

REPORT  
OF THE  
FUTURES TASK GROUP  
TO  
THE DIVISION OF MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND EDUCATION  
THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA  
FEBRUARY 1993

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## REPORT OF THE FUTURES TASK GROUP

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PREFACE

Questions relating to the future of ministry within the United Church of Canada have been given high priority on the Church's agenda in recent times.

The reality of shrinking financial resources, and a diminishing volunteer base require a radically different approach to way we structure the work of Ministry Personnel and Education.

The formation of the Futures Task Group was an attempt on the part of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education to take seriously this present reality and to engage in a pro-active approach toward planning for the future.

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SECTION 1

PREAMBLE

1.1 Theological Reflection

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus' ministry begins with a text from Isaiah which informs his understanding of the future of his ministry:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because God has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."  
(Luke 4:18-19)

As the United Church of Canada moves into the 21st century, the understanding of ministry as reflected in this text continues to shape our present theological and biblical basis for ministry. God's commitment to the dignity and well being of those most vulnerable in society calls the 21st century Church to a ministry with the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed.

In this ministry, God calls the Church to discern the signs of hope in the world and to respond to the voices seeking love and justice within society. While the Church struggles to carry out this mandate, Jesus' story of the persistent widow who confronts the corrupt judicial establishment of the day provides us with a powerful biblical image of the hope manifest in God's persistence with us.  
(Luke 18:1-8) God will persist until:

"the day in whose clear-shining light  
all wrong shall stand revealed,  
when justice shall be clothed with might,  
and every hurt be healed;" 1.

As we move toward the 21st century, the reality of decreasing human and financial resources results in a temptation for the Church to engage in competition about which justice concerns are most important in God's eyes. When Jesus' disciples began to have similar discussions among themselves and with Jesus, they were called to be a community in which mutuality, respect and sharing of all resources was essential. In the same way, God calls us into community where "justice shall be clothed with might, and every hurt be healed," both for those within and outside the community.

1. Hosmer, Frederick Lucian, "Thy Kingdom Come - On Bended Knee", The Hymn Book, (Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada, 1971) #278, verse 4.

## 1.2 Mandate of the Committee

"A high degree of imagination is required of those who trust in God!" 2.

This report reflects the imagination of a group of people called together by the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (MP&E) following their annual general meeting in February 1992 with the following mandate:

1. To study the directions of the church and ministry as we move into the 21st century.
2. To identify and describe the implications of that study for all aspects of the Division's life and work.
3. Out of its experience to recommend to the Division a model for an ongoing review of its vision, priorities and goals.

The Task Group would have a membership of 6-10 persons drawn from the Division, representative of staff, portfolio areas and constituency, with lay/order of ministry but always the best possible persons. The group would also have an outside facilitator. The membership of the Task Group would make a preliminary report to the Executive in September 1992 with a final report in February 1993 to the Annual General Meeting of the Division.

The budget for this was set at "up to \$20,000" to cover the cost of a possible 3 meetings plus facilitator fees and research costs.

Prior to the formation of the Task Group, the Division appointed Larry Peterson of Larry Peterson & Associates In Transformation as the consultant. The Task Group met in Toronto on three occasions: May 7-9, 1992, August 29-31, 1992, and November 27-29, 1992. The consultant met with the Task Group in May and in August and the first evening of the November meeting.

2. Hall, Douglas, The Future of the Church, (United Church Publishing House, 1991) page 75.

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SECTION 2

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Process

At the first meeting of the Futures Task Group in May 1992, the members of the group were introduced to "Open Space Technology" by the consultant, Larry Peterson. The purpose of this process was to "manage the complexity" of the task before us. Task group members were invited "to explore those areas for which they individually had a concern or passion."

Between the May and August meetings, we agreed to read/research MP&E papers such as Task Force on Ministry, Project Ministry, History of Diaconal Ministry, and Lay Ministry Paper. We read:

- Douglas Hall's book, the Future of the Church,
- Reginald Bibby's, Framgmented Gods and Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada,
- the Division of Communication's, Voices and Visions: A United Church History and
- the Professional Church Leadership paper from the National Council of Churches, compiled by Peggy Shriver and called, The Waiting World Parish and
- other applicable articles.

