



# Spiritual Care Network

June 2010

*Our Vision: To be confident, trustworthy and spiritually resourceful team offering pastoral and spiritual care to Ministry Personnel in BC Conference.*

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## Perhaps Bart Simpson is not the best spiritual guide! By Dan Chambers

Getting around has never been so easy, it seems. No matter what neighbourhood or even what country you happen to be in, you can check your GPS for directions that are highly reliable though not infallible. You can even program the soothing voice of “Brad from California” or “Bonnie from Australia” or even the comical voice of Bart Simpson (no joke) to direct you safely to your desired location.

Or, if you, like me, are without a handy GPS device in your car, simply flick-on your computer (or iphone) and Google Maps can not only show you how to get there, complete with map and detailed instructions, but allow you to drive the route on your computer screen in 3-D.

Getting around has never been so easy.

Interesting, isn’t it, that a recent study showed that, if given the chance, both women and men of different ages preferred asking for directions and in fact they found their destination more quickly and accurately than those using high-tech tools. Perhaps there’s something within us that simply prefers people to computers. Even the GPS voice of Bart Simpson is no replacement for the voice of a real human being.

No surprise, then, that today leaders in the church seek conversation and company with one another. We can read. We can attend lectures. We can research on the internet. But actually gathering



together in the same room to share questions and experiences, frustrations and insights, is invaluable. When the path ahead is untried and unsure, relationship matters.



## Thar be Dragons!

We also know that getting around by car is not at all the same as traveling the dusty roads of the church in today’s society. Some of the maps we unravel, it seems, point to the edge of the world and enormous regions of uncharted ocean with the words written, *Beware! Thar be dragons!* Do we sail in that direction or don’t we? Or, to abruptly shift metaphors, do we stay with the fleshpots of Egypt or venture into the uncharted wilderness of the desert?

Google hasn’t yet done a map for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Steve Jobs has yet to develop a leadership app for our iphones that can point us in the right direction, and no GPS device can be attached to our office desk or pulpit that will reliably inform us when we’ve taken a wrong turn. So we turn to each other, listen to each other and trust that underneath it all the Spirit is

moving within us. That perhaps is the best we can find for an internal GPS device. We are both the explorers and topographers. Though others have gone before us offering essential wisdom for the journey, we are the ones making the maps today, and so collegial conversations are essential for each of us to gain a sense of the longitudes and latitudes we are navigating.

## Imagine! A future Grounded in Faith and Action

Russell Small, the President of Newfoundland Labrador Conference, points the delegates gathered for the West District spring meeting to the story of the loaves and fishes. When told to feed those gathered, the disciples can't. They are too busy with the details of the gathering. You know, all those meeting arrangements, last minute twists, technology snags. They are too busy. And too emptied by their bus-i-ness. What do you have to feed them, Jesus asks? Nothing, they reply!

We haven't invented the rat race. We only run it. Still.

This winter when Nora Sanders, the General Secretary, invited the church to respond to her assignment to develop three proposals for moving the church into and through the next three years, the dominant response was that we are tired. It didn't matter from which coast you were writing, fatigue laced the words. Voices across the church said our "bus-i-ness" is killing us, taxing our resources, leaving us empty. Pastoral relations was one area many pointed to. Our presbyteries and congregations just can't figure out the forms and processes let alone keep up with them. And The Manual: complex; complicated; time-consuming.

It is no wonder that at the end of a meeting we feel like we have nothing left to offer!

"A Future Grounded in Faith and Action" offers another way. It envisions a church whose processes and practices are enabling and encouraging rather than restrictive and proscriptive, that are agile and responsive rather than fixed and regulative. Endorsed by the General Council Executive, work is now underway to develop new ways of being together. One of the major directions being developed is moving many of the pastoral relations "employment" and oversight functions to staff positions at Conference level. BC Conference already has a version of this in place with its regionally deployed staff. The intention is to lift this supervisory function from the Presbytery so that the Presbytery can be a forum of collegiality and support. At the spring meeting of the Spiritual Care Network we dreamed a bit about the possibilities for our presbyteries if their agendas are not dominated by administration. The possibilities are exciting!

