## EDGE: A Network for Ministry Development

**Brandon Area United Churches**

**Brandon and Area, Manitoba (held at Trinity United in Brandon, MB)**

### Report on Vision Day, May 4, 2018

### Let’s Talk 2: God’s Work Never Ends

### EDGE Consultant: Lesley Harrison

### May 28, 2018

1. **Summary of the Vision Day:**

**Agenda**

**1:00 – Gathering and Worship**

**Purpose**: A chance to gather and explore God’s work in Brandon and the surrounding area as we continue to vision our future together through intentional soul searching and building of relationships.

**Goals:**

* To explore and discover how sharing our resources can strengthen our community and our relationships in the future
* To begin to establish future joint efforts and visioning for the strengths of the ministry (such as Social Outreach, Mission and Service, Volunteerism, Youth,, Worship, Music, Technology, Committee Structure, Infrastructure, Finance, Sharable Resources, etc.
* To consider together, how we are called to do the work of Christ and to make it relevant to those not being reached (i.e.: evangelism)

**Agenda**

**1:00 – Gathering**

**Worship** (EPIC – Leonard Sweet Term: Experiential, Participatory, Image Driven and Community Focused) – this worship also gives a glimpse of: “Godly Play” and “Messy Church”

* *Messy Church is a type of church worship held during the week with no intention of funnelling people into the more traditional Sunday worship. It is family based and usually contains a craft, celebration (worship) and a meal with prepared food. Messy Church is designed for families who may not find traditional worship suitable for their particular needs and schedules.*

**1:45 – Plenary Session: The Shift, New Church Models and Fresh Expressions**

**Lesley** - offered the broad socio-cultural level shifts and examine the church's response over the last 25 years:

* to consider the characteristics of vital healthy churches and what

enables those churches to respond effectively

* Theological assumption that God is doing something new
* Lenses through which to understand the cultural and religious shifts
* The move from denominational to missional understandings of being church
* Adaptive Change
* Leadership in a Shifting Context

***The Changing Church***

* *While the church played a central role in the community of the 1950s, that time has passed. Families are now torn by many competing activities and limited time. People associate and learn with new tools including: Twitter, Google, Internet and Facebook. The pace of change is quickening as illustrated by the “Shift Happens” video which Lesley showed. (See:* [*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkt2escJAQI*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkt2escJAQI)*)*
* *Phyllis Tickle has said that the church has a rummage sale every 500 years. We are now into this cycle by perhaps 100 years. We are moving from a modern to a post-modern world characterized by:*
* ***Modern (pre-1963)*** *\_* ***Post-Modern (1963+)***
* *-Mechanistic -Organic/fluid*
* *-Analytical/Rational -Experiential/Mystic*
* *-Top Down -Communal*
* *-Text Based*
* *-Duty –Freedom*
* *Loyalty –Choice*
* *-Commitment -Little Commitment*
* *-Receive ministry –Participative*
* ***References***
* *The EDGE focus is on church renewal which is sometimes called “fresh expression of churches”. Recommended resources:*
* *“Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening” by Diana Butler Bass*
* *“Evangelism in the Inventive Age” by Doug Pagitt*
* *“Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism” by Martha Grace Reese and Brian McLaren*
* *Two types of churches exist now. Denominational and Missional which characteristically exhibit:*

***Denominational Church Missional Church***

* *-Exists as an organization with a purpose -mission driven*
* *-“Believe, Behave, Belong” -led by Spirit*
* *People seek to belong.* When forming community in the past, people would gather together with a common belief system and then learn the actions, language, and behaviour of that community before finding a place of belonging there. Now, the majority of congregations have shifted from that understanding of community formation to following the premise of creating a place of belonging so that people can then begin to learn the customs and traditions and prayer (behaving) and that will enable people to feel comfortable to explore and share diverse ideas and beliefs.

**Time of Transition: New Questions for a New Day**

These questions are set up in such a way as to reflect in the first question of each grouping, what might have been asked and/or assumed within the modern era (they pertain to the church, however, many other organizations would have held similar assumptions but possibly asked the questions in a slightly different way). The second question in each grouping reflects what might be asked and/or assumed today in a post-modern culture. Of course, the key to change lies in our experience and reaction to this place of transition in our asking one set of questions and holding a set of assumptions while trying to live into the new.

