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To: **Toronto Conference Executive**

From: **Sharon Aylsworth, member from Toronto Southeast Presbytery**

Cc: Toronto Southeast Presbytery Executive and TS Transition Team Members

SHARING OUR RESOURCES – ANOTHER VIEW

For some time, I have been feeling a disconnect between the focus of Toronto Conference executive and the focus of my roles as chair of my local congregation, as GC42 commissioner and as member of the executive of Toronto Southeast Presbytery. This disconnect came to a head with the recent proposal from Living Waters and the discussions at the April conference executive meeting where it seemed that there was a strong push to give all of the financial resources of Toronto Conference away.

I am thankful for these events as they have encouraged me to reflect on why I am so uncomfortable with that direction and what I would suggest as an alternative.

I am not in favour of giving it all away. I am in support of sharing in recognition of the abundance and privilege with which we live. I want to pursue something between keeping it all for ourselves and giving it all away, something that will enable us to do the work we need to do to support and grow the church in our region while sharing our resources wisely.

As a person who chooses to live in the east end of Toronto, I take note that the executive chose not to meet in our presbytery this entire year and wonder how well we are understood. Toronto South east is undergoing significant change. The number and presence of the United Churches has been decreasing quickly here as in other parts of the country, but at the same time, the population here is growing and diversifying. Where there were small older church congregations, the surrounding areas are now growing in population, young people and their families are moving close to the city centers, major arteries and transit. There is a perceived potential for growth. The presbytery has already experimented with seeding several different ministries/missions but we have much to learn. Certainly some of our congregations are still moving toward closure but quite a few others are attempting to change their connections with their communities and envisioning new missions and ministry. These efforts require support.

While I've only been talking about Toronto Southeast so far, I believe that our first responsibility as a conference/region is to develop and support ministry and mission in this region. Our borders contain some of the most densely populated and diverse areas of the country, where the potential for growth and for volunteers is large. It would like to see us and

the future region 10 have a primary focus on making this region a successful healthy part of the church. It will take money and leadership to do this well. I suppose I'm suggesting a middle ground which allows us to ask strategic questions and have money to support programs that are identified. When an opportunity arises or is created, we would share money, experience and anything else of use beyond our borders. This approach is not as easy as either of the extremes but has the chance of making a greater contribution. What is helpful in one region would most likely be helpful in other contexts and can be shared rather than replicated over and over.

I offer this paper and the variety of ideas it contains in hopes that we can begin a conversation beyond the conversations I've been part of thus far at Conference executive.

The rest of this letter starts with a short reflection on generosity and sharing, reviews some of the ways we already share and then gives some examples of things we might do in this middle ground approach. This last piece attempts to suggest what our work could look like if we have a major focus on Toronto Conference and a minor focus on sharing and the wider church.

Please accept that this is offered as a starting point rather than a fully developed discussion.

GENEROSITY AND SHARING

I have been struggling to understand the motivation behind the 'give it all away' position. Is it a desire to level the playing field acknowledging that our Conference's resources are at the moment more plentiful than most. Are we trying to set a precedent that we hope other parts of the church will follow even if by 'giving all away' we will make it less likely that our own Region will be able to continue sharing going forward? It is important to remember that we have wealth at this point in time because we have been selling expensive real estate. This is time limited and will have an end point.

At a time when financial shortfalls speeded decisions to downsize and restructure the whole church, I believe we need to be especially diligent with the money we do have. Most businesses that want to continue and grow, for instance reinvest rather than just extract and distribute profits.

Individual surviving congregations at least in Toronto Southeast are working towards new visions and community connections, a clear form of reinvesting for the future. If we give it all away, the conference/region would not then have funding to assist them.

We are aware of 12 or 13 grant requests received or on the way for 2018 funding and beyond. My own congregation has spent two years determining direction. We had PTCC help hiring EDGE assistance for community roundtable and now have a direction and are ready to seek assistance to support our next steps. One might question so many applications but I believe they represent congregations who after some training, and after watching neighbours close,

have gotten the message. They realize that they need to find better ways to connect with their communities if they are to set new mission directions and, in fact, survive.

I hope we want to encourage and support these initiatives rather than turn them away. If we were to give all the conference money away, the assistance the church provides for these new and reenergized ministries would come, if it comes at all, from Embracing the Spirit, the Foundation and other grants available to the whole church. Rather than funding them ourselves, we would be competing with other churches across the country for those funds.

When trying to find an image for this, I remember the emergency instructions on airplanes. In crisis, the air masks will drop from the ceiling, passengers are encouraged to put their own on first before trying to help anyone else.

HOW ARE WE SHARING NOW?

We already have a variety of ways of sharing. We may specifically think of things recently decided by Toronto Conference executive – the refugee sponsorship program, the return of M&S monies intended for the conference so that other areas of the country could be better supported, funding for the PROK relationship, sabbatical grants, explorer project, Supervised Education Grants and Right Relations projects. But, this is not all of the sharing that is going on.

The creation of PTCC itself, shared resources across the conference. These resources were for the most part a result of escalating property values in Toronto and the closing of many congregations.

PTCC money is used to share our wealth, through the funding of missions and ministry within each Presbytery. The Toronto Southeast mission funding includes AURA, Lake Scugog Camp, Toronto Urban Native Ministries, Chaplaincies at U of T and hospitals, the Fred Victor Mission, Massey Centre, Bloor St Refugee outreach program and more. The Toronto Southeast grants have supported expanded and new ministries in many congregations and mission plants in several places. Through these mission gifts and the grants from PTCC we have been reinvesting monies into the ministry and mission in our community. This approach of putting money back into Toronto (conference) honors the congregations who put such love, faith and sweat into those now departed churches who, as they closed often expressed hope for ministry to survive and grow in their communities.

