

Humber Valley United Church

STRATEGIC PLAN

Approved by Board, September 17, 2019

Mission, Vision and Commitments

Vision Statement

- To serve as a growing and flourishing Christian community.

Mission Statement

- To worship God in a spirit of joy.
- To welcome all in a spirit of belonging.
- To care for one another and the world in a spirit of love.

Key Commitments

- To be a safe place in which everyone is welcome to participate in any or all aspects of church life wherever they are on their faith journey.
- To continue to be inclusive of people of all ages, sexual orientations and gender identities; racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds; family configurations; abilities; and economic status.
- To welcome all those who wish to attend, join, celebrate life passages, and participate in any worship services, activities, events, and small group programs.

A Strategic Analysis of the Congregation

Humber Valley United Church seeks to be a growing and flourishing congregation that is a place of connecting, caring, and creativity in which people of all ages come together in a vibrant, compassionate and supportive community that enables them to grow spiritually and engage the world. As it looks toward the future, Humber Valley United Church has several identified areas of **significant strength** upon which to build:

Connected Creative Caring

- HVUC people **connect with God and one another** through many devotional and educational initiatives; by celebrating rites of passage; by partnering with the many groups that use the building; and by supporting organizations including Dorothy Ley Hospice, Youth Without Shelter, Water for Life Initiative, Out of the Cold, Water First, and Sleeping Children Around the World.

76 Anglesey Boulevard, Toronto, Ontario M9A 3C1
416 231-2263 info@hvuc.ca

- HVUC's **creative spirit** is reflected in a wide range of musical and dramatic enterprises, and in creative worship services that include many artistic expressions.
- **The ministry of caring** – for one another and those in the neighbourhood – has been manifested in HVUC's commitment to the Stephen Ministry, in a popular program for seniors, and in the work of the UCW, UCF and the Pastoral Care committee.
- HVUC has adopted a **new and streamlined governance structure** that will enable congregational leaders to focus more energy on strategy and building and strengthening its ministries than on the operations of the church building and the management of the individual committees and teams.
- HVUC's **sanctuary** is adorned with marvelous stained glass windows and offers a modern, creative and welcoming space for worship and meditation.
- HVUC has **financial reserves** upon which it can draw.

HVUC also has a **strong, experienced, and committed group of lay leaders** in place to guide the congregation's renewal efforts over the next several years.

At the same time, **several areas of significant concern** have been identified that require serious attention:

- The current group of core leaders is stretched. While a significant turnover in the membership of the HVUC Board has recently occurred, most are long-time members of the congregation who have taken on many roles in church life.
- The congregation is becoming smaller. Between 2007 and 2017, the number of resident members has declined from 382 to 207.
- Between 2015 and 2019, worship attendance has plateaued and remained stable between 120 and 125 (during the peak attendance period of October-November when statistics are compiled).
- The congregation is comprised mostly of senior citizens. Only 11% of HVUC members are under age 60, nearly twice as many people on the congregational roll are over 90 as are under 50, and the number of funerals in recent years has outnumbered the number of baptisms by a ratio of 10-to-1.

In spite of these challenges, Humber Valley remains a committed and spirit-filled community of faith. And the congregation has identified some **significant new opportunities for ministry**:

- Participants in a fall 2018 Community Round Table consultation identified issues of loneliness, mental health, and social isolation as being significant problems. Many area residents live alone, the central Etobicoke community contains a higher percentage of seniors than the city average, over half of those aged 20-34 continue to live at home (compared to a city-wide average of 34%), and the need for neighborhood gathering places has long been identified as a high priority. As well, an ongoing need exists for affordable after-school and evening programs for children and youth.
- A strong interest in music and the arts exists in central Etobicoke. The continued popularity of the nearby Etobicoke School for the Arts has created a large group of alumni who have gifts and talents to share. But this community has few first-class facilities where artists can perform.
- Research shows that, despite a sharp decline in religious affiliation, there remains significant interest in spirituality and making constructive contributions to community well-being. Hands-on volunteer opportunities are important to many, and civic leaders indicate that HVUC and other faith communities can helpfully address problems related to a breakdown of community connectedness.

