**Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church (SSUC)**

**Report to the Congregations**

**on**

**Consultations Regarding the Proposed Model of**

**Shared Ministry/Staffing**

**between Chalmers and Sydenham St. United Churches**

**May 1, 2017**

# Introduction

This progress report from the Chalmers/SSUC Joint Committee is the third to come before our congregations since May 2016, and the last before a final report and recommendation to be presented to meetings of the congregations on June 4, 2017.

# Shared ministry between Chalmers and SSUC

**May 2016**: Chalmers and Sydenham Street United Churches both passed the following motion:

Whereas:

1. The congregations of Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church have a long history of joint worship and activities undertaken by the two congregations;
2. The congregations set up a Joint Committee in 2014 “to explore, in consultation with the congregations and ministry staff, the possibilities for a more formal relationship between the congregations and develop a vision for the United Church of Canada presence in downtown Kingston…";
3. The Joint Committee has been meeting and consulting with members of the congregations, and various community members in downtown Kingston;
4. The Joint Committee has discerned a desire for a closer relationship to enhance the effectiveness of the ministries of both congregations by building on mutual strengths and spiritual, human and physical resources;
5. It is desirable that the congregations continue on a viable basis, each with its own distinctive character, mission and commitments, but at the same time enter into intentional discussions around cooperation in areas such as a shared ministry of the word, sacraments, pastoral care, music, faith formation for all ages and outreach, shared administration, and shared programs and activities; and
6. The Joint Committee has recommended that it continue its efforts to identify the common interests of the congregations, and pursue cooperation in the above-mentioned areas.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The above affirmations are hereby approved.
2. **It is declared and affirmed that the congregations will explore joint initiatives in the areas of shared ministry of the word, sacraments, pastoral care, music, faith formation for all ages and outreach, shared administration, and shared programs and activities.**
3. The Joint Committee be re-mandated to undertake further consultations with members of the congregations, staff, and others as may be appropriate, regarding the opportunities for cooperation and joint initiatives in the above areas, with the expectation that specific initiatives may be acted on when ready and that reports to the congregations are made periodically.
4. **The nature of future cooperation between the congregations will be defined and a detailed implementation plan will be approved by both congregations, no later than June 2017**.

**February 2017**: The Joint Committee (six appointed members from each congregation) reported again to the congregations on the progress of its consultations and deliberations.

That report laid out a conceptual proposal for the creation of a single ministry/staff team to jointly serve the two congregations of Chalmers and SSUC. A copy of the February report is available on the churches’ websites. The people of both congregations were encouraged to reflect on the proposal, share questions and concerns and present written submissions. Both congregations also participated in a shared meal and table dialogue on Palm Sunday (March 9, 2017).

The Committee received much thoughtful and valuable feedback, which it considered carefully in preparing a revised draft proposal. Some of the key themes, around which both celebration and concern centred, are highlighted below. There were many other comments, also noted with appreciation, incorporated into the Committee’s review. A copy of all the input received (unedited) is available for anyone who wishes a copy, on request.

# What is being proposed?

* **A single team of ministry personnel and staff to serve both Sydenham Street and Chalmers United Churches**

The concept of shared ministry/staffing serving two Pastoral Charges is not unheard of in the United Church as increasingly, congregations are seeking new ways to respond to changing needs and changing communities. In Bay of Quinte Conference, for example, Tweed/White Lake-Bethesda and Queensborough are three United Church Pastoral Charges who are sharing resources and staff. This is not the same as a multi-point Pastoral Charge, as the congregations continue to have separate and independent governance structures.

* We are proposing a team comprised of:
  + One Minster of Worship and Pastoral Care (full-time)
  + One Minister of Congregational Life and Community Engagement (half-time)
  + One Director of Music Ministries (half-time)
  + One Operations Manager (30 hours)
  + One Office Administrator (full-time)
  + Custodial staff (at the current level of staffing)

Some of the strengths that this model offers our congregations include:

* The availability of a wider more diverse range of ministry skills and experience to serve the congregations and their mission; greater specialization is possible;
* A strong support structure for ministry; less isolation and feelings of competition among ministry staff and congregations;
* Less duplication of some ministry functions and supports;
* Efficiencies and greater effectiveness of centralization of some non-pastoral roles.

Some of the disadvantages of the model that we would need to work to overcome:

* A larger membership base for ministers/staff to get to know and serve;
* A possible perception of greater distance from the ministry/staffing team on the part of the congregations (a feeling that we don’t ‘own’ our own ministers/staff);

Proposed summaries of duties for the positions will be provided to the congregational meetings in June. However, the finalizing of detailed job descriptions will be the responsibility of a JNAC (Joint Needs Assessment Committee) for the ministry positions, and a new joint Chalmers/SSUC Ministry and Personnel Committee for the staff positions.

