

Eagle Ridge United Church

Congregational Vision

Governed by: Congregation

Adoption Date: June 24, 2007

Modification Date:

POLICY:

We envision an inclusive, Christ-centred, multi-staffed church where:

1. Everyone is growing spiritually, no matter at what age or stage they began.
2. Everyone has gifts and talents that are valued and used to change lives.
3. Everyone is an essential part of a loving, supportive, and diverse community.

What is a vision statement?

Our vision is where we believe God wishes us to be at some point in the future. It is a word picture which describes what our congregation will look like if we remain faithful to our purpose and core values. How we attain that is worked out in the goals and strategies developed by the Session

Commentary on the Vision

We envision an inclusive, Christ Centred, multi-staffed church

Churches are like people. None of us have it all figured out, and at Eagle Ridge, we don't pretend to have all the answers. After all, this is God we are talking about. Churches are extremely complex, and to discern exactly what God wants us to do is even harder. Still, there are a number of things about which we are very clear. We are clear about the deep vision that Christ calls us to live out in our community. It is the vision of an open and inclusive church where we committed to play an important role in God's healing and transformation of the world. We understand that role is fulfilled primarily by creating a safe and accepting church where every person can connect and belong, and where they can discover and then pursue God's dream for their life.

We are also clear that in Jesus' eyes, every single person is a beloved child of God – period. Thus we strive to be as inclusive as is Christ. For us, this means that we value every person regardless of how similar or dissimilar they are to us, and that we follow Jesus' lead as we continue to break down all of the barriers which separate individuals from God and from community. In short, this means that all persons are honoured and invited to be a part of our church, without having to worry about their race, religious background, culture, gender, education, sexual orientation, gender identity, differing abilities, or age.

This means that we are intentional about not only being welcoming to those who come to "check us out," but that we also embrace the gift that with every new member, our community changes. We want our community to continually change. We need our community to continually change.

We are called to be a church that welcomes and fosters questioning. Spiritual quests often begin with great questions. We encourage people to question their faith and wrestle with their doubts. We believe questioning is an important spiritual discipline.

We believe that Eagle Ridge is called to become a fully functioning discipleship church which is able to cultivate the spiritual lives of a diverse community. This means offering multiple worship opportunities and a large variety of Christian nurture programs that will connect with the growing variety of people who look to us to help raise them up as disciples of Jesus Christ. This is a daunting task as we are already blessed with real diversity in our neighbourhood and in our congregation. The challenge is to meet the needs of four generations, as well as the large range of experience with which people come. For the first time in the life of the United Church, we have individuals coming to us with absolutely no experience of the Christian faith. We also have many people tentatively approaching us after having very poor experiences of church. On top of that, we have all sorts of people who have been on the journey for anything from a short time to a lifetime. All of whom deserve to be ministered to in ways which are sensitive and appropriate to where they are right now.

Finally, we understand the unique theological ground we hold. Along with a small cohort of churches who employ an historical/metaphorical interpretation of the Bible, we find ourselves offering the only Christian alternative to the conservative Protestant churches. Therefore, we believe that our vision has to be large enough to be a strong voice for what we believe is the truly radical nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The staff and resources needed to equip and empower this diverse a community will be substantially more than we currently have. Still, the three key characteristics of this community will anchor us to our core values and beliefs throughout this journey. These characteristics embody the essence of who we want to become. Therefore they must be nurtured and protected as we grow and change into this new vision of Eagle Ridge United Church.

We envision an inclusive, Christ Centred, multi-staffed church where:

1. Everyone is growing spiritually, no matter at what age or stage they began

We believe that spirituality (a person's relationship with, and experience of God), is something that is present in, and available to, every person even if they are not aware of it. We believe that our role as a church is to help people recognize and deepen that relationship regardless of their age, whether they are just beginning this exploration, resuming it after some time, or have been fully engaged in it for most of their lives.

Spiritual growth opportunities are infused throughout the church's life. Worship, fellowship gatherings, friendships, mentoring, Christian nurture programs, Small Groups, service opportunities, all provide space for any individual to connect with, explore and deepen their relationship with God.

