

The Crisis in the Church and What's Being Done About It

If you were to visit one of the many churches in Toronto's "downtown" area this Sunday, or last Sunday, you would likely find more empty pews than worshippers. A year from now the number of worshippers will likely be even fewer. Such trouble spots in the United Church require investigation and a remedy.

If you visit the average United Church this Sunday, or any Sunday, you'll find much of the congregation in their "greying" years and few, if any, teenagers. Apparently the younger generation "don't buy" the same brand of religion that the more mature church-goer seems to cling to. If younger people are to be attracted to church, then we must discover, and deliver, what they are seeking . . . be it more relevant sermons, a more understandable language, a more practical, show-me-how type of religion . . . better reasons for going to church.

If you have wandered around your own community, on a Sunday, or any day, you'll find many things happening. You'll see houses coming down and apartments mushrooming up in their places. And the people who move into these apartments appear to completely isolate themselves from the community and the church.

TIME TO CHANGE WITH THE AGE

These are but a sample of the problems the church is facing, must look into and take action. A steady drop in church membership and attendance is making itself felt. The decreasing number of theological students, plus the ministers who are leaving the church for other occupations, is a bit alarming. And this pattern continues right down to a smaller roll call at Sunday School level.

Unless somebody does something about these situations, and hundreds like them, The United Church of Canada, in Canada, will be in deep trouble. Dr. Ernest Long said it this way . . . "The Church has five years to change radically or else.

". . . there must be radical changes in our church from top to bottom. The General Council, the conferences, the presbyteries and the congregations must continue to look after administrative details, but their most urgent task right now and in the next five years is to ask radical questions about the church: What is the purpose of the church?, or to put it more bluntly, what business are we in . . . preserving an institution or proclaiming a Gospel?"

SOMEBODY IS DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THE CRISIS

Early in 1967 a commission was appointed and instructed to give serious consideration to a professional survey covering Metropolitan Toronto. The project was to be similar in scope to the one recently completed in York Presbytery and others.

On June 12, 1967, the three Metro Presbyteries committees united to form the "Inter-Presbytery Committee." Soon terms of reference for the task to be done were prepared. Professional consultants were interviewed and pertinent information sought from all available sources including consultations with officers of the General Council of the United Church, The Home Missions Board and The Toronto Home Missions Council.

NEED FOR METRO SURVEY

Your three Presbyteries are TRUSTEES for the United Church in Metro Toronto, which has tremendous resources in wealth:

Capital Investment — \$83,000,000. Annual Income — \$8,700,000. 1967 grants by Home Mission Council — \$225,000.

The responsibility of the Trustees is to make sure that this is being used to the best advantage. However, as it is estimated that from 25% to 40% of church property in Metro Toronto is obsolete or no longer properly serves the needs of the community, a realignment of these resources may be required to meet properly the constantly changing conditions the church faces.

Cursory exploration into such conditions by the Trustees indicates that a number of things can be done that will not only save substantial sums for the United Church but greatly increase its effectiveness at the same time.

However, before any action can be taken to reach the promised goals, many facts must be gleaned. Such facts cover the use of present building, changing patterns of living, attitudes towards "Church-going" by members and non-members and endless others.

The collection, interpretation and presentation of this material demanded the services of professional consultants and fact-finding organization.

ACTION ALREADY TAKEN BY INTER-PRESBYTERY COMMITTEE

At a full meeting of the Inter-Presbytery Committee on January 22nd, 1968, the following motions were unanimously passed:

Moved by M. W. Sparling, seconded by Dr. A. MacQueen, and passed—

That we recommend to our respective Presbyteries—

1. That the Presbyteries approve the complete survey.
2. That the Inter-Presbytery Committee be authorized to proceed with Phase One (outlined on later pages). Also that the cost be underwritten by the Toronto Home Mission Council.
3. That the three Presbyteries be asked to provide funds for the balance of the survey as outlined in the brochure at an estimated additional cost of \$80,000.

