



History of The Explorer Project

Background

In September 2014, sparked by conversations about recruitment for future ministry leadership, Toronto Conference Executive approved a new initiative to encourage young adults to consider a ministry vocation. The Project was designed to involve people who have demonstrated leadership in our Church but who have not yet discerned a call to ministry or begun the candidacy process or theological education. The Project does not replace or substitute any part of the candidacy process.

The Project

Toronto Conference partners with other Conferences to identify active young adult church members who would value this opportunity. Each selected Explorer is given an honorarium and their round trip expenses to their site are covered. Each Explorer is placed in a site away from his or her home Conference. The normal pattern is for a three-month experience, from May through July. Each participating Conference is also asked to identify host sites which would offer an exciting experience of contemporary church identity, mission and ministry. The Host Sites create a Host Committee and appoint a Mentor. The first iteration saw three Explorers experience the project and the evaluations from all parties was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the results.

After the results of the first iteration, Toronto Conference Executive proposed a second iteration. Based on the experience of the first year, we completed the recruitment phase earlier and by January we were able to match seven Explorers to their sites. All Explorers completed three month assignments. We held a third iteration during the summer of 2017 and another seven Explorers had a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our church and enter vocational discernment.

Anticipated Explorer Project Outcomes

In creating the Project, the following outcomes were identified:

- Up to 8 already involved younger adult United Church members will be encouraged to consider ministry as a vocation. They will be affirmed as people who are valued and appreciated by their Church and as individuals who have gifts for this vocation
- Ministry sites will have the benefit of meeting these people, benefitting from their shared experience, and being affirmed as healthy communities who can help develop and mentor future leadership. They may be assisted in their own ministries to develop something new and they will experience the service of this healthy spirited young person.
- Committee members will experience the privilege of relationship with vibrant younger members of our Church and be encouraged by their commitment to discipleship.
- Whether the experience leads to a sense of vocation to the orders of ministry or not, we trust it will deepen the sense of joy in discipleship for all who are involved.
- All involved will have an expanded sense of The United Church of Canada, gaining insight into the diversity and distinctiveness of ministry in other parts of the body.

Leadership by Conference Appointed Lead Staff

This project was designed to have low central administration and its success depends on the careful work done by Lead Staff appointed by the participating Conferences. These Explorer Staff may or may not be employees of the Conference. The Lead Staff were the prime contact throughout the summers for the host site and Explorer within their Conferences. Processes for selecting Explorer candidates and Host sites are designed to suit the Conferences' different contexts.

From past participants, we have heard:

From Explorers

Has the Project helped you reflect upon ministry as a vocation?

"I knew the traditional ministry path was never for me, but it was very interesting to see how I could be a minister in another context....I am still not sure whether I am ready to pursue this path of ministry, however without this opportunity I don't know whether I would have considered it so seriously, or really know what such a position would be like."

"The project allowed me to see what ministry is like on a day-to-day basis....I am beginning my discernment process and while that was something that has been on my radar for quite some time, I feel as though the Explorers' Project was the catalyst for me beginning it at this point in time. I feel if I had not participated in the program, I might have continued to put off discernment, or potentially never have completed it at all."

"Illuminated the ministry of *everyone* – how congregants engage in ministry....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.

"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."

From Mentors

Would you recommend this experience to others?

"Absolutely! It was a great experience for our ministry and we hope that it was equally as great for the Explorer."

"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."

“Absolutely, yes! It gave the pastoral charge an opportunity to participate in the discernment (and training) of future ministry personnel and the people took that role seriously.”

“Yes—gives the congregations a connection with the wider church, and hope for the future of the church. Great opportunity to encourage young adults to pursue the vocation of ministry.”

“Absolutely! It was encouraging to the congregation, to witness and walk alongside a young adult thinking about ministry. It was inspiring to hear him talk about his faith and his sense of call to ministry.....Pick us again!”

“I think that the Project was an energizer for our congregation. It allowed them to see themselves through new eyes....”

From Host Sites

Would you recommend this experience to others?

“DEFINITELY! I think the the Explorer program is an opportunity for youth within the church to expand their awareness of our communities of faith across Canada but also of different ways that faith is being lived as the hands and feet of Christ doing sacred work. We would happily host another Explorer in the future.”

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.”

“Yes—brings new life and energy into a congregation, connects us with the larger church. Gave the host churches a sense of purpose that they were contributing to the Explorer’s learning experience.”

“YES. It allows younger questioning adults to see that they have a place in the church where they can belong....It opens their eyes to new ways of faith sharing and a reaffirmation that the United Church of Canada is willing to go the extra mile to see that we embrace and appreciate who they are and what they stand for.”

2019 The Explorer Project Continues

This year the partner Conferences will be Toronto Conference, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Alberta and Northwest Conference, British Columbia Conference and Saskatchewan Conference. These Conferences will recruit Explorers and provide sites to host an equal number of Explorers from other Conferences.

For More Information

Contact Dale Hildebrand, Toronto Conference Personnel Minister
E-mail dhildebrand@united-church.ca | Phone 416-241-2677 ext. 6261
Website: torontoconference.ca/explorer-project