**We dream of a church  
in which at the end of the day,  
at the conclusion of a meeting, we will  
find our baskets full, and all satisfied.**

Similarly with The Manual. Can it be designed to serve as an "operating system" which provides a common platform and standard into which we can plug our regionally-based practices? Think of an iPhone and the countless apps that have been designed to work with it.

If you were designing our "operating system", what would be your priorities? What do you consider fundamental standards for our life together? When you work with our pastoral relations processes, what are the barriers you encounter? What confounds you? Send your ideas to me!

The General Secretary's report and the subsequent actions of the Executive of the General Council can be found at [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca). As proposals are developed, they will go to the Executive and, many recommending substantive change, to the next General Council. I encourage you to read the report and dream. Dream of a church in which at the end of the day, at the conclusion of a meeting, we will find our baskets full, and all satisfied.

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Rev. Alan Hall

## Sowing Promise, Growing Leaders

**A BC Conference Leadership Development Program**, facilitated by the Very Rev. Peter Short. This three-phase intensive program is designed to nourish, challenge and transform. It is hoped that upon completion of this program you will have greater clarity about the possibilities and pitfalls of leadership in a time of change, will hone leadership skills, will find ministry more fulfilling and will have a network of colleagues who are also companions on the journey.

**Phase I: October 17-22, 2010 @ Loon Lake, Maple Ridge**

**Phase II: Independent Study/Mentoring**

**Phase III: April 1-6, 2011 @ Loon Lake, Maple Ridge**

You should have received a brochure about this leadership opportunity, and may also find information on the BC Conference web site [www.bc.united-church.ca](http://www.bc.united-church.ca).



## Spirit-filled Leadership: The Hummingbird and the Presbytery

By Therese Descamp

Like the rest of the members of Presbytery assembled in the small church, I sensed that something was wrong before I actually KNEW it. I kept trying to ignore a faint squawking at the edge of my consciousness. I glanced back once to see that the church doors were open, and assumed the commotion was outside. Then Dan stopped preaching, glanced up, and said, “Wow. Look at that!”

It was a hummingbird—a Rufus hummingbird, I later learned. It had apparently wandered in through the open doors and was doing its best to get out. Unfortunately, it was relying on instinct, which meant flying upwards toward light. But the light it flew toward was the ceiling fixtures rather than the sun; and, as it bashed itself against the sanctuary ceiling, it shrilled out its frustration.

The hummingbird had interrupted the last official act of Presbytery, Sunday morning worship. We’d been trying, all weekend, to speak frankly about the changes coming for the church. We talked about the fact that none of us could really know what church will look like; we just know that it won’t look like what we are used to. We were trying to creatively imagine the future; we were trying to remind ourselves that God is with us in this great transition from mainstream to marginal. We were even letting our grief squeak out in tiny bits. The hapless hummingbird was interrupting our Conference President, Dan Chambers, as he spoke about the need to practice finding our way in this new place without landmarks.

The sermon stopped. The lights were turned off. Someone suggested opening the windows, but they weren’t the kind that could be opened. Someone else suggested we all get quiet so it could hear its mates calling from outside. Then we were asked to pray. We waited. Someone got a bowl of sugar water; someone else walked down the aisle with a big bouquet of red plastic flowers. Some folks reminded the rest that eventually the bird really would tire, and then it could be put out.



But the hummingbird continued to smash against the ceiling and screech.

Our powerlessness was painful. You could feel the anguish in the air as the bird flew back and forth, back and forth, never landing, calling out its distress over and over. After ten minutes—it seemed like eternity—someone suggested that Dan continue his sermon. He did, but it was different; we were all divided, our hearts longing for the bird’s release, our heads trying to attend.

In a short time, I heard something from the back, something different, something not so shrill and distressed. Hardly daring to hope, I turned around. There in the back corner next to the open door someone held high the dusty red flowers, now splashed with sugar water. There was my friend with his i-phone, playing a Rufus hummingbird call over and over. There was the bird, coming down—oh God, coming down to the flowers, taking off, coming down again, and finally resting long enough for the flowers to be walked out the door. When the hummingbird took flight outside, the church erupted in cheers.

We talk a lot in the church about living into change; we talk a lot about spirit-

filled leadership. But we don’t often get an object lesson about this future of ours, and we don’t often get to see how difficult it is to be a leader.

