

OVERSIGHT VISIT OF TORONTO SOUTHEAST PRESBYTERY

Tuesday November 9, 2010

Conference Visitors: Shelley Roberts (NW), Linda Parsons (LW), Don Laing (SW)

The oversight visit by Toronto Conference found a spirit of guarded optimism among the members of the Toronto Southeast Presbytery Executive. They acknowledged that it is early days yet for oversight as they are living into the new presbytery structure and well aware that they are not yet at the place that they hope to be while at the same time feeling that they are moving in the right direction. They also acknowledged the grieving that is still evident in some members who no longer see friends and colleagues from former presbyteries within the court. There was also acknowledgement that they are just getting to know the current presbytery membership and a little bit about the location and activities within the local congregations now joined together. This transition time was likened to a “wilderness” time where people have every right to complain as they leave behind the old for the yet to be and struggle with what is essential for their faith journey.

The Oversight team suggested that the Executive members might find it useful to look at the responses gathered from their presbytery in the Conference Oversight survey. Team members also noted that the conference survey results bore little resemblance to either the presbytery’s report to the 2010 conference annual general meeting nor to the much larger number of responses to a Toronto Southeast Presbytery survey of its membership that were recorded in the presbytery minutes of September 21, 2010 (appendix A). The team then gave more credence to the later two documents named, feeling that perhaps the conference survey was the less useful documentation. The conference team members noted that the presbytery web sight was out of date (last minutes posted were May rather than September) and the executive list had not been updated and this was mentioned for information.

General Questions & Comments:

Quorum (number of clergy present in the court) was a concern at one meeting of the last six but it was noted that as most business is enacted by another body (teams), there are few motions that would actually impede the day to day operation of the presbytery were quorum not achieved.

The presbytery has a vision statement (see handbook) and a committee is working on the mission strategy required for financial purposes.

Having the Conference staff working in the Presbytery is a great benefit and the current staff members are much appreciated by all.

Worship has been a significant part of each of the presbytery meetings and that emphasis has been appreciated. Eating together before the meeting of the full court has helped bring people together. There is a high energy level and most people will participate in the discussions. Overall, communication has been done well and there is a good spirit of team work, trust, and cooperation. People have done a good job of responding when

concerns have arisen and good ideas have been offered to improve the working of the presbytery.

Some discussion time was spent around changing times—more clergy working less than full time hours and reluctant to spend significant time on presbytery work, some congregations do not see presbytery work as part of the clergy job description, lay people do not receive paid work time “off” for presbytery and must juggle very busy lives with many demands on their time. A number of very active presbyters found the change to the new structure gave them a chance to “retire” from previous presbytery commitments and this was not anticipated when the restructuring was taking place. On the positive side, some participants suggested that the most important part of the new structure was the constant attempt to diagnose problems, then moving to modify or correct these.

Even with the changes in structure, the meeting of presbytery offers few answers to the questions that are close to the heart of those in our congregations. Congregational revival and mission strategy garnered a high response in the presbytery survey as areas of interest. The presbytery is moving from doing to becoming and making, to being enablers, but you cannot rush the end production. Overall, the members with whom we met were hopeful and willing to work hard to develop this new presbytery.

Shelley Roberts, Team Chairperson
Don Laing, Linda Parsons

