

**Pastoral Oversight Team
Toronto Southeast Presbytery
Report of the Pastoral Oversight Visit to
Rosedale Pastoral Charge**

Tuesday, June 21, 2011

Visiting Team:

Rev. James McKnight (Visiting Team Lead), Barbara Edwards, Rev. Paul Hutchison

Reason for the Visit:

The Pastoral Oversight Team of Presbytery asked to visit the Rosedale Pastoral Charge in accordance with its mandate to visit each pastoral charge in the presbytery once every three years. It had been some time since the Rosedale Pastoral Charge had last been visited.

Purpose of the Visit:

As acknowledged to the congregation, the purpose of the visit was to:

- 1) recognize, affirm and celebrate the ministry taking place through Rosedale United Church
- 2) enhance the relationship between the congregation and the wider church
- 3) provide an opportunity for mutual self-reflection
- 4) engage with the challenges and opportunities for the ministry of Rosedale United

Preparation:

The customary letter requesting a visit was sent to the Rosedale Pastoral Charge, to the attention of the Clerk of Session and the staff Team Leader, on April 19, 2011. The date of the visit was established, and the information asked for was collected and kindly provided in advance, as requested. Also in advance of the meeting, the Visiting Team Lead had a number of conversations with both Clare Barry (Clerk of Session) and Doug Norris (staff Team Leader), and visited with Doug in person on June 1st. A questionnaire to be presented to the congregation was formulated in collaboration among Doug Norris, Clare Barry, Jim McKnight and members of the Steering Committee of Rosedale United Church. The questionnaires were distributed to the congregation and staff of the pastoral charge, with the request that completed forms be returned to the Clerk of Session for presentation to the Pastoral Oversight Visiting Team. An invitation was extended to all staff to meet individually and at their pleasure with members of the Visiting Team. The Visiting Team themselves met on June 7th to discuss the visit and the visiting process, and prepare for their meeting with the Rosedale Board and staff.

Process and Visit:

Completed questionnaires were collected, and different members of the Board were individually assigned the task of analyzing the responses to one of the questions and then providing a report to the Board and, subsequently, to the Pastoral Oversight

Visiting Team. Because, overall, congregational response to the questionnaire was relatively small, the Board also drew on information garnered from recent stewardship campaigns in formulating responses to the various questions. On the date of the visit, the Visiting Team met at the church at 5:30 pm. They were welcomed by Clare Barry and shown the sanctuary. At 6:00 pm, Barbara Edwards and Paul Hutchison met individually with Doug Norris, staff Team Leader, and Jim McKnight met with Kristin Philipson, minister for Youth & Children's Ministry. At 7:00 pm, the Visiting Team was welcomed to the Board Room, where they met with the Board and enjoyed their very gracious hospitality. The meeting was chaired by Clare Barry, Clerk of Session, and proceeded in accordance with the proposed agenda. Those who had prepared the response to an individual question presented their work in order, beginning with question 1. Their printed reports were supplied to everyone attending the visit, and the Visiting Team took their copies with them. Questions were invited, and asked, in the context of each separate presentation. It should be noted that a particular single voice of dissent from the congregation was recognized by the Board, and the comments of that particular individual were reported in their entirety, as requested. A summary of the responses to the questions is as follows:

Question1: Can you share an experience you cherish about your time at Rosedale United Church?

The various responses were organized into five separate categories, namely: 1) Sense of family or community, 2) Pastoral support, 3) Outreach initiatives, 4) Intergenerational approach / engaging the next generation, 5) Connection with the Holy. Representative comments include:

- its wonderful family and community feeling of warmth, and belonging and caring congregation who reach out
- A member of the Prayer Circle approached me while I was grieving to ask if they could pray for me. Knowing that others cared was very comforting
- Doug gives pastoral care to those in the community not just members of the church. He is visible within the neighbourhood
- Refugee Committee, which started about 11 years ago and has supported over 50 refugees
- Baking cookies with the Sunday School for the Out of the Cold programme and finding out that one very young child connected this with a homeless person he saw later in the week
- Serving Communion with my oldest son
- The intergenerational Youth Service on Oct 4th inspires one and gives a light of excitement for the new generations to see their spiritual commitment and leadership
- The sermons and music are wonderful

In our discussion, it was acknowledged that there is lots going on "behind the scenes" that contributes to the positive experiences expressed by the congregation.

