that one of the greatest **challenges facing both congregations** is their aging demographic (e.g., lack of younger people, less energy for programs and outreach).

Participants identified **new insights**, as follows: a desire to “let go” of the numbers question (“we don’t need to worry about numbers in the pews”); the understanding that inspiration is central to moving forward; the recognition that both churches need to focus on UCC strengths and make church accessible to people who identify as “spiritual but not religious”; and, that UCC’s strengths may be perfectly suited to address the needs in the larger culture (e.g., inclusivity, hospitality, civility, and advocacy can heal a world that is increasingly polarized, uncivil and lonely). Some recognized how working together would create the opportunity to do more with waning resources.

The dreaming session was an especially animated and joyful time. Participants discussed and envisioned **dreams for the future of the two churches** including:

- **Social change and justice:** affordable housing initiatives; ministry with children, attention to Indigenous lives/voices; support for immigrants/newcomers; caring for the earth; accessible supports for healthcare, food security, addictions, and mental health issues.
- **Buildings:** creative and shared use of the buildings: accessibility/visibility of the buildings, flexible and powerful (multi-purpose) spaces; becoming a community action centre.
- **Worship and the arts:** the promotion of music (e.g., concerts); celebrating beauty and awe in the sanctuaries; performing arts venues; having a virtual presence.
- **Intergenerational programming:** preschool programs; seniors’ ministries; engaging young people (inviting their participation); intergenerational community events.
- **Shared resources:** shared staffing; not worrying about the money.
- **Community-building in the city:** interfaith collaboration; conversations that matter (like Credence workshops) where the Spirit is at work; city-wide collaboration (i.e., partnering with other outreach organizations and congregations in the city); advocating for justice and making peace.

When asked about their **takeaways** from the workshops, participants mentioned the following:

- We need to collaborate (we have similar goals and similar situations and are all looking to the future), and we are stronger together, but it does require intentionality; it doesn’t just happen;
- There is still a lot we do not know about each other;
- We need the diversity of this collaboration; we are getting insights and perspectives we haven’t heard before;
- We love the age range in the workshops (becoming intergenerational is a hope for the future);
- It is ok not to have the answers, but to be curious and creative and to wonder; we’ll get there!
- It was encouraging to be in a room full of faith and trust.

Words mentioned to describe the day included: hopeful, envisioning, possibilities, collaboration, mission, encouraging desire, faith, city-wide, joy, growth, change, energy, enlightening, caring, gratitude.

# APPENDIX E : REFLECTION ACTION GROUPS

## Model of Reflection/Action Groups

Reflection/Action (RA) Groups are small groups of people who gather around a common gift or service which they use to reach out and bless others for the flourishing of relationships, neighbourhoods, cities and the world.

These groups would be distinguished from small groups or Bible studies in that they all have a three-fold Inward/Upward/Outward focus (authentic relationships/spiritual formation/missional action).

A typical group gathering might look something like this:

1. Inward: Check in to build authentic relationships
2. Upward: devotion or reflection that supports spiritual formation
3. Action: education and action planning around the chosen focus of the group
4. Closing: silence, centering.

Congregations that have supported these groups have found:

- a) Leadership is key
- b) Leaders need support
- c) Support to all the groups may create momentum (e.g., a monthly potluck)
- d) Communication with larger congregation is important (spotlight during worship every few months)

As it is sometimes easier to develop the Outward aspect than the Inward/Upward, some congregations use these three opening questions every time they meet to both build relationship (inward) and strengthen Spirit (upward):

1. Where did you see love this last week/month?
2. Where did you see the luminous (exceptional, surprising) in the ordinary?
3. When did you feel most fully human, either through joy, grief, or deep connection?

Alternative question:

What is your deep gladness this last week/month? What made you weep or pound the table? What are the things that give you joy and what are the things that keep you up at night? God calls us through both of those feelings.

Appendix D offers a description of Lectio Divina which can also be used as an opening for an RA Group.

## APPENDIX F: LECTIO DIVINA IDEA FOR OPENING

Note: This section offers one further idea of a way to open a small group in a way that strengthens the spiritual roots of a group's ministry.

