

Evaluations of the 86th Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference

1) Please offer your comments on this year's annual meeting.

- I appreciated the different format for the meeting, with a theme that was both inspiring and challenging. We had sufficient time to involve ourselves in consideration of the issue and I am leaving with additional resolve to "go deeper" forward with questions that relate to my soul - full relationship with creation.

The Saturday morning session was a relaxed atmosphere in which we could hear about the gifts of those who are entering ordered ministry in our church, and the reflections of those who are retiring - and presumably moving on to other forms of ministry. This part of the annual meeting gave me hope. It didn't feel rushed, as it has in so many previous years.

The congregation of St. Paul's were gracious hosts and I applaud them for their organizational abilities.

Worship and music fed me. I particularly enjoyed the music selected by the speakers on Saturday morning.

- Unfortunately when I went to submit my evaluation form on Saturday the box had already been removed from the table. Please share my comments with all the staff in your office.

I thank all of you for the best organized, smoothest run AGM that I have attended. Every little detail was worked out with great care and concern. I am particularly grateful for the "preferred parking" for those of us with mobility issues and the arrangement to use public lots for the others. It was obvious to all the delegates that there had been and still was a wonderful spirit of co-operation with the staff and host of volunteers at St. Paul's. They were superb!

The format for the introduction of the candidates and the presentations by the retirees was brilliant. For the first time we all felt a part of it and thoroughly enjoyed the singing and the speeches. What wonderful diverse gifts we all bring to ministry.

I found to have such an important church meeting held in the House of God to be very meaningful. The necessary business was dispatched quickly and efficiently. Hurrah!

The theme presentations and speakers imparted so much knowledge but also gave us hope that we are not powerless. In fact we are empowered by God to make change in our world and most of us went home determined to do so.

Thank all of you for the countless hours of work it took to run such a great event.

- Last year when I retired, we were limited to 90 seconds for our comments, and were told that the microphone would be turned off if we went more than 30 seconds overtime. That rule should have been applied this year as well. Past Moderator Bob Smith's talk was a real highlight for me. The Ordinands comments were excellent!
- The food was fantastic, it was the best ever. I enjoyed immensely the worship on Friday by the Moderator, but I could have concentrated better if there had been air conditioning. It was cooler on Saturday and I was able to concentrate better, but not in afternoon.

- Great being out of Toronto in a church. It would have been good if we could have used a neighbouring church basement to enable table groups. Really enjoyed having favourite hymn verses by ordinands, retirees, etc. There was no way to foresee the heat!
- Where was the business?!? Not too much. – Great to have Bob Smith and Moderator Mardi on the same stage (a lot of wisdom there). Good music. Good Food.
- I don't really know where to begin. I am disappointed I guess. In terms of business there were really only two points of business and yet the one which we needed discussion on was blown past. There was no time given to the youth to speak to us. The music, while beautiful was all very passive. While I believe there is much value in the quiet passive voice I believe the annual meeting should be a time of inspiration and renewal. I felt very little of either here this weekend.
- Good things: - hospitality of St. Paul's people – well organized – presentations were fairly good (those of young people could have been better organized, more succinct)
- It was ? and weird. It was great to support not only a local congregation, but a city outside of the GTA. The meals and the hospitality was superb. It was good to see the co-operation and support between/among the churches in the town. Segment with Rev. Smith the best of the lot.
- The facilities of St. Paul's were excellent. The warmth and genuine joy of St. Paul's volunteers could not be equalled in a commercial venue. Particularly enjoyed the candidates/retirees choosing a focus hymn. Thank you for all the hard work that enabled everything to run so smoothly (at least what the court could see).
- Really enjoyed the congregational setting. The discussion was interesting. Business very limited.
- I am really happy to have an educationally focused annual meeting. Mardi, Bob & Alanna were all great. The food was excellent – great price. I loved being in a church and a community like Orillia. We should do this again. I loved saving the money and not paying for a 'big hotel'.
- Nice being in a church; worship and music good; Saturday evening excellent; Mardi's questions thought provoking; registration very smooth; GC40 commissioners met before – good idea; PA system good; special stickers for disabled good idea.
- The meeting was well coordinated, on time and very interesting; an interesting time and so generous of the Moderator to be lead as for three sessions. No mention specifically of the 85th anniversary of UCC that I heard – now a celebration.

