

## 2017 Explorer Project Evaluative Comments

**From Explorers**

*[The Explorers debriefed with the Lead Staff and some wrote additional comments, hence the mix of first and third person comments. To respect privacy, names have been removed.]*

***How has your Explorer experience impacted your own journey of faith and discipleship as a Christian?***

At home very involved in her own congregation, and this was very different from her home congregation. Seeing what her Mentor does, talking with other ministers, the Explorer felt like they had stronger beliefs and she doesn't know if she could have that core of faith.

Illuminated the ministry of *everyone* - how congregants engage in ministry. Working alongside people from the church helped to put a focus on that. Inspired increased thought about what ministry looks like. Hasn't changed his faith really but grew his conception of discipleship (with the work of the wider community and wider church)...He formerly thought he would like to start out as a military chaplain but has become more interested in pastoral ministry because of this experience.

Because she sits on the B.C. Conference Exec, it was very interesting to see how another conference runs.

Has inspired her to do more learning and exploring of her faith. Has learned lots already during this experience through discussions with her Mentor and she intends to continue the exploration with books she has recommended to read. [The Explorer] is looking at officially becoming a member of the United Church. She was never baptized or confirmed.

Realizing how diverse ministry can be, that there are more ways than just the typical ministry model to offer gifts. Seeing the social gospel in action by working with Regina Anti-Poverty ministry had a big impact. Opportunities to discuss heavy theological questions with the Mentor, and observing how he is able to engage with the range of theologies from traditional to progressive and see a middle ground that works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

She reported that it is tricky to get out to church as a university student as studies and school life prevent her from being a part of her church. After this experience she feels that this has been a "gift from God" and that she has felt her faith grow. And feels that she will try to have more balance in her life and make room for her spiritual life.

***The Explorer program was created to help young leaders in the church to understand what ministry as a vocation looks and feels like. How did that work for you? What are some of the key insights into ministry as a vocation that you were able to take away from this experience?***

As a result of the program, she now thinks she is heading in a different direction than ordained ministry in the UCC.

Fulfilled that goal for sure with opportunities to practice worship planning/prep, visiting, outreach. Didn't experience much to do with funerals or some other parts of vocational ministry so there's still more to learn but Sunday morning worship and congregational ministry for sure. Learned how important it is to do advanced work/planning and be able to adapt, because ministry can have surprises thrown at you that may take up your planned prep time or may change your focus totally from what you expected to be doing.

Had never been to a funeral before so that was interesting. The functionality of an older demographic congregation was very different from her own and it was good to be exposed to that. It was very helpful to shadow the ministers. It solidified what she was already thinking, which is that she is going into ordained ministry.

She feels she learned a lot about what exactly ministers do through lots of experiences: pastoral care/hospital visits, leading worship, attending committee meetings/learning what happens behind the scenes.

Ministry was different than expected – not just the traditional worship and pastoral care tasks. The Mentor demonstrated that a minister could be different and was always out in the community meeting with organizations and creating partnerships (folk fest, the farmers market, the "Unsettling Ideas" book club, social justice groups, street culture youth) always with the goal and vision for the congregation as a top priority.

I thought that the Explorer was someone who had contemplated ministry even in a very cursory way—in some ways, it was good that she had not...I think she and all of us benefitted from being able to demonstrate a wide array of ways that ministry personnel function.

Our Explorer said that this experience has helped her to reflect on ministry as a vocation. She knew that it was more than Sunday but was not sure what it entailed. After this experience she felt that she would reflect strongly about pursuing ministry as a vocation.

***If a friend asked you if he or she should apply to the program, what would say to that friend? Do you see value for the larger church? Would you recommend it to another young adult?***

Definitely, it was a good way to spend the summer and try something new and different.

100% yes! It was nothing short of an amazing experience. It's a great exposure to all the different aspects of ministry.

Absolutely! There's less going on in the church congregation for young people. Back in the day it wasn't a choice, you just WENT to church. Now it's become a choice to go and most young people don't see that the church has anything to offer them. This opportunity is a reinvestment in young people that can show other young people that the church is a place for them.

Yes. It's really interesting to learn what a minister does and what church ideas there are in another part of the country. It's very personal in that you can write your own goals and work along with your mentor on fulfilling those goals.

