



EDGE: A Network for New Ministry Development and Ministry Renewal

DRAFT - EDGE Viability Report Riverside United Church Ottawa, Ontario

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Nothing in this report should be taken as a criticism. The EDGE Viability process is designed to help congregations evaluate their own current situation, recognizing that there is widespread decline in all mainstream protestant denominations. This report reflects on your blessings and challenges to help you understand whether you have the resources, capacity and Missional focus to successfully pursue a congregation renewal. Recommendations are provided for moving forward.

The Viability report is based on the following information sources:

- Riverside UC EDGE Viability Reports Parts 2 & 3 (November / December 2016)
- Riverside United Church Annual Reports – 2014 & 2015

The Viability Report is divided into the following sections:

A. Key Observations

Riverside's Key Statements

Riverside's Blessings

1. Stable Finances
2. Inexpensive, Accessible Building
3. Seed Money for Renewal
4. Investigating Renewal

Riverside's Challenges

5. Declining Volunteer Resources
6. Ageing Congregation
7. Low Participation Rate in Worship
8. Not Tracking Attendance

B. Recommendations

1. Be Curious – What Would Excite our Congregation?
2. Engage Your Neighbours
3. Commit to Long Term Renewal

4. Seek Experienced Help

A. Key Observations – based on Reports 2 & 3.

Riversides Key Statements – Current Situation (Section 11 Report 3)

- What patterns are reflected out of the “current situation”?
 - “A sense that we can continue to be what we have always been. A tendency to “slide past” the difficult discussions about the future. A need to replace the generous giving of our elderly members who may not be with us 5 years from now, but younger families often cannot or don’t make the same financial commitment. This is also true of time and energy to volunteer, especially fundraising upon which we depend to meet our operating budget.”

- How might these patterns be considered within a theological framework?
 - “Council is currently reading and discussing Rev. Dr. John Pentland’s “Fishing Tips” and is finding some of his frameworks useful in considering the dynamics of our congregation...For example if we did the hard work to define our values, and articulate our vision and mission we might see shifts in our thinking. This is an area for further work and exploration.”

- What is life-giving? What is life-draining? What is God calling this congregation to?
 - “This needs to be asked [about] everything that we do.
 - Outreach is life giving. Reverse offerings are life giving. Messy Church is life giving, Sunday worship is life giving, as are special worship events. Even meetings can be life giving as we experience caring, laughter and support through the meeting process.
 - Constant worry about money drains people, as fund raising has to be a priority. The struggle to find people to fill positions is life draining. We do need to understand and articulate our mission and decide how best to live it.”

Riverside Blessings

1. Stable Finances – Over the past five years there has been a net surplus of \$52,028. The number of identifiable givers has increased by 9% over the past three years even with the high number of funerals in 2014. Total givings have declined by only 3% over the past three years, although total revenue has declined by 6% due to reduced fundraising. Nearly 40% of givings come via PAR which provides stable funding through the year. A cloud on the horizon is a need for \$150,000 (Riverside’s share) of future capital improvements.

2. Inexpensive, Accessible Building – Because the building is shared between the two congregations (Riverside United and the Anglican Church of the Resurrection) , it is very economical since fixed costs are shared. The building has been renovated and

is fully accessible and provides a very flexible space with a large green space and space for potential development.

3. Seed Money for New Ministry – There is \$198,129 in endowment funds (\$60,500 of which is a restricted manse fund) which is being well stewarded. This could provide seed money to invest into a renewed ministry.
4. Investigating Renewal – Riverside should be commended for starting the process of considering ministry renewal. Given sustainable renewal can take 5 to 7 years it is important that this process be continued and if possible accelerated, since there are concerns that they will have insufficient volunteers, will fundraise too little and that major capital expenditures may be required in the next 5 years.

