

**Toronto Conference Executive
November 16, 2011**

What has been lost in the restructuring?

- We're not engaged in a variety of issues in the life of the church, e.g. social justice
- Opportunity to learn things that we might have taken back to our congregations and UCWs
- The small family feel of the nine Presbyteries
- It takes longer to get to the Executive meetings
- Loss of information about the mission of the church and the M&S Fund; there's not the contact at the Conference level
- Opportunity to gather together to hear Presbytery concerns at the Executive meetings
- There's no longer a staffing committee
- No direct contact with sources of information; now it comes through the executive secretary

What has been gained?

- Clarity of role
- New respect for the value of policies
- Smaller size has been more entertaining with the experience around the table
- There's time to think about other things, e.g. sharing from our depths rather than getting right into the business
- We're no longer trying to manage the minutiae, focus on the big picture
- Meetings run smoothly; a larger size must have been unwieldy
- There's more of a blending of the four Presbyteries, rather than looking out for our own area; opens eyes to the bigger church
- Resources are now in the Presbytery instead of being at the Conference committee level
- A vast change in the equity of resources amongst the Presbyteries
- People at this table come to look at the big picture; there's a more cohesive look at what we're doing
- Having staff in the Presbyteries has been tremendous
- When we want to struggle with ideas, the smaller number is more manageable
- There are fewer meetings
- Educationally we've gained by learning about governance

What have you learned from the restructuring?

- Those who are committed will always be committed, and those that aren't, aren't
- It was challenging to implement, especially at the Presbytery level; people don't read and they slip back into the old ways of doing things

- It takes five or six years to embed new ways of doing things; old habits die hard
- You cannot communicate enough
- Learned about Scarborough; there's a loss of the feeling feel, but an expansion of the family feel
- Enjoyed driving to a variety of places and have felt invited
- If it doesn't work the first time, back up and try it again
- All of the Presbyteries have found a way to meet less, but the Commissions that meet frequently have the most cohesiveness
- Program and public witness were less highly rated in the Presbytery consultation than property and personnel; this is similar to losses in congregations when changes are made from eldership
- Restructuring does not solve leadership or personnel problems
- Order of Ministry people can gripe about lay people not being willing to change, but this process has shown that OM people resist change
- Change brings fear and when people are afraid, they don't move forward; regular communication can help, but the recipient needs to be open to receive the communication
- Presbyteries learned how much work there is to do in the church
- We were all going by the seat of our pants, e.g. in the area of amalgamations; we didn't know how much we didn't know
- It has been interesting to learn how to do policies and figure out how to implement them
- We don't know yet how effective the shift of work has been
- Our congregations are so consumed with survival; we're tying up our human resources in things like pastoral relations work and don't have the energy for other things like program and public witness
- A lot of work went on hold for a year or two and is now starting to flow, e.g. new work happening in public witness and youth work
- Perhaps a greater emphasis on program and public witness may be helpful for congregations
- The consultations with Presbytery people have been positive and have provided energy to help others to see how things can be done, e.g. property matters, chairs and secretaries of Presbyteries, GC Commissioners

What are the most pressing issues facing the functioning of the Conference and/or the Executive?

- Oversight of Presbyteries; if we're hearing that Presbyteries are struggling, how do we make the oversight more than a listening exercise? E.g. training/orientation
- What does oversight of Presbyteries really mean? When that is clear, action plans can be developed.
- Finding people to serve in the various roles, e.g. Marg and Ann were both acclaimed
- Need more training events for leaders of all ages, e.g. teens, 50-year-olds, training disciples

- Conference can focus on equipping people for service in roles
- Embracing diversity: how do we engage other people? Respect, education and engagement are three words that are important in the Truth and Reconciliation process.
- Financial resources being strained is not as big as the strain on human resources. We need more staff to help with many of the routine things.
- We need to broaden our understanding discipleship, which may run counter to the term limits we have; we have a small pool of people.
- How will we engage people to come to this table to do policy work?
- At some point, we need to ask whether it's useful to sit here and focus on policies. How do we exercise oversight of other functions?
- Have learned a lot about policy, but it's not very interesting to talk about when you go back. We could focus time at Executive meetings on what we can report back.

What recommendations do you have for improving the functioning of the Conference and its Executive?

- The Executive could identify some theme at each meeting or for several meetings that would be significant for the life of the Conference and its congregations, e.g. producing leaders, discipleship
- In what way can we help Presbyteries and congregations to build up our mission life?
- We could set aside a time to look at oversight.
- We're ready to focus on our mission statement.
- Do we need to examine other tasks that are repetitive that we could hire people to do?
- This is a governance body, which is different from a body doing discipleship stuff. Do we want to expand beyond governance?
- We need to be careful about making too much distinction between nuts and bolts and spiritual matters.
- How do we define support? And in policy governance, how do define "who" we serve?