

## **The Five Practices**

### **Introduction**

Our task over the next 90 minutes or so is to introduce you to the 5 Practices of Fruitful Congregations...which are: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Service and Mission and Extravagant Generosity.

The Core Planning Team talked quite a bit about how we wanted to introduce these 5 practices to you. We wondered about what kind of a mood you might be in by early Friday afternoon, and therefore what you might best respond to...And immediately we threw out the following two ideas: 1) the presentation of formal academic papers in support of and against the 5 practices...and 2) a panel of experts up front here debating the validity of the 5 practices in the Maritimes context...

(pause)

What we chose to do instead is to introduce you to the 5 practices in 5 dramatic and moving theatrical vignettes...

...no cost has been spared...

...casting alone took us months and months to find the most talented, finely-tuned, theatrical artists that money could buy...

...we have been here in Sackville for over 3 weeks now, struggling through a rigorous schedule of night and day rehearsals...

...thousands and thousands of dollars were spent on set design, costumes, hair, and make-up...

All of this so that we can bring to you here...at this time...and at this place...the world premiere of our vignettes...entitled..."The Five Practices"!

### **Radical Hospitality**

Announcer: "Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Radical Hospitality."

Narrator: The lights come up on an adhoc stage set for a game show pilot. It is obvious that the producers do not have a lot of money and they are shooting in someone's living room. In the beginning the only two players on set are the producer/director (Hal) and the host (Wink Sajak).

Hal

*(a young up and comer who is staging this pilot with money on his credit cards and loans from his parents.)*

Come on Wink, you can't back out on us now, we have to go to tape or we lose the studio space and who knows when my mom and dad will allow us the money to shoot another pilot.

Wink

*(a man meant for the cheesy role of a game show host)*

All I have to say Hal is that I am not used to working under these conditions. I mean, no star dressing room...the catering truck is from the local subway shop...and if I'm not mistaken the make up man is your cousin Bertha.

Hal

I told you when you got involved in this project Wink that we were just going to shoot the pilot on a low budget and then, hopefully, one of the networks will pick us up and from there the sky's the limit!

Wink

*(capitulating)*

Well okay then...but only because you're my sister's kid.

Exits

*Enter Tabitha the Contestant Co-ordinator*

Tabitha

Hey, Hal...bad news.

Hal

What could possibly go wrong now.

Tabitha

Well...

Hal

Go ahead...don't hold back.

Tabitha

Well...it seems that the bus that was transporting our contestants out from downtown has stopped at a mini mart in Moncton and refuses to go any further.

Hal

Why the heck not!?

Tabitha

Well...it seems that your Visa card is over its limit and they say that unless you come to them with full payment...in cash...they aren't going to be bringing the contestants one

more stinking yard closer to your darn old TV shoot...and that last part was a direct quote.

Hal

You have got to be kidding me...I told them I would settle up on Monday morning first thing.

Tabitha

Nope...I'm definitely sure that I am not kidding

Hal

Well what do we do now?

Tabitha

(a shrug of the shoulders)

Hal

I mean we have to have contestants or the whole shoot is off and I'll never get this all arranged again.

Tabitha

(a shrug of the shoulders)

Hal

You know Tabitha shrugging your shoulders is no help to me whatsoever.

Tabitha

(a shrug of the shoulders)

Hal

Say something...I mean you're the contestant coordinator...so coordinate already!!!

Tabitha

Okay...okay...okay...let me think...let me think...let me think...let me think...let me think...

Hal

Stop saying "let me think" and think already!!

*(They both think together for a moment and then Tabitha gets a brainstorm)*

Tabitha

I've got it!

Hal

What?

Tabitha

The solution...I've got the solution Hal!

Hal

Good what is it?

Tabitha

We go out onto the streets of this neighbourhood and we bring in people to be our contestants.

Hal

Right off the street?

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Without screening them?

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Without testing their suitability...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

...their intellectual makeups...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

...their psychological profiles...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Just like that...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Anybody at all...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Just welcome them in.

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

...willy nilly...just like that?

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Tabitha...

Tabitha

Yup!

Hal

Stop saying “yup!”

Tabitha

Okay.

Hal

This is a radical idea you’re thinking about you know...

Tabitha

I know

Hal

Just opening wide the doors of our set and letting just anybody come in and take part in our show.

Tabitha

Neat isn’t it?

Hal

You know it is kind of neat.

Tabitha

Yup.

Hal

Tabitha

Tabitha

Yup, I get it...no more Yup.

Hal

Thank you.

Tabitha

No probs.

Hal

This idea of yours Tabitha...its dangerous you know.

Tabitha

Dangerous how?

Hal

Well...opening your doors to just anybody and welcoming them in willy nilly...that could be dangerous.

Tabitha

Or exciting?

Hal

Exciting...how?

Tabitha

Because you never know what you're gonna get.

Hal

That's the dangerous part.

Tabitha

That's the exciting part too.

Hal

I'll have to run it by Wink.

Tabitha

Why?

Hal

Because he's the one who is going to have to interact with these people we bring in from... wherever.

Tabitha

I guess.

Hal

*(calling off stage)*

Wink can you come in here for a moment please.

*Wink enters...his face half made up with stage makeup (very tanned).*

Wink

Yeah boss?

Hal

We have a problem Wink.

Wink

My close up lens didn't show up?

Hal

No...it's here.

Wink

Thank goodness.

Hal

But the contestants aren't going to be able to make it.

Wink

*(panicked)*

Why not?