- I appreciated the presentations and the music. There was a good spirit in the house. So even though there were moments of confusion they were shared with grace. This Annual Meeting featured a refreshment that I have not experienced for years. This was a good witness for our difficult season.
- Appreciated long breaks for snacks and meals – time for fellowship. Liked being in the sanctuary for meeting. Meals excellent! Good book display. Well organized – including parking. Excellent sound system. Good choir of music. Favourite hymns – meaningful.
- It was good but the venue left a lot to be desired – it was too stuff – no air!!! Without table groups there is not commitment to stay – no group building – disconnected. It was great to have Mardi here she redeemed the Conference!!! She is awesome.
- St. Paul’s did an incredible job with the hospitality! Being in a sanctuary for the meeting was better than expected – but I missed doing “the work”. I didn’t miss the table groups – the one on one sharing worked better for me. Loved the fruit for refreshments. The water stations were great so that I could refill my water bottle. The hymn selections interwoven with the candidates and retirees was wonderful. I liked that we met in a space that didn’t have lights on or air conditioning – less of a negative environmental impact.
- Positives: 1. The manner in which the ordinands, ...retirees were presented. 2. The Welcome that the team from St. Paul’s extended and meals and breaks. 3. The use of internet for communication pre-Conf. 4. The worship and prayer and music. 5. The gentle manner of the President. 6. The book display
- Enjoyed having conference in a church environment with the community involved. As much as the Moderator was excellent and the speakers, but very little information about anything other than the environment. Is this the only aspect of our church we are dealing with. Enjoyed Rev. Robert Smith very much.
- Enjoyed having the conference in a church setting even if it was hot. Meals were excellent. Parking well situated to church. Volunteers friendly and interesting to talk with. A well prepared conference.
- Hospitality was excellent. Loved that the worship portions and especially the Celebration of Ministry Service was in a church sanctuary. Too much time spent on the “creation theme”. Liked the singing between each candidate and retirees 90 seconds. Thanks for the availability of water.
- A couple of negatives...
 - warm weather (beyond our control... and highly unusual for May)
 - the pews were a little tough by the end of Saturday!
 - people sat with those they knew... unlike in a convention centre where we were assigned seats so there was mixing and we met new people.

- missed theological reflector pulling connections between the biblical text and the various AGM sessions... then challenging us to next steps... leading to transformation
- missed a First Nations presence... no smudging
- no ethnic (language specific... inter-cultural) presence shy of scripture being read in Korean on Sunday. We did not attempt to sing in other tongues (one song in French on Sunday).
- business was non-existent... a few motions and the rest was information and education

On a positive note...

The music & worship leadership was wonderful! Karen & Stuart worked well to integrate new and old hymns... multi-sensory aspects to worship... thoughtful prayers underscored by music... tactile responses (stones)...

Being in a church environment, the whole weekend was “worship”! The music interspersed with times of discussion... the candidates & retirees speaking... the naming of those who had gone before us were acts of worship! The dialogue about the environment... the conversation between Mardi & Robert Smith had an intimacy about them... and again were very worshipful. And the ‘Celebration of Ministries’ service was so moving with the choir in the loft... the amazing banner acting as a backdrop... the feeling of being on Holy Ground instead of in a ballroom. Couldn’t be beat!

I liked how the retirees were honoured in the court... not at a “retirement” banquet... as it has been done in previous years. It was good to have names to go with faces... and to give thanks for all the years, gifts, talents and collective wisdom each has shared with the church! I was knitting a prayer shawl throughout the conference and all these people have now been knit into the shawl... to enfold whomever receives it!

