

Lakeview United Church/ Yellow Grass United Church/ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada: An Ecumenical Shared Ministry based on a Collaborative Ministry Agreement

October 31, 2021

Memorandum of Understanding

Preamble

Ecumenical Shared Ministry Report

In 2019 The United Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (together with other Christian denominations) established a Task Force under the title "Ecumenical Shared Ministry". The Report of that Task Force is included by reference in this memorandum (Appendix A).

Ecumenical Shared Ministry is the tool that is permitted by the respective denominations to afford a relationship that is founded on the specific needs of each of the participating Congregations. This sharing respects and will provide for the denominational identities of the members and adherents who choose to participate, to be preserved and represented.

Collaborative Ministry Agreement

The United Church of Canada has recognized the value in sharing ministerial resources between congregations. In certain circumstances, a formal Collaborative Ministry Agreement is desirable. In its application, it contemplates sharing of clergy between congregations, for the benefit of all concerned but also offers the opportunity for an expanded connection between communities of faith in a common purpose.

Yellow Grass Congregation as an Ecumenical Shared Ministry

The Yellow Grass Trossachs United Lutheran Partnership was established in 2003. It was comprised of the boards and members of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church Yellow Grass, Yellow Grass United Church and Trossachs United Church.

The three churches entered into a form of Shared Ministry. A written Memorandum of Understanding dated February 12, 2012 (a copy of which is annexed hereto and forming a part of this memorandum Appendix B) more fully established the nature of that Shared Ministry relationship.

Yellow Grass Congregation (as it is hereinafter referenced) continues to date as an Ecumenical Shared Ministry. In its current form, the Yellow Grass Congregation is supported by a combination of a Lutheran Pastor for one Sunday a month and the balance of Sunday Services through pulpit supply from the respective denominations or other resources. The Lutheran Pastor also provides pastoral care on a “as needed” basis for weddings, funerals and other services.

The relationship between the Yellow Grass / Trossach Churches (now as Yellow Grass Congregation) although predating the Task Force Report is consistent with the goals of a formal Ecumenical Shared Ministry as contemplated in that Report. The Yellow Grass Congregation continues as an approved Ecumenical Shared Ministry by their respective denominational organizations.

Lakeview Congregation and a hybrid Ecumenical Shared Ministry on the basis of a Collaborative Ministry Agreement

In 2020, Lakeview United Church (for reference Lakeview Congregation) embarked upon a new minister search concurrent to the resignation of its Minister.

During the search process, Lakeview Congregation became aware of the Yellow Grass Congregation as an Ecumenical Shared Ministry.

In the course of inquiry about Ecumenical Shared Ministry, Lakeview Congregation became aware of a spiritual leader who was and is interested in a full time position with a pastoral charge/community of faith. As it happens, Yellow Grass Congregation according to its membership and other resources cannot reasonably support a full time pastor/ministerial position. Lakeview can do so. A relationship between the two entities --- Yellow Grass Congregation and Lakeview Congregation ---- that fulfills their respective spiritual needs in a unique opportunity for a shared ministry is compelling for all concerned.

Relationship between Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations

This memorandum reflects the substance of what Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations have tentatively agreed to, subject to the approval of their respective denominational organizations and the members of their individual congregations.

In discussion with each of:

1. Yellow Grass Congregation;
2. Lakeview Congregation
3. Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada; and
4. Living Skies Regional Council of The United Church of Canada

the idea of an expanded Ecumenical Shared Ministry based on a Collaborative Ministry Agreement between Yellow Grass Congregation and Lakeview Congregation has been advanced.

The Vision of Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations

Yellow Grass Congregation has a membership of approximately 110 consisting of individuals and families (including approximately 22 under the age of 18 years) drawn from historical membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada.

In common with many rural churches in Saskatchewan, membership of the respective churches has declined over the last number of years, and the average age of the typical member or adherent has concurrently increased. Understanding that in order to be viable as a place of worship there must be a critical mass of individuals in the community to support a church, it made good sense for these churches to come together in a joint effort to provide services and support to persons who identified as Lutheran or United Church.