Hal

Not important why not...they just can't make it.

Wink

So everything's called off then?

Hal

Not really...no. Tabitha has an idea of how to make sure the show goes on.

Wink

*(turning to Tabitha)*

How?

Tabitha

We bring in new contestants...untried contestants...untested contestants...exciting contestants...right off the street!

Wink

*(thinks for a moment)*

I quit.

Hal

No you don't.

Wink

Yes, I do...There is no way in 'you know where' that you are going to get me to host a show with untried and untested contestants...I mean who knows what they might say...how they might act...they don't know how we do things around here...they don't know how things are supposed to be done...I mean, Hal, are you crazy...they could wreak havoc on the whole game show genre...the whole tried and true way that game shows have been done for centuries...eons...even dozens of years!

Tabitha

Yeah, ain't it great!

Wink

That's the problem with the young people who want to take over the game show circuit...they have no respect for tradition...for how we have always done things...I mean could you imagine if you pitched this crazy idea to my name sake Wink Martindale...to Monty Hall...to Alex Trebek...or...or...Heaven forbid...to (*hand on his heart*)...Bob Barker.

Hal

Calm down Wink

Wink

If we are willing to let everything we stand for just get swept away in a torrent of (*shuddering*) newness...then eventually we don't stand for anything.

Hal

I'm not asking you to give up everything you stand for Wink. I am definitely not asking you to change the way you do things. I love the traditional ways...the traditional formats...But isn't there a way to hold on to the way things were...to do things the way they were...but to be open enough and welcoming enough to be different in how we are when we do them?

Wink

(*pondering*)

But it's dangerous...

Tabitha

(*gently*)

...but exiting...

Wink

...it's the unknown...

Tabitha

...but rooted in the known...

Wink

*(scared)*

But how will I fit in...what if there is no place for me and people like me?

*(pause)*

Hal

There will always be a place for a classic like you Wink.

*(pause as the three folks look at each other)*

Wink

Then let's get to it...

Hal

Tabitha you go out and welcome in some new contestants...

Tabitha exits...

Wink, you get back to make-up...

Wink exits...

*(yelling after him)*

And tell Cousin Bertha to tone it down on the number 3 bronzer!

*(Hal looks around the set for a minute...pondering...)*

This is going to be great!

Exits running...

Announcer: Radical Christian Hospitality describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community; an outward focus, risking a reaching out to those not yet known, offering a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, to a willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of all newcomers.

### **Passionate Worship**

Announcer: “Vibrant, fruitful, growing churches offer Passionate Worship that connects people to God and to one another.”

Narrator: The scene is a Worship Committee meeting of St. Bertha’s United Church in downtown Anywhere. Around the table are the few and finite who represent the rather large committee with attendance issues. They have gathered here this evening to discuss the new minister’s first service and decide just how they should proceed.

Meriwhether Jones

*(a petite but powerful matriarch-in-training of the church who holds the traditions she was raised in and that were embraced by her parents as sacrosanct in the church..about 40-50 years of age)*

In the absence of the Chairperson this evening I call this meeting of the Worship Committee for St. Bertha's United Church to order. Ronald Birch cannot be here this evening to Chair the meeting because of his son's hockey game so he called me this morning and asked me to take over for him. And, of course, I am always too ready to step into the breach when others are not able to fulfill their obligations to our wonderful church. *(pause)* Now, let us begin with prayer...Who would like to offer an appropriate prayer for the beginning of our meeting this evening?

*(no one steps forward)*

Anyone at all?

*(again no one)*

Fine, I will offer a prayer...Let us bow our heads...**Father** God, we have gathered here this evening to try and figure out how to proceed with our new minister. Yesterday we witnessed his first service with us and already many of us can see where the problems lie. Help us, who have seen our schedules clear enough to gather here this evening, come up with a solution for the problems which face us. In Jesus name...Amen.

*(pause)*

Now, Sophie, would you please call the role.

Sophie Wannamaker

*(dressed all in pink and very committed to bringing pink food to every meeting that she ever attends)*

Well yes Meriwether I will take our role call in just a moment, but first I wanted to make sure that everyone was aware that I put the coffee on in the kitchen before our meeting began so that everyone can enjoy that. And I also brought a wonderful Raspberry Chiffon Cake from a new recipe I discovered this week in "Ladies House and Whatzit" magazine. So please help yourselves to a big piece and enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.

*(pause...no one moves)*

Well then, I can see from looking around the table that only 5 of us were able to attend this evening's special meeting. I guess Monday evenings are not the best nights for folks because of the choir rehearsing that night and whatnot. Let's see now we have Jeremy Fortnight, Samantha Golightly, and Theodore Fengartner...plus you and myself of course Meriwether which means we have 5 in total.

*(she sits down)*

Meriwhether

Yes...well...you know how I feel about attendance at these meetings...If you are not planning on attending the meetings, then say “no” when you are asked to be on the committee. But that is a subject for another day...Our main concern, and therefore our only agenda item for this evening is to decide what we are going to do about our new minister...the Rev. Houghton.

Theodore Fengartner

*(a man who is used to getting his own way and tends to “go up against” Meriwhether just for sport)*

I think he’s great...he’s lively...he kept me awake that’s for sure...we were out of there by 11:58...so I don’t see what the problem is...he’s only been here a week for heaven’s sake.

Jeremy Fortnight

*(no nonsense, underspoken...usually answers in one word or less)*

I agree.