Question 2: What are the two or three priorities in ministry that you would identify for Rosedale United?

The responses to this question were seen as readily lending themselves to organization around the congregation's Mission statement (developed 2000 - 2002):

Our Vision for Rosedale United Church

We are not alone.

Living in God's world, and as followers of Jesus Christ, we gather in community to worship God, to care for others, to support one another, and to strengthen our faith.

Rosedale United Church lives out this mission through:

Encouraging Individuals To Become A Community of Faith:

As a welcoming church community;
With a collegial, well-led ministry team, and responsible stewardship of resources;
Where relevant ministries encourage new members, sustain and stimulate existing members;
With respectful, attentive caring for one another;
Nurturing broadly based lay leadership and involvement; and
With proactive encouragement of youth.

Nurturing the Community through:

Fostering spiritual growth;
Providing pastoral Care;
Providing an engaging and diverse worship experience;
Meeting spiritual needs of all ages, from children and youth to elders.

Reaching Out as a Community by:

Being attentive and responsive to community needs;
Being aware of other faiths,
Compassionate and diverse response to local and global needs;
Being a responsible congregation of The United Church of Canada

It was observed that, in more recent years, "Nurture the spirit, build community, honour the past, and build a future", has become an operative vision for Rosedale United congregation, translating into the simpler "Learn - Grow - Serve" frame for upcoming years.

Representative responses to this question include:

- Innovative and creative worship services
- Exceptional music
- Kristin's leadership with youth and children ministry. She handles teens and youth so well.
- The care and dedication of the Prayer Group for others helps so many spiritually by providing support and comfort
- The Outreach and Refugee programmes
- There is a generosity of spirit here, a gracefulness and courage
- As I took a moment to sit down at the recent CRC Thanksgiving dinner, listened to the guitar and singing of John Deacon looking around at my family and the happy, smiling faces of the many Rosedale United Church volunteers and the CRC staff and guests who had come together to give, receive and share, I felt truly connected to a broader community
- Pursuing inclusiveness - welcoming families and individuals of all ages and persuasions into the congregation
- Reaching out to those who can't get to church by connecting with them
- I walk into church Sunday mornings, my spirit soars, all pain, worries and sadness leaves me. To [me] my church is like heaven, a home away from home, keep up the good work as one big loving family.

In our discussion, it was observed that pastoral care was extended to all the congregation, not just to those in need of urgent care. The "Can Do" attitude of the congregation was highlighted and the definition of "building community" as an outward-looking endeavour was clarified. The idea of "using the strength within to build without" was expressed. Reference was made to a lengthy Worship and Music discussion which centered on the divergent emphases of focusing on the 25-40 age group as opposed to putting the focus on all ages. Assessing the mission of the congregation within a culture of change was another priority identified to the Visiting Team, as was the idea of moving toward "structural justice" by exploring underlying questions and causes.

Question 3: What skills and resources does Rosedale United have that support its vision and ministry? What skills and resources can Rosedale United offer to other congregations and to the wider United Church?

The response to this question was divided into two sections: Lay Ministers and Ministerial Staff.

Lay Ministers:

It was recognized that many highly trained and very well educated individuals and professionals, with varied and special skills, support the life and work of Rosedale United Church. A willingness to serve, once asked, was identified, and a depth of experience and expertise with endeavours such as Habitat for Humanity (four builds per

year), Out of the Cold, and Rosedale's Refugee Committee (which, since its inception, has successfully arranged the immigration and support of fifty refugees) was seen as something that could be shared with the wider church. It was noted that Rosedale members share their expertise as treasurers and board members of charitable organizations, and that volunteers from the congregation bring experience and learning back to Rosedale from the organizations they serve.