The proposed second half-time ministry position has been named (provisionally) Minister of Congregational Life and Community Engagement. Based on the feedback to date, the Joint Committee will recommend a period of further consultation among members of both congregations before the nature and scope of the position is fully determined. We noted particularly, the concern over whether the congregations should continue to provide faith formation/Christian education programming for children and youth (see below).

# Summary of Congregational Feedback to the Draft Proposal

There were a number of themes that emerged in the congregational responses to date – both affirmations and concerns that were repeated by people in both churches. We have grouped these into the following categories:

* Impact on Congregational Life
* Outreach/Impact in the Community
* Ministry with Children and Youth
* Music
* Buildings
* Sustainability
* Process and Planning

### Impact on congregational life

Celebrations:

* *Friends and community ties that go back a long way*
* *Strength in unity*
* *The fact that we can have this discussion is reason to celebrate*
* *The creativity that can come from working together*
* *A feeling that something is growing/moving*

Concerns:

* *How will it work to worship together?*
* *We fear losing members*
* *Our congregations have different cultures; how can we maintain our individuality?*
* *Are we sure enough of our individual identities as congregations?*
* *The burden of past history*
* *The strong need for pastoral care (lack of clarity among Chalmers people about the Circles of Companionship model at SSUC)*
* *Affirming Ministry (a difference between the two congregations)*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The strongest concern expressed by the congregations is about shared Sunday worship, alternating on a periodic basis (primarily a fear that members of the congregation where the service is not happening will simply drift away).

The Committee continues to strongly recommend that there be only one shared Sunday morning worship service in the liturgical format we now both follow (with other smaller services to take place in style and regularity as the congregations choose). Some committee members have called this the “one bulletin” option. To continue with two Sunday morning services with two choirs would either require a ministry/staffing model much closer to the current one (in which case, it’s questionable why we would choose to change), or would create an untenable workload for the new staffing team.

We have a long tradition of worshipping together in the summer months. A single worship and music ministry team will only make it easier for both congregations to recognize “their” service. Naturally there is a strong attachment to our current buildings, and a greater comfort level in familiar surroundings. However, we are confident that over time, the rhythm and style of shared worship that changes location with the seasons can become both familiar and comfortable. In the final analysis, the success of this model will depend to a great extent on the enthusiasm, goodwill and commitment of the congregations to make it work.

The Committee has noted the concern for appropriate pastoral care to the two congregations. It is now highlighted as a significant component of the job description for the Minister of Worship and Pastoral Care. In addition, the Committee continues to propose that the model of SSUC Circles of Companionship (a geographic division of the members of the congregation into smaller “circles” that meet for mutual support and care) be expanded to the two congregations.

A number of people have expressed concern about a distinction between the congregations – the fact that SSUC has been an Affirming Ministry in the United Church since the late 1990s, and that Chalmers has not taken that step. Chalmers has not formally addressed its status over the past 15 years, and in April 2017 the Coordinating Council of Elders passed a motion to explore becoming an Affirming Ministry of the United Church of Canada.

### Outreach/Impact in the Community

Celebrations:

* *That our pooled resources can strengthen out outreach and justice programs;*
* *That united we can do more good things in the community and be a stronger presence in Kingston.*

Concern:

* *That current programs (like the Benevolent Fund) not be lost*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The committee heard predominantly positive responses to the proposal to work more closely together. Indeed, this is happening already with the formation of the joint Truth and Reconciliation Action Group (now an ecumenical body with the addition of a representative from St. Marks Lutheran).

### Ministry with Children and Youth

Hopes and Concerns:

* *That Ministry with Children and Youth needs to be part of the proposal;*
* *That our future lies with young people; hope that bringing the churches together will maximize possibilities for engagement with children, youth and university students;*
* *That our future lies not with children and young families but with retired people.*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The Committee has heard somewhat contradictory hopes and concerns regarding programming for children and youth. For some, it is central to our ministry, and we lament the small numbers of children we have been able to engage. Others take the view that we cannot be all things to all people and that we should focus on those things we might be able to do really well, such as ministering to post-secondary students and older adults.

The Committee has deliberately not fleshed out the duties of the proposed half-time Minister of Congregational Life and Community Engagement, believing that the congregations would benefit from further conversation about this important aspect of ministry and further thinking about the priority we wish to give programs of faith formation and Christian education. We note that many of the comments about children’s programming are aspirational, and may not reflect capacity in the congregations to support such programming.

We would also hope that the congregations might explore applying for seed funding from the United Church Vision Fund, to amplify this position – a position that will help us set the stage for some bold new mission initiatives.

### Music

Celebrations/Hopes:

* *Continued emphasis on music*
* *A larger choir to lead services*

Concerns:

* *Each choir has an identity and loyalty to its current formation*
* *Concern about the potential loss of members*

**How the Committee is responding…**

In addition to the above, there were many concerns raised of a practical nature (the size of the choir loft, the availability of sufficient music copies, etc.) We are confident that many of these concerns would be addressed and alleviated in the actual implementation of the model, following consultation with those most directly affected.

