

CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL SHARED MINISTRY TASK FORCE

**FINAL REPORT
MAY 2005**

BACKGROUND

In September 2002 the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) received a request for a task force on shared ministry. The idea first emerged at the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in June 2002 when members of the Canadian Regional Sub-committee on Candidacy (RSCC) and one of the two Canadian UUA Ministerial Settlement Representatives met with Mary Bennett, CUC Executive Director (ED) and Linda Thomson, who was then Consultant for the UUA St. Lawrence District and is now one of the Directors of Regional Services for the CUC. The request was the outcome of that meeting. The Board subsequently struck the Task Force which included a minister, a religious educator, a young adult, an RSCC appointee and a board liaison.

The original document from the CUC Board to the Task Force contained this problem statement:

There is a growing awareness that the most effective form of ministry is one that shares power and responsibility between the laity and the professional clergy. In Canada shared ministry takes many forms with no clear consensus or definitions on the role of shared ministry in the new CUC.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Task Force, as defined by the CUC Board, was to:

- define shared ministry in Canada
- determine opportunities for and constraints restricting shared ministry efforts
- make specific ends and means policy recommendations to the CUC Board regarding shared ministry

MANDATE

The mandate given to us by the CUC board was:

- explore and define terms referring to shared ministry
- assess the impact of the new service delivery plan on shared ministry and report findings to the Board
- research shared ministry needs with our societies and propose ways to meet those needs
- identify shared ministry policy concerns for board discussion and decision

- identify shared ministry means issues and program opportunities for action by staff or CUC committees
- identify resources for implementation of these recommendations
- do as much Task Force work via e-mail and telephone conferences

MEMBERSHIP

Task Force members were: John Storm (chair), Bob Woodham, Christopher Wulff, Kathy Sage, Christine Johnston, Stefan Jonasson, Lynne Picard and Elaine Roberts. Mary Bennett was an ex-officio member. Linda Thomson was involved as Acting E.D. when Mary was not available. Our budget was \$2500.

Some members left the Task Force. Elaine Roberts was appointed co-chair in September 2004 and shortly afterwards, John Storm resigned. Remaining members are: Christopher Wulff, Kathy Sage, Christine Johnston, Stefan Jonasson.

MEETINGS

In February, 2003, the Task Force met in Toronto. Subsequent meetings were via conference call. Those members in attendance at the 2003 and 2004 CUC Annual Meeting and Conference (ACM) held face-to-face meetings. In addition, at the 2004 ACM the Shared Ministry Task Force hosted a Networking Table which approximately 18 people attended, including Michael Tino from the UUA, attending the conference in his capacity as Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry at the UUA. Michael served as Director of Shared Ministry at a large US church before assuming his present position. Also, one of the Task Force members met with the Lay Chaplains during their pre-conference meeting and attended the workshop presented by the CUC Principles Task Force. All these events yielded some insights into shared ministry. A survey of the CUC member societies was developed to gather information about the understandings and experiences of Shared Ministry in Canada. Eleven societies responded.

Although not technically meetings, the Task Force presented two events at the 2005 ACM. They are:

- a workshop presented by Michael Tino, Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry at the UUA. A member of the Task Force is the volunteer host for the session.

Sharing The Ministry With Everyone

*Learn how your congregation—whatever its size—can do to connect people of all ages in our congregations to opportunities for service and ministry that match their values and gifts. Learn why this is an essential strategy for growth, and how it relates to retaining our youth as adult U*Us.*

- A networking session

We will share the final report of the Task Force on Shared Ministry at this session and solicit feedback and suggestions for spreading the good news of shared ministry in our congregations. Join us.

DEFINITION

The definition of Shared Ministry developed by the Task Force is:

Ministry is the act of serving. Shared Ministry is what we* do to serve our congregation and the broader community, individually and together. Each individual brings unique gifts to contribute.

*includes members of the congregation, paid staff and ordained minister(s)

IMPACT OF THE NEW SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

One of the concerns of the group submitting the proposal for the Task Force was that there would be service gaps related to ministry as the new service delivery option in Canada was implemented; services that had previously been provided through the UUA, and in particular, their field staff.

The attached document, **An Examination of Current Practices and Understanding**, was developed in October 2003 by Linda Thomson for the Task Force. It identifies areas of concern, and then notes where they are already in place, where there are gaps, and what might be developed and/or considered. Initially, there were some gaps e.g. conflict management for congregations which had formerly been provided by the Districts either through their District Executive, a volunteer team or contracted consultants.

