



EQUIPPING FOR... LEADERSHIP

Leading through Change – A story from a two-point charge

Produced by Canadian Ministries

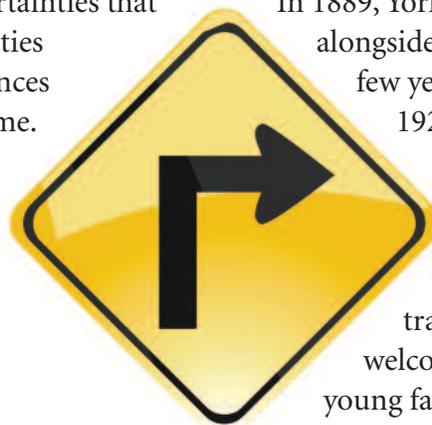
This is a story of two Saskatchewan Presbyterian congregations: Dunleath and Knox, Yorkton in Assiniboia Presbytery. It is retold to encourage reflection, discussion and learning that might help other congregations navigate the uncertainties that accompany change. All faith communities change; and every community experiences it differently. No two stories are the same. The components that contribute usually include: the history, local context, a community wanting to live faithfully, identification of need, motivation to try, visioning and risk-taking.

Read aloud Isaiah 43:18-19.

Reflect on a change, a “new thing” in your life that impacted you – perhaps more than any other change you have experienced. Why do you think it affected you in such a big way? (If time permits, consider both a change that you welcomed and a change that you did not welcome.)

Sing or read “Will you come and follow me” #634 in the Book of Praise

Pray: God of the past, present and future. You are our God; we are your people. Open our minds and hearts to new understandings of what this means for us and for our church. Amen.



“The things of old”

In the early 1880s, European farmers moved to east-central Saskatchewan. A small settlement, Yorkton, grew up along a tributary of the Assiniboine River.

In 1889, Yorkton moved four kilometres to be alongside the new railway. It became a village a few years later, a town in 1900, and a city in 1928. In the latter half of the 20th century, farms became larger and mechanized and less labour-intensive. The labour population was freed up to go to industry, government, transportation, trade and finance in the city. Yorkton welcomed a more diverse population with young families and new Canadians from the Philippines, South Korea, India and the Middle East. With its economy linked to the surrounding agricultural, tourist and park landscape (of which 80% is cultivated), Yorkton (population about 20,000) is Saskatchewan’s fifth largest city.

Around 1884 Presbyterian congregations formed in the farming communities, one named Stornoway and another Dunleath. The Dunleath congregation met in several rural locations before making its home in the hamlet of Dunleath. In 1908 in Yorkton, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church was built and the awaiting congregation moved in; in 1925 it became part of the United Church of Canada. In 1951 a new Presbyterian congregation formed in Yorkton, part of a three-point charge with Dunleath and Stornoway. It moved into its new church building in 1953,

taking the name Knox. In 1954/55 the Stornoway congregation was removed from the charge, becoming a mission field (and it was dissolved in 1965/66), leaving Knox and Dunleath as a two-point charge – Dunleath being about 10 minutes east of Yorkton on Highway #10. (In 1966 Dunleath brought the church building from nearby Stornoway to be placed on the Dunleath Church's foundations.) In 1989 Dunleath celebrated 100 years of Presbyterian ministry, renewing its commitment to “being a good neighbour, and continually exploring new ways to witness to Jesus Christ in this day in this society.”

Reflect on your congregation's history and context.

Discuss

1. What do you know about the early years? How could you find out more e.g. from church office records, word of mouth, national office Archives?
2. What do you know about the history of your community and changes over the years?
3. What have been your congregation's greatest strengths, achievements, challenges?

Pray: Loving God, you have called us to this place at this time. Thank you for the people who have gone before us. With their commitment, we prepare for the “new thing” made possible by living your way. Amen.

