

**St. Paul's United Church**  
**Critical Congregational Update Meeting**  
**March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Present:** Barb Thompson, Maude MacNamara, Bud Bird, Gary Llewellyn, Lita Llewellyn, Alma Bidlake, Ivy Bujold, Meghan Roebuck (minute taker), Lois Walker, Tammy Coughlan, Cathy Davis, Joe Wilby, Barbara Cull-Wilby, Shawn Meister, Beth Meister, Brad Webb, Erin Webb, Gain Simmons, Carole Peacock, Bill Paterson, Lois Paterson, Greg Morton, Dean Jones, Joan Shaw, Andrea Allen, Patty Trail, Sadie Miller, Ron Naugler, Mary Stickle, Chris Grant, Ralph Simpson, Elaine Hart, Hugh Lautard, Kelly Simpson, Marilyn Brewer, Debbie West, Vee Mariner, Ann Krause, Jane Blakely, Sharon Pond, Rev. Michelle Armstrong, Debbie Allison, Blaine Irving, Derrick Grant.

**Opening Remarks:** Blaine Irving at 11:50

- This meeting is to give an update on the work of the teams: Ecumenical Shared Ministry, Divesting St. Paul's Property, and Congregational Future. Your feedback will be taken to the Annual Meeting on April 7<sup>th</sup> to see where we go from here and next steps.

**Opening Prayer:** Rev. Michelle

**Ecumenical Shared Ministry Update:** Alanna Palmer

Team members: Carole Peacock, Bill Paterson, Alanna Palmer, Debbie Allison, Tammy Coughlan, Rev. Michelle

- Noted that the Special eNews sent out had a motif of a puzzle because St. Paul's is like this right now: many hands, many pieces but no puzzle box, so we don't know what the picture looks like.
- When the Leadership Team started talking about St. Paul's, it was about the shrinking congregation and growing expenses and is this sustainable. St. Andrew's was talking about shrinking congregation and not having a minister, but their building is good.
- This is when St. Andrew's sent a letter inviting Wilmot and St. Paul's to discuss Ecumenical Shared Ministry, more than what we all do during the summer. Meaning more than one denomination sharing a minister, building, programs, etc. but every denomination stays the same. Wilmot declined at this time and St. Paul's felt it was an opportunity to explore.
- The Team is talking with people at St. Andrew's and saying if we do this, what would we want to keep from St. Paul's. Feedback mentioned the Pantry and Brown Bag programs, faith formation groups, so we would need rooms and time for these. St. Andrew's mentioned helping us with the Pantry program and us helping with their Friday morning Breakfast program.
- Team is trying to put together some kind of template/agreement in what each church would do together while remaining their own entity and congregations as St. Paul's United and St. Andrew's Presbyterian.
- People have a choice to go to any other church or stay with St. Paul's in the downtown, with a downtown centered mission.
- The Team is in negotiations.

**Question:** Lita Llewellyn

Do we know for sure that St. Paul's building is not sustainable?

**Alanna:** The Board and Trustees and committee members had a building condition report done which identified repairs that are needed in the short-term worth millions of dollars. We looked at what would be an ethical choice: raise money to build a building or raise money to feed the poor, dress the naked, and visit the sick.

The expenses of the building are holding us back as a lot of our money is going towards that. If we divest ourselves of this and have the property used for other purposes, and we wouldn't have this financial burden on us... What could we do as a congregation to help the greater world.

**Blaine:** We need to be aware that our congregation is shrinking/aging with no expectations that this will change based on what we are doing now. Everything we think and talk about needs to keep this in the back of our minds.

**Alanna:** St. Paul's was built as a Presbyterian church and in 1925 when the UCC was formed, a group of Presbyterians in Fredericton that went and built their own church. St. Andrew's in a newer church, built of brick instead of stone, so it's easier for them to maintain it and there is not a lot of maintenance.

St. Andrew's church holds 400 people and St. Paul's holds 1100 people. Studies have stated that when a building is less than 40% occupied, please feel lonely and abandoned. When it's over 85% occupied, people feel crowded. The spot in the middle is perfect: 40 people from St. Andrew's and 40 people from St. Paul's.

**Question:** Gary Llewellyn

Any decisions that are taken today and in the foreseeable future, there are timelines to consider. I fear that we will lose something in the process given a great deal of planning is required and the bits and pieces are huge and widespread. So, whatever we decide that there are considerable timeframes, e.g. 5 years to get from A-D and steps along the way. Some steps could be offensive to some people, or maybe our timing is wrong. We need to move forward and process, which takes time and consideration at each step.