Meriwhether

So I suppose it didn’t bother you that he took it upon himself to change the Order of Service without even running it by this committee.

Theodore

And what would we have said about his changes if he did come to this committee.

Meriwhether

Nevertheless there is protocol that must be followed.

Samantha Golightly

*(a young mother of three kids all below the age of 5)*

I think sometimes there is too much protocol around this place. We need more change to keep us fresh.

Meriwether

Fresh...Fresh!! I suppose you call having the children involved in communion fresh!

Samantha

My oldest Luke talked about that experience for the whole day yesterday. He actually started to ask us about communion and why we do it.

Sophie

Oooo, that's wonderful...what did you tell him.

Samantha

*(pause)*

Well, I told him that I would make an appointment with Rev. Houghton as soon as I can so that I know what to answer him.

Meriwether

Hmphf!

Theodore

He did a great service for the first time out. This is not the easiest church to serve if you remember back to some of the situations we've been in over the last decade or so. Why don't we just give him some leeway and the benefit of the doubt and see where he takes us.

Meriwether

Because we can't let it get out of hand. There is a way to be the church and he is not that way.

Sophie

But that's what we asked for Meriwether...we asked for someone who is innovative and new in his ways of doing things.

Meriwether

We most certainly did not...

Sophie

Excuse me Meriwether, but I was on the Search Committee and you were not, so I think I know better what we asked of the man when he was hired.

Meriwether

So you asked him to come in and ruin our church with all of his new ideas...I mean really...clapping from the pulpit...forcing me to cross over the aisle and hug someone on the other side...If I wanted to hug someone on the other side of the aisle, then I would sit on the other side of the aisle.

*(The door opens and Rev. Houghton [a man of about 55-60 years of age] interrupts.)*

Rev. Houghton

Knock knock...How are you all? I was just out in the sanctuary meeting with the choir and getting to know them a little bit and thought I would stick my head in here as well and see how you folks are doing?

Meriwhether

We are fine, thank you very much.

Rev. Houghton

That's wonderful.

*(comes further into the room and sits down)*

Now which committee is this meeting here tonight. You know I'm still chasing my tail trying to figure when everybody meets and for what.

Sophie

Why this is the Worship Committee meeting Reverend. Can I offer you a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

Rev. Houghton

No thank you very much Sophie I just finished my dinner.

*(Sophie sits down upset)*

The Worship Committee?...I must have my nights all mixed up...I thought the Worship Committee met the third Tuesday of every month.

Jeremy

Does.

Rev. Houghton

Then I guess I'm confused.

Theodore

Meriwether called an emergency meeting tonight so that we could discuss something very dire.

Rev. Houghton

Dire...well that sounds...dire I guess is the only word. Can I be of any assistance?

Meriwether

Samantha

*(simultaneously)*

No!

Yes!

Rev. Houghton

Okay...Well I always like to begin with the 'yesses' so let's start there...Samantha?

Samantha

Well, there seems to be some concern around the table...

Theodore

Not all the way around...

Samantha

...that the worship service you gave yesterday was a little too...

*(she looks to the others for help)*

Rev. Houghton

A little too...

Samantha

Yes...a little too...

*(looks again to the others for help, but no one rises to the occasion)*

...well, how would you put it Meriwhether?

Meriwhether

*(unflinchingly)*

Modern...new fangled...touchy feely...loud...gregarious...funny...I felt more like I was  
at a night club instead of my church.

Rev. Houghton

Wow...well I certainly am sorry that you felt that way...Let me assure you that causing you any kind of consternation was the farthest thing away from my intentions yesterday morning.

Meriwether

Listen...I don't know what they told you on the Search Committee that hired you but we are a traditional church that likes things done a certain way.

Rev. Houghton

That's exactly what they did tell me when they hired me...and its one of the reasons I chose to come here to St. Bertha's United...because of your upholding of our great traditions.

Meriwether

Then what do you call that spectacle yesterday morning.

Rev. Houghton

I call it church.

Meriwether

Well it wasn't like any church I have ever attended.

Rev. Houghton

But it still was a traditional worship service...we gathered...we heard the word of God...we celebrated the eucharist...we...

Meriwhether

*(cutting him off)*

We clapped...we danced up the aisles...we hugged and shook hands with strangers...

Rev. Houghton

But I didn't ask anyone to dance up the aisles...and she was only six...and I certainly didn't ask anyone to clap...those were just spontaneous expressions of spirit in church...that should be celebrated not contained.

Meriwhether

A little containment when it comes to church doesn't hurt.

Samantha

There were parts of the service that I really enjoyed Rev. Houghton...especially when the children got to take part in serving communion. My little Luke has not stopped talking about it.

Rev. Houghton

Yes, I got your message and we'll set up a visit for next week sometime okay?

Samantha

That would be great.

Meriwhether

So the idea then is to just keep adding new things to the service until we regulars won't even recognize where we are on Sunday mornings.

Rev. Houghton

Not at all...The idea is to go on a fishing expedition and uncover where the passions of this congregation lay.

Meriwhether

Passions! Passions! Rev. Houghton, there is a place for passions and it most certainly is not in the church.

Rev. Houghton

Mrs. Jones, when we come to the church...we commit ourselves to a church community...and every time we gather it is a whole new journey.

The early church was made up a bunch of ordinary folks...ordinary folks who experienced extraordinary things when they came together to worship. And one of the most extraordinary things they experienced when they came together was the breaking of moulds.