The hospitality of the people of St Paul’s and the Conference/Presbytery staff was amazing!!! The volunteers ran for water... served meals... showed people around the building... whatever they were asked to do, with a smile, grace, good humour and love! Far better than any convention Centre!!!

I left Orillia feeling refreshed... challenged to live out my faith in new ways... blessed by the people, the music, the holy conversations I’d engaged in over the 3 days.

Wonderful work by the planning team and all who executed it! If there were blips... they were not noticeable... and were handled with respect, flexibility, grace and humour!

I thought this was the best AGM since Duff-Peel hosted it in Orangeville several years ago! Glad to be out of the city... and in a church setting! Is there a church or churches in Barrie that could host next year’s event? Just curious!

- On Saturday May 29th when we were rehearsing for the 'Celebration of Ministries' service, NN pointedly asked David Allen why Mardi Tindal was not laying on hands... as Moderator of our church... to represent the universal church. David said that ordination/admission/recognition was a function of the Conference, not the General Council... thus the Moderator would NOT be participating in this part of the worship. I have heard from almost every other Conference across the country that the General Council staff most certainly laid on hands... in fact I witnessed Michael Blair do it at Friday evening's celebration for the Hamilton Conference! Also at the other

celebrations several people came to lay on hands... and we were limited to two (which was very hard to pick... when so many people have been part of our journeys). I was led to believe that there were "rules" we were following regarding the Moderator and # of people to lay on hands ... Whose rules? Rules for TO Conference that are different than other Conferences?

I ran into several other folks from TO Conference in Elmira (Hamilton Conference AGM site) and we all wondered the same thing... why couldn't Mardi lay on hands, when Michael could? None of us could come up with a reasonable answer.

Bottom line... It was a real shame that when the head of our church was such a key part of the whole weekend's program... when she had such a wonderful presence with us, she was not allowed to lay on hands to invoke the Holy Spirit's continued workings upon us, in us, around us, through us! This made me personally very sad.

- I thought the meeting was generally well run and the program valuable. I especially appreciated the singing of hymn verses as an introduction to the ordinands, retirees, etc. This should be retained for future meetings. Most of the theme presentations were good, but I thought NN and NN were not articulate, and lacked theological depth and United Church connection. I was very upset about NN abusing NN speaking privilege by exceeding the nominal 90 seconds substantially.

Hospitality was great. Meeting in a church is a good idea, but with the following provisos. The facilities were OK, but I missed table groups. Certainly for a meeting with significant business on the agenda, table groups are essential. The heat was a problem.

Staff did a great job. However I do think there is a governance issue in staff acting as scrutineers. This was not a problem with no real contentious issues, but should be examined for future meetings. I am not suggesting there is a problem, but appearances are important, and there should be no possibility of a situation in which someone might suggest that those with an interest in the outcome of a vote were counting the vote.

- A well organized and worthwhile time, the venue of a church was acceptable; air conditioning was a problem on the Friday night. Orillia was an excellent place to be. I don't see why a church couldn't be tried again.
- I think there should be more time for business.
- Really enjoyed the focus on worship and inspiration. Really enjoyed having Carol ask who was leaving the Conference, would have been great to ask who was new. Of course, the heat and pews made it difficult to be still for long stretches.
- Loved the church setting. Loved coming to Orillia. I liked this site because of its beauty and ability to accommodate this Conference. Nice to be out of Toronto.
- Wonderful hospitality! Wonderful worship! Loved having the meeting in the church (less distraction, less movement of people). Loved going outside of Toronto. Food meals seemed pricey.