However, CUC staff moved quickly to plug the holes in service delivery. Congregations and ordained ministers increasingly have access to services which meet their needs. Work remains to be done in the area of leadership development, both lay and professional.

In the area of professional ministry, there is a need for course support and other resources for Canadian students seeking to satisfy UU specific requirements in their curriculum, as well as achieving credit recognition in Canadian non-UU seminaries for these courses, and arranging for them to be delivered with some degree of consistency where and when the students need them.

CUC staff are currently addressing two service areas related to professional ministry by working with:

- seminaries on entry requirements for UU students, and
- congregations on search issues and are developing strategies for ensuring congregations in Canada and ministers considering Canada can easily access all resources that are available. Linda Thomson is leading this work with the program staff team.

The document, [Coming to Canada, Eh?](#), for US ministers considering serving in Canada is being revised by Kathy Sage (a Task Force member) under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada (UUMOC)

NOTE: The Task Force did not explore the option of developing certified lay leaders for Canadian congregations, those too small to sustain professional ordained ministry. British Unitarians have a program to train lay leaders and so does the Ohio-Meadville District of the UUA.

POLICY CONCERNS

The CUC board member on the Task Force reviewed the CUC by-laws for shared ministry language and found no concerns. Similarly, the CUC Policy Governance Manual contains no references to ministers or ministry. But some policies in the Operational Policies do contain references to ministers e.g. The Abuse Response Protocol and Safety Policy uses the term “minister” twice. In this policy it clearly means professional ministers. Financial Policies 9 V 1 (Theological Education Fund) and 9 V 8 (Canadian Regional Sub-Committee on Candidacy Fund) also refers to ministers but the meaning is ambiguous.

At the January, 2005 meeting of the Board the following motion was passed:

Moved by Christine Johnston that the concept of shared ministry be applied to the formal By-laws, Governance Manual and Operational Policies of the CUC Board. Thus it needs to be clearly stated whether the policy refers to professional ministers or to lay members carrying out ministry.

Subsequently, the language in the two identified policies was changed.

SHARED MINISTRY IN OUR CONGREGATIONS

SURVEY RESULTS

The concept of Shared Ministry ranges from an idea not considered to an accepted practice across small to large congregations. Quotes from congregational responses are in *italics*.

Some key indicators of shared ministry:

1. **Mission Statement.**

A clear and memorable mission statement clarifies what the congregation understands as its purpose (or ministry). An example from a Canadian congregation: *....to foster a diverse and caring spiritual community celebrating individual freedom of religious thought, sharing a commitment to social justice, and the reverence and enrichment of all life.*

2. **Well-Developed Plan for Member Talents and Interests**

While the “language” of shared ministry is new, the idea that every member has the opportunity to actively participate is a part of the vitality of a U*U congregation. From the survey, *“Members of our congregation are actively involved in the life of the congregation and in activities that join us with other community organizations. Most likely they don't think of this as 'shared ministry' since the term is new”*.

Several of the larger membership congregations expressed that involvement of members was key. *“I'm not sure they have that particular name for it, but of course they know when and what they contribute to the congregation and that their contribution is appreciated. Many people are actively involved in a whole variety of ways.”*

One congregation has taken it further: *“For quite some years now we have adopted the idea that ministry is something that every one does. The minister takes on the responsibility of supporting members in the work they take on to keep our church relevant and vibrant. We already do a lot of shared ministry -there is no resistance to it.”*

Terminology such as “shared ministry” was not so important in one of the smaller groups, *“Shared ministries are the last of our worries. With a dozen regulars in the congregation, you don't get a lot of people fighting over anything except how not to have to do the same job over and over every year. The mission statement of this group is “In the discipline of truth, irrespective of its source, and in the spirit of universal brotherhood, undivided by nation, race or creed, we unite to strengthen our convictions in the value and need for liberal religion, and through the strength of unity, to give such expression to those convictions as the Fellowship decides”.*

The survey asked how gifts and interests of members were determined. Almost all checked, *“wait for them to identify something themselves”*. Some congregations are beginning to develop plans for this practice. Hamilton is developing a *“Beloved Community Document”* which *will review some of our commitment to each other in this work. We are just now organizing a 'gifts inventory' of our members.*

