



TORONTO CONFERENCE CHURCH DEVELOPMENT
AND PROPERTY POLICY REVIEW TASK GROUP
REPORT

MAY 4, 2009

DRAFT

Executive Summary

The task group for the review of church development and the property policy was established in response to the motions of the January 21, 2009 Toronto Conference Executive. These included:

MOTION: that Toronto Conference undertake an evaluation of church development/ redevelopment within the Conference, the evaluation to include recommendations regarding who initiates a development project, who participates in the project and what are each party's responsibilities, what are the processes to be followed in a development project, and how the project is funded.

MOTION: That the president appoint a task group to carry out a review of the Conference property policy (in accordance with the motions of Toronto Conference Executive meetings of November 9, 2005 and January 11, 2006). This review will make recommendations regarding the distribution of surplus funds from the sale of properties within the Conference in terms of ministries and proportions. The review will also recommend where the surplus funds should be deposited.

MOTION: That the reviewing task group or committee recommend how tasks associated with the disposition of surplus property, currently being carried out by the property advisory committee, be done in the future.

MOTION: That the funds generated from the disposition of property and that are received by Conference through amalgamation, congregation disbanding and congregation ceasing to exist, go into the inter-Presbytery fund and be held there until such time as the review of the property policy has been approved and implemented.

The Conference President appointed Eleanor Scarlett, Allan Parker and Anne Harbridge to the review task group, with support being provided by Carol Paniccia.

The task group agreed that extensive consultation with the Conference constituency was needed before any recommendations could be made. Due to the tight time constraints and the limited availability of the task group members it was decided that a questionnaire would be sent out to all ministry personnel and lay members of presbytery asking for their opinion on both church development and a new property policy. The response to the questionnaire was very limited – less than 1%. For this and several other reasons, the task group has refrained from making far-reaching recommendations.

Questionnaire Responses

The responses to the questionnaire came from a mix of lay and ministry personnel as indicated below.

Group	Presbytery										TOTAL
	TSO	TWE	TDV	TSC	DPL	GRY	YOR	SIM	MUS	OTHER	
OM	5	4	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	18
LAY	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	14
TOTAL	11	5	3	2	3	2	1	3	1	1	32

Although the responses sometimes seemed similar, they were not, because individuals replied in the context of their “own stories”. Each was unique and very meaningful to those involved giving the task group a fuller insight into the challenges faced on church development projects. From the stories it was very evident, that the success of any future development / redevelopment, would require better use of human and capital resources. Anything less would seriously jeopardize the endeavour.

To all of those who are in the new Presbyteries, the reading of the complete report should be mandatory. The Executive Summary provides a list of the recommendations made by this task group but it does not provide the intuitive understanding that one would have if they were to read the survey responses. Certainly we will and must do business differently in the future because “it isn’t that way, any more.”

In so far as the Property Policy, (what to do with the money from closed and sold churches) very few provided specific suggestions. However, most seemed in favour of monies being held in a central pot until the new Presbyteries were well in place.

Church Development and Redevelopment

For the most part, the perception of church development in the Conference means “building a building” – bricks and mortar. The Conference needs a new definition for church development, one that specifically includes increasing church membership and has nothing to do with buildings. A recurring theme that came up during this review was that church development needs to be more program-oriented.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Conference expand its definition of church development to include redevelopment and revitalization and eliminate the separation between the two. Church development / redevelopment will refer to the work of any congregation or congregations working together to redevelop property or programs to meet the needs of the community they serve. This could include but would not be limited to amalgamation, specialized ministries such as youth, seniors or community ministries, and it may or may not involve property.

The task group reviewed the responses to the questions pertaining to church development. Several trends emerged, particularly regarding who initiates a development project, who participates in the project and what are each party’s responsibilities. The recommendations below reflect these responses as well as the views of the task group members.

RECOMMENDATION: That Presbyteries and/or congregations are responsible for initiating a church development project. *Note: processes and procedures for doing so will be defined after restructuring*

has taken place.

