



Red Deer Lake United Church Call-Out 2022

On February 6, 2022, Red Deer Lake United Church Board Chair Rob Howard set the stage for Call-Out 2022, an initiative to connect with members of our church community with the following email:

Members of our Red Deer Lake United Church Community

During the early part of 2022, the Red Deer Lake United Church Board is hopeful that we will be able to continue to work through the Covid 19 pandemic and what has been a very difficult time for the church staff, church board and members of our church community. The pandemic has been challenging for all churches and although we believe we have been able to make the best of the situation, through our virtual church services and over the past few weeks some limited opportunities to return to services in our church, we really have missed opportunities to come together and interact personally. Although there has been some incredible work done through volunteer initiatives and special programs such as our Congregational Care program, we want to find ways to connect with you, see how you have been doing and let you know we care about you. As a Board, we are organizing a team of volunteers to connect with each member of our church community through a personal phone call. We want to know what we have been doing as a church community which has been most beneficial for you as we work through this pandemic. We also would be interested in any thoughts you wish to share about what more we can be doing.

It is a major undertaking to contact members of Red Deer Lake United Church through a phone call. We would appreciate hearing from church members who are willing to assist in volunteering to make some phone calls. We will provide some focus questions and support for those who are interested in making this significant contribution as members of our volunteer phoning team. Any questions, comments or suggestions which are generated through the process will be passed on to the Board. You can show your interest in joining the phoning team by responding to this email.

We are planning to have the team make phone calls sometime in February. **If you do not wish to receive a phone call, please indicate so by responding to this email.** This also is an opportunity for anyone who wishes to share some feedback with the Board to begin the process by responding to this email and your response will be passed on to the Board.

We have experienced an unprecedented challenge as a church community, but we are confident that with your continued support and active involvement in the life and work of our church, we can turn this pandemic experience into an opportunity for regrouping and revitalization.

Thank you very much for your ongoing support!

Rob Howard,

Board Chair,

Red Deer Lake United Church

A team of 21 volunteers was organized to make a phone call to the over 225 individuals on the Congregation members list. Over the next three weeks the team members embraced the opportunity to connect with members of the church community, express caring and support and engage them in a discussion of the following questions which had been suggested by the Board:

1. Do you still feel connected with RDLUC during this difficult time?
2. What, in particular, has been helpful?
3. What more might the church be able to do?
4. Due to COVID Restrictions, online services became necessary.
 - a) Have you watched (any, some or most) of these online services?
 - b) Recently, (as a result of technology upgrades at RDLUC) it has been possible to broadcast Sunday services from the church. Do you prefer this option?
5. Do you still see RDLUC as your church? (Please explain);
6. Do you wish to make any other comments?

The Call-Out Team members described the experience of overcoming the sense of isolation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic over a period of two years by connecting through a phone call, to be a very positive and enjoyable experience which was appreciated by those who had been contacted. The team members prepared and submitted a summary of the feedback which was generated through the calls to Board Chair Rob, in accordance with the March 6 deadline. An important outcome of the process has been the updating of contact information and the RDLUC congregational membership list.

The information which was outlined in the Call-Out Team Summary reports, which were submitted to the Board Chair, will be used by the Board to reflect on what is working well and in identifying priorities for further action. It should be emphasized that references to a specific concern or matters of a personal nature will be addressed in a confidential and appropriate manner by the Board Chair.

Key areas of commendation as well as recommendations arising from the Red Deer Lake United Church Call-Out 2022 initiative are as follows:

COMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Active Involvement of Volunteers in the Life and Work of RDLUC** - The involvement of a significant number of members of the Red Deer Lake United Church community in volunteering in many different ways was described as being a hallmark of the church. Volunteering has been described as an important aspect of stewardship, living out our Christian faith and making a difference in our church and the broader community. It was noted that even during the pandemic, when we were not able to have live church services, volunteers continued to be actively involved in supporting, caring and connecting.
- 2. Promoting Hospitality Within and Beyond the Church** - Appreciation was expressed for hospitality initiatives to make the church a welcoming place and to create the sense that, “we are all in this journey of faith together” such as greeting, serving coffee and snacks, and personally connecting with people to make them feel welcome and comfortable. The involvement of the Hospitality Team in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic by providing Meet and Greet Zoom sessions prior to the virtual church service was appreciated. A representative comment relating to hospitality was that, “RDLUC is excellent in greeting and making people feel welcome and valued- let’s continue to build on what we do best”