Because most of us grow up with various mindsets...we come to church with mindsets as well...and when we begin to entertain the idea of community it really says that we may have to go back and break the moulds of our mindsets so that there is room for everyone at worship and not just ourselves.

Now, into your living, breathing community of church that you have been members of for so long comes this man who brings in difference and change...I bring in what church means to me and it is our job together to marry what church means to me with what church means to each of you...and to every single person who comes through our doors...Because every time a new person enters our community we are born again...we become new...because we have new energy...new direction and a new force that is born from their presence with us.

Because I know church to be one way in my heart and you know it to be another in yours. You may have been used to shirts, and suits and ties; and I'm used to just come as you are. And so we become a different community, in a different time...but that doesn't mean we discard God, or tradition, or any of the things you know and love about your church...we don't throw out the whole tree...instead we just learn how to dig a little

around the roots...how to invest some new fertilizers...and then we sit back and see  
where God takes us.

Meriwhether

Well...I don't know about all that.

Rev. Houghton

But will you give me some time to show you what that is all about? Will you stand by  
me and help me to help us find our new way?

Jeremy

I'm in...

Theodore

Me too...

Samantha

Us three through seven...

Sophie

Oh you explained that so well...Let me go and get you a piece of my Raspberry Chiffon  
Cake...

*She jumps up and leaves to the kitchen*

Rev. Houghton

And how about you Mrs. Jones?

Meriwhether

Well...I suppose I can give it a few weeks or so...but you just remember that I have your home number on my speed dial so I'll be calling you!

Rev. Houghton

And I promise to welcome every one of your calls.

Announcer: Passionate Worship means worship that connects people to God, worship that people enter into with expectancy, and with the anticipation that God desires to speak to them and connect to them. Passionate Worship is authentic, connecting, and sustaining.

### **Intentional Faith Development**

Announcer: Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Intentional Faith Development.

Narrator

On pages 66 and 67 of the book “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” there is a kind of a side bar article that tells the experiences of one particular church around the issue of Intentional Faith Development in their church...it reads...

The pastor and staff of a mid-sized congregation noticed that while the church received many new visitors, and a high percentage of them were joining the church, nevertheless attendance remained steady month after month. For several years the church had seen growth in attendance, and they couldn't figure out why it was leveling off now. The church practiced hospitality with excellence, with visitors and new members feeling welcomed at worship and into membership. But then after a few months, visitors and new members would drift away, become less consistent in attendance, and fall away altogether. To understand the situation better, the minister visited with some members who had joined in the last several months.

He discovered that people felt welcomed and supported when they first visited the church, and continued to feel a sense of belonging in worship. But when they tried to become part of Sunday School classes, men's organizations, choirs, and Bible studies, the groups felt cliquish and uninterested in welcoming new people. Even after some months of trying, they felt at the margins in these smaller groups and ministries. One woman said, "Before I moved here, I was kitchen chief in my old church for years. I didn't expect to do that again here, but I hoped to join the cooking team. When I showed up to help with the dinner, they handed me napkins and told me to put them on the tables, and then I just stood around by myself the rest of the evening. I felt like they didn't need me or want me."

The minister and staff soon realized that "the front door" was working well as people felt invited and welcomed. But they were slipping out "the back door" because they were discovering too many of "the middle doors" were closed tight.

They began a series of teaching events and lessons in the adult classes, mission teams, service organizations, choirs, and Bible studies to try to move the culture of hospitality deeper into the life of the church. After some months, they noticed that the small groups began to grow, and with them the worship attendance began to trend up again. Most new members will not feel like they really belong to the church until they find meaningful connections in small groups beyond the worship experience. Are your church's "middle doors" open?

*(pause)*

In March and April we included in the weekly send out from the Conference office an invitation for you to forward to us any innovative, successful, wonderful, joy filled, small group gatherings that you are holding as part of your church's current ministries. What we give you now is a kind of "altar call" for those ideas...where we can dramatically testify to what we have that is already working and thereby hopefully highlight for you what this idea of "Intentional Faith Development" is all about.

From the Milltown - Upper Mills Pastoral Charge

Christians come in all shapes and sizes. Some walk to church, some drive to church, and at Milltown United Church in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, some even crawl to church. When our minister and her husband became new parents, they quickly began to realize the challenges of taking an active wee one to church on Sunday morning. Parents of our youngest adherents often find it difficult to relax during a regular worship service as they try to calm the crying and contain the toddling. So, our church decided to offer a worship experience geared toward babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and those who love them. We call it Worship for Wee Ones and advertise it as a time "where babbling is expected and fussiness is accepted."

During this time, parents and wee ones gather on playmats and cushions for one hour once a month. Our time begins with special prayers, action songs and storytelling. We end with a time for snacks, free play and much-needed adult conversation.

This small group for extra-small people is meeting the spiritual needs of many who would otherwise be hesitant to take part in church life. It's not uncommon for church regulars sans wee ones to join us because they simply enjoy the energy of the group. So, at Milltown United we're trading coffee and cookies for Num Nums and juice boxes – at least for a wee while.

(pause)

From St. Paul's United Church in Spryfield we heard...