Yes, would definitely recommend but it has to be taken seriously – not just a chance to live in another part of the country. You need to be open to the opportunities that your mentor presents

It provides value by helping to get young adults interested in some form of church leadership, provides an opportunity for the transplanting of ideas and learning from other churches.

Our Explorer said that she would recommend a repeat of the project and would be more than happy to talk to perspective young adults who might choose to explore ministry as a vocation. She sees value in the benefit for the larger church. She also said, “We hear all the time how youth are the future. I believe that youth are the now of the church. This project allows youth to experience what ministry might be like and it gives youth opportunity to be involved.”

### **From Mentors**

#### ***What difference did the Project make in your ministry setting?***

It was a refreshing experience for our pastoral charge. The participant brought energy and strong leadership skills, and a strong commitment to his Christian faith and this helped new initiatives happen! People were encouraged to meet a young person who is so passionate about faith and ministry and the church and this encourages people of all ages and stages in their own faith journey.

It allowed the congregation exposure to a young person who might potentially have an interest in pursuing ministry. It also gave them an opportunity to experience different ideas.

It has allowed us to imagine and try some new ways of using our musical gifts to connect people in the community. It has given us some fresh perspectives of ourselves and what the younger generation is looking for in a church family. Therefore, it is encouraging us to work harder to connect with families in our area.

*Her time with us highlighted the lack of emphasis we have placed on youth led youth and children’s programs in the last decade. It reinforced how valuable it is to combine activities for multi generational interaction that is not necessarily family based – She enjoyed time with seniors in a structured way of interaction and they enjoyed her presence and participation.*

I think that the Project was an energizer for our congregation. It allowed them to see themselves through new eyes as the Explorer shared about his time. It allowed them to “show themselves off” (which I mean in a very positive way) allowing them to be encouraged by what they are doing and seeking to be as a community of faith. This is important as we are in a time of change/flux/curiosity about the future and a healthy sense of encouragement is going to be very important in the coming months.

Tangibly [the Explorer] also lead 3 special study sessions, offered much enjoyed prayers in worship and at the beginnings of meetings and the monthly Senior’s lunch social, as well as 3 well-received ‘mini-sermons’.

***Please comment on your experience as a Mentor***

We appreciated the support from our Conference Youth Minister. She connected our Explorer to the wider network and was very instrumental in helping us quickly understand the purpose of this project.

Overall, I enjoyed the experience. It did not come without challenges. It “felt” like I always had to find something for our Explorer to do, as she did not seem to take any initiative on her own.

I have enjoyed working with [our Explorer] and helping her to explore her future in the church. Mentoring is new to me and I saw my role as two part; facilitating experiences and opportunities for the explorer and encouraging spiritual growth.

*The intensive beginning allowed me to get to know our Explorer, her areas of interest and her disposition. It simplified our daily planning and coordination....We checked in daily and when I took a week off, she was confident of a go-to person. When I have supervised students, the process is formal and has structure, as a mentor, we incorporated reflection in our time together.... It was an adjustment to incorporate the need to “assign” “suggest” “propose” “request” expectations/tasks of the Explorer, but that developed over our time together. Initiatives of the Explorer were supported and incorporated in our ministry together and had a positive impact.*

I found [our Explorer] to be exceptionally well prepared to organize for herself various learning opportunities, meetings with other churches and people in the city, and as a consequence it was not taxing for me, not constantly looking for things for her to do. As well, my two clergy colleagues shared the work of mentoring her, and I know that she engaged well with them.... I have come away with a sense of optimism that there is in fact another generation of women and men eager to see the life of the united church and our distinct practices continue on, with delight

This experience has been wonderful. I was particularly grateful for [our Explorer's] willingness to take on duties, show initiative, help out in any way possible, and constantly look for and embrace ways to take part in the life of the congregation and the community. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to reflect with her on pastoral care visits, where I would walk through the visit again and point out what I was intending to do (or what impact to have) in each part of the conversation. It was a really good reminder to me of the skills that I use now automatically, but which took time to learn and develop. Her deep and mature faith, her openness to whatever the experience had to offer her, and her excitement about ministry put me 'back in touch' with my own sense of call. I feel very privileged to be her mentor and proud of her already!

