

New Beginnings House Group Leaders Report

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Compiled by: Rev. Lisa Aide, Janet Brigham-Turowski, Nancy Carle, Audrey Landon, Jim Marchand, & Anne McLachlan

Micah 6:8 – Showing Proper Respect before God *“It is quite simple, do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.”* (E. H. Peterson)

From November 9, 2023 to January 10, 2024, 48 people from Paulin’s congregation met in small groups led by Janet, Nancy, Audrey, Jim & Anne. The groups were a mix of people who had been attending Paulin for many years and people who had been attending for a few years. We had representation from Gen X, Boomers, and the Silent Generation. Thanks to everyone who participated in this process of discerning God’s vision for Paulin.

The House Group Leaders met with Rev. Aide on January 29, February 5, & March 4, 2024 to review the group discussions and generate this report. It is a report to be received by the congregation and approved by the session.

Working through the New Beginnings material, the House Groups discussed Paulin’s current situation in terms of the 5 features of a vital congregation – Clarity of Purpose (the Why), a focus on Discipleship rather than social club membership, being Contextually Relevant to the Community around our church, having Passion & Energy, and being able to Mobilize Resources for Mission. We reviewed the December 2021 Assessment Report completed by Rev. Mavis Currie. While many participants felt it was out-dated because of delays due to the COVID pandemic (who knew that we would have restrictions affecting our community and healthcare services for 3 years), it gave us a better understanding of the history of our congregation and the context of our community. We discussed what it means to be Missional – Transforming Lives, Transforming the Community, and Equipping/Training People for Mission. We ranked ourselves along the Missional Continuum. We generated 6-word stories. We reviewed 3 possible future stories: Stay the Same with no Change, Re-define our Mission to transform lives in the community, or a Parallel Start.

What we learned from the New Beginnings Process about our Congregation:

We have a range of views about how our congregation is doing in terms of being a missional church. While we want to honour our past traditions and provide spiritual opportunities (i.e., worship) that are comforting for the older generations, we recognize that we need to change and provide a variety of spiritual opportunities to transform lives within our congregation, provide training to our volunteers, and transform lives within our community.

Five Features of a Vital Congregation:

The 5 House Groups viewed different strengths and weaknesses in our congregation in terms of our vitality.

Strongest Features:

- There was consensus that our strongest feature is our **ability to mobilize our resources for mission** (although we tend to donate money or items rather than donate our time). Paulin people are generous when mission projects are identified within our community and support our national church work through Presbyterians Sharing and PWS&D. Renting space in our building to community groups can be viewed as mobilizing our resources for mission.
- Our **passion and energy** was also identified as a strength in that we have a passion for being socially connected with each other and a passion for our building. But it was also identified as a weakness in that we are reluctant to volunteer to greet on Sunday morning, to read scripture, or teach Sunday School.

Weakest Features (Opportunities for Change):

- **Not being contextually relevant to the community** was identified by several groups as a weakness. Our congregation does not reflect our surrounding community as it has a higher representation of people born before 1960 and those with White/European-Canadian ethnic backgrounds than our community does. While we may be meeting the needs of these older generations through our traditional worship service and through social activities, we are not meeting the spiritual needs of Gen Z, Gen Millennial, & Gen X. Most of our

spiritual activity occurs on Sunday morning with limited opportunities throughout the week.

- **Clarity of Purpose** was identified as another area of weakness. We don't seem to have a common **WHY**. A WHY is the reason that our church exists. It is what we stand for or believe in. It is our mission, our purpose. When we focus on WHAT and ritual, we lose the why. Church becomes comfortable rather than challenging. Some groups identified a desire to make God's teachings and our worship relevant to the everyday lives and challenges of people in the congregation and in the community.
- A focus on a **Social Membership Model** with **Discipleship tendencies** (as defined in the New Beginnings material) was another area of weakness. A discipleship model means that we donate to bless someone else and we give freely without strings attached; the church serves the community rather than its members; people rely not on the minister for spiritual growth but are responsible for their own spiritual growth; worship stretches & challenges us rather than satisfying us; and prayer decides rather than majority rule.