Humber Valley believes that by building on its existing strengths of caring, fostering creative enterprises and building connections with God and neighbour, and by doing so in creative ways that respond in new ways to identified community needs, new members will be attracted and nurtured, while existing members will continue to be supported.

HVUC Renewal Strategy

Part One: New Ministry Initiatives

Beginning in the fall of 2019, HVUC will launch **three new innovative ministry initiatives** that will attract, nurture and connect with those needing community. These new ministries will target three demographic groups: youth, families, and seniors. They will build on existing strengths, address identified community needs such as loneliness and social isolation among youth and seniors, and make HVUC the supportive, creative and spirit-filled place that newcomers of all ages will want to join.

1. **Modern Worship Opportunities.** In addition to maintaining the high quality of the longstanding 10:30 am Sunday service, HVUC is committed to offering a spirited, band-driven worship service on a regular weekly basis that will focus on families, children, and youth. These services will feature contemporary Christian music and a casual style that appeals to a younger

demographic, and will be closely connected with new programming for young people. This initiative will be developed through a two-fold process:

- a. In the fall of 2019, three special services designed to identify more clearly the most appropriate template for these services will be developed, launched, promoted and evaluated. A working group will support the Minister in coordinating the planning of these services; experimenting with different styles, formats and times; developing an initial base of support for this initiative and overseeing the promotion and advertising of these ventures. A contemporary band may include a band leader, keyboard player, guitarist, bassist, drummer, sound technician and soloist(s). An evaluation of each service will take place. Effectiveness will be determined by attendance and by the response of participants.
- b. By January 2020, develop a plan for offering these services on a more regular basis, with the goal that, no later than September 2020, they will be offered weekly.

2. **New Ministry Initiatives for Children, Youth and Families.** Renewing this area of ministry is vital, and new efforts will build on the energy that's recently arisen in HVUC's ministry with Children, Youth and Families. An energetic new committee chairperson has been recruited, a series of family-oriented evening events has been launched, a small but lively "Angel Voices" children's choir has been established, and a new program is being organized to help working parents connect on a regular basis with God and one another. This momentum will be continued and further developed through a two-fold process:

- a. Creating a 10-hour a week contract position for the 2019-2020 church year. The staff person will:
 - Work with existing staff to develop programming similar to the "Graceland" model at Wellington Square United in Burlington, which would be closely connected to the weekly worship services.
 - Organize and promote monthly theme-based gatherings of young families featuring food, crafts, and opportunities for worship and conversation.
 - Develop new programming for youth that focuses on the recent group of HVUC confirmands.
- b. By June of 2020, develop a long-term staffing plan for this area of work.

3. **Expansion of HVUC's Seniors Ministry Program.** HVUC will develop new opportunities for neighborhood seniors to become part of the HVUC community, and will establish a seniors ministry program that will feature weekly gatherings. The current monthly "Daytimers" program will continue, and additional programming elements could include

- Other lunches and speakers following the current “Daytimers” format.
- Music for seniors, including a music therapy program.
- Dance/exercise classes focusing on wellness of body, mind, and spirit.
- Life skills – including jam-making, knitting, and internet usage.

Seniors will also be encouraged to participate in the after-school homework club for children that HVUC will initiate this fall, with a focus on helping children with their homework as well as teaching them life skills (e.g. cooking, knitting, etc.) In addition, a technology support group, led by one of our congregants with support from local high school students, will be formed to provide support to seniors needing help with their cell phones, computers and other electronics.

The development of this program will proceed as follows:

- a. September-December 2019 – create a coordinating group to develop a more detailed model of programming, identify possible funding sources, and develop a roll-out plan for 2020 and beyond.
- b. Secure necessary staff to lead and facilitate this initiative.

