



## **The Explorer Project**

### **Background**

In September 2014, sparked by conversations about recruitment for future ministry leadership, Toronto Conference Executive approved a new initiative to encourage young adults to consider a ministry vocation. The Project was designed to involve people who have demonstrated leadership in our Church but who have not yet discerned a call to ministry or begun the candidacy process or theological education. The Project does not replace or substitute any part of the candidacy process.

### **The Project**

The Project has grown over the past several years and in 2018 it is anticipated that it will include British Columbia Conference, the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, London Conference, Alberta and Northwest Conference, Saskatchewan Conference and Newfoundland and Labrador Conference as well as Toronto Conference. Final confirmation of participating Conferences will be made by the end of November, 2017. These Conferences will share in providing the necessary financial resources. Each participating Conference will also be asked to identify host sites which would offer an exciting experience of contemporary church identity, mission and ministry.

Each selected Explorer is given an honorarium and their round trip expenses to their site are covered. The Host Sites create a Host Committee and appoint a Mentor.

While not completely age restricted, the plan for this project is to involve people who are in their early twenties. This will be a 3 month experience over summer months. Exact dates may vary from site to site but the common pattern is May through July. A site might involve more than one ministry or mission unit. For example a larger congregation might "twin" with a smaller, healthy ministry or a congregation might "twin" with an outreach ministry. Each participating Conference will select 1 or 2 excellent Explorers for this experience because the Conference will know of their past involvement within the United Church, their leadership and experience to date and their suitability for this experience. Each Explorer will be placed outside his/her home Conference in one of the other participating Conferences. Each Conference will decide upon its selection process.

The first iteration saw three Explorers experience the project and the evaluations from all parties was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the results.

After the results of the first iteration, Toronto Conference Executive proposed a second iteration. Based on the experience of the first year, we completed the recruitment phase earlier and by January we were able to match seven Explorers to their sites. All Explorers completed three month assignments. We held a third iteration during the summer of 2017 and another seven Explorers had a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our church and enter vocational discernment.

### **Anticipated Explorer Project Outcomes**

In creating the Project, the following outcomes were identified:

- Up to 8 already involved younger adult United Church members will be encouraged to consider ministry as a vocation. They will be affirmed as people who are valued and appreciated by their Church and as individuals who have gifts for this vocation
- Ministry sites will have the benefit of meeting these people, benefitting from their shared experience, and being affirmed as healthy communities who can help develop and mentor future leadership. They may be assisted in their own ministries to develop something new and they will experience the service of this healthy spirited young person.
- Committee members will experience the privilege of relationship with vibrant younger members of our Church and be encouraged by their commitment to discipleship.
- Whether the experience leads to a sense of vocation to the orders of ministry or not, we trust it will deepen the sense of joy in discipleship for all who are involved.
- All involved will have an expanded sense of The United Church of Canada, gaining insight into the diversity and distinctiveness of ministry in other parts of the body.

### **Leadership by Conference Appointed Lead Staff**

This project was designed to have low central administration and its success depends on the careful work done by Lead Staff appointed by the participating Conferences. These Explorer Staff may or may not be employees of the Conference. The Lead Staff were the prime contact throughout the summers for the host site and Explorer within their Conferences. Processes for selecting Explorer candidates and Host sites are designed to suit the Conferences' different contexts.

From past participants, we have heard:

#### **From Explorers**

*Has the Project helped you reflect upon ministry as a vocation?*

"I knew the traditional ministry path was never for me, but it was very interesting to see how I could be a minister in another context....I am still not sure whether I am ready to pursue this path of ministry, however without this opportunity I don't know whether I would have considered it so seriously, or really know what such a position would be like."

"The project allowed me to see what ministry is like on a day-to-day basis....I am beginning my discernment process and while that was something that has been on my radar for quite some time, I feel as though the Explorers' Project was the catalyst for me beginning it at this point in time. I feel if I had not participated in the program, I might have continued to put off discernment, or potentially never have completed it at all."

"Illuminated the ministry of *everyone* – how congregants engage in ministry....He formerly thought he would like to start out as a military chaplain but has become more interested in pastoral ministry because of this experience.