3. Leadership Working Together

Clarity of purpose and an invitation for all to identify and engage their interests and talents sets the stage for effective shared ministry. *“If we want people engaged in the congregation, shared ministry is the way to go. For people who want a deeper spiritual life, seeing what they do in and for the congregation as ministry, not just another job, would add a spiritual dimension”.*

The encouragement for each member to be involved seemed to hold true among the survey respondents whether there was professional ministry or not. When there is a called professional ministry, a clarity of role and relationship supports the vitality of shared ministry. *“Contract (or covenant) recognizes rights of professional ministry and shared roles in worship and church activities; encourages shared planning and visioning. We also have covenanted to support each other in the ministry at _____, recognizing our professional minister and the ministry of all congregants.*

One question in the survey asked about conflict resolution. Congregations identified several options they'd used: *Covenant of Right Relations, conflict resolution committee/panel, outside mediation, conflict resolution policy.* One congregation stated simply, *“We talk things out”.*

BARRIERS

There is not a common understanding of ministry. One of the questions asked by the CUC Principles Task Force in their first survey of Canadian Unitarians, congregation by congregation, was, *“What is your personal ministry?”* Some of the responses were:

- helping others, emotionally, spiritually, practically, financially

- environmental stewardship
- sustainable communities
- teaching

Others said they “didn't understand personal ministry”.

The following quote heard at a conference session demonstrates that 'ministry' is an uncomfortable word in some of our lay-led congregations: “*in our congregation if you talk about ministry, some people will leave*”. No doubt there are others who reject the word ministry, especially in relation to lay persons.

There was, however, clarity among the Lay Chaplains. They understood their work to be ministry. When questions were asked about social justice work in the congregation, the children's program, pastoral care and other activities in the church there was general agreement that, of course, they were ministry. They liked the definition developed by the Task Force.

Survey comments about barriers to shared ministry:

“Most institutional organizations have inbuilt resistance to change. We practice it (shared ministry) more than proclaim it”.

“We do not, as far as I know, have any resistance to this concept. It has been used in our congregation for quite a while”.

“We are starting to 'walk the walk' but we don't discuss it as such. There is work to be done.”

There are attitudinal barriers too. In a church with an ordained minister, some members see him/her as the designated leader who does ministry. Others believe only professional clergy can be spiritual caregivers. Baby boomers, the ultimate consumers, shop for their church and may not initially embrace the concept of shared ministry.

But by far the great majority of U*Us in our congregations, we believe, simply have not thought of their work in the church as ministry. They teach in the church school, they sit on the Board, they work on Social Justice projects but if you told them they are doing ministry, they are ministering, many would be surprised. The definition developed by the Task Force is not commonly held.

RESOURCES

The committee gathered some resources for encouraging the use of shared ministry language, increasing the understanding of what shared ministry is and how it is, or could be, practiced.

Readings (attached)

- There is Ministry, author and source unknown
- Shared Ministry, Robert W. Karnan
- Ministry is All That We Do - Together, Gordon McKeeman
- Shared Ministry - article in the Canadian Unitarian, Vol. 43 - No. 4, Fall 2002, www.cuc.ca
- One Hundred Arms - from a sermon by Rev. Kathy Sage
- Key Elements of Shared Ministry - from a report by Rev. Robert Latham

Books

- All Are Chosen ed. Margaret Beard and Roger W. Comstock, Beacon Press, 1998
- Awakened from the Forest: Meditations on Ministry, collected by Gary E. Smith Skinner House Books, 1995
- Churchworks, A Well-Body Book for Congregations, Anne Odin Heller, Skinner House Books, 1999. (includes evaluation of shared ministry in a congregation)
- Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity, A Report by the Commission on Appraisal, Section Six, Congregational Governance, Unitarian Universalist Association, June 1997
- Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry, Roy D. Philips, 1999.
- Salted with Fire, ed. Scott W. Alexander, p. 133, Giving the Ministry Away, the role of the minister in future churches, Barbara Wells, Skinner House Books, Boston, 1994
- Sharing the Ministry: A Practical Guide for Transforming Volunteers into Ministers, Jean Morris Trumbauer, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis. 1995
- Transforming Liberal Congregations for the New Millenium, Roy D. Philips, Unity Church - Unitarian, 1996

Congregational Resources

1. First Unitarian Congregation in Toronto offers two programs to help its members identify their personal ministry:
 - **Mapmaking:** A series of monthly potluck dinners and discussions exclusively for “our newest members to guide them in finding rewarding ways to build community, deepen their spirituality and **live out their ministry.**” It is a five-session program designed to help new members become fully integrated into the congregation.

