

Pacific Mountain Region & Trinity United Church
CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT RETREAT
December 2-3, 2022

A group of about 40 people gathered with Robin and Kathy Davies (Pacific Mountain Region) to explore the intersection of God's yearning for the world and Trinity United Church's unique and particular call in response to that yearning *in this time* and *in this community* and *in this context*. The intention was to engage these as spiritual questions for discernment and prayer and to listen deeply to each other, to the world around us and to the movement of the Spirit. Discerning **'Who are we?'** as Trinity United Church (*identity question*), **'Who is our neighbor?'** (*context question*) and **'To where/what is God calling us?'** (*purpose question*) creates possibilities for wise and Spirit-led action.

On Friday we focused on the identity-question by looking at the history and stories of TUC and how they have shaped our current sense of identity and values. Saturday morning, we focused then on the context-question of 'who is our neighbour'. Saturday afternoon was spent in a process of purpose-discernment, listening for where and what Spirit may be moving and calling us to be and to do at this time.

The following report is drawn from notes taken through each section, including reflections on possible next steps in discerning a ministry plan.

Theological frame

- **Isaiah 11:9** *The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.* This speaks to the BIG why – what is your call? To proclaim God's Shalom – the peaceable kingdom.
- **Acts 1:8** You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This speaks to the 'what'. And with these words, Jesus ascends into heaven leaving his church to determine *how* to fulfill this mandate.

Process frame – Difference between discernment and decision

Discernment is not the same as decision making. Reaching a decision can be straightforward as we consider our goals and options, perhaps list the pros and cons of each possible choice, and then choose the action that meets our goal most effectively. Discernment, on the other hand, is about listening and responding to that place within us where our deepest desires align with God's desire. The work of this weekend gathering was part of discerning purpose and ministry at TUC and then aligning our resources to support that purpose and ministry.

CURRENT IDENTITY

History Timeline: The intention of the time-line exercise is not to create an accurate historic reference, but to highlight and identify the events and stories that we believe have shaped our Identity, Values & Culture

		Programs/ Ministries	Partners /Outreach
1935	Camp Hurlburt established	Camp Hurlburt	
1953	Vernon United Church 27 st & 30 Ave building opened		
1954			Cubs start
1973		Spice and Sprouse Couples Club	
1970's		Kids involvement	
		Sunday School and 3 generations in church	
1985	Old church burned down		
	Shared space with Anglican Church after fire		
1986	UCC apology to Indigenous Peoples		
1987	Planning for new church dedication committee		
1980s & 90's		Marriage Encounter / Couples groups	
1987	New Church Building, beautiful sanctuary		
1988	UCC official recognizes and ordains LGBT ministers		
1989	Bob Thompson arrives		
1990's	Welcoming gay people and couples		
1990's		Jim Hannna's Youth Group, musicals, wonderful experience for teens	
1994	Collapse of youth group, crisis split congregation, questions of 'inclusion', judgement		
		Amazing Music Program	
1998-2015			Transition House gift giving at Christmas
			Refugee campaigns: Vietnam, Kosovo, Syria, Ukraine – ongoing
	10 years when ministers and youth leaders changed rapidly		
1995		Healing Pathways (Healing Touch) started and room opened	
2000	Blair and Shelagh arrive		
	Don McNair – Sunday School		
		Big night of celebration with Drama, Choir, FUN	
		Supper club	
2003			Amnesty meeting
		Men's group, Family Fun Group, UCW	

2005		Jazz vespers	
	Camp Hurlburt Capital Campaign		
2009			Ecumenical Concerns Committee / Street Lunches
2009-2011	Intentional Interim Ministry		
2010			Emergency Food action Network begins TUC champions
2010		Creative Youth Ministry	
	Collapse of Camp Hurlburt development – people leave		
			Active outreach
		Labyrinth painted in hall	
2011	Jeff Seaton’s ministry begins		
2011-2014	Sale of camp Hurlburt, difficult process as trinity makes decision		
2017	TUC hosts cultural competency course		
		Women’s retreats	
2018			
			World food day lunches
		Family Christmas eve services	
		Men’s Thanksgiving Dinners	
		Loss of hymns that you grew up with	
		Granddaughter in Sunday School	
2019	Robin and Linda arrive		
		Social group, welcoming new people, Maranatha group	
2019		Walking labyrinth	
2019		Christmas dinner	
2020	COVID		
		On-line services	
		Choir stops	
	Gratefulness for gifted spiritual leadership,		
	Grateful for personal support received		
2021	Return to in-person worship / Sunday school appreciated		
2022		Lots of Tots, Launch of Affirm Process	