Ministerial Staff:

There was clearly a deep appreciation for the effectiveness of the ministerial staff. It was acknowledged that the congregation "expects high performance from the ministerial staff", but that, in turn, the staff enjoys the considerable support of the congregation. The skills and abilities, the creativity, drive and energy of the ministerial staff were recognized, and they were described as an "effective team .. even in disagreement". [Well placed and high praise, indeed.]

Question 4: Describe the place that Rosedale United holds:

- a) in the community**
- b) among other churches in the community**
- c) in (Toronto Southeast) Presbytery**
- d) within the wider United Church of Canada**

a) In the community:

Rosedale United Church and Rosedale Presbyterian Church together serve the community in the heart of North Rosedale. Rosedale serves as a place of worship and pastoral care and as a location offering many programs open to the public (e.g.) Alcoholics Anonymous, drop-in for nannies and tots, yoga and meditation. Space is made available for a variety of community gatherings (e.g.) meetings of the North Rosedale Ratepayers' Association and, through the ministers, the support and pastoral and liturgical functions of the church are extended to the community.

b) Among other churches in the community:

There is a reciprocal arrangement with Rosedale Presbyterian for summer services, and shared participation with other churches in the annual Canned Food Drive.

c) In Toronto Southeast Presbytery:

Response to this question was articulated primarily in the language of community outreach, the community being the downtown Toronto area. Reference was made to Rosedale's active participation in the Out of the Cold program (administered through Metropolitan United Church); the strong, ongoing relationship with Toronto Christian Resource Centre (Rosedale United Church was instrumental in the establishment of CRC in 1965 and contributed over \$600,000 to the recent capital campaign); urgent financial support offered through the congregation's Good Samaritan Fund (which is administered by the ministers); UCW support of various community organizations (including Meals on Wheels, Distress Centre and Sistering, Fred Victor Centre, Massey Centre, Camping Opportunities); the congregation's Refugee Program (to which

reference has been made earlier) and participation in Habitat for Humanity builds (again, to which reference has been made earlier); through the efforts of the Outreach Committee, significant support of worthwhile programs in the area. Participation in Presbytery finds expression through the active involvement of Doug Norris and the congregation's one lay representative, a member of the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Commission.

Question 5: What topics generate the most intense discussion at Rosedale United?

One of the topics of intense discussion has been the position taken by the United Church on a number of economic and political matters, positions viewed by many at Rosedale United Church as inadequately thought out, ill-considered, or biased. Strong feelings against the broader United Church have been generated and congregational contributions to the Mission and Service Fund of the Church have suffered.

Another area of intense discussion was identified in the "healthy tension between those who prefer to give away most of [Rosedale's] funds (including reserves) and those who recognize that for [the Rosedale United Church] congregation to continue well into the future, it needs reserves for the very high costs of maintenance and refurbishment to a beautiful but old and deteriorating building".

Other areas of intense discussion were described in the language of excitement, and inspiration. Intergenerational worship and the effectiveness of the Refugee Committee were particular sources of such enthusiasm, as were the creative deliberations around developing new methods to engage families both within and outside the congregation. Even more than this, perhaps, was the experience of interest and caring and spontaneous support, the material sense of "caring community", which was clearly identified as characteristic of the Rosedale congregation. Rosedale is a big church, yet real attention was given to personal concerns and struggles and needs. The congregation is seen as providing ready response to requests for support, whether by the membership, the community, the staff or the ministry team.

Question 6: What are the roadblocks and challenges faced by Rosedale United in the congregation's endeavours to fulfill its vision? What do you see as being the prospects for Rosedale United five years from now?

The prepared response to this question began with the statement:

We would like to reframe this question into "challenges and opportunities" as we do not think of "roadblocks" when embracing the future.

[A perfect "Rosedale-ism", really. "You show me a roadblock, and I'll show you a challenge!"]

The challenges were divided into three groups: Membership, Aging buildings, and Questionnaire input.

Membership:

The first consideration noted under this heading was attending to the challenge of effectively meeting the pastoral care requirements of the congregation, and continuing to find creative ways to provide loving and caring support to those in need.