At St. Paul's United Church, Spryfield we formed a Prayer Circle in October 2009. We extended an invitation to anyone who felt a desire to pray with and for others to meet once a week on Wednesday evenings for one hour. Ten people came to the first meeting. At the beginning we took time to talk about what would make everyone feel safe and comfortable in this group, and to share our hopes, fears, and expectations. We also shared our memories of learning to pray and introduced various prayer practices, such as prayers of thanksgiving, arrow prayers, intercessory prayer, and the breath prayer. A helpful resource for getting started was *A Praying Congregation* by Jane Vennard. As we became more comfortable with each other and with praying in a group we began to spend less time talking about prayer and more time actually praying together. We pray in a circle, passing around a "talking stone." When the stone is passed to you, you can pray out loud or silently. When you are finished you pass the stone to the next one in the circle. Numbers declined as we approached Christmas and the nights became longer. But we still have a committed core group who meet weekly, and others who join us when they are able. It is truly a blessing to be able to come together with others as we continue to learn about prayer and pray together for our congregation and our local and global community.

(pause)

From Sackville United Church we heard...



### **Spiritual Journey Group**

*"Indeed God is not very far from any one of us, for it is in God that we live and move and have our very being." -Acts 17:27*

Many of us long to deepen our relationship with God and to live out of the desire for that relationship. Yet we often find we need structure and prayerful support and guidance as we attempt to remain committed to our intention and yearning for God.

*A Spiritual Journey Group* is a small group of friends (3-5) who meet on a regular basis (usually monthly) to share as they wish of their spiritual journey (where they have experienced the Holy in their daily living; feelings of connection or disconnection; feelings of gratitude and feelings of struggle). The group supports each other through deep listening, silent prayer and compassionate response and encouragement. There is no pressure to share beyond one's comfort. The meeting follows a rhythm of silence, sharing, response and prayer.

Two Spiritual Journey Groups have come together (over the past 18 months) at Sackville United Church and offer these comments:

*“The listening, silence, prayer which this spiritual journey affords - I experience as a genuine oasis.”*

*“For me the Spiritual Journey Group is an opportunity to feel more attuned to and connected in my faith. I appreciate the attentiveness to self, to God and to others. I find it prayerful, enjoyable, and manageable. This group touches my heart and helps me keep my spiritual bearings.”*

*“I find the SJG to be a great opportunity to refresh and reenergize spiritually. It helps me to let go of worries and anxiety and find ways to manage better, that I hadn't thought of before.”*

Each Fall we extend an invitation to the congregation to meet and be introduced to this way of being together. Those who wish to explore and share their spiritual journey in the company of others begin new groups or, if numbers are small, established groups may receive a new member. We look forward to continuing to grow in our spiritual life through our Spiritual Journey Groups.

(pause)

From St. Andrews in Truro we heard...

We in St. Andrew's in Truro have an excellent Bible Study group that has been strong for many years. But there is also (Shh.) a group of senior women who meet every second week in various homes. This group is a private one, for several reasons: we meet in members homes and sit around kitchen tables - easy for people to hear one another, and eight is just the right number - more would not fit around our tables! Also, the group is confidential, and have grown to love each other like sisters! OK, we do have a light

lunch, but we also study!! We have studied many different books over the years - the "40 Day Journey" by Kathleen Norris but we enjoyed Joyce Rupp much more!

(pause)

From the Bideford Pastoral Charge we heard...

This is a story of a Bible study group that evolved into an outreach group, caring for the pastoral needs of community members; a social justice group- voicing their concerns about health care issues; and an advocacy group that uses its collective voice to speak up for those with no voice ie. handicapped individuals.

Three years ago a small group of 5 women gathered in the church hall to begin their study of the scriptures for the week. We gathered around a table for coffee and a time of checking in with each other...and then spent 90 minutes discussing the lections for the week and finding places where they intersected with our lives. Over the three years we have changed our location several times to accommodate the needs of various members- sick spouse, wheel chair accessibility, desire to offer hospitality. We have grown in number over the three years where our average attendance is now 12 members. We have also grown in respect to our vision of our ministry in this place.

Out of the scriptures has come our increasing awareness of the call to be about caring for all of God's children. Several projects have evolved from this small group. There is a group now who organizes the monthly work time at the Salvation Army Lunch Program in Summerside. Most of the Bible study members are involved in making prayer shawls and prayer beads for members of the community who are going through a difficult time, or who are celebrating a milestone. Recognizing that as we age, there is a tendency...due to health or relocation...to become isolated from the community, this group took on the task of organizing, preparing and serving a turkey dinner during Advent for Seniors. It was a great opportunity for those who are unable to get out for church on a regular basis to come to worship, to celebrate God's love, and to share in a social time with long time friends.

The group has made 'Care' Baskets for members within the community who have been struggling this year. Some baked, some contributed lotion, others contributed books, and others prepared the basket. The recipients expressed thankfulness that someone took the time to care.

We have also become more social justice minded over the years and when one of our group brought our attention to the debilitating cost of a drug used to treat macular degeneration...we began a letter writing campaign to government officials and wrote letters to the editor in the local newspapers.

In addition we have advocated for assistance being given to a family with a handicapped child so that adequate transportation could be more accessible.

This is a story about a small group of women who came together to study the Bible and discovered that there is much more to being a Christian than going to church. They discovered that together they can do so much more than one or two alone. This group has served to bring the members of a three point charge into fellowship with one another...working together to serve God. All members would agree that this has been a life-giving group for themselves as they bring hope to others.

(pause)

And from the Three Harbours Pastoral Charge we heard about 2 great groups...

