

FROM NOW ON

RURAL MINISTRY AFFECTS US ALL.

The theme of this year's meeting of Maritime Conference will take us...

FROM what has been – the strengths, the gifts, the joys, and challenges of rural and small town life to...

NOW - this moment in time when complex issues face rural and small town life that dramatically impact all of Canada, and certainly the United Church of Canada. We stand at a crossroad. How do we move...

ON into the future to which God is calling us? What is our faithful response as people of hope and promise?

The Gospel, Ecumenism, and Theology (GET) Committee of the Conference responded to our 2009 request to explore issues of rural ministry in Maritime Conference. Here are their conclusions:

1. **Rural and small town issues affect all Canadians.**
2. The issues are **deeply interconnected**. You cannot talk about the economics of small towns without talking about the environment. You cannot talk about the environment without talking about the social fabric. You cannot talk about families without talking about health. And you cannot talk about health without talking about transportation...and on it goes.
3. There are no outside experts. **We are the experts** on our own communities. We are the ones who can uncover what God is calling God's people to be and to do in the face of this rural crisis.
4. We are at a crossroad. **To get different results, we need to do things differently.**
5. Using **Open Space Technology** at this annual meeting will help take us in new directions...if we let it.

On Saturday at this year's annual meeting facilitators Donna Clark and Michelle Cooper of *The Courage Group International* will "open the space" for Maritime Conference delegates and guests to explore the issues and seek solutions together. Our guiding question will be,

***"Making a Difference in our Communities: What new possibilities and bold actions is God calling us to step into?
What really matters?"***



Your Invitation: Come, ready to...

- Speak out of your experience
- Dream out of your passion
- Share an idea, not as something "someone" should do, but as something YOU want to explore if others will join you
- Pursue your passion, follow your interests, move as you feel you need to
- Join a conversation, listen, engage, offer input, move on as the Spirit leads
- Invest in the life of the Conference, in the life of the congregations of our Conference, and commit to engage in this exploration and discernment together.

*At this year's annual meeting of Maritime Conference
let's turn our issues into ideas, and ideas into actions.
Following Jesus' example, let us be visible hope in our communities.*

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY PROCESS

"Open Space Technology" (OST) is the name given to a meeting without a predetermined agenda with a focusing question or theme that people care about. OST is emerging as a leading edge large group consultation methodology that can transform the way communities are engaged, enrich decision making, produce inspired results and empower groups and the individuals within them. Open Space Technology meetings capture the energy that we usually find at coffee breaks, creating an environment for action-oriented and highly productive discussion, creativity, high learning and fun. Meetings are characterized by self-organization and high degrees of freedom for participants.



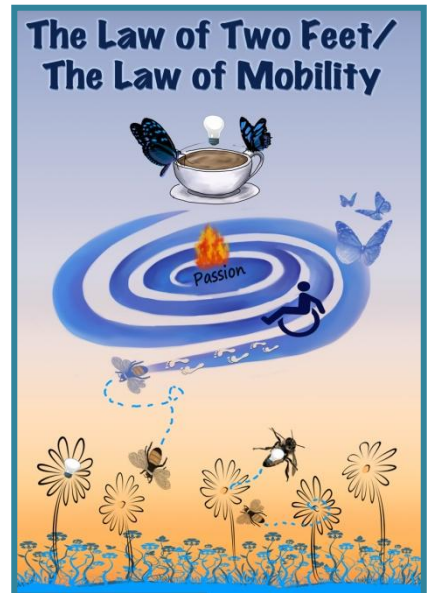
The OST meeting opens with an introductory plenary at which the purpose, background, boundaries and form of the meeting are introduced. Participants are seated in a circle or series of concentric circles. The circle symbolizes the notion that leadership comes from each and every one of us and that every person's contribution is equally valued. After a brief introduction to the process, participants create the agenda. Any topic related to the theme that is important to those present can be added to the agenda. All identified issues and opportunities to have a chance to be discussed by whoever is

interested. Following the agenda setting exercise, participants quickly break into smaller discussion groups during multiple concurrent sessions. The persons posting the topics are responsible for convening the small groups and providing reports of the discussions, which are immediately added to a book of proceedings that is distributed to participants following the gathering.

The "ground rules" for OST are expressed as four principles and one law:

- ***Whoever comes are the right people.***
- ***Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.***
- ***Whenever it starts is the right time.***
- ***When it's over, it's over.***

The ***Law of Mobility***, or the ***Law of Two Feet*** states people can enter or leave a session when they choose. If a session is not meeting their needs for either contributing or learning, participants are free to move to another. This is probably the most powerful of the rules. It encourages people to take responsibility for their own learning and energy and reduces the likelihood of an individual or interest from exerting "control".



OST meetings tap into the collective wisdom of the group and many people say that "magic" happens, with ideas generated and work accomplished that people never thought possible.

A short, international video describing how Open Space Technology works can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UoG24LdU5Q>

Information kindly provided by Donna Clark and Michelle Cooper, facilitators for Maritime Conference Open Space Technology process, May 2011