

# **Report 2:**

# **IDENTITY**

***Roslin Thomasburg Pastoral Charge  
Comprehensive Review Task Group***

***April 20, 2011***

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# **TRINITY UNITED CHURCH ROSLIN**

## **REPORT II      IDENTITY**

### ***GOVERNANCE AND PROGRAMMES***

Trinity United Church, Roslin is one congregation of the two point Pastoral Charge known as Roslin-Thomasburg within the East Zone of the Belleville Presbytery in the Bay of Quinte Conference of the United Church of Canada.

For the most part the requirements of the United Church of Canada are implemented. We employ an approved ordained minister and have in place a governance structure as suggested in the Manual Bylaws Section 139a - the Session/Stewards/Official Board Structure. A part time pastoral charge secretary is appreciated with an honorarium. Our pastoral charge appreciates the dedication of a very talented Minister of Music who is supported by each congregation with a small honorarium. Many members are elected to fill the committee requirements.

The Joint Official Board: as elected or appointed at Annual Congregational Meeting

- Joint Board of Session (Elders)
  - Worship Committee
  - Membership Committee
  - Christian Education Committee
  - Recording Steward
- Joint Ministry of Personnel Committee
- Pastoral Charge Treasurer
- Moira Valley News – 1 editor and publisher

Trinity United Church Roslin: as elected or appointed at Annual Congregational Meeting

Honorary Elders – 4 members  
Board of Stewards – 7 members  
Trustees – 3 to 4 members  
Memorial Committee – 3 members  
Welcoming Committee – now decommissioned  
Nominations Committee – 3 members  
Sunday School Superintendents – 2 members  
Stewardship/Mission & Service Representative – 1 member  
Social Justice/Outreach/Food Bank – 2 members  
Presbytery Representative – looking for replacement  
United Church Women – very active  
Fundraising Committee – as required  
Shared Services – 2 members  
Observer Representative – 1 member  
Envelope Secretary – 1 member  
Congregation Treasurer – 1 member  
A Church janitor is appreciated with an honorarium.

All of these volunteer positions are just the beginning of being part of the Trinity United Church, Roslin congregation. Many unnamed committees of unnamed persons look after many issues of church business.

Donations are received and recorded on a weekly basis by the envelope secretary. The record of weekly deposits is forwarded to the treasurer who issues a monthly allotment to the Pastoral Charge treasurer. The Treasurer/Bookkeeper ensures that expenses related to Trinity United Church, Roslin are paid in a timely manner and prepares quarterly reports for the Trinity Roslin Official Board. A line item Budget is prepared for approval at the Annual General Meeting. This budget reflects little more than basic maintenance of our current building and employment expenses. An annual Charity Return is prepared as required by the Canada Revenue Agency.

Sunday Worship is generally at 11:00 am. Joint Pastoral Charge Sunday Worship services with Thomasburg are held during the summer months of June, July and September at 10:00am. During August there are no services due to staff vacation. The worship

committee (Session) under the guidance of the Minister determines the format of our traditional weekly worship.

Adult Lenten Bible Study is encouraged and held on a weekly basis over a period of several weeks. Our Minister is encouraged to avail himself of Presbytery and Conference educational training and retreat events. Local Lay School of Theology training sessions are available to all church members and have been offered annually for the past 29 years.

Resources are available through UCRD (United Church of Canada Resource Distribution), the Belleville Presbytery Resource Centre at St. Matthew's Church in Belleville and some local retailers. Church members are also encouraged to use the personal (and extensive) library of our current minister. Bulletin covers are purchased through UCRD.

Several local area United Churches are involved in "Shared Services". Every few months on a rotating basis an extra service is held joining St. Mark's, Cannifton; Emmanuel, Foxboro; Melrose; Front Road; along with Thomasburg and Trinity Roslin United Churches in Worship and Fellowship.

### **Programmes (Activities)**

Trinity United Church, Roslin offers Sunday School for younger children to introduce them to our faith.

The UCW, which is open to all women of the congregation, has far reaching relevance in the community and is very effective in keeping connected to less active members. They are a dominant group in the church and have the ability to see what needs to be done and make it happen.

The Men's coffee hour offers a social opportunity for men of the church and of the community to meet once a week from January to April. This informal gathering of 10 to 25 is very popular and was extended into late spring at the request of the men.

As part of the community of Roslin churches, we participate in the production of the "Living Nativity", and in a joint Remembrance Day Service. These community events are well attended and very

effective as we share worship with other denominations.

## **WHO WE ARE**

### **Demographics**

Our current congregational make up (by approximation):

Over age 80	26	(Male: 10, Female: 16)
Age 50-79	79	(Male: 35, Female: 44)
Age 26-49	22	(Male: 10, Female: 12)
Youth 15-25	13	
Children	12	

We are unable to compare this to the actual number of persons within our nearby communities who claim an affiliation with the United Church of Canada.

The majority of our members are homeowners of a single-family dwelling. We are an aging farming community. Many live in this rural setting while commuting to work. Some have a home business. Many are retired. Many are older seniors.

Within our congregation we see a wide range of occupations. Many members and adherents are also involved in a number of other community organizations that have their own time demands.

Sunday morning worship attendance is an average of 31 persons, (based on the numbers recorded from January to June 2010); the majority is over age 55. Children attending Sunday School varies from none to about 12.

## ***WHERE WE MEET***

Our Church Building was built as the Roslin Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1869. The structure is of red brick with a stone foundation and a steel roof. It has a traditional style, not theatre style, with a centre aisle and a raised dais at the centre front with choir space to one side. The original rails surrounding the raised dais were removed during a 1967 renovation. This renovation also included paneling the walls, lowering the ceiling, and installing the still existing carpet. The pews, from Bethel Church, with added seat cushions are noted as not very comfortable.

We have a working bell that is rung just prior to the Sunday Services.

Our building at Roslin is a sanctuary with an attached hall that has a small kitchen and a single washroom. The hall is used for congregational, family, and occasional community functions. Although it is not totally accessible, we recognize that our responsibility is to provide a safe facility.

In compliance with the Hastings and Prince Edward Health Unit our water is tested regularly. An ultraviolet system is in place and is protected by a gate. In addition we use bottled water for drinking. Our facility is kept clean and is well maintained.

The membership, especially the Stewards, the UCW, and other keen folk, volunteer their time to help with a yearly clean up and repairs as needed, under the direction of a much-appreciated in-house carpenter.