The Committee continues to strongly recommend the melding of the two choirs into a single choir with a single Director of Music Ministries. To maintain two choirs would only make sense if there were two separate Sunday morning services. It would also necessitate a full-time (or two part-time) Director(s)/Music Minister(s). We know that members in both choirs have enjoyed opportunity to sing together in the past and believe that loyalty to the new joint choir would be established over time.

### Buildings

Celebrations:

* *We have two beautiful historic buildings*
* *The work that SSUC has done so far (The Spire)*

Concerns:

* *Many people are very tied to their building*
* *We still have two costly buildings to maintain in this model; does it make sense? Why not get rid of one building?*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The Committee recognizes that the maintenance of a costly historical building places a considerable financial burden on a congregation. We applaud the work of the Friends of the Spire in imagining and pursuing a creative and more sustainable vision for the SSUC building. While it might be tempting to enter into the discussion about buildings, the Committee has no mandate to do so. Therefore our recommendation is that the ministry of the congregations be carried out on a “campus” (two church buildings and Chalmers Church House). One component of the staffing model – having a single Operations Manager – is intended to maximize the effective use of the buildings, in conjunction with the Spire project.

### Sustainability

Celebrations:

* *Celebrate the possibility of financial stability*
* *Better stewardship of resources when shared*
* *The Spire is a positive model*

Concerns:

* *Fear that financial concerns dominate*
* *Fear of attrition and that givings will drop*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The Committee has heard both the hope that a model of shared ministry/staffing and greater sharing of resources might lead to sustainability (particularly financial sustainability) and also a deep concern that a resulting loss of members might lead to greater financial instability. We are however, very aware that our current structures at Chalmers and SSUC are not sustainable in the medium term. We believe that the new staffing model will provide both congregations with closer to balanced budgets in the short term, and we pray that cooperation in shared engagement with our community will lead to bold ministry and mission initiatives that will attract and revitalize membership.

### Process and Planning

Celebrations:

* *Celebrate the conversation to date*
* *A dialogue has started*

Concerns:

* *Uncertainty about the details; We need more facts and figures*
* *What about current staff*
* *Why not amalgamation? Why not a two-point charge?*
* *Moving too fast*
* *Don’t feel at the point of having something to celebrate.*

**How the Committee is responding…**

The Committee acknowledges that people of both congregations are in different places in their hearts and heads, as they study this proposal. For some, the conversation has been going on for many years, and they wish it would move more quickly. For others, the conversation seems quite new and the timing appears rushed. Still others believe that the proposed change represents only loss, and for them, any timetable would be too fast.

We recognize that moving more slowly may seem helpful in dealing with a change of this magnitude. However, we believe that we have a unique opportunity in this moment, with vacancies or pending vacancies in ministry and staff positions, to create a new staffing model. If Chalmers and SSUC don’t take this opportunity, it may not present itself again for quite some time to come.

We acknowledge too that this process is stressful for our current staff members. In the proposed model, some job descriptions would remain very much as they are now. Others will likely change. We know that the congregations are fully committed to accepting their responsibilities as good employers and we will work to ensure that all employees are treated fairly in this process.

There are people in both congregations who are concerned that this process doesn’t go far enough. We have heard from some that we should be talking about amalgamation. As with the question of buildings, the question of merging the congregations was beyond the scope of the Joint Committee’s work and we do not believe that we have a mandate to address it.

While we can provide some level of detail on the proposal, there are many specifics that will only become clear if we decide to move forward with the joint staffing proposal. The decision to adopt a new model will require a measure of trust and confidence on the part of both congregations that outstanding questions can and will be addressed and creative solutions found to what are perceived as current obstacles.

### Draft Motions to come to the congregations in June 2017:

Moved that Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church implement a model of shared ministry/staffing for the two congregations, with the aim of having a full joint ministry/staffing team in place by June 30, 2018 at the latest.

Moved that Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church establish a Joint Needs Assessment Committee (JNAC) immediately, with a report coming to the congregations by early fall, in order to begin a search to fill new ministry positions.

Moved that at least one member of the Joint Committee from each of the congregations be appointed to the JNAC, to provide for continuity.

Moved that Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church establish a Joint Ministry and Personnel (M&P) Committee to serve both congregations, and that the new M&P Committee be empowered to finalize job descriptions for non-ministry staff and consult with current staff with the aim to fill staff positions as soon as possible.

Moved that Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church establish a Joint Worship Committee to begin planning for shared worship services beginning in January 2018.

Moved that Chalmers United Church and Sydenham Street United Church initiate discussion towards the establishment of a Joint Property Committee, and any other such shared committee work as may be appropriate.

Moved that the Joint Committee be re-mandated to continue to:

* Guide the transition process;
* Facilitate further consultation on a second ministry position (currently proposed as Minister of Congregational Life and Community Engagement – half-time) and determine the scope of the position in relation to ministry with children and youth;
* Report regularly to the governance bodies of the congregations;
* Issue a final report by June 2018.