

Reflection

For a while now, and for a bit longer, we are engaging in the process of considering information regarding building-design options, cost estimates for various levels of enhancement, and funding variables to support the HOME project and the annual operating budgets of the next few years. We are going to hear some debate about how we are doing as BUC, where we think we are going and how we should get there. There will be many details for us to absorb and track.

Through all of it however, I invite us to focus more on the bigger picture. We have capable, committed, trusted, people working on the details, on Council, on HOME commission, on Trustees, on our beloved staff team. Let's let them do their work with the details on our behalf. Let's us focus on the overview, the larger picture of what kind of church we want BUC to become.

During the past several weeks and especially this week in Beach Metro News, we have heard the phrase "Go big or stay home", by Ross Richards as he headed down what would be his last ski run. We've all agreed with the comments about Ross, at the celebration of his life, regarding positive attitude, unconditional support for his church as it moves forward with change, and going big.

I can't help but think that these comments also fit our church, our council and our congregation at this time.

In 2007, virtually all of us present at that time voted in favour of a vision of a new, different, relevant and more broadly engaging church for the Beach community and beyond. We opted for change, for a transformation of our two founding churches into a relevant, engaging and sustainable church in this community for generations to come.

We knew then, whether we admitted it or not, that we were setting a very high standard that flies in the face of the reality of organized religion in our time, that is, decline: in numbers, in finances, in building condition. And we did it anyway--we dreamed big, set our course as best we could, embraced a hearty dose of faith, and took the first step of a very long journey.

Now, a mere 4 years into the process of renewing ourselves in this vision, is not the time for second-guessing ourselves, of self-doubting, or of half measures.

Our transformation journey entails updating our culture, our practices, our engagement with the wider community in new ways. It involves connecting with neighbours in the Beach who have shunned our old ways and will

need to see a new, more relevant 'us' before they will be interested. These new connections, with people not like us in terms of religion and faith, will stretch and challenge us, no doubt, but these will be stretches and challenges we should be willing to undertake, for the sake of our church's future and for our own sake, for the growth it represents for us as individuals and as a community.

A significant but not primary component of that transformation change involves our building and property. The changes we make to our building regarding its appropriateness, its efficiency, its usefulness, its openness, its visible connections to interests and concerns of our neighbours; these changes will serve well our cause of radical transformation for wider engagement.

For these reasons of vision and commitment and faith, we should move forward with our HOME project to our fullest ability. Yes, we are flying in the face of reality in the United Church in Canada, indeed of any organized religion, but here's the interesting question:

"What have we got to lose?"

Given all the evidence around us in this time in history--churches and religions becoming irrelevant, declining participation by members, and a

correlated decline in the impact of church in today's society--given the demographics of a typical church congregation anywhere in Canada, where are we headed if we don't pursue our dream, if we sit back, stay comfortable in our traditions, practices and culture of the previous years of our church, if we hunker down and resist these changes that are so disconcerting and divisive in our midst, what do we think will happen?

Well, we answered this back in 2006-2007 as we considered whether to start this new church. We said then, "We'll go broke, we'll soon be bankrupt, our old buildings are becoming burdens that we can no longer support, we're becoming less relevant as evidenced by our declining numbers and increasing ages. In sum, our church's days, or years perhaps, are numbered".

That's the apparent downside of not engaging in change, but...

What's the downside of making these changes, of chasing our vision of a relevant, engaging, forceful church--that next generations value in their community, and that doesn't work??

I suggest to you that this 'worst case scenario' looks somewhat like this, in say...the year 2020: BUC is still here, on this site in the Beach. People still attend Sunday worship and a few additional programs and activities as well, 'though not in the same numbers as today. Some have died, some

drifted away as the relevance and meaning seemed to fade for them. The building is in great shape, needing no repairs and costing relatively little to operate--thanks to the commitment and support of the congregation back in 2011. And the budget, God be praised, is balanced.

How so, you ask?

Because, with fewer people and thus lower financial support, the obvious, final remedy was applied in 2013--the ministry and other staff positions were cut back so that expenses now match income.

And that congregation of 2020, smaller and perhaps declining, steadily aging but managing, can continue in that mode for a long time. It wouldn't be the church of our vision in 2007, but that of itself is not a bad thing. In fact, that would be OK. It just wouldn't be the church we are capable of being; the one I think Ross spoke of when he said, "Go big..."

And so, here in 2011, I suggest to you that our big dream has not yet been realized and that we should continue to push forward.

At the same time, we must be sensitive and responsive to those of us who find this process upsetting and concerning, who feel we are losing the church we always knew. We cannot simply leave some behind in the name of our big dream. Last week council began the development of several project ideas for our church that will build up our connections with one another, that will support those of us who adapt more slowly to

change, that will help all of us keep a focus on the people of BUC and its community while we also develop our ministries for a changing world. I invite each of you to consider how we as a church need to manage this balance between moving forward for the sake of our church and our individual development as members, and supporting and assisting those for whom these changes are quite troubling.

Would you please share your ideas with me or anyone else on our council team. Together we can resolve this apparent dilemma.

For today, I believe our choice is obvious...

let's go big together!

Ron Fitton
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