Because we have had PTCC, our congregations are often actively discouraged from competing for Foundation money, making more of that money available across the country. This is a kind of sharing for which some may not recognize, but is a practice that can be continued. Not dipping into the common pot is just a different way of sharing.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE TO INVEST IN OUR REGION and in some cases beyond?

When I heard that some in Toronto Conference desire to 'give all of our money away', I thought that it might mean that all of this money would be sent outside of the conference/region. Not sure if this is what was intended, but it has led me to reflect on why we, who have abundance, should continue to invest in our region as well as share some of the wealth – money and experience. Back again I come to the image from the airplane – we need to look after ourselves first, before assisting others. It isn't as if we don't want to care for others, but we need to survive in order to do that. How we survive is the question. We are continuing to close churches at a rapid rate. These are often in areas that, because of changing population may be sites for mission plants, for new avenues to share the good news.

In the past, many of the questions I'm about to ask would arguably have belonged with the presbyteries or even general council, but going forward, can/should be regional. Taking a conference and regional view, allows us to look at this densely populated and fast changing area as a whole.

If we were to agree that our primary purpose is to develop and support ministry and mission within the conference/region – and perhaps we might recognize that the whole church is counting on each region to do this work for their own area. Knowing that the church is depending on us to look after our region, suggests we can ask different question of our work.

Let's continue to support local initiatives, but also look at broader areas of focus such as the following...

1 Ethnic and Intercultural Ministry. Other conferences and denominations have taken steps to identify opportunities for expansion. In particular, I'm told that the Anglicans and BC conference have done significant work in this area. As an example, the Anglicans have identified that the United Church of Christ folk from the Philippines are closer in belief to our United Church than the Anglican Church. I believe that Tor Southwest has begun working with a Pilipino community, but a response could be to fund the identification of potential locations across the region for ministry seeding and provide support for development of this ministry through the PTCC granting process. And this is just one example of growth potential.

Along this same line, we may look wider at potential connection or development of other ethnic ministries which seem to be unique in that they may not be local community based but draw people from a distance to worship.

Toronto is incredibly diverse and populous – Approximately 1/6 of the Canadian population lives in the GTA -and more than 50% identify themselves as being of a visible minority! Greater Toronto provides an excellent opportunity to develop intercultural ministries and develop an understanding that may be of use across the church. We may want to consider developing a

network of several regions that compose the GTA – similar to our feedback to the boundary commission, these groups would have much in common.

2. New Ministry Development. Tor Southeast and others have gained some experience with ministry plants. Many of these seem to be reliant on a particular minister and their gifts and focus. Some questions might be...Is there a way to ensure continuing ministry should that person move on? Will those plants ever become self sustaining and able to provide support and participation in the broader church? Is that our hope for them? We could initiate a program to learn from the experiences in our Region and from other regions experimenting with similar approaches that would allow us to learn from each other and get 'smarter' about our selection and management of plants. TUCC and TSE presbytery are looking at developing a training program that includes having stewardship as a major component of seeded ministries.

3. Legislation. The government of Ontario has stated that the province and certainly public buildings will be accessible by 2025. This has significant implications for our church. Surely we want to be leaders in this and not delinquent. Within Toronto Conference, we have some initial information about the status of accessibility in the conference, but no plans that I'm aware of to address this as a program requiring funding and leadership. We could work with GC to determine what needs to be done... This is a problem facing all Ontario regions and eventually of interest to all regions in the church as disability/accessibility legislation is being prepared in Ottawa. Our first contribution may be to define a project and fund staff to assess the size of the problem in our region and propose a plan of attack. This could be a great opportunity to work with other regions in Ontario to make something specific and important happen. We may find they are ahead of us on this.

4. Indigenous ministries - the city of Toronto is the home of one of the largest populations of indigenous people in Canada. We have very limited ministry with this population. Individual congregations and people have connections, and there is a partnership with the Anglicans, called the Toronto Urban Native Ministries but I'm not aware that we have looked at this to see if we are doing all we can. Demographics suggest that as many as 70,000 indigenous people, including professionals, business people, families, youth, artists.... live in Toronto, with a concentration in the east end of the city near the Don River and Taylor Creek.

5. Pastoral Relations – There is some work going on with regard to ministry personnel through the Office of Vocation etc. in the new church structure. It is probably not enough yet, but there is work underway. On the other hand, I've heard almost nothing for congregational and lay support. Pastoral relations are complex and multidirectional relationships and we have little to help the congregational side. Many people come to church work bringing their business experience. It isn't obvious, but it is true that our church works differently than most businesses. Learning this lesson can be painful and can take energy away from ministry and mission. We need all sides of pastoral relations to function in a healthy manner. We are

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directly involved in some of these situations through the sub-executive. Are there ways that help this situation?

6. Portfolio Staffing As some of these examples suggest, perhaps this region could share by funding identified needs that are important here, but can be shared and connected more widely. That could for instance be staffing for specific portfolios such as work with youth and millennials, training in support of stewardship within new ministries, building understanding of the challenges and opportunities of all regions who have both rural and large urban centers... etc.... Such staff might have work that crosses a number of regions. There will be options, but the population density here allows for more opportunities to experiment and from which to draw volunteers.

I hope we can resist the temptation to pursue giving all our money away and look instead at the work of the conference/region whose first priority is the development and support of ministry and mission within the region with a secondary priority of sharing and working with other Regions for the betterment of the church and God's work in this time and place.

Blessings,

Sharon

With input from some people from Toronto Southeast Presbytery