About this future of ours: just saying we’re ready to be changed will not help us avoid pain. We are going to feel utter powerlessness when congregations choose old, instinctual solutions. If there’s an ounce of compassion in us, it is going to hurt to watch communities smash themselves against barriers that can’t be removed, or fly desperately towards light that isn’t real. We may feel as if there is nothing we know how to do to make things better; and we may be right.

About the difficulty of being a leader: it won’t be comfortable, and we will need each other desperately. I talked to my friend of the i-phone later, and he told me how long he waited to do anything because he wasn’t sure he could really help. He told me how he had six different hummingbird calls loaded on the platform and no idea which one was right. We also spoke of how the person who knew that hummingbirds liked red flowers was necessary, as was the one who knew about the smell of sugar water. And how the rest of us needed to be silent and prayerful.

I don’t know who was, really, the spirit filled leader that day. Was it the person with the technology, or the one with the knowledge of birds? Was it those who prayed? Those who pointed out that the bird would eventually tire and drop? Or could it have been the hummingbird—the Holy Spirit?—who showed us that spirit-filled leadership in our changing, marginalized church is going to be unpredictable, uncomfortable, and require our best creativity, our deepest cooperation.

**“Spirit-filled leadership in our changing, marginalized church is going to be unpredictable, uncomfortable, and require our best creativity, our deepest cooperation”**

# Jethro Initiates Moses into a Spiritual Care Network

By Tim Scorer

We spend a lot of time celebrating the inspired leadership of Moses as he fought for the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian tyranny and then led them for many years on their arduous journey to a new land. For all his God-accompanied, Spirit-centred leadership the full humanity of Moses shines through those stories. We often get glimpses of this congregational leader figuring out how to deal with the next crisis and learning from his experiences. This is never clearer than in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus where the whole chapter is given over to the visit of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, and to Jethro's mentoring of Moses', the overwhelmed and overworked judge.

Chapter 18 begins by giving background

as to how Jethro, the priest of Midian, came to be visiting Moses at the camp of the Israelites in the wilderness. When Jethro arrives, he and Moses greet one another. They then spend time catching up on family news. Jethro is keen to know how his son-in-law is faring in this great adventure of liberation. Moses is only too pleased to give Zipporah's father all the amazing details of the deliverance from Pharaoh and of the subsequent desert journey. Jethro is awed by what God has done in freeing and accompanying the people. He leads the celebration for all that has been achieved through God's power.

At that point Jethro might have returned home, but he stays on in the encampment

and spends time observing Moses at work as judge for the people. It doesn't take long for Jethro to see a major flaw in the process of the administration of justice. Moses is trying to do it all! Clearly Jethro is as concerned for Moses, as he is for the effective dispensation of justice: "You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." He then proceeds to describe a system of training, education, delegation, and supervision which would save Moses from overwork and result in greater satisfaction and 'peace' for the people. Moses institutes the system suggested by Jethro and it works! The chapter ends by telling us that "Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country."



## Nine Guidelines from the Exodus story:

1. **Welcome a trusted colleague or mentor** to witness you in some aspects of your practice of ministry. Be conscious of opening yourself to hear the observations and reflections offered and of letting go any defensiveness and judgment that would keep you from receiving the gifts of the witness. (vs. 13-16)
2. When you are called to be a witness or a mentor create a space and time in your conversation with your friend in ministry in which you feel comfortable to **speak plainly and openly** about what you have observed and about the reflections you have from those observations. (vs. 17-19a)
3. When you are acting as a mentor of the person in ministry, **centre yourself in deep care** for the other. Recognize this as a moment when you embody the character of God: compassion. (vs. 19)
4. As a mentor or spiritual care-giver, **distinguish carefully** between the times when it is most helpful to do each of the following: quietly observe, describe what you see (behaviour description), empathize with the other, express judgment (and sometimes confrontation), give counsel or advice, and offer a blessing. (vs. 19-23)
5. When it is time to offer advice and counsel **discern carefully** at what level the advice is best offered: general advice connected to your observations, specific advice that includes (as Jethro's advice does) a well-conceived plan and the likely consequences if it is followed, or a combination of the two. (vs. 19-23)
6. In all that you do as a witness and mentor **stay consciously open** to the movement of Spirit, discerning and listening, and aware always that what you offer as mentor and guide is shaped as a result of your centering in spirit. (vs. 23)
7. When you are the one being accompanied and mentored, **listen carefully**, taking with gratitude whatever seems like a gift and letting go of whatever doesn't quite fit for you. Trust that the one who is offering the gifts of compassion, observation, judgment and counsel does so with the best of intention and not to do you harm. (vs. 24-26)
8. When the mentor/guide has completed their accompaniment of you, offer words or actions to **release** them back into the world. (vs. 27)
9. Take time to **recognize achievements** in leadership, both through formal acts of celebration and ritual as well as through sharing of food together. (vs. 10-12)