"Our Explorer said that this experience has helped her to reflect on ministry as a vocation. She knew that it was more than Sunday but was not sure what it entailed. After this experience she felt that she would reflect strongly about pursuing ministry as a vocation."

#### **From Mentors**

*Would you recommend this experience to others?*

"Absolutely! It was a great experience for our ministry and we hope that it was equally as great for the Explorer."

“It was a refreshing experience for our pastoral charge. The participant brought energy and strong leadership skills, and a strong commitment to his Christian faith and this helped new initiatives happen.”

“Absolutely, yes! It gave the pastoral charge an opportunity to participate in the discernment (and training) of future ministry personnel and the people took that role seriously.”

“Yes—gives the congregations a connection with the wider church, and hope for the future of the church. Great opportunity to encourage young adults to pursue the vocation of ministry.”

“Absolutely! It was encouraging to the congregation, to witness and walk alongside a young adult thinking about ministry. It was inspiring to hear him talk about his faith and his sense of call to ministry.....Pick us again!”

“I think that the Project was an energizer for our congregation. It allowed them to see themselves through new eyes....”

### **From Host Sites**

*Would you recommend this experience to others?*

“DEFINITELY! I think the Explorer program is an opportunity for youth within the church to expand their awareness of our communities of faith across Canada but also of different ways that faith is being lived as the hands and feet of Christ doing sacred work. We would happily host another Explorer in the future.”

Yes. Not only does it contribute to the process by which the United Church of Canada recruits potential new leaders, but also enables the congregation to see itself as part of the future of the church.”

“Yes—brings new life and energy into a congregation, connects us with the larger church. Gave the host churches a sense of purpose that they were contributing to the Explorer’s learning experience.”

“YES. It allows younger questioning adults to see that they have a place in the church where they can belong....It opens their eyes to new ways of faith sharing and a reaffirmation that the United Church of Canada is willing to go the extra mile to see that we embrace and appreciate who they are and what they stand for.”

### **2018 The Explorer Project Continues**

This year the partner Conferences will be Toronto Conference, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, London Conference, Alberta and Northwest Conference, British Columbia Conference and Saskatchewan Conference. These Conferences will recruit Explorers and provide sites to host an equal number of Explorers from other Conferences.



## The Explorer Project, 2018



### Host Site Committee and Mentor Responsibilities

Thank you for applying to be a Host Site and Mentor for an Explorer this year. While you have been given some general information about the Project, we would like to detail your specific responsibilities.

#### Host Site Committee

Once you have been matched with an Explorer and given his/her contact information, you are asked to work with your Mentor to arrange to have a first conversation between your committee, the mentor, and your Explorer, at least two months before the Explorer arrives. We suggest using Skype or Facetime, but a conference call could also work. The Explorer will have been asked to develop learning goals, ready to share those with you at the meeting. Those goals can be refined together during the meeting. We will have matched you and an Explorer because we have seen a fit between your expressed interests and opportunities, but this early communication will help you all clarify expectations. Further communication is welcome, of course, but this early "meeting" is required.

You have agreed to arrange appropriate accommodation and will confirm your plans for housing, meals and travel with your Conference Lead Staff person. The Conference Lead Staff normally visits the accommodation site prior to the Explorer arriving.

During your first conversation with the Explorer, please be ready to give as much information as you have to date about the opportunities you have identified for the Explorer to experience ministry in your context. We expect that this conversation will help you develop your early ideas.

Both your committee and the Mentor will be engaging the Explorer in regular conversation during their months' experience. We suggest that you meet at least twice a month but you will probably need some of you to meet more regularly with the Explorer in the opening weeks. Your Conference Lead Staff will talk with you about your plans for welcoming the Explorer and helping them settle in. While the Mentor may not attend all of your Committee's meetings, please ensure that he or she is part of your first meeting on site with the Explorer, and your last meeting. At the end of each of the first two months, you and your Explorer will complete a month's end reflection and email it to the Project's Co-ordinator, Carol Hancock [chancock@bell.net] and your Conference Lead Staff. Near the end of the last month, you will be asked to complete an evaluation form, as will the Explorer and the Mentor. Throughout the summer you are welcome to contact your Conference Lead Staff with any questions or needs you might have. If that staff person is to be away on holidays, he or she will have provided an alternate contact to you.