The property limitations create a concern for event parking. The building has some issues related to its age.

The church has been enhanced by recent renovations to the entrance. An inviting area has been created with the addition of windows within the doors and a lighter wall colour to brighten and update the entrance area. The glass French pocket door to the sanctuary, and the comfortable chair in the renovated entry have proven to be useful to parents with young children.

## **Community Context**

### **Geographic Location**

The village of Roslin is situated at the juxtaposition of four townships of which the main road was the King's Highway. Trinity United Church, Roslin is located at 157 Roslin Road at the southeast corner of Huntingdon Township in the County of Hastings. Our congregation is mainly from the surrounding townships of Thurlow, Tyendinaga, Huntingdon and Hungerford. The property is approximately 75 feet wide and 160 feet deep. We do use the adjacent neighbour's parking area. There are valid concerns in using this parking space.

The church is near the current Highway #37 about half way between the City of Belleville (population 45,000) and the Town of Tweed (population 2,800). The neighbourhood is surrounded by other places of worship, specifically a Presbyterian Church and an Anglican Church. While there are no retail businesses in the village, our building is next to an active construction enterprise.

### **Social Location**

Our community consists of a very comfortable mix of backgrounds and of economic status, but is backed by a strong farming community.

Our church is committed to continuous contributions to the Tweed Food Bank. Social involvements are an outworking of our faith stance.

### **Defining the Congregation's Community (Location)**

We best fit the definition of "*The Open Country Church: is found at a crossroads or on secondary highway in a rural area. It serves sparsely populated area around it. It has a small membership and building. It is often slow to change which is often due to the fact that much of membership is in reality one or more extended families.*" as defined in our study document entitled Identity – Chapter 3.



## **History & Purpose**

Our church is unique in the fact we have continuously worshipped in the same building since 1869. The church was built by the early settlers with Methodist zeal who had grown beyond needing just a circuit rider, and prepared to congregate as a church in a single location. The congregation shows great respect for the previous generations in displaying items such as paintings, wall hangings and stained glass windows.

While the history of amalgamation has shaped our congregation, and the feelings from that event are still palpable, not all the congregation lives with that history. The passage of time and the addition of new members are re-shaping our present congregation. Our congregation is a mix of new members and descendents of founding congregants who continue to work well together while able to give a genuine welcome to new people. More history is available in REPORT I "A MEANINGFUL HISTORY" (January 2010).

## ***Character of the Congregation***

### **Life Stage**

Although we meet at a traditional time of 11:00am, many aspects of the service are taking on a less traditional form, which appears to be appreciated by members of the congregation.

Our congregation uses many old hymns and appreciates learning some new ones.

The number of persons attending Sunday Services at Trinity Roslin has decreased over the past decade.

Roslin is a congregation that continues to support new and invigorating ideas, and is an ongoing entity looking to refocus our vision and mission. We offer community involvement (i.e.: Men's Coffee Time). The organization of church life is mainly dependent on the women. Without the Minister and the Trinity Roslin UCW the church programmes would suffer.

This task group is of the opinion that our congregation falls into the 80/20 rule. That is 80% of the pastoral time is tapped by 20% of membership; 20% of the congregation leads the church's other 80%.

One looming question seems to be – is there a critical mass enough to lead the congregation if we no longer have a minister?

The membership has the ability to adapt to many possibilities – building a mindset to use the talents and skills of many people. To identify the untapped skills, talents, and interests of members is something we need to encourage. There are people resources to be used.

We find we best fit the study document description of *the Maturity Stage*: “*At this stage, the critical leadership function is to get them to tell the story of how they got there with considerable honesty, celebrate its heritage, affirm the Congregation’s gifts and strengths and own its uniqueness with a view to restate and refocus its vision and mission. At this stage, leadership is mostly about vision and persistence. The educational needs are new programmes and ministries aimed at new members and the community at large. Some of these new programmes may appeal to both old and new but often do not. Intentional effort must be directed toward creating new small group experiences.*”

## **Dynamics**

Systemic Anxiety is defined as resistance to change or the desire to return to former or predictable patterns or commonly known as, “we have never done it this way before”.

There is an increasing systemic anxiety within our congregation as we struggle to meet today's financial requirements, conditions in accessibility, health unit issues, and parking issues. The declining numbers attending Sunday Services contributes to this anxiousness. We are blessed with an Ordained Minister, however churches in general are suffering increased anxiety due to the shortage of trained spiritual leaders.

Within our church a majority of members are exhibiting less energy as we age. There is still the odd spark that becomes apparent as the need arises. The level of energy appears to be determined by the projects and events that are in process at any given time. Whether the younger but fewer members of our congregation can maintain this level is the BIG question.

In the administration of the life force of the Church, our Minister supports us. He leads our direction by recruiting people such as "The Comprehensive Review Task Group" to delve into the meaning of our life force.

Through the encouragement of our present Minister, we are able to face and embrace changes.

Many "new" (less than 20 years) members of this congregation stay involved because of the sense of welcome, acceptance, warmth and inclusion, which occurred when they first entered the congregation of Trinity Roslin.

Generally, the anxiety level is middle-of-the-road to high right now. Music, Worship, UCW, and Men's Coffee Hour are satisfying many needs and people are working well together – even bringing in some community interest.

Our multi-congregation background has brought a variety of leadership skills to this congregation. More than a few members take on leadership roles within the congregation. We suggest that there may also be additional leaders who may require encouragement, patience, and prayer to accept a role. This will lead to a level of anxiety, which may or may not be a positive element.

