
ProVision Fund: Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery

Final Report

Name of Program	Faith Podcast
Date(s) of Program	September 2015 – December 2015
Congregation/Organisation	Lynn Valley United Church
Person Responsible	Shauna Grinke – congregant LVUC
Email	sgrinke@shaw.ca

Objective of Program

The objectives of the program were to:

- *Experiment with the medium of podcasting as a way to create a vibrant new form of ministry.*

We imagined this: *“Podcasts are still relatively new as a medium, but are also incredibly popular among a diverse population, and they are as of yet relatively untapped by the United Church. While many churches have embraced podcasts by recording and releasing church services, the most popular podcasts available in the format we are envisioning, involve dialogue and storytelling around a topic, and the sharing of multiple, diverse voices. Podcasts like This American Life, CBC’s Q, Canadaland, and Startup are a few that this podcast will be modelled after. We believe our content is unique with enormous potential to be a vibrant new form of ministry.”* We further suggested, *“By embracing the full potential of the medium for dialogue, interaction, and storytelling, this Faith Podcast will reach new groups of people who might not otherwise be interested in attending a church service.”*

- The promotion of faithful public witness.*

In our application for Provision funding, we asserted that: *“This podcast will bring conversations about faith and spiritual practices, hosted by The United Church, to a new platform. By engaging in dialogue and creating a collection of stories and personal experiences centered around intriguing, deep-seated questions of meaning, hope, God, love, life, death, and resurrection, we will promote a faithful public witness.*

We believe that all people, whether they consider themselves spiritual or not, are hard-wired to engage with questions of meaning and values that faith addresses. By approaching a variety of faithful practices with a spirit of curiosity and acceptance, we seek to help spur conversations like this in individual listener’s homes and relationships, as well as online.”

- *The promotion of a multicultural and intergenerational approach to ministry.*

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In the podcast design, we stayed focused on: *“One of the primary goals of this podcast is to draw in a diverse array of voices, spanning cultures, ages, genders, lifestyles, and religious practices. This will provide the two-fold benefits of exposing people to new points of view, outside of their own experiences, and growing their perspective, as well as creating a sense of acceptance and “home” to people representing a variety of backgrounds. The medium of podcasts is particularly relevant to those in the age ranges not currently found in Sunday services.”*

-To revitalize the health of the United Church.

This was our objective around ‘the health of the United Church’: *A healthy church community is made up of a variety of people, actively engaging with God, each other, and their community at large, creating a space for open discussion about the principles of faith and what they mean in day-to-day life. From the ground up, this podcast will assist in this task: the project's creative team is a trio of young professional artists and producers, each one representing a different faith background. The guests will further this diversity and engagement, and the podcast itself brings this conversation to a new demographic that might not otherwise be interested in Sunday church. This broad representation and engagement across platforms will help create a vibrant, healthy community for the United Church.”*

- Additional Goal: the creation of a professional, excellent final product.

Finally, our ‘product quality’ was important: *“On top of the criteria for the ProVision fund, we intend to create a high quality, professional-grade podcast, both in terms of production values and storytelling. With such readily-available technology to create podcasts, it is more important than ever to ensure the final product is professional and relevant. Low quality sound or unprofessional interviews or editing can be detrimental to the ability of a listener to engage with the subject matter.”*

Outcome and Achievements

We are thrilled with the outcome and achievements of this project. We planned to complete 10 unique podcasts; we created 11, and have additionally created a ‘summary podcast’, whereby Blair Odney (Minister Lynn Valley United Church), and the Hosts (Joel Grinke, Andrea Loewen) debriefed the learning and possible next steps. We would be delighted to share this with the ProVision Funding Committee should this be of interest.

Regarding our first objective of: *experimenting with the medium of podcasting*, we learned quickly about creating a professional and unique podcast experience. After our first two podcasts, it became evident that, in order to be able to do a podcast each week, that we would need a professional editor and sound designer. The third through eleventh episodes benefited greatly from the addition of a skilled professional in that technical capacity. We were delighted to be able to attract diverse age ranges, ethnicities, faiths, life experiences, and perspectives to each weekly podcast. The guest artists on each podcast – including musical and spoken word artists, and writers from prose, poetry and play-writing disciplines – added a unique lens to the

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weekly subjects and conversation. The professional website and the inclusion of Life. Right? The podcast on iTunes are testament to the strong production values of the podcast series.

