

**SSUC Special Congregational Meeting**  
**Sunday, August 20, 2023, 11:30 AM**

1. Call to Order  
Rebecca Aiken-Bailey called the Special Congregational Meeting to order at 11:35 AM.
2. ZOOM Orientation and Instructions for Asking Questions.  
Christopher New explained to those folks who were online the procedures that they needed to follow to leave questions or comments, how to raise hands and vote during the meeting.
3. Appointments for this Meeting:  
**08-20-2023-1: That the following appointments be made for this Meeting.**  
**Rebecca Aiken-Bailey (Chair of Board) as Chairperson**  
**Janet Campbell as Secretary.**  
**Dale Irving as Parliamentarian.**  
**Ruth Stewart-Verger as Guardian.**  
Moved by Rebecca Aiken-Bailey. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Maie Kellerman. Motion Carried. 32 in Favor
4. Making Use of our Guardian  
The chair and guardian explained the role of the guardian, after which we all responded:  
*In this spirit, we will speak and act with respect, patience, open-mindedness, humility, seeing and seeking the best in ourselves and each other.*
5. Extention of Voting Privileges  
**08-20-2023-2: SSUC invites all regular adherents, friends, and supporters of SSUC to vote at this meeting in all matters being considered.**  
Moved by Maie Kellerman. Seconded by Bernie Hardin. Approved with 2 opposed and 5 abs.  
  
A question was raised regarding why this was not a “SSUC Members Only” vote. See *The Manual B.3.7.2 When Adherents May Vote [...a congregation’s] decision may allow voting rights on all matters or only specified matters.*
6. Transition Team Report Recommendations:  
A. Questions and Clarifications  
Questions and Conversation took place around these areas:
  - breaking the recommendations into different parts
  - Whether any of the positions would require training in
  - What it might mean to pass this motion “in principle”.  
**Motion 08-20-2023-3: That the SSUC Congregation approve in principle the recommendations contained in the Transition Teams Report and the board be authorized to create and Implementation Team to begin the work of enacting the recommendations.**  
Moved by Sandra Lockhart. Seconded by Amy Loewen.  
  
**Motion to Amend 08-20-2023-3a: That the motion be split into two:**  
**That the SSUC Congregation approve in principle the recommendations contained in the Transition Team Report; and**  
**That the board be authorized to create an implementation team to begin the work of enacting the Transition Team recommendations.**

Moved by Esther Oaks. Seconded by Margaret Powell. 49 For. 29 Opp. 6 Ab. Carried.

**Motion 08-20-2023-4a: Amended Motion: That the SSUC Congregation approve in principle the recommendations contained in the Transition Team Report.**

Moved by Trudy Smith. Seconded by Esther Oaks. 63 For. 2 Opp. 2 Abs. Carried

**Motion 08-20-2023-4b: That the board be authorized to create an implementation team to begin the work of enacting the Transition Team recommendations.**

Moved by Jacob Kellerman. Seconded by Anne McCracken. 56 For. 6 Opp. 4 Abs. Carried.

7. Rebecca thanked all who worked on the Transition Team for their amazing work.
8. Adjournment.  
**Moved by Bill Hibbard. Carried**

## Transition Team Report: Executive Summary

The Board is excited to share the report of the Transition Team and its recommendations with the community of SSUC. This challenging work will continue to provide members of the SSUC community with the ministries and connections they need and enjoy and it will also enable us to reach out beyond our current community and provide life changing support to others.

The overwhelming message from members is, “keep doing all the great things we are doing.” Everyone is aware that Covid stopped much of the work we were doing and as we are gearing back up, folks want everything we had before and more. Sunday gatherings, both in person and online, are the main reason that people remain connected and have also been the vehicle through which new people have come to join us and we echo this gratitude shared for all who contribute to these meaningful gatherings.

The recommendations we are making for hiring additional resources will enable us to expand our ministry in ways that were identified as priorities during the information gathering, and are exciting for the future of SSUC. The members of this community shared very openly and we have worked to honour the ideas and suggestions that were made, along with needs in the broader community that we are learning more about. It is well recognized that we are an aging congregation and we need to include more diversity if we want a sustainable future. That is why we are suggesting we increase our resources to provide programming for intergenerational groups, including children, youth, and young families.

At the same time, we need to retain our commitment to being a place where people feel they belong. The implementation of small group ministries will enable us to create environments where people of like interest can come together. This priority will include in person and online members. Our commitment to the 2SLGBTQ+ community for almost 25 years has inspired enhancing our work in this area. We know how valuable the 2SLGBTQ+ community is to our wellbeing and identity, and know that there are many who can benefit from our support and increased activity in this area.

