



# United Fresh Start – Practices

This resource provides guidance practices about how the *United Fresh Start* program is shared and administered in The United Church of Canada. It provides background on how the program can help nurture vitality for both ministry personnel and congregations. It provides details about how the program works. It shares testimony of how the program has had a positive impact in two presbyteries. It provides history on how the program has been developed in our denomination.

These practices are for congregations, presbytery and Conferences who choose to utilize this program that is being offered to the denomination by the General Council Office.

## **Introduction**

*Fresh Start* is an experiential educational program developed nearly 20 years ago by the Episcopal Church in the United States and is now used by dioceses in the Anglican Church in Canada. The program, in our denominational context, has been re-branded as *United Fresh Start* and it involves a trained facilitator meeting with a congregational group, including lay leaders and the newly called or appointed ministry personnel. The facilitator works through modules from the *United Fresh Start* curriculum. Together, ministry personnel and congregational leaders gain a mutual understanding of leadership expectations, role clarity, and the use of power and authority.

## **Motivation**

A premise of *United Fresh Start* is that both congregations and leaders are most open to new learning during a time of transition. The first two years of a pastoral relationship is an ideal time for the congregation and minister to develop together a common knowledge base for the challenges that they will face during their time together. *United Fresh Start*, therefore, has been primarily viewed as a program that is offered at times of changes in the pastoral relationship. The curriculum of *United Fresh Start* is based on some of the most prominent organizational development research published over the past two decades. The content is organized into 22 modules and addresses topics such as transformational leadership, change management, church size, conflict, decision making, power and authority, roles and expectations, and polarity management. The material draws from the work of leading experts such as Ron Heifetz, Meg Wheatley, Barry Johnson, Speed Leas, Edwin Friedman and Peter Steinke.

As we work to support healthy pastoral relationships and nurture vitality of both ministry personnel and congregations, it is hoped that *United Fresh Start* can be a program that assists in growing healthy pastoral relationships. This program is expected to be a way to improve the resiliency and overall wellbeing of ministry personnel and help to foster health in the pastoral relationship at its beginning. The stronger the pastoral relationship between ministers and the congregation as a whole, the healthier and more effective both ministry personnel and the congregation or pastoral charge will be. The goal of this program is vital ministry personnel, and vibrant and vital congregations or pastoral charges. A healthy pastoral relationship is linked not only to the health and effectiveness of ministry personnel, but is key for the congregation to live out God's mission in faithful and contextual ways.

## **Program standards**

To be known as *United Fresh Start*, the program has a number of standards:

- program is shared by a trained *United Fresh Start* facilitator
- the facilitator uses the *United Fresh Start* curriculum materials and methods
- the *United Fresh Start* program is supported by the presbytery
- ongoing relationship between presbytery, Conference and General Council Office for supporting the program

## **How does it work?**

*In Congregations and Pastoral Charges:* In a congregation or a pastoral charge the *United Fresh Start* program is led by a trained and accredited facilitator who is assigned to work with the congregation by the presbytery. The facilitator meets with a congregational group, including lay leaders and the newly called or appointed ministry personnel. Together, they work through a number of modules (including the four core modules) of the *United Fresh Start* curriculum. For some modules, it is appropriate to have a large congregational group work through the module. Other modules would work best with the ministry personnel and a group of key lay leaders from the governing body. Aside from the four core modules (entering a new system, family and friends-leading an integrated life, history-sharing and understanding, and transition), the facilitator works with the group to discern which other modules would be helpful for the particular context and background of the faith community. Ideally, the modules could be shared over half-day sessions spread out over the first two years of the new pastoral relationship. There is no expectation that all 22 modules are reviewed in the two year period. The group decides which modules would be helpful, beyond the four core modules.

*For Presbyteries/Districts:* Because *United Fresh Start* is a program connected with healthy pastoral relationships, it is a program overseen by the presbytery, specifically the pastoral relations committee. Ideally, the trained facilitators are in connection with, but not necessarily members of, the presbytery pastoral relations committee (or equivalent). This connection enables clear communication between facilitators sharing the modules with a congregation and their ministry personnel and the committee that has oversight of the pastoral relationship.

