

Kimberley United Church
Where Do We Go From Here?
January, 2020

Context

Like United Churches in many places across Canada, Kimberley United Church is facing a time of change. The culture in which we live has changed and thus so must the way we do ministry in this new context. This has particular challenges in smaller rural communities like ours. We are in a time when we must ask some important questions about what our future ministry can look like and what is needed in Kimberley.

Our current reality is

- a) we are aging;
- b) our numbers are declining;
- c) we still have the resources to hire a full-time minister yet we have been in search for a new minister for almost a year and have not had any applicants so far;

75% of the people in our congregation are over the age of 65, we have (very few) children or young families and are not attracting this new generation. Our current Sunday attendance is about 40 per week. Without a minister it will be difficult to sustain the energy and capacity needed to continue ministry and it is time to look at what is needed now.

What can we do?

Both the Council and the Search Committee have been asking that question. The Council has been talking about the possibilities of a Shared Ministry with All Saints Anglican Church in Kimberley. With the support of Kathy Davies from the Pacific Mountain Region and Bishop Lynne McNaughton from the Diocese of Kootenay, we have had initial exploratory conversations with others from All Saints to see what a “made in Kimberley” shared ministry might look like. These conversations have resulted in some intentional efforts to begin working together. Church Council appointed a small group to meet with a similar group at All Saints Anglican Church.

What would be possible if we joined together in a shared ministry, with shared resources, energy and ideas, that we can't do on our own.

Anxieties

There will be some anxieties around a Shared Ministry. Other places have experienced the same and we can learn from them. As they have persevered, they have discovered new life as they faced their anxieties.

There have been three primary anxieties:

1. A loss of United Church identity. We have chosen to be United Church, and there is some anxiety around how we might maintain our United Church identity in such a Shared Ministry.
2. Related is an anxiety about Worship. What will worship be like? As United Church members we have a liturgy for worship that includes time for prayer, reflection, singing, as well as a message each week. We celebrate communion less frequently than those in the Anglican church. This does not mean that we take communion any less seriously, simply that we have a worship that includes a variety of expressions possible in a flexible liturgy.
3. What about the building? There is always great anxiety about a building which we have come to love as our spiritual home. We have celebrated in this building with family and friends; people we know and love have worshipped here, been baptized here, celebrated marriages and conducted funerals. This building carries important memories for us.
4. What will we lose? Though we have not yet hired a new minister, we know we have the resources to continue with full-time ministry for the time being. What will it mean to share a minister?

It is important to name those anxieties, and also to be very gentle with each other about how we deal with them. But we cannot allow them to stop us from moving forward to see what new ministry is possible in Kimberley.

Models of Shared Ministry

What might a Shared Ministry look like? There are many different models. The key element is that we devise a home-grown solution. We will navigate this relationship in a way which meets our needs as a Christian presence in Kimberley. It will be almost entirely up to us to negotiate a Shared Ministry agreement between Kimberley United and All Saints Anglican.

As we do so, we are hopeful that we will be able to name and deal with the anxieties being experienced by both parties. We are also grateful for the level of support for a Shared Ministry in both our Diocese and the Pacific Mountain Region of the United Church. Bishop Lynne and Regional Minister Kathy Davies have a wealth of experience in negotiating such a relationship.

What's Next?

In the next month, we hope to hear questions and concerns and hopes from as many people as possible through informal conversations and small group discussions.

At our Annual General Meeting, we will have a discussion about the possibility of Shared Ministry and whether we wish to pursue a conversation with All Saints Anglican more intentionally. This will not be a decision to enter a Shared Ministry, but a decision to explore the idea more fully

Final Thought

The church in Canada is changing. Kimberley United is also changing.

We live in a world which is searching, and we have tasted the life which God can give.

We follow a God who has been faithful to us in the past, and who will continue to be our faithful God.

As we are reminded by the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 43:

*Do not fear, for I am with you;
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert*

It's a good vision for us all. It can sustain us as we move forward in trust.