

**THE CENTRE OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES PROGRAM CONSULTATION:
CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION**

January 28 – 30, 2013 | Winnipeg, Manitoba



Back Row: Steve Willey, Christopher Lind, David Fletcher, Adrian Jacobs, Bruce Myers, Chris Trott, Donald Phillips, Ted Dodd, Paul Gehrs.
Middle Row: Scott Douglas, Pat Thompson, Marcie Gibson, Kimiko Karpoff, Julie Anne Lytle, Walter Deller, Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd, Jackie Van't Voort, Joan Golden, Ann Naylor.
Front Row: Lori Stewart, Janet Ross, Andrew Reesor-McDowell, Maylanne Maybee, Alice Watson, Mark MacDonald.



"The complexity of the issues in our world today suggests that we need to be cautious with answers. It may be more important to struggle to find the right questions and, having found them, to patiently and passionately push the horizons."

~ from a sermon by the Very Rev. Dr. Marion Parry, 37th Moderator of the United Church of Canada, on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the Centre for Christian Studies

During its 121st year, the Centre for Christian Studies (CCS) reached out to a diverse group of students, graduates, educators, and denominational leaders to consider the context for theological education and future directions for its program. 24 church leaders accepted their invitation to participate in a three-day consultation – a sturdy container for the struggle "to find the right questions" and "to patiently and passionately push the horizons." The alternative of a one-on-one interview was offered to anyone who was unable to join the circle.

The process was a reflective one. No attempt was made to solve problems, resolve tensions, reach consensus or formulate recommendations. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions, share their own, and listen deeply to each other's perspectives and stories as well as the spaces in between. They were also in conversation with scripture during the consultation – the Songs of Deborah, Hannah and Mary. The result was a rich dialogue and a bumper crop of insights and learnings for everyone involved.

It is impossible, however, to capture all of them in print. Read on and you'll discover what we took away as most important and as next steps. We invite you to think of this document as a tool for dialogue with an even wider circle of stakeholders, and ultimately for discernment and decision-making by the CCS's governing bodies.

Our fervent prayer is that this contribution serves CCS in continuing to live out its mission "to educate men and women for ministry who will transform the church and the world toward wholeness, justice and compassion."

*Andrew Reesor-McDowell and Patricia Thompson
February 2013*

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By all accounts, the Centre for Christian Studies is like a mustard seed. Smaller than other theological schools. Prolific, economical and tenacious, it grows wherever planted and is able to self-sow. The entire plant is thought to have curative powers. Like CCS, mustard is consistently described as a seed of great utility, piquancy and promise.

It is not surprising then that many people, including us, see CCS's identity, program and context through an ecological lens. We understand it as a living part of an ecosystem connecting the church and the world in all its complexity.

This understanding has shaped, therefore, what we heard during the consultation and how we've documented the group's "best thoughts." While we provide more detail in the following pages, we offer these three points as a quick summary:

- Participants affirmed CCS's ecumenical diaconal identity and relationships. They suggested, however, that CCS's identity is different from its image.
- Participants were concerned about the economics of theological education and training in Canada. They think CCS's educational model is its most valuable asset, in particular its learning circles and theological reflection spiral.
- Participants named this moment as a time of renewal for CCS. Unlike other turning points in its long history, this one is part of a historic shift that is transforming how churches and their affiliated schools relate and function.

To continue the conversation, we've chosen three words rooted in the Greek word *oikos* meaning household: ecumenism, economy and ecology. We heard participants call CCS to:

- a greater commitment to ecumenism in ethos and practice
- a renewed economic model based on a thorough analysis of enrolment trends, revenue streams and fiscal arrangements

- disciplined collaboration on critical issues with churches, theological schools and others in the diverse ecology of justice-seeking communities

We know that CCS is committed to carrying the questions and insights from this consultation forward and to widening the circle to include others. This particular household is also in the habit of singing songs of resistance, empowerment, reversal and transformation in the tradition of Deborah, Hannah and Mary. For these reasons, we look forward to hearing where the questions and songs take you next.