**Purpose:** The purpose of Lectio Divina is to invite group members to experience a listening form of prayer. Lectio strengthens the "listening in silence" muscles that are foundational to spiritual practice, and ground ministry actions. Engaging in individual spiritual practices is foundational to congregational strength. *NOTE: An alternative approach for centering the group is provided at the end of this document.*

**Introduction:** Many in the Western church are most familiar with spoken prayer (we compose words and offer them to God). Lectio Divina is prayer that focuses on listening. Listening prayer is an ancient practice of people of faith: It was observed by our Hebrew spiritual ancestors and was common in the early church up to the Reformation. The words "Lectio Divina" are 2 Latin words that translate as "Holy Reading", indicating that we listen for how God's Spirit may speak through a Scripture text. The foundational insight is that God's Spirit reaches us not only through intellectual analysis of a text's historical context, but also through our affective senses, i.e., "what captures our attention". Different words or phrases may stand out to individuals in a group. There is nothing right or wrong about what stands out; it may be different for each person. When individuals in a group share what stands out to them, it becomes a group reflection. While Lectio is most often practised with a text of Scripture, it can also be experienced in relation to an event: "what stood out to you?"

**Timing:** Lectio can be placed as the opening of every group meeting.

**Variations:** There is a shorter version of this, with the text read twice, and one round of the circle.

**Preparation:**

- Choose a short text; often 2 or 3 verses is sufficient. A list of possible texts is included below.
- If the group is meeting by Zoom, the text and instructions can be shared by screen share. If the group is meeting in person, sometimes people appreciate having the text and instructions printed out, especially if this is new to them. See Appendix B for a sample printed version.
- Remind the group that this is a form of prayer.
- Review the order of the prayer: "You will hear the passage twice, listening for what stands out to you; after a short silence you will be invited to share the word or phrase that stands out; we will then hear the passage for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time, with another short silence following. In that silence, reflect on a possible connection between what stood out and your own life, or the congregation's life. This may be a way in which God 'speaks' to us."
- Invite the first and second reading. After the second reading, using a circle format, invite each participant to share what caught their attention. Invite the third reading of the text. Using the circle format, invite participants to share more deeply about the words that caught their attention. Close with a spoken prayer.

### Lectio Divina Guide Opening for RG meeting:

1. Facilitator: Ask for 3 volunteers willing to read the passage (slowly). Decide who will be first, second, third reader.
2. Guide the process: "We will hear the passage read twice, slowly; Listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you, and after a short silence you will be invited to share that word or phrase."
3. First reading
4. Second reading
5. Facilitator times a short silence; 1 minute or shorter
6. Facilitator: "Starting with (name); let us go around the circle, saying only the word or phrase that stood out to you. There is no need to add any explanation or commentary. You may pass."
7. Go around the circle.
8. Facilitator: "We will now hear the reading a third time, followed by a silence. This time, listen for how the word or phrase (or some other part of the reading) connects with something in your experience, or in the congregation's experience." You may want to ask yourself: "What does this word/phrase bring to mind from my/our experience? (it might create a picture in my mind, or remind you of a past experience).
9. Third reading
10. Facilitator times the silence: (longer this time; 2 minutes)
11. Facilitator: "Starting with (name) let us go around the circle, sharing any connection you have seen. You may pass."
12. Go around the circle.
13. Facilitator: Thank people and offer a short, spoken prayer that gathers up some of the threads of what people heard.

### Sample Lectio Divina Texts

**Mark 6:21-32:** "Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place."

**Psalm 46:** "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult."

**Mark 4:26-28:** "Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.'"

**Isaiah 43:19:** "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness desert."

### Lectio Divina Sample Handout

**Mark 6: 21-32:** "Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place."

- We will hear the passage read twice. \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ (names of readers)

- Listen for a word or phrase that gets your attention.
- Short silence.
- Around the table, say only the word/phrase that stood out to you; add no explanation or commentary. You may pass if you wish.
- We will hear it again, (\_\_\_\_\_) followed by 1-2 minutes silence.
- In the silence, ask yourself: What does this word/phrase bring to mind from my/our experience? Is this word/phrase connecting with something in my/our life? (It might create a picture in my mind, or remind you of a past experience.)
- Around the table, one by one, in one sentence or two, offer what comes to mind. (You may pass.)
- Close with a spoken prayer.

#### Alternative to Lectio Divina (Lectio on Life)

This approach builds on the idea that God makes Godself known through the miraculous and mundane moments in life.

