

March 30, 2011 Social Justice Strategy Session at Fairlawn Avenue United Church  
Report of the Proceedings

Some Key Messages Arising

1. Collaboration on current and new projects will lead to deeper involvement and success.
  - With Faith in Action as well as other Fairlawn teams
  - With other churches – the Voices blueprint
  - With multi-faith groups
  - With like-minded organizations
  - With individuals in the larger community
  - With many generations
  - With all of our congregation
2. It is important to celebrate our talents and successes.
  - Take time to acknowledge what we do at Fairlawn to give us the energy and ideas we need to take on new tasks.
  - Take time to celebrate and respect what we all do to make a difference in the lives of others.
3. We want to talk about a life of service – the whole of our life
  - Reach every age in our church.
  - Create a place for those in transition.
  - Jesus acted. We must act too.
4. Reach out creatively
  - Make Fairlawn a welcoming place for the communities around us.
  - Create space and respect for all views within the church about living our faith in the larger world.
  - Be creative in moving beyond our church in ways that also benefit members of our congregation.
  - Involve our youth and listen to their ideas for social justice.
5. Clear communication and respect will enhance understanding
  - Clear, consistent messages about social justice - the social justice/faith in action graphic idea
  - Create welcoming opportunities to share our experiences and understanding of social justice.

## SUMMARY OF IDEAS

### INVOLVING OUR YOUTH

#### Some Key Points:

- The project must be practical and hands on.
- The project must be seen to be making a difference.
- Connecting with other organizations would increase our scope. Examples include Right to Play, Habitat for Humanity.
- Use social media – telling stories on YouTube about successful projects.
- Build on the work our young people do now such as the 30 hour famine.

#### Preliminary Work: Find out what they would like to do

Work with Dona to arrange a brainstorming session with the youth of the church who are interested in exploring the whole idea of social justice - locally with CRC perhaps and, because they do focus on the wider world, beyond Canada. Ideas from the March 30<sup>th</sup> session as noted below could be used as examples to get the discussion started. We could also include other young people that often participate in youth activities but are not necessarily part of the church.

The objectives of this session would be to encourage their ideas and involvement and to develop programs that would appeal to young people and are also part of our overall focus of poverty reduction.

Ideas: [note – additional information on these ideas can be found in Appendix A]

Idea One: Provide a program of information, training and coaching to set up local and international internships

Idea Two: Plan a Youth Conference featuring youth who have lived through poverty.

Idea Three: Mentor younger children in areas of need such as Regent Park.

Idea Four: Develop social action projects that are within our overall focus of poverty reduction and can build on current programs and partnerships such as CRC.

Idea Five: Create an opportunity for Fairlawn youth to meet with people who are marginalized to find out what would help them.

## IDEAS THAT INTEREST THE MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup> PARTICIPANTS

### Idea Six: Collaboration within the church

Create opportunities for unified efforts with other groups in the church such as Outreach, Green Action, Boarding House Ministry etc. This type of collaboration could take the form of individuals sharing what they do and why as well as celebrating what we already do together. We could also select an umbrella area such as affordable housing that we could all support.

### Idea Seven: Develop a unifying social justice or faith in action graphic

All elements of Faith in Action are important. We need a unifying language – and a unifying graphic - where all these elements can fit.

### Idea Eight: Create Fairlawn as a clearing house for those in transition as one way to reach beyond the church.

Establish Fairlawn as a warm and welcoming place where people come together to share, learn, participate and perhaps become motivated to act. Tag line: If you are in transition, come to Fairlawn, we can help.

While this idea of a clearing house does not necessarily fit social justice, it could be an add-on to Faith in Action or even beyond. We could work with people in our own congregation as well as those outside the church to help them develop their skills and talents.

As the idea includes the development of volunteers and outreach into the community, perhaps this could be a project for our Church Community Developer, Eleanor Edwards.

### Idea Nine: Develop an incubation space at Fairlawn

Use Fairlawn as a venue for an incubation space for new ideas and provide the tools for this. The concept of “teaching how to fish” as illustrated by programs at The Stop was suggested as an example of how this could work.

### Idea Ten: Partnering with other organizations for action

Set up partnerships with NGOs and other organizations [churches?] to work on social justice issues such as affordable housing, subsidized daycare, the need to remove claw backs and set up programs for financial literacy.

Idea Eleven: Continue our work on poverty reduction

We want to continue to encourage the government to move forward on this. The current provincial budget does mention housing, mental health, and the ongoing Social Assistance Review.