**Alanna:** Recap, Gary was talking about a timeline, how long will this take – maybe up to 5 years, decision points along the way, and could we retrace things if things go wrong.

We are aware of the timeline. Trustees have been ringing the alarm bell for a while saying that the church is not in good condition physically. We don't have enough volunteers to paint or fix things. So, Trustees have been on this in their 5-year plan, which came to a head last year when we recognized that our capital reserves and investments that were raised specifically for restoration of the church were very low. We had committed \$150,000 to repair the roof of the sanctuary which left us with only \$75,000. We don't have any money for big repairs or renovations, so we told the Board that we don't have the capital funds to do anything more than emergency maintenance work.

The Leadership Team got together to discuss the possibilities. People aren't flocking to church like they used to or come as often as they used to. We have about 100 donors that we can rely on for their contributions but there is not enough income to replace outgoing money, but we still want to be a downtown congregation that does good work for the downtown community. So, the offer from St. Andrew's came very serendipitous.

We are thinking about this offer and from our committee's perspective, we are looking at a year from the Annual Meeting to decide. We don't want to lose the opportunity.

**Question:** Derrick Grant

The steps in the process are complex. Wondering if there is any explanation of the physical assets of St. Paul's building, roof etc. that is crumbling and needs a lot of work. Why would someone want this building when we are leaving. What are the liabilities for our congregation in terms of the physical part of this and the vision forward.

**Alanna:** 80 people in a smaller church is more energetic, a synergy is created, more people coming together. People may come back to church if they see what we are doing and creating.

**Question:** Brad Webb

Brad's former church amalgamated and after it was done there was a resurgence with a bigger more vibrant group. More programs took place because 3 congregations came together.

**Rev. Michelle:** Moving to join St. Andrew's takes steps, Leaders are meeting up to 4 times per month to keep this congregation moving.

**Alanna:** There is a handbook for how to set up Ecumenical Shared Ministry (ESM), provided by the United Church.

**Ron Naugler:** Everyone should have a copy of the ESM Handbook. Very important to read.

**Meghan Roebuck:** The handbook will be on the website and paper copies available in the office.

**Question:** Bud Bird

Why are the congregations so small and what can we do to build the congregation. If we can't, we should just accept that the size of our congregation is as good as it will get. If this is a fact, then we can't afford this building.

The concept of joining with St. Andrew's or Wilmot to sustain our congregation and create synergy is the only choice we have. There is an energy in working together and this creates enthusiasm.

**Alanna:** The 1-year date is because June 2025 is the 100 Anniversary of the formation of the United Church of Canada. The vision is that we would be here at St. Paul's to celebrate this anniversary and have time to close services here.

**Rev. Michelle:** There is process in the pieces of this process and things can't be rushed.

**Blaine:** Timeline needs to be identified by the Board. If we still have St. Paul's after moving then there will be additional revenue requirements, continued building maintenance and extra expenses. We can't afford to pay for 2 buildings.

**Property Disposition Team:** Jane Blakely

Team members: Jane Blakely, Mel McGuigan, Mary Dingee-Jacobs, Blaine Irving, Cathy Davis, Andrew Steeves, Lois Walker

- Prospectus was created to give to people who want to purchase our property.
- Kindred Works: discussions of redeveloping St. Paul's property did not work out because Kindred Works lost their project funding. They also wouldn't demolish the sanctuary because of its historic status.
- Feelings of panic set in regarding cash flow and our finances.
- We commissioned and paid for an engineering report: the Building Condition Report, which identifies substantial and multimillion dollars of repairs needed over the next period of time.
- It was decided in November 2023 to investigate the sale of the church as our congregation wouldn't be able to raise the required funds for the repairs.
- The Team met with the Heritage Manager at the City of Fredericton in November 2023 to find out how to deal with the sale of our heritage building. They were enthusiastic about redevelopment opportunities.
- Contact was made with the Chair of the Regional Property Committee who sent us the Regional Property Management Manual that speaks to the processes.
- Questions were asked about Fair Market Value of like properties – if there is a market, vs Assessment Value for setting a listing price of the property. A realtor could give us some examples.

- It is preferred that the church is reused for community purposes, such as by another church.
- We received a letter through a realtor from the Better Life Church in December, which included their expression of interest to purchase our property. The response from the Board in January was that we were in the early stages of putting a package together, but they would receive it when it was completed.
- The Better Life Church came for a tour in March and really liked the building. They have been sent the Prospectus package including the engineering and insurance appraisal report but were told that St. Paul's must go back to the congregation.
- Now we need to decide what we want and how to proceed. Next steps are for us to determine what is needed for a Purchase & Sale Agreement transaction and retain financial, real estate, and legal expertise.
- The houses are the easy part to negotiate because they have Fair Market Value.
- The hall is challenging as it's not a stand alone building and tenants so what is its value.
- The sanctuary, which is what the Better Life Church wants, is complex so how do we fit that into the transaction.