- 3. Congregational Care** - The congregational care initiatives for keeping connected with individuals in need through the prayer ministry and healing team and the delivery of food, special treats (such as the Christmas cookies), caring hugs bags, chemo care bags special cards, creative artwork, painted stones with inspirational messages, gratitude cards and welcome kits which have all been created by church volunteers and coordinated by Vi Sharp have been greatly appreciated and instrumental in creating a sense of belonging to a caring church community. A special thanks was passed on for the personalized Christmas greeting cards from Nick and Vi.
- 4. Virtual Church Services** - Appreciation was expressed for the virtual church services during the pandemic when there were no live services. These services provided social media access for both members of the church community and individuals new to the church community, to be engaged in worship services on an ongoing basis. The work of Rev. Nick in providing virtual services and the involvement of volunteers in helping out with the technical aspects of the virtual services and zoom sessions is commendable. It was noted that we need to continue with virtual services for the benefit of those who cannot attend church personally and for those beyond our local church community. Some expressed appreciation for being able to watch the service outside of the regular time.
- 5. Using Zoom to stay connected** -The use of Zoom for virtually connecting with others for Meeting and Greeting prior to worship services and discussions following worship services was appreciated especially when it wasn't possible to meet personally. Zoom was also useful for meetings and activities such as Faith and Coffee and Sister Friends. Several indicated that they were not involved in the virtual services or zoom sessions because they lacked the technology skills to do so.
- 6. A focus on the Safety and Well-being of Members of the Church Community** - Strong support and appreciation was expressed for the Board's continuing emphasis on maintaining health and safety during the Covid 19 pandemic. Several church community members mentioned that they are not anxious to come back to the live church services right away, as much as they want to be there, because they are concerned about COVID and endangering their health.
- 7. Spiritual Leadership and Inspiration** - Appreciation was expressed for both the hard copy and online publication of the Church @ Home magazine which featured sermons from Rev. Nick and submissions from members of the church community. People liked Rev. Nick's focus on making sermons relevant to the challenges we are facing in our modern-day world as well as the personal opportunities we have to make a difference in the broader community. Many felt we should continue making spiritual connections through movies, books and a special focus on such things as indigenous issues.
- 8. Weekly Updates from the Church Office**-Communication initiatives through the church office including: emails, Facebook, Instagram and weekly updates are very well done and should continue to be a priority. A significant number of individuals contacted indicated that they had not been receiving this information from the church and they were pleased to have their email and other contact information updated as part of the callout process.
- 9. Making a Special Effort to Keep Connected** - A common theme in the feedback generated through the phone calls is the importance of making a special effort to keep connected. "It is always good to receive a phone call from a member of our church community who is just checking in to see how we are doing". Special appreciation was expressed for the involvement of Congregational Care Coordinator, Vi Sharp, in making phone calls and keeping in touch. The Call-Out 2022 initiative proved to be a very positive experience for those making the calls as well as those who were contacted. Members of the church community appreciated this special effort to connect, express caring and provide support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Music in the Worship Service** - Music is seen as being an integral aspect of our worship services and concerns were expressed that several individuals have left the church as a result of frustrations with the music component of the worship service. A concern was expressed with the many changes that have been made in the music leadership role over the years. Clarification is needed on how important decisions (such as the nature of the music program) are made, and every effort should be made to involve the members of the church community in the decision-making process. It was suggested that, “we need to be sensitive to seniors in the area of music and there should be a pianist and a choir along with other forms of music. The focus should be on having a variety of music both voice and instrumental and consideration should be given to sharing music resources with other churches”.
- 2. Spreading the Word about Red Deer Lake United Church-** Representative comments in regard to the importance of making more people aware of what Red Deer United Church is all about and has to offer include: “We need to do much more to reach out to surrounding communities (including our Tsuu T’Ina Nation neighbours) using social media, community letters, coffee meetings, family activities, support groups, connecting with neighbours and advertising all that we have to offer as a church community. I enjoy meeting and talking to people at RDLUC and we need to let people know we have something special going on here. Every effort should be made to increase our exposure and community connections”.
- 3. Optimizing the Potential of our Church Facility-** It was noted that we have a very special church facility in a beautiful location and more should be done to promote multiple uses of our facility Representative comments include: “It is very good to have a kindergarten program in our church; it brings in children and young parents and makes them aware of our church and as well it generates some rental revenue. The On the Edge Concert series has been an excellent initiative for promoting musical performances and bringing people into the church to see all that it offers; it is also a good fundraiser for our church. We should explore the possibility of expanding On the Edge to include multicultural entertainment and food and groups such as Red Thunder, an aboriginal music group. We have missed having the turkey supper! There should be a concerted effort to explore further opportunities for utilizing the building for initiatives such as the commercial kitchen rental and workshops, art displays and programs to promote Fine Arts and the Performing Arts”. Some other related suggestions included: “it would be good to have outdoor services or services in the garden, more drive-through communion, speakers outside in the garden for those who wish to ground themselves in nature during the service and family picnics and family social events (carnivals) after the regular worship service.”
- 4. Programs for Children, Youth and Young Families-** Although it has been a priority for several years, we need to explore new strategies for welcoming and involving children, youth and young families. Respondents suggested more activities like the Kids Special Christmas service which actively engaged children, and all ages of participants in coming together for a meaningful, worthwhile experience. Congregants miss having Sunday School with children active in our worship service.
- 5. Promoting Collaboration and Building Inclusive Relationships** - While there is strong support for focusing on making RDLUC a good place for children, youth and young families, we cannot lose sight of the importance of meeting the needs of all congregants. A representative comment is, “There is a place for new and old to exist successfully together, but equal attention to each must be perceived”. Several respondents indicated that the minister serves a very important role in: building caring, respectful relationships; being visible; and finding ways to connect with each and every member of the church community.
- 6. Continuing and Enhancing the Virtual Services** -It was very good to have the virtual services during the pandemic and there clearly is merit in continuing to provide this option even after we are back with live

