

Evaluations of the 87th Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference

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

- Well done Marg Walker!! Your leadership is gentle and grace filled. Your ministry is a blessing to us all!
Holy manners were definitely lacking when a retiree gave a demeaning and belittling label to the Barrie churches. She stated it as if it was a given fact rather than the opinion of a few. When such disrespect happens and is not named by the Court as inappropriate, hurtful and unacceptable, then the whole Body of Christ continues to suffer.
The candidate's statements were wonderfully inspiring. I once again loved the music interspersed with the statements.
Music ministry was outstanding this year!
The Celebration of Ministries Service was wonderful. The music in particular was perfect and did not take over the worship service but rather served the worship service.
- This year's AGM was the best of the six I have attended. It was so relaxed, partly I think because of the setting and the wonderful hospitality provided by the volunteers from St. Paul's and partly because those chairing the meeting seemed relaxed and actually enjoying the proceedings. One of the highlights again was the speeches of the ordinands, admittands and the retirees. Having them choose a hymn for us to sing really makes us all feel involved. I hope we can continue this practice. It will never get stale because of the great variety available and our participation.
The small group sessions were meaningful and well led. However I did miss hearing the points of view expressed by order of ministry and youth. I always found the mixed table groups to be great opportunities for learning and hearing many sides of an issue. The food at the site was good - not too spicy for those of us not accustomed to ethnic type dishes and the servers were exceptionally polite and friendly.
Accommodations re: parking and the golf cart ride at the camp were much appreciated by those of us with some mobility issues. Trekking across the street on Friday evening was a bit of a challenge as I am less mobile as the day goes on and there were stairs to be climbed as well.
The conference staff deserves a real round of applause for all their hard work in advance and during the meeting. They did a great job.
As we waited outside for the cavalcade of motorcycles to pass by so we could cross the street I wished we had a big banner proclaiming who we were! Let us know if the situation might arise next year and we'll make one! It never hurts to advertise who and whose we are!
My thanks to all involved. I went home exhausted, yet exhilarated, tired, yet inspired! Well done.
- I thought the meeting was well organized and ran smoothly. I appreciated being in the stream for discussion and liked being matched with other order of ministry folk. It was good to have that time to connect and share from a level of understanding. That

said, I felt that there were one too many conversations - partly because the room was quite noisy and smelled strongly of paint – these things can't be helped I know but it made for a less than positive conversation venue. I liked meeting at St. Paul's again because it felt familiar and is much more pleasant than driving into the city. I like that the meal plan is optional and that there are lots of eating venues within walking distance. I really enjoyed hearing from Peter Short but was woefully disappointed that he only spoke once during the meeting. I would have appreciated hearing from him on the Saturday especially in the morning when we ended up with a half hour to spare or in the evening. Conversation is good but so is being inspired and motivated by such an excellent speaker/preacher. He was there and we should have heard more from him. I would have liked to hear more reflection from Peter or another speaker on leadership. As interesting as the discussions were I would have liked more input. It was great hearing from the retirees but it went on a little too long and being back to back with the words from those coming into ministry it made for too much of the same thing and as interesting as they were it was hard to maintain interest after a while. I know, I know I am starting to be nit-picky but you asked for feedback!

- Excellent theme speakers and facilitators!
Lively music and good directors, etc. (perhaps could encourage attendees to bring some instruments – cymbals, timbrals, etc.)
Book room selection had good mix for all ages except for choice of ordination cards – need at Conf. AGM!
Tell people what displays are there and where to find them – good information that does not always seem to have any priority!
Very moving Celebration of Ministries Service!
- I was pleased to experience a part of the opening worship in English and Mandarin. Newtonbrook and the Taiwanese United Church in Toronto have been following this practice in their joint worship services for several years. Why not introduce more languages into our worship services in this inter-cultural church? We can do it! I was very pleased to be a part of the clergy “stream”. This was a positive step forward! Thank you so much! For once in my ministry I felt like I was a part of a community with a common denominator.
- A timely and helpful theme.
Excellent music/worship leadership and integration. Appreciated the concept and division of the three streams meeting and then coming back together.
The space, location, food, hospitality at table and in the building from St. Paul's was excellent.
Time to hear the ordinands was excellent and encouraging. Time to hear retirees interesting but time keeping was a problem for most. (self included).
Youth presentation in Saturday plenary excellent.
All up front leadership competent, articulate and gracious.
- Music leadership was very lively and appreciated. More traditional hymns would have been appreciated. St. Paul's hospitality was splendid.