## **Functional Model**

This task group feels that our church is best described from our study document as a *"House of Worship: is a provider of religious goods and services (baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc.). Its main focus is public worship and religious education. Its main purpose is to provide uplifting worship experiences and to educate membership in churches traditions, denominational heritage,*

*doctrines and rituals. This model tends to make limited demands on members' time, talent and treasure and participation level is not seen as an indicator of loyalty. It depends on its clergy, paid staff and committee structure to make most decisions about development and programming. It can be likened to a "temple" a ritual centre mostly disconnected from secular lives of members. It is often synonymous with a cathedral church. Often the congregation is a Consumer Congregation in that they go for religious products but involvement is otherwise peripheral to their personal lives."*

### **Size and Dynamics**

*We are most defined as a "Pastor Centered Congregation: usually involves 50 – 150 active members. In this setting the minister is centre of everything. Like family church, this congregation also works based on relationships and the minister is expected to know everyone and their children and other extended family by name. People tend to join because of the activities and personality of the minister."*

### **Spirituality Types**

*As a congregation at our best, we know and value our own tradition and beliefs and still respect those of others. This can be identified as *Cognitive Spirituality (spirituality of the head)*. We also see ourselves as having the type known as *Servant Spirituality (value and promote faith in action)*. *Discipleship that results in ministry to the world is at the heart of congregational values. In this setting membership mobilization, engaging spiritual gifts, application of talents and sharing resources for service to the world are critical to what it means to be a member.**

### **Theological Stance**

*As a *Community Stance Congregation* and a *Shepherd Stance Church* we see ourselves as striving to welcome one and all, downplaying denominational affiliation to appear to be a community church. We tend to celebrate the best of culture and*

recognize its best influences. Meetings may be adjusted due to conflicting school or community events. We are a church of nurses, teachers, social workers, caregivers, and agricultural workers. We tend to favour a “family of faith” operating theology.

## **Faith Styles**

We have an open faith style shown by a high capacity of honesty and open sharing. News and communication flows easily and everyone tends to know everything. Congregational structures and processes tend to foster and facilitate communication, not hinder it and leadership tends to set the tone. We easily welcome strangers into the life of the congregation.

## **WHAT WAS HEARD DURING INTERVIEWS:**

**QUESTION 1** What is good in our church now?  
What makes worship alive and meaningful?  
What additional worship activities would you like to try?

## **COMMENTS**

Some of us have gotten to be good friends now. There is some “pickiness” but camaraderie is good.

Many of us (women), within the congregation have become better friends. Our involvement with the Comprehensive Review Task Group has been one impetus and the “Coffee Time” has been another. It has evolved into friendships.

There is a homey feeling among the congregation.

The Sunday greeters offer a friendly welcome.

We are blessed to have great leadership: minister, organist, choir, and Sunday School teacher.

The roof doesn't leak right now.

The Music! The Cantatas, the choir and Marg's energy at the keyboard.

Our minister, who encourages us and over extends himself to show he really cares about us.

The children, when they are involved.

More special people throughout the year, not just at anniversary. It might get more people out, new ones and regular ones. Have one less hymn and have a guest soloist would help to “take something away” besides the sermon.

There is a preference for well known hymns and music. It is too small a group for too many new hymns. Adding the guitar is a welcome change.

Sermons are not as condemning, more realistic with an updated message.

## **Question 2 What do you see to make it better?**

### **COMMENTS:**

More sermons relevant to the “now”. Sometimes there is too much detail in the sermons and the message gets lost or tries to tell the same thing, too many ways. Sometimes the service is too long. When it runs past 12 noon the people get restless.

Better esthetics, the pews are not attractive. The carpet needs replacing in the sanctuary. The sanctuary looks needy. The pew racks need to be able to hold the hymnbooks, welcoming card/envelopes etc. better. There is no room for Bibles in the pew racks.

Children’s story is not always relevant to the child(ren) present. Sometimes the story goes way over the heads of the children in the Service- not age relevant. Rev. Tom has even stated that at times. The good thing is they have learned the Lord’s Prayer and are more comfortable starting it for the congregation to follow.

To make things better we need more kids, more people, and more parking.

## **Question 3 How does our church relate to our community and to the world? When we are at our best, how do we express God’s love, mercy, and justice to those within our church?**

### **COMMENTS:**

At times of death, grief and/or tragedy or with celebrations, we are over the top – 150%. We are supportive with food, good wishes, compassion and caring, cards and best wishes. We are willing workers for luncheons, potlucks, and providing food for fundraisers. We are cognizant of our ageing community by providing cookie trays at Christmas. We are dedicated with providing for the Food Bank, mittens, etc for the less fortunate but have difficulty with how to help or get involved with those who have personal difficulties or problems, or learning disabilities and need assistance. Our Minister and Organist, as well as a few dedicated individuals provide spiritual and musical support to those in nursing homes and retirement residences. Individuals visit other residents that live in the city and relatives support them with visits, care and concern for their well being.

We remember them in our prayers. Some congregants are supportive of M&S. We raised funds for an ambulance on the other side of the world, came to the aid of the victims of the earthquake in Haiti with financial response and show care and concern as other crises evolve.

Involvement with M&S fund shows world support.

Community events such as the Living Nativity and Vacation Bible School, contributions to the Food Bank, the UCW’s support for funerals are all examples of relating to our community.

Individual talents or support are offered as needed.

**Question 4 Are you comfortable with your involvement in our church?  
Do you wish to share anything specific?**

**COMMENTS**

Yes totally. There are always lots more things to do though if there was enough time.

No. Uncomfortable with the dictates of the National Church. There are limits on the way we do things. No issues are resolved so decisions are not made – “why bother?” Comfortable with financial involvement but not physically involved.

**Question 5 Forgetting any limitations, make three wishes for the future of our Church. What would church look like?**

**COMMENTS**

That the church keeps going, if not at its present site-elsewhere

More people in the pews on a regular basis

More involvement of “the people” plus somehow attract new and interested people and that the people are willing to support change.

Thank you God for granting “our” three wishes

“Church” is not a building –it is the people - people that are comfortable in their faith. A new building with an inviting sanctuary, would be nice. A building that is accessible and welcoming with a state of the art kitchen, bathrooms, an office for the minister, well equipped with technological services and congregants willing to get involved and with enthusiasm. A building that is multi-use and multi-useful; a people/persons friendly building that would house more than “Church”. An adequate sized parking lot would be advantageous to accommodate all the cars that need to park - plus have handicap zones, drop-off and pick-up areas for those that require the service.

Would like to see the church full

All upgrades completed.

A Community Church for all denominations. Combine our efforts with other churches in the community.

## **SUMMARY**

Our tradition, as a congregation, is to enjoy Church and Community events that bring people together in fellowship. Trinity Roslin is standing on the edge of a precipice and if current trends continue, financial viability will no longer be possible. There are current issues needing to be addressed with regard to our church building and property. We recognize the need for compliance by 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2012 to the Accessibility Act. For families in our community, we recognize that Sunday has become a day for much more than attending church; shopping, family events, sports, work commitments, etc tend to take precedence. And finally, continued viability would be very difficult, if not impossible, without the regular services of a Minister, at least while retaining our current form and focus of "Church". We would have to make significant improvements and changes.



