

# THE “POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE” OF KNOX OTTAWA WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? WE NEED YOUR INPUT!

## OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT and REQUEST FOR YOUR INPUT

Around the world, in all areas of society, people and organisations are reflecting on:

- what they experienced over the past few years,
- what they have learned, and
- where they should go from here.

At Knox Ottawa members of the leadership team have been studying our experiences as a congregation, as we seek to fulfil our mission to be “*a Christian community of faith, seeking to grow in knowledge of Jesus Christ and living our lives as he teaches us.*”

Knox Session and Temporal Board<sup>1</sup> chose the following challenge statement for their discussions:

**“To discern what Knox’s purpose should be moving forward”**

and focussed their reflection on the following areas of our church life and mission:

- Worship,
- Service to others,
- Fellowship and community.

After four discussions held from October 2022 to January 2023 the following action items were identified:

1. To help people engage in the ministry and mission of Knox through volunteering;
2. To establish a process to identify and implement initiatives to improve or extend Knox’s ministry and mission.

**We now need you and everyone else connected to Knox to engage in these discussions**, and add your energy and ideas to help launch us into the post-pandemic future of Knox.

We ask that you take the time to read and consider the ideas presented here, and then participate in the next steps in the discussion. You can add your voice by:

- Participating in congregational discussions;
- Sending your input and ideas by email to [knoxottawa@rogers.com](mailto:knoxottawa@rogers.com) or by mail to *Knox Church Ottawa, 120 Lisgar St., Ottawa, ON, K2P 0C2* (Please put “post-pandemic future of Knox” in the subject title.)
- Talking with the Clerk of Session Joan Coulter, TB Chair or Pastor Jim Pot.

## INTRODUCTION

In early 2022 Pastor Jim Pot, Clerk of Session Joan Coulter, and Chair of Temporal Board Tom Burnie began to review and discuss the experiences of Knox Ottawa during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to collect additional information and ideas through discussions with Knox staff.

From October 2022 to January 2023 Knox Session and Temporal Board (TB) met together four times to discuss the “post-pandemic future of Knox,” using the following key areas of our church life and mission to structure the discussions:

- Fellowship/Community
- Worship

---

<sup>1</sup> Session elders and Temporal Board members are elected by the congregation. Session provides leadership and oversight in areas such as mission, pastoral care, worship, Christian education and stewardship. Temporal Board is responsible for church infrastructure, including facility and finances.

- Service to Others
- Education/Teaching/Discipleship
- Building the Common Good (social justice, etc.)
- Infrastructure (facility and finance)

Session and TB began the first discussion by choosing the following challenge statement:

**“To discern what Knox’s purpose should be moving forward.”**

They brainstormed what brings people to Knox or keeps them at Knox in each of the six areas, then explored each area in further detail at a second discussion. At the third discussion the following themes were identified as principal areas of focus, in this order of priority, from among the original six:

- Worship
- Service to others + Building the common good
- Fellowship and community

(Note: it was decided to combine *Service to others* and *Building the common good*, as they are very closely linked; *Service to others* provides direct service, and *Building the common good* works with others to improve overall infrastructure.)

A fourth discussion was held to further explore the three areas of focus, consider next steps and plan for sharing the results of these discussions with the Knox congregation.

## **IDEAS ON THE THREE AREAS OF FOCUS**

Below are highlights raised by Session and TB for each of the three areas, using the following headings:

- Obvious “keeps” for Knox;
- What Knox added during the pandemic;
- What we learned from the pandemic;
- Other ideas for this theme.

### **1. WORSHIP**

Obvious “keeps” for Knox

- preaching, Bible base, reflections on life’s purpose, echo of Knox’s commitment to social justice;
- Choir and organ are important to many;
- Hymns should not be a performance, but involve the congregation;
- Christian calendar is visible, talked about and part of the service;
- Youth are recognized and have a role in the service (e.g., read, sit at front for children’s time, sing).

What Knox added during the pandemic

- live streaming of all our worship services, to allow people who are temporarily or permanently unable to come to Knox for worship to participate;
- Involvement of a wide variety of musicians, with various instruments and styles of music;
- Ways to be creative with worship – for example, preaching from different locations in the sanctuary, involving people from far away when we couldn’t worship in person;
- Enabling people who are watching online to participate in communion.

What we learned from the pandemic

- People want to be involved in helping with worship – e.g., many people offered to do Bible readings;
- People are looking for connection, and we need to help people build a connection to Knox if we want them to stay;
- We were able to find ways to make music a big part of worship, even when we could not have a choir;
- People are open to more variety and formats in our music, not only classics and songs from the hymnbook. There is strength in both organ/classics and contemporary music.

