

**Ministry and Mission Profile
Aurora United Church
November 2014**

To live into the ministry and mission of Aurora United Church, we should design and build an inclusive facility at 15186 Yonge Street, capable of inviting the full community into spaces which honour their presence and various needs, including physical, mental and spiritual considerations.

Discipleship

(bold print text is taken from The United Church of Canada's "A Song of Faith")

**With the Church through the ages,
We speak of God as one and triune:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer
God, Christ, and Spirit
Mother, Friend, and Comforter
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
And in other ways that speak faithfully of
The One on whom our hearts rely,
The fully shared life at the heart of the universe.**

At AUC people of all ages are encouraged to grow in their Christian faith through worship, spiritual formation and service. The form, structure and content of this discipleship is varied and creative as it aims to reach the members and adherents of the congregation where they exist spiritually, balancing a need for traditional elements along with progressive and experiential forms of spiritual nurture. AUC strives to make these opportunities meaningful, personally relevant and inspiring for all, resulting in both continuous challenge by one's faith and growth in one's faith.

**We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:
faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,**

Currently, AUC offers many opportunities for the congregation to grow in one's faith. Time, talent and financial constraints do limit all that can be offered. One such example of these restrictions is the challenges related to programming for youth, young people and young families, an area deemed important for the church. Since the fire, the AUC congregation has increased partnerships and involvement with other local churches and organizations within the

Aurora community in order to continue worshipping and serving and to help the church redefine its mission before rebuilding its edifice. Opportunities for partnership with these same groups for spiritual growth through worship, education or service, could be considered, thus expanding the number of available programs for all. Centrally located in Aurora, AUC is well positioned to reach out to and welcome people from the surrounding community to become involved with the church.

God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Needs in Aurora raised during the AUC Community Roundtable in September include a social services hub or partnering of services, the need to tap into youth in the community, and the opportunity to “build a sustainable, diverse, connected and engaged community.” AUC would need to be flexible, innovative, creative, progressive and welcoming in order to move into these opportunities.

Justice and Outreach



***God transforms,
and calls us to protect the vulnerable,
to pray for deliverance from evil,
to work with God for the healing of the world,
that all might have abundant life.
We sing of grace.***

Aurora United Church has long been an integral thread in the fabric of the Aurora community. Not only has AUC housed many groups, activities, and services, the AUC congregation is very active in providing outreach services locally through various programs. Two core programs are Welcoming Arms and Rise and Shine. Although AUC members are very proud and knowledgeable about local outreach initiatives there is significantly less awareness of social justice initiatives within the church.

There are many opportunities for outreach in the Aurora community, and AUC has the opportunity to offer its unique gifts as a Christian church committed to compassion and justice. With the fast expansion of the Aurora area there is a growing need for social service support. Although Aurora is an affluent community there is a “silent” sector of people in need of housing alternatives and other services. The Community Round Table in September opened a door to many possible opportunities for community outreach, and confirmed Community leaders’ hope that AUC can be instrumental in providing them.

The challenge of engaging the AUC congregation in social justice and outreach opportunities is an interesting one. There appears to be a dichotomy between what is important to the faith of the AUC congregation, and what the AUC congregation sees as an ideal church.

The issues are:

- IMNA Report and Environics Report:

Addressing the needs of community beyond church walls, working on social justice, working on the environment seem to be only of moderate importance in regards to the fundamentals of faith of the AUC congregation. This general attitude appears to be in keeping with the overall lifestyle data that reflects the AUC congregation and the Aurora area. Where we see the dichotomy is how AUC sees the “perfect” church. A Christian Church that reaches out to those who need help in community, helping with impoverished people, a church that offers opportunities to get involved in activities outside of church, congregation all work for justice in the world, all score very high on the AUC wish list.

- Visioning Day:

Conversations centred around creating better awareness of social justice issues using all forms of communication from bulletin boards, a “minute for justice” in the service, to use of social media. We talked about having office spaces available in new church for community services such as ESL, Immigration services, youth services etc. Creating a hub so to speak. We also talked about housing possibilities. We discussed the increasing diversity of the community as it grows and how we could use outreach to create meaningful relationships and celebrate this aspect of the city. A point made several times was that whatever we do for outreach we need to keep in mind that we are a church and not a social service agency.

***The spirit challenges us to celebrate
the holy not only in what is familiar
but also in that which seems foreign***

Ultimately AUC does a good job at outreach and has a long tradition of being available and reaching out to community. We may have to step out of our comfort zone, closer to our picture of the ideal.

Leadership

To embody God's love in the world, the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship of all believers, both lay and ordered.

A key part of our strategic vision is balanced lay and ministerial leadership working in close collaboration. This requires strong, empowered lay leaders. To this end we will seek and emulate best leadership practices both within the United Church and beyond. We will encourage lay leaders to step forward as champions of new projects consistent with our vision. We will define leadership tasks and terms, and promote leadership sharing and succession planning to avoid stagnation and burn-out. We will provide for high quality training opportunities for leaders, to encourage/enable growth. We will be especially alert for opportunities to identify, support, and develop younger leaders. We will seek to create clear and empowering organizational structures, and agile decision processes.