<http://liferightpodcast.com/>

Regarding our second objective of *promotion of faithful public witness*, we definitely brought conversations about faith and spiritual practices to a new audience. We stepped into conversations with courage and authenticity, and people responded. The full 11-podcast series can be found here: <http://liferightpodcast.com/life-right/>

We also learned the challenges of getting noticed in the very noisy environment of social media marketing. We used a focused and proactive social media marketing campaign, and achieved the following results:

Website Visits: 2,060

Pageviews: 3,050

Visitors: 1,694

Listens: 1,968

Listens per Week: 151-210

Regarding our third objective of “*the promotion of a multicultural and intergenerational approach to ministry*”, our guests were culturally and generationally diverse, and explored topics of relevance to a diverse listening audience. We explored topics such as Unconditional Love, with a transgender couple; issue of Identity with a young Middle Eastern woman and a lesbian; Reflections on Death with a 80-something doctor and a Twenty-something who has written her own eulogy; the topic of Forgiveness from the perspective of a psychologist, and a young woman who had been abused; the topic of Social Justice was explored with young adults through a ‘theoretical’ lens, and a priest through a highly practical and very personal lens. Feedback that we received on Facebook, through email, and through conversations among listeners was that the content and delivery was relevant, profound, and authentic.

Regarding our fourth objective “*To revitalize the health of the United Church*”, the production team for the project was ‘wowed’ by the Lynn Valley United Church congregation response to the series. Even though this is not a ‘technologically savvy’ group of people, the interest in the project in the congregation was high. People in the congregation listened to the podcast, and the podcast series gave them the vehicle to reach out to people – like sons and daughters – who had actively resisted being included in ‘church stuff’ previously, but were intrigued by this project. The forwarding of iTunes links via email could not be captured numerically. However, anecdotally, we know that this was a key method of distribution of the series. At the January 9th Vancouver Burrard Presbytery meeting/workshop with clergy, congregational leaders on Adaptive Change, there was considerable interest expressed on the story of this project, and interest in continuing the discussion of expanding the involvement of the broader United Church community into this work. There was wide-spread agreement that furthering this project would be in support of the wider United Church community.

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And, finally, our goal of “*the creation of a professional, excellent final product*” was achieved. The series stands up against any professional podcast available on iTunes today. From the sound quality, to the production values, to the guests, to the depth of inquiry and content, ***Life. Right?*** is a project of which to be incredibly proud.

Learnings and Celebrations to Share with Others Considering a Similar Project

This has been an incredible project! It brought discussion, conversation, reflection and excitement to our congregation. It introduced a diverse audience to reflect on human and spiritual themes. It brought people together to talk about topics that ‘we’ve all thought about, but never really talked about.’

We learned that, if we are going to continue to develop and leverage this medium as a new form of ministry, we need to continue to explore funding streams. From a financial perspective, we learned that a realistic budget for a quality 10-podcast series is \$12,000. The congregation and production crew are interested in continuing to pursue this work. The response from other United Church leaders at the January 9th meeting, suggest that there is energy around furthering this work. The production team hopes to apply for further funding, as we know we need a deeper library of episodes to leverage different funding (crowdsourcing, sponsorship) in the longer term.

Project Income and Expenses

Project Income	Amount
Organization Funds (from LVUC)	\$ 1000
Other United Church of Canada Support	\$
Other Grants	\$2000
Fundraising	\$
Funding from Partners	\$
Other:	\$
	\$
Amount Received from ProVision	\$5000
Total Income	\$8000

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Project Expenses	Amount
Staff/Contractors – Life. Right? Podcast Hosts/production team	\$4000.00
Materials and Supplies	\$664.43
Promotion and Education	\$1522.44
Rent	\$0
Other: Guest honorarium (\$243.63; Music Composition:\$900; Bank Fees \$19.50; Artist Fees: \$650;	\$1813.13
Total Expenses	\$8000
Balance	\$0

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