Our Passion: Welcoming people, food in the Upper Hall, and social connections were identified as passions. Inclusiveness - Our congregation is a place where diversity is accepted without judgement. People are accepted as they are. We are Passionate about accomplishing the work of the church – mission, fellowship & sharing God's word. We are Passionate about the building and how it is maintained. We have a history of passion about ministry/mission. Our negative energy is that we focus on recruiting & social connections rather than spiritual development.

Resources: We have a well-maintained building. Our building was built and renovated by previous generations but we feel that we have to fill the building (fundraise to support operations) rather than concentrate on God's mission. We have a choir that sings traditional hymns and music. We have traditional musical instruments – organ & grand piano.

We have a small group of volunteers who are dedicated but have been serving in the same roles for many years. We have no succession plan for these volunteers. We may need to consider having members try out these roles by participating in

small time-limited projects. In order to make better use of our people resources, we may wish to review committee names, purposes, and terms of reference.

There is no job description for the minister. In order to support the minister in their role and clarify the role of the congregation, develop a job description for the minister that is aligned with our future story.

People are asked to participate as volunteers but there is no training provided for them i.e., greeters.

For mission work, we are good at giving money and things but not at seeking out opportunities to share of our time and ourselves.

Best at: Fellowship, community dinners and social connections. However, while we may be good at welcoming the people that we know, but we may not always be good at greeting those we don't know. Perhaps assign unintentional greeters on Sunday morning to find someone they don't know, sit beside them, & strike up a conversation?.

What It Means to Be Missional: How are we being the hands and feet of God?

1. How Many Lives Have Been Transformed?

We provide social connections through coffee hour after service, women's breakfast, summer fundraiser meals, & greeting people after church. But we have limited spiritual development activities outside of Sunday morning & no youth activities. Very few people volunteer for worship service activities- greeting reading scripture, or hosting coffee.

2. How has the Community Been Transformed?

Community Hub – rentals to community groups (Riverfront Theatre, AA, Scouts, Guides, TOPS, South Windsor Seniors, for-profit South Windsor Day camp), monthly mission projects, & yard sale.

But, could we connect more to our community rental groups and be more than a benevolent landlord? Are there other ways we could support these community groups?

3. How are People Equipped for Mission?

We encourage children/youth & families to attend Camp Kintail; Women's Retreat at Camp Kintail, Bible Studies on Wednesdays.

Opportunities for improvement that were identified included: training for volunteers; providing space for a youth group; generate succession plans on committees to develop leadership skills.

The Missional Continuum (ranges from 1 to 5)

Participation: (2) Church participants care for one another & are friendly to new people who visit the church. The church adds at least a few new people each year. The church intentionally plans one or two activities each year for people outside of the church.

Leadership: (2) Some leadership tasks (in worship meetings and programs) are shared between the laity and minister. The minister is viewed as the one primarily responsible for following up with visitors and making calls to housebound person. The church has job descriptions for leadership roles, lay & but not clergy. A job description for Clergy might encourage more lay persons to volunteer to support worship & other activities.

Church Budget: (2) Between 90-95% of the church budget goes to internal expenses (building, staff admin, & programs). Less than 5% is given away beyond the church. Building rental income helps to underwrite church expenses.

Relationship to Community: (3) People (aged over 60) from the community frequently visit dinners and/or other events sponsored by the church. These visitors are familiar faces to the people in the church, but most visitors do not become active in the church.

Use of Building: (2) Community groups use rooms for meetings. Groups may not be connected to the church's mission or governance & they pay a rental fee for their time in the facility. There may be conflict over scheduling & cleanliness.