Deborah the Prophetess, Marc Chagall (1957)

"Can CCS be a truly national school?"

"What would it mean for the Centre to not be primarily female?"

"How can we relight the ecumenical spirit and vision within CCS?"

"Who benefits and who loses from a particular diaconal identity?"

"Is CCS no longer a school for mission?"

IDENTITY AND IMAGE

At the start of the consultation, participants were invited to reflect on CCS's identity and image. They affirmed that CCS is part of the worldwide *diakonia*. As such, they referred to CCS as a school or college for the diaconate. Its educational stance was described as theologically and politically progressive. They said its approach is flexible, inclusive and welcoming of anyone who "is prepared to stay curious and to stretch," not only those who share its theological mindset. They also acknowledged the school's national reach and ecumenical character.

Its image, however, is different from its identity according to participants. Some wondered if it is more accurate to think of CCS as a training centre instead of a college or school. Others said the school appears closed to anyone who does not share its politics of gender and sexuality and values of feminism and liberation. Despite its open-ended name, CCS is perceived as predominately for women who are preparing exclusively for diaconal ministry.

Participants also said that many regard CCS as a western and/or prairie school based in Winnipeg with deep roots in Toronto. As a distributed learning pioneer, CCS is known in communities across the country but not necessarily as national in scope. They think of CCS as "very United Church," not a school where Anglicans and students from other denominations or faith communities would feel at home.

CCS was encouraged to remember and reclaim the parts of its story that are most relevant to today's realities, including key words like *diakonia*, ecumenism and mission. Participants probed the tensions between diaconal and ordained/priestly ministry, and missional and ecclesiological theology. They also wondered about the school's location "on the edges, in the corners, and sometimes on the outside" of the church – or what biologists call the "ecotone," the integrative space between communities where ecologies are in tension.

Two questions were offered from an Aboriginal perspective to help us reflect on CCS's identity: where are you from and who are your relations? Another view was that identity is not static or a straight line. Rather, it is continuously shaped in response to the church and the world. Another participant offered the word "hybridity," meaning mixture, to communicate the diversity and complexity of CCS's identity.



Hannah Prays for a Child, Marc Chagall (1957)

“How is it best to form people to give leadership, to draw forth that diaconal identity that is present in everyone, in the church and in the world?”

“How do we educate and form people to be as ‘flexibly competent’ as possible: being able to draw on a very rich treasure chest of theological knowledge, including the ways people have been thinking about situations over the last 2,000 to 3,000 years?”

“Since the UCC has given CCS a monopoly on diaconal training, where do students go if this approach isn’t for them?”

PROGRAM CONTENT, DELIVERY AND PARTNERS

Participants circled the question “what kind of education and training does someone need to minister effectively in the emerging and evolving church?” They wrestled with different perspectives on the efficacy of current approaches, the absence of national leadership standards and competencies within denominations, and the workings of church polities.

Many participants referred to CCS’s educational model as its most valuable asset. In particular, its learning circles and theological reflection spiral were viewed as portable and applicable to different contexts. Similarly, several participants expressed an interest in seeing CCS’s two-week Leadership Development Module used more widely for training designated and other lay ministries. They think that CCS graduates possess the skillset that all church and community workers need, even those who do not share CCS’s mindset.

There was considerable discussion about the relevance of CCS’s integrated three-year diploma program as compared to modular or “à la carte” programs and workshops. A desire to protect the integrity of the diploma program, and the depth and intensity of this learning experience, was expressed. A few participants spoke to the need to engage prospective students and to remodel offerings and approaches to better meet their needs. They raised issues related to student access and readiness to enroll in existing CCS programs, including:

- length and cost of the diploma program
- fit with different learning styles and theological orientations
- recognition of credentials
- prior learning assessment
- residency and external course requirements
- recognition of CCS course work by other theological schools
- denominational identity and sensibility
- stipendiary/non-stipendiary status
- future employment prospects inside and outside the church

“What is the exact relationship between the [educational] model, method and location? Can it be taught in a different style? Are there things that need to be taught with this method that need to be taught in more places than CCS?”

