

We Are Not Alone: Forming The Basis For Union

January 21, 2007 Report of the Joint Dialogue Team of Bellefair & Kew Beach

United Church of Canada 'A New Creed'

*We are not alone,
we live in God's world.*

*We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus
the Word made flesh
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.*

We trust in God.

*We are called to be the church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, and in life beyond death,
God is with us.*

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

We Are Not Alone: Forming the Basis of Union - Introduction

The document that follows, entitled Creed In Action, is an attempt by the Joint Dialogue Committee to articulate a vision of the new church that would evolve should the congregations of Bellefair and Kew Beach United Churches vote in favour of union. Appended to the document are a number of appendices. The appendix entitled Transition Plan outlines the process that would be required during an interim period immediately following a strong affirmative vote and prior to the formation of the new Church Council. In the appendix entitled Frequently Asked Questions the committee addresses many of the concerns and requests for clarification that were expressed at our year-end congregational meetings. A further appendix entitled Summary Budget Projection has been developed in response to several requests for additional information in that area.

That this document appears to favour union will come as no surprise. Early in its deliberations the committee concluded that neither Bellefair nor Kew Beach could survive as they are presently constituted. More importantly, however, the committee soon recognized the truly exciting and energizing potential that would be realized by combining the human and financial resources of the two congregations while at the same time dramatically reducing their combined staffing and building expenses.

Some have wondered whether the committee should first have created a mission statement and then developed action plans which were informed by and congruent with it. In fact, the committee initially spent time and energy attempting to do just that before deciding to adopt the New Creed of the United Church of Canada as its mission statement.

As you read the Creed in Action section of the document you may notice that the committee has tended not to describe programs that are specific to particular groups within our congregations such as seniors, children and youth, or young families. This certainly does not mean that such programs will not be developed. In fact the financial, staffing and building resources generated through union will make it possible to provide a wider and richer array of such programs than is currently possible. The committee believes, however, that the tenets expressed in the Creed in Action are universal in nature and should apply to all segments of the congregation.

The tenets expressed in this document are meant to form the foundation or 'basis for union' between Bellefair and Kew Beach United Churches. Future church leaders will be expected to develop and lead the new Church in accordance with these tenets.

Finally, as congregants read and consider this document the committee would suggest that they ask themselves two questions. First, is the vision of the newly created uniting church as described in this document one which they support? Secondly, will the newly created church with its increased resources and reduced expenses, be more able to achieve and sustain that vision than is presently possible?

After more than a year of study the Joint Dialogue Committee believes that the answer to both questions is "yes".

The Creed in Action: The Basis for Union

Section 1: Scope and Limits

***“We are not alone
we live in God’s world.”***

- a) We believe that as we travel life’s path we are always in God’s presence and surrounded by God’s Love.
- b) We are two congregations that are a part of the larger whole of the United Church of Canada, located in the East part of Toronto known as ‘the beach’. Currently Kew Beach and Bellefair congregations are the two church congregations that are interested in the possibility of union.
- c) We celebrate our proud history of ministries in this part of God’s world, distinct from one another and as good neighbours to one another and the larger community
- d) We expect that the church will mean different things to each of us at different times. Consequently there will be times when we need and times when we can give. We intend that they will balance and that whenever possible we will see ourselves as servants of God to help others in any way that we can.
- e) We respect that each participant in the church may bring unique gifts and that money will not be the only measuring stick for value.
- f) We recognize that as a community that wants to serve our neighbourhood both near and far that we will endeavour to encourage and build a culture of participation, commitment, giving, and responsibility within our congregation
- g) We will invite new leaders, members, and participants from among people who identify with the church and will also serve wider circles who call upon us for help.
- h) We will actively seek to welcome participants from demographic groups currently under-represented among us and create an inclusive church community.

Section 2: Theology and Faith

***“We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus
the Word made flesh
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.”***

- a) We believe God has created and is creating our many gifts.
- b) We believe that God came to us through Christ and continues to live amongst us.
- c) We will use clear and current language wherever possible to include all members of our church community.
- d) We believe that God works through us, others and through the Spirit.
- e) We believe that it is the same creating God, incarnate Christ and living Spirit.

