



**Grand River Spiritual and
Educational Resources (AVEL
Ontario)
2016 Conference Report**



Background:

This background on Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources (AVEL Ontario) located at Five Oaks Centre in Paris, Ontario, is intended to assist Toronto Conference, London Conference, Hamilton Conference, Bay of Quinte Conference, Manitou Conference, Erie Presbytery in Hamilton Conference and Chinook Presbytery in Saskatchewan Conference in their decision making during 2017 budget deliberations.

Our History-AVEL

Since 1988, the Ontario outlet of the Audiovisual Education Library (AVEL) has operated to serve the pastoral charges, Presbyteries and Conferences in Ontario by offering videos, DVDs and other resources for loan.

Funding was available from the General Council of the United Church of Canada through the former Division of Communication to the AVEL Ontario outlet to help pay the staff and promote the outlet.

This service is now paid for out of Conference budgets (and therefore through the Conference assessment to pastoral charges) so that all users might have equal access to the wealth of resources.

The Ontario AVEL Outlet has operated out of the General Council Offices, the former Brant Avenue United Church in Brantford and currently is run out of Five Oaks Centre in Paris where it pays rent.

Our History-Grand River Bookstore

In November 1997 Erie Presbytery, in which the Ontario AVEL Outlet resides, established a task group to look at the wisdom of establishing an Erie Presbytery Resource Centre. A Presbytery Resource Centre had existed in the Presbytery years earlier at Waterford United Church but had been closed.

In the process of these discussions a decision was taken in September 1998 to begin partnership conversations among Five Oaks, Erie Presbytery, the Ontario AVEL Outlet and the General Council Division of Communication (United Church Publishing House) about establishing a joint venture that would loan videos to all congregations in Ontario.

The AVEL Ontario outlet became a partner in the Grand River Bookstore & Video Library on January 2, 2000, along with Five Oaks Education & Retreat Centre, Erie Presbytery and the Division of Communication of the United Church of Canada, under the umbrella of a Pilot Project for Resource Distribution. United Church Bookrooms closed March 31, 2002 and on April 1, 2002 the Grand River Bookstore & Video Library began operating with the following partners: AVEL Ontario, Erie Presbytery and Five Oaks Education and Retreat Centre.

This partnership incorporated in 2004 with a new name: **Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources**. In 2010 AVEL West ceased operation and in January 2011 AVEL Ontario began serving Chinook Presbytery in Saskatchewan Conference through presbytery membership in AVEL and other United Church of Canada congregations East and West through

congregational membership or through single usage fees. Links to the websites for **AVEL Ontario, AVEL Montreal and Ottawa, AVEL Sackville and AVEL St. John's** are found on the United Church of Canada website on the Contact page.

Our Mission Statement:

A ministry of the United Church of Canada providing and promoting resources: audio-visuals, books, United Church programming materials, church supplies and skilled resource people offered in one location and by one operation:

- That supports current programs and issues
- That enhances the ministries of worship, education, social justice, spirituality and faith of the individuals or groups who use the outlet
- That equips individuals and groups for the mission of God as articulated and personified in Jesus Christ.

Actions Taken:

- Resources promoted at regular presbytery meetings.
- Resource displays organized for workshops held at Five Oaks and other locations.
- Book and video displays taken to Presbyterial and Conference gatherings and Annual General Meetings.
- Book and video displays taken to individual churches.
- Books/DVDs chosen and purchased to support the many events at Five Oaks.
- Book and DVD reviews at events held at Five oaks and other locations.
- Workshops organized and presented for Five Oaks programs, hosted groups at Five Oaks and other locations.
- Webstore available for non-local bookroom customers www.grandriverbooks.ca
- Easy to use and up to date web store with secure online payment methods.
- Regular communication through monthly newsletter.
- Network with resource centre directors and conference staff regularly and as requested
- In October 2015 we launched **AVEL Ontario Online**, which enables our users to access online, information about a title and order it for use. This initiative was made possible by a technology grant from Hamilton Conference. We worked with PeaceWorks Technology Solutions in Waterloo to offer an online data base that provides a catalogue of resources available, featuring program description and availability; offers online order fulfillment to members and non-members alike. Non-members are charged a fee for use and shipping charges; we offer easy online access to the United Church of Canada's YouTube channel for live streaming; we will offer regular newsletters from the data-base with current information about the service and resources.

Challenges:

- To creatively function within two systems, one that generates revenue through the sale of print material and one that offers a DVD loaning library with free one-way shipping.
- To raise the awareness of United Church resources both print and DVD and their potential as part of challenging, creative and transformative programming.
- To enthusiastically support all ministries within the United Church of Canada by promoting resources produced for their various programs.
- To continue to provide the same level of ministry without increase in partner funding.

- To continue to uphold the unique partnership between five Ontario Conferences, Erie Presbytery and Five Oaks Education and Retreat Centre and to include conferences, presbyteries, congregations and individuals who are inspired to invest in education.