### Other ideas for this theme

- Worship is not only a sit and leave experience, but can also be a place to participate (e.g, AV, ushering, reading, leading);
- Involvement in worship can lead to involvement in other aspects of Knox – e.g., helping with contemporary music, joining the choir, sharing stories of faith with children;
- We could market music as part of what Knox has to offer – to musicians and congregants. Contemporary songs can be used at any point during the service. Music budget is currently focussed on the organ and choir. Is there room for more variety?
- Everyone should feel welcome, whether first time or regular attender. We need to connect with people at the doorway;
- How can we encourage youth to stay involved? – e.g., connect with other churches, youth night;
- AV is key to accessibility of our worship. We need to find ways to encourage people to help.

## **2. SERVICE TO OTHERS and BUILDING THE COMMON GOOD**

### **Service to Others**

#### Obvious “keeps” for Knox

- Out of the Cold (OOTC) – helps the hungry, connects Knox to the community through guests and volunteers, exemplifies Jesus’ concerns;
- Centretown Emergency Food Centre (CEFC) support (monthly food collection, participation in fundraising although this has decreased in recent years);
- Benevolence Fund, to be used at the minister’s discretion;
- Student internships, and support for others through the Students for the Ministry Fund.

#### What Knox added during the pandemic

- OOTC
  - Significantly expanded our service – twice per week; November to July; Thanksgiving meal;
  - Large numbers of new volunteers from Centretown and beyond;
  - More community partners;
  - Hybrid service options – eating inside + takeout.

#### What we learned from the pandemic

- There are many who want to volunteer and to support the OOTC program financially;
- We were able to be very flexible in responding to constantly changing demands, parameters and requirements. Providing hybrid OOTC service (eating inside + take out) is complicated, but responds to the different needs of guests;
- The visibility of OOTC resulting from serving meals outside led to new volunteers and financial sponsors with no previous connection to Knox.

### Other ideas for this theme

- How can we maintain the visibility of OOTC and other projects of Knox?
- What would be our guiding principles for deciding on changes to OOTC or initiating or changing other service projects and activities? (e.g., existing need, volunteer and financial support);
- Should we expand our involvement in the CEFC? Should we add another program more related to Knox? (e.g., community kitchen?)
- Sponsoring refugees is very demanding. Do we have the volunteers and resources to do this? Should we add our support to a larger group effort?
- We want to support community mission, not only our own projects but participating in projects with others (e.g, Open Table outreach to young adults). We should participate in projects that are relevant to our Knox goals, within our scope and scale, and meet the needs and goals of others regardless of religious affiliation. (Loving God and loving others as ourselves);

- Our goal is to have limited scope and do it well, rather than too broad and do it poorly.

### **Common Good**

- Knox has been involved in discussions in the past as to what the Presbyterian church has reviewed and developed a stance on, and it's important to continue to do so. We need to share our opinions and positions;
- We have an opening through the pulpit to build the Christian case and capitalise on existing momentum (e.g., Christian climate movement). The congregation identifies the issues, and supports the minister in sharing the message;
- We need to study the current needs in the community that Knox could address, but we should not try to do things that are best done by public officials or governments;
- We could work at advocacy to address social needs. We would need to partner with those who have the knowledge and the passion (e.g., organisations, other churches) as we have in the past (e.g., *Chew On This* campaign to make visible the issues of poverty and food insecurity; Dr. Peter Bryce Indigenous Medical Scholarship at UOttawa).

### **3. FELLOWSHIP/COMMUNITY**

#### Obvious “keeps” for Knox

- The importance of encouraging fellowship. Many people come to Knox and stay because of fellowship;
- Coffee hour;
- Friendly and welcoming ushers and greeting elders;
- Having meals together;
- Elders who keep in touch with people in their district and provide support to them.

#### What Knox added during the pandemic

- Online bible study – Allowed people to participate who hadn't been able to attend in person in the past. New people became engaged in Knox through bible study, and established or built on connections with others;
- Online trivia nights – Helped keep people connected. Time in small groups allowed people to catch up and maintain connections;
- Online coffee hour – Provided opportunities to talk with others when we couldn't be together in person.

#### What we learned from the pandemic

- People are seeking connection. Many reached out to their elder or the church expressing loneliness and their need to be with people face-to-face. We need to create a culture of caring for everyone;
- Inviting people to participate in presenting worship services (e.g., reading) helped people to make connections with others;
- Many people who watch online continue to feel very connected to Knox, and to support Knox financially;
- Some will drift away if there is not enough to keep them connected to the congregation.

#### Other ideas for this theme

- How could coffee hour more effectively increase fellowship?
- Profiles in Knox News helped us learn more about people who attend Knox;
- Sacred Space gave university students an opportunity for fellowship;
- Having intergenerational meals together, and encouraging people to move and talk to different people, builds fellowship and connection;
- We get to know people when we work with them on different projects (e.g., bazaar, committees, working groups). How can we better connect people through opportunities for volunteering?

- While we want people to return to attending in person, some cannot, and we need to continue to find ways to keep them connected with Knox;
- People watching the live stream service could be encouraged by “chat champions” to connect with others online via chat during the service. Online discussion groups could talk about the service and the sermon, or we could have online coffee hour following the live stream.