## **REPORT II : IDENTITY**

### **THOMASBURG UNITED CHURCH**

#### **Introduction**

This is the second report of Thomasburg United Church Comprehensive Task Force. The first report dealt with the meaningful history, and this focuses on our identity as we are now. This report is a result of the task force's discussions and research, and of information gathered from the congregation through questionnaires, informal inquiry and interviews.

#### **Organization**

Thomasburg United Church is one congregation of the two point Roslin-Thomasburg Pastoral Charge within the East Zone of the Belleville Presbytery in the Bay of Quinte Conference of the United Church of Canada. We comply in general with the requirements of the United Church of Canada, as outlined in the United Church Manual. We share with Trinity Roslin a full-time ordained minister, a part time secretary and a volunteer treasurer. The Joint Official Board of the pastoral charge is made up of the Board of Session (elders appointed from each congregation), Board of Stewards of each church and Board of Trustees of each church as well as representatives from all church organizations and committees. Joint committees include Ministry and Personnel Committee and Shared Service Committee. The Board of Session is responsible for the spiritual life of the congregations, and its work is carried out through the Worship, Membership and Christian Education committees.

Thomasburg Church's Board of Stewards consists of six members, who are elected for a three year term, as well as the church treasurer and envelope steward; it is responsible for the maintenance of church property and finances. The treasurer looks after the congregation's bank accounts and, with the help of the envelope steward, keeps track of the regular contributions. There is no budgeting process in place at the church level, and therefore any major expenditure or change is brought to the congregation. Recently, the Board of Stewards has been playing a larger role than formerly in promoting fund raising and congregational givings. It is also very active in maintaining the building and grounds, doing repairs and overseeing the paid part time custodian.

The Board of Trustees consists of three members who serve a five year term, and the minister. It has legal responsibility for the assets of the church, and functions very informally, making decisions about insurance and other property matters.

As with most United Churches in Canada, we are dependent on volunteers. Besides the Board members, volunteers make up various committees. The Memorial

Fund Committee, comprised of three members, recommends to the Official Board appropriate uses for donations made as memorial gifts. The church treasurer keeps track of the funds. The Nominating Committee of two is responsible for finding individuals to fill board and committee positions as vacancies occur through resignation or as terms expire. The committee presents to the annual congregational meeting a slate of names to be voted on for the year. Other volunteers serve as Sunday School teachers, promote the Mission and Service Fund, organize scripture reading and greeting roster, Observer subscriptions and food bank donations, and represent us at Presbytery. Ad hoc committees are set up as the need arises.

Our Minister of Music is given a small honorarium for her great contribution to our worship. This includes selecting the hymns for Sunday services according to season and theme, rehearsing and conducting the choir, playing the organ, and introducing new songs to the congregation.

## **Church Activities**

### **United Church Women**

The Moira Thomasburg UCW group is important to the women of the congregation because it provides a mid-week programme and worship on a monthly basis. Attendance at meetings varies from 8 to 12. The group's various activities facilitate the development of friendships. Everyone is pleased to participate in fund-raising and other social activities of the church. Community outreach includes informal visiting, neighbourly support, assistance to families in need, cards, food to shut-ins and donations to other community organizations. Members feel supported in their day to day life by one another. It is also a regular practice to assist the stewards in maintenance of the kitchen and provision of church supplies.

### **Sunday School**

The current Sunday School programme is very informal and is for a multi-age group geared to the preschool and primary years. Babies are also welcome. A variety of different curricula are used. Attendance varies from 0 up to as many as 10 or more for baptism Sundays and other special occasions. About six women have volunteered as teachers on a monthly rotation basis over the past two years. While the attendance is not consistent, children are very frequently part of our church experience.

### **Special Events**

Rather than regular programs, it has been the practice to arrange for special events depending on the church season or interest. Some examples include the annual family concert at Christmas, variety nights or movie nights.

## **Choir**

The church choir is such an important part of our church that it is a special programme for the members who receive social, spiritual and musical enjoyment from the experience. Practices are held jointly with Trinity Roslin. The age of the participants currently influences both the practice frequency and types of performances. Numbers have declined in recent years, to 7 members from Thomasburg and 8 from Trinity Roslin, affecting the nature of the music challenges. Special music is usually performed jointly for services at both churches at Christmas, Easter and anniversaries. The participants enjoy the experience and are still very pleased with their involvement. Members of the congregation frequently express their appreciation for the leadership provided by the choir.

## **The Community in Which We Live**

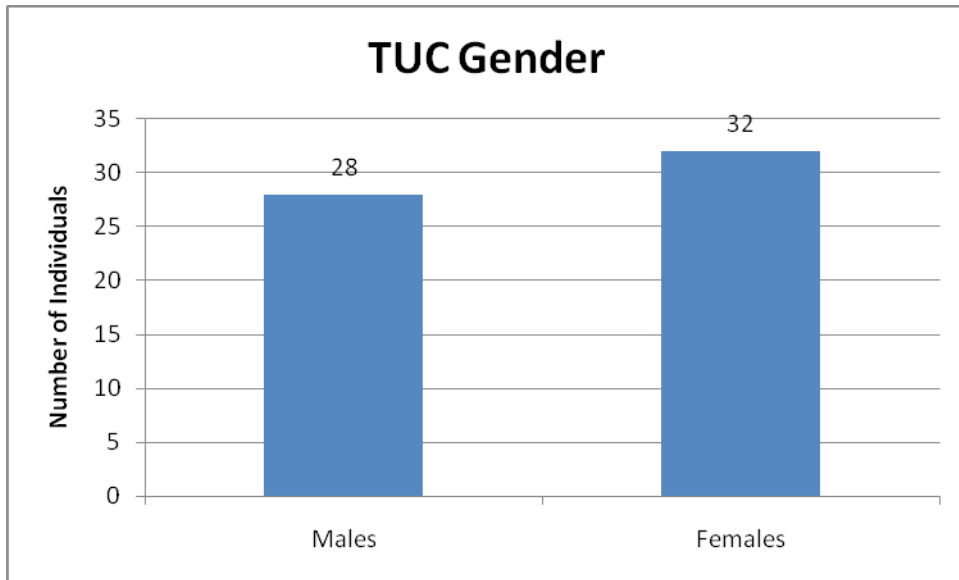
The church neighbourhood encompasses a large rural area, from east of the Moira River and north to Lost Channel as far west as Fuller and beyond the hamlet of Moira. As a rural church, we are not a large congregation and we tend to know each other as neighbours as well as through the church. There is not a lot of racial and cultural diversity in the area. The church has experienced considerable stability of membership. Most people living in the area are either long time inhabitants or have chosen the location.