Therefore, we will offer worship services that are expansive, innovative and celebrate a vibrant spirituality. We will routinely organize events to bring the community together in fun and casual ways. We will open up space for people to become friends. We will organize a

mentorship program for those who need it. We will offer a large variety of spiritual formation programs appropriate for each age and stage. We will provide programming that supports spiritual discovery and renewal. We will facilitate LIFE Groups which supply a vehicle for spiritual growth as well as ministry opportunities. This varied programming will attract newcomers and inspire members for their work of making a difference in our communities and ultimately the world. We will seek out and facilitate opportunities to engage in real, hands-on service to others.

In support of this vision, we recognize that no one can grow with us, unless they first take the risk of walking through our doors and then deciding to stay. Therefore, we are committed to welcoming those new to the journey with an open and accepting spirit, and with safe and appropriate programs and opportunities to explore the Christian faith. We affirm that for many, worship will not be their point of entry into the community, so we commit to keeping all of our events, groups and programs open and sensitive to newcomers.

In short, we see Eagle Ridge becoming a responsive centre for spiritual growth that helps others discover their deep longing for God. We recognize everyone has unique gifts and we will help each person discover their unique call: "Identify, equip and empower." We will support all ages and stages to answer their yearnings to grow and to become all that they are capable of becoming.

We envision an inclusive, Christ Centred, multi-staffed church where:

2. Everyone has gifts and talents that are valued and used to change lives

Every person is born with talents: certain things they do naturally well. In addition, every person is gifted by God with spiritual gifts, also things they do naturally well, but which help them to participate in God's work. We believe that in God's eyes, all people are equally gifted. Although everyone is gifted with different talents and spiritual gifts, not one of them is superior to another. All gifts are equally valued. All gifts are equally needed in the church. Even what can seem like an insignificant gift to one person, can make a life-changing difference to someone else.

Simply put, the purpose of these Spirit-given gifts is not to make a person more popular, successful or wealthy. Instead, they are to equip every person to participate in Christ's ministry to the world. The church's responsibility is to help every person to identify, develop and then deploy their gifts. We believe that every person has the call to be in ministry to others and to God's creation. When we are practicing ministry using our spiritual gifts, then we experience God working in and through us. We know deep in our bones that our life makes a difference in the lives of others, and that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

The greater purpose of disciples using their gifts for ministry is to participate with God in the creation of the kingdom of God. This includes creating alternative communities which place their highest priority in modelling their lives on that of Jesus, rather than getting pulled into individualism, consumerism, materialism and other idols which call for our allegiance in the wider culture. These gifts are also to be used to speak out against injustice and inequality wherever they are encountered. We believe that this is the mechanism through which God changes the world.

We commit to helping everyone discover their gifts and call for ministry and to celebrate those gifts within the community of faith. We also commit to helping individuals find places to deploy their ministries both within, and outside of the church.

We envision an inclusive, Christ Centred, multi-staffed church where:

3. Everyone is an essential part of a loving, supportive and diverse community

As disciples of Jesus, we take our lead from him. Part of Jesus' mission was to create a community which would live and model life in the kingdom of God. This community would be primarily marked by the quality of its relationships. We believe that the members of Eagle Ridge, and every other church, should use their time in worship and in ministries to practice living in this kingdom community. That is, while we are a part of the life of the church we will try our hardest to live as though the kingdom is fully present. This means that love is the lens through which our entire church-life is viewed. Thus, we will intentionally practice being respectful, non-judgemental, compassionate, encouraging and supportive with one another. Likewise, when someone fails to live up to this standard, we will be gracious and understanding as we place our relationships above our own issues and gently help that person to alter their behaviour.

Gone are the days when we could just blend in with the society around us. More and more the church stands in contrast to the dominant culture around us. We are being called to stand as an alternative community who lives out of a set of unique values, all rooted in Jesus' command to love one another. These include us embracing the inclusive nature of Jesus, who went to great lengths to signal that those the world labels as outcasts and "others," God views as beloved. Thus, we envision Eagle Ridge United Church as a diverse community in which every person is seen and treated as an essential member whose presence, as well as their gifts and talents, is seen as crucial in order for us to become whom we are called to be. Further, we affirm that our lives and our ministries are all interrelated. We need each other. As Martin Luther King, Jr. put it, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

As we believe the Kingdom of God is mirrored in a diverse community, we commit to developing an affirming and accepting culture within the congregation that welcomes anyone and everyone in. Furthermore, we will stand with those who are rejected and marginalized by society, offering a place where they will be celebrated for whom they are, never looked down upon for whom they are not. We believe this is not only what individuals crave, but also what our society most desperately needs.