Facilitator: Ask the group one of the following three questions. Provide silence to give people time to think. Invite the conversation in a circle format. Close the circle with a time of silence, followed by spoken prayer.

- When in the last have you felt most fully human, whether through grief, joy or deep connection?
- Where have you seen the luminous in something common? When has something that is common shone out for you?
- Where did love capture your attention this week (feeling love for someone else, seeing love between others or experiencing love yourself)?



# APPENDIX G: THREE ACTION PLANS

## Downtown United Sample Reflection-Action Planning Chart

### Possible Pilot Group: Intergenerational Community

\*This is an example of how leaders might begin to plan for a R-A Group themed around inter-generational community

Recommendation	Concrete Goals	Concrete Steps	Implications (resources, costs, pinch points?)	Details (who does what by when)
<p>Recommendation: Develop a Reflection/Action group to develop/support intergenerational activities/connections</p> <p>Rationale: We are a whole people of God, so we want to include everyone. We are aware of longings for Intergenerational (IG) connections. IG connections enhance meaning, purpose and belonging for everyone</p> <p>Anticipated Outcome: Broadening perspectives Reach some less-represented groups</p>	Address spiritual needs with mindfulness of needs for youth, young families, seniors and elders. Diversity in gatherings as well as locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop faith study that engages all ages at age-appropriate levels but also through combined learning opportunities.</li> </ul>	Resources both physical and financial  Identify facilitators	
	Create a context for spiritual/personal growth through special interest groups. These groups would self-identify around common interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize conversation groups.</li> <li>Meet with folks where they are (i.e., parents of youth in sports, gather at the basketball court and connect.)</li> </ul>	Allow for emerging leaders within interest groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure interest groups flow through the church structures</li> </ul>
	Develop community through the use of facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dinner integrated into activity</li> <li>Dinner Theatre with faith-based participation for all ages.</li> <li>Conduct an 'interest' poll.</li> </ul>	Awareness of direction of interest groups be filtered through the governing bodies. Interest groups must meet the values identified by the two communities.	
	Include both congregations, to enhance collaboration by sharing information within both structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication channels events, planning, conversations all noted within the online networks and in bulletins for those not linked to online media</li> </ul>	Vigilance with effective communication	

## Downtown United Sample Reflection-Action Planning Chart

### Possible Pilot Group: Mental Health Support

\*This is an example of how leaders might begin to plan for a R-A Group themed around mental health ministry

Recommendation	Concrete Goals	Concrete Steps	Implications (resources, costs, pinch points?)	Details (who does what by when)
<p>Recommendation: <b>Develop a group that encourages DU in both reflection and action in relation to Mental Health needs in our community</b></p> <p>Rationale:</p> <p>Anticipated Outcome:</p>	Create an environment where mental health is seen and discussed from a spiritual perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grief groups</li> <li>Parent morning connection time</li> <li>visit in homes and nursing homes.</li> <li>Preaching about mental health – and how it is everywhere.</li> <li>alcohol, depression, anxiety education normalization and awareness of hidden mental health issues.</li> <li>Create an environment where people feel safe to be not ok.</li> <li>Develop lay visiting teams</li> </ul>	<p>Confidentiality</p> <p>Accessibility of information beyond media links</p> <p>Posting information in washrooms</p> <p>This means more people need to be involved and aware of issues.</p> <p>Expansion of our circles of care</p> <p>Time to attend events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speakers</li> </ul>
	Raise awareness of mental health needs that are present in our Faith community and in those who interact with our community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational events</li> <li>Support Creativity: art and emotions/experiences</li> <li>Grief Walks</li> <li>Utilize local resources for ongoing information sessions</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This question comes after we identify the ‘what and when’</li> </ul>
	Increase awareness of the resources available in the community and make meaningful connections with support agencies (advocacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>211, United Way, Red Cross, Riverstone Recovery, cooling and warming centres,</li> <li>Providing ways to share with congregations</li> </ul>		
	Become familiar with the mental health resources in our area.			

