

HIGHLANDS UNITED CHURCH

FIVE YEAR MINISTRY PLAN

PRESENTED TO THE CONGREGATION

MAY 27, 2007

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In this Ministry Plan we will explore Highlands United Church's mission and witness for the upcoming period of 1-5 years. It is meant to be a dynamic, living document that the Congregation will revisit and adjust regularly.

Our Vision Statement

The mission of Highlands United is focused by our Vision statement:

As followers of Jesus, we want to be a community that ***gathers*** and takes ***risks***:

- To receive and engage a diversity of people,
- To celebrate life-giving worship,
- To love and be loved,
- To know and be known,
- To serve and be served
- To learn, pray and grow together.
-

Trusting in God, we want to be people who ***scatter***:

- To live out faith in action,
- To seek peace, justice and healing,
- To share time, ministries and money.

Led by the Spirit, we are continually ***transformed*** on this journey

Into the midst of this hope-filled vision we bring our history and our present day to day realities.

Where We Come From

We at Highlands United Church have grown up with the Edgemont community of which we have been an active and respected part since our inception in 1951. From the beginning, we have taken risks to serve the needs of the Congregation and the surrounding community especially in:

- Our mission to families, youth and children, which has been a pillar of Highlands' ministry.
- Offering creative worship of God with fabulous music and choirs.
- Our partnership with First United Church, the downtown eastside mission.
- Listening to the stories of our brothers and sisters globally and responding to their needs
- Our sponsorship of and ongoing support and advocacy for refugees.
- The Healing Hands ministry.
- The Flea Market, which has led the community in recycling and reusing for a more sustainable world.
- Development of strong, faith-filled lay leadership.
- The passion and joy in serving that has been evident in so much of the mission that has been undertaken over the years.

Present Realities

At this time our community demographics are changing. Public schools are experiencing reduced enrolment of children. Real estate prices have increased so that it now generally takes families with two incomes to purchase homes in the area. Affordable housing has not been built into the community plan. The first generation to settle the area are now seeking the amenities of seniors' housing and assistance. There is an increasing diversity of people, cultures, languages and faiths on the North Shore – we are now God's global village. There are also a growing proportion of folks who are economically struggling.

We are at a pivotal moment at Highlands. Our Vision statement reflects the reality, hopes and dreams of the whole Congregation, while leading us to new and re-energized mission initiatives. These must respond to the changing nature and demographic of our community and our context within that community. The commitment of the Congregation to serve God and community in this time and place is as strong and vital as ever.

The Focus of this Ministry Plan

This Ministry Plan seeks to outline a vision of God's call to Highlands United Church at this particular time in our life and in our history. We have the leadership necessary to move ahead in the initiatives outlined, within the next 1-5 years. The Congregation's strong Vision Statement, and the results of the process that led to that statement, forms the basis of the categories and goals suggested below. The design is meant to be facilitative rather than limiting, expansive rather than restrictive.

Highlands is a Congregation whose passions include Worship, Vision, Outreach, Music, Children and Youth, and Education. We value inclusivity, ministry of the Laity, good order, innovation, community mindedness, healing, and having fun together. We care about one another, support each other in life transitions and want to experience our faith being lived out in the way we treat one another. Our deepest desire is to continue to serve God's global village from our location in Edgemont Village, North Vancouver.

As we work with the wider community near and far, we search to find what the mission for a Christian community is. We are not a community centre. We bring a unique perspective which we believe is life-giving and we want to be able to freely offer our light. We want the Congregation to evolve as a 'movement of the spirit amongst people' rather than a 'religious institution' or a 'service club'.

Highlands is a large Congregation and we receive feedback from people that it is 'hard to get in' when a person first comes to Highlands. Once in, people feel this is a warm and wonderful Congregation. Therefore, the ministry of hospitality needs to guide our actions and support all other activities and experiences.

Small Group Ministry

Much of the ministry of Highlands already occurs when groups of people get together around a particular passion or project or value. This Ministry Plan calls for us to intentionally organize our ministry life into a Small Group Ministry format. This intentional structuring is meant to set an expectation and to invite people to gather in small groups. Appendix B is a summary of what Small Group Ministry is and how small groups can work. Small groups are meant to be more than solely goal-oriented groups, but also to serve as another way of doing pastoral care within our Congregation.