- Location was great. Parking on street was ok. Would have walked further at Congress Centre to doorway. Registered for T.O. Annual Conference. Thought we would be doing the business of T.O. Conference. I expected after one year of new Presbytery division that it would be appropriate to discuss the challenges and success that each Presbytery has experienced. This could have been a great time to share what has worked or not. I registered for T.O. Conference Annual Meeting, if I wanted a day of religious/environment retreat that is what I would have registered for. Environmental issues are important, however three hours Saturday afternoon far too long.
- One of the best – church setting makes a difference! Singing and all those hymns was most uplifting. Liked the ecology – water in decent cups, etc. The yellow tee shirt hospitality was helpful and friendly! Lots of planning, but good spirit. Food good and generous!
- Location too hot without air conditioning. Pews hard on a bad back to sit so long. Without table groups generally just people knowing each other conversing. Question the Moderator’s theme “Green to new black” and wonder if she has had conversation with “Journey of Black persons in the United Church”.
- Great hospitality by host church. Water at strategically placed tables was most helpful. Pews were a little tight when working with a 3 ring binder. Was good to walk to refreshments in another church – good change of air and exercise – the pews did not get uncomfortable because we walked and stretched.
- The church venue was a very welcome change. The worship services were wonderful. Meetings were not too long and there were ample opportunities to meet/exchange news outside of scheduled activities. The church volunteers, meals, etc. were excellent. All in all, a wonderfully planned and executed event!
- The church setting was good. The welcome and hospitality was great. The parking was fine. Food at St. Paul’s was good. Snacks were good – there was lots! Worship was good. Music was good. Enjoyed the speaker – Mardi Tindal and the guests she brought and the way she facilitated discussion among the congregation – very effective.

2) Please offer your suggestions for improvement of future annual meetings.

- Sitting in pews is not a good means of engaging discussion groups. It is difficult to have a group with more than two or three and I found that I was frequently sitting with friends. If we are meant to have in-depth discussions, informed by a diversity of voices, there needs to be a table-groups that are intentionally formed. A meeting in a church sanctuary cannot accomplish this. I would strongly recommend the use of a conference centre / hotel arrangement as a venue. We could even use a venue such as Centennial College on Progress Ave. in Scarborough where they have an integrated residence / conference centre - or the University of Toronto's locations which are similar.

- It should be in an air conditioned facility! It should be in a facility where there can be table groups! Put ? section re our feelings, before, during, after each session, back in.
- Every three years – post General Council, have Conference wide gatherings of Pastoral Relations, Oversight, Education & Students, etc. and brief them on changes to *The Manual* and other things they should know. It also gives an opportunity for cross-Presbytery dialogue.
Saturday afternoon did not, for me at least, pass the ‘so what’ test – all good stuff, but I think needed more of an action focus – how we can make our voice heard by government.
- There needs to be children here. The youth must have a voice. In order to become refreshed and inspired we need to act not just be spoken to. While there is need for quiet musical reflection there is equal need for music that has us dancing in the aisles.
- Not so good – hard pews – heat – no meaningful business – some discussion about what is/isn’t working within the new structures would have been interesting/constructive.
- It was very uncomfortable in the Sanctuary – heat and the pews. There wasn’t the opportunity for connection. To have four sessions on one theme wasn’t a good idea. Although there’s no business – have other activities?? That would keep us more engaged, and/or active. Schedule a time for discussions around General Council issues when necessary. There should be structured time for “bonding”.
- Full packages available at registration. Confirmation of registration.
- It seems slow – Things dragged on too much. Why was that? I am wondering why we sat so much. I missed tables and circles and more face to face. How can we improve that?
- More fans for evening if in an un air conditioned building; mix people for meals; need to explain procedures more ie ballots.
- Air conditioning in the meeting hall; tables to sit at so one can see who else is at the meeting; more time for socializing.
- I wish that the matter of meals was simpler both in the ordering and the receiving. I enjoyed the Saturday lunch very much; not so much the evening meal. Ask God for a little less heat, but, then, perhaps God wanted to see us sweat.
- We need small groups – table groups – look at the back of someone’s head does not build community. Are we trying to become a congregational church - ?
- Because of the pews we could have used my “stretch” breaks without needing to leave the space. I missed the interaction with the youth – that was the one good thing about

table groups – being with a young person helped with the learning and the discussion.
*Continue to have the Celebration of Ministries service in a sanctuary if possible even if the rest of the meeting is not.

