



Taking Action to Strengthen Our Interdependent Web

What makes a church community a thriving and dynamic place? Why would anyone want to belong to a church community? How do we strengthen our interdependent connections to make Westwood the energizing and sustaining community we all wish for?

Several Board and Westwood people attended the Western Regional Gathering in Calgary in mid- October to hear the talk by Rev. Dr. John Pentland. He has rejuvenated a failing Calgary United church into a thriving and growing congregation. His ideas have been so sought after that he was persuaded to put them into a book, "Fishing Tips". We were so inspired by hearing him that the Board have all read the book and started working through it to pull out ideas that we can use at Westwood. We have had two sessions and plan to have another in the new year. We are excited about possibilities.

Declining church membership is not unique to Westwood - it is a much larger issue and simply setting a goal, as we did a few years ago, of "120 members by 2020" did not provide us with the means to attract or keep new people. It is obvious that we need to be thinking and doing differently or as Rev. Pentland would suggest - we need to try casting our nets on the other side of the boat.

We are in the middle of figuring out what would fit with our specific niche in Edmonton. We will be proposing middle and longer-term actions. Some of these will be multi-year projects which will need the support of the congregation. But we can take action right away on some things. You may have noticed two changes, both of which relate to our human desire for connections with each other, to feel the web of support and belonging. We are taking two minutes of our sermon time to invite people to have a short discussion with a neighbour. This simple interaction opens the door to longer conversations and deeper relationships. We are also setting out a couple of tables and some chairs so people are encouraged to continue that connection after the service.

And for another immediate action: the Board is taking the money allocated for the Youth program, which currently has no youths, to hire Sulya Fenichel to expand the "outward" focus of our children and youth programs. She will be working to raise awareness of Westwood within broader communities, looking for ways for Westwood to contribute meaningfully to those communities. She will be doing special event planning with an emphasis on events that involve external communities, relationships and partnerships. The money for the current year is already in our budget but for next year, when some of our older children move into the youth category and we need to provide regular Sunday morning programming, we will need to add a

\$3000 budget line. We can only grow if we plan for what we WANT not just expect to maintain what we already HAVE.

We have seen how quickly we were able to raise over \$5000 for new chairs. Let's thrill ourselves once again by showing how we can all pitch in to support Westwood with our regular sustaining pledges as well as by contributing extra to see this project take off. We WANT to have more children, youths and community connections - so let's contribute our personal resources to develop and strengthen our connections. Please consider this when you make your pledge to Westwood.

With sincere appreciation of the great privilege it is to be your president and to be working towards a strong interdependent web,

Lorian Kennedy
President, Westwood Board of Trustees
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