

New Vision United Church

Draft Living Faith Story

Preamble

Our financial reality has brought us to a bridging time. As a result, our Living Faith Story has been updated to reflect this. We acknowledge that our sources of funding (Holton Ave. redevelopment and MacNab St. leasing) have been slow to bear fruit. The funds for paid ministry leadership are limited in 2024. At this time, we anticipate increased income from Music Hall leasing in 2025 which will call for a review of our capacity for engaging paid leadership.

Mission

New Vision United Church is an inclusive, diverse community of Christian faith that encourages the gifts and graces of all people. We are committed to pursuing our ministry through loving God and actively sharing with our neighbours.

Aspirational Values

- We understand our values to be many: Affirming, Intercultural and accessible, community and social-justice focussed, innovative in worship-style and stewardship, accountable to each other, welcoming, relevant faith, respect, lived values, integrity, pragmatism: the Gospel is our shared lens.
- We aspire to live these out by being:
 - a multi-generational congregation feeding the spiritual needs of the people;
 - committed to offering a social justice and equity-focussed ministry seven days a week;
 - a community of faith that follows Jesus with theological understandings that are both deep and wide. We value theological approaches that are rooted in Christ's call for the healing of all of creation: a faith that is equity-seeking, hope-fulfilling, and empowered by love. It is this value which guides us into being intentional space for liberation, feminist, crip, mad, and queer theologies; and which invites us to learn of others;

- a supportive ministry to newcomers and those seeking asylum, especially as related to those persecuted for their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression;
- a community seeking to celebrate and engage in intercultural ministry. We value the diverse life experience, values and expressions of spirituality of our local and extended community through the growth of intercultural ministry;
- a church responsible in stewardship, unlocking the value of our buildings to benefit the community and help to finance our ministry and mission;
- a community that invites belonging first, without pre-conditions.

How New Vision lives out its unique Mission

We are a United Church community of faith, based in the heart of downtown Hamilton, which is discovering how to be a church in a rapidly-changing urban-core setting. Our faith and worship practice strives to be experiential, participatory, and image-rich (EPIC worship). We seek to incorporate many voices in every service; we make use of technology to enrich the worship experience; and we try to provide opportunities for Threshold Partners to move around and to engage with each other and to live the worship experience. We intend for the worship experience to facilitate interaction with each other, and with God. Our practice of community celebrates the Belovedness of all people.

Everyone who affirms (annually) they seek to follow Jesus by choosing to live a life of compassion, live and act in hope for God's world, grow in faith within New Vision United Church, and everyone who also makes these commitments

- regular worship attendance
- generosity in giving
- practising a spiritual life in daily living

is a Threshold Partner of New Vision United Church. They have the right to vote on all matters, and to take on practically every leadership role. Threshold Partners are welcomed to make a Profession of Faith as they continue to grow in the relationship with the community of faith.

As we pursue discerning what God is up to in downtown Hamilton, we seek to ensure that our Affirming values permeate our governance and decision-making process. We are learning to become anti-oppressive and anti-racist, acknowledging the need to move from a colonial institution to one that strives to be inter-culturally informed and enlivened. In the processes by which we make decisions, we intend that a broader spectrum of

people – those who have frequently been overlooked or left out – will have opportunities to participate.

Currently, this mission finds expression in two ways:

Deepening New Vision's Commitment to being an Affirming and Intercultural Ministry

Outreach Ministry

Prior to the pandemic, we had an active weekly Outreach ministry, providing meals, morning coffee break, worship and social support. Now, we are trying to figure out what Outreach looks like in a post-pandemic world with our community of faith.

We have committed to partnering with four other Hamilton United Church Affirming congregations with our presence at Pride Day celebrations. Collaborations with these groups in providing linked Affirming ministry activities is a potential avenue for expanding our Outreach Ministry.

Refugee Sponsorship

- After almost six years of planning and waiting, the Al-Zahras, our Syrian refugee family arrived in May 2022!
- The sponsorship was officially completed and celebrated in May 2023, and some New Vision volunteers continue to provide social support and orientation to the city. With the generous help of the Rockville United Church of Christ in Rockville, MD, we were able to raise the funds necessary to support the family through their first year in Canada. The sponsorship project was also an exercise in faith and reliance on God for us. We have in the process developed meaningful relationships with our newcomer family.
- In 2019, we committed to supporting an LGBTQ refugee from Kenya to integrate into the community. This young man is now living independently and pursuing studies at Mohawk College.
- Through his best friend, a refugee in Kenya, we have established ties with Nature Network, a group of (mainly Ugandan) refugees supporting other refugees in Kenya, providing housing, job-related skills training, and housing for their siblings.
- In 2023, we are providing emotional support and practical assistance to asylum seekers living in the region who find us.

Intercultural Relationship Currency Design Project

This group planned and presented two Asian Heritage Month celebrations, and increased our understanding of Indigenous issues, including a regular

land acknowledgement before services and recognizing Orange Shirt Day. Our intercultural ministry is based on models of biculturalism and integration, not assimilation. This work came to a standstill, but we believe this is important to who we are. We have set the intention for this work, and started on it, but have much work yet to do.