What we learned from this process about our community

- 37,000 people in the Census area surrounding Paulin
- 71% identify as Christian Faith Background

- 67% of Households have Children
- Ethnicity of the community: 64% White (95% at Paulin); 20% Asian (<5% at Paulin); 9% MENA (0% at Paulin); 3% Black (<1% at Paulin)
- 59% married or Common-law; 29% single, 13% widowed/separated/divorced
- Generational representation in community 18% Gen Z (<2% at Paulin); 21% Millennial (6% at Paulin); 18% Gen X (16% at Paulin); 37% Boomer & Older (82% at Paulin)

82% of the Congregation is Generation Boomer or older.

People who attend Sunday worship do not represent our surrounding community.

We are missing generations: millennial & Gen Z (missing children).

Maybe they don't come because Sunday worship does not meet their faith needs?

In order to become best at meeting the faith needs of younger generations, who make up most of our surrounding community, we need to ask them how they want to worship, to learn about God, and to see how God's teachings are relevant for their lives.

As a start, maybe we need to survey the community groups that rent space in the building, survey the younger generations who are not attending Sunday worship; and survey those who did not return after COVID?

We could also engage the new members and find out why they have come to Paulin from other faith communities.

What is our Future Story?

Vision (Six Word Story): Connecting, Inclusive, Transforming: Life with God

Connecting with our members and adherents, connecting with our community groups, connecting with the community surrounding us and connecting with mission partners. Inclusive in that all are welcome regardless of age, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, or faith background. Transforming by being open to change and to being a force of change in the world around us. Life with God.

1. **Stay the Same Story** – "Sitting in our usual pew, singing the old hymns, hearing a good sermon & visiting with our Paulin friends after church."

The 5 groups were unanimous in rejecting the “Stay the Same Story.” We need to do something different, we need to make changes. But we also recognize that the people who are already in our congregation are a gift and we need to minister to them and for them and not just make a dramatic shift. We recognize that the traditional style of worship is comforting for the older generations (born before 1960) and we need to keep some aspects of this worship on Sunday morning for their benefit as we transition. To help people who participate in the Sunday worship service make this transition, we can take a creative way to make small changes. For example, make some changes in music and worship service during periods such as Lent (6-7 weeks), Advent or Eastertide (from Easter to Pentecost) & then revert back. Or for 1 Sunday a month, have a less formal service where the choir takes a break and contemporary praise music is led by a small praise band; instead of a sermon, there is a dialogue or Readers’ Theatre (rehearsed reading of scripture passages, especially those that have multiple characters).

The 5 house groups suggested a combination of both the Redefining Mission and the Parallel Start Stories as our Future Story. The stories below are possible scenarios that incorporate ideas generated by the small groups and by the December 2021 assessment. They are meant to be a guide but not to be prescriptive.

2. Redefining Mission – “A Church that is also a Community Centre.”

Groups of the South Windsor community had been renting the Upper and Lower Halls at Paulin for many years for a small fee: South Windsor Seniors, AA, TOPS, and Riverfront Theatre. Guide and Scout groups use space for no fee. Members of Paulin wanted to make the church building more of a community hub but were unsure how to start. So a small group from the congregation made some small steps by forming the community hub committee. This group became responsible for managing the building rentals and supporting the building as a community hub. It worked together with the Fundraising Committee to ensure that community dinners met the needs of the surrounding community.

First, the group posted info about church faith activities, community dinners & social activities on the bulletin board by the door so that community groups saw them & invited them to participate. The church newsletter included a short article

