

Shining Waters Regional Council Guidelines to Help Congregations Amalgamate Well

The decision of two or more congregations to amalgamate is often difficult and emotional, and usually, it follows much prayerful deliberation. While congregations may decide to amalgamate for many reasons, often they have discerned that they simply cannot continue to carry out their ministry alone. There may be grief, but also excitement and relief as two or more communities join together to form something new.

The following steps are intended to help congregations do this work well by identifying and addressing many of the matters that require particular energy and attention.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS

1. A congregation should reach out to neighbouring congregations to determine interest in amalgamation. This could be done by the governing body or by asking the region to facilitate a conversation about possibilities. The Staff Lead or the Minister, Support to Communities of Faith and Right Relations could support congregations in beginning this process.
2. Whether you involve the region now or at the time of decision-making, it's a good idea to keep the region informed of steps you are taking.
3. When talking with other congregations, it is important to determine what you have in common and if both or all the congregations are interested in amalgamating. For an amalgamation to be successful, it is helpful to have similar beliefs, values and missional goals.
4. If two or more congregations are interested in a possible amalgamation, the governing bodies, or a designated group from the congregation, would develop a proposal to amalgamate.

DECIDING TO AMALGAMATE

1. Each congregation meets separately to consider the proposal to amalgamate. Notice of the meeting, and its purpose, is read during public worship for two Sundays. The meeting may take place the next day (Monday) or any time after that.

Quorum for the meeting:

A meeting of the congregation or pastoral charge may take place only if a minimum number of full members is present, as follows:

- a) for congregations or pastoral charges with 100 or more full members, at least 20 full members must be present;
- b) for congregations or pastoral charges with between 30 and 99 full members, at least 10 full members must be present; and

- c) for congregations or pastoral charges with fewer than 30 full members, at least 1/3 of the full membership must be present. (Manual 2019, B.5.5)
- 2. If the decision for all congregations involved is affirmative, the governing bodies contact the regional council. Representatives of the regional council hold separate meetings with each congregation to hear their opinions on the proposed amalgamation.
- 3. The Communities of Faith Commission of the regional council decides whether to approve the amalgamation and an amalgamation date is set.
- 4. A congregation's life does not end when it amalgamates with another congregation. Rather, the congregation continues to exist in ministry as the new amalgamated congregation.
- 5. The regional council and the amalgamated congregation enter into a new covenantal relationship.
- 6. Consultation with the regional council is encouraged throughout the amalgamating process. The Staff Lead or the Minister, Support to Communities of Faith and Right Relations are the staff who can assist you.

PROPERTY

When congregations amalgamate, the result is often an excess of equipment, furnishings and even buildings. Decisions need to be made about which items are needed the ministry of the amalgamated congregation, and what can be declared surplus.

The regional council consults with the congregations on the property needs of the new amalgamated congregation. A congregation may ask its governing body to represent it in this consultation.

The regional council may decide that some of the congregations' property will not be needed for the new amalgamated congregation. Any property that will not be needed is called "surplus property."

The regional council is responsible for all surplus property after the amalgamation and decides how to use the surplus property for the benefit of the United Church.

Before an amalgamation, the trustees of a congregation hold all property for that congregation. After an amalgamation, the trustees:

- i) hold the surplus property for the United Church, to be used as the regional council decides; and
- ii) hold all other property for the new amalgamated congregation.

This change is automatic when the amalgamation takes place. The regional council may choose to appoint its own trustees for surplus property. Shining Waters Regional Council has a property management agreement with Toronto United Church Council and may ask TUCC to manage surplus property on behalf of the region. The region may also consult with the United Property Resource Corporation.

GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

Gifts made to the previous congregations automatically go to the new amalgamated congregation, even if the gift document refers to the congregation by its former (pre-amalgamation) name. “Gifts” include bequests made in a person’s will.

AS YOU PREPARE TO AMALGAMATE

Decisions to be Made

1. Determine staffing needs for the amalgamated congregation
2. Agree upon the name of the amalgamated congregation
3. Determine where the amalgamated congregation will meet
4. Discern the Living Faith Story (ministry vision) for the amalgamated congregation
5. Create a governance structure for the amalgamated congregation
6. Create a newly merged historic roll for the amalgamated congregation

Honour Your History:

- Set the date for the last worship service for each congregation. Consider who you might invite, special music, reception details etc.
- Plan a celebration honouring the years of faithful ministry, or hold a series of special events in the time leading up to the final service.
- Arrange for registers (baptism, wedding, burial, historic roll), minutes and other documents from each congregation to be sent to the archives.

Care for your Members:

- Communicate with all members about the amalgamation, letting them know that their membership will be carried into the newly amalgamated congregation. This may also be an opportunity to update your membership roll.
- Adherents also need to know about the amalgamation.
- Ensure everyone knows when and where the community of faith will be gathering for worship. Provide updated contact information.

Care for your Staff:

- Give proper notice to lay staff. Consult with a lawyer if needed.
- Give proper notice (90 days) to all ministry personnel, called or appointed as needed
- Give proper notice to ADP
- Fill out Record of Employment forms, final tax documents etc.