* + - * + *How do we bring them in?*

*How do we send them out?*

* + - * + *How do we survive?*

*How do we serve?*

* + - * + *What’s our vision and how do we implement it?*

*What’s God up to and how do we get on board?*

* + - * + *What can this church do?*

*What can we do together?*

**2:45 – Break**

**3:15 – Collaborative Ministry / Clustering Process**

1. Foundation of a Healthy Collaboration

Building Relationships

Strengthening Resources

Renewing Energy

Celebrating Stories

Exploring Opportunities

Creating Action Plans

1. Journeying through the transitions in the congregational change process requires:

* trust and humility
* a radical hospitality toward difference
* a commitment actively to seek the best for others and to bless them
* the capacity to forgive and be forgiven

1. Relationships and Trust

Movement forward can only happen at the pace of relationships!

1. Leadership Gathering #1

* gathering of representatives (ministry staff and 2 lay leaders) from each pastoral charge
* To offer leadership training and spiritual practice development
* To discuss and design concrete vision and mission questions to be carried back to the congregations
* Consultant to gather information/data that will help to design the EDGE Sessions and Vision Day and be used in potential future initiatives of the “Let’s Talk” process

1. Leadership Coaching for Ministry Personnel

* Leadership personnel from each participating Pastoral Charge will meet together regularly with a coach for two purposes:
* To engage ongoing spiritual practice and discernment
* To discern, from a leadership perspective, the shape of a collaborative and/or new ministry going forward

1. Viability Assessments (including written analysis)

* Each pastoral charge/congregation choosing to participate completes a Viability Study
* This tool provides data used to analyze and assess financial trends and volunteer capacity under categories such as:
  + - volunteer resources
    - changes in volunteer positions
    - congregational demographics
    - facility features
    - building condition
    - current situation
    - financial details (giving patterns, budget, investments)

1. Community Round Tables

* We/EDGE would recommend 3-4 Community Round Tables
* A Community Round Table is the congregation’s opportunity to engage local government, business owners, professionals and other not for profit groups in a round table discussion about your community
* The focus is on a wide range of topics: current community status, long range vision for the community, problems and concerns facing local gov’t , businesses and professionals, services that are needed, etc.

1. Leadership Gathering #2

* gathering of representatives (ministry staff and 2 lay leaders) from each pastoral charge
* To share information and understandings gathered through viability and CRT reports
* To discuss and design next level vision and mission questions to be carried back to the congregations
* Consultant to gather information/data that will help to design the EDGE Sessions and Vision Day and be used in potential future initiatives of the “Let’s Talk” process

1. Vision Day

* This event is for members of the congregations. The Vision Day is designed to help shift the culture and lenses of the congregations by seeding imagination and generating hope and excitement about the new missional opportunities God is inviting us into.
* The agenda for the Vision Day will be designed and will attempt to be adaptive to what emerges as the congregations engage in their spiritual discernment exercises, experience and learn from the modeling of collaborative ministry and from the overall process and data gathered

10. EDGE Sessions

* Consultant to work with The “Let’s Talk” Task Force to review information from all of the processes, collaborative ministry modeling, spiritual discernment and the feedback from the Ministry Personnel Coaching Sessions to facilitate a way forward for those congregations that are interested to move further in the collaborative process

**4:00 – World Cafe**

(art of hosting or intentional spiritual discernment)

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

* tables with paper to draw, reflect, outline on
* people sit at tables but are encouraged to move, wander, cross-pollinate ideas, thoughts, key questions from table to table acting as "ambassadors of meaning" (these are the travellers)
* one person stays at the table as the "host" to welcome new travellers
* the final phase of World Cafe is often called "The Harvest" - involves lifting up the patterns and possibly seeing some of the whole or larger picture of where the energy is or what is emerging as a call to future ministry together

**We hosted three rounds of different questions:**

1. *Given your experience of “the shift” or process of change (in this area and/or your congregation) what feelings, concerns, vulnerabilities are coming up?*
2. *What is God calling the Brandon Area Churches to?*
3. *What areas of collaboration and/or resource sharing are bubbling up and what are the next steps to engage this process?*

**Harvested Responses**

*1. Given your experience of “the shift” or process of change (in this area and/or your congregation) what feelings, concerns, vulnerabilities are coming up?*

Central - Lack of financial support. Anxiety about keeping the building open as costs for maintenance are rising. Current situation is not sustainable. Interest in sharing worship electronically that is interactive. Central currently live steams Sunday am worship but do not currently have a system that allows interaction with other congregations.