In order to ensure that the small groups represent the holistic vision of the Congregation, there are 5 priority areas in which we will positively stimulate small groups. These areas are:

- Learning and Faith Formation
- Hospitality, Caring and Healing
- Worship and Music
- Diversity
- Peace and Justice.

As more people feel empowered to join small groups in the areas of their gifts and interests, we will move towards creating a culture in the Congregation that recognizes:

**Ministry occurs everywhere,
Anytime,
And is done by everyone.**

In order to adopt the Small Group Ministry model we will ask staff and lay leaders to use their time and energy to make the transition from a "standing committee" structure to a Small Group Ministry structure within the next 1 – 3 years.

We will have small groups offered within the following areas:

1. Learning & Faith Formation:

This area will include small groups focusing on learning: about theology, faith, ministry and traditional practices, with a goal of becoming 'informed' Christians. It will include current study ministries and will have a goal of offering learning opportunities on an ongoing basis so people at all stages of faith growth can find a way to 'enter' into learning and to enter into the Congregation. Small groups in this area will be under girded by hospitality regardless of the content.

This area will invite people into small groups to study the marks of 'Progressive Christianity'. We will establish a process to allow the Congregation to discern if we wish to be affiliated with the Centre for Progressive Christianity (www.tcpc.org).

2. Hospitality, Caring and Healing:

This area will include small groups focusing on hospitality amongst the people within the Congregation, friendship with newcomers, caring with children and youth, caring within families, caring with adult – young, middle and older.

Part of a Caring ministry is recognizing our need for healing and so this area will include current ministries of Healing Hands, grief recovery, Formerly Married etc.

We will explore various ways to reach out further through our strong healing ministry.

This area will also include small groups focussed on our church family and church home, including groups working to contribute to the financial well-being and physical plant of the church.

We will develop a ministry to and with families which includes being a resource for families in the Congregation and community experiencing difficulties. This will include

families with young children, and also families at all stages who are trying to support and deal with physical and mental health issues and other challenges.

We pride ourselves on being a Congregation that is open and welcoming to gay and lesbian persons. We will set up a process for the Congregation to consider taking the next step in this openness by becoming an "Affirming Ministry". This is a designation given by the United Church to Congregations who complete a process and vote affirmatively to accept gay and lesbian persons into their midst (www.affirmunited.ca/affirming_ministries.htm).

3. Worship and Music:

This area will include small groups who wish to experiment with other forms of worship and/or music. It will include the current Worship Committee, which will function as a small group with a focus on the 9:30 and 11:00 services, the Chancel Committee, the Flower Committee, the Music leadership and staff and the choirs. While the choirs are large groups, they have the same relational values as small groups.

Highlands will develop a new worship offering at a time during the week/month which works for younger families and the emerging spirit generation of 30 – 45 year olds.

We will also explore various ways to reach out further through our strong music ministry.

4. Diversity:

In this area, small groups will be offered to facilitate the Congregation exploring ways we could more publicly include a diversity of people – culturally, racially, economically, linguistically and others in our community who may feel stigmatized and/or marginalized.

In particular, we will take initiative to be welcoming to people who speak English as a second language, who are not currently affiliated with any other faith community, and would be interested in experiencing worship and learning more about Christianity in English.

5. Peace and Justice:

This area will include small groups who want to explore issues, or to have an action-based focus, or a project based focus within the community or larger world community. Currently we have the Refugee committee, the Local Connections and Global Connections committees and the In From the Cold ministry at the North Shore Shelter, engaged in this work.

Small group opportunities will be opened up in the peace and justice area, especially in the area of environmental stewardship and interfaith connections. Our culture is cynical about the ability of the great faiths of the world to live together in cooperation rather than competition, and we will work to overcome that cynicism.

We will take initiative to develop a cooperative relationship with at least one other faith community on the North Shore, i.e. a Synagogue and/or a Mosque.

We will continue to build on our global relationships.

We will move towards building a mutual partnership with the North Shore Shelter so we can engage with poverty and homelessness in a face to face manner.

Led By The Spirit, We Move Forward

As the Small Group Ministry evolves and grows we will welcome and expect members of the Congregation to suggest new topics, new approaches. We will, however, maintain our focus on achieving the key ministry goals we have set for ourselves in this Ministry Plan over the next 5 years. Appendix A is a summary of those goals.

