

HARCOURT MEMORIAL UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL PROPOSAL FOR A NEW MODEL FOR GOVERNANCE (April 6, 2009)

MOTION – Council recommends to the Congregation that a **changed governance model for Harcourt Church Council, incorporating a smaller, more efficient Council**, be used for a **trial period, from July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2011**, and that this model be evaluated by January 2011 with the intention of proposing to the Congregation that the structure be continued, or continued with recommended revisions.

◆ **WHY?** Harcourt's governance structure follows the "Council" model, the most commonly used model of three forms allowed by the United Church of Canada *Manual*. Harcourt's Council is very large (90-plus members, as all members of all Standing Committees belong). Fewer council members attend regularly, which affects continuity of discussions, and as Council meets infrequently (~ 4 to 6 times a year), its ability to plan and to respond effectively is hampered. A small Coordinating Committee does meet monthly, but it is probably too small to provide sufficient leadership and coordination towards implementing Harcourt's vision.

The initial aim was to streamline Council structure, making it smaller (ideally 10-15 members) and able to perform its functions in an efficient and nimble manner. Over the fall and winter, the Coordinating Committee and Council looked at a number of approaches to restructuring governance. It quickly became apparent that the driving force for restructuring our governance was not just about streamlining for efficiency, but was about making another transition as a Congregation – the transition that Anthony Robinson calls "*moving from board culture to ministry culture*". Thus, the objective in streamlining governance structure should be to move the emphasis from running the church and change it to carrying out the many aspects of the Harcourt vision. **That is, releasing members' time and gifts so that they can be used for ministry - for what God is calling the Congregation to do.**

◆ **KEY POINTS OF THE STRUCTURE PRESENTED FOR CONGREGATIONAL APPROVAL**

- The **new Council will consist of 11 councillors, the Secretary to Council, and all members of the Order of Ministry** who have been appointed to the charge.
- A priority item for the new Council is to **establish strategies to strengthen communications** with the whole Congregation and to ensure transparency in Council actions.
- The present **Coordinating Committee will not continue**, with its tasks taken on by the new, smaller Council, which will normally meet monthly.
- Other **Standing Committees** of Council will continue to operate, with their current mandates, structures, planning and budget cycles and reporting mechanisms. These mandates and structures will be reviewed as part of the business for the new Council, and may change.
- This proposal is a **starting point** for future development and evolution of the governance structure for Harcourt, as Council seeks to find the most effective ways to take responsibility for policy development, to provide operational oversight of Congregational priorities and their implementation, and to continue to discern what God's mission is for Harcourt.

◆ PROPOSED COMPOSITION OF NEW COUNCIL AND NOTES

1. **Chair of Council** | *elected by Congregation, for 3-year commitment as Vice-Chair, Chair, Past Chair, as with current practice.*
2. **Past Chair of Council** |
3. **Vice-Chair of Council** | *Male and female chairs alternate, as at present.*

4. **Secretary to Council** *non-voting, yearly appointment by Council, no term limit*

5. **Lay representative to Presbytery from Congregation** - *One of the elected representatives of the congregation, selected by those representatives, to serve a two-year term, with the option to rotate or renew the appointment.*

6. **Vision Implementation Team Chair** - *designated by the VIT Committee annually; no term limit.*

Note: Council established the VIT in fall 2008, to play an advisory and planning role and to provide longer-term continuity in efforts towards implementing the Harcourt vision. VIT is to be a maximum of 5 people: a minister; the Vice-Chair of Council; and 3 other members, one of whom chairs VIT and is on Council. Council is seen as having the current year's activities as its major concern, rather than the longer viewpoint of VIT; this role of VIT may be re-visited as Council's function evolves and changes.

7. **Ministry and Personnel Committee designate** – *designated by this Committee annually with no term limit. (This Committee provides a “human resources” function for staff, and is mandated by the UCC Manual [244].)*

8. **Councillor for Financial Accountability (Stewardship)** - *designated annually by the Finance Committee in consultation with the Stewardship Committee. Role is to provide Council with “budget awareness” when governing church activities and programs.*

Note: It is not intended that this Councillor be the Congregational Treasurer, who already has a heavy workload. Council as a whole will regularly review the financial statements and budget status, and ensuring budget compliance is a matter for the whole Council, working in consultation with the Standing Committees. The term “Stewardship” has been included in this title as “Stewardship” is one of the Committees required by the UCC Manual [245], yet we want to recognize that “Stewardship” can mean a whole lot besides balancing the money.