Once the facilitators have been trained, the presbytery accredits them to share the program within the presbytery. Because the presbytery has oversight of the program in congregations, the presbytery appoints trained facilitators to share the program congregations. The presbytery can also track trained facilitators who lack the gifts and skills for the work and avoid reappointing them to further work.

The presbytery must also decide how it is going to implement the program. The presbytery can decide whether it will be an optional or mandatory program for those entering a new pastoral relationship. Also, the presbytery can decide whether facilitators will be compensated for their work with congregations or if it's volunteer work. A recommended practice for remuneration of facilitators is that it is based on the daily rate for visiting ministry personnel from the minimum salary schedule.

The presbytery is invited to be creative about how they share this program. The presbytery can also decide that if more than one new pastoral relationship is beginning at the same time, then it may make sense for all the faith communities to work through the modules together (with space for separate conversations when reflecting on issues specific to one congregation).

The *United Fresh Start* program is not only helpful in a new pastoral relationship. There are modules that are helpful during discussion before or after an amalgamation. There are helpful modules that can be used during discussion about a shared or co-operative model of ministry between pastoral charges. Also, some modules can be used as the basis for clergy retreat days. Finally, some presbyteries have introduced the program to the presbytery by sharing a module or two during a presbytery meeting.

*For Conferences:* Conferences which choose to make the program available have a helping role in organizing facilitator training events. Further details about these facilitator training events are noted below.

*For General Council Office:* The General Council Office provides oversight of the *United Fresh Start* curriculum. Recently, the curriculum has been updated for the United Church context through a contract with Joe Ramsay since he left his staff position with the General Council Office. The written material and slides for each of the 22 modules have been updated with new images and graphics for fresher slides. A denominational-specific website has been developed ([unitedfreshstart.ca](http://unitedfreshstart.ca)) where the curriculum can be accessed by trained facilitators in a password-protected section of the website. The secure website also contains a facilitator message board for support and communication.

At the General Council Office, the program coordinator ministry personnel vitality, Adam Hanley, is responsible for oversight, training and standardization of the program. He manages the training *United Fresh Start* facilitators, in partnership with Joe Ramsay, who serves as the lead facilitator trainer. Adam has developed a tracking process to determine where facilitators are offering the programs and which modules are being utilized. There are further details below. An evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the program will be completed in three years. He is also responsible for promoting the program to Conferences, as well as seeking ecumenical partnerships for facilitator training events and the sharing of best practices.

### **Tracking and Evaluation**

Online forms have been developed for the tracking and evaluation of the *United Fresh Start* program and the use of the curriculum in congregations.

The first form ([https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs\\_tracking](https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs_tracking)) is to help track, at the General Council Office, which modules are being used and where. It is hoped that this form will be submitted after each presentation of a module.

The second form ([https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs\\_congregation](https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs_congregation)) is to be filled out by someone from the congregation where a facilitator is sharing the program. The goal is for the congregation to be able to share some evaluation of their experience of the program. It is hoped

that the facilitators will share it with congregations where you are sharing the program and encourage the group to assign some folks to complete and submit it.

The third form ([https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs\\_facilitator](https://unitedchurch.formstack.com/forms/ufs_facilitator)) is to be completed by the facilitator when they have completed all the modules with a congregation. The goal is to collect feedback on the whole experience of sharing many modules with a congregation, as well as gain insight into which modules were most helpful, the types of situations where the program is being used, and the facilitator's evaluation of the curriculum.

While facilitators are actively sharing the *United Fresh Start* program, they are encouraged to use these forms.

### **Oversight**

The oversight of the *United Fresh Start* program is shared.

As mentioned above, the General Council Office oversees the program, maintains both the curriculum and website, and coordinates facilitator training events. This oversight helps to maintain the standardization of *United Fresh Start*.

The presbyteries provide oversight of the program within their context. They determine the mandatory or optional nature of the program. They determine the local practice for compensation of facilitators. They determine when and where the program will be used. They accredit facilitators and deploy them to share with program with congregations. This helps *United Fresh Start* be overseen by those most knowledgeable with the local contextual needs and realities.

### **Facilitator training**

Facilitator training is usually Conference-based. The facilitator training occurs in a residential setting over four days and is led by three or more experienced facilitator trainers. In the *United Fresh Start* program the trainers are referred to as members of the *United Fresh Start* faculty. It is anticipated that these events will be led by Joe Ramsay who serves as our dean of faculty or lead trainer. The other faculty members for a training event could be a trained Conference personnel minister, an experienced facilitator or Adam Hanley from the General Council Office. However, there could also be ecumenical opportunities to share a facilitator training event with a local Anglican diocese, although care is required to make note of denominational differences in how the program is shared.