The absence of full time qualified ministry personnel reflects not just the financial realities of supporting this position, but also the fact that fewer individuals are taking on the call to be a minister. This leaves many rural points under served --- or un-served ---- with no expectation that this will change in the future.

A relationship with an urban church represents a unique opportunity to secure on a regular and defined basis the services of qualified ministry personnel, and thus the ability to remain relevant to the community of Yellow Grass, and ultimately financially viable for at least the near term. A consistent resource for pastoral care including weddings, baptism, confirmation, funerals and community building that comes with good leadership is a “game changing” moment for Yellow Grass Congregation. It protects the Congregation from the considerable financial risk of a full time appointment. It provides continuity in worship leadership, which is an important feature in any healthy and growing church community. And it provides an opportunity to grow as Christians.

Yellow Grass maintains its unique character as a rural church. It is not dictated to nor under the leadership of persons outside of the community. The inherent flexibility of a proposed Ecumenical Shared Ministry based on a Collaborative Ministry Agreement is enough of a differentiator from its peers to make the relationship between Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations something special.

Lakeview Congregation has a confirmed membership of approximately 200 consisting of individuals and families (including approximately 25 under the age of 18) drawn from a geographic area beyond the Lakeview Subdivision as it may be identified in Regina. Membership consists of persons who are Members of the United Church of Canada, and adherents.

In common with many urban churches in Saskatchewan, membership at Lakeview Congregation has declined over the last number of years, and the average age of the typical member or adherent has concurrently increased. Just as in the experience of the Yellow Grass Congregation, in order for Lakeview Congregation to be viable as a place of worship there must be a critical mass of individuals in the community to support the church. Lakeview Congregation has had some success in being a part of the community as a facility for a number of long and short term tenants, including a relationship with a Filipino congregation that utilizes the Church premises on Sunday afternoons (Jesus the Anointed One). Historically, Lakeview Congregation was also a resource for a local Muslim community for the purposes of meeting during and celebrating Ramadan.

The absence of full time ministry personnel at Lakeview Congregation is not driven by financial constraints. The congregation is solvent and expects to be so for the foreseeable future. Rather, the current vacancy of a full time minister reflects the difficulties of a small pool of qualified applicants across Canada who may not have any interest in moving to and living for the next number of years in Regina.

Lakeview Congregation has also recognized the potential value in a relationship with a rural church (especially so where many at Lakeview have roots in agriculture as well as extended family in rural Saskatchewan). A connection with Yellow Grass Congregation is not a great reach for anyone. It also represents a unique opportunity to secure on a regular and defined basis the services of qualified ministry personnel, and thus the ability to remain relevant to the community of Regina.

Likewise, a consistent resource for pastoral care including weddings, baptism, confirmation, funerals and community building that comes with good leadership is also potentially a “game changing” moment for Lakeview Congregation. It protects the Congregation from the considerable financial risk of an uncertain choice, by the hiring of a member of clergy known to the Congregation. It provides continuity in worship leadership, which is an important feature in any healthy and growing church community. And it provides an opportunity to grow as Christians with the hope of persons being drawn to Lakeview Congregation.

Lakeview Congregation maintains its unique character as an urban church. It is not dictated to nor under the leadership of persons outside of the community. A shared ministry operates in a different way of doing things to some extent, and it broadens our horizons insofar in taking on a role in a larger undertaking. We have human resources that can be shared. We serve a larger purpose by helping preserve the viability of Yellow Grass Congregation simply by being a part of a larger plan.

The inherent flexibility of a proposed Ecumenical Shared Ministry based on a Collaborative Ministry Agreement is ideally suited for the Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations.

The Partners

This memorandum captures the substance of an agreement between the parties, namely Yellow Grass Congregation and Lakeview Congregation that includes aspects of an Ecumenical Shared Ministry and a Collaborative Ministry Agreement to cooperate in accomplishing this undertaking.

The Immediate Purpose

This is not a merger.

It is not the legal joining of multiple parties in a joint venture. It can be adjusted and/or amended as required. It can be improved. Or the parties may decide to terminate the agreement. It is in some sense an experiment in how Christian denominations may need to think collectively rather than competitively.

