

Currents and Into the Promise Report

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Currents and Into the Promise: Executive Summary

This executive summary summarizes the findings and potential implementations from the interviews and responses received from participants of the Currents and Into the Promise processes, based on the work of Alan Roxburgh and The Missional Network (TMN) resources. Please refer to the full report for background information on the processes and responses.

Main Findings:

- Overall, more impactful for lay participants – training for lay leadership with skills and connections, larger role in church discernment and community outreach/relationships; conversely, less impact on clergy overall (and less clergy participation to begin with).
- Walks and experiments were the favourite practices amongst participants. Dwelling in the Word and conversations with strangers were appreciated in theory, but mixed in reception. Many respondents realized that they did not really know the neighbourhoods in which their churches are situated.
- Most of the impact was individually or congregation-focused – roughly half of the experiments are continuing, and no groups are continuing under the banner of the process; however, all spoke about intentional listening skills and change in perception of neighbourhood that can be applied to other facets of congregational life.
- For both of these processes, while there was energy and commitment that kept the processes going, several factors may have hindered the effectiveness of the discernment and experiments. These include changing national structure, changes in pastoral relations or ministry personnel, questions concerning the authenticity of facilitators, and expectations for lay participants to bear the brunt of educating their fellow congregants.

Insights for Future Ministry Initiatives:

- Permission to get negative results is liberating for some involved in new ministry initiatives. Changing the conversation from “saving” to “being” the Church is a hard mindset for some to adopt, but can lead to much more creative results.
- Get the right people to facilitate and coach, as coaches were proven to be very helpful to the processes. Clergy and lay coaches with proper training and authenticity can aid with many group initiatives.
- Expand the scope of discerning God’s presence for both within and beyond congregation. This can allow a greater level of participation, while still maintaining the principles and practices of such a process.
- Diverse lay participation is key to getting the most diverse results, especially when interacting with other communities. This is important to reach more communities, but also to ensure that the participants are more aware of any inherent biases or social tendencies within the group.
- The greatest impact, and the greatest emphasis, should be placed on the skills and spiritual development imparted to individuals, as they are transferrable to other initiatives and other parts of congregational life. This is important, especially as lay leaders are taking on more active roles in the United Church.

Introduction

The following report is written on behalf of the Toronto United Church Council (TUCC) to analyze the insights gained from Into the Promise and Currents, two processes that encouraged participants to seek out God's presence outside of the sanctuary walls, and be present in their local communities in ways that are different and innovative compared to traditional concepts of outreach. This report outlines the background of the two processes, analyzes the individual practices within the processes, and explores the experiences between lay, clergy, and facilitator roles. Following this is a discussion on what insights from these processes can be applied to future innovative ministry endeavours.

Background Materials for the Processes

Background of Roxburgh

Both Into the Promise and Currents are based on the work of Alan Roxburgh, founder of The Missional Network (TMN), and a proponent of discerning the Spirit's work outside of the Church institution. Particularly, these two groups followed his process laid out in his book *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time*. Roxburgh's underlying missional and theological assumption is that God is at work in our neighbourhoods, and we as Church are being called to join our neighbours in God's current work. In this the Church is not being called to "get away" from Church, but be present with their communities in ways that do not dictate how the community relates to the Church. Roxburgh's model of mission is based on the reality that the Church (particularly the Protestant North American Eurocentric Church) is unravelling, that building/property-focused approaches are not effective, and that the Church is not in "exile", but in an entirely new place.

Roxburgh's methods were developed within an Anglican context. As such, more than one participant in these groups noted that some assumptions that Roxburgh makes are not as applicable for congregations in the United Church of Canada (UCC). One such assumption was the prevalence of clericalism in the Church, defined as the assumption that those ordained have all the answers. While clergy do undeniably have some sway over congregational decisions and outlooks, the more congregation-focused ethos of the UCC makes this less of a systemic issue than in more hierarchical denominations. Other assumptions are just as prevalent in the UCC, including an attitude of "fixing" the Church to restore models of Church that are no longer functional.

Roxburgh's approach is not one of "fixing" the Church, but rather encouraging active listening and discerning skills (to ourselves, to God, and to our neighbours), as well as focusing on process and experimentation, rather than projects or clear goals from the start. His process, designed to be at least 18 months, emphasizes the permission to "fail", and the small scope of the experiments that were to emerge. Practices that developed these aspects include neighbourhood walks, and "Dwelling in the Word". These two practices were incorporated alongside group sessions with both Into the Promise and Currents.