**\*\* We need to know what the congregation wants to do before moving forward. We don't want to go too fast but also not too slow.**

**\*\* Do we want to empower a group of people to broker this deal to 90% to bring it back to the congregation or have congregational meetings for every decision?**

**We need clarity about what you like to see come back to the Annual Meeting**

**Blaine:** We have reached out to Better Life Church to see what they want and mean from their letter regarding process and timeline but couldn't get more information.

**Question:** Ralph Simpson

We don't own the church so how can we sell it and where does the money go if we aren't here?

**Jane:** We are the custodians/trustees of this property, and it is the congregation's opportunity and responsibility to sell the asset we've been blessed with in the same way we maintain it. If we are unable to sell it, the Region steps and disposes of the property. If we are successful in selling it, some of the funds go to the United Church of Canada and some funds stay with St. Paul's congregation.

The Region will be updated after this meeting and after the Annual Meeting to keep them in our process, and at some point, we submit a proposal to them saying what we want to do, and the money involved, of which a % goes to UCC and a % to St. Paul's.

**Alanna:** The percentage is 17%.

**Question:** Ralph Simpson

How and when do the people of the UCC get involved and how involved are they?

**Jane:** The Regional Representative can be on our committee and is included in correspondence and will meet with us whenever needed. The question of theology aligning with the buyer is not considered, we can sell the property to any church and place limitations on the use of the property in the sale agreement i.e. keeping the heritage status.

**Question:** Bud Bird

We need to hurry so the offer doesn't go stale. If our congregation can't support the church, then we have an obligation to sell. Have we called for a grand development opportunity? Do any other churches need our building? Public call for proposals?

**Jane:** That is the direction we were going, to prepare a Request for Expressions of Interest to distribute far and wide, but after the discussion with an architect who noted that our property was not great for redevelopment, we decided to find someone who wants to use it as it is and not go the way of the big development approach.

**Question:** Bud Bird

Does the sale of the property include the hall? And do we go with the first offer?

**Jane:** Yes, that is everything, the whole property. We jump at the first offer with a clear understanding of what we want to get out of it and see how negotiations go.

**Question:** Brad Webb

We don't have access to the trades people it would take to do the kind repairs we need to fix the church building, even if we had millions of dollars.

**Jane:** *If we were to come back to the Annual Meeting with a loose proforma sale package that we wanted to take forward, would people be comfortable with looking at that and discussing it?*

**Question:** Ralph Simpson

Is Better Life Church interested in sharing our space?

**Jane:** There was some discussion of that. They have an immediate need because they are renting space and getting bumped. But after discussions, it was decided it would be too difficult unless we are prepared to make a lot of changes. They have 200 people and a 2-hour service with things happening afterwards and parking would be a huge concern.

**Question:** Greg Morton

What happens to St. Paul's and where would we worship?

**Jane:** We would develop Ecumenical Shared Ministry with St. Andrew's and be St. Paul's in the St. Andrew's building.

**Question:** Joan Shaw

Do we have professional appraisals for the individual houses and the church property?

**Jane:** Yes, we have an appraisal that was done for insurance purposes but can't use it for sale purposes. We will require a new updated appraisal to use for the sale.

**Question:** Joan Shaw

What about Downtown United? Where does Wilmot stand, what's their position? St. Andrew's invitation popped up but weren't we talking about sharing ministry with Wilmot?

**Blaine:** Wilmot is not interested in Ecumenical Shared Ministry currently but wants to be kept in the loop. The Downtown United project has been delayed until the fall as we are busy with this.

**Question:** Bud Bird

I am very involved with starting the Downtown United study and was disappointed in the report because it's not tangible to amalgamate with Wilmot. Our congregation should accept the fact that we have to sell and that shared ministry with St. Andrew's is the path we should be taking.

**Community Communication Team:** Patty Trail

Team members: Ron Naugler, Roger Miller and Patty.

- The group has been trying to keep things going at St. Paul's while we are here.
- They are calling all the people who are not present to explain what is going on and get people's questions to bring forward.

**Closing Comments:** Blaine

- Thanked everyone for their time and attendance and this important meeting.
- Any information, questions, clarification of what's being expected at the April 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting is encouraged. Please reach out to Jane for Building the building, Alanna regarding Shared Ministry and Patty regarding reaching out to those in our community.

**Closing Prayer:** Rev. Michelle at 1:45pm.