- **Lifecraft: The Path of Ministry**” is a day-long program designed to help you **discern your unique ministry. What is your passion? What has your life story been saying? Where are you being called to serve?* **(italics are mine)*

2. Congregations that have a Committee on Ministry which evaluates the whole ministry of the church may have more understanding of shared ministry. In the 1997 report of the UUA Commission on Appraisal, The Reverend Robert Latham suggests that the “Committee on Ministry oversee the **entire ministry of the congregation, not just that of the clergy.*” Two of the areas of responsibility of the committee relate directly to this discussion of shared ministry:

- “Assessment: responsibility for working out a plan to periodically assess the effectiveness of **every facet of congregational ministry.*”
- Communication: facilitates the flow of communication regarding effective ministry. **It promotes dialogue between groups representing various aspects of the congregation's ministry.* It seeks a commonality of goals and a webbing of approaches. It engenders trust and mutual respect. It is in consultation with the Board, committees and agents of the congregation's ministry. It makes recommendations whenever and wherever it deems needful in upgrading this ministry. Its approach is always positive rather than negative - always focusing on potential rather than problem.”

Latham adds: “The standard by which all facets of ministry are evaluated is the congregation's statement of Mission-Covenant. Since **ministry is everything the congregation does to fulfill its mission,* there is no other appropriate standard.....” **(italics are mine)*

Congregations that do not have an ordained minister may never have thought of evaluating the congregation's ministry at all. They may not have a mission!

3. **The Beloved Community** document that Hamilton Unitarian Congregation is developing might be a useful model for other congregations to use in identifying the gifts of members/friends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force would like to see Shared Ministry become the hallmark of Canadian Unitarian and Universalist congregations; that congregations understand their work is to help individuals first discern their gifts, and then find ways to use them to serve each other and the greater community.

We endorse the idea that the most effective form of ministry is one that shares power and responsibility between the laity and the professional clergy, and make the following recommendations:

1. **Language.** Language shapes our thoughts and actions. If you want to change the way someone thinks about something, language is a powerful tool. If shared ministry is to become a reality in our Canadian congregations we have to start using the language of shared ministry. Shared ministry, using the Task Force definition, is the ministry of professionals, paid staff and lay persons.
 - Ensure that in CUC publications the terms “professional” or “ordained ministry” are used when referring to ordained ministers.
 - Encourage congregations to examine their by-laws and policies for clarity in reference to professional, ordained ministers as distinguished from the ministry of congregational members.
 - CU*UL School is an ideal setting for the promotion of the language and practice of shared ministry. Participants are congregational leaders and the schools are in the earliest stages of development.
 - Continue to call Thursday and Friday of the ACM, when many, varied day-long programs are offered, Shared Ministry Days. It will raise the profile of shared ministry and encourage people to use the language. Continue to invite related groups offering meetings or events on those days to have their group included under the umbrella term (e.g. CUSJ, Board Meeting).
2. Appoint a team to:
 - develop a manual on shared ministry which includes the definition and resources and a church service (similar to the Sharing our Faith Sunday material) and forward the materials to the Visioning Task Force.
 - Develop, or request individuals or congregations to develop, outlines/materials for workshops to present at the ACM. The materials could be available for use at Regional Meetings and distributed to congregations. Examples include:

- Evaluating Your Congregation's Ministry - not the Minister but the Ministry!
- versions of Toronto First's Mapmaking and Lifecraft: The Path to Ministry.
- Introduction to the Hamilton Unitarian Congregation's "Beloved Community" process.

NOTE: Survey respondents indicated an interest in:

- *Lesson Guides for Board Retreats*
 - *Conference Workshops*
 - *Continuing to use the language and develop resources for Shared Ministry.*
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- have a conversation with the Executive Director and the Directors of Regional Services regarding the possibility of the RNG Consultants on Congregational Wellness and Vitality adding these workshops to her/his bag of tricks.
 - glean more information from the congregational survey on Shared Ministry.
 - develop a relationship with the coordinators of CU*UL schools to explore how the concept of shared ministry might be incorporated into the schools.
 - explore other resources (e.g. congregational, denominational, Alban Institute) to support shared ministry in our Canadian congregations.
 - explore specialized lay ministry training and the interest in it, particularly in small congregations where professional ministry is not a possibility in the foreseeable future.