## Who We Are

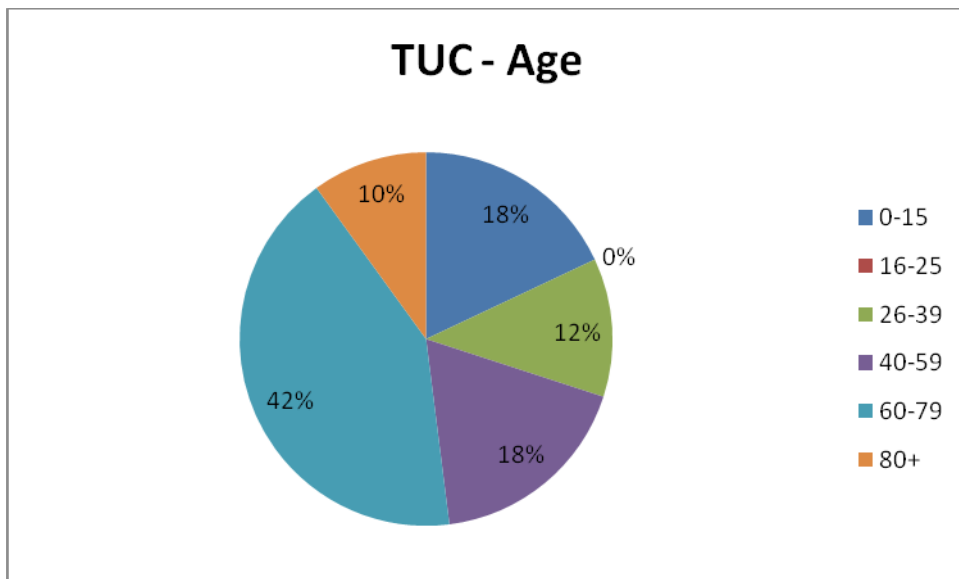
### **The Facts**

The official roll indicates that Thomasburg Church has 62 members, including 14 non-resident, and 40 adherents. However, there are approximately 60 who can be counted in recent and relatively regular attendance.