Group Reflections on History Exercise: Communal Worship has always been very important, as has the expectation of social action. The church was seen to have Institutional and Social Power and Authority¹. Overseas and Home Missions mattered deeply. Families looked for Spiritual and Social formation, marriage connections. Faith community set behavioral standards. Camping experience very important. Rites of Passage mattered: life celebrations, grief support, honouring of Holy days.

What has changed over time a wider sense of openness has developed with inclusion and diversity now said to be welcomed more fully. The Congregation is no longer perceived to be at the center of power and influence

What continues to be: Trinity as a place of Sanctuary and Communal Worship, focused by Scripture, Prayer, Thanksgiving. Trinity continues to be a place of community and social connection, though is no longer central to this as people now have a lot more options. TUC reflect its community and context

What has been Important to TUC: Music, Dance, Theatre (Youth Musicals), Children, Fellowship, Outreach, UCW, the practice of being affirming and welcoming

What has been challenging: There have been communication and process challenges – especially when facing contentious decisions (sale of Camp Hurlburt, Jim Hanna's departure). There has been a pattern of congregational splits and re-building after difficult processes

Values and Aspirations as seen throughout history: Family, community, outreach, servanthood, generosity, volunteers, elders, heart centered, deep caring and deeply attached, value each person as they are.

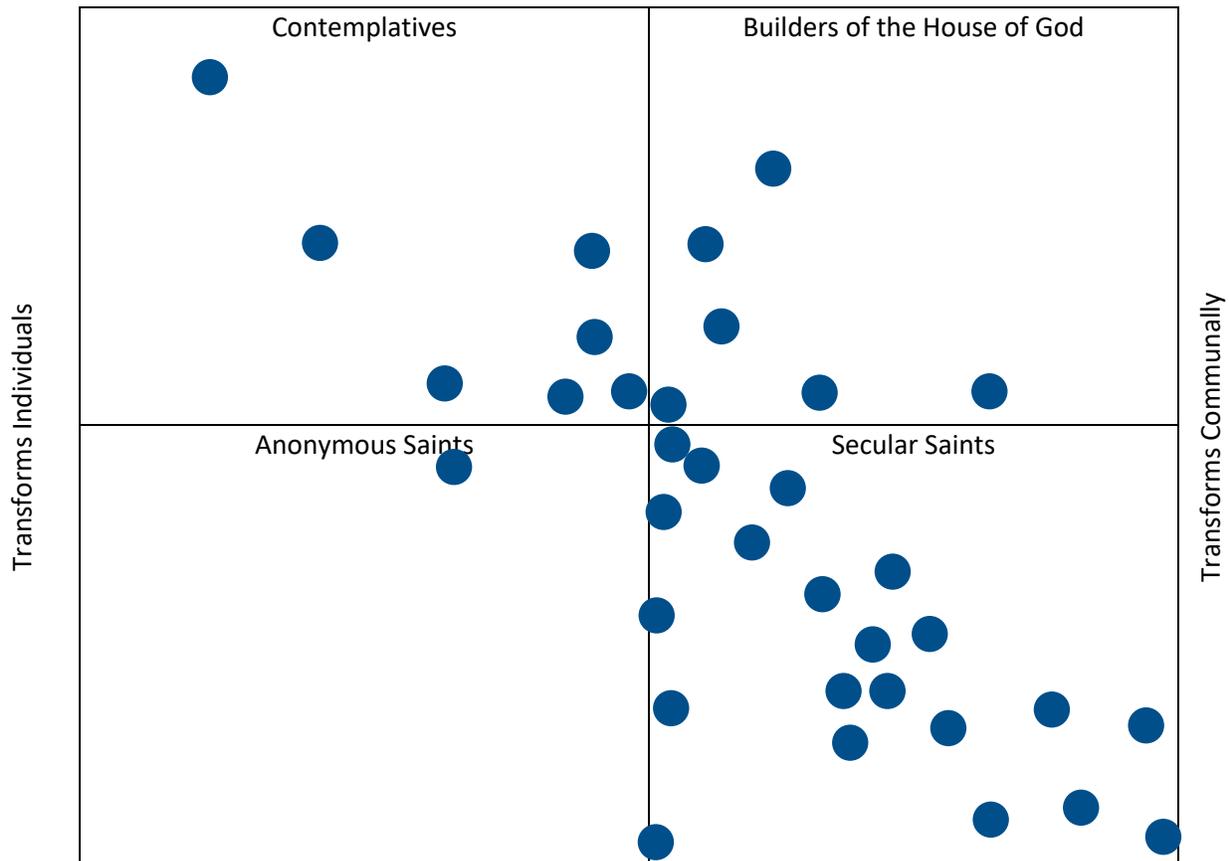
Core Purposes: Opportunities for communal Worship. Community. Spiritual Nourishment and Connection. Expression of God's Shalom by living / sharing the Social Gospel. Being relevant to the Social and Spiritual Communal Life of those around us. Passing on sacred stories and traditions to the next generation.