Background of Into the Promise

The "Into the Promise" process was the brainchild of Rev. Dr. Christine Jerrett. Her process was originally aimed at developing resources and support for the increasing number of lay leaders in the UCC, whose existing structures and changing context were not adequately supporting lay leaders. There was also a discerned need to explore the Spirit's actions outside of the Church, understanding that there

needed to be shifts in mindsets and expectations, rather than relying on the traditional program-based approaches to outreach and “saving” congregations. Jerrett encountered Roxburgh’s “Five Steps for Going Local” through his books and other resources from TMN. She then shaped an experiment for several UCC congregations around Roxburgh’s approach, exploring if this process would “help congregations develop the skills and capacities they need for discerning the next steps forward on their journey”. The name, “Into the Promise”, is based on the experience of the Exodus, and the promise of God as guide.

Congregations that participated were generally those who wanted to explore new ways of being church, not seeking a “solution” to reverse the trends. It was not billed to congregations as something to increase attendance, but rather to engage with a “new future” and develop some skills to wander into this new future more aware. Several congregations from Bay of Quinte and Hamilton conferences attended an information session with Roxburgh in February 2016 and some congregations from that group then chose to engage with the process without the involvement of TMN. Jerrett served as the primary support facilitator for both conferences, but the Waterloo Presbytery groups also had Rev. Dr. Paul Miller as another facilitator.

Each congregation had 3-5 participants, and clusters of 4-5 congregations met bi-monthly, and met with the facilitator more infrequently. Clergypersons were discouraged from participating too much in the process, allowing lay participants to discern the Spirit’s work without “deferring” to clergy. There was a “guiding” team from the higher courts, and weekly emails from the facilitators part-way through the process. It was framed in an 18-month process, with participants receiving the Roxburgh material at an orientation meeting. Prior to the meeting, the participants did not have much prior materials except for those who went to the original Roxburgh session.

Background of Currents

The “Currents” process was similarly brought about by one person’s interest in researching new ways of being church but played out within a more urban context. Anne Shirley Sutherland, who worked with the Toronto Southeast Presbytery, was also intrigued by the idea of helping congregations discern new ways of doing mission and interacting with their local communities. During her latest sabbatical, she studied some of the work of Fresh Expressions in the UK, and had been invited to hear Roxburgh speak at an EDGE event around five years ago that included multiple UCC conferences. Anne Shirley believed that Roxburgh’s approach could be replicated within Toronto congregations; however, she recognized that there needed to be a good amount of charisma and “selling” to get congregations onboard the concept and the commitments for the process. John McLaverty was the consultant from The Missional Network throughout the process, and Ian Manson was a facilitator alongside Anne Shirley.

A two-day conference was organized with Roxburgh as speaker. The first day of the conference was aimed at clergypersons, while the second was aimed at potential lay participants. Multiple responses noted that the layperson session was better received than the clergy session, for a variety of reasons. From this initial two-day conference, it took a while for the actual process to get off the ground. From the initial plan to have six participating congregations, plans were changed when only four congregations ended up participating (due to two of the others being in too big of transitions to allocate people and resources to the Currents process), which included increasing the number of “coaches”, and waiving the fee for participating congregations.

Effectiveness of Process Practices

As the emphases of these processes was on experimentation and a lack of dictated conclusions or outcomes, unsurprisingly a variety of opinions and insights came from the individual practices within the process. Some of them were more useful and applicable in other situations to participants, while other practices were not as well received, or else were deemed a challenge to commit to. Many of these practices involve developing intentional listening and discerning skills, as well as a level of trust and vulnerability. These skills and intentional vulnerability are integral to any form of outreach or innovative ministry, and so all these practices have elements that can be transferred beyond the scope of the project.

Dwelling in the Word

All the participants in Currents and Into the Promise were encouraged to partake in a biblical listening exercise that Roxburgh coined as “Dwelling in the Word”. Most of the clergy and coaches, and some of the lay participants, identified the similarities between this exercise and Lectio Divina, a traditional devotional exercise of using Scripture to intentionally become present with God through the Word. Roxburgh’s practice emphasizes having multiple voices read the passage. The hope would be that the people participating may share how the Spirit moved them or highlighted different parts of the passage for different reasons. As opposed to a bible study, there was not as great an emphasis on exhaustively studying the passage, or referring to clergy for interpretation, but allowing all voices to be heard, and how the Spirit’s moving might indicate how one relates to one’s neighbours.