“Creative Cluster”

“Creative Cluster” is a group that meets each Tuesday from 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the Three Harbours Pastoral Charge, from September through June. It might be described as a book club, because we do read a book, aloud, and in fact are currently reading, “With or Without God” by Gretta Vosper. It might be portrayed as a support group, because we each have the opportunity to share our highlights and our lowlights from the prior week during our time together. It might be depicted as a place for nurture, because we often share food and ideas - both personal and church related. The current members of “Creative Cluster”, however, describe it as a saving grace in our lives, for in those three brief hours we find peace in a hectic week, wisdom in answer to our questions, and affirmation in response to our desire for renewal in our lives and in our church!

and...

“Beach Ministry”

In the summer of 2009, Three Harbours Pastoral Charge went to the beach! That’s right, we took church beyond the doors of our sanctuaries, and out to the sandy shores of Blue Sea Beach in Malagash. We advertised in church, in community, and at local tourist spots; encouraging people to discover the joy of faith and fun in the sun. We offered our beach ministry on four Sunday evenings in July and August with only one being rained out. The people who came enjoyed wonderful fellowship, great singing, an opportunity to swim, a chance to feast on roasted hot dogs and smores, and a few mosquitos - but we probably shouldn’t mention those! This summer, our beach ministry will continue at the beach in Fox Harbour, with the sound of lapping waves, the feel of sand between our toes, and our church family sharing in food and fellowship - it just doesn’t get any better than that!

ONSCREEN:

Intentional Faith Development refers to the purposeful learning in community that helps the followers of Jesus mature in faith, such as Bible studies, Sunday school classes, short-term topical studies, and support groups that apply the faith to particular life challenges.”

### **Risk Taking Service and Mission**

Announcer: Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Risk-Taking Service and Mission.

Narrator: The scene is a dress rehearsal for a “talking heads” newscast with a very inept anchor who will bungle many of the things he or she says (Think Ted on the old Mary Tyler Moore Show).

Enter Ted and he moves to sit in the anchor chair

Ted

You know Mary...I would be able to be much happier on my set if I had a better chair...Ted Koppel had a better chair you know...

Mary

*(always a voice from off stage)*

Yes Ted...but for this rehearsal could you just sit down and read the news copy...we'll talk to Mr. Grant about your new chair later.

Ted

That's okay Mary...no need to bother Lou

*(sits)*

And the copy is where exactly Mary?

Mary

It's that pile right in front of you Ted marked "Copy"

Ted

Oh yes...yes...

Mary

Could we get started Ted...we only have a few minutes until we go to air and I want you to have time to review everything you'll be reading tonight...Some of it is pretty extraordinary and I want to make sure you get the words just right.

Ted

Oh Mary...?

Mary

Yes Ted.

Ted

Which is my lead off camera tonight Mary?

Mary

Ted...we only have the one camera.

Ted

Yes...yes...

Mary

Could you start with the first item Ted please...we're on the air in only a few minutes.

Ted

*(going into his announcer voice)*

This is Ted Waxter with the 6 o'clock news...In the headlines this evening...the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada is taking some awful risks with its Mission and Service Fund...film at 11

Mary

Ted...Ted...

Ted

Yes Mary

Mary

Its not that the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada is taking risks with its Mission and Service fund...not at all...no...what the copy says is that the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada undertakes to practice Risk-Taking Service and Mission.

Ted

That's what I said...risking its Mission and Service fund.

Mary

No Ted...undertaking Risk-Taking Service and Mission

Ted

I'm sorry Mary but you have that wrong...I am a member of the United Church of Canada and every Sunday I put a dollar into the right side of my envelope and that goes to the Mission and Service Fund...not the Service and Mission Risk-Taking whatever it was you said.

Mary

Yes Ted you're right...we all give to the Mission and Service Fund on Sunday mornings...But I am not talking about that at all. This story is about the new risk-taking practices that the Maritime Conference of the United Church hopes to take in the field of service and mission work within our congregations.

Ted

Well what's the difference?

Mary

Well Ted...let's see if I can explain this...One of the risk taking things we can do as a church is to give to the M&S Fund and that's great...but real risk-taking service and mission goes far beyond that kind of monetary giving.

Ted

So M&S is part of this new Risk Taking Service and Mission...but this new fangled idea of Service and Mission is bigger than just M&S alone.

Mary

*(amazed)*

You got it Ted...Wow...I'm impressed.

Ted

So how does it do that?

Mary

Read the next item Ted and you'll see.

Ted

*(back to his announcer voice)*

This just in...one congregation had worked on projects in Mexico for years...mostly by sending down supplies...helping to build schools, churches and everything else they may need. But when they heard about the devastation in Haiti a number of congregations came together and pooled their resources with other churches in the area to raise not only money but awareness of the devastation this country was suffering. Ministers and congregations from all over the world reached out to help and together changes were made...The joint work team coordinated with a Haiti churches and planned work projects from many countries...coordinated together as one huge act of service and missional outreach.

Mary

That's great Ted.

Ted

So it's all about what we can do for countries that have been devastated by natural disasters?

Mary

That and much more Ted.

Ted

Like what?

Mary

Risk-Taking Service and Mission includes any projects, efforts, and work, people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others, whether or not they will ever be part of a community of faith.

Ted

So then there is no direct pay back to the ones doing the work?

Mary

What do you mean Ted?

Ted

I mean no more money in the offering plate after all of this hard work?

Mary

No Ted...no more money in the offering plate.

Ted

I see...

Mary

But it still makes a big difference to the life of the church Ted.

Ted

Why?

Mary

Because Risk-Taking Service and Mission is one of the fundamental activities of church life that is so critical that failure to practice it in some form often results in an actual deterioration of a church's vitality and ability to attract new members.

Ted

How?