Part Two: Other Key Initiatives

Several other key initiatives also will be undertaken to support these efforts at revitalization:

1. Publicizing church initiatives, programs and events in focused, creative and engaging ways using websites, social media platforms, and other appropriate vehicles.
2. Offering training to HVUC members about the “dos and don’ts” of inviting, welcoming and incorporating people into the church.
3. Continuing the process towards becoming an “Affirming Church.”
4. Giving encouragement to those wishing to establish new small groups, such as “God on the Go,” a new men’s group focused on speakers and discussion, and a group for young adults.
5. Planning for the establishment of an inter-generational drama/music/dance program.
6. Helping participants of new projects transition into congregational supporters/members.
7. Engaging other churches in clusters in joint programming.
8. Developing programs and a neighbourhood gathering place to engage 20-34 year olds in our community who are still living at home with their parents

Resourcing This Plan

Successful implementation of these initiatives will help HVUC experience the renewal of spirit and numbers that is required. But it will necessitate that at least **two full-time equivalent (FTE)** ministry/programming positions be funded, **in addition** to necessary music and support staff. Two basic staffing models exist: creating two full-time order of ministry positions; or calling one ordered minister and hiring several part-time specialists to lead particular pieces of work.

Regardless of the model that's chosen, this decision represents adding an additional half-time ministry person to the 1.5 FTE ministry staff for which HVUC has budgeted in 2019. This will mean **absorbing approximately \$45,000 in additional annual ministerial costs**. Adding this figure to the projected 2019 budget deficit of **\$15,400** means annual budget deficits over the next few years would in the range of **\$60,000**, absent new grant or revenue sources. If the 2019 deficit is higher than anticipated, greater deficits in subsequent years could also be anticipated.

Moreover, a recent actuarial analysis of the HVUC congregation revealed that a **\$50,000** drop-off in congregational givings can be expected over the **next five years** because of congregational demographics. Research indicates that it can take between seven and ten new givers to make up for the contributions of one long-time member, so the task of maintaining revenue streams over the next five years will be challenging.

Implementation of this plan will therefore require a determined effort to explore and access new funding sources including:

- Identifying possible sources of government, private-sector and church-based grant support, and initiating applications where possible.
- Identifying funding available from existing HVUC financial reserves, and securing appropriate commitments.
- Identifying new stewardship resources and programs for the congregation, for implementation in the fall of 2019 and beyond

The approach to funding recently taken by Lawrence Park United Church also will be fully researched. Lawrence Park has secured a \$900,000 line of credit on their building and property to fund the new

ministry initiative they're launching in the fall of 2019. They recognize that their church could close in 10-12 years if a successful new ministry geared to 20-50 year-olds isn't developed, so are working creatively to channel as much funding as possible into this renewal effort. Because the United Church of Canada owns a congregation's land and buildings and thus receives the proceeds from their sale when a church closes, Lawrence Park has estimated that the UCC would only receive \$18 million rather than \$19 million from any eventual sale of that property, and is prepared to risk that eventuality. HVUC will examine the option of securing a line of credit or mortgage on the HVUC property to ensure adequate resources are in place, if needed, while also researching other creative funding models.

This approach to funding is unusual. However, it reflects the fact that, like Lawrence Park and many other mainline congregations, HVUC faces a greater shortage of human resources than financial ones. And it acknowledges the uncomfortable truth that, if congregational renewal is going to occur at HVUC, it must take place during the next several years. To that end, every available resource will need to be accessed to ensure that this plan is successfully implemented so that the necessary and desired renewal can take place.

Assessing the Plan

This Strategic Plan is a living document and will require careful monitoring and assessment. The Board will work to ensure that new ministry initiatives are aligned to the Strategic Plan with the goal of rebuilding the congregation and revitalizing and re-energizing the existing faith community. The success of these programs will be evaluated on an ongoing basis according to the ways in which they increase church attendance, increase active participation in the life of HVUC, enhance congregational sustainability, and provide members and participants with positive and meaningful experiences. Volunteer time and cash resources will also need to be used carefully.

Through developing and implementing this plan, a new and spirit-filled future at Humber Valley United Church is possible. The congregation has a deep passion for experiencing and sharing the love of God and Spirit of Jesus with others, and doing so with faith and courage will help ensure that the next chapter of life at HVUC will be rich indeed.