Each member of the Task Group was invited to gather stories of what people see to be the issues and opportunities for ministry in the 21st century.

At the second meeting of the Futures Task Group in August 1992, we called on the committee's expertise in reflecting on and analyzing the social/political/economic realities of the world in which we live and the impact of these realities on our Church's future.

Between the second and third meetings four members of the Task Group presented an interim report to the Executive of the Division of MP&E and invited responses in three areas: 1) What is useful and helpful? 2) What is missing? 3) What do we need to be sure to include? These responses informed our third meeting.

Just prior to the third meeting in November, we were informed that if we continued with the consultant we would over spend the budget allotted to this task. As a result the consultant was invited to be present on the first evening of the third meeting at which time we discussed the draft report prepared by him. The remainder of the third meeting was spent in compiling the information required for this final report.

SECTION 3

CONTEXT

3.1 Some Important Aspects of our Social Context for Ministry

3.1.1 Demographic Shifts

The population of Canada is aging. Current demographic trends suggest that when the last of the "baby boom" generation reaches retirement, 65% of the people in Canada will be "dependent" on the other 35%. Currently we are in a 50% split.

Rural communities are likely to continue to decline in numbers. There is also a shift in population from core urban areas to the rural communities immediately surrounding the cities.

The 1991 Canadian census indicates that 38% of the population consists of new Canadians. In the next 20 years, Canada's growth will come primarily from immigration and the majority of immigrants will be from the third world. Christianity will no longer be the dominant religion in Canada and will continue to decrease in numeric and social significance in the foreseeable future.

3.1.2 Economic Shifts

With the movement toward Free Trade and the large economic power blocks in Asia, Europe, and North America, Canada's ability to control its own economy is decreasing. The separation between rich and poor is increasing. Unemployment is increasing as manufacturing continues to move to centres where labour is cheaper. With a market driven economy, the pressure increases to consume more in order to create jobs.

In a more competitive world economy, issues of sexism, ageism, racism, classism become more pressing as those currently in positions of power and privilege are faced with diminishing resources.

3.1.3 Increase in Use of Technology

The rapid pace of technological change including such things as faxes, voice activated computers, interactive computer networks, cellular telephones, speed the flow of information. The increase in robotics decreases the need for people in the labour force. A technological society runs the risk of reducing experiences of community and diminishes the value of human relationships.

#### 3.1.4 Changing Social Fabric

The understanding of community is changing with individual rights increasingly coming before community rights. Disputes are more frequently settled by litigation.

There is an increasing variety in what traditionally has been called "family".

#### 3.1.5 Violence and Abuse

When those within society who have power and privilege abuse that power, the result is often violence against those who are vulnerable. The awareness of violence as commonplace in our society is both viewed on television, and experienced on streets and in homes. Safety is an issue for people of all ages. Frustration in the midst of increasing unemployment and lack of consumer power will continue to increase the potential for violence and abuse.

#### 3.1.6 Health Care and Social Programs

Health care and social programs will continue to be affected substantially by a diminishing lack of government resources. Without universal health care, the most vulnerable people will be at increased risk.

#### 3.1.7 Environment

Issues such as the ozone depletion, chemical spills, acid rain will continue to be on the agenda. An increasing amount of time, energy, resources and a new global ethic will be required to address these urgent issues.

#### 3.1.8 Decline of Institutionalized Christianity

Adherents to organized religions have been a diminishing proportion of the Canadian population since the 1960's. Canada's church attendance has dropped to 35% of the total population. Reginald Bibby's work indicates that regular church attendance by teenagers has dropped to 18% of that population and is expected to drop to 15% by the year 2000. 80% of the teenage population expects the institutional church to provide the "fee for service" rites of passage such as weddings and funerals. Bibby's research also challenges the idea that older people are more religious and therefore attend church more regularly. Congregations today do have large numbers of older people, but most of them joined in the 1950's when there was a boom in church attendance. When this generation of older people dies, church attendance will experience an even sharper drop.

### 3.2 Some Important Aspects of the United Church of Canada Context

#### 3.2.1 Pastoral Charges

The number of preaching points continue to decrease gradually each year. As financial pressures increase, membership decreases, and financial contributions continue to decline in relation to inflation, pastoral charges are being realigned and adjoining pastoral charges are being amalgamated. Some congregations are closing and leaving members free to choose where to participate. The average age of members in many congregations continues to increase.