The scriptural passage most often read was Luke 10:1-12 (The Commissioning of the Seventy). Some groups occasionally replaced the Luke passage with another, while others kept using the Luke passage throughout the entire process. Some found the practice affirming, agreeing with Roxburgh in that the practice ensures the participants know that all are worthy to dwell with God in the Word, rather than just ecclesial leaders. Some groups that had assumed themselves to be homogenous quickly discovered unique perspectives. For the majority of those who responded, the Dwelling in the Word exercise, if it did not provide a monumental shift in understanding, did encourage active listening skills. One respondent noted that the passage became a “mantra” of sorts. The increasing familiarity of the words and each other set up a more open atmosphere. She noted that the one time they did use a different passage, it set an entirely different tone, and was overall less effective.

However, many lay respondents noted their frustration with the passage. Some noted that they did not have the biblical literacy to understand the harshness and assumptions within the passage. One participant, who identified herself as one still discerning her faith and understanding of God, found the exercise particularly difficult theologically; while different voices were heard, the text to which those voices referenced was questionable. Others found that using the same passage every time was not effective for their groups, either emphasizing existing weariness in the project (same old, same old, with little discernable “progress”), or finding that they as a congregational group had exhausted everything they could out of that passage.

Overall, those who had more experience with Lectio Divina or other scripture-related devotional practices (generally the clergy) were more enthusiastic about Dwelling in the Word. Most appreciated the listening skills developed, and the chance for all to be heard and have their insights valued in a larger group, especially with an openness to the Spirit. Yet the theological learnings were lost on some, or participants felt too unsure of the practice to “get the most out of it”. Many suggested that in a more thorough introduction to the process or the practice of Dwelling in the Word in other circumstances, more time be taken to guide and teach the context of the devotional practice and the biblical context of the

passage. However, as one clergy participant noted, any devotional practices takes months or years to become truly incorporated into one's faith, even when intentionally done on a regular basis.

Community Walks

The community walks that were incorporated as part of the listening and discerning phases were arguably the most impactful and positively received of the practices in both Into the Promise and Currents. Most of the participants had some inkling going into the program that their neighbourhoods' demographics had changed since they had first moved to the area or joined the congregation; however, many were shocked at just how different their communities were. This was a common response across the various contexts of the participating congregations. Many of the Currents groups encouraged fellow congregants to go on these walks. The Into the Promise groups tended to do the walks as their own group. One participant, who had lived in the neighbourhood of their congregation for over a decade, noted that this wasn't the most impactful activity for those who are closely tied to their neighbourhoods; however, they saw the usefulness for "commuter congregants".

Many participants were struck by the social architecture (or lack thereof) within their neighbourhoods. Urban congregations surrounded by mid- and high-rise developments realized that they did not have as easy an access to neighbours' residences. Most communal spaces were based around malls or other commercial centres, dictating how some interactions could happen. That, or community gatherings were happening in places and at times that the participants did not previously consider. A couple of participants were surprised that their church building was no longer considered the "centre" of the community, and that neighbours didn't define their neighbourhood by which church was close by. Many of the Into the Promise participants, living in more rural locations, experienced first-hand how their communities were turning into bedroom communities; while they had noted the new subdivisions being built with varying regard, by walking through them, they had a clearer understanding of the physical and demographic changes that had occurred, with the benefits and challenges that presented. Churches built in the core of these smaller communities were now in an area where most people didn't gather.

While there was a lot of interest and learnings from the walks, there were some complications with the practice. For some of the participants in rural communities, the geographic distance and lack of infrastructure made it difficult at points to physically walk through the communities. Some used this as an opportunity to explore the immediate vicinity of their residences, while others organized walks in different parts of the community, including parks and trails. While none of the respondents noted any difficulty due to mobility concerns, this ought to be considered with any undertaking of such a practice.

Furthermore, one participant noted that while there was some benefit to defining one's neighbourhood geographically, she felt that not enough time in the process was given to discerning what "neighbourhood" meant to each of the participants, as well as the concept of "being neighbourly". She considered this to be important should this process be implemented again, as part of an attempt for further instruction and discernment at the beginning of the process; there is also something to be said about walking into the community with as few assumptions or biases as possible. Deciding how you want to define neighbourhood comes with the risk of not giving enough weight to the experiential and objectiveness of these community walks.