Additional Note: During the Timeline discussion there was quite a lot of 'energy' and what seemed like unprocessed reactions to the events surrounding Jim Hanna's departure. It is a story that appears to be difficult to discuss. It caused a significant split in the congregation and may continue to impact on the community of faith 30 years later. As TUC begins the process of becoming an Affirming Community of Faith, the history of this event and its impact may be important to name and to work through – to offer clarity where possible on the events, to resolve unspoken hurts that are still impacting members, and to lift out any learnings that can help the community of faith move forward on its affirming journey.

Theological Identity Exercise

Using the Meads Quadrangle of Evangelism, we reflected individually on what we believe about God through our personal experience and then shared these reflections in small groups. A graph of the quadrants was created, with each person identifying their own position on these questions.

- **Internal / External:** From 'My relationship with God is an internal personal experience one-on-one with God' to 'My relationship with God is an external experience through relationship with God's world and creation'.
- **Individual / Communal:** From 'Transformation happens through my individual experience' to 'Transformation happens through my communal experience'.



Contemplatives: people who go deep with God; quiet, seeking God's presence. They are the heart of a community of faith's prayer life and can be gifted spiritual directors.

Anonymous Saints: simply go about their business day-to-day with a sense of call. They operate out of faith, though that may not be visible to others. They are often the 8:00 church goers, they don't like groups and won't serve on the governing body no matter what.

Secular Saints: are aware of injustice and feel people's needs. They want to change things and will form task groups or committees to redress wrong. Frequently involved in community action or ecumenical groups, they are often impatient with those who do not sign on or see things the way they do.

Builders of God's Household: are aware of how much people need each other and really care about the structures of religious life. They help people find place in community and nurture the life of the community of faith, working on commissions and worship committees.

Group Reflections: This may not be fully representative of the congregation (ie Anonymous Saints / Contemplatives may not come to congregational workshops) but does show a clear leaning towards community, outreach, social gospel ethos. The table groups also reflected back the value of gathering and faithing about faith and spiritual lives with each other in small groups.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Our 'Homework' was to drive through the community on the way into the workshop on Saturday morning with a reflective stance, asking: *who is our neighbour? ...what gives you hope? ...what breaks your heart? ...what changes do you notice in the community?* We then shared in groups of 3. There were no written notes, but it led to a reflection on the needs and neighborhood of Vernon.