The United Church of Canada has always included a wide diversity of theological perspectives. A perception that these differences have created conflict has resulted in some people leaving the United Church or operating from the margins of the church.

The United Church is involved in fewer ecumenical projects than in the past. Campus ministry is only one example.

The incredibly high cost of building programs for New Church Development places those faith communities in positions of considerable stress. The present distribution of financial resources within the United Church does not provide adequate financial backing for these new congregations.

#### 3.2.2 Structure of Church Courts

The decrease in money available, and a reduction in the number of volunteers are factors contributing to the pressure to lower the number of church courts from four to three courts. Throughout the church debates about the deployment of staff in presbyteries and conferences are occurring. This seems to be leading to competition for dollars to provide funds for staffing. Conference and Presbytery staff are being decreased in number and new approaches to staffing are being developed in many conferences and presbyteries.

There is a move to shift decision making responsibility to the congregational level. A perception exists that other church courts do not listen to the needs and wishes of the people. Congregationalism seems to be gaining in strength.

In some conferences, presbyteries are being realigned in an attempt to provide a more equitable sharing of people and financial resources. Conferences

are struggling to find a new vision for their role within the church.

3.2.3. Ministry Personnel

Immigration from Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Latin American countries is changing the fabric of our country. While our social context is increasingly non-European, most people entering paid accountable ministry in the United Church are of European background. Some ethnic-specific congregations are being formed, largely as a result of immigration. The church often experiences difficulty in locating ministry personnel for these ethnic-specific ministries who are bilingual and at ease with the ethos of the United Church of Canada.

Approximately half of those becoming candidates for ministry are women. However, many years will pass before the ratio of men to women in active ministry is even.

Significant role confusion exists for ministry personnel, particularly among those who prepared for ministry more than twenty years ago. The shift from a hierarchical style of leadership to a more mutual style, in which power is more equally shared among everyone and people are encouraged to contribute because of their particular gifts and abilities, has resulted in an experience of confusion about expectations, and marginalization among some ministry personnel.

The increase in the number of lay persons serving as ministry personal (i.e. staff associates, lay pastoral ministers) and being licensed for all the functions of ordered ministry is experienced by some order of ministry persons as a devaluing of their training. There no longer seems to be anything "unique" belonging to the order of ministry. The question, "Why did I go to school for seven years if others can be prepared for ministry in six weeks?" has reverberated throughout the church.

In the United Church, ministry is often understood by its functions: Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care for ordained ministers; Education, Service and Pastoral Care for diaconal ministers. The focus is on what Order of Ministry persons actually do. The result is that people attempt to understand their ministries by comparing them with the ministries of others and when very little of what they do seems to be uniquely theirs, these people perceive a threat. With this as a backdrop, the church can understand why some people in the Order of Ministry are experiencing an identity crisis.

Education for Order of Ministry traditionally has had an urban focus. Even people with a rural background become urbanized by the educational process. The majority of people who graduate each year continue to be settled into rural/small town ministries.

In support of the initiative of First Nations peoples to provide indigenous leadership, the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre, the Francis Sandy Native Training Centre and the Vancouver School of Theology Native Training Program were established to provide appropriate opportunities for preparation for ministry.

Most education for ministry is traditionally academic and residentially based. The exceptions to this are the First Nations training for ministry (identified above), the St. Stephen's College Western Field Based Diaconal/Lay Professional preparation program and the Lay Pastoral Ministry Training Program. Presently, no specific training is available for staff associates. The need for recognizable standards through accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools is a perceived barrier to developing acceptable field based or distance education models of theological education for ordained ministry.

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## SECTION 4

### IMPLICATIONS

#### 4.1 Division of Ministry Personnel and Education

##### 4.1.1 Recruitment

Recruitment of persons indigenous to particular geographical areas combined with the development of distance education could ensure an awareness of regional cultures and possibly result in longer term ministries in those areas.

To meet the requirements of resource towns, new communities and declining communities, consideration should be given to inviting people who are interested in short term and/or "tent-making" ministries to consider ministry as a vocation.

Recruitment must be emphasized as a local congregational responsibility. Other courts of the church will have the responsibility for developing and providing resources to assist the local congregation with this task.