Idea Twelve: An Affirming Church

Help adults become informed about Gay/Straight Alliance; gender equality; inclusiveness; an affirming congregation. We could undertake this process officially through the United Church.

COMING TOGETHER TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE

Idea Thirteen: Create a Forum for Discussion

It is important that we have opportunities to communicate our respective views in a non-judgmental setting. We all practice social justice in different ways. It is important to acknowledge this and celebrate what we all do in a collective way rather than regard these different approaches as a problem. It could well be that we find we have more in common than we thought.

Idea Fourteen: Communication: Gathering and Sharing Information about Social Justice

Several ideas were suggested to share information about social justice including articles and film nights.

## Appendix A

## SUPPORTING MATERIAL

## IDEAS FOR INVOLVING OUR YOUTH

Idea One: Internships – local and international

Provide a program for youth to become interns in countries needing volunteers. This could also lead to an awareness of projects in our own city such as Habitat for Humanity.

Points under this idea:

- Arrange a walk about for young people in “mean streets” led by people who have been there.
- We could involve members of the congregation who have experiences to share. Youth who are interested in pursuing this as part of a career goal could be invited to information sessions in the church or with organizations such as World Vision.

Idea Two: Youth Conference

Organize a youth conference featuring young people who have lived through poverty such as young mothers, those living in shelters.

Points under this idea:

- Partner with CRC for this idea.

Idea Three: Mentoring younger children in areas of need

Set up tutoring and mentorship programs with our teenagers and younger children in areas of need. [Note from Rosemary – Youth Assisting Youth has a mentoring program that could be explored]

Points under this idea:

- Use graduates of George Saunders scholarships to mentor Fairlawn youth and/or teach them mentoring and other skills.

Idea Four: Social Action

Invite youth to participate in social action. Our youth are very enthusiastic about the 30 hour famine for World Vision.

Points under this idea:

- Projects such as serving meals at CRC; building homes with Habitat for Humanity. Find out where the help is needed and how to help. [Update: tentative plans for Fairlawn youth to serve Christmas dinner to CRC community members and volunteers on December 15<sup>th</sup>]
- Integrate with Sunday school themes.
- Identify opportunities for them to become engaged in concrete, hands-on activities. For example, aboriginal involvement, food banks and shelters.
- Connect with their Community Hours commitment at school.
- Link to an issue the congregation is working on such as CRC/Regent Park.

Idea Five: Develop strategies with those who are marginalized

Create an opportunity for Fairlawn youth to meet with people who are marginalized to find out what would help them.

Points under this idea:

- Introduce youth to the concept of radical theology. Jesus went among the poor.
- Look for opportunities to get to know those who are marginalized.

## IDEAS THAT INTEREST THE MARCH 30<sup>TH</sup> PARTICIPANTS

Idea Six: Collaboration within the Church

- Perhaps consider a merger of groups? [Outreach, Green Action, Social Justice, Boarding House etc.]
- Talk about “personal service” rather than charity as a way to emphasize personal commitment to a cause instead of or in addition to providing money
- Celebrate what we are already doing – talking with each other about individual and group social justice actions. Provide time for other groups to talk about their work.
- Select an umbrella area we could all support such as affordable housing. Affordable housing and boarding house ministry could be connected.
- The situation of uncertainty at TMCH could be a key moment for change and advocacy. CRC could be helpful here. [Note: CRC is keeping on top of this issue and will feed into us via CRC Chair Greig Clark as developments occur.]

Idea Seven: Develop a unifying social justice or faith in action graphic

- Fairlawn is beginning the process of developing branding for the church. There is also a governance review that is ongoing. We need to tie into both these initiatives if we want to pursue this idea.

Idea Eight: Create Fairlawn as a clearing house for those in transition as one way to reach beyond the church.

- The clearing house idea is one way to build our church – reaching beyond our doors into the larger community.
- The FNC is already “warm and welcoming” and could be a focus for the clearing house idea as well as a partner with the church in this effort.
- We can appeal to those in transition – the practical side of a life transition as well as the potential for spiritual growth.
- Transitions could include:
  - From high school to university to work: perhaps use the George Saunders grads to mentor younger ones at Fairlawn.
  - From couple to parents
  - From working full time to part time and/or retiring
- Include the spiritual side of transitions, perhaps using the idea of a life of service. This could attract those 55+ who want to “transition” their energies outward.
- Our potential reach could include new retirees, new neighbours, new businesses
- This could be an outreach program for people who are ready to retire. Offer skills inventories and arrange for organizations that need volunteer help to give presentations on the kinds of volunteer opportunities are available and the skills and talents needed. Perhaps make use of some of the organizations supported by Outreach funds.