Who are those living in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Ends of the Earth in our community?ⁱⁱ

- *The people of Jerusalem are the current members:* They know the traditions and the 'lingo', Christian, similar and familiar to us, we support each other
- *Those of Judea are like us (current members) but* are not currently active. They may come occasionally for baptisms or Christmas and Easter, and when they do come, they are not seen as "different". They include Christians from other denominations, university students, young adults, children of members, spiritual but not religious, summer homes.
- *Those in Samaria on the other hand are people who are different from us, though they live close by so we may run into them or meet them occasionally.* If they do happen to come to church, we see them as different and may not know how to respond: Cultural diversity in Vernon, Indigenous peoples, Sikh, not all Christian, tourists, political differences, queer people, immigrant workers, homeless, mental health challenges.
- *Those at the end of the earth live relatively far away.* We would never expect to meet them or know their names, but we feel a responsibility to or for them: World community, Natural disasters, world Christians, world council of churches, war torn areas, famine affected areas, NGO's, those in penitentiary.

CURRENT PURPOSE

We discern our unique vocation and identity, 'call' within our current context, using the following 8 step process:

1. **Frame the Question that asks** Who we are, who our neighbour is, and what God is calling us to do or to be. This is about the articulation of our vocation: identity, context, and call. An example could be:
What is God yearning for in our community and what is TUC's unique call in Response?
Questions that arose in discussion before articulating this first step included:
How do we enter into relationship with our community – ourselves, neighbours, creation? What does God want of Us? What does our community want of us?
Where is God active? What transformational difference are we called to make in the lives of those we serve and our community? Who is my neighbour?
How to shift from lead to a relationship of mutuality and listening?
2. **Ground question in Core Values**
Values and Purpose as discerned earlier included importance of Family, Community, Outreach, Servanthood, generosity, volunteers, Elders. It was all to be heart centered, deep caring and deeply attached, reflecting value for each person as they are. Communal Worship, Community, Spiritual Nourishment and Connection, Expression of God's Shalom by living / sharing the Social Gospel, Relevant to the Social and Spiritual Communal Life, Passing on sacred stories and traditions to next generation
3. **Shed ego and bias.** What do I need to let go of to make room for God's gifts and direction? Fear, Preconceived ideas, awareness of our particular lens of privilege, ego, impatience, patience, expectations, desire for recognition, why can I not leave, 'change the ratio' *as a response to quote "90% of what the church does can be done without the Holy Spirit, be still and allow Spirit to move*

4. **Explore:** What is God yearning for in our community and what is TUC' unique call in Response? We clearly have enough to provide resources to others, to be partners, and so where can we be a support, respond to the inequalities in our community? We have music and ministry to touch the souls of people. We are able to connect seniors in our community by means of church social gatherings, singing, support. We care to connect with youth and teens, and are wanting to know what God is yearning for in the lives of young people? We are aware of the need for food and clothing. We would offer others a sense of loving and inclusive Presence. We would be transmitters/channels of God's message through experiences of loving inclusive sacredness. We would be characterized by the welcome and healing peace that we offer – safe place – the housing of body and soul. We would reflect how God is already at work in our lives and everywhere. We want to explore how best to use all our resources for healing, wholeness. We would engage with the community in order to learn what community needs. Listen. Look for alignment with partners. Do what we can to establish the shalom of housing and food security. There is an urgency to take action to ensure resources are effectively utilized for the future. We would take care of each other.
5. **Weighing:** - What is your most 'compelling' aspiration... what stirs you to action and response? What is emerging:

It seems that TUC would continue to be a Community of Faith that seeks to be a voice of the social gospel in Vernon - in particular, a voice of inclusion, of Gods belovedness of all, the sacred presence honored in all exactly how they are, in service of Shalom - A place of healing and wholeness. We would be a voice *not of Gods judgment but Gods love* – a voice of lovingly inclusive sacredness that touches the soul of people. There is a particular passion to respond to the inequalities in your community. This is a community of faith with abundance and sense of urgency to take action to ensure resources are effectively utilized for the future. A worshiping community gathering for spiritual nourishment and connection, sacred presence, sacraments/ communion as well as wanting to be as effective as possible in passing on sacred stories and traditions to next generation. We would be a listening community of faith seeking to be in partnership/ mutual relationship with those around you - Taking Care of Each other

Next steps in Discernment:

6. **Take time for prayer and reflection**
7. **Testing with wider congregation**
8. **Movement towards decision**

The Retreat closed with a commitment to continue the process of discernment with the wider congregation. The notes from the retreat will be sent to Rev Robin. He will gather a small group of volunteers to lead the next steps.

