

Update on CFJA Implementation Committee Sunday, October 16, 2011

I am very pleased to be here this morning to share with you the exciting news about our work. I am representing our very vibrant committee, and I will introduce each member to you later in my remarks. I am going to begin with a very brief summary of the history of the Centre, as I believe it will be helpful for framing our common understanding of our work.

The current CFJA Implementation Committee is building on the work that had already been done by the congregation, the TSP Board and previous committee members. We also acknowledge the rich heritage brought to the new congregation on amalgamation in 1980 of - Trinity United and St. Paul's Avenue Rd. United and the central part of the St. Paul's Centre in our new identity.

Just to review - the idea for a centre for faith, justice and the arts grew out of one of the core values of the TSP 2003 5 year plan -

We seek to be a community of faith that witnesses publicly as a Christian community and takes a stand on issues of social justice, locally and globally, and deepens our relationship with the arts community and with other faith communities and with our neighbours.

An Ad Hoc committee was established to explore how to live out this vision, and, based on its recommendation, **a Steering committee was established by the Board in May 2005 with a mandate to: facilitate exploration and consultation within the congregation and beyond around the concept of and possible models for a centre for faith, justice and the arts.**

This Steering Committee worked very hard to visit other church-related community centres, research governance models, review congregational priorities, write a statement of the vision and theology for the centre and incorporate all this in a report to the Board in October 2006. The Steering Committee was then disbanded. This report was approved by the Board and presented to the congregation.

The congregation adopted the recommended purpose statement for the Centre:

- a place for the exercise of ministry and mission of Trinity-St. Paul's United Church, Bathurst United Church, Christos Metropolitan Community Church and other faith communities
- a place for residence and performances of Tafelmusik and Toronto Consort, and support of other arts organizations and groups
- a place devoted to the pursuit of justice and peace in our world and through the work of faith communities, arts organizations and community groups

In 2007 after a hiatus, as the congregation dealt with the change in pastoral staff, a needs assessment process and a search process for new staff, a CFJA Implementation Committee was struck by the Board with the mandate to put wheels under the concept of a Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts. The congregation embraced the vision and the mission of the Centre in the liturgy of a

worship service with the words: **We embrace the vision of being a Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts and seek to live it out.**

That brings us to this current committee. We are seeking to live it out. We feel privileged to carry out this work on behalf of the congregation. We appreciate this opportunity to share our progress and our thinking with you and we look forward to hearing your thinking around our work and the CFJA after the service.

At our 2010 TSP Board Retreat Vicki invited us to use the metaphor of a threshold to reflect on our life and work in the congregation. It really resonated with me in terms of our work with the CFJA. We were on the threshold and filled with the excitement and anxiety that comes with it. We had worked hard, with Duncan's able facilitation to develop 3 possible scenarios for our future work. We presented these scenarios to the Board and received direction and support to move forward with scenario 2 - which was titled Partner Synergy - Inviting and supporting initiatives from partners within and beyond the building. I shared these scenarios with you last fall. At that point we could just begin to see what the future held for us.

Today we have taken several steps over the threshold and beyond and the vision of what lies ahead is coming into focus for us now. It has so much potential to engage others in our journey. The congregation has identified its mission to those in the community adjacent to the church as hospitality, witness and presence and has embraced the vision of being the Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts. This vision seems very opportune at this point in our city. Funding to the arts is threatened. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing. This makes our mission even more important. Our current committee is mindful that God's mission is the work of the church. As Marilyn Legge says, "Mission is the church's agenda, its *raison d'être*.

We are also mindful that mission is a dialogue grounded in relationship and as such must be informed by listening. Growing into this vision is a process. As a committee we believe that we are building the road by walking it.

I would say that our committee has spent the past year listening carefully to individuals and groups in the faith, justice and arts communities in the city. The day a week that Vicki has devoted to this work has enabled her to reach out and also to be the conduit for hearing these voices. We also listened to each other and our own experiences in doing CFJA work. This has informed our future work and plans. As we were listening, we were also responding and revising and addressing issues as they arose.

In preparing for this presentation I reviewed all the reports and minutes from the past. I found the minutes of the Feb. 6, 2009 CFJA committee meeting very helpful. Barbara Lloyd was chair of the committee at that time and Norah McMurtry, Brad Ratzlaff, Lance Wilford, David Fallis and Vicki Obedkoff were

committee members. The minutes clearly laid out the purpose of the Implementation Committee (to facilitate the vibrancy of the CFJA vision) and four strategies for pursuing this. I will use those 4 strategies to highlight the current committee's accomplishments and our plans.

The first strategy is by - communicating the CFJA vision with the TSP congregation, surrounding community, associated group renters.

Well, here I am - communicating with you. I have spoken in other services and hope to have someone from the committee do it regularly. We have also had articles in the TSP Times. Our mandate is to report to the Board and we do that through written reports and orally at meetings and retreats. Our publicity around our events has communicated our vision to the wider community.