The ministry of Emberwood is one we are all growing to appreciate and value and it is our recommendation that it be integrated more fully into the life and work of SSUC.

None of the positions that are being recommended require that the candidate be trained in ministry. It is our hope that we will look for and find the best possible candidate for each of the positions. We would also encourage supporting the creativity of those we hire to develop the best ministries possible at this time.

The cost to implement these recommendations for the remainder of 2023 would be approximately \$20,000. The Transition Team is suggesting that we work to have programs up and running for September and that the programs, people, etc. be reviewed after a season and any modifications be made at that time.

**Board Transition Team Report to the SSUC Community**

June 2023

## I. The Process

The Transition Team was established in the fall of 2022 with the purpose of

*Providing recommendations to the SSUC Board regarding the congregation's desired focus, vision, medium/long-range goals, and the associated staffing needs in 2023 and beyond;*

And with the following objectives:

*To determine methods to undertake consultations with the congregation, related agencies and groups, and/or broader community in order to achieve the team's purpose;*

*To affirm and leverage SSUC's strengths, history and identity to achieve its purpose;*

*To explore different staffing models and determine the best avenues to allow the congregation to meet its needs and achieve its focus/goals/visions;*

*To facilitate congregational ownership of the final recommendation(s).*

**SSUC Transition Team Terms of Reference, approved SSUC Board October 20, 2022**

The Team met regularly to establish the questions that needed to be asked and plan ways all members of the congregation could participate. Team members included Anne McCracken and Terry McDougall, who concluded their work with the team partway through the process. Active members are Kim Boyes, Alison Brooks-Starks, Dawn Guenther (Saskatoon), Joyce Madsen, Andrea Rubik, Dara Smith, Curtis Tufts, Joanne Van Beek, Janis Zalitach, and Chris New. Our thanks to Katharine Weinmann of Panache Consulting for her guidance throughout the process.

The team gathered information from both the in person and online communities through questions and events. The email address of the Transition Team became the repository for online comments and ideas. Two events were held to gather insights and comments about the needs of the community.

Throughout the process of listening and discerning the Team reflected on the four identity statements of SSUC to ensure that the work was aligned with being:

*Spiritual Seekers United in Community:  
Celebrating Diversity  
Engaging Life with Spiritual Depth  
Inspiring Compassion and Connection  
Making a Meaningful Difference*

The Transition Team also undertook interviews/discussions with retired minister Nancy Steeves, and current minister Chris New, representatives of other agencies, including neighbourhood schools, outreach partners, and community leagues.

The Team has considered all of this input in our discernment and recommendations.

## **I. Emphases and Needs We Heard**

The Team identified how the priorities interconnected and identified 3 major areas that represented the messages from the congregation:

1. Social Justice Outreach and Action (includes 2SLGBTQ+, Reconciliation)
2. Expansive Community Connection (includes Social Connections, Expansive Spirituality, [Emberwood] and Congregational Care)
3. Young Families/Youth/Children

### **1. Social Justice Outreach and Action**

This area includes ministries we do to partner with and enhance our local community, establish partnerships with agencies and groups doing work that aligns with SSUC's values and identity, and create safe and nurturing spaces for community around issues important to us.

The places we are currently active and involved in are many:

- Indigenous education, awareness and connection, facilitated by a rejuvenated and active *Moving Forward to Reconciliation* group,
- SSUC's crucial place as a 2SLGBTQ+ spiritual community, the Affirming Team, Emberwood, Camp Dragonfly,
- Our partnership with the Edmonton Food Bank, Operation Friendship, Bissell Centre, Integrated Community Ministries (Saskatoon) and the other agencies and programs in Edmonton and Saskatoon that we support with our time and through our Outreach Budget.
- Our commitment to the Earth Charter,
- Refugee support,
- Ongoing commitment to Affordable Housing, including the pending land gift and housing project for the eastern edge of SSUC's property.

The team has heard the desire to build upon these strengths. The potential falls into two categories:

- A. **2SLGBTQ+ Action.** There are countless stories of folks that are finding SSUC to be a truly affirming and welcoming place, something not found even in other affirming United Churches. SSUC is poised to claim/reclaim its role as the preeminent place for affirming spiritual community in Edmonton. There are also very real needs in the broader community. With the discontinuing of a Regional (Edmonton) Affirming Coordinator, there are gaps in programming

needed within Edmonton. A few of these have been named: youth GSA/community support for those without adequate support in their schools; advocacy needs in support of trans issues/drag show demonstrations, etc.; adopt-a-parent/grandparent for the queer community/multi-generational gay space, Dragonfly parent support throughout the year, etc. Sunday gathering visibility, increased possibilities for SSUC education and learning, building of community advocacy, 2SLGBTQ+ coordination between Emberwood, Camp Dragonfly, and city agencies and groups.

