

TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: Church Redevelopment: Asking the Right Questions

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If you are on a denominational committee with the responsibility of investing a limited amount of money in creative church redevelopment initiatives, how would you determine what, in fact, is a valid and creative redevelopment proposal? How is a determination made between initiatives that are destined to produce “substantial change” in a congregation’s ministry and those initiatives that are considered routine activities in a congregation’s life?

This is not an easy task for committee members because each project is unique and often is without comparison. A fully developed understanding of congregational dynamics is certainly an asset. Good intuition helps. Even so, there are certain evaluation questions that should be asked by any group making decisions about providing grants and loans for a church redevelopment strategy.

Toronto United Church Council surveyed various denominations in Canada and the United States and has discovered there are many similarities in the evaluation questions that are used to test applications for church redevelopment grants and loans.

Those questions have been gathered and categorized here for two purposes. First, they are useful in giving guidance to congregations on:

- what is deemed to be a supportable church redevelopment, and
- what are the various components of a good church redevelopment plan.

Secondly, this is information that may supplement and/or enhance the evaluation criteria currently used by the people who are asked to consider and act on the applications that are received.

The first category of evaluation questions focus on the congregation’s commitment to the redevelopment initiative:

Is there an understanding that church redevelopment and revitalization may take several years to complete?

Does the plan include the formulation of a vision statement, mission statement and values that will convey the ministry to which God is calling the congregation?

Is there a process to identify long-range goals (three to five years) and annual objectives?

Will the community be engaged to assess demographics, community needs, and ministry opportunities?

Has the congregation identified and set apart a strong team of people who will lead the redevelopment initiative?

Has the congregation developed a stewardship plan to support the redevelopment effort including a commitment of current financial resources and pledged financial support from congregational members?

Is there a willingness within the congregation to make changes in worship, programs, outreach, fellowship, building and finances that support the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives?

Is there a willingness within the congregation to adjust the church's organizational structure to give energy to the initiative?

Is there a constructive and creative plan to manage conflict if and when it arises? [Conflict often results from change and if handled well can result in positive transformation and growth.]

Is there a regular (annual) review process to determine if objectives are being met and whether changes are needed in the redevelopment plan?

A second category of evaluation questions centres on the role of the minister or ministry team and how he/she/they will share in the endeavour:

Is there a strong commitment to the redevelopment process from the minister (or ministry team)?

Is there recognition by the minister (or ministry team) that the redevelopment effort may take several years to complete?

Is the minister (or ministry team) prepared to be a strong leader and an enthusiastic member of the leadership group?

Is the minister (or ministry team) prepared to gain and hone new skills in managing the dynamics of change and the dynamics of conflict?

There is a third set of evaluation questions pertaining directly to the role of the judicatory in affirming and supporting the redevelopment [for our United Church it is the Presbytery]:

Has the Presbytery assigned one or two capable people to be a part of the leadership group of the redevelopment initiative?

Is the Presbytery prepared to provide resource persons to assist the leadership team to implement various components of the redevelopment plan?

Is the Presbytery willing to invest its financial resources in the congregation's redevelopment initiative?

Is the Presbytery committed to be an active partner in the regular (annual) review process?

The above evaluation criteria for the making of church redevelopment grants and loans, when effectively applied, encourage the growth of new, creative and innovative approaches to mission and ministry. The wise investment of Presbytery and other resources can ensure transformation happens. It is a worthy goal.

The gathering and categorizing of these evaluation questions was carried out by the staff to Toronto United Church Council.

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