Conversing with Neighbours

While the walks were a favourite amongst the participants, the encouragement to talk to others in the neighbourhood was received with a mixture of excitement, challenge, and rejection. From both Into the Promise and Currents, there was at least one participant that withdrew from the process at this stage,

citing their discomfort with approaching strangers. For many participants, the conversations felt contrived, even when it was stressed that there was to be no ultimate goals of these conversations beyond knowing people better. It was noted that this was one of the biggest barriers in recruiting participants at the beginning of the processes.

Some groups felt slightly constrained by the questions that were laid out by Roxburgh. Other groups felt freer to adapt the questions to better fit their context and comfort level, which demonstrated that they were actively discerning how they were interacting with their community. Whether the questions were altered or not, one participant noted that the only way this exercise is fruitful is when the questions are framed around learning more about the other person. There are many types of conversations and questions that get information, but do not build relationship. Conversely, others found that the phrasing of the questions was not that much of an impediment, quickly realizing that the impulse to relationship, once started, is very natural, and is something that is missing in most of our public spaces.

A couple of respondents had some discomfort in what they felt was “keeping church a secret” during their conversations. Roxburgh’s approach emphasized that indoctrination and outreach should not be the focus of conversations, and the topic of church and faith was to naturally arise if it ever does. Some felt that this meant they had to keep their identity secret and felt like they were deceiving their neighbours into a relationship. One group whose experiment was hosting a community walk along a local waterfront trail felt awkward not disclosing they were part of a congregation to the other walkers.

Still other participants felt too unprepared in terms of faith knowledge and evangelism to even potentially have conversations about their faith with neighbours. More than one respondent noted that they preferred to express their faith to others by their actions, rather than evangelism through word of mouth. While this is arguably a denominational tendency or a loss of UCC’s evangelistic roots (borne in a much different context than how many consider evangelism today), the unsureness of some of the participants may have limited the number of connections made, as well as the number of opportunities to explore the Roxburgh process from a theological or ecclesial point of view.

For nearly all the participants, their primary interactions were with individuals within the neighbourhood, often asking about their thoughts concerning the community. However, a couple of groups very quickly moved to talking with organizations, either as a direct result of individual conversations, or in a couple of cases, by “cold-calling” local social justice groups and business associations in the area. One respondent noted that this was arguably an easier way to converse about the neighbourhood, since conversations with organizations tend to have a more structured nature. While the conversations with strangers in the neighbourhood kept up the vulnerability and insights, the organizations reached out to were better able to provide connections that can make the experiments more “effective”. Despite this, any interaction with neighbours, no matter how difficult it was for the participants, were worthwhile in some regard.

In interacting with local neighbourhoods and organizations, biases can alter how one perceives what demographics exist in the neighbourhood. The natural tendency to seek out those similar or familiar to you, and the diverse social architecture of neighbourhoods means that voices may go unheard by those in the Church, unless there is an intentionality about reaching out and truly being present in the neighbourhood. With this intentionality, a community of faith can become more aware of and dwell in the conversations already ongoing in the neighbourhood. One group discovered that there was a whole discourse on reconciliation with First Nations groups near their community that they were unaware was happening. The key to discovering God’s work in the neighbourhood is intentional listening and presence.

Group Meetings

Most of the respondents were appreciative of the opportunity to meet in larger groups, which usually occurred at least once every two months for the Currents groups, and somewhat frequently for the Into the Promise groups. As the Into the Promise groups were more geographically spread out, some of the large meetings were held online, rather than in person. While the effort was appreciated, one group of respondents noted that the technological limitations of rural and older congregations made the long-distance meetings less viable and helpful (they could not get a video component and could only listen in on a phone). This added to the perception of many of the participants in this group that the Roxburgh process is less applicable to rural contexts without some major revisions. This spectrum in access and comfortableness with technology needs to be considered in innovative ministry endeavours, as it is being considered by the church on a national level.

Nearly every respondent noted that at times when they felt a lack of momentum or confusion as to how to proceed, the group meetings helped spark ideas and provide comfort in the discomfort and unsureness that all the groups were experiencing. Several of the Currents participants were especially appreciative of the group meetings, since each of the participating congregations had such different contexts and experiences arising from the process. While a couple of participants noted that the meetings made them feel like they were “ahead” or “behind” the other groups at times, many found camaraderie throughout the entire process. More than one respondent noted that the group meetings did provide some extra accountability and pressure to keep momentum going within their own experiments; this was mostly appreciated, as they recognized that small groups and small-scale experiments can quickly fizzle out without encouragement. Though the process and the facilitators expressed permission to “fail”, it was encouraging for all participants to see their fellow groups struggling and succeeding in their discernments and insights into God’s work around them.