Moved by Rev. Colin Todd, seconded by Rev. Wm. R. Fritz and passed—

That the Executive be empowered to engage Project Planning Associates Limited to conduct Phase One as soon as approval is received from the three Presbyteries.

Moved by Rev. Colin Todd, seconded by Rev. D. Brown, and passed—

That we suggest to the three Presbyteries that the balance of the cost of the survey could be covered by an assessment of 25¢ per member per year for three years.

All three Presbyteries have now approved the project generally and have requested that Phase One be started as quickly as possible.

Officials of the Anglican Church, when interviewed, promised sympathetic support but were not able to offer financial assistance at the time, due to previous commitments. Support, however, was promised in writing by the Toronto Home Missions Council to the extent of \$20,000.00 for a Metro wide survey. . . . Phase One of a five phase plan.

THE WORKING PLAN FOR THE FIVE-PHASE PROJECT

Phase One

In the success of the York Presbytery survey, wholeheartedly adopted by all congregations, great credit was given to the Local Committees appointed by each congregation in co-operating with the consultants in all phases of the operation. Your Inter-Presbytery Committee feels that this factor, of which you are a part, is vital to the success of our survey.

Using the basic information in the Church Year Book, the consultants will assess this in conjunction with the Local Committee, examine the relation with the local area and its needs and the trend, with a forecast for the future. The 152 churches in Metro will be classified according to many different factors and in the light of the changing needs of the areas served.

Phase Two

Will examine existing land use in relation to housing types, population trends and densities, ethnic distribution.

Phase Three

The Social Planning Council of the Metropolitan area in 1964 completed a sociological survey which revealed many important facets of domestic and family life. This covered youth problems, community attitudes, etc., and made a strong recommendation for a further detailed examination of all the sociological factors involved in high density living, in the light of the trend toward still greater population densities in the large urban centres.

This phase of the survey recognizes the need for this approach, if reliable conclusions are to be drawn. While the cost is \$30,000 any attempt to draw valid conclusions in the absence of this would be of questionable value.

Phase Four

The distribution of population has changed drastically since the present system of church government was established in Metro Toronto, and the heavy influx into this area since then, and the problems this influx created, make local church government largely ineffective. A superficial look at the situation indicates that substantial financial savings could be made by bringing the congregations of the 152 churches into closer relation. This one move would help us to reduce the number of problems now faced.

Phase Five

Once all the pertinent information indicated above is gathered and analysed, we can assess our strengths and weaknesses. Only then can we attempt to secure a realignment that will meet the real needs and problems of the Church and our peoples. The identification of the problems is the first step in planning solutions.

At this stage the consultants, with the co-operation of the local committees, will be able to present such a clear report that the Presbyteries can start to plan for present and future needs.

It should be emphasized that the three Metro Presbyteries must make the final decisions for whatever action is taken . . . for the future of the Church in Metro Toronto will depend on the wisdom of the course planned. If the forecast of population trends is valid, the situation in Metro will shortly prevail in every large centre in Canada. Therefore the project we have in front of us can rightly be regarded as a pilot project of tremendous concern to the whole Church.

WHO WILL HANDLE THIS IMPORTANT SURVEY?

After thoroughly examining the competency, experience and professional qualification of three firms who were recommended to us, the firm of Project Planning Associates Limited was selected to conduct the survey.

This firm has a professional staff of 52 and complementary personnel of over 50. The list of clients served is impressive, both in Canada, in Europe and elsewhere. Particular mention is made of the excellent job they did for The United Church in York Presbytery.

Their function may be generally stated as follows—to gather facts covering both Churches and the area they serve.

- to show the relation of all the factors.
- to prepare reports in graphic form.
- to assist and advise the Presbyteries in preparing final recommendation.
- to do the above in an objective way without being influenced by sentiment, prejudice, or extraneous factors.