The second consideration was recognition of the transition occurring, as many current members are passing away. While, presently, Rosedale United Church membership is stable, the prepared report stated that “the ‘community at large’ is less likely to become engaged in what is perceived as the ‘traditional church’, hence church membership may decline”. The current challenge is seen as developing programs that will sustain the engagement of (the likes of) the population of newcomers in the 25-40 range who are “testing or exploring” the connection with Rosedale United.

Again, as stated in the report prepared for the Pastoral Oversight visit, “The Board has ongoing strategic discussions on how to move forward as a church to meet the vision and needs of the church while honouring the past and engaging the present and future.”

Aging buildings:

The congregation evidences a realistic appreciation of the challenges presented by aging buildings, and recognizes the careful financial management of the Board of Trustees for maintaining the building and manse.

Questionnaire input:

In addition to reflecting the challenges of membership already described, responses included the challenges of:

- a changing community (in terms both of age and religious backgrounds)
- continuing to be a meaningful Christian resource for the residents of Rosedale and beyond
- discerning direction as the emerging church
- maintaining and developing the ministry of all the congregation
- communicating effectively so the members understand and feel part of the processes and changes

The presentation to the Visiting Team named certain current aspects of the life of Rosedale United which could be seen as providing favourable response to some of the challenges identified, and which could be of assistance in developing future programs. They will be highlighted later on in this report.

The second part of Question 6 did not really elicit any material response. It was perhaps one of those questions for which there is either an immediate answer, or an answer that requires a whole other study.

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to share with the Presbytery Pastoral Oversight Committee?

Responses included:

- Rosedale is exceptional as it is a friendly family spirit with no seemingly dissention or power struggles
- Gratitude for the efforts of Presbytery in oversight and assisting with getting ministers
- Significant reservation was expressed about the United Church making [the formal process of] settlement contingent upon acceptance of the ADP system

Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations provided in this Report are based on:

- a) The summary of responses to the questionnaire, as presented by the Board at the Pastoral Oversight Visit
- b) Discussion during the Pastoral Oversight Visit
- c) The individual visits with Doug Norris and Kristin Philipson
- d) The printed material provided to the Pastoral Oversight Visiting Team (which included the 2010 Annual Report of the congregation, all staff position descriptions and some recent Board minutes)

Observations:

1. The first thing that needs to be said is that Rosedale United Church is a vital and effective Christian communion within The United Church of Canada, faithfully and conscientiously living out its vision and mission in the ministry of Jesus Christ.
2. The next thing that can be said is that leadership at Rosedale United Church, by lay people and ordered ministry, staff and volunteer alike, is industrious and capable, responsible, conscientious and effective.

What follows are observations and conclusions about the principal workings and relationships that make Rosedale United what it is.

3. While there is evidence to suggest that Rosedale United, because of its size and depth of resource, both personal and financial, could be nominated a “program” or even a “corporate” church, the overall experience of Rosedale is as a “pastoral” church, where care and concern for the membership and the community, for ministry personnel and staff, are expressed in very personal terms, and attended to by congregation and ministers alike. Rather than dismissal, for example, caring and self-assessment was the Board’s response to the one dissenting voice answering the Pastoral Oversight questionnaire. In another instance, concern was expressed about how to extend appropriate pastoral care to friends and members of the congregation outside the country.

