

## **Questions and Answers Arising from the Board's discussion of the JNAC Report January 9, 2008**

### **Q. Can you summarize the process and main findings of the JNAC Report?**

The committee has been meeting regularly for about 6 months, with a slowdown over the summer. It engaged in detailed discussions, touching on many of the same questions and concerns that JNAC members expect the Board and congregation will have. We interviewed Peter, Eileen, and Barry and had a great deal of input from members of the congregation through interviews, conversations, emails and letters. There has been feedback from most Board members, some of it passed on by Maureen and Robert who are members of both groups. We examined closely the existing information gathered at Oasis and the Stewardship Showcase. JNAC looked closely at the Environics report and Emerging Spirit; participated in the Stewardship Committee's Asset Mapping exercise and has followed the Board's discussions of its priorities. JNAC found no need for new surveys at this time.

The JNAC was launched on Peter's departure to try to discern what is our congregation's sense of who we are and where we want to go. In the private sector this would be called a SWOT analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

JNAC found that it was difficult to discern in what direction the congregation really wants to move, what we want to become, and what kind of job we want to invite a new minister to take on. There have also been comments from many people that we should consider moving away from the model of having two ordained ministers as not being the most effective use of resources. These two themes intertwine. How do we move forward with a sharper focus from our current model with an egalitarian team ministry model to one in which there is more specialization of staff? JNAC concluded that a managed process of change through intentional interim ministry would be the most appropriate course of action.

### **Q. What options did JNAC consider beside Interim Minister?**

JNAC looked at several options. One was to extend the JNAC process another six months to try to work out our direction, perhaps with help of a professional facilitator. But that would be far beyond JNAC's mandate and capacity.

JNAC did look seriously at calling a new minister in 2008 or 2009. But in that context JNAC would have had little choice but to keep a job description similar to Peter's within a team ministry context. Further, if the Committee had been in a position to judge, for example, that the next prime focus for the new lead minister was to become community development and/or Christian Development, which would overlap with Eileen's current focus. This would result in a significant change in her job description, creating a potentially even more difficult situation for everyone.

JNAC considered bringing in a staff associate now, but then you have again fundamentally changed Eileen's job description for the next two years to become the lead minister, essentially replacing Peter.

With all of these considerations JNAC decided that interim ministry was the cleanest and most effective way to accomplish a major change both in direction and from team ministry to one lead minister with other specialized staff.

### **Q. Can you describe interim ministry in more detail?**

No congregation is ever in a stable state. There is always transition in progress. Interim ministry is an attempt to grab hold of a period of major transition and ensure that it takes you where you really want to go, not to a place that you did not intend. People often think interim ministry is dead time. It's just the reverse. It's taking control of your transition, saving you from the fatal flaw of thinking that all you have to do to ensure a great future is to get the right minister.

An interim minister is a full minister, with all the usual responsibilities plus the extra responsibility of working with a transition committee to develop and implement a transitional process appropriate for the particular congregation. The interim minister would pick up many of Peter's areas, especially primary responsibility for worship, so the congregation would not see a gap. But the interim minister would also drive the transition process.

Details of the process may vary. But it is always a large group process involving many people and lots of time. Learning in depth your identity and your goals. Then working out where and how to go where you have chosen. And lastly, starting to move in that direction by experimenting and implementing changes. Interim Ministry is not about just figuring out where we want to go, it also about making the changes to get there.

In the first few months the interim minister gets to know us, and asks lots of "curious researcher" questions -- why do we do what we do? --- which in turn leads to a managed process involving group study --- which in turn leads implementation of change. After a year or so, when the congregation is ready, it is time to restart the JNAC process.

Lots of issues may arise: finances, staffing, relation to the community. The whole church, under leadership of the transition committee, works on those issues so that as you reach the end of the interim period you have a much better picture of what God is doing in this neighbourhood and how you can get on board. The issues of grieving and power structure and such get addressed along the way. In this ongoing stream of change that is always going on you have caught a couple of years of it in your net and used it to find your path into the future.

As the JNAC report underlines, interim ministry is something that a congregation DOES not something that is done to it. The congregation remains in charge of exactly what the interim ministry is going to be for us. WE have to decide where what we want to make of this opportunity.

It is important to understand that an interim minister is not just a short term minister, but rather a person whose job is to help a congregation redefine itself during a specified period, and who then leaves. Even if we really like the interim minister, and the interim minister likes us, the interim minister cannot be a candidate to become our new continuing minister.

### **Q. Are there any guarantees?**

Of course not. But remember that if people address their problems and work on them, they will be in a better position than if they do not. We have had 14 years of good ministry. We want our next period to be good too. The chances are better via a formal interim process.

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**Q. Why do we keep asking over and over where we want to go and what we want to do? Oasis, JNAC, and Asset Mapping! We don't want to keep answering those same questions over and over yet again.**

There have indeed been a lot of good ideas presented at the Board going back even to the last JNAC report in 1999, and there is a lot of potential at KUC, but a shaper definition of our priorities and action has been limited. An interim minister should encourage us to be bold and actually get moving on some of the good ideas we have already thrown out for consideration.

We want to hold on to what's good, but we don't want to sit on our hands either. Interim ministry is not likely to add to the list of things we might want to do; what it does give us is a chance to prioritize those ideas and actually start implementing them during the interim period with the congregation behind them. Then when the new staff arrives, they are entering a congregation that is already in motion in a chosen direction. Let's use this opportunity.