We plan to develop special worship services that intentionally incorporate different voices and perspectives in their creation. We will be mindful of the language that we are using.

We will also continue to adapt our worship services to a hybrid model of gathering. Through a minister who is participating in our community of faith, we also now have a connection to the World Council of Churches, with the potential to become more involved with this important group.

We desire to have Anti-oppressive and trauma informed grass roots approaches to help enable marginalized folks who have dealt with institutional racism and religious-based trauma. We will need to incorporate Affirming strategies to hear others' voices and gather information on how to meet all of our needs.

We are committed to less hierarchical decision-making processes. sharing openly with the congregation. It is our goal to have the lay leadership of New Vision reflect the diversity of the congregation. This may require working to build intentional connection between incumbents and interested Threshold Partners to increase the confidence of a wider spectrum of individuals in accepting leadership roles.

Discipleship

There are other expressions of our values that we currently live as supportive ministry - the community of faith offering pastoral care with each other, a depth of spiritual experience through *lectio divina* weekly bible study, and the growth of our Affirming Spirituality group.

Our Pastoral Care ministry was very active and intentional during Covid restrictions, creating an emergency call roster of Threshold Partners, and keeping track of calls and other contact offered or needed, especially for those without access to our Zoom services. Post Covid, our Pastoral Care Committee continue to support congregation members with ongoing card and visiting ministries. We also value the spontaneous acts of pastoral support from varied Threshold Partners.

We celebrate the work our choir and music leadership has done in removing binary-gendered language from our worship songs. The introduction of "Songs for The Holy Other" as a regular source of worship songs has offered

expansive language and introduces Affirming-inspired songs in worship. Our music also reflects and informs our intercultural values - especially with Black History, Asian Heritage, and a number of Indigenous days of prayer. Threshold Partners are also encouraged to request favourite hymns for inclusion in our services. For those who participate in the choir, the group offers a place of support and joy. Post-Covid, with increased numbers attending in person, we plan to once again distribute rhythm instruments to make a joyful noise.

We have in the past several years supported Roots to Justice and the Gore Park Saturday outreach program. As our building uses expand with the Music Hall Alliance leasing the New Vision surplus space, we will seek opportunities for mutual aid participation with other groups supporting individuals from marginalized communities.

Property as Mission

Holton Site

At the end of 2021, New Vision entered into a partnership with the United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC, now Kindred Works) to build new rental housing on the Holton Ave site. Although New Vision is no longer responsible for directing this project, it remains committed to supporting and enabling just housing for the community. Further involvement by animating the Holton Ave. space (outdoor and parking lot) in conjunction with Kindred Works may evolve as a project of interest, and has the strong support of the local City Councillor.

Main Street Site

The pandemic slowed the redevelopment of our 24 Main W property as a concert hall. However, renovations have continued, including moving the organ console, remodelling the stage, and removing the remaining carpet and linoleum on the main floor. The building also now meets Fire Code standards. Leasing surplus church space to a Social Purpose Organization (SPO) with an EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) program will become a revenue stream for the ministries of New Vision. This group will have values aligned with New Vision, but will be a separate entity, with a triple bottom line: Environmental, Social, and Financial. These are both organizing principles and areas by which value/growth will be measured and reported.

Some of New Vision's goals for the next year that might enhance your current ministry or begin something new

Affirming and Intercultural Ministry

- We continue to build on helping our Affirming values be an integral part of the life of the congregation; that is, not just the responsibility of a committee, but a living commitment that animates all of our works.
- Formalizing and expanding our newcomer supports to meet their expressed needs will continue, with support from Threshold Partners.

Property as Mission

Holton Site

- While we may continue to monitor and assess potential quadruple bottom-line impacts (spiritual, environmental, social, and economic) of this project, for us it is largely a matter of waiting for Kindred Works' to lead this initiative and develop the property.

Main Street Site

- Property Issues: negotiate long-term lease for the Music Hall;
- Mission Issues: we will continue to develop the site as a concert/event venue and a space in which New Vision United Church continues to live into its ministry.

Other initiatives, goals, hopes and dreams

- In our worship services, we plan to continue working to broaden participation in worship. Recognizing our financial resource limitations, we may have a community of faith led worship life. We have experience with this, and could draw on ordained and theologically trained members of the congregation to help support lay members in Breaking Open the Word. On-line Lay Leadership Training could also be accessed. Shared worship using Zoom technology with other congregations has been successful and could be continued.
- Continue every week to recognize our debt to Indigenous peoples, to live with discomfort, to find ways to avoid perpetrating historical injustices, and to learn to be settler-allies.
- Celebrating diversity will continue to be an integral part of our worship service. A key symbol of this continues to be the lighting of the rainbow candle.
- We need to talk about healing, as a congregation, and with our remaining staff. Working towards healing will also impact how we are together as a congregation, and how we make decisions.

- We will support the faith life of any children and teens who attend New Vision services and aim to ensure their well-being by creating space for their individual needs, questions, and aspirations.
- Finding a way to continue as a congregation in 2024, being convinced that God has a future for us.