Trinity - Congregation is aging and not attracting many new young people. Some coming in but not to the extent that people are dying. Volunteers are burning out. The word “amalgamation” is threatening to people - we are a family and want to stick together. Still many founding members at Trinity who are attached to the building.

Knox - Good energy right now but aware that there is a “holy shift” taking place in church and society. Congregation is aging with some new members coming in however likely not sufficient to sustain current ministry beyond the 5-7 year mark. Lots of opposition to the idea of amalgamation in Brandon given attachment to building and concerns about differences in theology and identity of congregations.

*2. What is God calling the Brandon Area Churches to?*

Called to have discussion about what we can do together. Good movement in talking about what we’re facing but needs to involve more people. Hope that we can keep open minds and hearts about our future together. Hope that we can do a better job meeting community. Messy Church initiative at Trinity has been successful in reaching out to families. Providing support and connection for rural congregations. Let’s do more together out in the community. Can we combine some of our committees to work more effectively: Green Team, Outreach, Faith Formation?

* to develop a common “mission
* dialogue with ourselves and each other (i.e.: educate the masses); develop and build relationships – get to know each other and get rid of the fear, make all churches welcoming to everyone
* ask the question: what is stopping people from coming through our doors
* create new task groups
* need to “get rid of” “white privilege”
* build more relevance for our youth (how do we do this?) – maybe find ways to make it more interesting and inviting for them
* more community involvement (Art Café, Coffee House, etc.)
* create models to show how it works, teach others
* to be open to change, to build relationships and look for innovative ideas
* to look beyond the city – to look more globally and bigger
* to say and act affirming
* be faithful to who we are and what we believe- sharing time/talents/treasures
* form relationships
* do we feel we need to change
* a need to be more collaborative – share events and resources
* we need to do more of God’s work in the community / mission
* identify what we are not doing well individually but better as a group
* “courtship” – perception of each other, 1st and foremost need to get to know each other better
* continue to explore and take a risk
* have a viable church
* one United Church in Brandon (long term) – “be prepared”
* challenged to get to know each other
* be proactive, not reactive

*3. What areas of collaboration and/or resource sharing are bubbling up and what are the next steps to engage this process?*

Central - Many like the idea of the creation of a new space/campus in Brandon area that would offer green space, additional parking, accessibility. Concern about keeping ministry personnel and open to the idea of sharing of ministry staff. Trinity - Buying in bulk. Next steps: more joint worship services.

Knox - Some conversation over past three years about redevelopment of existing building and purchase of adjacent house in order to create new ministry opportunities for affordable housing, BU student housing with focus on students from the north and Indigenous communities, or day care/preschool. (Recommendation of Stewardship committee to purchase adjacent property was not supported by congregation in 2016 as concern about lack of partners for the project) Need for more conversation with the congregation as a whole. Interest in consulting with Edge and looking for expertise/ partners in redevelopment conversation.

* outdoor services, picnics, share ministers (maybe some kind of a pilot project)
* Messy Church
* Special services/ music
* become more welcoming and learn more history
* share space and learn how to be together
* unified website for all churches with links from each church built in
* Shared services: every 5th Sunday, a tri-service in the city
  + to work more at it
  + share more than Weds
  + choirs need to sing together more
  + get to know what we do
  + invite others to Messy Church at Trinity, instead of hosting at all 3 congregations
* release minister to go to a rural church (unstaffed) for a Sunday
* refer to groups that are already going (i.e.: youth group, VBS – combined group)
* shared music with churches without music (i.e.: musicians in city can play and record hymns needed – for outlying churches with no resources)
* tri-choirs
* list the resources that we are willing to share or that we have and encourage sharing
* remember that we are all in this together – and as followers of Jesus we can afford to share, it’s OK as a part of our mission
* sing together
* have food together
* we all agree on outreach, it might be a good start together
* music brings energy – we all agree – share
* mid-week service in the summer or in the evening
* sharing resources – service contracts: snow clearing and bulk buying
* keep talking and move forward
* moving out of the church (Stanley Park, etc.)
* Service together – change governance model to include
* Joint planning – working to understand that we are all on the same page
* small group things together to get started and more meetings such as today (EDGE workshops)
* Joint activities such as being hosted by the UCW – Joint study groups
* committees working together: worship, CE, Outreach
* how do we do pastoral care, becoming affirming (i.e.: invite sharing of ideas
* Communication – need to have a “point person” – someone to send information to the other churches and possibly update joint social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. (events, such as: “Human Rights” “Fighting the Phobias” “International Day Against Homophobia”
* sit down with city officials and consider where there is a common goal or task
* consider a “Hub” model
* explore shared technology and what the cost would be
* find the people with the ideas and go ahead, go for it
* teleconferencing between committees
* programs to interest young people
* reconfigure sanctuaries for multi-purpose

