

GROWTH ANIMATOR REPORT

When you hear the word “Growth,” you might ask, “Does it mean number?” Yes, the number of people gathering together is important, the countable and uncountable number of gifts is valuable, but that’s not all. The Call of the United Church of Canada is a good summary of what it’s trying to accomplish, “Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice.” You might ask, “How is it possible?” or “Does it mean something substantial needs to be done?” I can assure you that that’s exactly the direction the United Church of Canada wants to take. The General Council Office of the United Church of Canada has reset its priorities and weaved its key priority activities, to make sure that they all will lead towards Growth. Visually represented, it transformed itself into a fish, with Growth as the fish head, and the rest will follow, namely, climate, justice, leadership, indigenous pathways, and the Common Good.

It’s like a project of building a community garden. Do we want to invite your neighbors to be a part of it? If we do, such an invitation implies we are receptive to changes, which include what size of land we would allow ourselves to share with others when it’s so limited. What type of soil are we going to use? Are we going to use the same type of soil, or other types as well since it implies the building of other sustainable and beneficial ecosystems?

As your Growth Animator, I shall be pleased to listen to your wonderful stories in the past, your present ambitions, and your plans for the future. My support could be summarized as the following three streams of work:

Renewal: This stream has something to do with the existing communities of faith. We want to help you connect, attract and welcome neighbors. Let your neighbors know about your existence, and find ways to knit them into your congregation’s life. We are not talking about arranging some social events like club activities, but what is behind those activities, i.e., sharing in the Spirit’s transforming work in our lives as well as the lives of other participants, which is needed and joyful.

Creation: God is the creator. How can the co-creating workers be helpful to God’s project of creation? Are we satisfied with the existing ways of doing church? Do they appeal to our neighbors and the next generations? Keep doing it if the answer is positive. But what if they are no longer relevant and sustainable? Seeding and strengthening new communities of faith like MPFT might be a possibility. We all realize that the landscape in Canada for doing church has changed in the last few decades. Are there groups and needs being neglected? The francophone ministry is not a ministry for just one homogenous group of people. It has groups of youth and young adults whose needs keep changing. It will have contacts with other communities, including but not only migrants, indigenous people, 2SLGBTQ+ persons, and people with disabilities. What should be done when your next generation requires certain training or practice every Sunday morning? To go online might sound like a bad idea for some, but it might be the only choice for many. God is calling people together in new ways. How can we join in?

Invitation: Evangelism is an old word; however, it might sound like a new word to the United

Church people. We don't use that word very often for a reason, but we do share our faith with others. Can that be done more intentionally but at the same time humbly? As we mentioned before, people are fully occupied with activities other than worship services on Sundays. How can we build new relationships or maintain the existing ones deeply through our greetings? Instead of talking about the weather as we used to, can we relate the conversation to something a little bit more personal? Like, relate the sunshine, breezy wind, or cloudy weather to how one feels right now? There are reasons why people can't attend Sunday worship regularly, are we listening attentively and responding with alternatives? What are the other ways that would allow us to explore and experience the Christian life and values together? Being flexible with time, location, and activities is a must. What about also showing our gratitude towards the people we encounter, i.e., the sharing of their talents, and their struggles? These are easy ways to share the story of Jesus effectively. There are also more challenging ways to what a post-Christian, post-colonial, humble and joyful evangelism would look like.

There may have been serious disconnection in the past, however, the church has devoted itself to bridging the gaps that shouldn't be there. The church wants to know if there are any resources it could provide that would help to invite others to join this community-building project, to improve or even change the interpersonal relationship that everyone longs for. A good combination of effective platforms, meaningful dialogues, and agreeable objectives will surely help to build a sustainable and beneficial ecosystem for all.

The church wants to help everyone to dive into the same vision and call, namely deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice. We can move forward or fail forward together. A part of my role is to identify those glitches. The denominational church has decided to create and mobilize its resources for growth, internally and externally, numerically, and spiritually, to walk together with the Regional Councils that have been working hard and faithfully. So, let's keep envisioning and painting the futuristic pictures that you see. As an animator, I will try my best to help bring these pictures and portraits to life.

Calin Lau