- f) As congregations of the United Church of Canada, we hold much in common in our theological approaches, although there may be some subtle differences. To this end we respect the many different ways God is revealed to each of us.
- g) We will continue, as we have in the past, to be open to diversity of theological thought and we will strive to educate ourselves on current issues.
- h) We will be open to new conversations about God's presence and activity with each other, and with the wider, multi-faith community, including those who question God's presence.
- i) With a purpose of assisting those who want to grow closer to God and to develop their spirituality, we will provide opportunities and support to do so.
- j) We respect that each of us will look to the Bible in different ways for guidance, some in a literal manner and some a metaphorical manner.
- k) Christ's resurrection remains the central key to our faith.
- l) The mysteries of nature and wonders of science will assist us in learning about God's creative actions.

Section 3: Worship

"We are called to celebrate God's presence"

- a) The worship services will celebrate God's presence in our lives in an open and welcoming environment.
- b) We respect the importance of music in both congregations and are confident that our ability to praise God through music will continue stronger for all the gifts that each congregation will bring. We are confident that there will be many opportunities for different celebrations through music.
- c) We recognize that the one, traditional Sunday morning service meets many members needs and also are committed to working at developing alternative methods of worship and spiritual sustenance.
- d) Our traditions are important and weave together to demonstrate what is important to us as a community. With that in mind, great effort will be made to honour and maintain many of our congregation traditions and also to build new traditions with great meaning for our children and those who come after us.
- e) We recognize that endings are inevitable and that there will be changes. It is our hope to be a caring and supportive community for those of us who grieve at different times for what may be lost.

Creed in Action Section 4: Space and Accessibility

"We are called to live with respect in creation"

- a) First we must remember that the strength of the United Church, our church, is our people. What we do determines our faith, not the building in which we stand or sit.
- b) That said, we acknowledge our beautiful buildings and that they are deteriorating at a faster rate than we can renovate.
- c) We have said we will first sort out who we are and what we do as a united community, then we will decide what space we will need to carry out our work and to worship in.

- d) We already know that our site must be accessible, warm, caring, multi-purposeful and meet all required laws for buildings and services that we will want to provide ie. Food, childcare, accessibility and so on.
- e) We are apprehensive about our current sites and buildings – and how changes will be decided.
- f) We are concerned about our obligations to current tenants and our community space users and to that end intend to honour our agreements till June 2008 with possible negotiations beyond that..
- g) We recognize that there are no surplus assets, but extensive liabilities of deferred capital repairs and costs to reconfigure our space to responsibly meet one united church's needs.
- h) We take seriously our promise to respect the world God has given us and as such will seek to create a site that respects, preserves and restores the environment.

Section 5: Ministries and Ministers

“We are called to love and serve others”

- a) Pastoral care remains a very important item to us and will be addressed as the groups come together, both to look at what has been done and what we want to do. Input from those previously involved will be greatly appreciated.
- b) Our mutual care and concern for each other, and our service to others, are central ministries we share among all lay volunteers and all staff
- c) We build relationships and community in a rich variety of groups and activities, each with their own ministries and leadership.
- d) We recognize that some potential ministries and ministers are under-represented among us, compared to the community around us.
- e) We believe it is important to widen our circles of care and to reach more of our neighbours in service together.
- f) We celebrate our current church fellowships, such as UCW, AOTS. Choirs, youth groups, senior groups and their ministries and their leaderships
- g) We support our current commitments to community fellowships such as bridge and bowling, couple's club, theatre groups, beavers, cubs, scouts, guides, and rangers, and AA groups
- h) We anticipate an equal or greater range of ministries, led by a partnership of lay volunteers, and lay and ministry personnel paid staff, in developing teams
- i) We expect that some groups may merge while others continue to meet in their original groupings.
- j) We acknowledge that people who are congregational members may gather in many other configurations, which are neither governed by the church nor owed more than the same neighbourliness and helpfulness we extend toward any community neighbour.
- k) We recognize that there will be times of stress and encourage dialogue to better understand and help each other.
- l) We hope to continue as one good employer of building and administrative staff to complement lay volunteers and make ministry possible, safe, and hospitable. Changes in staffing will be addressed in an open and honourable manner and

decisions will be made based on the congregations' community needs. A Joint Needs Assessment Committee ultimately will determine this.