**6 Categories Emerged:**

1. **Amalgamation**

* a number of the churches present are naming that the current situation is not sustainable
* The word “amalgamation” is threatening to people – each congregation considers themselves to be a family and want to stick together; many are very attached to their own building.
* many concerns about differences in theology and identity of the congregations (especially within Brandon)
* Hope that we can keep open minds and hearts about our future together.
* Can we combine some of our committees to work more effectively: Green Team, Outreach, Faith Formation?
* Many like the idea of the creation of a new space/campus in Brandon area that would offer green space, additional parking, accessibility. Concern about keeping ministry personnel and open to the idea of sharing of ministry staff.
* have a viable church
* one United Church in Brandon (long term) – “be prepared”

**EDGE Recommendations**

The church faces challenges in our changing socio-cultural time. It is a transition to a culture of exploration and questioning; collaborating and working together on new ideas; working for causes that make a difference in our community and world. Most likely the church will not exist as it is a generation from now; it will look and be different, however, we still have an important role and our task is to discern what that role is. For the church, this means that change is afoot as you create a place of spiritual belonging where people of all ages can share in life’s journey, and as you are/become that place, the challenge is to communicate and share who you are with each other and let others outside your church know**.**

1. **Distribute EDGE Report, “Changing Congregations: A Research Report on the ways congregations in the United Church are finding their way into God’s “new thing.”**
2. **Host a Third “Let’s Talk 3: God’s Work Never Ends” with a strong strategic planning focus, i.e.:**

* **consider what type of commitment to a process congregations are willing to make**
* **invite 2 lay representatives and clergy from each congregation to join a “Collaborative Ministry Team”**
* **review the EDGE process for Collaborative Ministry and consider if/how to proceed**

1. **Consider an EDGE Property Consult – review of current properties to assess for viability within a collaborative process**
2. **Property and Redevelopment**

* Some conversation over past three years about redevelopment of existing building and purchase of adjacent house in order to create new ministry opportunities for affordable housing, BU student housing with focus on students from the north and Indigenous communities, or day care/preschool.
* Knox (Recommendation of Stewardship committee to purchase adjacent property was not supported by congregation in 2016 as concern about lack of partners for the project) Need for more conversation with the congregation as a whole. Interest in consulting with Edge and looking for expertise/ partners in redevelopment conversation.
* sell churches; consider a “Hub” model
* reconfigure sanctuaries for multi-purpose

**EDGE Recommendations**

1. **Consider EDGE recommendations under category a) Amalgamations**
2. **EDGE Property Consult which might move to:**
3. **EDGE Onboarding Process – review of interested Pastoral Charge properties, including:**

* **Viability Assessment**
* **Intake /Missional Assessment**
* **Property Scans**

1. **Continue Collaborative Talks and Sharing Resources**

* Called to have discussion about what we can do together. Good movement in talking about what we’re facing but needs to involve more people.
* dialogue with ourselves and each other (i.e.: educate the masses); develop and build relationships – get to know each other and get rid of the fear, make all churches welcoming to everyone
* small group things together to get started
* outdoor services, picnics, share ministers (maybe some kind of a pilot project)
* share space and learn how to be together
* Shared services: every 5th Sunday, a tri-service in the city
  + to work more at it
  + share more than Weds
  + choirs need to sing together more
  + get to know what we do
  + invite others to Messy Church at Trinity, instead of hosting at all 3 congregations
  + change governance model to include
* mid-week service in the summer or in the evening
* list the resources that we are willing to share or that we have and encourage sharing
* sharing resources – service contracts: snow clearing and bulk buying
* we all agree on outreach, it might be a good start together
* share music/sing together
* identify what we are not doing well individually but better as a group