9. **Councillor for Christian Formation** - *each elected by the Congregation*
10. **Councillor for Congregational Life** - *2-year terms, 4-year maximum*
11. **Councillor for Justice and Outreach** - *eligible to be re-elected after a break of 1 year*
12. **Councillor for Operational Life** - *election each year for 2 of the 4 positions (staggered)*

Note: “Councillor for” designations indicate the Councillor through whom the accountability reports from one or more of the Standing Committees are channelled. They should not be viewed as “representatives of” these Committees, but as part of management clusters, working with the ministers, to ensure there is effective action by Committees and good communication with Council and between Committees.

13. **Ministers** - *members of the Order of Ministry who have been settled in or appointed to the Pastoral Charge; all may attend and participate; one must be present for an official Council meeting to occur. Non-voting members of Council.*

◆ COUNCIL MEMBERS AND COUNCIL MEETINGS

Meetings: Ten regular meetings each year are proposed, with summer meetings “as required”. Specified functions or activities will be assigned to each scheduled meeting in addition to items of “regular business”. Additional meetings could be called as needed to deal with business, or “on demand” by the Council Chair, Councillors, Ministers or Congregation. The monthly meetings of the Coordinating Committee would not continue, with its “executive” functions being taken on by the smaller, more frequently-meeting Council.

Council Members: Expectations for those people serving on Council are high, in commitment of time and effort and willingness to pursue greater spiritual development. Recruiting people to become members of Council needs to be done in a mindful manner, with clearly defined **skill sets** that will reflect the needs of Council (e.g. expertise or experience in one or more of the ministry areas that are part of the Congregation’s mission).

A **Nominating Committee** will be charged by Council with: (a) making the Congregation aware of positions available on Council and other Committees, and of other appointments to be made, and (b) establishing a slate of names of people willing to serve for consideration by a Congregational meeting. Nominations may also be made from the floor at a Congregational meeting called for electing Council members. The Nominating Committee will also be charged with making candidates aware of the *qualifications and skill sets* required for open positions and the task descriptions (“job descriptions”).

Terms of Office: The four “Liaison Councillors” will be elected for 2 year terms, renewable once without a break. Two Councillors will be elected each year (staggered terms), providing a mechanism for a Congregational meeting to express its opinion of Council’s current activities. Terms of office for other Council positions are indicated above.

Transition: If the proposed new governance experiment is approved, it is suggested that the elections for the first “new” Council be in June 2009. To provide the desired “staggered” Councillors, two of the positions (# 9 to # 12 above) would be elected for a one-time 3 year term (renewable for an additional 2 years, for a one-time 5 year maximum) and two others for a 2-year term, maximum of 4 years.

◆ MANDATE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCIL

- 1. Keep the purpose and vision of the Congregation before the Congregation.** Protect the Congregational vision from corruption, and facilitate regular review of the Congregational vision, identity and values
- 2. Discern the strategic priorities and annual goals for Congregational life and work,** and bring them to the Congregation for ratification.
- 3. Provide the leadership, training, coordination, and general policies that will allow Committees, teams and individuals to carry out discipleship.** Council works to ensure that Congregational Committees and teams are adequately equipped to achieve their core annual goals and responsibilities, with the term “equipped” referring to *policies, people, timetable, information, skills and relationships*.
- 4. Monitor progress of core ministry teams and flexible ministry teams towards meeting annual goals and strategic priorities.** Council acts with the various Standing

Committees and Ministry Teams to facilitate review of performance of the groups, and to talk about issues and matters of management that may involve the work of more than one group.

5. **Provide operational oversight**, including ensuring effective and responsible financial management of Congregational resources, making certain that the Congregation lives within its approved annual budget and/or deal with exceptional circumstances.
6. **Communicate** effectively and responsibly within and beyond the Congregation; ensure that there are ways to invite and obtain input from the Congregation, and provide information on a consistent basis through news letters and bulletins, Congregational meetings and electronic communications.