“I will make a way in the wilderness”

In 2000 the two-point charge of Dunleath and Knox, Yorkton were seeking a new minister. From the congregational profile, we know that at Knox thirty to forty worshippers attended Sunday services; 38% of them were retired; their budget balanced, and they owned their church building and manse free of debt. Their community, the city of Yorkton, was thriving and there had been “a surge of development.” Yet, concerns were named: decline of farm income was creating financial stress; increasingly farm couples were retiring to the city; there was growing poverty affecting children and youth; and a rise in gambling. “In these difficult economic times, most of our goals

and objectives for the next few years will concentrate on building our congregation, both financially and spiritually. We feel we are in a time of trial and will need to focus our energies on keeping our faith alive and nurturing each other emotionally.” On the profile, the top three ministry skills most valued were: leading worship/preaching, communication skills and home visiting. Much lower on the list were mission and outreach, evangelism and stewardship.

Dunleath had had little change in population. The proximity to Yorkton meant it was easy for people to travel to other churches for worship. In 2000, eight to twelve attended Sunday worship, mainly senior citizens, and financial support came mainly from people in the surrounding area – people who were not regular church attendees. A concern was identified: “We are concerned that it will be difficult to continue due to the present economic situation. However, we do believe that where ever there are two or three gathered in Christ's name, his word will be heard.”

A minister was called. But seven years later, the two-point charge was vacant again and a new minister was called. The small, close-knit Dunleath congregation had continued to work hard, was mission-minded and willing to take risks; Knox was focused on congregational concerns, running out of money and reluctant to do anything differently. By 2011 Knox was in crisis: no money; no CE program; no fundraising; no mission work. And, no denying that something had to be done.

The minister and a team from Knox participated in the October 2011 Stewards by Design conference with consultant Kennon Callahan. This experience began a shift. The team returned articulating the need to be mission-focused and asking the congregation to change from thinking only about themselves and how to stay open, to looking outward and doing mission. They came to recognize that the growth in the region and in Yorkton over recent decades had also “brought many changing needs which provide opportunities for Knox to reach out.” Identifying that peoples' gifts included being “good at providing food” and that community needs included “hunger, because housing is so expensive”, they decided to do a community

dinner. The main risk was financial, but they chose to do it as a mission project rather than a fundraiser.

Read “Opportunities for outreach.”

Reflect on the changing needs in your community. Brainstorm a list of opportunities for your congregation to reach out, “to make a difference.”

Pray: God, help us dream your dreams, hear your Word, and discern your mission for us. Amen.

“I am about to do a new thing”

In late 2011 the minister and clerks of session discussed the congregations’ situations and future possibilities with presbytery. They gained presbytery’s support for an application for financial support through the grants and funds administered by Canadian Ministries. A report from 2012 says, it “was a year of questioning, visioning, and planning... We made plans that were implemented and some that fell through... we tried to remain focused on our accomplishments and on future goals, striving to become better stewards of God’s grace and to use our gifts, both individual and communal, to become more mission-minded congregations.” In September that year, the Knox session had a one-day retreat focused on church planning using material from *Equipping Elders*; then the session decided to go forward using Callahan’s *Twelve Keys*. Elders talked about using the *Unbinding* series in the future.”

Clearly for the Knox congregation, taking risks made a difference. At some point the people realized that if they didn’t try, “there would be no reward.” The community dinners happened first, and then the mothers’ group where issues of parenthood, self-care, relationship and faith were discussed while members of the congregation provided child care. This felt riskier and a greater commitment, particularly since two children were part of the congregation; there was a greater sense of responsibility to meet their needs as they grow up.