4. One of the purposes of meeting separately with the ministry personnel and staff, and congregation (or, as in the case of this visit to Rosedale United, with the leadership of the congregation, on their behalf) is to determine if the vision and goals and priorities of the ministry personnel and staff, and congregation are congruent or disparate. Congruency contributes hugely to an experience of functionality, in the best sense; disparity, quite the opposite. Evidence provided in the Pastoral Oversight Visit has pointed overwhelmingly to congruency, and so the experience of the overall smooth running of the Rosedale Pastoral Charge really ought not to be unexpected.
5. It might be noteworthy that only two of the Rosedale United staff met individually with members of the Visiting Team. However, no indication was given that it should be so. Quite the contrary. All indications were that the staff are very respectful of one another, even in disagreement, and that disagreements are to be worked through and not used as excuses.
6. The staff who were met individually expressed a deep appreciation for the congregation and their fellow staff, and the congregation expressed a deep appreciation for the staff.
7. The role of Team Leader among the staff is an intricate one, and seems to be managed very effectively by the present incumbent. It would probably be correct to say both that he brings considerable skill to the role and that he has grown into the role during his tenure of ten years.
8. It has been acknowledged that the congregation has high expectations of the staff. At the same time, it has been acknowledged that the congregation has the depth and capacity to provide the staff with effective and appropriate support.
9. The leadership of Rosedale United - Board, ministerial staff and non-ministerial staff - seems to operate with considerable transparency. When it came to the observation, posited by Doug Norris, that Rosedale United operates on two platforms - a traditional one that Rosedale does well, and another one, running in parallel, that is very different (meeting in homes, not only in church, reading many sources of wisdom in addition to the Bible, praying less with words and more with bodies, caring less about denomination), the congregation (represented by the Board) appeared to be fully informed and fully on-side. There was no indication whatsoever of a lack of understanding. Such congruence is completely consistent with the recognized functionality of the congregation. In addition, it bodes well for future planning.

10. The congregation, together with the leadership, recognizes the reality that the church and the community are experiencing significant and rapid transition, even transformation - that we live in a “culture of change”. While there is commitment to honour and respect tradition, there is also a decisive intentionality to build on that tradition, to adapt and make the changes necessary to be the church and do mission in new, creative and effective ways. This intentionality has found expression in the “Can Do” attitude of the congregation; in the way that roadblocks are not seen as roadblocks, but as challenges - to be met and overcome; in the willingness to seek out and embrace what works, relinquishing and discarding what does not; in the undertaking to go with what is relevant and energizing and life-giving and not stay with what is not; in the readiness (however tentative) to consider notions of “structural justice”.

11. It was interesting to note that Rosedale United seems to see itself as more inward- looking than mission oriented. This particular self-assessment is at odds with the truly remarkable record of faithful initiatives in mission undertaken by the congregation. Rosedale United has contributed marvelously and in diverse ways to the work of Toronto Christian Resource Centre (CRC), Habitat for Humanity and Out of the Cold. The congregation’s commitment to mission has been extensively expressed through the wonderful work of the Refugee Committee, the Rosedale UCW, the Outreach Committee, the Good Samaritan Fund, the Holly Berry Fair, the Pastoral Care Committee, and through the significant and budgeted support for the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada. Rosedale provides the treasurers for both the CRC and The Massey Centre. Truly, the initiatives in mission of the Rosedale United community of faith are remarkable and, arguably, might not have been possible in the absence of a strong congregational base.

12. Speaking of a strong congregational base, it is necessary to recognize the sound financial management and effective stewardship campaigns enjoyed by Rosedale United, along with the financial support and commitment of the congregation.

Conclusions:

Rosedale United Church is a high-functioning, faithful United Church congregation. It is well positioned to engage with the challenges of being the church in these fast-changing, modern times. It is intentional about recognizing and adapting to the needs and priorities of this present generation, seeking new understandings, and exploring and designing strategies in order to convey Christ's promise for life's meaning and Christian values for life's abundance. The congregation enjoys a depth and breadth of resource, both financial and in people, and a well-functioning leadership team that is engaged, hard-working, conscientious, responsible, committed, capable, respectful, faithful, adaptable, creative. Rosedale United lives out a vital and vibrant ministry as followers of Christ.

Recommendations:

1. The challenges facing Rosedale United Church are ones that are familiar to many United Church congregations. Rosedale is not alone. To some considerable degree, it seems that Rosedale is attempting to discern responses to the challenges all by themselves; in a sense, in isolation. Much as in the traditional model of a support group, it might be worthwhile for Rosedale to seek out other congregations of like description (such as Metropolitan United, Timothy Eaton, Islington United, although not necessarily all United Churches or all situated in Toronto) and enter into conversation. Regrettably, reinventing the wheel seems sometimes to be an all too common characteristic of United Church process, and so unnecessary.
2. The congregation of Rosedale is involved in a myriad of activities, initiatives, responsibilities and commitments. The total number of volunteer hours contributed annually must certainly be astonishing. While, hopefully, most of that time is enjoyably and happily spent, it is not unusual for burnout, or extreme and sudden fatigue, to be lurking dangerously nearby, especially if people are feeling keenly a sense of obligation. A danger, too, is that the faithful workers who come to church on Sunday can only see the work they have to do, and miss the restorative and nurturing aspects of the Sunday service. An additional risk is that people in the congregation arrive from the challenges of one week to get ready for the challenges of the next and are met, in the Sunday service, by challenges to give, and to contribute and be involved. It can be overwhelming, and result in sudden and unaccountable collapse. It might be worthwhile to assess the extent to which the congregation is being stretched and challenged, and investigate the levels of expectation that prevail, both explicit and implied.