Care for your Finances:

- Arrange for the final charitable tax return to be filed for each congregation.
- Arrange to have Canada Post forward all mail to the new address for one year to ensure nothing gets missed.
- Determine what charitable number will be used for the amalgamated congregation and notify CRA of the changes
- Update the church name on any investments and accounts
- Update signing authorities

Care for your Property:

- If you have a cemetery, arrange for ongoing management
- Sort through all the furnishings and items belonging to the congregations. See if other United Churches have a need for anything, such as hymn books, laptops, chairs, banners etc. While remembering that trustees are responsible for ensuring fair market value is received, you may choose to have a silent auction for items that do not have a high resale value which will no longer be needed. Remember that items donated to the church cannot be given back to donor families, (CRA rules) but they are welcome to purchase them if they are for sale. Items may also be donated to other United Church congregations and ministries.
- For any item with a higher retail value, such as a grand piano, solid silver or brass items etc. it is best to seek an appraisal and consult with the covenant commission before selling.

THINGS TO DO AFTER THE AMALGAMATION

- Start with a celebration service
- Consider ways to help people get to know one another, for example name tags, small group activities, fun gatherings, or a directory. Enroll in Fresh Start workshops to help build a healthy congregation
- Communicate well and often to keep people informed
- Consider starting a new tradition that represents the new congregation
- Be gentle with one another

AMALGAMATIONS INVOLVING MORE THAN ONE REGIONAL COUNCIL

If the amalgamation involves congregations that are within the bounds of more than one regional council, the regional councils involved must

- a) each approve the amalgamation as a change in the covenantal relationship between that regional council and the applicable congregation;
- b) agree on any conditions to be included; and
- c) get the approval of the General Council. The General Council may make adjustments to the boundaries of the regional councils involved as a result of the amalgamation.

For assistance with any of these steps please contact
Jody Maltby, Staff Lead: Support to the Region and Communities of Faith
jmaltby@united-church.ca, 416-231-7680 or toll free 1-800-268-3781, ext 6226
or
Kim Uyede-Kai, Minister, Communities of Faith Support and Right Relations
kuyedekai@united-church.ca, 416-231-7680 or toll free 1-800-268-3781, ext 6173

To submit information to the Communities of Faith Commission for consideration, including:

- *A decision to amalgamate*
- *A change of name*
- *A governance model*

please contact Rachael Howes, Executive Assistant
rhowes@united-church.ca, 416-231-7680 or toll free 1-800-268-3781, ext. 6144

Please see the following pages for excerpt from the United Church Manual, 2019

The Manual, 2019

G.1.4 Amalgamation of Congregations

The process for an amalgamation is set out below. The congregation and regional council are each responsible for the steps assigned to them.

G.1.4.1 Decision by Congregations

Each congregation meets separately to make a decision on a proposal to amalgamate.

G.1.4.2 Regional Council Consultation

The regional council holds separate meetings with each congregation to hear their opinions on the proposed amalgamation.

G.1.4.3 Regional Council Decision

The regional council makes a decision on whether to approve the amalgamation as a change in the covenantal relationship between the regional council and each of the congregations.

G.1.4.4 New Covenant

The regional council and the amalgamated congregation enter into a new covenantal relationship.

G.1.4.5 Property

The regional council consults with the congregations on the property needs of the new amalgamated congregation. A congregation may ask its governing body to represent it in this consultation.

a. **Surplus property of amalgamating congregations:** The regional council may decide that some of the congregations' property will not be needed for the new amalgamated congregation. Any property that will not be needed is called "surplus property."

b. **Use of surplus property:** The regional council is responsible for all surplus property after the amalgamation and decides how to use the surplus property for the benefit of the United Church.

c. **Change in property ownership:** Before an amalgamation, the trustees of a congregation hold all property for that congregation. After an amalgamation, the trustees

- i) hold the surplus property for the United Church, to be used as the regional council decides; and
- ii) hold all other property for the new amalgamated congregation.

This change is automatic when the amalgamation takes place.

G.1.4.6 Amalgamations Involving More Than One Regional Council

If the amalgamation involves congregations that are within the bounds of more than one regional council, the regional councils involved must

- a) each approve the amalgamation as a change in the covenantal relationship between that regional council and the applicable congregation;
- b) agree on any conditions to be included; and
- c) get the approval of the General Council. The General Council may make adjustments to the boundaries of the regional councils involved as a result of the amalgamation.

G.1.4.7 Congregation Continues to Exist

A congregation's life does not end when it amalgamates with another congregation. Rather, the congregation continues to exist in ministry as the new amalgamated congregation.

G.1.4.8 Gifts and Bequests

This section (G.1.4.8) applies to gifts made to a congregation that has amalgamated, whether the gifts are made before or after the amalgamation. "Gifts" include bequests made in a person's will.

The gift automatically goes to the new amalgamated congregation, even if the gift document refers to the congregation by its former (pre-amalgamation) name.

There are resources about amalgamations to assist congregations and regional councils. See the Congregational Board of Trustees Handbook available from the General Council Office.