Marg's gracious leadership set a lovely tone for all proceedings. Regrettably, we heard Peter Short only once and it was not clear how his discussion of "spiritual path" set the stage for the leadership theme. As well, the work in streams was uneventful in addressing the leadership challenges facing us. Instead of opening up vistas, the directions given in the order-of-ministry stream seemed to constrain vision. Without any significant examination of options, we were told that the mandate was for "transformational" leadership and anti-Empire strategies. The small group discussions in which I was involved reflected frustration with the ideological template handed us.

- My first time at Conference. It was interesting and I learned. Very enjoyable. Appreciated being able to participate.
- There is no purpose in these meetings.
Can we take just one day if there is no business?
I love these meetings in a church. Orillia is a great location. Many thanks to St. Paul's.
- The talk by Peter Short was a highlight.
I enjoyed the way the candidates and retirees used a hymn verse as an introduction to their talk.
The music facilitation was excellent.
St. Paul's was well prepared in the event of heat with lots of water and lemonade – much appreciated.
The streams were a good idea. My difficulty was with the space – the basement smelled of paint and was very noisy with that many people. I could have done with time of my own to reflect. For an introvert, all those "knee groups" were exhausting. I find it much more helpful to get to know a table group and work with those people for the weekend.
- Great hospitality. Space is ok. President Marg was great & enthusiastic! Rev. Peter Short's talk was great. The music was great – the musician had a good way of getting us involved. I would've loved to hear Peter Short again on Saturday – and have him integrate the reflections from the people.
I enjoyed going to Sparrow Lake Camp! I enjoyed the youth.
- Program was excellent. Good music, great people.
Wonderful, wonderful weekend. Thanks so much!
- Friday great. Peter Short's presentation excellent. Very powerful. Lovely surroundings. Have it at St. Paul's (a lot of stairs) but oh well. Friendly and warm. Great start at the "streams" Saturday.
Saturday – what an awesome day – Enjoyed the discussions/dialogue. Very informative and I'm inspired.

- Great Weekend
The lay people's stream was well organized.
Peter Short was memorable – funny – poignant
Fellowship and meeting space was great – food too!
See you next Year!
- Everything so good. Sunday morning 59 years old U.C.C. camp. It was so beautiful.
We would like to come again next year.
Rev. Peter Short message was so touching at opening day, and I liked his message at
the Celebration of Ministries Worship.
- Wonderful Music! Well done Ross and team! Pres. Marg deserves credit for
conducting every part of the weekend so well. Rev. P. Short was outstanding. (We
should have had him present a second time!) Hearing from candidates and voting on
accepting them was worthwhile and interesting – respectively.
Streams – P. Evans is very good at asking great questions. We were not likely as
effective at answering and sorting through them.
It was very difficult to catch what O. Bula was presenting.
Breaks – ample, and appreciated fruit and snacks and refreshments.
Meals – I only did the meal at camp. It was great.
- Speaker – Great
Music – Great
Food & Church – Excellent
Location * * * *
Stream Leadership well done
- Excellent! Great discussions! Wonderful music. Good food. Comfortable
surroundings. Sound good. Appreciated the book room. Peter Short's address Friday
was engaging and inspiring.
- The food was amazing! Thank you St. Paul's. The ordinands and retirees speeches
were great.
Guest speaker – good
- The music was FABULOUS!!!
The themed sessions were okay, but why separate the lay and ministry streams –
there's already a distinction, you've just cemented it.
The presentation of ordinands etc. very moving and appropriate.
The retirees celebration most moving