The same concern holds true for ministry personnel and staff. A realistic assessment should be done to determine the hours actually being worked by the

staff (including volunteer hours) to ensure that overwork is neither being allowed nor actually expected. It is especially a risk in as high-functioning a staff as the staff of Rosedale United. Sadly, it is often the case that “part-time” is a misnomer when applied to the hours to be worked by ministry personnel in the United Church. Again, it could be instructive to investigate the nature of the expectations which pertain.

3. The role of Team Leader for the staff at Rosedale United is a very complex one. There is little doubt that it has evolved over the years to accommodate the particular characteristics, capacities and inclinations of the individuals on staff. And while assurance was received that, in accordance with United Church polity, the Position Description for Team Leader includes no supervisory responsibility, supervisory responsibility is implied in the Team leadership portion of the Direct Responsibilities section of the Team Leader’s Position Description. The observations in this Recommendation are being made primarily to highlight the fragile balance that exists within a staff team of the size and nature of Rosedale’s, a balance that has likely been not lightly achieved, and that is probably maintained largely through the skills and abilities brought and developed by the present Team Leader. Any change in staffing will certainly upset the balance, if only in the short term. It might be useful to review all staff position descriptions and make sure the lines of accountability and supervisory responsibility are uniformly and clearly spelled out.
4. It might be worthwhile to assess the overall nature and extent of congregational participation in the Sunday morning worship celebration. Appreciation of intergenerational worship has been expressed by the congregation which, at some level, translates into appreciation for expanded participation. Perhaps a survey of the skills and talents and ideas of the congregation (especially the newcomers) could be made, with an eye to honouring those capabilities and capacities and inviting participation for Sunday mornings. The intention would be more along the lines of designing the worship service around the skills and talents and ideas presented rather than trying to fit the capacities and ideas into a predetermined worship format, with the usual leaders taking part. There are a number of models which reflect this “change from outside” kind of approach.
5. The way in which the congregation of Rosedale United is engaging so intentionally the rapidly changing context in which their ministry is being expressed is exemplary, and instructive. It could be a considerable benefit to any number of United Church congregations if Rosedale United were to document and publish some of the principles and practices and insights they have discerned, and make them available to the wider church, as a resource. It could be a resource that would be received with thanks.

6. The congregation is to be heartily commended for their decisive intentionality in acknowledging and engaging the realities of a rapidly changing social context in order to convey the promise and the values of the faith, while hoping at the same time to honour the best of their traditions. The stage has already been set with an effective and attractive website, intergenerational worship services, the Junior Choir and music, and wellness programs that reach out to the community. Other innovations have been identified and introduced as well: meeting in homes, not only in church, reading many sources of wisdom in addition to the Bible, praying less with words and more with bodies, caring less about denomination, exploring the implications for mission within a culture of change, moving towards “structural justice”. In a very real way, our faith tells us that life and growth and change are gifts given of the Spirit, and ones in which we can rejoice as faithful people. It is our hope that the congregation of Rosedale United continue to be open to the changes that bring life, and that there, they find new joy.

In his Christmas message of 1939, King George VI offered words that speak to us today. This is what he said:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me a light that I might tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied, “Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than the known way!”

It is our prayer that this same, faithful message bring encouragement and hope to the congregation of Rosedale United Church and this whole United Church of ours.

James McKnight
Barbara Edwards
Paul Hutchison

For the Pastoral Oversight Team
Toronto Southeast Presbytery

July 17, 2011