The Project is providing an honorarium of \$5000. to each Explorer. At the beginning of each month, the Explorer will be given \$1200. of this amount, with the balance being sent upon the receipt of the final evaluation forms. All evaluations are to be sent to Carol Hancock [chancock@bell.net] and copied to your Conference Lead Staff.

These Explorers are being encouraged to discern whether they might have a call to ordered ministry. They are young adults who have already demonstrated leadership within The United Church of Canada and we are excited about the gifts and skills that they will bring to your site. They are not additional staff for your site, but they are talented people who are encouraged to explore new dimensions of ministry, as well as contribute the experience they already have. While they have been told to expect an average week's "workload" for the summer, they are encouraged to take time to learn and reflect as part of their experience. You can help them consider the elements of a balanced life.

We hope that this will be an enriching time for all of you; may you find joy in this experience and may you all find it refreshing and meaningful.

### **Mentor Responsibilities**

Once you have been matched with an Explorer and given his/her contact information, you are asked to work with your Host Committee to arrange to have a first conversation between your committee, the mentor, and your Explorer, at least two months before the Explorer arrives. We suggest using Skype or Facetime, but a conference call could also work. We have asked the Host Committee to take the lead on organizing that, but please ensure that this gets organized. The Explorer will have been asked to develop learning goals, ready to share those with you all at the meeting. Those goals can be refined together during the meeting.

You will see from the information above that the Host Committee will also be having reflective conversations with the Explorer and it will be important for you and the Host committee to stay in good communication. Between you, you will have to sort out who does much of the organizing for the Explorer's experience. Each site has worked this out as best suited them, but if you, as Mentor, are also the Ministry Personnel for this site, you will likely be instrumental to the planning!

Some mentors have attended most, if not all, of the Host Site Committee meetings. We are not asking you to prepare a separate evaluation until the end of the Project but you are always welcome to contact your Conference Lead Staff throughout the summer. He or she will be your "go to" person if you have any concerns.

You will be contacted by the Project Co-ordinator, Carol Hancock, to invite you to join a conference call amongst this year's Mentors. This is meant to be a time to share any questions or ideas you each might have, before your Explorers arrive. We hope to have several past mentors join that call as well, to be a resource to you.

You are asked to meet regularly with your Explorer, perhaps weekly at the beginning and a little less frequently as your summer unfolds. If you will be away on vacation during the time of the project, please ensure that your Explorer has someone else to talk to in your place.

As Mentor, and someone who is experienced in the practice of ministry, it is our hope that your conversations with the Explorer will focus on this time as an opportunity for them to

discern whether or not they might be experiencing a call to ordered ministry. We have been clear that this is a priority for the Project, but also that we hope the experience will encourage their continued leadership in the United Church, whether this is their vocation or not. We believe that with your help the Explorer can discover more about their gifts and also identify areas in which he or she can grow.

We encourage the Explorers to stretch beyond their current comfort zones and explore areas of ministry that are still new to them. Your support and encouragement will play a major role in their learning. Because this Project is not connected to any part of our church's formal candidacy process, we have deliberately called you "mentor" and not "supervisor" but if you have the latter experience, you may have good tools that will apply to this situation as well.

While the Lead Staff of the Project for your Conference will be your primary resource, you are welcome to contact the Project Co-ordinator at any time. [chancock@bell.net]







## Host Site(s) Information Form 2018

**If more than one site will be participating in the Explorer Project, please include information for each site. If you are selected as a Host Site, this information will be provided to your Explorer.**

Name of Pastoral Charge/Mission Site:

Address:

Phone number(s)

Email Address:

Ministry Personnel [Name(s) and contact information]

Host Committee Members [Name(s) and contact information]

Mentor [Name and contact information]

Main Contact for the Explorer Project:

Please describe the focus of your Ministry/Mission:

Why are you interested in being a Host Site?

Describe some of the particular opportunities and experience that your site can offer to an Explorer:

Describe the accommodation you will provide

What sort of travel will be required within the pastoral charge/community? Will the Explorer need transportation beyond public transportation?

Most Explorers will spend about 3 months at the Host Site, between May 1 and August 31, 2016. Exact dates will be negotiated. What would be your preferred start date and end date?