◆ COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

Standing Committees: With the exception of the Coordinating Committee, the current Standing Committees of Council would continue to function, with their present mandates, structures, planning and budget cycles and reporting mechanisms (*Harcourt Handbook pages 30 & 31*). Those mandates and structures may be updated and revised in future, but this is the starting point. Current Standing Committees are:

Christian Development	Fellowship & Communications	Finance	Justice & Outreach
Living the Welcome*	Pastoral Care	Property	Spiritual Life
Stewardship	Worship		

* *Council has been asked to move rapidly to review the mandate and functions of this Committee and its diverse teams. Some other Standing Committees have been relatively inactive, and so a review of all Standing Committees is a priority for the new Council, as is establishing best practices to ensure communication between Committees and Council.*

Operational oversight: Council needs to provide oversight and monitoring of activities of Standing Committees, Sub-Committees and flexible Ministry Teams (informal and/or developing groups). Council also needs to encourage effective communication between Committees and teams which have overlapping and/or complementary components to their mandates and activities. Council provides the leadership, training, coordination, and general policies that will allow these groups to carry out discipleship, and actively reviews with the groups their progress towards annual and longer-term goals. The ultimate objective in proposing a streamlined Council structure is to **release members' gifts so that they can be used for ministry**.

Accountability and oversight of the activities (and budgets) of the various Committees and teams is the responsibility of the entire Council, working in consultation with those Committees. The mechanism for interactions ("reporting") of Committees and Council is through one (or more) designated Council member and an assigned ministerial support person. Council is informed about Committee activities through reports, through the designated Council liaison, and through scheduled Council meetings held at least twice a year which will discuss activities of specific Committees as a matter of regular business. **Committees will have an improved budgeting and planning process**, so that the current and planned activities and expenditures can be readily assessed by Council. Council will seek to create an environment of "**assumed permission**"; that is, Council policies will exist to define what is "out of bounds", and beyond that, if a Committee sees a need, and has the budget, then that group should go do it. Committees will have a plan for the year's activities and their budget for the year set out. Council would take responsibility for

making contact with the Committees to see how things were going, and how they might need help. Meanwhile, Committees would report regularly to Council on progress towards the year's goals, and with regard to changes or deviations from the planned schedule and budget.

◆ COMMUNICATIONS

One consideration with a smaller Council is “how people will know what’s going on”. It is critical that any changes proposed to the structure of Church Council need to consider carefully **communication issues**. To ensure transparency in Council activities, on-going communication with the whole Congregation is also essential – even when there is no crisis. Good communications let people know what’s going on, and provide opportunities to participate. A more compact Council raises legitimate concerns about transparency, democracy, and general information exchange. Transparency and accountability are important, but we also need to recognize that churches differ from business and community service organizations; properly, churches are about God’s Mission - more concerned with *discernment* than *democracy*.

In any case, good communications are critical, and a significant component of the proposed restructuring is a commitment by the new Council to address this issue as a priority item. ***As an integral part of this proposal for restructuring, the new Council is directed to develop (and to implement) specific strategies to strengthen communications, and to bring that strategy forward to the congregation by October 2009.*** Some approaches to be considered include timely and informative *Herald* reports of business and discussions from Council and Committees so that the whole Congregation is aware of objectives and activities; regular open information meetings for all interested Congregation members, as informal brief update sessions scheduled after a church service, or more formal topic discussions or study sessions.

◆ HOW THE PROCESS GOES FORWARD

The Congregation is asked for approval to implement a two-year experimental trial of the new governance structure of Council, with an evaluation and review to follow.

A proposed timeline for implementation of the new Council structure involves approval at a Congregational meeting in June, so that people willing to standing for Council and Committee positions know what the new structure is that they will be joining. There will be opportunities for the Congregation to ask questions about this proposal at **informal information sessions** on Sunday April 19, April 26 (information table), and other dates as required.

Approval from Presbytery is needed for changes to the governance structure AND for the two-year trial. The Council structure that is outlined in the *Harcourt Handbook* is a **formal structure** that was passed by the Congregation several years ago and ratified by Presbytery. **Changes to the structure require both agreement of the Congregation and approval by Presbytery**, so that decisions continue to be made in a lawful way. If the Congregation is in agreement with making the outlined changes for the two-year experiment, we would notify Presbytery of the intention to conduct this trial, and request approval for the trial period.

The motion on page 1 indicates the two-year time period for the trial, followed by a return to the Congregation with an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate the changed structure and to make refinements, before asking Presbytery to formally accept a new governance structure for Harcourt Church.