It was a bit busier than I expected, but certainly enjoyable. The chance to think more intentionally through things that I do, or that the congregation does was great. It was nice to be able to share some worship leadership throughout the summer. It also gave me a renewed excuse to go out for coffee and cinnamon buns regularly!

***How do you think this experience helped the Explorer consider the vocation of ministry?***

He was able to experience the daily life of a rural congregation and to share his gifts alongside many faithful people. Our strong local ecumenical partnerships and working relationships helped to emphasize the ecumenical nature of ministry today. Liam had the opportunity to witness the ministry of the whole people of God, lay people, and an ordained and diaconal minister.

She was definitely surprised to see the scope of work involved in ministry. She stated she had absolutely no idea there was so much to do! Maybe, some day she might be interested, she says!

I think it helped her to see ministry as less intimidating and more as a realistic possibility. It has helped her to combine her passions with her faith and see new opportunities for her future. She has also learnt about the struggles of rural ministry on the Prairies and the diversity of the United Church of Canada.

*Ordered ministry is not where her heart lies, but I think that this experience highlighted the value of lay leadership and committed participation. There is no doubt in her that her gifts are celebrated by the faith community and that she has been affirmed in offering them.*

I believe taking part in the project here offered her both a setting in which to further engage in some deeply held convictions and practices, work on her ability to speak with others and teach others about convictions and practices she wants to share, and a chance to broaden her experience in seeing how a different congregation and a different staff team operates.

My sense is that [our Explorer] came with a good sense of being called to ministry, but not sure about whether this was the right time. As she leaves, I know she is preparing to begin the discernment process in her home presbytery/conference and looking at different theological schools, so I think it definitely helped.

I think that our Explorer got to see with depth one manifestation of ministry (through my example and a chance to ask questions/discuss issues), and with the interconnected nature of what we do in the community, got to contrast that with Social Justice Ministry (Through Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry which is housed in our building) and in conversation with colleagues in the city and through the active work of our Host Committee, rural churches as well.

***Would you recommend this experience to others?***

Absolutely! We experienced firsthand the benefits of this project for young people in our church and for our local congregations. We would also acknowledge that it is a significant commitment and needs to be considered carefully.

Yes, I certainly would – it is a delightful way to expose youth who may have some inclination toward ministry. It's a good learning experience for both Explorer and Mentor, as well as Host Site Committee. Good exposure for congregation also.

Yes! I would highly recommend this experience! It was well worth the effort as it was truly enjoyable to have another colleague in the office and in ministry. I have never experienced team ministry and so this was a positive way to explore how to partner in ministry. The benefits to myself and the congregation are innumerable.

*Yes we would encourage other congregation that are active to incorporate an Explorer in their late spring and early summer plans – particularly if they have active children and youth programming.*

I would recommend participation in this project to congregations that have enough activity and enough engagement with the emerging needs in our churches to properly engage with the participant over this period of time. On balance I would expect that any participant would bring some level of new insight and experience to be shared with the host congregation, and a look in 'behind the curtain' of congregational ministry life will benefit those who are considering a vocation by offering a more complete picture of the kind of work we do.

Yes, absolutely. It is so heartening for the church to see gifted young adults who have been formed in the faith and in leadership, offering those gifts.

Certainly. It feels like a great way to contribute to the future of the church and build connections across the country. I really love that it is inter-provincial.

### **From Host Sites**

#### ***Were there benefits for your ministry setting?***

[Our Explorer] initiated a new project, the Alphabet people, “a safe space of community and friendship, inclusive of all identities and orientations”, and hosted 6 meetings....He brought great maturity to his Explorer role, and was able to consider this initiative and other projects from the perspective of how they might be maintained, owned and sustained as part of our ongoing ministry after his placement was finished. Social media – Crossroads now has a Face Book page and several administrators thanks to his leadership. Worship leadership, preaching – [he] provided fresh perspectives and a youthful voice in worship.... He participated in a significant [way] in planning and leading our annual outdoor ecumenical service and serving in a number of other community organizations during his time in our communities. It has been encouraging for people to meet a young person who is so passionate about ministry, faith and the church. [His] interest in pursuing a career in ministry has heightened our congregations' awareness of the path to ordered ministry.