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

- A little more time was required for those choosing to have their meals off site. Retirees need to stick closer to a 90 second time frame.
- Conference was great so thanks for all your work
I was wondering about the numbering system for reports
most people around me were using their laptop or had printed off the reports all in white
the old system of Blue, Yellow, etc. was created for a time when work books were distributed by conference and we always had many pages to add (carefully colour coded) once we arrived - if all your sheets are now white or if you are scrolling through on your laptop a consecutive numbering system might be used from now on which would make it much more easy for us to follow and you could still add pages 17 a, b, c
if needed at conference time
Just a suggestion to think about as times change
Also I really missed the "Easter" message from Conference Personnel ministers for Ministry Personnel
I find Easter the most stressful time of the year due to workload of extra services plus meetings that continue non stop and always appreciated your heartfelt support which seemed to come from someone who understood the pressures and appreciated the efforts of the order of ministry folk during Holy Week
grist for the mill.
- Keep the meeting in a small city/town – I would be happy to go back to Orillia. I really liked the experience a few years ago when the retirees were honoured at the Saturday evening meal. Made it feel a little more special! I recommend using the streams for conversation again and keeping the groups as lay, ministry, youth. Music was excellent – bring back Ross – he was terrific.
Thanks to all who worked on the planning and put together the meeting. I know it is a huge task and I appreciate your work.
- Group Sessions were thought provoking but gain more insight and reflection if mix of youth, clergy and lay – if need to could have one session with only one stream.
Ask ahead of time re choir members – could perhaps have copy of music at least a week prior (not much time to practice) – had to have folders – what happened to the ones donated to Conference approximately five to six years ago?
Have stretch breaks – long time sitting (get up for 2-3 minutes)
- Turn Norm Seli loose more often!
- A better co-ordination of the content of the two theme addresses with the process of the stream gatherings would have improved the overall plan. Because this connection was lacking, the streams perhaps suffered from good process and sharing but lacked content and significant issues/ideas/visions to discuss or take away. Such co-

ordination is of course a planning/advance preparation issue – but might reap an even more significant occasion for inspiration.

- All in all, it would have been better to have three substantial theme addresses with time for brief, small group reflection after each one and then opportunity for plenary discussion on the huge leadership challenges we face ... e.g. radically diverse theological visions, precarious viability of many pastoral charges, positive strategies for engaging/welcoming new Canadians to the UCC, etc.
I was deeply saddened by the laughter and applause attending the remarks of two ordinands about how great it was to be in a church with such minimal doctrinal standards. About this, of course, planners of annual meeting can do very little. Thanks for asking for evaluative comments and for reading mine...
- Keep the similar format
- One day? Unless GC year.
- I would like to see us out of a sanctuary and back in table groups. This need not be somewhere swish – an arena would be just fine.
With someone of Peter Short's calibre, it would have been good to have him more than once – it's good to have lots of opportunity for talking with colleagues, but "input" of a mentoring nature is also much appreciated!
- I would've liked a bit more "meat" from the weekend – I feel that there were a lot of discussions but I don't have much to take away with me. I would've liked to hear more theology or more talk from Peter Short.
Secondly, I would've liked to see more youth at the Conference. I brought five with me and there were only 15 altogether! What's going on? I'm disappointed! My guess is that the Presbytery reps needed to advertise this in their congregation and find ways to nurture and support youth to attend!
- Liked it very much at St. Paul's. Enjoyed the music – uplifting.
Ditto! Next year. Great food and hospitality!
- All volunteers work so well and we thanks you for your smile. We like to see you again.
Excellent work. Congratulations!!
- Display space should be better advertised with signs
- As stated above, when you have a resource like we had this year (Peter Short) let us be blessed with greater exposure to him or her – as well as the church service.
I enjoyed hearing from the retirees – except from one minister who seemed to want a "soap box". I guess it's nearly impossible for organizers to control such posturing (and selling books – or signatures)!
At camp, there could have been a coffee urn at the Rec Centre.