Experiments

The experiments of the Into the Promise and Currents groups were very diverse. There was little by way of models or examples for the groups to follow, so their experiments arose primarily from their conversations and discernment. As Roxburgh entails, most of the experiments were small in scale; few if any of the experiments initially required much resources or planning prior to their start. Some of the participants, and many of the congregants with whom they talked about the process, struggled with the idea of experimenting rather than “program” or “outreach”; the impulse towards structure and clear goals was evidently strong in all of the congregations that participated. Yet the participants ended up with experiments that were largely process and experiment-driven, rather than more traditional forms of coming up with outreach programs.

Some of the experiments surrounded identifying groups of people who also felt disconnected from their communities, gathering people together around walks, coffeeshops, or chat groups. Other experiments focused on bringing together different organizations within their neighbourhoods in forum-like meetings, where common goals could be explored, and communication between the organizations could be more consistent. One such experiment brought together the local business association and various non-profits; after an initial learning curve in which it was brought to the participants’ attention that they were unwittingly trying to control the conversation, the forum became a useful gathering to share information through the neighbourhood and make more organic connections for each association’s goals. Rather than just one experiment, the group’s reaching out made them more aware of several initiatives throughout the neighbourhood that they could assist as a congregation or as interested individuals.

Other experiments grew out of the insights gained from community walks and conversations regarding where people were spending their time. One group had two experiments: one was based out of the local arena, where they engaged with fans in a Christmas mission project, while they also provided space for garden plots, tied in with the local food bank. One group developed stronger relationships with non-church organizations that were renting space from the congregation and encouraged a program with one of the organizations aimed specifically at the local neighbourhood. In the end, all the participants gave an honest effort in following through with their experiments, and many of the experiments conducted followed closely to the envisioning of Roxburgh.

Conclusions and Reflections

Roughly half of the experiments that were conducted by the Into the Promise group have continued in some capacity after their official conclusion, which was in 2018. The Currents process officially wrapped up in June of 2019, so it is still unclear which processes will continue into the next year, although two of the four groups expressed that they plan on continuing or re-starting their experiments in the fall, with one other group expressing interest in doing the process again as they move into a new building and neighbourhood come the fall. There is debate over whether the outcomes can be considered “successes” or not. Yet many of the participants have taken heart in Roxburgh’s assurance that “failure” is permissible; the point of the process is not to guarantee results, but broaden one’s understanding of God’s work in communities.

In this regard, most of the respondents experienced some broadening of their definitions of outreach and community and were positively challenged and changed as individuals. Several groups noted that their preconceived notions of the demographics and needs of their neighbourhood were proven wrong (in terms of economic status, ethnicity, and social architecture), forcing them to depend on the communities within their neighbourhood to get a better understanding. One group took a neighbourhood walk only to discover that there were no public “hang-out” spots in their neighbourhood, forcing them to explore how and where people do meet, with variable success. They responded that many of the skills and ideas learned through this process can and will be applied to other areas of their congregational life, particularly the listening skills for Dwelling in the Word, and the adaptive leadership training for the Currents coaches and clergy. Respondents from two-point charges noted that the process brought the participants of the two communities of faith closer together, especially where there might be existing tension of concern about their relationship with each other. For those that may not have had a dramatic change in their outlook, they at least appreciated the listening skills developed through these practices.

Some groups have continued to meet to continue to share insights and ideas, while other groups have decided not to meet formally, although they are much closer than they were at the beginning of the process. A couple of respondents noted that they had been able to share their insights and introduce Roxburgh’s ideas to fellow congregants, but the majority of respondents noted that their fellow congregants still had difficulty in understanding the concepts of the process and the “experiments”. Overall, while some participants had more positive experiences than others, few if any had any regrets or animosity towards the process.