Worship and Christian Education/Pastoral Care are the key parts of our Plan where we look for ministerial leadership.

- A fundamental part of our Strategic Plan is inspiring, relevant Worship. We look to a strong Ministerial worship leader with excellent preaching skills and the ability to create & stimulate diverse forms of worship and social interaction.
- We see Christian Development, children's and youth programming and Pastoral Care as critically important, and look to inspiring Ministerial leadership in growing and re-energising these programmes.

AUC has a tradition of quality music programmes, with Chancel Choir and groups such as the Bell Choirs and Youthful Spirits. Music leadership is an important part of our mission and ministry. We need a Music Director capable of sustaining and developing these aspects, of working in close collaborative harmony with Ministerial and Lay leadership, and of moving us in new musical directions while maintaining traditional links.

It is important to note that as AUC defines our post-fire future, we see ourselves as already having solid Ministerial and Council leadership. There is a strong ministerial team in place, working well in sharing responsibility with our present Council Chair.

Ministry Partnerships

3 sessions, with anywhere from 4 – 8 participants per session

1. What leadership role does AUC play in our community?

A palpable sense of pride permeated the discussions surrounding previous associations and partnerships at AUC. Members of the congregation spoke warmly and knowledgeably about associations with a number of groups, including: Scouting, the Iranian Seniors group, the YMCA Nursery school, the Korean church, parenting groups, Al Anon, Canadian Mental Health and many more. The loss of the church was recognized as having such a wide impact on the entire town; loss of affordable rental space, a community gathering space, our own spiritual home were all mentioned.

There is a sense that the congregation views itself as a hub in the Aurora community, and wishes for this to continue in the future plan.

2. What should be sustained, and what should be encouraged as we venture into the next phase?

Partnerships were viewed favourably as a means to address the needs of the congregation, serving a wider outreach mission of the congregation and to provide revenue in hopes of reaching a sustainable future.

On the whole, the notion of partnerships was both recognized and embraced as a next step in creating a future building that met the ecumenical needs of the congregation, while serving the community. A real willingness emerged to explore these options – partnerships with everything from businesses run by social service agencies (ie. Coffee shops staffed by clients of Canadian Mental Health Association), to modular rental space for community groups, to potential partnerships considering the needs of the community were acknowledged.

Several ideas flowed out of this discussion, including:

- a) A rebuilt AUC on the same central site that addresses the needs of the AUC congregation, but also shared with the community;
- b) Flexible space with revenue/rental opportunities;
- c) Self-sustaining model to ensure long-term financial viability;
- d) Potential partnerships with other faith communities, including Trinity Anglican;
- e) Multi-tiered and multi-purpose hub, including a dedicated worship space.

What emerged from these discussions reflected the desire of the community to have a new AUC that reflected the size of the congregation that stands now, one that embraces partnership opportunities that reflect our work as a people of God, and provide for a viable economic future.

Pastoral Care/Spiritual Care

We think of pastoral care as the supporting of others in their response to crises, challenges, and special life events. Our recent IMNA Survey tells us that pastoral care ranks very highly in our “Ideal” church. The pastoral care ministry at Aurora United Church includes the work of our Pastoral Care Committee, Health and Wellness Committee, parish nurse, clergy and members of our congregation. Among other activities, we visit and deliver flowers to shut-ins, send cards to congregants to mark significant occasions, provide leadership on a yearly “Seniors’ Sunday”, carry on a vibrant prayer shawl ministry, and hold Lunch and Learn sessions on various health related topics. In conjunction with our ministerial staff we have initiated the formation of small caring circles for those needing intensive care. Our clergy provide counsel and visit seniors’ residences. The parish nurse is involved in a health ministry which emphasizes the wholeness of body, mind and spirit. Pastoral care is alive and well in our congregation! As we look to the future we are asking how we can expand the reach of pastoral care within our congregation to be fully inclusive of all congregants, while continuing our present activities. One of our greatest challenges is discovering who needs pastoral care, and therefore we should consider new and complementary approaches to meeting it. Good pastoral care evolves in a congregation where members know one another well. It follows that we must encourage activities where there is good interaction among attendees. We can be more intentional in welcoming “the stranger” to our services and coffee hour. We can make more use of the internet/ computer programmes to keep in touch with those missing from services e.g. our young people at school out of town. The computer would provide continuity for some of the activities of the Pastoral Care Committee. Individuals would partner with new members, teen confirmands, or families having children baptized. And we can further promote pastoral care by compiling and making available literature detailing all aspects of this important ministry at AUC.

“We sing of a church seeking to continue the story of Jesus by embodying Christ’s presence in the world.”

Spirituality and Self-Care

Aurora United Church is committed to “uniting hearts and hands on the journey”, and so it is in the realm of spiritual and self-care. The congregation has served as family outside of family for some in their time of need, providing comfort and companionship to those in need, a community of “faith nurtured and hearts comforted” (Song of Faith). Informal networks of friendship and support connect members to one another. AUC is a church of action – a Christian community reaching outward to each other and the world, and spirituality is primarily expressed through the actions of worship and service to the world.