Idea Nine: Develop an incubation space at Fairlawn

No additional points

Idea Ten: Partnering with other organizations for action

No additional points

Idea Eleven: Continue our work on poverty reduction

- We need to continue to put pressure on politicians and let them know that people throughout the province care about poverty.
- Work with people living in poverty, e.g., CRC, Boarding House Ministry to help develop recommendations that make sense to them. We already have these connections and should build on them.

Idea Twelve: An Affirming Church

No additional points

COMING TOGETHER TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE

Idea Thirteen: Create a Forum for Discussion

- Ask members of our congregation what their views are on social justice.
- We need to provide opportunities for those who do not want to consider social justice as part of church work to share their views in a non-judgmental forum.
- We must be respectful.
- There is a process of understanding that needs to take place – valuing what we do from direct service all the way to lobbying politicians.
- Engage people in conversations
- We need to find ways to work together on practical issues in a hands-on way for something we all believe in.
- It could well be that some in the congregation feel they must support social justice out of fear or guilt – we ask for their money and their time and they feel guilty if they do not contribute. We need to go about this another way.
- This is a big step for some. We need to be cautious and careful and take it step by step.
- Make the connection between social justice and the work of Jesus.
- Ministerial leadership will help define social justice.
- Jesus acted – we must too.

Idea Fourteen:            Communication: Gathering and Sharing Information about Social Justice

- Have articles in Community Life outlining social justice action that we have undertaken.
- Talk about the fact that we are not the only church that works on social justice – use Voices as a Just Society as an example
- Explain what social justice is within the context of our Christian faith – perhaps through a forum and/or in written form - this is what we understand social justice to be – have clarity and examples
- Have a film night – show documentaries on various aspects of social justice at a real theatre. Or do the film night here – perhaps during a service so that everyone can participate.

## Appendix B

### ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD

#### Reach beyond the church

- Bring new people into the fold.
- Expand our information sharing and expand our mailing lists.

#### Collaboration

- Keep building linkages and partnerships. [e.g., the Voices group]
- Provide opportunities for people to work on specific projects.
- Move from the Voices group to multi-faith linkages – Adult Education’s plan for Abraham’s Walk could be a start.
- Connect with FNC regarding the ideas we developed tonight for youth.
- Talk about discipleship and a life of service – begin this in Sunday school. Set up a partnership with social justice, children’s education and other teams to set this up. [Note: Christopher mentioned that the fall curriculum will have a focus on social justice]
- Encourage a Big Tent.
- Support the activities of other churches and have them support us – Voices as an example of this.

#### Information Sharing

- Share the St. James Bond story. A video [?] being prepared by the developers of the space will hopefully tell the story ‘after St. James Bond’ – how the funds were used and the difference these funds are making in individual lives.
- Continue educating our congregation about what we have done with the housing fund. Invite a person whose life has become better as a direct result of housing supported by Fairlawn.
- Continue telling our story with regular columns in Community Life, Sunday bulletin.

#### Creative Information Sharing: Youth

- Offer a suggestion to our Fairlawn youth that they produce a video for YouTube talking about the great things we are doing at Fairlawn.

## Appendix C

### OTHER IDEAS NOT FOUND ELSEWHERE

- Arrange for projects with youth of other churches, other faiths
  - Facilitate training of unemployed workers
  - Create more awareness of social services available
  - Help newcomers who need for language skills, interpreters, help accessing health services
  - Early intervention in education
  - Continue influencing policy at the macro level – lobbying, letter writing, reports, educational opportunities that lead to understanding
  - Work on women’s equality. Set up social venues, conversation circles, perhaps partnering with another congregation and/or agencies currently working on these issues such as Newcomer Women.
  - Focusing on youth issues – be proactive – e.g., Pathways to Education
  - Aboriginal issues such as poverty, lack of relevant education, the problems they face moving into the city and the difficulties they experience in an urban environment.
  - There is value in setting up communication on existing programs with the church. Work through an inter-faith context; inter-cultural focus.
  - Recognition that we are a social justice church
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- The use of the word “divide” as in “bridging the divide” bothered some who felt it conveys a negative message.