- A program designed to interact with participants needs to be in a setting conducive to relationship building. Some parts of the program were involving but mostly it was composed of a speaker and many listeners. There are better ways – technology.
- Holding it anywhere other than in the city. Having a variety of interests.
- The only thing I missed was the smaller groupings at the tables.
- Offer a variety of workshops on differing themes. Hard to sit in pews for such extended periods – perhaps some more stretch breaks. Need to help people understand that a budget is simply a guideline – it's not carved in stone – it is a best guess only on how we will need or anticipate to spend our money.
- I'm hoping future AGM venues will be announced further in advance of this one... so holiday plans/study time might be rolled into the AGM time away.
For those who didn't pay for Saturday supper, it was a little tight going back to hotels to pick up family members to go out for dinner... then back to the hotel... then back to St Paul's. Local eateries were not very close to the church... travelling was required to/from the venue... and time to park and walk to/from the church... so designated for supper on Saturday was a little tight...
Perhaps also designate a few spots (pubs... coffee shops... hotel lounges... a lounge in the church) for people to meet after the evening sessions to continue the conversations... meet other presbyters... etc. People who knew each other arranged to meet after Friday & Saturday's sessions... but what about newcomers? Perhaps more could have been done to welcome them or include them? Or perhaps there should have been a way to delegate pews to different presbyteries... (front row South West... next row Living Waters... next row South East... next row Northern Waters... or something like that) so there was some way of mixing people? I sat with South West folks for most of the sessions or colleagues who I knew from Emmanuel College. When we've been at various ballrooms, seating was designated, so we met folks from across the Conference... and this was helpful to build our networks and see God's hand in the workings of our varied ministries.
- I think it would make sense to have the Celebration of Ministries service on Saturday night and save lodging, etc.
- I like the idea of using congregations in non-G.C. years. St. James Centennial in Parry Sound has a comparable sanctuary seating wise and is air conditioned. Plus there is similar access to nearby churches, plus a newly renovated arena two blocks away with banquet/kitchen facilities.
- I wish for one day conferences when we do not have a large agenda.

- It would be nice if possible to have menu choices available when ordering food packages prior to the meeting.
- I enjoyed this location. Would return to Orillia next year. Format more on the business issues of T.O. Conference. Learning time/sharing from four different Presbyteries re How are they organized and responsibilities, positives/negatives, joys/sorrows, success/challenges. Expected M & S update.
- Just wonder how you managed to make Business so thin! Spiritual leadership was helpful.
- Without proposals does the event need to be so long?
- In a General Council year we should meet in larger quarters in order to have tables to work on. I did not take the meal plan but heard comments that the Saturday dinner was not up to a \$20+ meal standard.
- Only air conditioning – of course – but I think I'd rather have extreme heat in a church setting then greater comfort in a more secular venue.
- Suggestions for microphones – instead of having staff pass it to people, I prefer having stationary microphone on the aisle/floor. Individuals who want to speak can line up. It was awkward to try to keep getting the attention of the staff who has the mike.
Worship – although I enjoyed the worship I think it would be good to have more diversity – in terms of culture. We have a diversity in our conference – Korean, Ugandan, Chinese – can the leaders of these communities be given opportunity to lead worship? Mardi's presentation – overall good. She led us thru the via positiva, negativa, creativa and transforma. She ended with stories of hope. However, what was missing for me was the following question. “Take a moment to think about what you're really bothered by in your home, church or community. What is something that you'd like to do something about? What would be a first step towards this?” I would have liked time to reflect on this question alone and to discuss in two's or three's.
Youth program – Inter-Presbytery Event. I appreciated the fact that there was an event for youth. Thank you to Ruth Noble, Monica Moore, Amanda Buchanan, and Alydia Smith. It was great to have them participate in the service. As a mother of a daughter who participated, I felt that they deserved more comfort than the floor. For this year, I understand there wasn't a lot of time to plan, but for future, can more comfortable accommodations be found for them? Perhaps Sparrow Lake Camp or something?