AUC has many opportunities to support the spiritual growth of its membership:

- We can seek opportunities to formalize some of the informal support structures for people seeking emotional and spiritual support from their church community, by: clarifying the roles of support figures such as the parish nurse and others, providing new means of communication for those reaching out for support, such as a question box or website, and finding ways to ensure people are assured of confidentiality when they reach out, so that they have control over their personal struggles and how they are shared.
- Since “in community and in solitude, God changes our lives, our relationships and our world” (Song of Faith), we can seek opportunities to support solitude and the inward journey as robustly as we already support the outward journey in community. We can do this by exploring personal spiritual practices more, perhaps even partnering with other faith organizations with strength in personal spiritual practices, to provide means for congregants to strengthen their own spirits.
- We can recognize that all are called in different ways, and not all will be willing, able or suited to every type of service. We can address the issue of burnout, by empowering community contributors to set boundaries for their time and input into the congregation. We can care for our caregivers, by sending out the call for volunteers, and by recognizing that others may have restrictions on their time and capabilities that we as a community know nothing about and thus respecting their contributions and their limitations. We can recall that many come to the church because their “well is already dry” and they may need to be filled before they have in them to give.

In these ways, we can recognize that spirituality and self-care are not selfish or unnecessary, but rather provide congregants with the strength and inner resources needed to be able to turn outward to the world.

Stewardship

Stewardship is a well understood and demonstrably practiced concept at Aurora United Church. The congregation is innately “faithful in the use of that which is another’s” (Luke 16:12) – generous in its giving of time, talents and treasury as an expression of Christian faith. Stewardship is considered by AUC as a significant fundamental of faith, and as an attribute of an ideal church.

At this juncture in its history, AUC aspires to embrace a time horizon for stewardship that extends beyond weekly givings, monthly committee meetings and annual campaigns. Indeed, the context of taking care of the gifts that we have been entrusted with has expanded to become a generational view. We are no longer just operating a church of today, but are also building tomorrow’s church that will serve the AUC’s congregation and community for the next century. Our role as stewards through this process entails designing and implementing a sustainable model of operation that does not put a financial yoke onto the congregations of 2020, 2050 and 2100.

The near- and medium-term stewardship objectives for AUC in light of above are four-fold:

- 1) Continue to leverage and celebrate the talents of the congregation that are visible and have defined our recent history. The list is long - and includes talents of music, caregiving, teaching, leadership, technology and hospitality.
- 2) Tap into “latent” talents of the congregation – specifically marketing, planning and community communications / public relations - that are critical for our mission forward. These talents are present at AUC and have been demonstrated through bursts of brilliance in the past – but not to the scale that is required now.
- 3) Identify and implement a sustainable financial strategy including income streams beyond congregational giving that will support the operations of the church.
- 4) Sustain the current culture of giving and gift recognition. The congregation’s instinctive willingness to offer time, hearts and hands without solicitation is a remarkable gift.

Worship

“In worship, Aurora United Church gathers to celebrate God’s presence and to respond by going out into the world as followers and friends of Jesus Christ. Worship expresses the dynamic quality of Christian faith and is expressed as a communal act whereby God is present with God’s people, and they are enabled to be present to one another and to God. Worship needs to be aware of the dimension of Christian formation, education, pastoral care and service. Faithful leadership in worship encourages and enables participation. As we gather, we celebrate God’s presence in remembrance and in hope. In worship the wholeness of Gods’ past, present and future names who we are and whose we are.”¹

The congregation at Aurora United Church view worship as a central attribute of an ideal church. Worship is where God’s presence is felt, where people discover how to look at and understand their faith, where there is an opportunity to grow spiritually and where people are encouraged, through the words of Jesus and a loving community of faith. Worship is where people may translate their personal faith into action in their daily lives. When asked about their faith, the congregation believes that attending worship services and living according to the teachings of Jesus is fundamental to their faith formation.

At AUC inspiring worship involves a number of elements. It is first and foremost a time to be changed and moved by God. The sermon, music, sacraments as well as the affirmation of being in community of other faithful contribute to this transforming time. The involvement of lay people, children, acknowledgment of the community through the prayers of the people and a time of quiet, silence and meditation also contribute to inspiring worship.

As we consider the central importance of worship in our lives at AUC it is very positive to know that the needs of the congregation are being met with the strong leadership of our ministers and any refinements are manageable. There is a strong desire to ensure the sacraments of Baptism and Communion remain central to our worship time.

As we look to the future we cannot underestimate the importance of audio visual and technological expertise and the ability to include visual elements, as we did in the past, into our worship services. There is a desire to ensure child and youth participation, inter-generation and intercultural/interfaith services as well as inclusion of the many voices in the congregation including lay people and speakers from other faiths. There is also a strong desire to ensure the sacraments of Baptism and Communion remain central to our worship time.

¹ Based on *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of Canada*.