Section 6: Social Justice and Action

“We are called to seek justice, and to resist evil”

- a) We will continue to learn about social justice issues, make efforts to understand evil and learn how we can make changes through our actions.
- b) We celebrate our denominational traditions of ‘thinking globally and acting locally.’
- c) We believe that we can improve the balance between our focus on us and our focus on our world by working together as one congregation.
- d) We believe that by pooling our resources and people, we can improve our impact on the issues that need changing both near at hand and around the world.
- e) We will continue and strengthen our current advocacy work, and participation in local ecumenical and inter-faith coalitions such as lunch programs.

Section 7: Communication and Evangelism

“We are called to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope”

- a) We proclaim our belief in Christ's story in everything we do, individually and as a church community, so that our belief is communicated to others through who we are and how we live our faith on a daily basis.
- b) We believe that we can do more together than should we try to continue as individual congregations.
- c) We distinguish between service, offered without inviting others to join as a result, and evangelism which is prepared to share our good news and hope, and to extend an invitation.
- d) We plan to be clearer and more professional about the messages we send out to offer help and service, and to invite participation and belonging
- e) We intend to develop better use of new technologies to communicate among our participants and beyond to our surrounding community
- f) We may be the only gospel our neighbours read. We must make it clear and focused. We should remember **“May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet and may they see the face of Christ in you.”**

Section 8: Rites and Rituals

“In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us”

- a) We celebrate a common story of living through losses, and living in hope, with many informal local traditions as well as formal liturgical rites
- b) We recognize that all of us, and both congregations, already enjoy the presence and company of God, and have much to teach and have more to learn at all ages
- c) We believe that we can realize and represent that abundant life, death and life beyond death better together in one thriving church than in two declining ones

- d) We will continue time honoured and loved traditions and shared rituals after our vote on February 25, 2007 and beyond any union of our congregations
- e) Our families and neighbours will be able to bring their births, changing relationships, and deaths to celebrate and grieve, as we can at the current congregations
- f) We will work together to combine and respect the honoured and loved traditions of the founding congregations
- g) We will develop new rites and rituals, as we grow together, that will bind us together, speak deeply to new members, and become traditions for new generations
- h) We offer rites and rituals without discrimination as they are an integral part of our pastoral care ministry
- i) We look forward with anticipation the opportunity to celebrate our new community with rituals of celebration and commitment, making a new covenant together

Section 9: Governance and Development

“We are not alone”

- a) Governance will be open, participatory and transparent.
- b) Through uniting our congregations, we will eliminate some of the duplication of effort by volunteers that is presently involved in operating two congregations.
- c) We will continue to utilize a council structure given that the founding congregations were governed in this manner.
- d) Representation on the new council will come from past council members, new council members, members of the BKD, and an overall equal representation from both founding congregations.
- e) We are committed to hearing the “voices” of the congregation and will work diligently to encourage communication, improve methods for listening and opportunities to share views and ideas that will lead to a richer community.
- f) The functions of the council of the uniting congregation in the Beach will be outlined by the Transition Team for the initial interim period, and continue to evolve thereafter through consultation with the congregation.
- g) We believe that our new church will evolve and that when our Council feels it is ready to move forward, we will require a vote by the congregation representing at least 2/3 to move away from the 50-50 balance on Council.
- h) Any issue that is to go to congregation for a vote will have at least 2/3 majority recommendation from Council before being presented.
- i) We would begin the development of a policies and procedures manual for the church within the first six months, incorporating best practices of the past and reflecting new and changing needs and context of the present. The manual would be an evolving resource for efficient and effective governance and operation of the new church.
- j) We believe that participants in the new congregation should be encouraged to offer their skills. We are committed to developing a system that will support volunteers and discourage burn out.