**B. Hands-on Social Justice Outreach.** Continuing our long legacy of justice/outreach involvement, our commitments of late have been largely financial, committing large amounts of our budget to other agencies and groups doing good work that aligns with SSUC's values. Our activity in these areas is limited to weekly food bank depot volunteers, and one-off or annual projects that help us connect and involve our time in work that makes a difference (backpacks for families, ICPM lunch preparation, Goods for Outreach, Drop your Gonch, etc.) For those looking for meaningful ways for their households to participate in activities that contribute to the betterment of their communities (especially newcomers and younger SSUC participants), it's important *to reclaim the **more active/advocacy/education/justice component** of this work by strengthening our relationships and partnerships with community agencies and individuals in the areas of indigenous learning/listening, area schools, and our financial-partner agencies to develop projects/opportunities for SSUC folk to make a difference.* Some of the work named here includes work to address mental health issues, increased relationship with indigenous people and issues, stresses faced by families within local schools.

## **2. Expansive Spiritual Community Connection**

One of the most important aspects for almost every respondent is our weekly spiritual gatherings. For those who join online and in person, this is considered the root of who we are and how we continue to meet and grow individually and as a community. The Board acknowledges that those who join us online are integral to the congregation. We need to ensure that every decision we make considers how we can make the experience as effective for those participating online as for those who are in the room. Our expansive spiritual path, expressed in our gatherings and in educational opportunities, is critical to helping us engage life with spiritual depth.

Emberwood's nature ministry is a reflection of our expansive understanding of spirituality. Beyond the walls of our gatherings is a huge community of people whose primary connection to their spirituality is nature. It's also a beautiful representation of SSUC values due to it being an important work for the 2SLGBTQ+ and BIPOC community, and those under 40. Being an important addition to the ministry of SSUC, we hear the need to strengthen how we work together to integrate the experiences that Emberwood provides for those within the SSUC community and even more importantly,

for those outside of it who engage in spirituality outside the experience of 'church' or 'Sunday community'.

Congregational Care is how we express care and underscore our connection with each other. This takes place in many ways – with the opportunities we have to get to know each other, learn with each other, and support each other - especially in times of need. Activities we plan to eat, play and reflect together work to create an environment where everyone can belong. Our aging membership may require special care around dealing with illness and grief. Congregational Care happens mutually within the community and with the specific work of the minister, Congregational Care Committee, social event planners, small group leaders, and others.

### **3. Young Families/Youth/Children**

SSUC has a long history of providing programs for children and youth over many years. Currently, the Sunday youth program leader position remains vacant, awaiting action taken as a result of our Transition process. This leadership is necessary but the need is wider in scope. There is an expressed need to provide space, support and vision to all kinds of folks in the early and young adult stages of life. Leadership is necessary and wide in scope, providing coordination across several areas of need, including:

- a full slate of programming on a Sunday so that the whole family can have opportunities for connection,
- needs for youth within and outside the SSUC community, particularly queer youth at high risk and in need of support
- young adults (18-30?) in need of more focused/monthly meaningful connection,
- family activities
- parent support
- oversight and curriculum support of our children's/youth programming that ensures consistent expansive and depth of learning/spiritual connection

## **II. What we Have and Who We Are - SSUC Assets**

As we have discussed the needs of the community, it's also important that we affirm SSUC's many assets. This isn't an exhaustive list, but to name those that have been emphasized throughout this process:

- Sunday Morning gatherings (both in person and online), particularly the relevant and accessible expansive messages and music, are the primary reason people are attracted to and remain passionate about participating at SSUC;
- The feeling of belonging and radical inclusivity is a primary value to the life and work of SSUC, including its history as the longest active affirming United Church in Alberta;