##### 4.1.2 Formation

Formation for ministry can no longer be assumed to take place automatically as part of the educational process. One's identity as a person in ministry is a critical factor throughout the whole process of preparing for ministry. One of the primary foci of theological education must be to provide opportunities for candidates to grow in self awareness in order to discover their own identities in relation to ministry.

Special attention will have to be given to the issues of identity in non-residential education centres to make identity formation an intentional part of their program.

Candidates for ministry will be called upon to be self aware and to develop a conscious appreciation of the ministry of other persons who have chosen a different expression of ministry as their vocation.

##### 4.1.3 Context

The context in which the church finds itself is continually changing. Analysis of what these changes mean for the church from the light of a faith perspective will become increasingly important. It is necessary for the church to be able to provide a

critique of a variety of different world views. The multi-cultural reality of Canadian Society is now a given. In order to offer effective leadership it is urgent that candidates for ministry be exposed to and develop an appreciation of the many different cultures which combine to form our country.

Technological advances are occurring at an exceptional rate. We cannot afford to be ignorant of the impact that this has on society as a whole and on our church in particular. It is imperative that candidates for ministry and other ministry personnel be equipped to function competently in electronic communication.

#### 4.1.4 Spirituality

Life is becoming increasingly complex. At each turn we are called upon to live in the midst of the delight of new discoveries and the struggles that come with increasing change. We are surrounded by vast increases in knowledge and confronted continually by the profound sense of the mystery of the universe. More than ever, we are faced with the urgency of identifying and articulating a spirituality that is grounded in the context of our biblical faith and theological heritage and lived out within a worshipping community. New forms of spiritual discipline will be required for ministry personnel to equip themselves for their ministry.

#### 4.1.5 Placement

New options for placing ministry personnel will be required. The present system of transfer and settlement conflicts with the goals implied in developing field based/ distance models of education and recruitment of indigenous candidates for ministry. While continuing to value the church's goal of preparing people for ministry anywhere in the church, consideration needs to be given to other appropriate ways of deploying personnel throughout the church.

#### 4.1.6 Collegiality in Ministry

For many years ordained ministers have been accorded a privileged position in the church and the wider community. Along with this special standing came some assumptions about leadership that gave ordained ministers significant power. This has led to a spirit of competitiveness and elitism. In the future, ministry personnel will be called to share the power of leadership in a more mutual style. Respect and intentional support for the ministries of all people is required. This can be supported by providing

opportunities for shared learning for people in the various expressions of lay and ordered ministries. Preparation for ministry could take place in such a way that lay, diaconal and ordained persons would share in some course work.

#### 4.1.7 Leadership

A variety of leadership styles will be required in the future and ministry personnel will be expected to provide flexible leadership appropriate to the particular circumstances. An openness to learning new styles of leadership and a willingness to grow and change as the situation warrants on the part of ministry personnel are foreseen as being necessary. Finding ways of valuing different leadership styles by the whole church will become a priority.

As a result of realignment of pastoral charges and the creation of more pastoral zones, ministry personnel will be called upon to prepare themselves to work more collegially. Thus the church will have to develop new understandings of multiple staff ministries and team ministries and create opportunities to prepare people for these ministries.

#### 4.1.8 Regional Church

As financial resources continue to shrink and populations decline in some geographic areas, it will be important to use our imaginations to explore a variety of alternatives with respect to the shape of ministry. Some possibilities include pastoral zones, (several pastoral charges served by a multiple staff), clusters of congregations (each with its own ministry personnel pooling leadership resources to take advantage of the diversity of leadership gifts that are available, 'circuit' served by one or more ministry personnel (who have a primary responsibility for encouraging and providing training for lay leaders), etc.

#### 4.1.9 Life Long Learning

Learning is a process that continues for a lifetime. The value the church places on life long learning needs to be advanced during the initial stages of ministry formation. Ministry Personnel will be accountable for developing an intentional programme for life long learning. An ongoing process of re-certification of ministry personnel based upon fulfilling certain educational requirements might need to be implemented.

Sabbatical leaves should be established for ministry personnel with a view to implementing a process whereby a time for reflection and re-formation is provided every seven years.