highlighting one of the community rental groups each edition and a copy of the church newsletter was emailed to each community group. A rainbow flag sticker was put on the church door to show that people in the congregation were welcoming to LGBTQ2+ people. Pride Month was celebrated during a service in August. After surveying the community groups about their needs, volunteers began providing a welcoming spot with snacks and refreshments in the parlour once a week for parents when the Guides or Scouts were meeting. Previously, some parents had waited in the foyer or in their cars because there wasn't enough time to go home and come back after dropping off their children. Over time more volunteers got involved and the evening coffee time expanded to 4 nights a week. Lots of ideas were generated in the community survey (cooling centre during hot weather; homework club after school; English language conversation club) but the community hub committee recognized that programs could only be built slowly. The congregation raised money for bursaries for children in the community groups to attend Camp Kintail. People in the congregation were asked to fill out a volunteer card listing the talent and abilities that they were willing to share with the community hub. After a few years, based on those talent & abilities cards, the community hub committee added an after-school homework club. A tips for volunteers binder was generated with steps for hosting events and tips for greeting to make it easier for volunteers to try new roles in the church. Focus groups with representatives from the community rental groups helped to identify mission projects lasting 3-4 months. There was a spring clean-up of the neighbourhood with the Guides and Scouts. A walking group started meeting at the church before heading out into the neighbourhood.

3. Redevelopment - "Paulin Centre – a family friendly service in the Upper Hall that includes crafts, activities, discussion, and laughter."

- **Paulin Centre** – It was Wednesday night, Bob and Frances were at their post in the Upper Hall, ready to welcome the congregation of Paulin Centre Presbyterian Church to worship. The greeters wore name tags. Wednesday night was chosen after an email survey was sent to the younger generations in the congregation and to the community rental groups. The Paulin Centre worship service had started in the parlour where it was more cozy but moved to the Upper Hall as more young people and families attended. Bob helped a young mother and her three children get settled at a table with snacks and

drinks. There were blank name tags on the tables for visitors to fill out. He had met this woman, Min Li, 2 weeks go. She had come to Paulin Centre Church with her neighbour. She was looking for a church that would allow her children to worship but she really wasn't comfortable with sending them to Sunday School. She didn't know the Sunday School teachers and she had heard stories about abuse in some churches. Church was fun; no one minded if the kids made noise or ate during worship and they learned something about the Lord in the 40-minute service. There were prayers, contemporary music, crafts, skits, and discussion rather than sermon. The music director attended a workshop every year and learned to teach everyone the songs before they sang them together. She had musical instruments that the children could play during the singing. Bob and Frances knew that some people in the congregation didn't understand why Paulin Centre needed to happen. Gertrude had said on Sunday morning that she wished the minister spent more time visiting the seniors rather than focusing on the "new church" that had opened in the Parlour 3 years ago. Jean agreed and said she wished the young families just came to the Sunday morning service in the sanctuary as they had in 1972. Children needed to learn to be quiet during service and Jesus never had food and drink when he taught people in the Bible. But Bob and Frances didn't let the chatter go anywhere. They knew that this redevelopment had to happen if Paulin Memorial was going to have a future. There was talk about a Paulin Centre retreat at Camp Kintail in the fall. The minister talked about the professional development workshop that she had attended during her study week. The minister and some of the elders were leading **small group ministries** that lasted for 6 to 8 weeks. Topics included a "new to the faith Bible Study" and a coffee house for youth aged 12-17. Maybe some day, Paulin Centre would move to the sanctuary and their style of worship would change again, but for now, this was the church's calling: worship that included crafts, activities, discussion, laughter & snacks.

21 Day Challenge

Over 21 days, beginning March 24th, provide reusable name tags for all church committee members that are stored at the church in bins e.g., Rev. Lisa Aide, minister, Bob MacVicar, Board Chair. Encourage visitors to fill out a blank name tag. Name tags to be used not only on Sunday worship, but for all church activities over those 21 days.

What Next Steps are Implied by this Decision?

- Put together an Implementation Committee of 6 people, including Rev. Lisa Aide and 2 of the house group leaders, to plan and implement these future stories. The Implementation Committee will meet with Rev. Paul Kang virtually for 6 sessions from sprint to the end of the year. The Implementation committee will refine the future story and help the congregation take the next steps to begin living into that story. The committee will report back to session.
- As the implementation committee refines the future story, all committees of session and the board of managers will review terms of reference to ensure that they align with the vision and future story. Consider merging committees that may overlap to ensure best use of people resources.