## **WHAT’S NEXT IN MOVING AHEAD ON THE POST-PANDEMIC FUTURE OF KNOX?**

The discussions outlined above led Session and TB to identify two key action items:

### **1) HELPING PEOPLE ENGAGE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING**

Volunteering plays a key role in:

- planning and carrying out ministries that fulfil our congregational mission,
- helping people build meaningful connections with one another,
- fostering a sense of belonging to the Knox community, and
- enabling each person to live out their Christian faith.

As a congregation we need to facilitate the process of connecting people to volunteer opportunities that match their interests, skills and experience.

#### **Action Item 1a — List of opportunities for volunteering at Knox**

A list of all the volunteer opportunities available at Knox will be created and maintained, and made available to everyone connected to Knox through a variety of means. The list will provide information about each volunteer role related to Knox.

#### **Action Item 1b — Volunteer Contact to help people connect to opportunities**

A Volunteer Contact person or team will be named to assist people in connecting with opportunities for volunteering. The contact will:

- Ensure that the list of opportunities is kept up-to-date by all those who lead teams, activities and ministries at Knox;
- Be the point of contact for anyone interested in volunteering, to provide information and answer initial questions about the opportunities available;
- Put potential volunteers in touch with leaders of the volunteer opportunities of interest to them, to discuss possible roles and help them decide if a role is a good fit for them.

### **2) IDENTIFYING AND IMPLEMENTING INITIATIVES**

Many great ideas were raised during the discussions of the post-pandemic future of Knox, both for updates or additions to current practices, ministries and activities at Knox, and for launching new initiatives. It is critical that a process be put in place to:

- Encourage ideas and provide a clear path for people of Knox to propose initiatives;
- Determine which initiatives are appropriate and feasible for Knox at the current time; and
- Find ways to implement the selected initiatives.

#### **Action Item 2a — Lay out the process for proposing, assessing and selecting initiatives**

In order to identify and select the initiatives most appropriate to Knox, it is important that everyone connected to Knox have the opportunity to submit proposals. The broader the range of perspectives and experience of those involved in developing proposals, the greater the likelihood that the process will lead to solid,

appropriate and effective initiatives. At the same time, it is critical that scarce resources of time, talents and revenue not be scattered among too many projects, or used on activities that are outside the scope or mission of Knox or unlikely to be beneficial.

- **Developing proposals** – A process will be needed for people to submit initial ideas, receive feedback as needed to ensure the ideas are in line with the mission and capabilities of Knox, then flesh out the proposal with input from others at Knox with related experience or responsibilities.
- **Reviewing and assessing proposals** – While we would like to be able to undertake every great idea, we will need to be continually looking at proposals and determining priorities, considering factors such as connection to the mission of Knox and feasibility with existing or potential human and financial resources. Choices will need to be made on which proposals are worth investing time and resources to explore the details needed to fully understand the feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed activity.
- **Selecting initiatives to pursue at that time** – Once proposals have been prepared, difficult decisions will need to be made on the initiatives that are feasible and appropriate to pursue at that particular time. Situations and priorities evolve on an ongoing basis, and many factors will need to be taken into account in making these decisions. Initiatives that are not able to be implemented at that time might be put in a holding area for consideration at a later date.  
Session, TB or both will need to be involved in decisions for major initiatives that have a significant impact on Knox or its resources; some decisions may even require a congregational meeting. Other initiatives may be of limited scope and impact, and can be decided by a small group of people involved in the particular area of the project. Criteria for determining the appropriate group for making decisions on proposals will need to be determined

### **Action Item 2b — Establish a team that will be the first point of contact for proposals**

In order to avoid unnecessary delays and bureaucracy, a small group of people would act as the first point of contact for people who have ideas for potential initiatives. This team can provide initial feedback on the proposal, particularly any concerns about its relevance to the mission or situation of Knox, and suggest questions to consider or people with whom to discuss the details. It is proposed that key members of Knox leadership (e.g., minister, Clerk of Session and Chair of TB) be the team as the process begins, with members added or replaced as needs or experience indicate.

The team would function similarly to the Contingency Committee, who assisted Knox in addressing issues during the challenging times of the pandemic, though in a more limited capacity. It will not be a decision-making body, but will give leadership for issues requiring follow-up, and ensure implementation of decisions made by Session and Temporal Board.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK? HOW DO YOU WANT TO ENGAGE?**

We need everyone connected to Knox to engage in these discussions, and add their energy and ideas to help us move ahead into the post-pandemic future of Knox. You can add your voice by:

- Participating in congregational discussions, both in person and online. Dates will be announced on the website, in the newsletter and during Sunday services
- Sending your input and ideas by email to [knoxottawa@rogers.com](mailto:knoxottawa@rogers.com) or by mail to *Knox Church Ottawa, 120 Lisgar St., Ottawa, ON, K2P 0C2* (Please put “post-pandemic future of Knox” in the subject title.)
- Talking with the Clerk of Session Joan Coulter, TB Chair or Pastor Jim Pot.