

Discerning the Soul

*A Project of Oak Bay United Church and
Fairfield United Church*



"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me, watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

(Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)



The congregations of Oak Bay United Church and Fairfield United Church each face significant decisions.

The *Discerning the Soul* project will assist both congregations to ***move from survival strategies to long-term health and vitality*** based on communal discernment that leads to action.

Purpose

Using the tool developed by noted church consultant Susan Beaumont, "*Moving From Decision-Making to Discernment*", the aim is to discover the ministry areas that promote greater effectiveness and joy in the ministry work of staff and congregations. The work will involve each congregation and their staff, separately and together.

This ambitious project has several critical goals.

Goals

- To assist both congregations in shifting the paradigm of congregational ministry.
- To assist the clergy of each congregation in their assessment of the leadership models they employ and their personal leadership style.
- To provide an opportunity for individual members of the congregation to participate in a process of deepening their spiritual life.
- To provide an intentional framework for conversation about spiritual matters that will assist further the development of a sense of community within each congregation.

Steering Team Members

The Steering Team provides guidance to the project and support and is composed of members from each of the congregations.

Clergy

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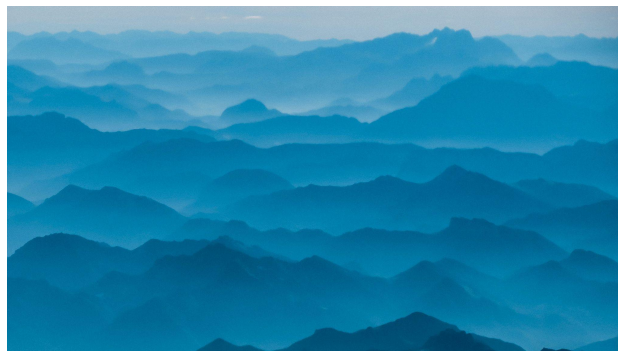
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Conceptual Framework

We are living in a liminal period.

Liminality: a quality of ambiguity and disorientation that occurs in transitory situations and spaces, when a person or group is betwixt and between something that has ended, and a new situation not yet begun.

Derived from the Latin limen, meaning “a threshold; the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building.” Latin limen originally meant a stone placed on the threshold of a door that physically had to be mounted to cross from one space into another.

During liminal seasons, we occupy space on both sides of a boundary or threshold. We have one foot rooted in something that is not yet over, while the other foot is planted in a thing not yet defined, something not yet ready to begin. We function with structures, identities and relationships formed by our old experiences, although we know that those structures and processes will not serve us adequately in our present reality or in the future.

Liminality is more than new people in new roles, or organizations going through transition.

Liminality can describe the state of an individual, a place, an organization, or an entire institution evolving. In fact, liminality can describe the disorientation of an entire era or civilization.

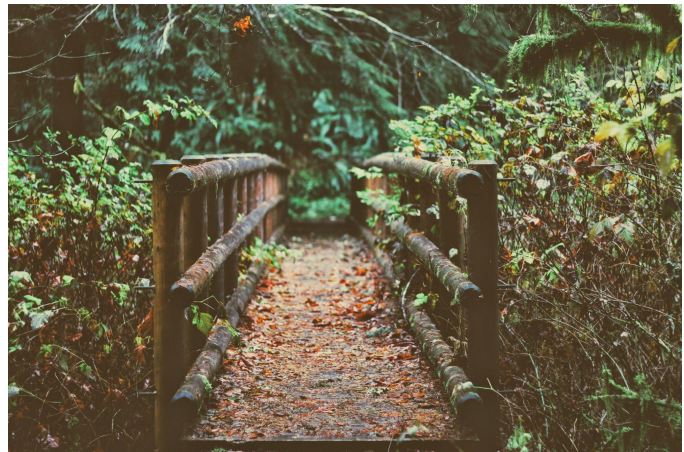
Project Stages

Stage One: SEPARATION

November 2022–February 2023

During this period a person, group or social order is stripped of the identity, social status and structure that was previously limited and defined.

The prime work of this stage is the identification of the models, thought processes and assumptions that once were helpful now must be left behind. This work of leaving behind can be taxing since it involves aspects of grieving; however, it can also be liberating for congregations and their leaders as they lay some burdens down.



The key question:

What do we leave behind?

Stage Two: ENGAGING THE LIMINAL PERIOD February - April 2023

During this period, the focus is upon taking stock of the current situation, its challenges, resources and opportunities. This can be disorientating since the assumptions of old structures and models can be seen to be developing cracks or proving non-viable. The work will be to identify points of opportunity and exploration. New things may be explored, tried and if proved inadequate mined for learning. This is a time of experimentation and learning as clergy and congregations seek to find significant leverage points, mutually shared, that will make the work of minister and congregation more joyous and effective.



The key question:

What is really going on (in our life and the life of our neighbourhoods and congregation)?

Where is the energy?

Stage Three: RE-EMERGENCE May-June 2023

This is a period of re-formation in which a person, group of social order adopts a new status and structure more appropriately suited to a changed environment or an emerging identity. With the two congregations and their ministers we will identify points of mutual interest, spiritual call, and available resources to develop a plan to implement the ministries each has discerned.



The key question:

Who are we going to be and how are we going to live during this chapter of our lives?

What's the plan and the next steps?