By gender: 32 females, 28 males

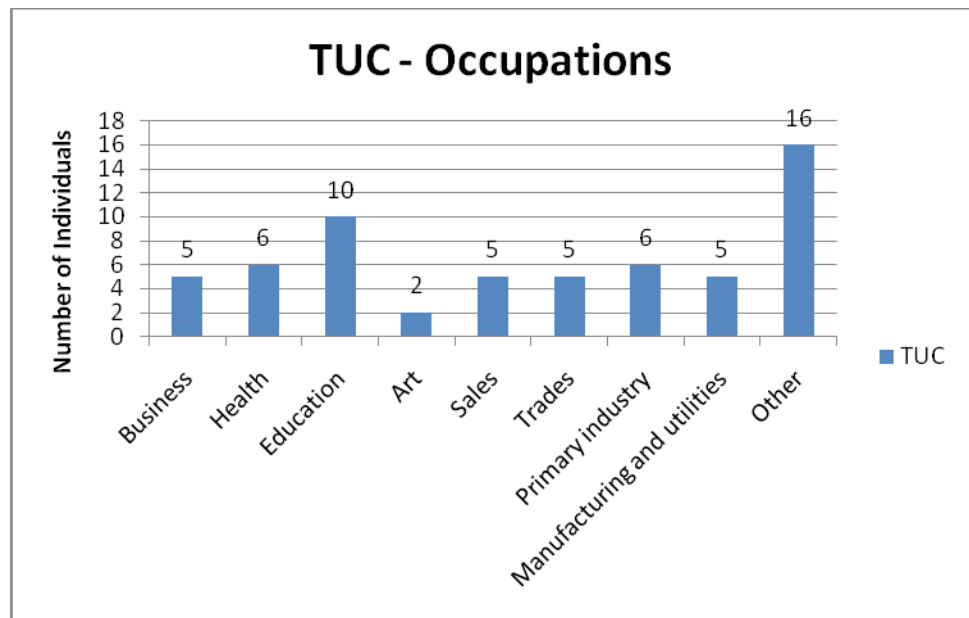


By age: under 15: 11 16-25: 0 26-40: 7 41-60: 11 61-80: 25 over 80: 6

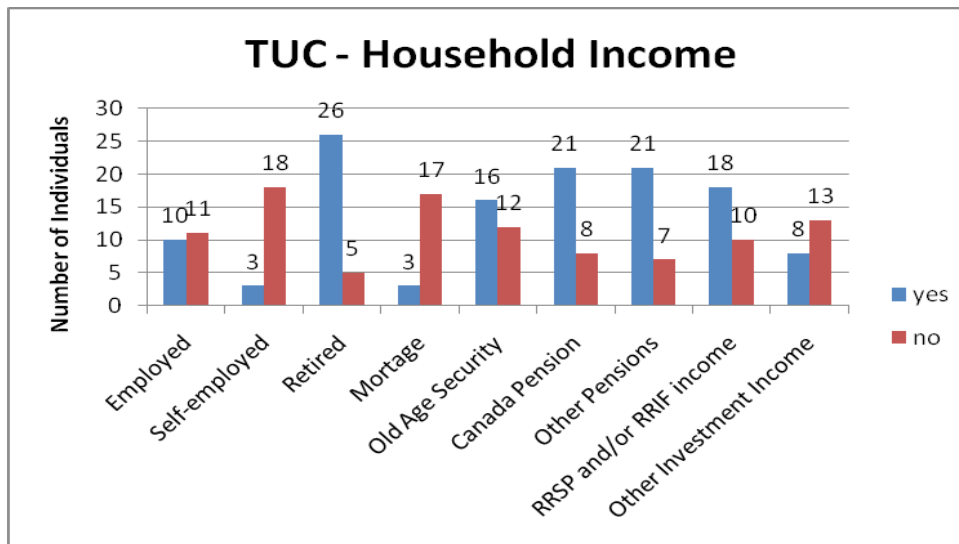
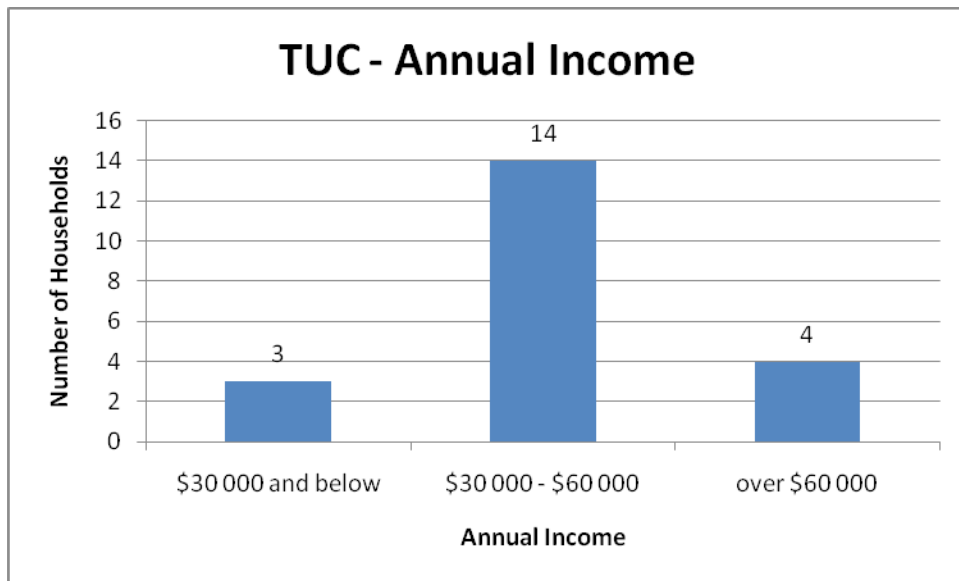


By occupation (including former):

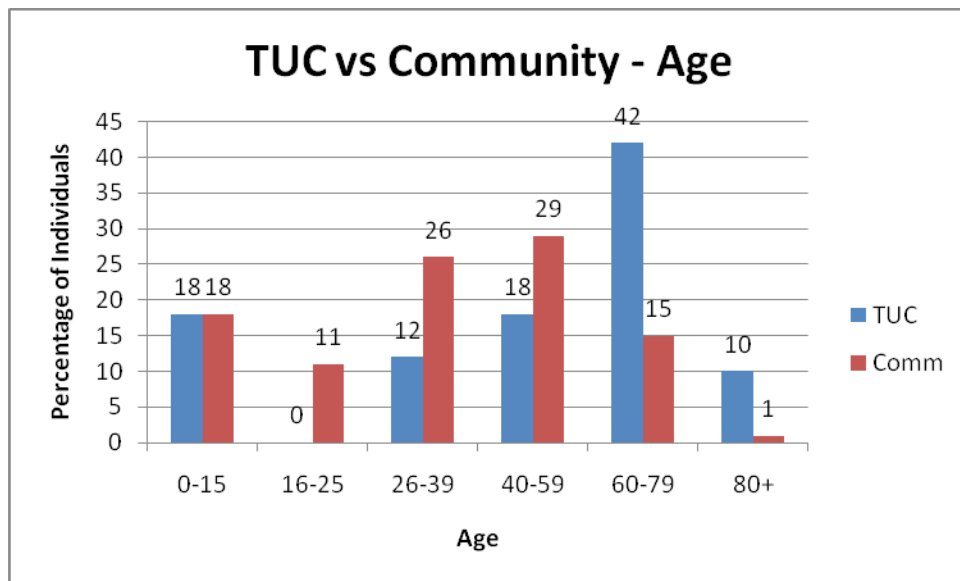
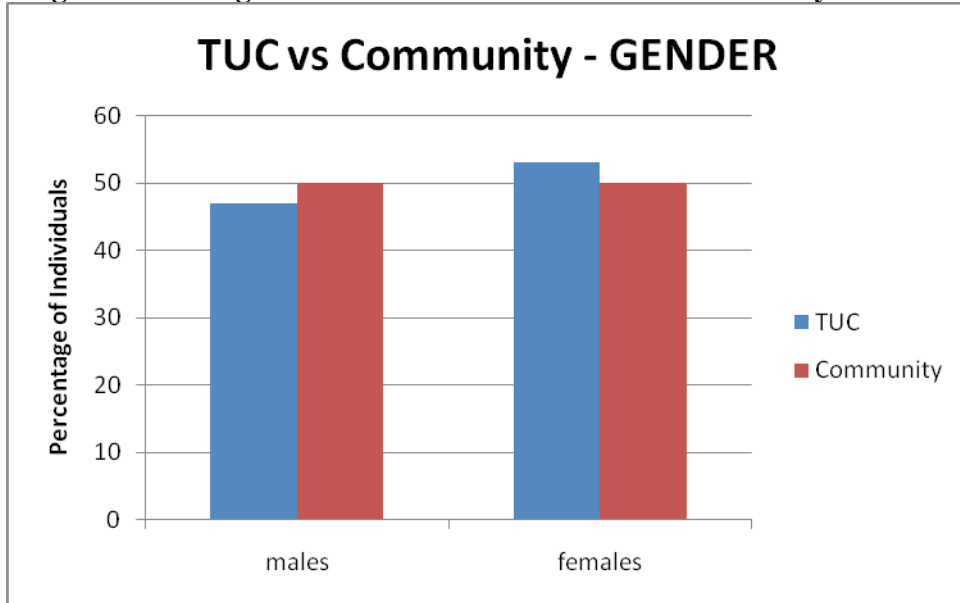
- Business and finance: 5
- Health: 6
- Education, government services, religion: 10
- Art and culture: 2
- Sales and service: 5
- Trades, transport and equipment operators: 5
- Occupations unique to primary industry: 6
- Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities: 5
- Other (minors and don't know): 16