“When is it theological training and when is it something else? Lay or authorized? What are the similarities and differences journey?”

“How does the CCS honour and celebrate the identity of each partner in any partnership?”

“How does CCS engage the issues of greatest concern to its prospective partners?”

“We are the church. Subjects not objects of our destiny. Sometimes God speaks through the bottom line.”

As for program delivery, participants acknowledged the ways in which CCS has been combining old and new technology to make distance learning possible since the move from a residential model in 1998. One participant asked if the real need was for new technology or to use what CCS already has more effectively. Another raised the possibility that CCS has a role to play in teaching students how to use technology in ministry. Our American guest, an expert in digital strategies for theological colleges, emphasized the sequential process required to make sound investments in technology. She advised CCS to start with refining its *message* before choosing *methods* and selecting the right *media* to reach their priority audience. It was suggested that an alliance with a university or college is one way to build technological capacity. “Piggy-backing” was viewed as an economical way to access ongoing IT expertise and support.

With respect to partnerships, participants recognized ways in they could engage with CCS to respond to shared challenges, and ways CCS could engage with them. One participant spoke about the role of ally for diaconal ministry. Others spoke about their current and prospective role as consumers of CCS programs and expertise. Still others described a role for CCS as a collaborator in working with specific communities (e.g. First Nations, lay leaders) and in innovation (e.g. use of technology in ministry and in education.)

Much of the discussion revolved around the process for initiating and nurturing partnerships. It was stressed that this process begins when prospective partners discover they are engaged in the same struggle within communities. Their relationship grows out of this shared work and not transactional conversations about their aspirations, agendas or resources. One participant asked: “What does it mean to offer your resources and what would it mean to be the recipient of what the partner has to offer?” Concern was expressed about partnerships that require either party to “de-self” or subsume their identity. There was agreement that it would be important for CCS to understand what it means by partnership and what it expects from such an arrangement before entering into a new one. The need to renew existing denominational partnerships was also acknowledged.

The conversation turned to the economics of theological education and training when one participant remarked, “I’m observing in myself an attempt to tease apart issues of vocation, identity, theology, and where the money is coming from.” Later, another participant invited

“How does the cost burden get shared between the student, school and partner?”

“Is the church the customer or is it the people who want this kind of education?”

everyone into a “thought experiment” – to imagine CCS as a business. He asked, “who are CCS’s owners and who are your customers?” It also revealed that most see the owner and customer as one in the same: the churches. They also see the churches and their affiliated schools as focused on the students as a key stakeholder akin to owner. A few participants identified anyone who shares CCS’s alternative vision for theological education as owners. They saw these individuals as donors and “sustainers and nurturers” of this vision. It became clear that the United and Anglican churches have different expectations, needs and approaches that call for a highly tailored response from CCS.

This discussion surfaced a deep tension between mission and market. Ancient and modern expressions of social finance were held up – from monks producing and selling their wares to the new wave of justice-seeking entrepreneurs engaged in social innovation – to help reconcile competing economic and social demands.

The historic and current position of CCS within the marketplace of education and training offerings was not examined, but left open for further study and reflection. The school is described as financially stable. Many participants, however, were concerned about continued dependence on a single fiscal sponsor.



Mary with Jesus, Marc Chagall (1974)

"What is the world that we're in and how is it calling us at this time?"

"What is the current and emerging theological basis for diaconal ministry?"

"What are the non-negotiables and what are the untouchables?"

"If you are doing to be the church with no money and no social standing, what are the riches that you have got? Theology and skills."

CONTEXT

Participants named this moment as a time of renewal for CCS. Unlike other turning points in its long history, this one is part of a historic shift that is transforming how churches and their affiliated schools relate and function. They were told that CCS seeks "not only for a financially secure future, but also for a robust program that is responsive to the changing context beyond itself."