- Needed a break between ordinands and retirees
I think having a Friday and Saturday would be nice and have Sunday free to worship in our own church.
Need to have ordinations in p.m. or evening. Too long a time between AM & PM
- Open the words on screen just a little before we start to sing
- The streams in the process was not so inspiring
- Accommodation should also be a consideration when choosing the meeting venue – most of them here, in Orillia, aren't acceptable. This could possibly affect attendance/full participation next year.

****Note:** A survey monkey questionnaire was used for the Youth Evaluation. Please see the results of the survey below:

RESPONSE TO EVALUATION OF YOUTH AT AGM MEETING SURVEY

1. Who Responded:

Youth-4
 Parents -0
 Youth Leaders - 5
 AGM Delegates - 1
 Other - 3
 Total: 13

2. Considering the whole annual meeting I would describe it as:

...
 Overall, a good conference. Thank you for organizing a "Youth at conference" this year. It would have been good to acknowledge the presence of the youth at the beginning of the conference by introducing them and by having them take part in some meaningful way, i.e. reading or doing "Call to worship" or something.

.....
 good connections with people, especially youth, but lack of clarity of purpose of meeting at large and role of youth

...
 Well organized.

...
 Amazing. It was fun and enriching. I learned some things about the United Church and had a great time doing it.

...
 I was not present at the annual meeting so cannot comment

...
 meaningful, uplifting and fun. Great to see my colleagues.

...

Fantastic

...

very good

...

A very fun and enlightening experience, that left me with much to think about long after the meeting/stream was over.

...

The whole annual meeting was great this year, I really like that the business was kept short and there was more time to worship and grow spiritually. By far this was the best annual meeting that I have attended.

...

A welcoming, positive atmosphere for everyone involved.

...

Engaging , worshipful, enlightening as we had conversation together.

...

A good community experience -- a little low on content.

3. The Youth Experience was:

Really rotten: 0

Just okay: 0

Pretty good: 2

Really great: 7

4. Further explanation of 3

...

I brought five youth to the conference. I was disappointed that there were not more youth delegates.

...

The Youth seemed like they were having a great time. Their performance of the song they wrote was very well done.

...

The other youth and youth leaders really made the time an unforgettable experience.

...

It was another great learning experience for me. I grew up in a totally different culture. From the outset, I was unsure of my role and nervous about how to work with the youth. As time goes on, I was able to get some idea of having fun with them. I am grateful for this wonderful opportunity.

...

The time at the conference was amazing, as it was in previous years, and you got to get really close to people, even though it's in such a short amount of time.

...

Great people, fun experiences, sweet food, what more could you want!

...

I am sorry , I did have some contact with a few of the youth who were present in the court , however I really didn't hear how they were feeling about their experience at

conference.

...

5. One thing I learned was:

We learned this weekend about "leadership". We need to be about empowerment and enabling. We need to be about forming leaders for the future. The youth at conference is one way for us to do this.

...

unsure

...

Maybe not learned but realizing that the Youth appreciate the opportunity to participate at this level of the church

...

It is helpful to have the presbyteries nominate their own youth!

...

As an adult, I have learned to be more respectful of young people and be more prepared to listen to them. They were great.

...

How talented our youth are. how much they want their voice heard.

...

That leaders can't lead without the others to help them out, because everyone may be seeing things in a different light.

...

about who I am and how I can share my gifts with the world and give leadership.

...

Anyone can be a leader if they put their heart into their cause

...

Everyone has more to learn about leadership and leadership involves us all.

6. My favourite part of the whole weekend was:

When the youth presented their summary of learnings in the form of a song they composed.

...

just sitting around hanging out with youth, talking about theological issues, etc.

...

Spending time with other youth from my church, getting to know them better. and also getting to see the youth from last year, and also meeting new youth who are part of the church.

...

The youth presentation on the Saturday evening. It was a big hit.

