

# Special Synod Council Report and Motion

## **In the Beginning..**

The history of campus ministry at UBC on the University Endowment Lands (UEL) property is a long and rich one, filled with hope and success, along with challenges and disappointments, and through it all God has been and continues to be with us.

Beginning in the early 1960's through the cooperation of three distinct Lutheran bodies, the Lutheran Student Foundation (LSF) was incorporated through the Societies Act of BC. By 1965 the LSF had signed a 40 year lease for two plots on the UEL from the Province of BC. On one plot was built the Lutheran Campus Centre and on the other, the parsonage. Through the 70's and 80's, campus ministry at UBC was vibrant and touched many people's lives through worship, counselling, leadership development and lots of food, to name a few ways. The buildings also provided housing for pastors and their families as well as a small group of students. It provided a space to gather for worship, to share meals and fellowship, a safe place for young people to explore, question and express their faith in God. Those that were involved with campus ministry during that time remember it fondly.

## **As Time Went On**

By the early 1990's the buildings were purchased by the BC Synod but began to show their age and were in need of repairs. The number of students participating in campus ministry life were fewer, financial support was greatly diminished, and over time the position of campus chaplain was reduced until the position ended. Thus began a number of fundraising campaigns throughout the BC Synod. People gathered to assess the situation and envision what campus ministry meant and would look like in the future. Various fundraising initiatives took place to upgrade the building and provide funding for campus ministry. With the help of gifts great and small, the BC Synod was able to raise \$581,000 and in 2003 purchased the lot holding the campus centre. Dreams and visions about the potential for this space continued. Without the necessary repairs however, the campus centre continued to deteriorate and in 2008 it was declared a health risk and unsafe for occupancy.

Today, the UEL property is still home to a derelict building that is a safety hazard as well as a financial and human resource strain. It poses continued health and safety risks for any who enter as well as potential legal and tax liabilities. A security company has been hired by synod council to patrol and report activity but it does not tend to the regular

break-ins and destruction; that has been left to synod council volunteers. The police have declared the building a fire hazard and with squatters a current threat, the moral and legal obligations of the BC Synod are high. There is also a real possibility that an outside governing body may require us to take action. Sadly, this property is not the life-giving place it once was, and it has not been such since 2008.

## **Motion to Move Forward**

So where do we go from here? This question about moving forward has been asked many times throughout the life of campus ministry on the UEL property. Visioning teams, committees and clergy have come together to discern what the future holds. Several similar types of proposals have been brought forward over the years but nothing has ever come to fruition.

A motion carried at the 2010 BC Synod convention was another attempt to move forward. The motion ***“Instructed the synod council to form a committee to examine the options for the possible commercial development of the land upon which the UBC Lutheran Campus Centre is located in order to support the campus ministry of the BC Synod.”***

Out of that motion a task force was formed to “examine options.” This task force invested significant time and money exploring options and doing research on a mixed use development. Property use, density and zoning bylaws administered by the UEL were just some of the challenges faced by the group. In 2016, a mixed use development proposal with market rental housing was presented to Synod Council by the task force. It included several financial models based upon building height and density that would provide for common worship/community space and various configurations of housing. Synod Council was advised that another \$200,000 in funding would be required for the planning and rezoning application process to continue, with no certainty of acceptance.

## **Recalculating**

As council discussed and considered the proposal put before us we came to realize that we needed to have a bigger picture. As we engaged in conversation around the table we allowed ourselves time to reflect on many questions, some that may not have been previously asked.

- Does this meet with the mission of the BC Synod at this point in time?
- What are the implications of focusing a large part of our resources on one geographical area?

- Could the current financial situation of the synod support this development with limited financial resources?
- Do we have the capacity, staff and volunteers, to support a development of this size on an ongoing basis? Is this the place where we can best invest our limited resources?
- Is the model for campus ministry, as practiced in the past, meeting the needs of students today? Is this what we need as we move into the future?
- How would this development address the need for campus ministry throughout the BC Synod?
- And perhaps most importantly, does this proposal respond to the motion from the 2010 synod convention to explore options?

In light of this a decision was made by Synod Council to re-examine the option for the possible commercial development. We sought the outside expertise of Catalyst Community Developments Society,<sup>1</sup> a BC not-for-profit that specializes in the development of multi use properties for nonprofits. We brought them in for their expertise in assessing viability and usage of the property. The report Catalyst presented to Synod Council concludes by citing three options to consider:

- 1) Sale of the land on the open market, noting the difficulty in assessing the property due to the uncertainty of rezoning.
- 2) Sale of the land to a mission-driven organization, noting the interest from the owner of the neighbouring property.
- 3) Redevelopment, noting the significant challenges for the synod given its current capacity and potential risk.

### **Considering the Options**

As you are aware many congregations and rostered ministers, as well as the BC Synod Council are engaged in the missional renewal process. This work has helped us reflect together, to listen, learn and prayerfully discern how to best move forward with the UEL property. Synod Council revisited the mission of the synod and the needs of campus ministry throughout the province by creating an ad hoc committee to examine the needs/models of campus ministry. One of the things that became clear is that the need for ministry to post secondary students in our region has shifted dramatically since the 1960's. At that time campus ministry meant serving just two locations. Today there are 27 schools of higher learning, with a broadly diverse group of students attending on-line, on and off campus part-time and full time.

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<sup>1</sup> Catalyst is currently working with Oakridge Lutheran Church and Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in the lower mainland.

Council weighed the financial costs, risks, capacity, and feasibility of each of the options under consideration. Both the task force and Catalyst agreed that the potential for commercial development on a scale large enough to financially support campus ministry Province-wide, as outlined in the 2010 motion, was highly unlikely given the zoning of the UEL property and its placement in a “buffer” zone between the campus and the residential area of the UEL. Catalyst also observed “That due to the BC Synod’s current lack of additional organizational capacity and limited expertise in the area of property development that to undertake a development of the property as the developer would be challenging and would carry significant potential risk.”

## **Conclusion**

Upon reviewing the information gathered and the proposals from Catalyst and the task force, after much discussion, prayer and reflection, after carefully considering the responsibility of stewardship of both our financial and human resources, the BC Synod Council recommends the sale of the UEL property.

**BCSynCoun–Mar2018–10:** Moved/Seconded that the Synod Council recommend to the 2018 BC Synod Convention that the synod sells the synod owned property on the University Endowment Lands. **Carried unanimously.**

While this recommended motion proposes to bring an end to campus ministry tied to land ownership on the UEL property, it does not mean an end to our hope for engagement in campus ministry at UBC and other schools across the synod. Over the past few months there have been expressions of interest in collaborative work around campus ministry with others at UBC.

We do not know what lies ahead. This work of discernment is something that we must undertake together to discover our priorities and how God is leading us forward as a synod. This conversation has been needed for some time. Our hope is to convene synod-wide conversations, perhaps as soon as this fall, to help guide us into God’s hopeful future.