Our Explorer was able to bring seniors together outside of worship and provide a real social gathering. She carried it through extremely well, giving an example of something that could continue.

One of the biggest benefits was having someone to plan and coordinate our week-long VBS in July rather than hiring someone to run VBS as we have in the past. She was also able to lessen our minister's workload, was someone the minister could bounce ideas off us when planning worship, and provided additional support in the church office. There was also a benefit to having the Explorer around as an example of a younger person actively involved in the church bringing new ideas and a fresh perspective. She provided strong leadership as a young adult, bringing in energy and enthusiasm for new ideas.

*She brought life and energy to our church. She brought new ideas to us and presented them well. Having her in our church created an opportunity to learn about the ideas and experiences of a young person....A fresh new voice within our Sunday School / youth program (x2) Helped support minister while associate on sabbatical. Different beneficial point of view from a younger leader. The children enjoyed summer Sunday School, not normally offered.*

- The project has brought participating members of our congregation closer together, building stronger connections between members of the site committee.
- His presence, as a young person interested in the church and in the ministry, brings a youthful energy to the church, and a reminder that we participate in the broader United Church family. With the aging demographics of our congregation it is, at times, difficult to look ahead and envision a future for the church. The Explorer's presence, and our involvement in the program, has been a reminder to take this long view.

Positive energy with a young adult participating in worship leadership. [The Explorer] brought energy, willingness to step in where needed: office, church service, with youth group, stepping in for worship planning.

Our Explorer brought a fresh perspective to our congregation and introduced some contemporary worship practices that pushed the congregation in new (and helpful) directions.

***Would you recommend this experience to others?***

Yes! This is a very enriching experience for Explorer and pastoral charge. It is very valuable to place the Explorer outside of their home province.

Yes, if appropriately placed. It could be an enriching experience for both parties.

Yes! We would highly recommend this project. We have received many benefits from having an Explorer here. It has helped us to look at new possibilities for our congregation and we have enjoyed having a younger person's perspective. The Explorer Project is also helpful to smaller congregations who may not ever be able to afford to have a summer student or hire a young person to help out during the summer.

*Yes, new ideas, new young energy....It creates opportunity and brightens the months.*

- a. Yes. The opportunity to have a young adult who is eager and enthusiastic, as part of our community of faith, has some transformative aspects to it. No matter how we were before, we will not be the same afterwards.
- b. It's a good reminder of what we are missing when young adults are not amongst us.

Yes. Not only does it contribute to the process by which the United Church of Canada recruits potential new leaders, but also enables the congregation to see itself as part of the future of the church. Whether or not [our Explorer] ends up going down the path of Ministry, the fact that he has shared with us his exploration connects us to the broader ministry of the United Church, while offering us the privilege to be a small part of his journey.

Yes, if support is in place. Congregations should be “positive” in attitude and see where God is calling them and should have experienced ordered personnel to mentor the Explorer. [Our Explorer] was a joy to have and the experience was a blessing for the congregation.

Yes, absolutely. It, of course, takes staff and volunteer energy, but it seems to be an excellent way to bring new perspectives to a congregation while also walking with someone as they discern their own relationship to ministry. It is a privilege. We are thankful for this opportunity to be a small part of our Explorer's journey.

### **Additional comments**

Just a word of thanks to the Toronto Conference for enabling this opportunity for youth and young adults. It is a wonderful chance for these young people to have a firsthand exposure to ministry with little pressure!

Crossroads United Pastoral Charge wants to acknowledge and thank Toronto Conference for their generosity and vision. Their generous financial support meant that money just wasn't an issue for the students or the pastoral charges involved – this frees us up to do and be ministry!! We want to acknowledge the important role of the Conference Coordinator who was available to help orient all of us to the project and helped us navigate forms and process

Being around a young adult who sees the potential for ministry and for the United Church was a tonic.

Local host members also encouraged future contact with his home committee regarding 'challenge projects' if he wishes to pursue ministry interests and to enable future information sharing regarding his future plans.

It made us even more committed to foster youth and youth adult leadership and to support their participation in wider church events.