

CROSSROADS LIVING FAITH STORY

Crossroads United Church, located in Kingston, ON, adopted the following Purpose Statement at the time of its formation as a new congregation in 2010:

Purpose Statement

Crossroads United Church, as a congregation of the United Church of Canada, is a welcoming and supportive community of Christians that gathers to worship, seeks spiritual growth and humbly works to advance God's justice in the world.

The various parts of this statement were expanded into a more detailed Mission Statement (see below) that has served as our guide since then, and we are using it as a framework here for our Living Faith Story. Throughout the document (and particularly in the Appendix: “*Our Stories*” you will see references and links to our website www.crossroadsunited.ca/ You are encouraged to explore the site to find out more about us and who we are.

First, however, is some information about our history and our administrative structure.

A brief history of Crossroads

Crossroads United Church was created January 1, 2010 by the amalgamation of Queen Street United Church (a long established downtown church) and St. Margaret’s United Church (founded in 1953 in what was then the west end of the City of Kingston.) The amalgamation was prompted by declining memberships and financial problems at both congregations and serious building repair problems at Queen Street.

There were many meetings within each congregation and between representatives of the two congregations. Because of the building problems at Queen Street, we started to worship together in St Margaret’s building before the decision to amalgamate. The congregations agreed to amalgamate and to worship and work in St. Margaret’s building. A Statement of Mission and Purpose was agreed, as well as an agreed model of governance (Council with committees) and the name of Crossroads was chosen.

Queen Street U.C. sold its property and buildings. Some proceeds were allocated to Presbytery for projects, and some donated to Queen’s Theological College (QTC) for bursaries to people training for ministry. When QTC closed, Crossroads and Queen’s University agreed to transfer the capital of this donation to Emmanuel College in Toronto, leaving some unused investment income for chaplaincy at Queen’s. The rest of the proceeds of sale remained with Crossroads United Church. Some of this money has been used for building maintenance and recurring operating deficits; what is left is largely responsible for the health of Crossroads’ current Balance Sheet.

Administration

At the time of amalgamation the governance structure adopted for Crossroads was a traditional Council structure with many committees, similar to what each of the founding congregations had been using. But like many congregations our average age is increasing rather quickly, and while there are plenty of people available to help with various tasks it is becoming difficult to recruit folk ready to take on leadership roles. Consequently it has become increasingly apparent that reliance on a myriad of committees is too cumbersome to maintain, and so we are moving toward a more streamlined structure

with less emphasis on committees and more on action teams. A provisional structure is expected to be approved soon, and will continue to be examined.

Crossroads employs an Office Administrator for 14 hours per week, with regular office hours 8:30 – noon, Tuesday – Friday. Her office is near the entrance door so she is the welcoming presence that most weekday visitors first encounter at the church. She provides administrative support to the Minister and to the congregation's various teams and committees.

At the present time the staff each use document software independently installed on their computers, but a cloud-based shared office suite will soon be installed. For communication with congregational members the office has email addresses for most of them and telephone numbers for almost all of them; ordinary mail is used as necessary.

During the pandemic shutdown virtually all committee and group meetings have been held via Zoom, mostly quite successfully. However it proved too difficult for the Council itself to maintain regular meetings, and so a much smaller “Emergency Response Commission” (ERC) was established to do the work of the Council during the pandemic shutdown. In particular the ERC receives regular financial reports from the church treasurer. As our financial statements show, regular church offerings have been maintained quite well during the shutdown. So despite the loss of significant rental income but thanks to significant government covid related grants our financial position has remained reasonably stable.

From our Mission Statement:

(a) Crossroads United Church is a congregation of the United Church of Canada.

Crossroads recognizes and values its participation as part of the larger conciliar body of the church. Both before and after amalgamation we are used to having ministers and lay members actively involved in higher courts of the church: Presbytery, Conference, Region, General Council.

More locally, our minister and some other United Church ministers in Kingston have jointly conducted shared studies through five-week ZOOM sessions open to members of all their churches. We have also participated in discussions about sharing staff such as an Office Administrator but so far the details of such a sharing have seemed unworkable. We are interested in considering further such possibilities of cooperation and collaboration.

(b) We are a welcoming and supportive community of Christians.

- Seeking to be kind and caring
- Affirming our own and others' self-worth in authentic relationships
- Providing a place where all people can feel safe and welcome
- Offering opportunities for fellowship

Early evidence of welcome and support at Crossroads was the happy unification of the two choirs into one stronger group even before the formal amalgamation. It was led by the directors of the two choirs. Some former members of the two congregations chose not to become part of Crossroads but most chose to join. Shared work on committees, tasks and activities promoted wider friendships, understanding, and cooperation. Crossroads is blessed to have many volunteers who contribute many hours in a great variety of activities. For example, our largest fund-raising and fun-raising event is our annual congregational bazaar: this is a major community-building event inherited from both congregations. Many members participate enthusiastically as suppliers of goods, as workers and

shoppers. People from the wider community come to join the fun. (See more details in the “Our Stories” Appendix.)

