

## **Final Report for Interim Ministry Sharon-Hope United Church Oct 15, 2017-June 30, 2019**

In August 2017, the pastoral relationship of 11 years between Sharon-Hope United Church and Rev. Kathryn Phillips ended as Rev. Phillips had accepted a call to another community of faith. There were several reasons that interim ministry was considered. The first was to allow space between a long term pastorate before another minister was called. The second was a theme of recurring conflict within the congregation. This had recurred several times over quite a few years and it was felt that this should be addressed before another call was made.

The Council members were asked for input into the goals for the period of interim ministry and the following were the goals identified at the beginning:

- To develop strategies to address areas of conflict within the congregation
- To develop a framework for the pastoral care team, including identifying educational needs for lay people
- To review the current governance model and facilitate a healthy functioning council
- To articulate the congregational identity and ministries through a visioning process
- To implement a stewardship program

As work began, the Transition Team added another goal:

- To improve communication within Council and between Council and the congregation

### **Goals**

#### **1. Conflict Resolution**

Rev. Leslie Sedore met with Council, teams within the congregation, staff and individuals in her first few weeks and learned about hurtful conflicts which were occurring. The Transition Team discussed these in several meetings before determining that we did not have the expertise to deal with the level of conflict that Sharon-Hope was experiencing.

The Transition Team recommended engaging Credence & Co. to work with us to assess, make recommendations and provide training to address conflict in a more positive, constructive manner. This work began in April 2018 with a congregational health assessment, which included interviews with randomly chosen individuals, key groups, and staff, as well as written surveys sent to the rest of the congregation. A summary report, which identified both positive aspects and areas of concern, was shared with the congregation in June 2018. From June 2018 to April 2019, Marg Van Herk-Paradis from

Credence & Co. has worked with Council, certain teams, Rev. Sedore, the Transition Team and the congregation on the recommendations coming from the report.

As the responses were held in confidence, the Transition Team was not able to identify specific issues from the past which may still be affecting the current environment. By having the opportunity to voice concerns it was hoped that people would be able to bring closure to what had occurred in the past. The work with Credence & Co. served to promote healthier relationships and a framework to deal with conflict in a healthier, more constructive fashion.

Feedback from the congregation in the spring 2019 included some enthusiastically positive comments, many that were cautiously optimistic and some which felt nothing had been accomplished. While we are now able as a congregation to engage in healthy, constructive conversations, we need to continually practice what we have learned and be ready to deal effectively with conflict in the future before it becomes irreparable.

## **2. Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care visitation had occurred before the interim period on an informal basis by members of the congregation with the minister and the pastoral charge nurse providing care during significant life events. It was felt that more structure was required to help ensure the needs of the congregation were being met.

A Pastoral Care Team has been formed and a system to track visitation was created. The team has held luncheons with worship twice a year for those unable to attend regular worship. A small group addressing grief, Healing and Hope, now meets monthly. Visitation continues by the minister and lay members.

A pastoral care workshop, sponsored by Living Presence Ministry, is happening in the area June 1 and is open to members of the congregation. This workshop will address aspects of a pastoral care visit as well as ideas to form a Pastoral Care Team. The pastoral care process needs to be expanded and strengthened to ensure we are meeting the needs of the congregation, and will need to be a priority for the next minister.

## **3. Improvement of the governance model**

There was a perception by some that the current Church Council model was not working effectively. The questions concerned the number of teams, but also the number of vacancies, Council procedures and lack of empowerment of the various teams.

Through further investigation, our sense was that the current structure is viable and working. We believe that the concerns were more related to unresolved conflict (noted earlier), a lack of trust and collaboration between Council members and between Teams, and a lack of communication between Council and the congregation. Through our work with Credence & Co. some of these concerns have been addressed. Some of the key vacancies on Council have been filled, and increased communication is occurring between Council and the congregation. We need to be better at recognizing the efforts of our staff and volunteers, and celebrate all that people do.