While there was an emphasis on the lack of expectation for “success”, a variety of factors made it difficult for some groups to achieve their full potential. Some have been noted above, including the struggle to adapt the process to a rural context, convincing fellow congregants, and a denominational tendency of shying away from visible and audible evangelism outside of specific social justice contexts. For many groups, maintaining the momentum proved to be difficult. For the Currents participants that had

been expecting a 12-month process, the extension of another six months wore some individuals down, with lessening participation by the end. For the Into the Promise groups, the lack of coaches for each congregation and the relative infrequency of pan-group meetings meant that much of the momentum was left up to the individual congregations; however, the addition of monthly (or sooner) messages from the facilitators helped rectify this to a certain extent.

Many noted that the timing of the processes may have hindered some of the experiments' potential. For the Into the Promise groups, much of their walks and experiments occurred in the fall; for those whose experiments were outdoors, or those with mobility issues, this meant a short window before the winter cut them off. A few groups recognized that concurrent transitions in their congregations (amalgamation votes, transition in ministers) meant that much of their energy was devoted to those concerns before their experiments. A number of participants also noted that the concurrent changes in the national UCC structure may have had indirect effects on their processes; while few if any of the lay or clergy participants were drastically affected by the restructuring, the energy of the national church towards this and the "loss" of presbyteries meant that it felt to some that they were losing support from the higher courts. Conversely, the instability of the national church at that time can also be framed as an excellent opportunity for individual congregations to entrench themselves more fully in their local communities.

Experiences of Lay Participants

The lay participants generally had the most transformative experience as a result of their work in the Currents and Into the Promise processes. The majority of them experienced a change in outlook on outreach and community, and many found it affirming that parts of the UCC was leaning into being church in our contemporary context. Quite a few respondents noted that as laypersons, they felt more involved in God's mission than they had been in other outreach initiatives or parts of congregational life. As much of the emphasis of these processes was placed on the lay participants, it is not surprising that it had the greatest impact overall. A few of the Into the Promise groups noted that there was perhaps a bit too much pressure on the lay congregants to "carry" the process and be responsible for relaying findings to the congregation. But the majority agreed the emphasis on lay participation and leadership had more positive than negative benefits.

Where there is less agreement is on the theological development of the lay participants. While many either immediately or came to appreciate Roxburgh's emphasis on God's work outside of the Church, many did not find themselves pushed beyond this initial concept to dwell in further discernment. For some, there was a lack of sustained theological reflection as the experiments developed. It quickly turned into more of a social experiment than religious. This being said, both processes began fairly recently, and discernment is an ongoing journey with God.

As with most of the coaches and clergy, most of the lay respondents were most appreciative of the individual skills that were acquired, including active listening to both God and neighbour. If the practices and experiments were not continued in full after the completion of the official process, the majority of lay respondents noted that they wanted to bring the intentional openness to other aspects of congregational life and be more intentional about making connections in whatever communities they inhabit.

Experiences of Clergy and Coach Participants

The clergy involved tended to have a bit more ambivalence when it came to assessing the effectiveness of the Roxburgh process. As Roxburgh's approach argues for a hands-off role for clergy and

given that one of the Currents groups was without a clergyperson during the process, there were less voices to draw upon. Most of the clergy were appreciative of Roxburgh's theological premise. However, in terms of their practical role in the process, there was a great deal of confusion. Part of that confusion some had attributed for Currents to the Roxburgh sessions in the fall of 2017, in which the clergy session seemed less convincing than the lay session the following day.

On one level, the amount of clergy involvement was based on their involvement in recruiting participants. The clergy were encouraged to find and support congregants that may want to take part in the process. However, more than one minister found that since they had actively recruited lay members, the lay members expected the clergy to have a significant role. Especially in the Currents process, where the coaches were often not familiar to the congregants, the lay participants desired their clergyperson to be involved in some capacity. In situations where it was a layperson that largely brought on participants, clergy were still involved, but the participation of laypersons was not contingent on the clergyperson's role. Despite the level of clergy involvement with the actual experiments, nearly all clergy members were supportive from the pulpit, with many offering sermons or discussions based on Roxburgh's premises.

For the Currents clergy group, there was a level of camaraderie that was appreciated, like that of the other groups. The texts that were used for the clergy meetings was received well by some, yet not so much by others. Some clergy found the adaptive leadership training to be beneficial and encouraged experiments that they could test within their own congregations; others felt that the book used was too dated and secular in scope to truly apply to the Church's current context. One participant noted that since Roxburgh's process emphasized having clergy take on a more silent role, leadership training around clergy leadership in supporting roles would have been time better spent

In interviewing the coaches and facilitators for the Currents process, it was recognized that many of them had a positive experience. Like the other members of the process, they found camaraderie in meeting with each other and as part of larger groups. As the role of the coaches was arguably more defined than that of the clergy, they felt somewhat more secure in how they were to support the participants. Aside from one coach, the coaches and congregants did not know each other well prior to the process. This meant that there was less of a chance of undue influence on the part of the coaches. However, this also meant that there was an extended period in which the different parts of the groups had to get to know each other and arrive at a place of trust and vulnerability. While this process occurs in any group, the shortened timeframe of Currents made this a hindrance to some.