# Downtown United Sample Reflection-Action Planning Chart

## Possible Pilot Group: Environmental Ministry

\*This is an example of how leaders might begin to plan for a R-A Group themed around environmental ministry

Strategic Priority	Concrete Goals	Concrete Steps	Implications (resources, costs, pinch points?)	Details (who does what by when)
<p>Recommendation:</p> <p><b>Form a focus group that leads and encourages Downtown United in reflection and action on our care for the earth.</b></p> <p>Rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Living out God’s call to care for everyone and everything</li> <li>The United Church of Canada’s New Creed calls us “to live with respect in Creation”</li> </ul> <p>Anticipated Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes to church operations and investments</li> <li>Faith in action, give shape to modern practice of faith.</li> <li>Help us evaluate our current structures in light of the impact on creation</li> </ul>	<p>Increase the two congregations’ knowledge about our environmental impact and evaluate the consequences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental audits of buildings.</li> <li>Discussions about what could be done to lessen this impact.</li> <li>Make congregations aware of the United Church of Canada’s Faithful Footprints program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could encamp people into their congregations further or open possibility to dream of what if we had one “environmentally attractive” building.</li> <li>Cost of audits.</li> <li>Building focus which has distracted from ministry at least at St. Paul’s</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board and Council to create a steering committee at next annual meeting to research, guide, and implement initiatives.</li> <li>Board and Council mandate steering committee to work with committees responsible for the church properties to carry out audits within one year and report back at next annual meeting.</li> </ul>
	<p>Celebrate Creation in worship and commit to action for its well being.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrate Earth Sunday, Environment Sunday, Indigenous Sunday, Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost, World Food Sunday.</li> <li>Advocate for change to climate policy.</li> <li>Review church investments in light of care for creation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worship resources available from the United Church of Canada</li> <li>Requires creation of group with committed leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board and Council mandate steering committee to work with finance committees to assess investments and report back at next annual meeting.</li> </ul>
	<p>Education about climate change and predicted impacts for our area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group to research and do a presentation/lunch and learn and <a href="#">enews/newsletter</a> pieces so we know local trends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding leaders who could present and or write articles.</li> <li>There was that couple from Wilmot who</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering committee to research and implement several joint information sessions throughout the year.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New relationships</li> <li>Renewed relevance in younger eyes</li> <li>Wider engagement with community with a focus larger than ourselves</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation imagining for future – start planning now to be able to respond and provide practical skills.</li> </ul>	<p>indicated a passion for science-based learning.</p>	
	<p>Theologically ground people in our spiritual call and responsibility to care for creation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the Season of Creation.</li> <li>Worship and Bible study having a focus on this.</li> <li>Provide opportunities for education in spiritual practices that put people in touch with creation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food Grain Bank has good resources and also has mandate magazine used in the past for congregational events and Bible studies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clergy, worship committees and steering committee to work with available resources</li> </ul>
	<p>Engage with local projects that support care for creation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect and form relationships with local environmental groups.</li> <li>Opportunity to listen to concerns and engage with activities that youth organizations are leading</li> <li>Could host an event or coordinate something like a spring clean-up</li> <li>Offer our space as a way to make connections with these groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People committed to communication between groups and congregation.</li> <li>Promotion. Methods for activities and criteria for selecting the ones that will be heavily promoted.</li> <li>Use existing learning and letter-writing skills of those that may not have the energy for more active forms of advocacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering committee to provide leadership and recommendations to Council/Board</li> </ul>

# APPENDIX H: IDEAS, DREAMS & STRATEGIES: LEARNING FROM OTHER CONGREGATIONS

The following is a resource prepared by Betty Pries, of Credence & Co

## Introduction

The following document is provided to help congregations generate ideas regarding the concrete actions they can take to live into their sense of mission and purpose. The questions and ideas offered here are **not** prescriptive. Instead, they are meant to help stir the imagination, allowing congregations to learn from one another regarding how they are responding to God's call in their lives and in their communities. The congregation's described in the following pages have each landed on different answers to the following key questions: *Who are we? Why are we here? What shall we do?*

## Who are we?

Who is your congregation? This core question can help congregations better understand their unique characteristics, gifts and challenges – all of which can help congregations with discerning their direction. There are multiple questions you may wish to consider as you think about who you are:

1. What are the key “identity” markers that define your congregation (theologically, denominationally, historically)? What do your demographics tell you about who you are?
2. Looking at your congregation's history, what patterns do you see?
3. When you consider the list of characteristics associated with *Thriving Churches in an Age of Anxiety* what do you regard as your congregation's strengths? Challenges?
4. What is the mood like in your congregation today? Why? How do you hope that a renewed sense of direction will engage your congregation's mood?
5. What, if anything, is your congregation grieving?
6. What longings do you hear in the congregation? What deeper needs, fears and dreams are reflected in these longings?
7. Are you a drive-to church or a neighbourhood church? How does your answer to this question influence your sense of mission?
8. Where is your congregation located? What needs do you see in the community around you? How does your location influence your sense of identity?
9. How is your congregation engaging in / being impacted by the larger cultural shifts around you? How do these shifts impact your sense of direction?