Mary

Read the copy Ted.

Ted

*(announcers voice)*

This just in...As well as its many global outreach projects...the church is also known for its involvement in their own communities as they have established food pantries to serve the homeless, sponsored scouting programs in under served areas, advocated for fair housing practices, gathered coats for the Salvation Army, collected toys for Toys for Tots, provided formula for babies in need, walked and raised funds for AIDS and Cancer research, held community kitchens and dinners for those in need...

Wow Mary, how do these churches get all this done and still have an hour free for worship on Sunday morning?

Mary

You'd be amazed Ted.

Ted

I guess I would.

Mary

Ted...

Ted

...I mean I could not even imagine getting involved in one of those projects let alone all of them...

Mary

Ted!

Ted

Busy...busdy...busy...that's what they would be...busy...busy...busy...

Mary

TED!

Ted

What Mary!?!

Mary

You're on the air in three...two...one....Ted...

Ted

*(going into his announcer voice)*

This is Ted Waxter with the 6 o'clock news...In the headlines this evening...the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada is taking some awful risks with its Mission and Service Fund...film at 11...

Mary

Oh Ted!

Announcer: Risk-Taking Service and Mission includes the projects, the efforts, and the work people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of

Christ, whether or not they will ever be part of the community of faith. Some churches have after-school programs for at-risk children, some send work teams across the country or across the world, some offer regular ministries to the incarcerated.

### **Extravagant Generosity**

Announcer: “Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations thrive because of there extraordinary sharing, willing sacrifice, and joyous giving of their members out of love for God and neighbour.

Then the live action scene begins...

*Entering from the side is a very strong person carrying over their shoulder a huge rope (like the kind you tie up a large boat with).*

*(NOTE: If getting and handling this rope is too cumbersome for the space then we could pantomime the rope. However the effect would be better with a long rope...long enough to encircle the entire auditorium.)*

*As this person makes their way into our vision...dragging this huge rope behind them...they begin to sing in a big (but exhausted) voice...*

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home;

*This exhausted person then finds a seat amongst the people as our first reader comes up to the podium and shares with us...*

### Speaker #1

A long-time member and proud grandfather stood at the baptismal font with his family for the baptism of his baby granddaughter. Another infant from another family that was new to the congregation was baptized at the same service. Following the service, the two families intermingled at the front of the church as they took turns having their pictures taken. At one point, the mother from the new family needed to get some things out of her bag, and the grandfather from the other family offered to hold her baby. Other church members were mixing and greeting and several commented on the grandfather with the

baby, and he found himself saying several times, “Oh, this one isn’t mine; I’m just holding him for a minute.”

Monday morning the grandfather called the minister at the church office and said he wanted to see him right away. The minister assumed the worst, thinking somehow the long-term member was upset about something from the day before. When the grandfather arrived at the church office, he told the minister, “I want to change my will to include the church, and I want to talk to you about how to do that.” The minister was stunned and couldn’t help asking about what brought the grandfather to this decision. The older man’s eyes grew moist as he said, “Yesterday I realized something while I was holding that other baby, the one from the family that just joined the church. I kept telling people that wasn’t my child, but then it dawned on me that it was part of my family, part of my church family, and that I have a responsibility for that little boy just like I have for my own granddaughter. I’ve been a member of this church for more than forty years, and in God’s eyes I’m the grandfather to more than just my own. I’ve taken care of my own children with my will, but I realized I also need to provide for the children of the church. So I want to divide my estate to leave a part to the church as if the church were one of my children.” Those who practice Extravagant Generosity have a God-given vision and faith to plant seeds for trees whose shade they will never see.

*The rope carrier rises and continues his journey around the circumference of the room...pulling and tugging on his heavy rope while singing...*

I looked over Jordan,  
And WHAT did I see,  
Comin' for to carry me home,  
A band of angels comin' after me,  
Comin' for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home.

*Perhaps others might have raised themselves out of their chairs to help him in his struggles...however...if not...then the first speaker returns to the microphone*

Speaker #1

Perhaps some of you might wish to help this man in his designated duties...

Rope Man

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home;

*Speaker # 2 approaches the podium...As this speaker approaches, those making their way around the auditorium with the long rope are asked to simply stop and listen...*

### Speaker #2

Six members of the Finance Committee of a small congregation faced the challenge of paying for an unexpected air conditioning repair bill of \$465.00. The church had already exceeded its maintenance budget for the year, and account balances were dangerously low. The lay members included a retired salesman, a banker, a teacher, a housewife, a small business owner, and an insurance agent. For more than forty-five minutes they discussed options. Should they borrow the money, postpone the utility payment, or make an additional appeal for money on Sunday? Should they reallocate budgeted resources from other ministries? They considered other money raising options, such as a rummage sale, a bake sale, another dinner. The thought occurred to go to one of their wealthiest members and ask for a special donation, even though the member was inactive and had not shown much inclination to help in the past. As the meeting went on, frustrations grew. Good solutions eluded them.

Finally, the teacher just shook her head at the impasse they had come to. Smiling, she suggested they simply stop talking and thinking so much and pause for silent prayer to see if God would provide another way. The others went along. After a few moments of silence, she looked around the room at her friends and fellow church members, and she said, "We all realize that any one of us could write a check for the full \$465 and it would not make any major difference in our lifestyle, comfort, or financial security." With that she pulled her checkbook out of her purse and wrote a check for \$465 to the church.