The training provides an introduction to the program for participants, an experience of some of the modules, and participants learn to share the program by spending time presenting a module and receiving feedback on their facilitation.

Because of the way that the training is organized, the ideal number of participants for a training event is 18. The minimum number is 12.

It is anticipated that Conferences will organize the local arrangements and registration for facilitator training, because Conferences are aware of local facilities for holding residential training events and are experienced in coordinating event registration. Many Conference

personnel ministers have been trained as facilitators in order for their eligibility to join the faculty of trainers for facilitator training events.

*Cost:* The General Council Office financially supports the program by covering the facilitator training program fees, including the trainer costs and materials. It is expected that presbyteries and Conferences contribute to the accommodation, meal, and travel costs of the participants.

*Faculty:* A training event is led by one lead trainer and two or more faculty members. Following the practice from *Fresh Start* in the Episcopalian church, *United Fresh Start* accredits faculty in the following way. To be accredited as a lead trainer, one must first become a trained facilitator and then be a faculty member in three training events working alongside an accredited lead trainer. To be accredited as a member of the faculty, one must be a trained facilitator before working alongside a lead trainer in a facilitator training event.

### **Testimonials**

I acknowledge that because of time spent together a further development occurred—the relationship between these two pastoral charges and the Presbytery grew stronger and enabled opportunities for these congregations to invite Presbytery to assist in other ways. That definitely would not have happened without this program.

Bob Wallace – South Alberta Presbytery

As a *United Fresh Start* facilitator, I have watched relationships and attitudes be transformed with renewed enthusiasm and awareness. I have experienced creativity and collaboration emerge from inspired participants who are willing to step outside of their comfort zones and their typical boxes to seek new ways of reflecting on, behaving and leading in their relationships with others.

Brenda Watt – Foothills Presbytery

### **History**

The introduction of the *Fresh Start* program into the United Church has its roots in the isolation in ministry work of the last two decades. The 37<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2000 received a report that included feedback from our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) based on a survey of their counsellors. The report indicated that a disproportionately high number of ministry personnel indicated that they felt “isolated” in their vocations and unsupported by the church as a whole.

In response, the General Council directed that the church seek to understand better the “Isolation of Ministry Personnel” and a study was conducted, culminating in a report with recommendations to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2006. The study was conducted by our EAP provider, Warren Shepell at the time, and included a survey that measured the overall psychological, spiritual and emotional health of ministry personnel. The report indicated that high levels of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout for ministry personnel were directly correlated to the health of the relationship between minister and congregation. Where there was conflict or dissatisfaction in a pastoral relationship, ministers usually experienced stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. One of the recommendations to improve the resiliency and overall well-being of ministry personnel was to implement a program to support pastoral relationships — particularly at their beginning stage. The report cited the *Fresh Start* program as an example of a program that had proven successful in the Anglican Church.

The Isolation in Ministry report and recommendations had an impact on many programs, resources and priorities of the General Council Office. The recommendation to initiate a program similar to *Fresh Start* was not addressed immediately. In anticipation of the eventual development of *Fresh Start* or similar program in the United Church, two General Council staff members, Joe Ramsay and Catherine O'Brien, received training and were certified by the Episcopal Church in March, 2011. However, an opportunity to begin developing a program did not occur until 2013 after the initiation of a comprehensive project called "Effective Ministry and Healthy Pastoral Relationships." As part of an effort to experiment with innovative approaches for managing pastoral relationships, three presbyteries in Alberta and Northwest Conference agreed to pilot the *Fresh Start* program.

The Episcopal *Fresh Start* program was chosen as an existing program that could be adapted for use in the United Church to address the need to support new pastoral relationships. The pilot program was established to test the program and curriculum in three presbyteries in Alberta and Northwest Conference. After testing the program for 28 months, a recommendation was made to the Ministry and Employment Unit to modify the curriculum for the United Church context and expand the program across the denomination.