It is a defined relationship that can be expanded or contracted as suits the circumstances of the Congregational parties. It does not mandate what one group or the other must do, saving sharing of a specific resource. It does not create a financial and legal liability in the relationship save for the specific engagement of a member of Clergy on a term contract.

It's true beauty is in its simplicity.

Lakeview Congregation and Yellow Grass Congregation seek to act together in the hiring on a term employment contract, with a qualified and experienced member of clergy. This arrangement expands the reach of both Congregations insofar as identifying suitable resources. It will successfully provide the services of a Minister/Pastor to the two Congregations as a shared full time ministry position and thus beneficial to both Lakeview Congregation and Yellow Grass Congregation as herein described.

If the rule is "under promise and over deliver" then in this Proposal there is room for growth and innovation and new ideas. Whether it may grow into something better than simply a merger of interests is the Great Promise not yet defined.

The Term

The respective Congregations contemplate an initial three year term, substantially based on a concurrent contract of employment with a member of the clergy. The terms of employment will be documented in writing and endorsed by both Congregations. The term will be renewable with the mutual agreement of the respective congregations.

Governance and Leadership Structure

Each of Yellow Grass and Lakeview Congregations operate under distinct governance models and thus church leadership. This will not change under this proposed Agreement.

A copy of the respective models of governance for each congregation is attached and forming part hereof. (Appendix C and D).

Decision Making

As each Congregation operates according to their own models of governance and leadership, joint decision making will only be called for in circumstances as contemplated by this Agreement.

This does not dismiss the possibility of representation on our respective Boards and certainly with a view to keeping current our mutual understanding of what is working or not. Consensus is the preferred model of decision making.

Understanding that neither of the Congregations are affording voting rights to the other, insofar as day to day operations of either the need for clarity in voting rights and conduct of meetings is not necessary.

Roles and Responsibilities

Each Congregation will set their own direction. Ultimately the goal of future viability led by an inspired and qualified ministry is the goal of the partners to this Agreement.

Financial Relationship

The only relationship of a financial nature will be in the context of the contract of employment of Ministry. In all other respects each of the respective Congregations shall be responsible for their own resources. Each will continue to function as a stand alone entity, with legal obligations likewise.

Lakeview Congregation and Yellow Grass Congregation would continue to be responsible for their own staff, premises, insurance, utilities, programming and community relationships. It is agreed and understood that in addition to Shared Ministry, the Congregations may or may not enter into joint programs or projects as they may see fit from time to time

Any other shared expenses shall be as may be agreed to from time to time. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, it is understood that the qualified member of ministry will not attend both Lakeview and Yellowgrass Congregations on the same Sunday. For those dates where services are provided by the qualified member of ministry in person at Yellowgrass, mileage and reasonable out of pocket expenses will be borne the Yellow Grass Congregation.

Fundraising

Any joint fundraising may be as agreed to from time to time.

Communications

The Congregations agree to share news and events. The exchange of information at the Board level will be accomplished by regular scheduled contact, and where appropriate, a joint meeting of the respective Boards. At the outset, it seems to make sense to connect quarterly and meet at least annually.

Planning/ Projects/Programs

Without limiting the generality of this Agreement, the Congregations may share in any “planning, projects and programming” as circumstances permit and as each may elect to so do.

The Congregations will make and implement their own strategic plan.

Each undertakes not to take steps that are in conflict with the cooperative spirit of this Agreement. In the event that there is some uncertainty, then they agree to discuss and resolve promptly.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The Congregations agree to meet through their representatives of their respective Boards from time to time, as above contemplated.

In this context, the Congregations agree to establish a Joint Congregational Committee, with representation from Lakeview and Yellow Grass Congregations. The mandate of this Committee will be to meet on a regular basis (but not less than quarterly) for the purposes of being the liaison for the respective Congregations and to give an opportunity to identify or address the common interests of all, including but not limited to the foregoing:

- Roles and Responsibilities,
- Financial Relationship,
- Fundraising,
- Communications,
- Planning/Projects/Programs,
- Outcomes and Evaluations,
- Conflict Resolution,

New Partners,
Policies, and
Ministry.