Then she said, "Anyone who wants to join me can add their check, too, and we'll earmark the surplus for children's ministry." Three others followed her lead, and two wrote checks for \$200 and \$100 respectively. The result of her inspiring and generous leadership? The air conditioner repair bill was paid, and the children's ministry had an unexpected \$1695 to launch a new initiative to teach the faith to the next generation!

There is no end to what church can accomplish for the purposes of Christ when the sharp awareness of the assets, resources, and talents that God entrusts to us supercedes the fear of scarcity and the obsessive focus on needs, problems, and shortages. Extravagant Generosity means graciously and responsibly placing ourselves and our resources in service to God.

*The rope carrier rises and again continues his journey around the circumference of the room...pulling and tugging on his heavy rope while singing...*

If you get there before I do,  
Comin' for to carry me home,  
Tell all my friends I'm comin' too,  
Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home.

*Hopefully by now others might have caught on to the program and raised themselves out of their chairs to help him in his struggles...however...if not...then the second speaker returns to the microphone*

Speaker #2

Perhaps some more of you might wish to help this man in his designated duties...

Rope Man

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home;

*Speaker #3 approaches the podium... As this speaker approaches, those making their way around the auditorium with the long rope are asked to simply stop and listen...*

Speaker #3

A downtown congregation in a moderately-sized community had occasional transients, homeless persons, and street people who would ask for handouts. Often street people would be found sleeping on the front steps. The staff developed rules, guidelines, and policies for how to help or how to refer those who asked for help. They had many discussions about the pros and cons of giving cash, vouchers, and addresses of other social agencies. One day's discussion took considerable staff time with few conclusions.

As the minister was leaving the church later that afternoon, he noticed the part-time custodian carrying out the garbage to the large trash bin in the alley. There was a homeless person sprawled out beside the bin, looking barely conscious. As the custodian approached the trash bin, he set down the garbage bag he was carrying, reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and removed a five dollar bill. Without having been asked, he walked over to the homeless person and gave him the money, said something, then continued his work, and returned to the church. The minister was amazed and humbled by this extraordinary display of generosity. The part-time janitor who earned less than anyone else on staff gave generously without even being asked, while the staff had spent several hours trying to figure out policies and procedures.

The minister asked the custodian why he gave the money without even being asked and also pressed him about whether he thought the homeless person might misuse the money for alcohol or drugs. "I always do that when I can," the janitor answered. "I give them a little money and say, "God bless you," because I figure that even though they may be pretty messed up, they are some mother's son, some father's child, and so I give them something. What they do with the money – well they have to answer to God about that. I just have to answer to God about what I do with mine."

*The rope carrier rises and again continues his journey around the circumference of the room...pulling and tugging on his heavy rope while singing...*

If you get there before I do,  
Comin' for to carry me home,  
Tell all my friends I'm comin' too,  
Comin' for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home.

*Many others should have caught on to the program and raised themselves out of their chairs to help him in his struggles... however...if not...then the third speaker returns to the microphone...*

Speaker #3

We have a job to do as a church! We must embrace all peoples...and envelop them with an Extravagant Generosity that has never been seen before...so get up if you are able and help our Rope Carrier envelop us all with his rope, thereby symbolizing the coming

together of all of us here on the team of those who plan to leave this place and go out and spread our Extravagant Generosity with all those whom we encounter...

*This speaker, and the other two, then become kind of cheerleaders for the group as we move into the circle of helpers and begin to envelop the crowd while singing...*

Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Comin' for to carry me home;

*...repeatedly as we continue our work. Perhaps one or two of the musicians might begin to back up the, until then, accapella singing with some growing music as we come together. This will of course end in generous, rhapsodic circle dancing (as we are well known for in the United Church) as the Rope Carrier makes his way to the completion of the circle and we are all one in our quest.*

Announcer:

Extravagant Generosity describes practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures. It describes lavish sharing, sacrifice, and giving in service to God and neighbour.

### **Set and Props Lists for AGM Skits**

#### ***Scene One: Radical Hospitality***

*Set Design:* If possible it would be great to have a curtain (old white sheets are okay) extended across the stage about 5 or 6 feet back. These curtains can then be festooned with sparkly Dollarama decorations (beaded curtains, etc.) A home made sign over top of the curtain should read..."The Jeopardized Wheel of Right Prices"

*Props:* Hal and Tabitha could have clip boards (but not necessary)  
Wink needs to have Kleenex for his second entrance (to be tucked in his collar), as well as an extreme bronzer for half of his face.

#### ***Scene Two: Passionate Worship***

*Set Design:* Behind the curtain from Scene One we will find a large table set up with 5 chairs all around it and a 6<sup>th</sup> chair off to the side. The chairs should all be

upstage of the table (including the 2 ends) facing outwards towards the audience.

*Props:* Each player should have an agenda for the meeting in front of them. As well, Sophie might have some napkins that she is placing around the table at the beginning of the scene

***Scene Three: Intentional Faith Development***

*Set Design:* The speakers will use the podium already available on the stage.

*Props:* No props necessary for this scene.

***Scene Four: Risk Taking Service and Mission***

*Set Design:* A desk and chair that looks like it might be from a news set.

*Props:* A script in front of Ted so that he can refer to it when reading the news items.  
As well, perhaps a pair of “smarty guy” glasses for Ted that he can put on before he turns on his “news voice”.

***Scene Five: Extravagant Generosity***

*Set Design:* We use the whole auditorium for this scene.

*Props:* The long, long, long rope for our singer.  
The readers will use the podium that is already available on stage.