With friendship and trust growing through shared activity, we stopped asking: “is she/he from Queen Street or from St. Margaret’s?”, instead asking “ is she/he willing and the right person for the job?” There was a willingness to accept changes. For example, St. Margaret’s had had a “no stained glass” policy but Crossroads happily installed two treasured stained glass windows from Queen Street’s building in the former St. Margaret’s building.

In addition to the minister’s pastoral care activities, there is a phoning team that calls most of our members periodically (normally a few times a year but more often during the shutdowns). They call mainly to just keep in touch but also to pass on any church news items of particular interest or to hear any concerns that should be passed on to the minister. Recently a few phoners have had to leave the program, so some new phoners would be welcome. There is also an informal group of visitors who call in on at retirement and long term care homes. Both former congregations brought aging memberships into the union so it is not surprising that we have had cases of illness and lost people due to death or moving in retirement. There has been support by church friends to individuals and families in such cases. Also during the pandemic shutdown we have been having a regular Sunday morning Zoom gathering open to all, featuring a general check-in and open discussion, and there are frequent opportunities then for personal support. The Crossroads congregation includes in its leadership and membership those who are openly part of the LGBTQ2+ community; there is “room for all in the shadow of God’s wing” (More Voices # 62). A formal process, like the one offered by Affirm United, to explore further the welcome offered by Crossroads would be considered as a next step for our congregation.”

We have been joined by many new members and adherents in the past 11 years. They have all expressed pleasure at the warm welcome they have received.

One prime example of a caring and supportive activity, both for the Crossroads family and for the wider community is the Crossroads Wellness Program. This is described in Section (e) below, and more details can be found in the Appendix: *Our Stories* which contains a collection of anecdotes about some of our activities and events.

(c) We gather to worship,

- Celebrating God's presence joyfully
- Engaging all ages intentionally
- Listening for God's wisdom in word, scripture and Christ's teachings
- Praising God through music, prayer and the Sacraments

Since in-house worship services had to be suspended during the pandemic shutdown, recorded online worship services have been produced weekly and are available via the church website and by Facebook and YouTube. We have the technical equipment needed to stream live services, and expect to do this once in-house worship services recommence.

Crossroads’ usual form of worship (whether live or online) is the traditional order of service with hymns (from Voices United and More Voices), prayers (typically led by the minister), scripture readings (using a variety of translations), sermon, additional instrumental or vocal music, and there is frequently a “Moment for Mission” time. Communion is usually, but not always, by intinction. The congregation appreciates thoughtful biblically-based sermons applied to current

issues in our world, showing familiarity with traditional understandings and ready to share newer understandings. The congregation comfortably shares a variety of theological positions, from conservative to progressive, but it is fair to say the most common is the usual moderate-liberal United Church stance.

In consultation with the music directors and Worship Committee, there will occasionally be visiting outside musical groups or, rather more rarely, visiting outside speakers. With the proliferation of online activity during the Covid-19 shutdown there has been some increased sharing of worship resources among some local congregations, with the hope of more to come.

Crossroads has an enthusiastic choir working with our two music directors, and during the shutdown has been able to contribute small groups and individual singers to the regular weekly recorded services. The choir also has a two octave set of chimes (a memorial gift from a congregant) that can occasionally be used to augment the usual organ/piano/clarinet music (see, for instance, the 2021 [Easter Sunday service](#) (about 45 minutes in). Crossroads is also fortunate to have an unofficial composer-in-residence who has written some [30 original hymns](#).

In addition to musical offerings, there is variable lay participation in Sunday services. Things have been different during pandemic on-line worship times, but in “normal” times we regularly have lay scripture readers, moment for mission speakers, congregational reports on such things as finances and outreach grants, etc.

Since there have been very few children in the congregation for some time, the current minister has chosen to use the corresponding “children's time” for a more general conversation time with all the folk present. This has worked well during ‘normal’ times, but had to be suspended during the shutdown and was partially replaced by an open Zoom gathering every Sunday morning just prior to the online service.

Occasional services with a very different size, place, time, format have been given in particular circumstances (e.g. Blue Christmas service), and they have been well received for their purpose.

The minister is encouraged and expected to take full advantage of the provisions for study leave and continuing education. When the minister is away, services may be led by visiting preachers, or by groups or individuals from the congregation, or by shared services with other congregations.

(d) We seek spiritual growth.

- Learning through youth worship and Sunday School, (*currently difficult, see below)
- Seeking meaning and understanding through questions, reflection and discussion
- Growing through Bible study and other study groups
- Being open to new opportunities for spiritual development and expression

Several of the faith formation and community group activities have had to be suspended during the Covid-19 lock down, such as our Bible Study group, our monthly Breakfast Group, and our monthly Luncheon group, but we hope most of these will resume once physical gathering is possible again. Other new study group activities using Zoom have been organized under the leadership of our minister as part of an informal consortium of local United Church clergy. These inter-congregational activities have been well received, and there is hope that they might expand into more general inter-congregational activity and cooperation. In general our various study group activities are led sometimes by the minister and sometimes by lay people. Any costs involve, e.g. for study books, are

usually, but not always, borne by the participants. It is fair to say these activities do not usually draw big crowds, but are appreciated by those who do participate.