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AVEL 2016 User Report

By Conference	2014 (Jan-Dec)	2015	2016 (Jan - Dec.)
Bay of Quinte	383		218
Hamilton	873		631
London	479		292
Manitou	167		94
Toronto	797		340
Saskatchewan (Chinook)	204		142
Five Oaks	88		
Francis Sandy Centre			
All Native Circle			
Non-members	207		14
Total	3198		1731

This table shows AVEL booking figures from 2014-2016. The column for 2015 is blank, not because AVEL Ontario was *not* used, but because in the transition from the Access database used since 2001 to house AVEL bookings to our new online platform, we found that we were unable to access our 2015 bookings prior to October. In 2015 we upgraded our computer system, thanks to a grant from Hamilton Conference, and the old AVEL platform could not be accessed with new technology. United Church Pastoral charges amalgamate or close, resulting in fewer members and a decrease in bookings, however, resources are still in demand and we fulfilled requests for AVEL resources. An AVEL newsletter will be sent to promote programming for November and December. Our newsletter is sent to all members who have signed up for updates and is accessible online at our website. AVEL Ontario has been a mission and ministry funded by the central conferences of the United Church of Canada. For this reason, usage is shown by conference, rather than presbytery. Moving forward, to obtain presbytery usage for an annual report, we will need work performed on our database by PeaceWorks and will follow-through with that work with conference funding in 2017. Individuals who borrow resources, either online or by telephone/email request have specific use intended for their loan. When members telephone to talk with the AVEL consultant about programming needs, the consultant can determine the user group or use intended for the loan. The information shared below comes from the experience the consultant with the constituents in 2016 and a knowledge of members' needs and resources available.

In 2014 Five Oaks programming began to initiate a shift to prepare for a changing United Church of Canada and the bookstore keeps current with these changes by promoting off-site book displays and working with Five Oaks to send book displays with off-site programs, for example, the Licensed Lay Worship Leader program in Kente Presbytery, Bay of Quinte Conference. We engaged with weekend hosted groups at Five Oaks and provide resources upon request, for example: bookstore stock and DVD support for groups such as Christian Meditation Group and The Toronto Institute for Relational Therapy. Up to 2016, Five Oaks was home to Ontario Jubilee Certificate Program in Spiritual Deepening and Spiritual Direction and the bookstore met resource needs for

students in all levels of the program. Moving forward, Jubilee Ontario has requested book displays for learning circles in 2017 at their new location. Course readers are prepared for Licensed Lay Worship Leader programs, Lay Foundation programs, Jubilee programs taking place at Five Oaks and Designated Lay Minister Diploma programs taking place at St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon. This work is possible through an Access Copyright license, maintained by Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources.

In June 2016 Five Oaks Centre announced that it would cease operations in November 2016. A member working group was nominated to work with the Five Oaks board of directors to formulate a plan to move forward and create a sustainable business plan to present at a membership meeting scheduled for June 2017. Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources (AVEL Ontario) has been invited to remain on-site as tenants and carry on with the ministry of resource distribution.

In October 2016 we began a conversation with General Council of the United Church of Canada around possibilities for resource distribution using the AVEL network as a framework. While these conversations continue, we will remain at Five Oaks, renting space and operating the AVEL Ontario outlet, a bookstore and presbytery resource centre.

Our financial reports for 2015 showed bookstore sales \$114,406.00, which includes \$7,064.00 in discounts offered to customers and \$1,283.00 in gift certificates. Discounts are offered to United Church Conference Staff, United Church members offering book studies for their congregations and purchasing in volume. Our webstore (www.grandriverbooks.ca) continues to serve new customers who cannot visit our location at Five Oaks. Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources will hold a board of directors' meeting on Monday November 7. After that meeting, our financial review will be available to Conference Executive Secretaries and partners. We do not anticipate an increase in AVEL Ontario funding in 2017 and have not requested an increase since 2004.

We are proud of the atmosphere at our bookstore and guests at Five Oaks comment on the fine selection on the shelves in both the bookstore and the video library. We give thanks for our long-time partners in ministry.

Popular Resources and User Groups

AVEL user groups include Adult Study Groups, Men's Groups, Women's Groups (UCW, etc.), Social Justice Groups, Church School Teachers, Youth Group Leaders, Clergy (baptism, confirmation, new member classes). **Usage statistics come from the period of January 1, 2016 to September 30, 2016.** In the past, our reporting covered the period from January to December. An updated user report will be available in February 2017.

Adult Studies:

What is God Up To? - a six-part study featuring Amy-Jill Levine was used by study groups in Hamilton Conference (36) London Conference (18) Chinook Presbytery (6) and Bay of Quinte Conference (6).

Saving Jesus – a twelve-part study featuring a variety of Christian scholars, thinkers and writers, produced by Living the Questions and used by study groups in Hamilton Conference (48) and Bay of Quinte (12). Saving Jesus is also recommended to Licensed Lay Worship Leaders enrolled in the Five Oaks program as a resource for assignments.

Saving Jesus Redux, an updated version of the original Saving Jesus has been used by study groups in Toronto Conference (36) Hamilton Conference (12) and London Conference (12).