...

Music and Peter Short

...

The Gathering on Saturday night, and then later that night spending time with friends and

talking about different religious matters, and about things that were on our minds.

...

Learning new hymns, and worshipping.

...

The Youth Stream meetings, and when all the streams met on the Saturday night

...

I do enjoy hearing from those who are being recognized at the celebration of ministries ceremony, ordinands, admittands and retirees. I especially like singing the hymns of their choice before they speak.

...

Staying at Sparrow Lake.

...

7. One thing I didn't like was:

...

hearing disparaging comments about the youth/youth presence from some of the older adults

...

it was too short and we didn't have enough time at Sparrow Lake Camp

...

Food. I was disappointed with the finger food for supper on Friday night. The Pizza for Saturday evening was not a healthy choice either. The food at camp was okay.

...

The registration process. It was slow and left little time for planning once we knew we were going as delegates.

...

how sometimes things went way over the time schedule, and that messed up the next event.

...

Everything was pretty excellent (including business)!

...

We did not choose the meal plan , it seemed pricey.

...

The business meeting was dry and could have been more relevant.

...

8. Staying at Sparrow Lake was:

...

It was great idea to have the youth stay at SLC but I think the youth could have been allowed more time at SLC. Perhaps they should have stayed there all morning on Saturday morning. They needed at least 2 hours there in order to experience a camp session activity, such as wall climbing, canoeing or kayaking.

...

great!

...

Only visited on Sunday morning but was glad for the opportunity to visit and see the property.

...

Fun :) but we didn't have enough time to do the ropes course or the rock wall

...

It was good. I was sorry that I was mixed up with the wake up bell on Saturday morning and got them up an hour early. If anyone complained about it, I will take the responsibility. However, I hope that they had more time to prepare for the long day as I did.

...

The best, much better then the previous year (staying at the church), because there was a lot more freedom and independence, and more things to do and see too.

...

okay.

...

Much better than sleeping on the church floor, and way more exciting.

...

A great community experience.

...

9. In the future organizers should:

we have to get more youth from the Toronto Conference to the Conference AGM - The youth need time together on their own, they need some guidance and education on the proposals that will be voted upon. Then they can have more meaningful participation in the meeting. The "Pew" situation is not good. It's better to be sitting around a round table.

...

add in an extra day for the youth before the meeting!

...

make it longer

...

I think it would be helpful to have a program guide for youth to be encouraged by, so that they know what they are getting into.

...

I would like to suggest that the church should provide the youth group more opportunities to get together and support their activities. We should have had more youth delegates than 16.

...

Ensure youth programming happens. give youth a forum for reporting their thoughts to the wider church.

...

Include more time for socializing with different streams, because when we did get time, it seemed like there wasn't enough.

...

Find accommodations closer to the church for the youth.

...

Do everything pretty much the same way, except make sure the t-shirts are included in the price next year :P

...

Have more time to build community.

...

10. Anything else...

My daughter (name removed), has grown up going to the Toronto Conference: from CAC (Children at conference), to Young teens at Conference to Youth at Conference. Now she is very comfortable at the AGM meetings. She understands the discussions and the voting process. I'm sad that since restructuring, we did away with the children and the Young teens. I actually think that these should continue and should be expanded. Right now, we are only doing a "half" job by having some youth come to the conference. It needs to start with children so that they grow up with it and it becomes a habit to come each year. As an adult delegate, I also enjoy seeing the children come in and out of conference and take part in worship, like they used to. Secondly, for youth in small congregations such as mine (which is most of the UCC congregations), we do not have a lot of youth so we rely on presbytery and conference events to get them together, for them to meet other youth. This is one great way for them to stay active and motivated in the United Church. Otherwise, there is not a critical mass of youth in our local congregations.

...

I was really impressed with Susie's leadership. She is an incredible youth leader equipped with a great sense of how to encourage and empower them. She is well organized and prepared. I love to work with her again some day.

...

Great job.

...

Music was great.