GET IN ON THE ACTION THAT WILL REVIVE THE CHURCH

It is wonderful to know that ministers, Church officials and laymen have stopped talking and started doing. And it is the sort of action that Dr. Long, writing in the *Observer* in November 1967, may have been hinting at. . . .

“We must realize then, that the problems of the Church today cut very deeply. The answers to them will determine whether the Church becomes a redemptive power in modern society or whether it sinks into mediocrity. If the downward trend gains momentum, it will be a bad day for the Church as we have known it. If we have the courage to diagnose the ills of the Church and commit ourselves unreservedly to the Lord and Head of the Church, this next generation can be one of the most electrifying, intriguing, challenging and promising generations in the Church’s history.”

Get in on the action. Do everything you can to help reach this wonderful goal. Make the Church mean something to the next generation . . . it will surely need it.

NEWSPAPERS ACROSS CANADA REPORT PHASE 1 FINDINGS

Newspapers and radio stations are interested in what is happening in the United Church in Metro. Over 40 of these news mediums in major cities carried an outline of the Report on Phase 1 of the Metro Study. The published stories were similar to the following.

TORONTO, November 18—United Churches in Metro have swallowed some bitter pills lately but the majority of clergy and lay members believe that the ultimate result will be beneficial.

The latest pill is the findings of Phase 1, a study initiated by the three Toronto presbyteries of The United Church of Canada which sought to base a plan for the future operation of Metro's United Churches on what their role should be and how it could be implemented.

Project Planning Associates Limited was given the assignment and have just completed Phase 1 of the multi-phase study. The complete study is expected to take another two years.

A Local Planning Committee has been appointed by each congregation to provide the consultants with information and to work with them in interpreting the findings of the study.

There are 152 United Church congregations in Metro including 10 ethnic congregations, two special congregations — the Evangelical Church for the Deaf and Fred Victor Mission. Total membership is 92,520 (based on 1966 statistics.)

The bitterest swallow is in the statistics of membership and attendance: Since 1963, membership has decreased from 98,000 to 92,500. The rate of drop is increasing. Sunday School membership has decreased from 66,585 in 1961 to 42,543 in 1967. Membership in men's organizations has dropped 50%, women's 25%. Average attendance is 42% of membership.

The roles of the Church

Lay and clergy agree that the primary function of the Church is for worship and Christian leadership, but there should be a change in the format of worship services. Ministers want more assistance from laymen, particularly in administrative detail and visiting parishioners. Both ministers and committee members, however, are concerned about reaching youth. They also feel there should be more amalgamations of specialized ministries

and that some church properties should be re-developed as church centres for a variety of uses. Present facilities in Metro churches are in use for only about one-third of the time.

The Inter-Presbytery Study also found that ministers on the whole, fail to communicate what should be the Christian attitude on the gritty issues of the day. For instance, ministers want the Church to have a voice in government decision-making and to be on the leading edge of social thought. Many lay people, on the other hand, seem to be more committed to a building than a cause.

Approach to the future

Toronto Presbyteries see three approaches to the future of United—and perhaps all churches in Metro Toronto. 1. Consolidate resources through amalgamations and investments according to a plan. 2. Retain existing buildings and staff in their present form and make a concerted effort to increase membership. 3. Allow the process of change to proceed unchallenged, with consequent rapid growth in some churches, and decline in others.

Meetings have been held with representatives of the three presbyteries concerned to discuss the implications of the first phase of the study for each congregation. These meetings, will lead to new and better ways for the United Church to identify and fulfill its role in modern urban society.

Dr. A. A. MacKenzie, Co-Superintendent of Home Missions says that the survey has already provoked a lot of discussion among members of the planning committees. "One thing we should not lose sight of is that changes have already taken place in the pattern of church life," he says. "For instance, while it is true that Sunday School attendance has dropped, more groups of young people are going to Cedar Glen (Toronto Conference Centre), not just for an hour a day, but for a whole weekend."