Next steps & Process recommendation:

Trinity United Church has a robust vision, mission, focus and values statement (see appendix) that was developed in 2012. The work at the congregational retreat confirmed that TUC continues to be aligned with this vision and these values. The next step is further to discern our ministry priorities and then to develop a ministry plan for the congregation based on the vision, values and priorities for ministry. The congregational retreat was the beginning of this process.

Next steps:

- (1) The Board approves this document as a good representation of the workshop and as what we need to be doing next.
- (2) Robin shares this document with all workshop attendees
- (3) Robin invites a small group of attendees to form a team to work with whomever is called to lead this process. That person is chosen.
- (4) The team begins by naming various ministry groups within TUC. *These groups are to include those related to Worship, Pastoral Care, Children/Youth, Outreach, TUC Community and Faith Formation, Church Community, Hospitality as well as any others - and the Board. The team must develop a questionnaire that sets up what is needed to help groups form the 'statement of identity, context and purpose' as well as answer other questions as set by the team.*
- (5) The team distributes that document to those various ministry groups to draw input from them with regard to synthesizing a possible 'question' that states our identity, context and purpose as well as any other input they may offer to this process.
- (6) Once there is clarity around our statement of identity, context and purpose, the team then begins the process of discerning and creating a ministry plan.

Kathy Davis would be available to assist with the next steps of this process – *IF NEEDED*:

The team would be looking to answer questions such as:

- Where are we seeing the Spirit at work at TUC what is needing to be affirmed, and what needs to be released?
 - What are the priorities you sense the Spirit inviting us to focus on over the next few years that align with the vision, values and emerging priorities of TUC?
 - Where is God already at work in our wider community and how do we better come alongside? What partnership do we already have in our community? In what ways are individuals already connected beyond our walls to help build those connections? What demographic information may be helpful from the city of Vernon, census data, or other community reports?
- (7) The team would identify 1-3 priorities for ministry over the next year, including a 1-2 line explanation outlining the needs for each key area priority for the short, mid and long term.
 - (8) The team would list the actions the community of faith will engage as they develop these priorities within a timeline (next steps, future steps)
 - (9) The team would create a resource stewardship plan to align your resources with your ministry. Resources come in several forms: skills and talents of people, time, property, and from a variety of funding streams and sources. How are the gifts we have been given (as individuals, as a community) enabled to flow through us and into the world. Identify what resources will be needed for each key ministry area: People, skills and gifts, finances, time, space – use of facilities.

THIS IS THE POINT AT WHICH WE WILL HAVE MOST CLARITY RE THE FUTURE NEEDS AND USE OF OUR BUILDING FACILITIES

Appendix: Trinity United Church Vision and Values Statement

Vision

Trinity United Church envisions a world that lives in the wholeness of God's shalom.

Mission

Trinity United Church is a Spirit-led Christian community practicing love rooted in the example of Jesus.

Focus of Our Work

To build and enhance relationships, nurture spirituality, and model sustainability.

Values

To help us in our focus of work, we the people of Trinity United church will:

welcome and celebrate diversity

display healthy boundaries and healthy practices in our relationships

work through conflict respectfully and inclusively

build, support and empower leadership from within our church and our community

champion social justice

support each other through life changing experiences

be led by the Spirit

foster vibrant worship and spiritual practices

respect the traditions of The United Church of Canada

be open to other faith journeys

model the change we want to see in the world

act with a social, economic and environmental consciousness

demonstrate accountable and transparent practices and decision making.

ⁱ It was pointed out how church buildings, schools and courtrooms were all traditionally clustered together.

ⁱⁱ Drawn from the work of Gil Rendle