Jesus Fatwah- a five-part inter-faith study from Living the Questions used by study groups in Hamilton Conference (40) Toronto Conference (10) Bay of Quinte (10) London Conference (10) Non-member Users (2)

Painting the Stars- a seven-part adult study featuring Bruce Sanguin and used by study groups in Toronto Conference (21) Hamilton Conference (21) London Conference (14) Bay of Quinte (14) Manitou Conference (7) Non-member (1)

Other popular titles used by Adult Study Group in 2016 include by all AVEL partners include: Embracing an Adult Faith (5 part, Marcus Borg); First Light (6 part, Borg and Crossan); Embracing Emergence Christianity (5 part, Phyllis Tickle); Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption in Society Today (5 part, Walter Brueggemann); If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat (10 part, John Ortberg); Embracing a Spiritual Awakening (5 part, Kathleen Norris); Experiencing the Bible Again for the First Time (10 part, Borg), Uppity Women of the Bible (27 part), Living the Questions (27 part).

Many adult studies are renewed at least once. This could mean that the study is repeated with another group, or that the study group used the materials over a longer booking period.

Men's Groups:

Popular titles for Men's Groups include: Journey of the Universe (Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry) Living the Questions, Renewal, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, Caring for Waters, Focus your Vision, Paul: An Appealing or Appalling Apostle, Paradise Lost, Religions of our Neighbours.

Women's Groups:

United Church Women's groups use Spirit Connection programs (Minutes for Mission, etc.) to lift up to their local congregations the mission work of the United Church of Canada. These groups also explore the issues of Right Relations by using We Were Children, Here Our Voices, Finding Dawn and Muffins for Granny. Women's groups have also used Rediscovering the Labyrinth (Lauren Artress), Babette's Feast, The Touch of the Master's Hand, The Fourth Wiseman, Renewal, The Christmas Shoes, Celebrate What's Right with the World, Gifts from the Mountain.

Youth Groups:

Popular studies used by those involved in youth group ministry in all conferences include: Dare to Be, Refining Fire Sustaining Grace, Questions of Faith for Youth 1 and 2, More than One Right Answer, Don't Sit on Your Stuff, Seeds Dirt Fruit, Bethlehem Year Zero, Dateline Jerusalem, Think Twice, Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes, DreamBeThinkDo.

Right Relations:

Users in all conferences have booked the following for their study in Right Relations: We Are Children, Six Miles Deep, The Eighth Fire, Hear Our Voices, Finding Dawn, The Box, The Book and the Preacher, Niigaanibatoowaad: Frontrunners. Nations Uniting (a ministry supported by United Church of Canada Mission and Service – Mandate Magazine, August 2016) use AVEL resources at their monthly Sharing Circle. All are welcome to attend the Sharing Circle, view the film and discuss. *In 2017 we plan to encourage groups in all conferences to book resources to use at 'film festivals' for their communities as congregations begin the work set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We will promote these resources as a package for study, through our newsletter and website. We will seek ways to purchase additional titles for this work.*

Pastoral Care Groups:

We have a good selection of resources used by Pastoral Care Groups in all conferences. Popular titles and those used in 2016 include: Griefwalker; The Grit and Grace of Being a Caregiver; You Can Be an Even Better Caregiver; You Shall Not Be Overcome; View from the Inside: Older Adults; The Natural Way of Prayer; Listen to your Sadness; The Wisdom of the Path, We Will Remember.

Affirming Ministries

Groups in all conferences have used in 2016: Affirming Congregations: Three Stories and For the Bible Tells Me So.

Black History Month

Sankofa, Seeking Salvation and Black Hands: The Trial of the Arsonist Slave have been used by members in Toronto Conference and Hamilton Conference during Black History Month.

Leadership:

Focus Your Vision, Celebrate! Change your Life, Change your Lens, More than One Right Answer, Shifting Years, Differences, Yes Lives in the Land of No and the Vision of Teams have been used for leadership training and leadership retreats. All titles are from StarThrower.

We encourage all United Church members in our service area to sign up at AVEL Ontario Online www.avelgrandriver.com. When you create a member profile, you will receive all of our updates and newsletters. Please encourage your communities to sign up – they are all ready members through your generous support of this ministry.

Action planned in 2017:

- connecting with members not using AVEL to create a member profile and encouraging members to explore all of the benefits available to them through their membership, through email, website and conference mailing.
- connecting with our members through newsletter, website, and email campaign (for example, TRC work and resources available to borrow, etc.)
- uploading resource centre print resources and church supplies available to purchase to the AVEL website to make online purchasing easier for our membership.
- work to improve reporting features from our data base to reflect presbytery usage.
- continuing conversations begun with General Council offices in October 2016 around resource distribution using the AVEL network as a framework.
- seeking new and up-to-date DVD resources to add to our collection for all user groups. *In January 2017, we added Violence Divine: Overcoming the Bible's Betrayal of Its Non-Violent God (Living the Questions). Two copies were added to the collection, and one is already booked for a congregational Lenten study.*
- connecting with conferences and presbyteries to fill a void for United Church resources in their area by offering travelling book displays or book displays for events and gatherings.