## More Leadership Opportunities:

**The Studio: Leadership and the Future of the Church** with Keith Howard and Janet Gear. This VST course is designed to allow students and ordered clergy to be in conversation and learn together how to affect the shape of the church of tomorrow.

*The church is being called to radical renovation, re-tooling and repentance. The impact of this is far-reaching and particularly **challenging for those who are called to exercise leadership.** In previous eras of ministry, responsibilities were fairly clear, especially within a congregational context – worship, Christian*

*education, pastoral care and some administration. While many of these tasks remain, people are now needed who can also help identify and pursue new ways of ministry and being church in a **context where the only constant is change.***

For more information, contact Janet Gear ([jgear@vst.edu](mailto:jgear@vst.edu)) before July 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Living the Faith The final Emerging Spirit workshop** for those who care about the present and future of the church and how, together, we live our faith. Ryerson United, 9:00 – 3:30. **Saturday, September 25th**

### **Stepping Further Out, Saturday, November 6th** *(still in process)*

Over and again we hear how important it is to know your context and connect with your community. In this workshop, Rob Dalgliesh will speak about how to make full use of that information, as he makes statistics stand up and live. In the afternoon, Keith Howard will speak about how the church can further integrate faith and life.

Being Grounded in Faith, and inspired in the spirit, gives us permission to be courageous in leadership.

## Circles of Trust—Touchstones by Parker Palmer

- *Extend and receive welcome.* People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other’s learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
- *Be present as fully as possible.* Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
- *What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.* This is not a “share or die” event! During this retreat, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.
- *Speak your truth in ways that respect other people’s truth.* Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one’s truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using “I” statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
- *No fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight.* This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the “helping professions.” But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.

- *Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions* instead of counsel, corrections, etc. With such questions, we help “hear each other into deeper speech.”
- *When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.* If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, “I wonder what brought her to this belief?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
- *Attend to your own inner teacher.* We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
- *Trust and learn from the silence.* Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
- *Observe deep confidentiality.* Nothing said in a circle of trust will ever be repeated to other people.

- *Know that it’s possible* to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

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## The Editor's Edge

by Sally Harris

Legend has it that before the voyages of Columbus and other Western adventurers, European mapmakers inscribed the words *ne plus ultra*, "there is no more," at the far edges of their maps. After the voyages of Columbus and others, these same mapmakers revised both their maps and their visions of reality. Although they had little knowledge of what lay beyond the far horizon, these mapmakers knew enough to inscribe the words *plus ultra*, "there is more," at the Western perimeters of their maps.



Plus Ultra "There is more"

It was an ordinary day when Luke described how the challenges of Peter's workplace were transformed. The scene is set in Luke 5 where Jesus is teaching in the shallow waters, a boat as his pulpit. When he is done preaching he turns and says: "Go deeper" "Huh," Peter says. "What do you mean go deeper? I am a professional. I have been working this lake a long time and today there is no fish."

To Peter and friends, worn-out and discouraged from an unsuccessful night's fishing, Jesus asked the impossible when he challenged them to "launch out into the deep." But Jesus' deeper vision encompassed both the sea and their lives. There is more! And Peter and his friends clearly had to revise their spiritual maps as they hauled an overwhelming catch into their boat.



If we can dare imagine new spiritual horizons we certainly find good company in the Bible's own "choose your own adventure" stories of "There is more!" The creed of any age and all adventurers and pilgrims, whether their journeys take place above the earth's atmosphere or on the Camino road; exploring patterns of connectedness in the world of quantum physics or walking the labyrinth, is always the affirmation "*Plus Ultra*"

There is more!