Each Congregation shall appoint two members to this Joint Committee, who in turn may appoint a Chair, on the understanding that the Chair shall rotate on an annual basis between Congregational Representatives. This Committee can set its own agenda and the format of its meetings (which may be in person or via video conference).

Joint Committee Minutes shall be provided to the respective Boards.

It will be the continuing responsibility of the Congregational Boards to confirm any actions proposed by the Joint Committee as a decision of the respective Boards, unless authority is given specifically to the Joint Committee. In any event, insofar as the respective Congregations are concerned, the Boards remain accountable throughout.

Conflict Resolution

In the unlikely event of a conflict between Congregations, each agrees to access the shared resources of either the ELCC or the United Church to settle disputes in an effective manner. In the event the mechanism of dispute cannot be resolved by agreement, the parties shall have access to and rely upon the resolution process as established by the United Church of Canada.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, matters of discipline regarding or affecting a qualified member of ministry, shall be applied according to the denomination of the said member.

Adding Partners

The Congregations do not anticipate adding additional congregations at least in the short term. This does not foreclose additional partners at a later date. All of the Congregations at the time of adding any new partners must agree.

As the case is, this does not foreclose one or the other of the Congregations expanding their reach into other communities, perhaps in the form of streaming services, but without altering the shared services model i.e. a common Order of Service that satisfies ELCC or United Church, whether in Yellow Grass or Lakeview.

Termination of the Relationship

Understanding that the relationship exists in support of a shared ministry, this relationship may survive or may come to an end at any time. Each of the Congregations may

terminate this Agreement on 90 days notice and for whatever reason, subject only to any legal obligations associated with the employment of Clergy.

Policies

The Congregations do not contemplate any unique Congregational joint policies that may relate to or govern the terms of this agreement.

Understanding that there will be members of the ELCC and United Church participating in the services of both Congregations, the guidance to Clergy in accomplishing the fundamental purposes of Ecumenical Shared Ministry, will necessarily account for:

1. Compliance with the respective denominational guidelines and regulations;
2. Conflicts of interest.

Ministry

The terms of engagement and the allocation of the time spent between Congregations would be as agreed in an employment contract, but presuming one Sunday Service per month in person at Yellow Grass Congregation and the balance of the month in person at Lakeview Congregation;

The appointed Pastor or Minister as the case is, would remain as a member of the “Roster” of Pastors with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, or Ministers of the United Church of Canada and among other things would be paid according to that denomination’s wage scale, together with accruing pension credits, and receive the benefits of employment according to the applicable coverage.

The Congregations understand that the role of Ministry in the respective denominations is under constant review. Accordingly, any changes of the denominations that directly or indirectly affects the intentions of this Agreement, after its execution and during its term will be addressed by the parties on a timely basis and to the extent necessary to allow this relationship to survive.

The member of clergy would provide --- subject to the rules and guidelines of the respective denominations --- the services unique to the denominational identity of each member of the respective congregations, meaning that according to the preference of the member or adherent, weddings, funerals, baptism and any other sacraments would be either by the United Church or the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada. In the event that certain services cannot be provided in this Ecumenical Shared Ministry as herein contemplated, then each Congregation would necessarily access appropriate “pulpit supply” to meet any such limitations i.e. in the event that the member of Clergy is unavailable for one or both Congregations.

Lakeview Congregation would initiate changes to its order of service to and would provide services according to the interests of the respective Congregations which would in turn concurrently be available to all via streaming video (on the Lakeview You Tube Channel);

In all events, the respective Congregations agree to work cooperatively and to enter into such further understandings or agreements as may be reasonably necessary to accomplish the goals of an Ecumenical Shared Ministry based on a Collaborative Ministry.

Executed at the City of Regina in the Province of Saskatchewan, as of the 31st day of October, 2021.

Lakeview United Church

Chair

Executed at the Town of Yellow Grass in the Province of Saskatchewan, as of the 31st day of October, 2021.

Yellow Grass United Lutheran Partnership

Chair