One of the important results of having these group gathering to talk together is the bonding and sense of community together that is generated. The same positive effect is often observed with other groups who gather for “non-study”, possibly for “church-work” activities (like the annual Bazaar), and end up chatting with each other about all sorts of things (not generally about theological issues, but often about community building and social justice issues).

* One of the disappointments at Crossroads over the last several years is that one of our Mission statements, namely “*Learning through youth worship and Sunday School*” has proved very difficult to realize. This had been our intention, and both founding congregations had (and we still have) willing and able volunteers. Also, in the 1990’s St. Margaret’s had hired a (non-recognized) DLM to promote this work. At first it worked quite well and her work expanded to create activities for Presbytery teenage youth (volleyball tournaments, occasionally leading worship in some churches). Her job also included some adult programming.

At amalgamation Crossroads included this position, with the same person working with volunteers from both founding congregations. However the flow of children and youth was already dwindling to only a very occasional child and eventually dried up; their parents were not attending church and other Sunday activities proved too big an attraction. Maintaining the nearly full-time paid position was a big factor in an annual deficit. When the DLM approached a normal retirement birthday in 2018 we decided not to extend the position.

(It is relevant that over the last few decades the Public School Board closed four K-6 schools in this general area of Kingston (the old west-end) – there were not enough children to justify the schools.)

(e) We humbly work to advance God's justice in the world.

- Living with respect in God's creation
- Seeking to understand and respond to the needs of others locally and globally
- Sharing ourselves, our time, talent and treasures through outreach initiatives
- Promoting the Mission and Service of the United Church of Canada
- Supporting the peaceful resolution of human conflict

Both founding congregations had commitments to outreach, and Crossroads has continued these commitments. We have had an Outreach, Justice and Advocacy Committee, but as with many committees it struggles to maintain optimal viability. It is annually allocated \$7,000 in our Operating budget and continues to selectively give grants to applying charities, mostly local. The committee reports to the congregation and aims to raise awareness of issues like the proposed Guaranteed Annual Income.

One Wednesday morning each month (even through the pandemic) a small Crossroads team distributes 25 grocery vouchers for \$25 (up from \$20 a year ago) to needy persons who line up to receive them; they are paid for by Benevolent Fund contributions (\$6,000 in 2020 - outside the Operating Budget). Crossroads has annually provided 48 generous Christmas hampers as part of a city-wide program coordinated by the Salvation Army. Our members donate money for the food, and pack and distribute the hampers to households identified by the SA. In 2020 the pandemic made it impossible to proceed as in the past, so the SA decided to give generous grocery gift cards to each household. In 2020

Crossroads raised \$3300 by special contributions to give to SA for this – close to our previous usual annual cost. A small Crossroads team has acted as servers at a SA “Bread of Life” end-of-the month dinner in an economically challenged neighbourhood of Kingston, but this was suspended because of the pandemic.

Crossroads has also provided excellent space in our Hall or meeting rooms for free or at nominal cost to community groups such as AA, Al Anon, Brownies, an Immigrant Youth program, and others. (We also receive significant income from some renters of space who pay realistic rents for the space.) It is not apparent how demand for this space will rebound after the pandemic but our space, with ample parking is very attractive. We hope to develop this kind of use, both for charitable activities and for rental income.

To provide care for people in our wider community, an enthusiastic volunteer with the help of other volunteers created a Wellness Program with some emphasis on seniors. It includes a variety of fitness classes led by paid qualified instructors and some seminars on particular issues presented by professionals. Participants include some Crossroads people but more from the wider community. The program has been funded by free-will contributions from participants and during the pandemic has continued on Zoom. As noted earlier, more details may be found in the Appendix.

Crossroads Mission and Service contribution has been determined by voluntary contributions and not included as a budget item. Individual contributions have been encouraged in our modest financial campaigns and by occasional Moments for Mission, but not vigorously promoted. Our contribution has declined from \$49,959 in 2010 to \$21,024 in 2020, a more rapid decline than the decline in contributions for Operating. Some causes of decline are people changing their priority due to Operating deficits, deaths or moves of some older generous supporters of M&S, and some voiced reaction to the change from Presbytery dues to congregational allocations.

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Brief alert re Statistics section: The attendance numbers in the Statistics section of the profile were reported very shortly after the beginning the covid shutdown, just after we started our online recorded services. At that time we had no idea how many folk were watching, and so the reported weekly attendance (15) was not much more than the number of people involved in producing and posting the recordings. A hopefully more representative number would be the average weekly attendance reported the previous year, namely 67.

August 18, 2021

Profile Team: Dan Norman, Gloria Whitehead, Hal Holt, Norman Rice, Sue Taylor,
Rev. Phil Wilson (Regional Liaison)

Appendix: “Our Stories” - To be filled in when ready.