#### 4.1.10 Advocacy

Ministry Personnel will be called to provide advocacy and leadership in the field of social change. Advocacy on behalf of those who are marginalized in our society will be increasingly important. Theological schools and training centres will be expected to provide adequate preparation for ministry personnel to ensure that the prophetic elements of our Christian heritage are strengthened. Gifts that will enable the church to play a significant role in community organizations should be identified and encouraged.

2 Our present and future reality is that the church is moving steadily to the margins of our society. Strategies that will enable the church to advocate on behalf of the marginalized of society from the margins will need to be developed.

#### 4.1.11 Ethics

Moral behaviour of ministry personnel based upon an assumed ethical foundation is not serving the needs of the church. We require a Covenant of Ethics that is grounded in our biblical and theological traditions, and supported and sustained by the church community. Such an ethic is needed to inform the lives and the relationships of ministry personnel. Our ethical standards need to be included within our current covenanting services.

Moral issues do not exist in a vacuum. The capacity to analyze moral issues must be cultivated. Our ethic should be consistent with and based upon our theology and faith. Ministry Personnel and their congregations will require training to enable reflection on the moral ethical issues of life in an increasingly technological age.

#### 4.1.12 Education

A primary role and function of ministry personnel will be that of "teacher". Thus theological education and continuing education should include a wide exposure to a variety of pedagogical techniques. Models for adult education must be developed and made available to prepare ministry personnel adequately for this important aspect of their ministry.

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#### 4.1.13 The Integration of the MP&E Structure

At present, standing committees of the Division operate in a very independent style. More integration of the different aspects of the work of the Division is required. Methods for sharing information and working together on issues need to be explored and developed. Compartmentalizing the Division's life and work will stand in the way of addressing the issues that face us. The possibility of working on more of an ad-hoc basis by establishing committees and task groups that are time limited and representative of the areas of responsibility of the Division should be examined.

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SECTION 5

ONGOING VISIONING

5.1 Premises of this proposal for ongoing visioning

5.1.1 The Division will be best served by making use of the existing structures, procedures and personnel in the process of ongoing visioning. *as a vehicle for change.*

5.1.2 Standing committees are composed of people who collectively represent an enormous amount of church & community experience, wisdom and theological insight.

5.1.3 Accountability reports, though descriptive of all that the Division is about, are currently under-utilized and undervalued and presently received for information only. *suggested?*

5.1.4 Presently our programs tend to be budget driven. *yes* Budgets need to be program driven. *(\*)*

5.2 Proposal

5.2.1 That each standing committee, together with staff, be asked to submit ~~with~~ its accountability report ~~a brief summary~~ statements of:

- concerns
- emerging constituency needs
- directions in which it is being drawn and options for these
- committee's own vision of its future work
- implications of all the above for the work and the budget of the Division

The reports ~~might~~ be renamed "Accountability and Visioning" reports.

5.2.2 That in dealing with these accountability and visioning reports the Division would assign all of them to a single Sessional Committee ~~which might meet one half to one full day~~ prior to the Division Annual General Meeting. *together in Conference Report*

5.2.3 That the Sessional Committee's task would be to:

- collate the concerns, needs, implications for work, directions, visions, potential conflicts, tensions, contained within these accountability visioning reports,
- reflect on the whole picture theologically and in light of the division's mandate,
- out of this collation and reflection, to bring specific recommendations to the Division for its debate and decision-making early on the agenda of the meeting,

to suggest to the Div. the implications of such <sup>as</sup> shifts in direction in order that the Div. can make its decisions in an informed manner

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- to include in its recommendations overall shifts in direction, dropping pieces of work, picking up new pieces of work, redeployment of financial resources, suggestions for joint meetings of standing committees or the establishment of ad hoc committees or task groups for particular pieces of work,
- to encourage in the debate of its recommendations both cross committee critique and affirmation aimed at maximum integration of the Division's work,
- to seek the insights of all Division members present representing the various regions of the country and various pieces of the Division's work including their individual and group study.

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<sup>be</sup> <sup>5.21.4</sup> ~~would help~~ That action taken in relation to recommendations work which ~~could~~ <sup>will</sup> then be shared with the General Council and its Executive for consideration along side of the work of other Divisions and Units.

## SECTION 6

APPENDIX

## Membership of the Futures Task Group

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