

Maritime Conference report for 2013

I'd like to talk with you about my perception of the working and shifting of the Spirit through the life and work of Conference this year. The time was scheduled as per an agenda, and as happened last year, big items likely to be contentious and needing more time to debate were left to the latter part of the agenda. I wonder about the wisdom of planning this way, people are tired and less patient, and may not feel engaged. The items were the process for church renewal, which we at Forest Hill have been part of, and the **budget**, which included the elephant in the room, money talk about the new building. I felt a palpable tension around me. From conversations I had before and during Conference, it was clear that there were some people who harboured resentment and felt lack of ownership around the whole decision making process regarding the new building. The fact is that the building process was driven by necessity, the old offices were in sad repair and the archives were in desperate need of moving to a better storage space. So plans were drawn up, the building was built. Last year at Conference there was extended and tense discussion about how to raise funds. Fundraising hasn't gone as well as hoped. When budget discussions began this year, the number of negative remarks and questions coming from the floor definitely raised the temperature in the room. At this point, the executive secretary apologized to the court for hurt and mistrust that has emerged from decisions made on behalf of the wider church by Conference Executive. Things settled down after that. For some people it seemed important that their feelings were acknowledged. It occurred to me that what we were going through as pastoral charge and presbytery delegates was much like the process I have been part of with many pastoral charges doing Joint Needs Assessments and Joint Searches. Sometimes there has been a noticeable attitude of uncertainty and distrust from the folks I've gone to be with, the result of past difficulties experienced with other people representing presbytery. Trust needs to be built and relationship formed before process can continue. At Conference this year, I sensed a lack of trust, and underlying worry. It became clear where this was coming from. With the call for money to help pay down the mortgage for the building which will likely include raising allocations, the spectre was raised of approaching and/or encroaching financial difficulties which are part of the reality being faced by many people sitting in that arena, lay and clergy alike, who feel that there is little or no extra to give, either personally or from their churches. Yet give we must. We have a beautiful, awarding winning building for staff who faithfully serve the whole Maritime Conference and a wonderful Archive space which has plenty of room for the valuable records of our churches. The message got through and there were pledges from a number of individuals at Conference. I heard remarks like, "we'll see what we can do". There was a moving of the Spirit, from uncertainty, distrust and worry, towards sparks of hope, acceptance and a buying in to the commitment to try to find ways to help. This is the United Church at work, the church that I love and feel called to be part of.