The Sharon-Hope United Church constitution was formally passed at the 2018 AGM after much work and discussion. Draft Team Guidelines (Mandates) have been developed and are currently being reviewed. These need to be finalized and taken to the AGM in early 2020 for ratification. Council has adopted a modified set of 'Robert's Rules' for conduct in Council meetings.

#### **4. Congregational Identity**

Sharon-Hope United Church lacked a common articulated congregational identity. Two separate committees had worked towards this goal without achieving vision and mission statements. It was felt that these are necessary to provide guidance, focus and direction to the minister, Council, teams, staff and the congregation, as well as how we present ourselves to the broader community.

Early in the interim period, two congregational meetings were planned by the Transition Team and Rev. Sedore. At the first, people listed what they loved about Sharon-Hope United Church and at the second, we developed a 'Wall of Wonder', a historical timeline of our church. Participants were asked for their concerns and hopes for our church.

This was continued with our work with Credence & Co. Four congregational meetings facilitated by Marg Van Herk-Paradis helped us learn to work together in a constructive fashion. Several documents including 'What We Think We Know', 'Our Common Story', 'Strategic Anchors and Behaviours' and draft Vision, Mission and Core Values statements were written based on this work. Selected topics were also discussed, including the purpose and use of Memorial Funds, and communication.

The final work on Vision and Mission statements needs to be completed. This will be submitted to Council for review and approval. It will then be shared with the congregation for approval.

#### **5. Stewardship**

A stewardship campaign has not been conducted by Sharon-Hope for a very long time. While a committee was formed in 2016, the chair of the committee stepped down shortly after taking the role, and the committee is no longer active. We believed that reactivating a stewardship committee to develop and implement a stewardship campaign would help to inspire the congregation.

It became apparent to the Transition Team the unhealthy conflict within the church needed to be addressed and work to develop a healthier climate within the congregation was needed before a new stewardship team could be established. Sharon-Hope remains without a Stewardship Team or a leader for this important area. Council will need to take responsibility to move this forward.

Although formal stewardship team was not established, there have been successes; a 'Time and Talents' fundraiser involving 60% of the congregation in sharing their talents, and a fun skit regarding 'PAR' increased the number of PAR participants.

#### **6. Communication**

This goal was added because we believed that the inability to communicate effectively (within Council, between Teams, and between Council and the congregation) and the dependence on informal channels of communication were contributing to the conflict within Sharon-Hope.

Our consultant from Credence & Co. worked with Council on effective communication between individuals and within groups. This training occurred as part of Council meetings.

Minutes for Council and Team meetings have been available, and are now more accessible. Council shares updates from meetings with the congregation after each meeting, and the Finance Team publishes a statement monthly. Discussions at Council meetings are more effective. The congregational meetings have been well attended, with many more voices being heard during the discussions. At the last congregational meeting, the topics were vision and mission, and communication. Following the congregational meetings, the participants felt more informed, more involved, more positive, and more part of the church community.

Feedback from the congregation has indicated that formal communication has improved, especially between Council and the congregation, but that informal communication is not always effective. The practice of communicating with the appropriate team or individual, with questions, concerns or suggestions, needs to become the norm and our leaders need to be welcoming when approached. We need to continue to review our communication methods with a view to improve what, how and to whom we communicate.

### **Challenges/ Issues That Emerged**

As the interim ministry started, the Transition Team knew there were conflicts within the congregation but it took an extended period of time before the team understood how deep seated the issues were (> 6 months). The Transition Team determined that the conflicts were beyond the skill set of the team and the interim minister and therefore the recommendation to seek an external agency was made to Council. The services of Credence & Co. were contracted to initially assess the health of Sharon-Hope United Church and present their findings to the congregation, and later to work with Council, the Transition Team and staff to facilitate healthier practices and to facilitate four congregational meetings. This process has been lengthy and, at times, people wanted it to move more quickly and to be more directive. Some members of the congregation had very strong opinions at the start of the process.

Credence & Co. began its work with Sharon-Hope United Church in April 2018. The initial report from Credence was shared with the congregation in June 2018. Work continued with Council and the congregation until April 2019. Although the majority engaged in the process and found it helpful, there are a minority who remain dissatisfied with the process and its outcome.