10. Who are the last 5-10 new people who came to your church? What patterns do you see among these people? Why did they join you? What does this tell you about how you are being called?

## Why are we here?

Some congregations want to write a new mission statement for themselves. One could say, however, that congregations already have their mission statement: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself.*<sup>3</sup> For congregations the core mission is already clear. What is less clear is the following: *How do we live into this mission statement? What are the practical ways – in this time and at this location – in which we can love God and neighbour as ourselves?*

There is an additional equally important question, however, with which most congregations must wrestle in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: *How do we breathe new life into our commitment to loving God and neighbour?* As the commandment to love God and neighbour becomes familiar, as the larger culture drifts deeper into other pursuits and as the vagaries of life distract, the impulse to live deeply according to these words can fade. For some congregations, reclaiming a meaningful sense of connection to God is at the core of their challenge. For others, the challenge lies with reawakening love of neighbour. For many, it is both. It is worth noting that according to the grammatical construction of the Luke version of this passage, to love God is to love neighbour; to love neighbour is to love God. We cannot do one without the other, though beginning with either love can help us find our way to a fuller life defined by the great commandment.

## What shall we do?

At Credence, we advise congregations to pay attention to the “crumbs” God leaves for us to follow. Said otherwise, it is our conviction that the direction congregations are meant to follow is already visible. The task is to learn how to see and then to respond to that seeing accordingly. There are multiple ways to practice seeing God’s “crumbs”. When congregations are invited to reflect on their current reality, listen carefully to one another and one another’s longings and dreams, and hold these dreams in prayer they are practicing seeing.

As your congregation listens, dreams and discerns together, you may wish to review the following initiatives taken by other congregations in order to help you imagine a sense of direction for yourselves.

### What dreams have other churches put into practice?

**The Two Streams Congregation:** This type of congregation maintains the tried-and-true while investing money in creative ministry ideas. In some cases, congregations develop two churches in one (the existing model and the new experimental-worship model); in other congregations, the new initiative is programmatic in nature rather than worship-oriented.

- Some congregations with children and youth invest heavily in this cohort. This can include (a) hiring a children, youth and young adult minister; (b) reviewing the Sunday morning structure to ensure it is welcoming to children and youth; (c) creating attractive play spaces in/near where

---

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from Luke 10:27. See also Matthew 22:37-39.

parents and other adults gather for coffee; (d) establishing midweek children's ministries such as Logos, Godly Play or Messy Church and youth groups for older children; (e) building meaningful 1:1 pastoral care connections between the youth minister and youth; (f) establishing a mentoring program between adults and youth from the congregation; (g) inviting neighbourhood families to join in children / youth events. Some programs (such as LOGOS) create relationships with members of the community by inviting parents to co-participate in the leadership of the program.

- For congregations that are aging and tired, the two streams idea has sometimes involved inviting a new more experimental worshipping community to form in the building (sometimes under the umbrella of the same church) with the intention that at some point the new worshipping community will overtake the old one.

**The Congregation Focused on their Natural Demographic:** As congregations take stock of who is / is not coming to their congregations, they can “follow the flow of the river” by targeting their primary demographic as the focus of their priorities.

- One congregation observed that they were mostly seniors and responded to this reality by making seniors the focus of their mission. This approach was especially successful as the congregation was located in a seniors-focused community. The congregation modified their baby room by replacing toys with reclining chair and began programs specifically targeted to seniors. In the congregation's first year under this new commitment, they had several baptisms – of seniors.
- Another congregation observed that several of their new people were members of the many homes for developmentally delayed individuals in their area. This congregation considered allowing their relationship with these homes to become their focus as a congregation.

**The Congregation Focused on their Neighbourhood:** Congregations can renew themselves by noting and attending to needs in their immediate neighbourhood.