**EDGE Recommendations**

We cannot assume a church building centering on Sunday morning worship is the shape of mission being called for in a new social reality in your neighbourhood. Many different forms of mission and indeed ‘church’ are emerging as ways to engage new generations with the gospel. While many traditionally shaped ministries will, no doubt, continue, it is also true that in this new time many traditional congregations are closing or clustering in order to be viable.

1. **Create a Collaborative Ministry Team : invite 2 lay representatives and clergy from each congregation and draft a purpose and responsibilities of the “Team” document**
2. **Plan and schedule regular joint gatherings, worship and activities between pastoral charges to build relationship and encourage future collaborations**
3. **Small Groups – consider what it would mean to develop a collaborative “small group ministry” including all pastoral charges willing to participate**
4. **Electronic Interactive Worship**

* Interest in sharing worship electronically that is interactive
* explore shared technology and what the cost would be

**EDGE Recommendations**

1. **Consider EDGE recommendations under category a) Amalgamations with a special focus of the Collaborative Team to be on: interest in and the “how to” of electronic interactive worship.**
2. **Set up a meeting/consultation with members of “Trinity Live,” Thunder Bay**

**http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/churches-reach-out-through-video-conferencing-1.122590**

1. **Building Community Connections and Partnerships**

* Hope that we can do a better job meeting community. Messy Church initiative at Trinity has been successful in reaching out to families.
* Providing support and connection for rural congregations. Let’s do more together out in the community
* more community involvement (Art Café, Coffee House, etc.)
* create models to show how it works, teach others
* to be open to change, to build relationships and look for innovative ideas
* to look beyond the city – to look more globally and bigger
* we need to do more of God’s work in the community / mission
* sit down with city officials and consider where there is a common goal or task
* programs to interest young people

**EDGE Recommendations**

To know the community and its offerings and needs is important for us as a church because it expands our understanding of God at work in the world. There are opportunities to connect with what God is up to in the community and further afield. God presents us with a clear and consistent call for openness to change and to being changed in partnership with the community

1. **Host a series of Community Round Tables**

* **EDGE can provide the planning team with a “DIY” process or provide facilitation to guide each Round Table**
* **We/EDGE would recommend 3-4 Community Round Tables**
* **A Community Round Table is the congregation’s opportunity to engage local government, business owners, professionals and other not for profit groups in a round table discussion about your community**
* **The focus is on a wide range of topics: current community status, long range vision for the community, problems and concerns facing local gov’t , businesses and professionals, services that are needed, etc.**

1. **Communication/Outreach/Evangelism**

* Communication – need to have a “point person” – someone to send information to the other churches and possibly update joint social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.
* unified website for all churches with links from each church built in (take strengths in one congregation to develop areas (of expertise) in others

**EDGE Recommendations**

Walter Brueggemann speaks of evangelism as simple story telling, finding ways to share our experiences of the gospel by connecting those experiences to what is happening for us or to us in the world around; we have the power to change or reshape the story by what we decide to privilege, to hold up, to give power to? One of the considerations is then, is it possible to or how do we tell our stories or offer testament to who we are (in a United Church way of course)?

1. **If/When a “Collaborative Ministry Team” is set up, ensure that communication and evangelism is a part of their mandate**
2. **Consult with The Conference of Manitoba and North Western Ontario for resources with regards to communication, web formation and social media assistance**
3. **Review what is currently being done to communicate presence and purpose and discern what could be done (i.e.: social media presence, signage, visitation, social dinners, etc.) to address lack of visibility, understanding of church and/or our United Churches as part of the neighbourhood.**
4. **EDGE is in the process of developing a 5 week small group or cohort process that will examine how evangelism is understood within a more progressive church context and what it looks like as an expression of discipleship (this program might be of interest to the leadership of a Collaborative Ministry Team)**

**4:55 – Closing**