A meeting was held with Reverend Norm Greene of the North Bramalea U.C. This church has completed two very successful development projects. Both projects were initiated and managed by the congregation. Lessons learned from this development project will be included in the church development repository.

RECOMMENDATION: That Presbyteries and/or congregations may seek out professional advice and/or funding for a church development project from any of the organizations or institutions on the Conference "Approved Funders and Service Providers" list (to be developed). TUCC may be an approved funder.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Conference develop an Approved Funders and Service Providers list. This list will be produced with input from congregations, Presbyteries and the National Church.

A report was produced by Reverends David and Bill Bruce in response to a December 3 passed motion at Toronto Conference Executive. The report was a clarification of the role of Toronto United Church Council. It stated that TUCC provides services to the Presbyteries but they are not exclusive providers of these services. Should a Presbytery or congregation choose to enter into an agreement with TUCC they would be free, but not compelled, to do so. Appropriate fees would be paid for these services.

RECOMMENDATION: That a moratorium be placed on church development only until: a) the new Presbyteries have gone through their priority-setting exercise, and: b) the new executive of Toronto Conference has decided what, if any, further action will be taken regarding church development.

RECOMMENDATION: That any of the four new Presbyteries that have an ongoing church development project, review the project(s) and determine its viability by June 30, 2010. The results of these reviews will be provided to the Conference executive.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Conference develop a repository of information and resources regarding church development and redevelopment. This would include (but is not limited to):

- Names of individuals within the Conference with expertise in church development or areas involved in church development (e.g.: building congregations, developing business plans, real estate, project management, etc.)
- Names of organizations in Canada and the U.S. offering church development training, leadership training, etc.
- Results of all church development project reviews, including lessons learned.
- Sources of funding that the Conference has previous experience with (may include institutions NOT recommended)

The Property Policy

The property advisory committee has overseen the operation of Conference property and has made recommendations regarding its disposition. Also the property advisory committee acted on behalf of the Conference in property matters making policy recommendations to Toronto Conference Executive from time to time as need arises.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Conference Executive Secretary and Finance and Property Administrator make recommendations regarding the disposition of Conference property and any other property matters.

The task group was asked to make recommendations regarding the distribution of surplus funds from the sale of properties within the Conference in terms of ministries and proportions. They were also to recommend where the surplus funds should be deposited.

There was no consistent response to the questions concerning the proceeds from surplus property. Some respondents favoured dividing the money up among various ministries such as youth and camping. Some proposed sharing the money with the National Church for use within the whole church. Another suggestion was that the proceeds should be divided among the new Presbyteries in the same proportions that were approved in another motion (27%, 27%, 23%, 23%). One respondent proposed leaving the proceeds in the Presbytery where the surplus property was disposed of. Quite a number of responses indicated that the new Presbyteries should be very involved in the development of a new policy. Only one respondent felt that the current property policy should remain in place, however several felt that funds should be available for church development.

Recognizing the thrust of restructuring in terms of devolving decision-making and responsibility to the Presbyteries, and in an effort to simplify things within the Conference, the task group gave consideration to the suggestion of giving the funds in question to the Presbyteries. Leaving the proceeds in the Presbytery in which the property was sold would perpetuate the financial inequality in the Conference. Dividing the funds among the four Presbyteries was a reasonable option. Presbyteries would then apply the funds to the priorities they define, whether these are community ministries, camping, church development or any other. No further consideration was given to this option after the task group was advised that the four Presbytery funds would not be established. Further, the task group felt that two things should occur before this policy is developed:

1. decisions are made regarding the financial assets within the Conference
2. the Presbyteries are formally established and have functioned for a period of at least six months.

RECOMMENDATION: That a commission be formed after restructuring has taken effect, to develop a policy for the distribution of the proceeds from surplus property within the Conference. The commission should include representation from each of the four new Presbyteries and from the Conference. The commission should consider the responses to the Church Development and Property Questionnaire and should further consult with the new Presbyteries and others in developing their proposed policy.

RECOMMENDATION: That the proceeds from surplus property continue to be deposited into the inter-presbytery fund until such a time as a policy has been developed for the distribution of these funds.