Participants focused on the overwhelming evidence of abundance and scarcity in the church and the world. They spoke about the disintegration of old systems and structures, and the emergence of new ones, and about finding oneself in the middle of it all. They asked about implications for diaconal ministry – its theological basis and expression. One participant cautioned CCS about "the ossification of institutions," and encouraged "organic resistance" and engagement in the "real work."

Others emphasized opportunity and risk. Several participants referred to a growing secularism in Canada, and the particular needs of a population segment called the "nones" – the non-religious or religiously unaffiliated. Awareness that CCS's survival depends, however, on the *testamur* status conferred by the United Church of Canada was cited as a significant risk to the school's future. The need to diversify its constituency and revenue streams was underlined throughout the conversation.

"The movement toward reconciliation of peoples coming out from under the exploitation of colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries" was also viewed as significant for CCS. During the consultation, the issues, strengths, and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples became a focus for discerning CCS's call. One participant expressed the concern that "we have built a church that the poor cannot afford." He suggested that the challenge for Aboriginal ministries will be to grow "without costing a dime" and critiqued the assumption that "ministry is a product of training, not the output of love and compassion." "If we are going to grow we have to do it on a radically different basis. We see our future closer to you than what we see from seminaries," he said.

As the consultation came to a close, participants affirmed CCS's mission and expressed their hopes for its future. Several people shared this perspective: "The diaconate could easily be

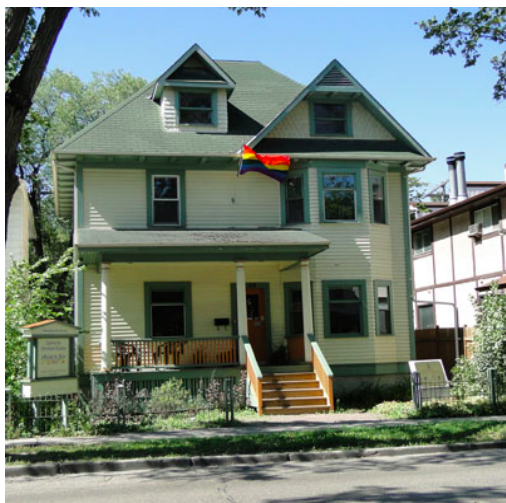
just what is needed right now as the church reawakens, questioning its purpose and relevance. We are trained to journey with people, to build relationships, and to help the laity find purpose and value in their own ministries. We have the opportunity to model a different way of being that can be transformative in the whole church, helping people to see new liberating and live-giving ways of being the church in the world.”

In the same spirit, CCS was called by a participant to the “green and growing edge,” a reference to American theologian and educator Howard Thurman’s prose poem:

"Look well to the growing edge. All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new lives, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge!"

It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.

The birth of the child — life's most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!"



NEXT STEPS

To continue the conversation, we've chosen three words rooted in the Greek word *oikos* meaning household: ecumenism, economy and ecology. We heard participants call CCS to:

- **A greater commitment to ecumenism in ethos and practice.** This commitment would express itself through dialogue with United and Anglican Church representatives, the exploration of new relationships with other denominations, and the crossing of religious and geographic boundaries to identify ways to become more relevant to a wider constituency of women and men.
- **A renewed economic model based on a thorough analysis of enrolment trends, revenue streams and fiscal arrangements.** This work includes understanding the transition from Toronto to Winnipeg – from a residential to distributed learning model – in financial terms. It also involves assessing the status of current programs and relationships in ecocycle terms (e.g. birth, growth, maturity, creative destruction, renewal) to set directions and priorities.
- **Disciplined collaboration on critical issues with churches, theological schools and others in the diverse ecology of justice-seeking communities.** This collaboration is about discerning the issues calling for CCS's attention as well as its community of allies and partners. It also involves consulting with other educational administrators in similar circumstances to learn how they are leading adaptive change.

We know that CCS is committed to carrying the questions and insights from this consultation forward and to widening the circle to include others. This particular household is also in the habit of singing songs of resistance, empowerment, reversal and transformation in the tradition of Deborah, Hannah and Mary. For these reasons, we look forward to hearing where the questions and songs take you next.

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