**Q. It is clear that the JNAC report assumes that Eileen plans to retire in about two years. Is that what has driven the two year process that is discussed?**

Eileen's stated intentions were part of JNAC's thinking. That being said, the fundamental considerations leading to Interim Ministry were the need to take time to define and find a more specific direction for KUC and look at changes away from two ordained ministers. The two year period is typical for interim ministry.

**Q. How does Interim Minister work in the context of team minister, with one Minister having being here for 7 years?**

This is a sensitive situation. The interim minister is not an outside consultant but an active minister doing all the things that any minister does in a congregation. It's very hard however for an interim minister to do the specific interim ministry jobs if everything has to be vetted through the team. The interim minister has to have responsibility for the transition process, but is still a minister in a team. It is more difficult, but it has been done with success.

Depending on the personalities and egos and situations it can be risky. The hardest kind of congregational disruption occurs when things get polarized -- around issues, but even more when they get polarized around people. Like a doctor whose first goal is to do no harm, the interim minister has to step carefully. Often there are issues that have been hidden in a congregation, and that come out during interim ministry. That's healthy; it's better to find those issues before the new call. -- There is always an extra dynamic with multiple staff that does not occur where there is a single minister and perhaps a part time caretaker and an organist who shows up only on Sunday. It can be scary. But not half as scary as having a new minister parachute in to a minefield of hidden assumptions and tensions, without the preparation that really should have happened.

**Q. Given the complexity of interim ministry in a multi-staff situation, is the job description for our interim ministry doable? Is it one heck of a challenge?**

Yes, it is challenging. But yes it is doable. This church should be able to pull in the pick of the crop, from out of the city and even out of the province. This congregation has the kind of track record and reputation that can attract good candidates.

**Q. What control would we have over who our interim minister would be?**

We would appoint a transition committee, and it would contact Presbytery and Conference and obtain a list of available interim ministers. The committee can then talk to and interview any of them before making a recommendation regarding a presbytery appointment.

**Q. What kind of people are interim ministers? Are there some who are younger and more energetic?**

Interim ministers tend to be more seasoned ministers, partly because the job needs training and a variety of experience, and partly because in general the people entering ministry these days (in all denominations) are often entering their second career.

**Q. What's the process? The relationship between transition committee, new JNAC, search committee, and so on?**

The whole process has a lot of overlap. We know where we are going well before we start the next JNAC so it is a short and simple process. We just have to work out the time line so that the search committee gets started in time. -- At Jim Urich's last interim, the JNAC started in October of the 2nd year and finished its work by Christmas. The search committee was launched at once. They were able to do their call in April for a minister who came in October. But the search process has a highly variable time line that you can't really predict. It can indeed take a year.

One focus of the interim ministry process is deciding who we are and how we want to appear to our community. Then there is a separate question of what our next personnel structure should be. -- The interim process may lead to choosing a new structure, but it is less about personnel than about who we are and want to be as a community. We may have ideas now about what staff we want, but if we take the process seriously those ideas may change. -- The time line is part of what should be discussed between the transition team and the interim minister up front. There is always a timeframe for interim ministry. You know where and when you want to end up, and you can work back from that to the timing of the events that must occur leading up to it.

**Q: We have not seen a growth in attendance with growth in population. How have other churches in the area fared in this period?**

JNAC did not poll other churches, so cannot comment on this. KUC has seen declining attendance, but we are not alone within the United Church. The same thing has been happening all across Ottawa Presbytery. Sunday School attendance is down, as are curriculum orders which suggests that it is happening everywhere.

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### **Q. JNAC refers to facilitators. What kind of facilitation is available? What does the facilitator do?**

Facilitators are available from Presbytery to help both the staff and the congregation with the transition. It might cost us some money but it could be money well spent. Presbytery has a list of firms and individuals who have done this kind of work with congregations. We will need to talk to such resources and work out what help they might offer. They might meet with staff and M&P or the transition team or with congregational meetings, perhaps once or twice a month. WE would set the parameters. If we don't want to make more lists but to reach closure, then we should tell them that. It's up to us to negotiate with them what they would do for us and how much it costs. We don't know yet how much it might cost, and there is nothing in the budget yet.

### **Q. How do we get more people coming in the door, and especially how do we keep them? Would the uncertainty scare them away?**

Treat it as a positive. Advertise it. Tell people that we are remaking ourselves and ask them to join in the process and help to define where we are going. Whatever we are and whatever we are doing, we will attract certain kinds of people. If we refuse to budge from the status quo, we will get people who want to drift with us. If we make change a positive focus we will attract people who will help us in that change.

### **Q. What are a pastoral and a program church?**

A pastoral church is smaller and everything focuses on the pastor. A program church is larger and has a wide variety of programs driven by a leadership team many of whom are usually lay members. From Presbytery's point of view we are already a program church, but we are really somewhere in between.

When a church grows toward becoming a program church it often needs to add staff. The program may require diversification, but the team tends to try to be egalitarian and this may add way too much workload for all of them. That in turn blocks the growth you were trying to support, because all of the staff end up spread too thin. If you want to grow you have to let the staff diversify their roles and not have everyone trying to participate in every committee.

### **Q. What options does the Board have in dealing with the JNAC report?**

According to the UCC's JNAC manual, the Board can adopt the JNAC recommendations, modify them, reject them, take no action, or send the report back to the JNAC for changes.

The Board also set up a process to ensure that the whole congregation has an opportunity to learn the additional information that it received (much of it in this document), and to discuss the report in open meetings before voting in a special congregational meeting on Feb. 10.