Early in the interim period, a proposal to develop a long-term rental agreement with a Montessori school was presented. This greatly increased the conflict between several factions in the congregation as there were disagreements on how it was to be executed and managed. This resulted in several people leaving the congregation. Ultimately, the rental agreement was finalized but the owner cancelled the lease and the school did not open.

There were multiple significant deaths in the congregation in a short period of time (November 2017-January 2018). The congregation needed time to grieve and this detracted from the interim process.

Initially, the interim period was to be 2 years (October 2017-October 2019). Rev. Leslie Sedore asked to end the interim period in June 2019 to potentially allow the next minister the summer period to become oriented to the charge.

### **Community of Faith's Mission and Purpose**

Developing a sense of identity was one of the goals for the interim period. As mentioned earlier, several attempts had been made to articulate the communal identity of Sharon-Hope United Church and had been unsuccessful.

Rev. Leslie Sedore began the dialogue with the congregation, reviewing the history of Sharon-Hope and exploring the strengths, the challenges and the hopes for the future. This work was continued with our consultant from Credence & Co. through a series of congregational meetings. The result was three documents: 'What We Think We Know', 'Our Common Story', and a draft version of Vision and Mission Statements and Core Values (see Appendix). These documents have been shared with the congregation and modified based on feedback that was received. There was consensus that they would be accepted in principle during the course of the congregational meetings. The Vision and Mission statements and Core Values need to be finalized and formally ratified.

### **Impacts on the Health and Spiritual Life**

At the beginning of the interim period, there were vacancies in key positions on Council, including Chair and Vice Chair. There are fewer vacancies on Council, although there is not a chair for the Stewardship Team or the Pastoral Care and Health Team. The Council meetings are more focused with business being delegated to the teams, and the work of the teams being respected. Discussions at Council meetings are directed to issues rather than individuals. The Teams which report to Council are active with volunteers coming forward to serve.

In worship, sermons are related to daily life. There has been intentional interim messaging in worship. There are multiple active small group ministries which have allowed people to explore their faith and build community. There are several new members who have become actively involved in the life of the congregation.

Through the congregational meetings, we have improved our listening skills. We are able to hear differing opinions and explore them through a healthy discussion. Many

more people have been heard and their opinions have been held with respect. We have acknowledged that all opinions matter and that no individual speaks for all. These practices need to continue into the future to allow our new skills to become the cultural norms of the congregation.

Rev. Leslie Sedore brings a strong sense of vitality to her role as interim minister. Her many positive traits are contagious and have created a wonderful atmosphere within the congregation. She has taught us that worship can be fun. She has challenged us to assess ourselves and to seek the direction we wish to move in as a congregation. She has been a marvellous asset to our interim period.

### **Summary**

As mentioned earlier, except for the goal of creating a Stewardship Program, there has been significant progress made on each of the other goals: Conflict Resolution, Pastoral Care, Governance, Congregational Identity, and Communication. In each area, we continue to have ongoing work, but also have identified areas which require focus. These tasks are being passed on to Council to continue.

Prior to writing this final report, we asked for feedback from the congregation. Some of the comments we received were enthusiastically positive, many were cautiously optimistic and some felt that nothing was accomplished. Themes that emerged were:

- Most of the congregation is trying to move forward and are able to accept differences.
- We need to move forward as a healed congregation ready to present ourselves as a welcoming and inclusive church.
- Positive changes need to be continued.
- We need to appreciate the gifts which we have and let go of past issues.
- Ongoing work is required to respect and appreciate the work done by others.

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous gifts of Rev. Leslie Sedore and her willingness to share these with us; her faith, her wisdom and insights, her joie de vive and her amazing sense of humour.

We also acknowledge the incredible work of Marg Van Herk-Paradis, Senior Consultant, Credence & Co. We thank Living Waters Presbytery for their generous financial support for our work with Credence & Co. and the guidance provided by the representatives from Presbytery who were part of our Transition Team.