services. A number of individuals indicated that they plan to continue to view the virtual services rather than attending live services because of physical limitations and health concerns. There is a need now to reflect on what worked well, determine what more could be done regarding virtual services and analyze statistics related to the number of individuals from within our church community and beyond who were meaningfully engaged in the virtual services. The option of providing virtual services through broadcasting the live services should seriously be considered because this was clearly the preference expressed by the Call-Out respondents.

7. **Reaching out to and Serving the Broader Community**-It was suggested that, “We need to build on our experiences from the past including projects such as Inn from the Cold - which provided an opportunity to serve those in need and connect with the broader community. We should also explore congregational care and hospitality initiatives which provided opportunities for children youth and members of all ages to work together in service to others. “We need to be curious and look to other churches for ideas about what makes them successful and we need to be more visible and let the surrounding communities know where we are and what we do”.
8. **Providing Transportation Services**- Unfortunately there are a number of individuals who because of the location of the church are unable to attend live services. In addition to providing virtual services, City of Calgary services and other programs for providing transportation should be pursued. The issue of getting a ride to church when you don’t drive was raised several times.
9. **Enhancing Communication**-Although there are a number of commendations relating to communication from the church office, there were some concerns expressed regarding frustration with the church office telephone answering/messaging service. Several respondents felt that a priority should be placed on updating the church contact list. Clearly, there have been some very significant communication challenges encountered over the past two years as we have dealt with the COVID 19 pandemic. There is a sense that, “we have lost a lot of people”. Several people indicated that they are not receiving the weekly RDLUC email and asked that their email information be updated. The following is a representative comment, “reaching out to the wider church needs to be done more regularly. It is at these times that people are more likely to open up about how they really feel. If they are not seeing or hearing from people, they need to be contacted. Pastoral care is handled very nicely by Vi and her team and while Nick’s job is the spiritual side, most people feel it is very important to have some more overlap and to hear personally from him more often” Based on the response to the Call-Out 22 initiative there should be a continued priority placed on maintaining ongoing, meaningful communication within our church community. The following is a representative comment: “the callout initiative was both appreciated by our congregants and a statistical success. It provided many corollary benefits in addition to its original purpose”
10. **Clarifying and Enhancing the Decision-making Process**-A number of respondents indicated concern with how decisions are made and the perceived lack of meaningful involvement of members of the church community in making important decisions such as the nature of the music program. There is also a need to clarify the roles of the Board and Ministry and Personnel Team in dealing with personnel issues and providing ongoing evaluative feedback and support to the minister and staff members. It is recommended that the Board review the governance structure and clearly outline areas of responsibility for: staff, the Board and the congregation in addressing needs and concerns, making decisions and establishing priorities for action.
11. **Articulating a Vision for the Church**-The Board should actively and meaningfully engage our minister, staff and members of the church community in establishing program priorities and, most importantly, articulating a vision for the church of the future and an action plan to achieve this vision.