Part of our mission is to develop relationships with our neighbours and communication is a two way street. Everyone on our committee has heard from voices in our community about how much Trinity-St. Paul's is valued as a centre where arts and justice groups can meet. The Board invited some community members to bring their perspective to our retreat in September. Every one of the speakers agreed that TSP holds a special place in the city and plays a special role. They identified TSP as embodying soul and spirit in the heart of the city. It was inspiring and confirming to hear from them.

The second strategy identified is:

Initiating activities and events that launch, draw attention to, and celebrate the CFJA vision.

I think we have aced this one this year.

We started in March with our playreading of David Craig's "Tough Case". This was a wonderful event. We had a great turn out and the play was very well received. It was an excellent reading and the message fit right in with our social justice mandate. The event attracted many from the restorative justice and theatre communities in the city. We plan to engage in future playreadings, perhaps even as a series at some point.

Building on the success of the EcoFestivals sponsored by the CFJA and TSP in the past, we held our second annual Bike Blessing. We made connections with bicycle groups across the city and got great press coverage, we even had a picture in the Observer. I stood on the front steps of the church throughout the afternoon and the presence we had on the street and the vibe was wonderful. In October we had our Songs of Peace and Protest event. What a wonderful evening. I know many of you were there. We had a great turn out and as Hans said we engaged a wider congregation. Each of the performers spoke of their connection to TSP and its importance to them. This was in many ways the epitome of what the centre is and can be.

On November 3rd we are co-sponsoring an evening with Stephen Lewis and Michelle Landsberg. We know this evening will resonate with many in our community.

We are planning many exciting events for the coming year - late afternoon music events, future play readings, art exhibits etc.

The third strategy is:

Developing relationships that help TSP live out its identity as a CFJA

This has also been a focus for us this year. Each person on the committee has taken on the role as a point person for specific events. This has enabled them to develop relationships with various faith, justice and arts groups. I will introduce each person as I speak about their work.

Janet Mairs, who has a love for the theatre and strong expertise in facilitation, has made contacts with several theatre groups in her role as point person for playreadings. Brendan Howlett's knowledge, perspective, theatre connections and enthusiasm have been invaluable. One theatre group has already used the centre as a rehearsal space and this has brought in some revenue.

Patty Zuver has recently joined our committee, bringing her wealth of experience and connections to the visual art community. She is in dialogue with the Central Tech art program and with several other artists about displaying their work at the Centre. We are very excited about these possibilities.

Mary Lou Fallis and Brad Ratzlaff and Amber Cunningham what can I say? Talk about connections and contacts and experience with the music community.

Ted Reeve has contacts in the Ecological community and experience in various church related organizations and is working on a possible evening with Don Tapscott here at the TSP Centre.

Vicki's ongoing work for the centre this year has enabled her to reach out to many different communities – other faith groups, similar centres both in Toronto and other cities, neighborhood organizations etc.. She also brings many years of work in social justice groups and in the arts to her work. Being able to allocate a day a week to CFJA work has been key to this relationship building and we thank the Board and the congregation for supporting this.

What an amazing committee. We welcome any others from the congregation to join us. You don't have to be a full committee member. If you have a particular interest, you could approach the committee point person and volunteer to support just that particular aspect of our work.

We know that this relationship building is key to the Centre's future. By making connections with other individuals and organizations and by bringing them together we hope to be the catalyst for synergies that may develop. The Centre can truly be a space and a place where the sacred and the secular meet and a portal for those who would like to be connected with TSP but may not be interested in being church members.

The fourth and last strategy is:

Coordinating and implementation of the CFJA vision with other groups, pastoral and building staff, Circles and Board

This is an important aspect of our work and one that we are always looking to enhance. We have invited Lynn Jondreville from Public Witness to our meetings. We will be sharing our minutes with Public Witness on a regular basis. We have worked closely with Bob Fugere in Property Management, especially around producing the new brochure. We are meeting with Walter Whitely and his group around governance issues next month. When staging events we work closely with John and Jackie and other staff and appreciate the excellent support they have given us.

That about sums it up. Our committee is excited about the future of the Centre in our city and on your behalf, we are dedicated to “putting wheels under the concept of a centre for faith, justice and the arts” by continuing our work. As with most things in life, this is messy work. It can’t be nailed down or put into a box. We don’t fit so well on an organizational chart. This can cause anxiety for us as a committee and for all of us as a congregation. This is always part of change and growth.

That said, we are very excited about the potential the Centre has to be a place in the centre of our city that stands as a steward for faith, justice and the arts.

I think we can still echo the words of the steering committee report in November 2006 – we both are, and are becoming such a centre. Growing into being the centre is a process and we are well on the way. It is going to be a great journey. for all of us.

After the service we invite you to engage in dialogue with members of the committee so we have the opportunity to listen to your perspective. We know you have valuable input. Janet Mairs will facilitate this time for sharing and questions. We welcome written comments if you cannot stay or feel more comfortable writing your comments. Written copies of these remarks will be available. Please get your coffee and bring it to the Memorial Room.