Riverside Challenges

5. Declining Volunteer Resources – The volunteers that govern the congregation are ageing and burning out. It is difficult to attract new people to take on governance positions, although recently there have been a few new people stepping forward. There is the feeling that “if a person takes it on they feel they may be “stuck for life”.” In 2015 there were 83 Council and Committee positions (excluding the Fundraising Network and Outreach and Social Action) but only 80% of these positions were filled. If all positions were filled, this would represent more than 100% of average weekly attendance at worship. This is a very high governance overhead which may severely limit resources for ministry. In addition, 30% of the minister’s time is devoted to administration, some of which may be handled by volunteers or additional paid admin services, allowing this time to be redirected to new ministries. The Church of the Resurrection should be approached to discuss a more equal sharing of admin costs associated with rentals.
6. Ageing Congregation – 63% of the congregation is over 60 years of age; 16% are over 80. Unfortunately, this is a common situation in the United Church. However, we are approaching a financial crunch – the oldest congregants tend to give the most and when they move away to be with family who can care for them, or into long term care facilities, or pass away, there will be a sudden and potentially critical financial impact. Nearly 40% of total givings come from those over 75 and 12% from those over 85. The top 5 donors, who may be over 85, give in the \$5,001+ per year bracket. While there are few young parents and children at Riverside you have initiated a successful Messy Church, which could be leveraged to befriend these families, to serve them, including spiritually, in ways that may not include Sunday worship but could result in increased volunteers and financial support.
7. Low Participation Rate in Worship – On average only 17% of total members and congregants (468) attend worship (average attendance of 80). The congregation Role should be reviewed to determine if it is up-to-date. There may be an

opportunity to engage the non-participating congregants to determine their needs and what would encourage them to be more involved and supportive of worship and other church programs.

8. Not Tracking Attendance – Attendance at worship and Sunday School is by no means the key measure of success, but it is an important indicator. It is my understanding that this important data is not tracked. It appears that average worship attendance has declined by about 10% over the last three years.

B. Recommendations – “We need to do something different to remain viable.” (Report 3) It is recommended that the following be considered.

1. Be Curious – What Would Excite Your Congregation?

- Ask your congregation what is meaningful to them, what engages them in their faith, what would excite them to participate more in the life of the church. Ask these questions to each significant segment of the congregation, possibly young families (families of any kind with children and youth at home), seniors and those in-between.
- Once their needs are known, develop means to meet them. The goal is to retain them as members / adherents and to grow their participation and support by meeting their needs.

2. Engage Your Neighbours

- In Mathew 22 Jesus stated that: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” What is your mission to implements Jesus’s calling? Determining this and expressing it clearly is the most important step in renewal.
- God is already active in your neighbourhood, go find where that is. As with your congregants, be curious about your neighbours and what their needs are. There may be acute needs around mental health issues or the isolation of seniors. There may be needs by young families for a community in which to enjoy family activities and to discuss raising children with sound values.
- You may already have ‘friends’ who help at church events but do not attend Sunday worship. The opportunity is to make more friends, individuals, organizations and faith communities, who will help you with your vision, to volunteer and to give financially to specific missions. Some will join you Sunday morning; others will help you invent new forms of church meaningful to them and you.

3. Review Governance Once Renewal Mission is Determined

- The governance of Riverside has a very high administrative component which restricts mission activity and is not attracting support. This should be reassessed

once the renewal mission is determined. At that point new governance requirements will be clearer.

4. Commit to Long Term Renewal

- Renewing your mission, exciting your congregation and engaging your neighbours is a long-term commitment. It often takes 5 to 7 years to develop significant mission, membership and financial results.

5. Seek Experienced Help

- You are not alone. EDGE, the United Church's network for ministry renewal, is the leading provider of congregation renewal services in Canada. It has and is helping many congregation to discern their calling and to respond to it. While renewal is different for every congregation, based on its internal situation, the community it resides in and the specific mission that they discern, there are common processes and a network of experiences that can be accessed to help guide you through renewal. EDGE can walk the path with you.