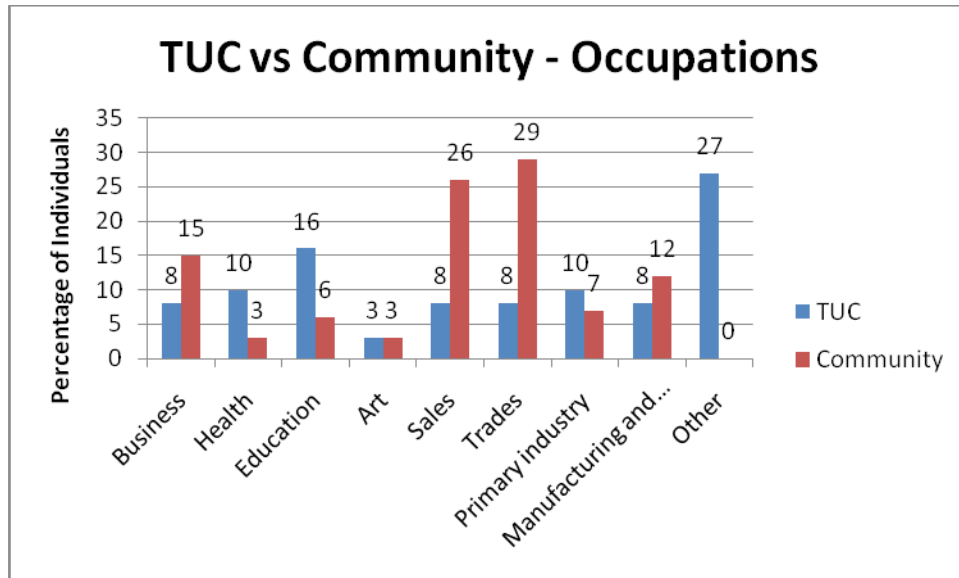


According to the responses of a questionnaire, the average yearly income of the majority of households is in the range of \$30,000 to \$60,000. 84% of the participants are retired.



**Comparing Thomasburg United Church and the Local Community**





For the most part, congregation members own their homes, which are single family dwellings. These vary in age and style from century-old farmhouses to modern bungalows. A few properties compare in size to a large urban lot but most range from several acres to several hundred acres. The larger acreages are used either by the owners, or rented to others, to produce agricultural crops or to raise livestock. In other cases, the land is used for horse pasture, or as a woodlot or maple bush, or for recreational enjoyment.

### History

The past of any person or family or institution will of course influence its present. Formed originally by travelling Methodist preachers for worship by the neighbourhood farmers and the residents of the hamlet of Thomasburg, the congregation now comes from a much wider area, including a few people from Belleville and Tweed. When several local churches were closed in the 1960's, some families from those congregations came to Thomasburg church and remain a part of it. The location is still significant in that it can be considered part of a wider community. Among the factors that may draw one to this church are a love of music and an individual's historical ties to the United Church and its predecessors.

A significant event in Thomasburg church's history was the fire which destroyed the former building, followed by a tremendous effort to rebuild, and to pay off the mortgage within a short time. An incredible amount of work and fundraising focused the congregation's attention on the property. Perhaps the legacy of that effort is the pride the congregation feels in maintaining the property in good condition. Perhaps another effect is the tendency to concentrate our attention on our own congregation and building.



## **Where We Meet**

### **Property and Architecture**

As seen from the street, Thomasburg United Church is a simple brick building with a covered porch, a sidewalk leading from the road, and a large free-standing sign. Built in 1963, it has a traditional sanctuary with fixed pews, and a raised chancel with fixed pulpit and lectern, which present a challenge in planning a non-traditional service or event. We are fortunate in having a good quality piano and an electronic organ. The basement is a multi-purpose space which can be divided with curtains if required, has a raised stage with a small room on either side, one of which is used as a Sunday School room and the other for storage. The kitchen and two washrooms meet the Health Unit requirements.

We want our church to be a welcoming place. We are fortunate to have a good sized parking lot, with access to the Community Hall property next door when needed. The walkways and the sign encourage people to come in. From the vestibule, the whole sanctuary can be seen through a wide double doorway, and there is plenty of space to move around at the rear. The interior is bright, with light oak pews and large windows.

Unfortunately, the building does not meet accessibility standards, providing only a motorized chair-lift to the basement, and railings beside the porch steps. A speaker system in the sanctuary is an asset, with an aging congregation. The speaker system has been our only investment in modern equipment, but recently the minister has shown us, with the use of his computer and an improvised screen, the possibilities for a different worship experience.

The congregation takes pride in the physical condition of the property and building. The Stewards are active in overseeing the upkeep. In periods of time when a paid caretaker is not available, both the janitorial duties and the outside maintenance are done by volunteers, and an annual spring clean-up bee is held.

## **Character of the Congregation**

### **Within the church**

A congregation's stage in life can be compared to that of an individual. Considering its long past and the average age of its current members, Thomasburg United Church can be considered advanced in maturity. Although there is some interest in new activities, with age comes a lower level of energy to act on them. Some members feel pressured because of having to take on more than one duty, and wish there were more people willing to take a turn. In interviews they made suggestions for relieving the situation: requiring fewer members on boards and committees; having fixed terms for all offices; and encouraging people to take their offices seriously when they agree to serve. Many people wished for more members, especially youth and young families. We are concerned about the survival of the church and the absence of young people, but feel helpless to bring about change.

We are not always looking for new programmes or to originate change. However, when a new idea or project is proposed, either by the minister or laypeople, members are very willing to take part as requested, from assisting with the projector to learning new songs and hymns.

In size Thomasburg Church can be considered a “family church” with fewer than fifty active participants. We value the Sunday worship experience and also our connection with one another. We have a strong tradition of loyal attendance at Sunday service. We have a number of strong and imaginative leaders in the congregation, but we do look to our minister for leadership, especially for change.

The spiritual experience of members is diverse, some with long family affiliation with the United Church, others with an evangelical background, including our present minister. It is evident by the commitment of the church family members that our community of faith is providing a way of worship and ideology, cultural values, and a real sense of belonging. Our mission statement is a concise expression of what we strive to be to all members:

“As a community of God’s people, we seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to share the love of God with every person. We provide a setting to experience God’s love and come to understand what it means to follow the living Christ as Saviour and Lord. We will encourage one another to put our faith into action.”

Our action is shown by monthly visits to nursing homes, and by our contributions to the food banks, and to special causes such as Haitian earthquake relief and neighbourhood fire victims. We are reminded of the United Church’s Mission and Service fund by a monthly Minute for Mission, we have regularly met our M&S goal, and for the year of 2010 our M&S goal has increased. Over recent years, although it has been a struggle to reach our church general financial requirements, our congregation to date has met these obligations, by responding with extra fundraising, and increased weekly contributions. We acknowledge the help of our minister, the leadership of the Stewards and the commitment of the congregation.