Implications for Future Innovative Ministry Initiatives

As the analysis of responses and interviews has demonstrated, there is a general sense that there were some positive individual and group learnings as a result of these processes. Only some of the experiments have continued, and there is little plan by any groups to continue their work under the banner of these two processes. This suggests that there is an appreciation for Roxburgh's theology, if not entirely by his methods. Yet some respondents did note that due to not being able to commit to the process completely, or given the lack of "success" of their experiments, there remain doubts about the effectiveness of the Roxburgh approach as a whole, and the likelihood of implementing it in the future.

PERMISSION TO FAIL - Roxburgh's process names and gives permission for "negative results" from experiments as an important part of discerning God's presence and the Church's role in the neighbourhood. For a few respondents, the permission to get negative results was liberating, changing the narrative from "saving the Church" to "being the Church". This framing can be implemented into future

innovative ministry initiatives, taking unnecessary pressure away from participants so they can focus on the discernment and transformation that these projects are supposed to provide. It is also more theologically sound, since the Church is already saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, and is sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not the Church's responsibility to save itself, but to discern and act with God's ongoing work in the world.

COMMITMENT CHALLENGES - What these two processes demonstrated is that it is difficult for congregations to commit to such a process and shift in missiological mindset. Having four or five individuals from each congregation who were often chosen due to their previous experience in community work or already had stirrings of God's work outside the Church struggle with the process does not suggest an easy implementation of Roxburgh's process on a larger scale. The transitions and multiple foci of congregations cause issues in implementing Roxburgh's process. Even with the small-scale emphasis of the experiments, Roxburgh's warnings that churches in transition cannot supply the support for the process rules out a majority of potential congregations. However, this does not mean that the process cannot be altered to be more palatable in group implementation, or that the individual learnings and practices cannot be applied to other ministry initiatives.

EXPANDED SCOPE - One of the facilitators of Currents noted that one of the ways in which the processes could be adapted for congregational use is to expand the scope of discernment. One of his main critiques of Roxburgh's missiology is the assumption that God's work cannot be adequately found within the Church as an institution. He suggested that this process could be expanded in congregational use for a more encompassing discernment process of the Spirit's work, both inside and outside the Church. This could potentially allow for more fruitful and surprising connection between congregation and neighbourhood, and involve more participants from the church who might not volunteer for Roxburgh's process. One other reason for incorporating this into a congregation-neighbourhood initiative is that in many cases, the most impact was felt between congregants or between different communities of faith. Both groups made up of two-point charges noted that one of the greatest experiences was the participants getting to know each other and each others' congregations better. A process that intentionally discerns and develops skills to dwell with God both inside and outside the congregation may be broader, but can incorporate more of the congregation and garner more positive experiences.

GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE - One of the other major learnings emerging from Into the Promise and Currents is the difficulty in "selling" an initiative, and the importance of getting the right personalities into the right positions. While this is a somewhat vague sentiment, almost all of the respondents noted that it was the persistence and supportive nature of the coaches and facilitators that spurred their experimentation. Even at the most positive points of the processes with the steadfast support of God, there was doubt and fatigue on the part of many of the participants. Where there was any doubt of authenticity on the part of facilitator or participant, it quickly derailed support for the process. Even with a process that is supposed to be small in scope and without much structure, putting resources into searching for and training the right facilitators can ensure a much more enriching experience, even if the results are less promising than expected. It is an opportunity to support leaders that are within the Church, but also "shop around" for facilitators that best fit the context and time needs of the participants.