### **Contact information**

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### **Appendix: The Modules**

- 1. Church Size and Its Implications:** Remembering the basics of Church Size Theory during a time of transition can help us see our situation anew.
- 2. Conflict Module 1 – Conflict Awareness:** Change in leadership, membership and mission, in and of itself, invokes conflict. Alban Institute Senior Consultant Alice Mann has said that one of the "great myths" of the church is that change is possible without conflict. Understanding the early warning signs and being clear on how we as individuals respond in conflict situations can help us navigate the transition phase.
- 3. Conflict Module 2 – Conflict Management:** The purpose of this module is to deepen participant's understanding of conflict and provide ideas and tools they can use in managing conflict effectively. (Related Modules #5, #11, #17, #18, #20 & #21).
- 4. Decision Making: Style and Clarity:** A look at: Authority; Nature of decisions; Need for involvement; and Congregational culture.
- 5. Dialogue – Searching for Common Ground:** An approach to living in community in spite of our differences.
- 6. Entering a New System:** The purpose for this module is to help participants understand that congregations are living systems and that the way new people enter the system can have a

substantial impact on their ministry. This module provides some tools for new leaders and their congregations to get to know each other, and learn about the congregation's history, culture and expectations.

**7. Exit and Entrance – Patterns, Emotions and the Wilderness:** The purpose of this module is to help participants understand that the success of a transition depends in part upon how exits and entrances are handled, to reflect on their own exits and entrances, and become more intentional about entrance into new ministry.

**8. Family and Friends – Leading an Integrated Life:** The purpose of this module is to help ministry personnel look at their lives, how they live and how they schedule their time. Participants consider the importance of balance, integration and how well they maintain relationships with family and friends.

**9. Family Systems Theory – The Congregation as a System:** A clear understanding of Family Systems Theory can help ministry personnel and congregations be more self-aware and self-differentiating; to be better equipped to identify those in the congregation with good leadership skills; and to better recognize and deal with anxiety in the system.

**10. Finances – What You Need to Know:** Responsible for the “big picture” and leading in the planning of the church's vision, mission and core values, ministry personnel and lay leaders can look at how monies are spent as an indicator of the extent to which the congregation lives into their vision, mission and values. Facilitating faithful stewardship of the congregation's gifts – time, talent and treasure – is a vital part of leadership.

**11. Habits, Norms and Expectations:** The purpose of this module is to explore how understanding a congregation's routines and norms can smooth a new person's entry into the system.

**12. History-Sharing and Understanding:** The purpose of this module is to share the history of the congregation and to explore how that history has shaped the congregation and its relationship with the wider church.

**13. Leadership for Our Times:** A look at authority and leadership styles in the context of today's challenges.

**14. Leading Planned Change:** The purpose of this module is to have participants reflect on their readiness for change and to consider how well they are doing in following the basic steps needed for change to be effectively implemented.

**15. Organizational Systems Theory – Using Organizational Analysis in Congregations:** The purpose of this module is to provide participants with a model for analyzing the effectiveness of their congregational systems.

**16. Planning for Effective Ministry – The Discern/Plan/Do/Reflect Cycle:** Planning is a cyclical process – “Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time” (Joel Barker). There must be accountability for action embedded in the cycle and every system needs feedback about how things are going and changing. Cultural relevancy is a key component when discerning the who, what, where, when, why and how of the Spirit's leading and discerning how the church lives into the way of Christ, expressing love for God and neighbour.

17. **Polarities – Differences to be Managed:** Learning to differentiate between problems that need to be fixed and polarities that need to be managed, and a model for managing them.

18. **Power, Authority and Influence:** The purpose of this module is to help participants understand the dynamics of power, authority and influence in their congregations by conducting a power analysis and looking at dimensions of trust and agreement among those with formal and informal power.

19. **Renegotiating Roles and Expectations:** “...as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and we reshape our inner selves. When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created.” This module equips participants with tools to negotiate roles and expectations.

20. **Role Clarity:** A clear understanding of your role in the congregation is one of the most important tools you can acquire as a church leader – ordered or lay.

21. **Transition:** Understanding the difference between change and transition will help participants recognize individual and group dynamics in times of change and equip them to respond accordingly.

22. **Wellness – Caring for Self in Transition:** Spiritual, Physical, Mental, Emotional and Social Well-Being for Leaders Experiencing Change.

(source: <http://unitedfreshstart.ca/what-are-the-modules/>)