We appreciate having a well-educated minister, and sermons that teach. We appreciate other learning opportunities such as the Lenten Bible study, the UCW programmes, and the minister’s occasional lessons about the duties of church boards, Presbytery, Conference and General Council. We are most comfortable with a familiar order of worship combined with a fairly informal atmosphere. In spite of our great pleasure in “making a joyful noise unto the Lord”, we are generally not comfortable with clapping or moving about in worship.

As a United Church, we aim to be inclusive, and to accept and welcome everyone, regardless of background or situation, without making them feel obligated. One new member expressed appreciation of being made to feel welcome, but given time to engage

in church life at her own pace without being encouraged to contribute.

When asked “What has Thomasburg Church done for you?” there was a wide range of answers. “Being welcomed” and “feeling needed” were some responses, as well as “knowing you can count on church people when you need them”. Several people mentioned the minister’s support to families in sickness or crisis. Attendance at church “gives one time for reflection”, “teaches us how to live the faith”, “allows me to share my faith with others” and “provides a foundation for daily life”, and in the longer term it “gives children a life-long foundation”. “Continuity”, “consistency”, “habit”, “discipline”, “commitment” and “hope” were all mentioned as satisfying a need.

This church has given many people an opportunity to work together and to take leadership roles. When asked, “What are the most satisfying ways you contribute to our church?” several mentioned working with the Sunday School, with the Official Board, and in the Presbytery or UCW Presbyterial of the wider church. For choir members, singing in the choir tops the list of satisfying ways to contribute; for others, it is using their particular skills, such as making and fixing things, bookkeeping, planning UCW programmes, helping with fundraising events or praying for people in need.

When asked what it is about Thomasburg Church that makes them want to be here, the most common answer was the sense of community among friendly, caring people. Some are attracted by the minister or by the music. Music is most often mentioned as the element of worship that makes us feel connected to God, and several people noted especially the closing “Go now in peace”. The minister’s sermons are significant in connecting us to God by applying the lessons of scripture to everyday experiences. Variety in worship services provides new ways of understanding God, and helps us grow spiritually, as do the joint services with Trinity Roslin and the shared services with area congregations.

Fellowship in the congregation is experienced in many ways – within the UCW, within the choir, in the work of boards and committees, the work bees and after Sunday service when everyone lingers to visit. We hope that everyone has a feeling of belonging and being needed. At social activities such as the Christmas concert and the turkey and ham suppers we enjoy each other’s company while working together.

Thomasburg Church members, in common with many United Church people, are not comfortable trying to communicate our faith in words to our neighbours and friends. Several individuals suggested that we can do so in other ways: by our giving to community needs like the food bank, by offering our church building to community groups, and by inviting non-church-attenders to special events and to Sunday service. Others said that example is the best way of sharing the Gospel without words. “If you live a good life, and your neighbours see that you go to church regularly, that is a way of communicating your faith”.

## **Outside the church**

The Task Force asked people to answer a brief survey on opinions about some social concerns.

*“We are called to live with respect in creation”*

Regarding the environment, responses showed that we are conscientious about saving water and energy, recycling and using the land wisely. People listed both traditional and new techniques, from saving rain water and drying clothes outside to no-till cultivation and compact fluorescent bulbs.

*“We are called to love and serve others”*

Thoughts on how to love and serve other included “treat people with respect” and “try not to judge”. Among the practical responses were “caring for your family”, “visiting nursing homes”, “helping at church and community events”, “donating to charitable causes”, “giving regularly to the church and M&S fund”.

*“We are called to seek justice and resist evil”*

When asked to describe their concerns on a number of social issues, people chose “religion” most often as a priority. Given the average age of the congregation, it is not surprising that many expressed regret for the past when more people attended and supported the churches. Some people commented on the hopeful signs of tolerance among religions in Canada.

Some of those who listed “race and culture” as a concern said that there is still racism in this area; we have not had contact with the great variety of cultures of other areas. Other issues on which several people commented were the widening gap between the incomes of rich and poor, drugs and alcohol, and the stress on health and social assistance funds as the population ages.

On the issue of local sustainability, the majority of comments dealt with the loss of farms and the difficulties faced by farmers and local businesses. Some positive comments mentioned niche markets, the “shop local” initiative, and home-based business, and the fact that in job terms “local” now means the area within driving distance.

### **Looking to the future**

Among the people interviewed, there were a number of wishes for our future: that Thomasburg Church remain viable and stable, and find ways to connect with the residents of Thomasburg Village; that those who attend grow spiritually, loving others without judging them; that being part of this church gives people a wonderful, life-changing experience; that individuals achieve a solid base to help cope with life’s challenges; that we keep our welcoming and friendly atmosphere; that young people show an interest in returning to worship; that we have more faith in our future.

There were also a number of practical wishes: that we not have to do so much fundraising; that Tom continue to minister to us; that we amalgamate with Trinity-Roslin. Some suggestions were offered to help make our church more central to the community: make the building wheel-chair accessible; offer its use to outside groups;

have more events such as music nights; be involved in projects to aid those in need. In order to give financial support to projects outside our own walls, we need to look at funding issues, which could mean cutting expenditures, and perhaps sharing assets, activities and goals with other churches.

## Summary

### STRENGTHS:

- Core group of dedicated loyal members
- Consistent attendance
- Commitment to and love of music
  - Highly qualified and dedicated music leader
- Variety of gifts and abilities
- Excellent property – building is in good repair and meets many of our needs
- Respect and affection for one another
- Excellent cooks!

### WEAKNESSES:

- Advertising the good things that are happening at TUC
- Lack of communication
- Inaccessibility for wheelchairs
- Lack of clear goals/priorities:
  - Financially
  - Programming
  - Modernization of facilities and equipment
- Leadership is aging and their energy resources are depleting
- Need for new energy especially to deal with :
  - Children, youth and young adults
- Committee structure not always successful
- Long term viability due to aging congregation population

All of these strengths and weaknesses give us material to think about in the next phase of the Comprehensive Review process of our pastoral charge.

### Volunteer appreciation at potluck suppers

- budget for committees
- goals and communication
- Christmas Eve service – shorter service, earlier start time??