MORE DIVERSE LAY PARTICIPATION - These processes also revealed the value of expanding or challenging the mindsets of lay participants that are more likely to volunteer for mission or congregational life initiatives. A couple of the respondents noted that some of the congregants they expected to volunteer for such experiments ended up not participating. They chalked this up to the goal-driven, Type A personalities that generally get involved with such initiatives. The emphatically anti-goal or result nature of Roxburgh's process would be off-putting to some of these congregants, meaning that it would be a tough sell early on. Those who ascribed to result-focused projects who did stay on struggled with understanding the concepts early on. However, many of them became open to Roxburgh's approach

by the end, and were open to giving up a sense of control in their life as a congregation. What the processes also did was encourage those who take a quieter or more observational approach to congregational life a chance to participate in the explorations of their faith community and local neighbourhoods. More segments of the congregation interacting with their local communities and with each other in an intentional manner can increase the positive connections and insights made.

BALANCE OF EXAMPLES AND CREATIVITY – One of Roxburgh’s insinences is that a process of experimentation is not supposed to be patterned on past examples. A group needs to seriously discern and decide how God is calling out to them in the context of their local neighbourhood. This is good in theory. However, a lot of congregations struggled without any kind of examples from the facilitators. Given that Roxburgh himself developed his process within a particular Anglican context, many felt that some examples from their own denominational or demographical context would assist in discerning the Spirit’s calling. Such a call for examples does not detract from the discernment necessary for any ministry initiative. Hearing multiple perspectives encouraged groups already within the process, as part of their meetings. However, in initially “selling” a ministry initiative, especially one that does not primarily cater to results or increased membership, having some examples to point to can help ease fears and explain confusing concepts of such initiatives. One can trust that communicating with God and with others can allow the creative ministry juices to flow; however, a floundering group of witnesses can take assurance in the work of past faithful peoples to help encourage and inspire them.

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT – The largest impact of Into the Promise and Currents was the skills and openness that were developed in each individual. The ethos of experiment and accepting that we are church, and do not control God’s mission or control our relationship with our neighbours, is transferrable from these processes to other ministry initiatives. Especially as lay leaders are becoming more recognized as an integral part of church life, and as the UCC is seeking God within and outside of itself as an institution, it is much more beneficial in the long-term to promote ministry initiatives based on skill development and relationship-building, rather than programme-based approaches. If Roxburgh’s five-step process is not appealing to many congregants, individual practices and intentional openness can be adapted and supported in various ministry settings. This might also be easier to “sell” to congregations as smaller practice-based approaches to opening up their senses and hearts to God and to neighbour. In particular, the community walks and Dwelling in the Word can be added to most initiatives, and may naturally develop into experiments or connections.



Members of the Currents process

Appendix One: Survey Questions for Participants

Implementation of Currents

How did you come to be involved in the Currents process?

What were your expectations going into this process? What may have been the expectations of others involved?

What resources were available to your group in the implementation of this process (reading materials, coaches, etc.)?

If changes had to be made to the process, what were they, and for what reasons?

Where there any circumstances that may have hindered the process from the get-go (ex. change in clergy, major congregational transitions, priority of other missions, etc.)?

Observations from Currents

With whom/which groups were relationships built, either in the community or within the congregation?

How easy or difficult was it for you to commit to the Currents experiments and practices?

Were there any major changes to the participants in terms of numbers or commitment?

What fears or assumptions may have made the process more difficult (ex. expectations from the congregation for “results”, vulnerability of new relationships, language/geographic barriers)?

How often/in what capacity did participants meet and discuss?

How did you discern your relationship with God during this process?

Have you noticed anything different about your own faith practices or missional outlook from participating in Currents?

Continuing Practices

Which parts of the experiment have continued beyond the scope of the original Currents process (either of the experiment itself, or the listening/discerning steps prior to and continuing with)?

Which parts of the experiment have ended/been dropped beyond the scope of the original Currents process?

Why do you believe these practices might have ended?

What aspects of the Currents process have you personally incorporated or learned from?

Were there any connections or relationships established with other communities of faith or community groups who are interested in or doing similar practices?

What might the next steps in your group's journey look like? What role might the TUCC or other participants have in this journey?

Roles and Communications

In what capacity was the clergy/pastoral supervisor of your faith community involved in this process?

Do you think that they participated the right amount, or were they involved too little/too much? Why?

How was information of the experiment given to the congregation throughout the process?

What were some of the general reactions from the congregation?

How might the process of monitoring/reviewing the Currents process be improved in the future (ex. specified review times, involvement of other church bodies, more/less oversight)?

Further Comments

Out of this experience, what are one or two of the most positive learnings for you that have arisen from this process?

Out of this experience, what are one or two of the most challenging or difficult learnings for you that have arisen from this process?

Is there anything else you would like to share with the TUCC at this time?