- One congregation was located near a hospital and owned the house next to the church. Because this hospital served people from the far north it was regularly looking for places to house people waiting for surgery and/or family members in the city supporting those needing health care. The church refurbished the house to become a house of mercy for those coming to the hospital near them for medical care.
- Another congregation was next to a courthouse. The pastor observed that not infrequently, those who had been charged with an offense came for support from her following their hearing as the courthouse had no chapel. This type of observation is helpful – it can become a way of focusing the congregation's mission.
- Members of a one congregation established a very good bakery near their church. The bakery became a gathering point for the local community and served to reinvigorate the neighbourhood in which they were nestled.

**The (almost) Single-Mission Congregation with Simplified Structures:** When congregations are small, they can scarcely afford to manage the structures and programs they once supported when they were larger. As a result, smaller congregations sometimes rally around a single “big” project, while allowing smaller

projects to proceed alongside the larger project. This is a programmatic approach to renewal.

- A rural congregation, far removed from an urban center, had received a meaningful endowment and wondered how to use it. They decided to invite and host a “big name” speaker each year drawing people from across the area – people who would not normally have the opportunity to hear such speakers. This mission has given a sense of meaning and purpose to the congregation and creates a yearly experience of being “full to the rafters.”
- An urban congregation in a low-income community in small numbers saw a natural gifting in the congregation in the area of carpentry. The congregation began offering free house repairs for community residents thereby reawakening a connection between the community and the congregation.
- A small congregation on the edge of a larger city saw its numbers dwindle following a painful conflict when many people left. As the congregation healed from its conflict, the people recommitted themselves to one another. In addition, following the passions of the people in the church, they established two mission foci: Prison-ministry and knitting prayer shawls.

Smaller congregations must often right-size their lay structures. The following are two examples of simplified structures:

- One congregation whose numbers were down to 45 chose to retain only one lay committee in the church – the church council. The council manages key congregational decisions and members also function as congregational elders. Once per quarter, the council hosts a catered dinner for the congregation. Following dinner, people gather around tables according to their interests (worship planning, fellowship planning, etc.). These ad hoc small groups plan activities/worship/etc. for the congregation for the coming quarter according to the table they are at. People are free to switch to a new area of interest at the next quarter’s dinner.
- Another congregation established two groups: Elders (responsible for faith formation) and Council (responsible for business decisions). These groups work with ad hoc subgroups to plan congregational activities. For this strategy to function clear lines of communication and a clear understanding of mutual accountability must drive the structure.

**The Start-Over Congregation:** These congregations imagine themselves as church plants. They tend to be very small to begin. They shed themselves of many of their “how we do things around here” traditions, many programs and go back to the basics of the basics. They commit to Bible Study, prayer and gathering for worship and fellowship. The operative word is that they commit. They commit to placing their prayer, Bible Study and gathering together at the center of what they do for at least one year. They might meet in uncomfortable spaces. They might intentionally invite some key new faces to join the experiment. They might fail or they might thrive. The point is that they are experimental, rebuilding on the old.

**The Small Group Ministry Congregation:** Some larger churches revitalize by investing in small group ministry allowing small groups to become a key location for congregational engagement, mutual support, prayer and vitalization. Statistically, it is known that people can only “belong” to a certain number of

people at any given time. Moreover, it is difficult to break into a congregation without at least a few deeper connections with a few people. Small groups allow for both belonging and a vehicle by which people can “enter” the larger congregation.

While some congregations see small groups as something very formal with a clear structure and purpose, others allow small groups to be much more self-directed allowing for multiple ways of being a small group together. While the small group strategy is common in evangelical churches, mainline churches have also picked up on the relationship-building opportunities associated with small groups.

**The Relationally-Focused Congregation:** In addition to small group ministries, many congregations find creative ways to spend time together while also reaching out to the community, including but not limited to: (a) board game gatherings; (b) puzzle nights; (c) hymn sing evenings; (d) winter/summer retreats; (e) guess-who-is-coming-to-dinner events; (f) yoga nights; (g) pickle ball gatherings; etc.

Some congregations lean deeply into becoming welcoming – appointing greeters not only at the door but throughout the building on Sundays to ensure newcomers feel welcome. Some appoint one or two people to invite guests to dinner each Sunday.

To strengthen relationships and a sense of connection in the congregation, many congregations make space for sharing as a part of their worship service.