- SSUC's long history of others-first thinking: from the inspiration and start up of Southern Homes and Operation Friendship, to the passion for giving to the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church, and its ongoing commitments to the work of affordable housing, the inner city, and many others.
- SSUC has many talented and committed folks who contribute in many diverse ways to the life of the community. From musicians, to gathering companions; from committee members to those committed to hospitality, all supplemented with those who are so willing to pitch in when a need arises. This rich culture of utilizing each other's gifts and skills is something the Team wants to encourage and continue;
- SSUC has a full-time ministry staff member in Christopher New. In his leadership, SSUC has Chris' stated priorities of spiritual gathering leadership, education, spiritual care and coaching, continued song writing, and coordinating the connection of vision/mission/expansiveness among all our ministries and efforts, among others;
- There are committees and groups of people already doing some of the work we've identified as needs and ongoing priorities. This includes the Moving Forward to Reconciliation group who have renewed focus in helping the congregation grow in awareness and participate in activities that move us along our reconciliation journey. This includes the small but committed group of people in or around the Affirming Team. They wish they could do more but are limited in time to do all that they have dreamed of doing. This includes the Outreach Committee, who plan and coordinate our annual donations to partner agencies and groups, as well as ensure ongoing projects like the Food Bank depot, Bissell and Operation Friendship initiatives, etc. This includes study group leaders involved in group learning and educational opportunities. And others...
- Emberwood has a long and valuable history, beginning with our Earth Charter commitments, Rainbow Connection ministry to 2SLGBTQ+ youth, the exceptional work and evolution of leaders Alison Brooks-Starks and Zoe Chaytors are a key part of how the community has evolved and how these emphases have grown into Emberwood.
- Ensuring a long life for SSUC requires that we continue to evolve and explore new ways of being a spiritual community. The congregation's commitment to marketing and online communication and messaging is key to sharing who we are and what we do with the segments of the public that are desperate for the expansive spiritual message and community that we offer.
- Our Building provides us with a place for the community to connect with us. Many organizations use our space as a meeting place for planning and celebrating their services.



- Our connection with SSUC Saskatoon has provided a base for our online ministry and rich relationships. We continue to work and share together.

### III. Recommendations

The Board is making the following recommendations to the SSUC community:

1. While affirming the strong history of outreach work of the congregation, **Recruit additional team members to the Outreach Committee** (or whatever structure would be most suitable) with the express focus of strengthening relationships and communication with partner and potential partner agencies/groups/schools, and facilitating manageable hands-on projects that aid/raise awareness, and provide short-term areas of social justice/outreach action involvement for SSUC folks.
2. **Establish a position for a 2SLGBTQ+ Action Coordinator** (10-15 hrs per week, \$13-19,000 annually)

This person would:

- develop the work of awareness, connection, education within SSUC ally and 2SLGBTQ+ community;
  - ensure connections and coordination with Edmonton (and Saskatoon?) Affirming Ministries;
  - develop partnerships with local 2SLGBTQ+ agencies and groups;
  - develop or coordinate programming according to stated and emerging needs in cooperation with the SSUC Affirm Team;
  - oversee and develop the year-long work of Camp Dragonfly, including sourcing summer director/staff/volunteers, as needed;
  - work with the SSUC Communications Coordinator to increase marketing/media presence to appropriate communities, openness and ability to connect and communicate 2SLGBTQ+ issues and expansive spirituality.
3. Affirming the expansive theological path that SSUC is travelling, the ongoing opportunities for broad involvement in leadership within gatherings, **ensure the ongoing rich spiritual, and value-focused living of participants through SSUC's gatherings, reflections, music and educational opportunities** that develop our understandings on the expansive path that make SSUC unique within the christian/spiritual landscape in Canada.
    - Continue developing a team approach that includes minister, staff (including any new hires), volunteers, leaders and all members who are passionate about learning and exploring new perspectives in expansive spirituality, and who wish to continue to grow and expand

the path we are on.

**4. Establish a position for an Intergenerational Small Group Coordinator**

(20-30 hours per week, \$30-40,000, annually)

This person would:

- identify and enable/support programs and activities for all ages, taking into account SSUC values, expressed needs for connection, learning, support, engagement, etc. These would include learning opportunities, support groups, social groups, conversation circles, topic/issue work, age/stage-specific groups, etc.;
- oversee children, youth programming, ensuring expansive curriculum for various program leaders, in cooperation with the minister;
- develop groups that encourage involvement of both in-person and online participants, together or separately.
- work with SSUC to contract leadership or solicit specific work as required (curriculum creation, small group leaders/facilitators, for example)

5. As Emberwood is integral to the expansive values and ministry of SSUC, **integrate Emberwood into the life and work of SSUC**, including creating a sustainable and just relationship with Emberwood leaders as salaried staff with benefits, which would be supplemented with grants and user-generated income, etc. Continued research into costs of providing benefits to Emberwood leaders. Costs to be determined for 2024 budgeting process.

**6. Develop the description and fill the position for Youth Program Leader**

(8 hours per week, \$8,000 annually)

In much the same way as our kidSPIRIT program leaders, this position will lead programming on Sunday and any mid-week programming to youth of SSUC and the broader community, resourced by the Intergenerational Small Group Coordinator. Working with the other staff and volunteers, will seek to fill youth gaps in area programming to build capacity.

It is our recommendation that these plans be implemented for integration in September 2023, or as soon as possible, with a plan for a review of the work, people, workloads and benefits to be carried out in January 2024. At that time programs can be adapted to reflect the current needs and learnings.