We imagine that each of these areas will include small groups made up of a variety of age groups. Sunday School classes can become small groups where the children work on a 'project' or a study in one of the initiatives listed in this plan. The same could be true for youth.

We will develop the lay leadership needed for all these small group ministries to happen. The group leadership will be foundational and we will commit ourselves to providing training and equipping for those followers of Christ who offer to lead a group.

Structurally, staff will be assigned to coordinate the Small Group Ministry beginning in September, 2007, and will take initiative to help implement our ministry goals.

The Coordinating Council's role as the gathering place for leaders of standing committees and small groups will be even more important as we move to a more intentional Small Group Ministry structure. They will continue to meet four times a year, allowing leaders to gather to coordinate their activities and share stories.

The Leadership Board, in consultation with the Finance Committee and others, will develop a Financial Plan by the end of 2007 that addresses, among other things, the financial resources needed to implement this Ministry Plan. The Financial Plan will also address our decision-making and budgeting processes to ensure they are working towards the fulfillment of our Ministry Plan.

Throughout the year, the Leadership Board will work with the Coordinating Council, small groups, committees and staff to ensure that we are being consistent with this Ministry Plan and that we make progress towards our goals. Through the Coordinating Council meetings, as well as periodic reporting to the Congregation, the Leadership Board will also ensure that we all know what the status is of the implementation of our Ministry Plan.

The Leadership Board will ensure that this Ministry Plan is periodically reviewed and updated to reflect our progress towards our goals as well as the evolving needs, aspirations and callings of the Congregation.

MOTION: That the Five Year Ministry Plan, as presented to the Congregation on May 27, 2007, be adopted as the mandate and guiding document for the mission and ministry of Highlands United Church.

Appendix A -
Summary of Key Ministry Goals for the next 5 years

We will intentionally organize our Congregational life into “Small Group Ministry” occurring within 5 broad areas of ministry namely: Learning and Faith Formation; Hospitality, Caring and Healing; Worship and Music; Diversity; Peace and Justice. The key goals within each area are:

Learning and Faith Formation

We will put in place opportunities for people at all stages of faith growth to engage learning and faith formation.

We will undertake a Congregational process to discern if we wish to affiliate ourselves with the Centre for Progressive Christianity.

Hospitality, Caring and Healing

We will develop a ‘family’ ministry which supports families to discover spirituality, build faith, as well as developing resources such as parenting groups and marriage support.

We will explore ways to publicly include and support gay and lesbian persons and discern if we wish to become an “Affirming Congregation”.

Worship and Music

We will seek to benefit by the National Church initiative with the ‘emerging spirit’ generations of 30 – 45 years olds, and will respond to their worship needs, including through a new worship offering at a time during the week/month.

We will build on the strength of our music ministry.

Diversity

We will reach out to people who speak English as a second language, who are not currently affiliated with any other faith community, and would be interested in learning more about Christianity in English.

Peace and Justice

We will encourage small group opportunities in the area of environmental stewardship.

We will attempt to establish a positive relationship with at least one other faith community on the North Shore, thus witnessing to our community that such a relationship is possible.

We will continue to build on our global relationships.

We will build a mutual partnership with the North Shore Shelter so we might engage with justice issues such as poverty and homelessness in a face-to-face manner.

Appendix B

What is Small Group Ministry?

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
—Matthew 18:20

...and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
—1 Corinthians 12:6-7

Small Group Ministry refers to small Congregational groups, usually three to seven participants that agree to meet for a specific length of time around a shared interest. By following an easily facilitated small group meeting process and reflecting on the group's time together in terms of personal spiritual growth, connection to the Congregation and to the wider community groups minister to participants and encourage ministry in a variety of ways. (from United Church of Canada website)

Groups can develop their own meeting process or use, for example, the following small group meeting format. (Approximate times for each part of the meeting are given.)

What is the Small Group Format?

Opening

Prayer or song to bring the group together. (5 minutes)

Check-in

Brief time for participants to share how they're feeling as they begin the meeting. (20 minutes)

Prayer/Spiritual Practices

Spiritual nurture resources will be provided in leader training. (20-30 minutes).

Group Interest

Whatever interest brought the participants together. (60 minutes)

Check-out

Brief time for participants to share how they're feeling as they end the meeting. (5 minutes)

Closing

Prayer or song to bring the meeting to a close. (5 minutes)