Many non-mainline congregations have an active Adult Education hour in addition to Children’s Sunday School, which happens before or after the worship service. The Adult Education hour provides congregants with a way to connect with one another and with faith in a more “lateral” way rather than from the pulpit to the pews. Because Adult Education is often led by lay people, it also democratizes faith in the congregation. Moreover, it is easier for new people to find connection in a structured Adult Education hour than during coffee hour.

**The Creative-Ideas Congregation:** One congregation began an annual theatre production that draws actors from the congregation (across the age spectrum) and also draws in people from the neighbourhood. This became the congregation’s one big event per year; making space for intentional and intensive relationship building, generating momentum and providing a sense of focus for the congregation.

Another congregation established a café as a space for creativity, fellowship, music, programming, speaking events, places of meaningful and spiritual conversation, coffee shop church, etc. Some of these cafés include creative avenues whereby those without funds can enjoy coffee and food.

**The Pastor-supported Congregation:** In an age time of anxiety people are looking for leaders they want to follow. Some congregations intentionally choose and support pastors who can lead them into meaning and depth. This approach means (a) providing professional development support to the pastor to allow the pastor to preach meaningfully about the current context (this helps the congregation connect faith with the reality of the current time); (b) building time away for the pastor for prayer and reflection (this helps the pastor lead by example when it comes to faith formation, to lead prayerfully, to support spiritual vitality – and not to burn out); and (c) making space in the pastor’s job description to engage in at least



one activity in the local community that is not related to the church (this helps to build connections between the church and community).

**The Spiritual Disciplines Congregation:** The time in which we are living has generated a profound need for meaning, purpose, belonging and inner rest. Churches in this time cannot regenerate or sustain regeneration without grounding or re-grounding themselves in their spiritual commitments and disciplines. Some congregations have placed spiritual disciplines (teaching, practicing, modelling) at the center of their ministry. This type of focus can include one or more of the following:

- Open the building for morning prayers (advertise this to the community around the church);
- Take time during each Sunday morning's service for several minutes of silent prayer;
- Incorporate rituals or inviting an appreciation for mystery in the service (words of response after the Scripture is read, lighting of the Christ candle, responsive readings, space for silence after the sermon, etc.);
- Practice Lectio Divina in small groups; make spaces to (re)engage the Biblical text with fresh eyes;
- Invite one congregant per Sunday to share a small reflection related to their faith journey (this is different than a mission report);
- Engage in the ritual of confession & consolation;
- Invite congregants to take up meditation and prayer;
- Build a labyrinth in or near the church.

**The Congregation that Closes Meaningfully:** Some congregations see that their time of ministry is coming to a close. Congregations can choose to close well or poorly. Those that close well take time to discern how their money will be used, their history honoured, their losses grieved, the new reality welcomed, and care for one another maintained through this transition. There are multiple ways to close: Some congregations choose to be adopted by another congregation, some amalgamate, some meet as a small group following the closure of their congregation.

## Final Reflections

Your congregation's vocation "...is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need."<sup>4</sup> What is your congregation's greatest joy? What is the world's greatest need? How is God calling your congregation at this time? The ideas suggested in this document are idea starters meant to inspire, encourage and support your congregation as it considers how to live into God's call for its life together.

## Summary of Congregational Initiatives

1. **Two Streams:** Keep tried & true while investing in innovative worship or programs.
2. **Natural Demographic:** Allow natural demographic to become *intentional* focus of mission & outreach
3. **Neighbourhood:** Allow neighbourhood needs to become *intentional* focus of mission & outreach
4. **Single Mission for Small Congregations:** Choose one "big" project around which to rally. Right-size lay structure.
5. **Start Over:** Go back to basics of basics; reimagine congregation as a church plant.
6. **Small Group Ministry:** Create small groups to nurture community, mutual support, connection & conversations about faith.
7. **Relationship Building:** Find creative ways to nurture community, welcome & belonging (Adult Education hour, community-building activities, etc.).
8. **Creative Thinking:** Think outside the box and try something quite new or different.
9. **Pastoral Investment:** Invest in the your clergy's development to encourage your clergy to be well, to nurture their spirituality and to preach to the needs of this time.
10. **Spiritual Disciplines:** Help your congregation and the surrounding community (re)ground themselves spiritually by offering various avenues to encourage prayer, meditation and scripture reading.
11. **Meaningful Closure:** If your congregation is called to close, do so meaningfully.

---

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Buechner