**PRESBYTERY VISITATION TO**

**TRINITY UNITED CHURCH**

**NORTH BAY, ONTARIO**

**Bob Jackson and Mary Lawrence made a triennial visit to the Trinity United Church congregation in North Bay on Sunday Jannuary 13th, 2013 by attending their regular morning worship service, enjoying a congregational lunch following the service and meeting with about 50 members of the congregation following the lunch, after which we also met with all the staff members – Ted Harrison, Lisa Blais, Betty Ferris and Wanda Gleason - although some very briefly and informally. We also met with the Treasurer Peter Mosley-Williams and Bill Brownlee. We were assured the books (financial, marriage record, funeral record, baptismal record, and the membership records) where all properly kept and up to date and signed appropriately and a quick visual review supported that assurance. We were also assured that the Housing Allowances for Staff were reviewed and we saw that they seemed more than reasonable and met the Presbytery standards. We were assured that the Police Records Checks were all current and in compliance with United Church policy.**

**More importantly we were impressed with the warm greetings we received as we enter the church and observed that that was the case for everyone. We certainly felt welcomed and were made to feel right at home. Of course, we knew many people present but even those who were new to us engaged us in conversation very readily and comfortably – some wondering if we were new to the community and to the church. Obviously, this natural effort to make everyone feel welcome was part of the Trinity congregation’s cultural. It felt to us very sincere and authentic.**

**Part of that feeling was reinforced by the somewhat chaotic atmosphere that accompanied the pre-service hymn sing. Again done every informally, led by a lay person, with the joyful noise of conversations and children in the background. The music was played by Betty Ferris in a most competent but flexible manner. It appropriately set an informal worshipful tone for the rest of the service. It appeared to us that everyone there was quite comfortable and accepting of this casual informality.**

**The service then began with the appearance of minister Ted Harrison who again welcomed everyone and highlighted some of the announcements and thanked some folks for their various contributions. As the service proceeded a number of lay persons took part in the leadership. During the service the treasurer Peter Mosley-Williams reported that a year ago the congregation was faced with the challenge of raising an additional amount of money to meet its financial obligations (some $50,000 plus), and he was happy to report that they had actually exceed that challenge, ending the year well in the black. The congregation responded favourably and was then invited to meet a similar challenge as they begin the new year. That invitation was met with a confident merriment. The impression that we got from all of this is that this is a congregation that is willing and able to roll up its sleeves and happily work hard to give of itself in order to not only survive but thrive.**

**We were also impressed with the amount of service time devoted to the children and youth who were there in good numbers, obviously engaged, and who appeared to be well looked after by competent, caring and fun loving adults.**

**Trinity United Church is blessed with an impressive choir of some twenty members under the leadership of Betty Ferris. They added a great deal to the musical inspiration of the service. We understand that there is also a junior choir, which bodes well for the future of the music of the Trinity congregation. We became aware that there are also a number of other musical groups associated with Trinity that add to the musical enrichment not only of the congregation but also the entire North Bay and area community, and also attract many people of musical talent to participate. This appeared to us to be a congregation that very much values and supports and encourages the musical and dramatic arts of the community.**

**The sermon was delivered in a style that departs from the formality of traditional preaching. We suspect that it is a style that is rather unique to the minister. It was very contemporary and connected to real ordinary everyday life, using real life experiences of both Ted and the congregation to illustrate its points.**

**Following the service a large number of the worshipping congregation stayed for lunch and enjoyed each other’s company. Then a somewhat smaller group of the congregation stayed to participate in a discussion led by the Presbytery representatives. The remaining folks were divided into five groups, and each group responded to a specific question about the life and ministry of their congregation. After about twenty minutes of discussion each group reported their responses to the total gathering as follows:**

**To the question “*What is it about this congregation that ties everyone together*” the consensus was the Ministers who work as a really effective team**

**along with the rest of the staff. The music and the caring inclusiveness of the congregation was another factor coupled with that friendly, welcoming atmosphere referred to above. The activities of the congregation both in outreach to the local community and the world, and in the variety of projects and organizational tasks were other ties identified. Food and the many communal meals were lifted up as very important. Another tie was the long history of Trinity and the church building. The sense of community and the inclusion of both young and old in the life and work of the congregation were also important factors that tie everyone together.**

**To the question “*What really matters to you about the ministry of your congregation*” people said the development of programs for all age groups so that everyone feels they fit in. This includes making people feel welcome, encouraging others to come and be part of the church community, especially children and grandchildren. It also matters that we all be proactive in participating in all aspects of the congregation’s life and work – working together as a family. Being compassionate and a good listener matters greatly. Having ministers who are approachable and who are able to relate to all age groups really matters. It also matters that the Sunday message be in today’s language and experiences.**

**To the invitation to “*Describe a time when you experienced a real sense of purpose and/or of belonging in your congregation*” we heard being involved in the social groups of the church, participating in fund raising activities for various aspects of the congregations work and life, and actively supporting our youth and children. They also talked about food, both enjoying meals and food activities together and participating in their preparation. Being part of the Trinity AOTS men’s group was named as well as several other events, projects and groups including UCW, Food Bank, Mission and Service Fund projects, AA, Cubs etc. The Sunday morning worship greeters provided a sense of belonging as do the hospital visitations.**

**To the question “*What do you see as the purpose for which God has gathered your congregation in your community at this time*” the group said to enhance families, to provide a wonderful and safe place for folks to be together, to provide leadership within our congregation, North Bay, and the wider church community, to provide a place of discovery and learning for all ages, to provide physical resources for partnership groups (Dreamcoat, JOY Band etc.), to provide a place for fellowship, and especially for our children to grow and mature.**

**To the question “*What do you anticipate might be different about your congregation in five years time*” The group affirmed that they will be five years older with all the implications of that reality. They also said that they anticipate that they will have more members. They see improvements in communication with the wider community as technology continues to improve. Our children in Sunday School will then be young people in high school and hopefully part of our youth groups which will provide opportunity for them to contribute even more and to challenge the congregation to make new changes. They see the need for more meaningful cooperation among the North Bay churches possibly even leading to amalgamations/mergers etc. They also see the need for more creative “outside the box” thinking regarding the way we are church (i.e. “the messy church”). Some of our present youth may be in a position to support the church financially and energetically. Those who are now 85 or older may not be here having passed into spirit. Some see the possibility of two types of worship services – one more traditional and one less traditional. Finally on a lighter note a few very optimistic members of the group said they would actually be younger and better looking! Why not!**

**The congregational group was thanked for their time and participation seeming to have found this little activity meaningfully enjoyable and quite encouraging.**

**It was noted that the group that stayed for this reflective activity did not include any of the young people of the church, except for a few very young children who played as we reflected. So Lisa Blais took the questions and plans to use them with the Sunday School youth next Sunday. Hopefully this report will include their feedback as well.**

**This visitation team of Bob and Mary then met with members of the staff as indicated at the beginning of this report. The general impression that we received was that of a wonderful team of colleagues working well together and very happy in what they are doing and with their employment at Trinity United Church. May God continue to bless this ministry and its outreach into the community of North Bay and the rest of the world.**

**Respectfully submitted by**

**Bob Jackson and**

**Mary Lawrence**