A 2013 report says, “Due to the help of Canadian Ministries [CM] and funding made possible through the generous support of Presbyterians across Canada,

Opportunities for outreach

Jim Kouzes & Barry Posner in *The Leadership Challenge* say, “In today’s world there are countless opportunities to make a difference... As there has been in all times of change and uncertainty, there is a need for people to seize these opportunities and lead us to greatness.”

we have been able to keep a full-time minister who, along with the sessions, has provided the leadership and ideas needed to become more mission-minded, reaching out to the growing community.” In 2013 Knox celebrated its 60th anniversary and chose the mission project (“our biggest undertaking”) of providing six free community meals a year. They noted, “We thank CM for its past and continued support... we are encouraged by the ideas that have come forth and the change in mindset, from resigned to hopeful.” In 2014 they reported, “We were very excited this summer to resurrect our Vacation Bible School. We had a wonderful time interacting with and getting to know children from the community.” And it was noted, “The negative voices which once dominated have become much quieter. We have found that we can do things that we were afraid to risk doing before. Our community lunches are a great example. Previously, the worry was that any more work would wear everyone out. What we have found, however, is that these ministries actually invigorate the congregation as we now have a sense of purpose beyond keeping the doors open.”

During these years Dunleath was trying to figure out its future with only six to eight people attending Sunday worship. Part of a farming community, it had always been mission-focused and supportive of community and church events, but could it sustain itself now? Would Dunleath succeed by “just hanging on”? The response “unlikely” was voiced; conversations happened after church among worshippers/elders; and the wheels for amalgamation began moving.

Read the box “Callahan’s *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*.” If possible, borrow or buy a copy of Callahan’s book and read the detailed description of the 12 keys.

Callahan's Twelve Keys to an Effective Church

The featured presenter at Stewards by Design conferences is Kennon Callahan, a well-published American pastor, teacher and consultant. His "12 keys" are divided into two categories with "relational" being the priority over "functional" and with the overarching advice being to build on your strengths and what you are doing well now.

Relational

1. Mission outreach
2. Shepherding visitation
3. Stirring, helpful worship
4. Significant relational groups
5. Strong leadership team
6. Solid decision process

Functional

7. One major program
8. Open accessibility
9. High visibility
10. Landscaping and parking
11. Adequate space and facilities
12. Generous Giving

Which ones have been priorities in your congregation? In each category, which one or two represent strengths of your congregation?

Reflect on and discuss how these strengths could be built on.

Pray: God, open our hearts and minds to our gifts and strengths so that we might move forward faithfully. Amen.

"Now it springs forth"

The Knox congregation had wanted amalgamation for a while; Dunleath had been reluctant. At some point in 2015 Dunleath decided on its own to worship with Knox. Then came the sudden realization for Dunleath that this was the way forward. It was a community decision. Knox was on board right away. "It was bitter sweet for Dunleath with people feeling sad about letting go of the building and history." But by the time of the official amalgamation the two congregations had been worshipping together for a while. The name was changed and the time of service, "but in many ways congregational life just carried on as it had been doing."

On January 1, 2016 the two-point charge of Dunleath and Knox, Yorkton amalgamated their congregations to become Grace Presbyterian Church with the vision, "to learn about God's love and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to share that love with others through mission, sharing, supporting and caring."

The new name was chosen because it says something about the church and God's people, rather than about a place or person in history. The amalgamation has brought renewed excitement and hope for the future, and an awareness of God at work in all the church's ministries.

Recommended Resources

Presbyterian Church resources include **people** (e.g. synod and/or presbytery, regional staff, other congregations/ministers, past and

current worshippers, national office staff in Canadian Ministries and Stewardship; **financial** (e.g. synod and presbytery, funds and *Presbyterians Sharing* grants, congregational campaigns, community fundraising) and **printed/online material** (below):

Called to Covenant

<http://presbyterian.ca/resource-centre/>

Equipping for Elders <http://presbyterian.ca/elders/>

Resources for Congregations in Transition

<http://presbyterian.ca/cd-resources/>

Unbinding the Gospel series

<http://presbyterian.ca/canadian-ministries/evangelism/unbinding/>

Books from retail booksellers

Choosing Change: How to motivate churches to face the future by Peter Coutts, Alban Institute, 2013.

Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strong, Healthy Congregations Living in the Grace of God by Kennon Callahan, Jossey-Bass, 2010 (2nd edition).

Canadian Ministries wants to hear from YOU!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of congregational change and the role of leadership. Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at canadianministries@presbyterian.ca or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 Ext. 271. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/pconnect](https://www.facebook.com/pconnect).