

The St. Andrew's Hall Institute for Elders' Education Pilot Project Report 2003

Theological Statement

Throughout scripture there are many images of journey – Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus, the disciples, Paul. These journeys were undertaken in answer to God's call, with a mixture of faith and doubt, with hope that the journey would end in the promised land, and facing uncertainty along the way. The Elders' Institute is on a journey that we believe is in response to God's call. It is a journey that has been characterized by challenges, but we are encouraged by the response of the people of God and hopeful that this ministry will continue to be a vital part of the church.

Introduction

The following are the mission statement and goals of the Elders' Institute pilot project:

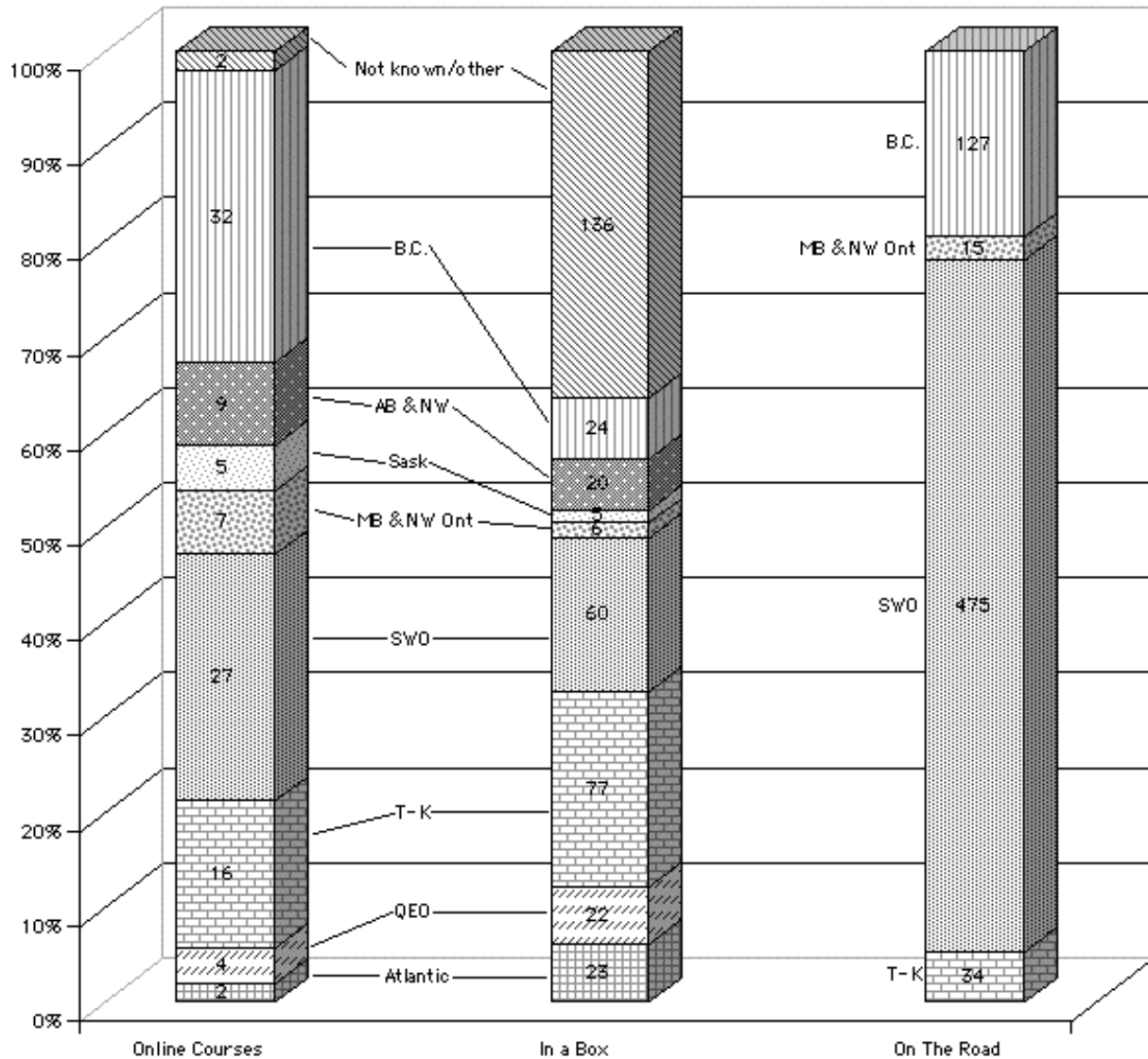
Mission Statement: *To provoke Canadian Presbyterian elders to lead the church into more faithful, effective and wise ministry and mission.*

Goals

- To develop programs and resources that most appropriately serve the current needs of Canadian Presbyterian elders.
- To fund and staff the proposed three-year pilot project.
- To create an institutional culture dedicated to constant improvement in the strategic and business plans for the Institute.
- To develop alliances and partnerships that further the purpose of Canadian Presbyterian elders' education.
- To identify and assess desired results on a regular basis.

We believe that the Elders' Institute has championed the cause of elders and has initiated a revival of interest and enthusiasm for eldership. Through our three program streams, we have directly reached 10% of the 11,000 ruling elders in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Feedback from the programs and courses has been highly positive, even laudatory. The Elders' Institute has good leadership and has set a good pedagogical model for distance and distributed learning. We have been able to target our market niche with integrity and knowledge. All of our programs are of high quality and our leadership reflects the theological spectrum and geographical spread of our denomination. The Elders' Institute is a national institution that is committed to a depth and breadth of elders' education rather than to occasional or local initiatives. We have been surprised by joy in the response to the Institute and believe that we are raising the bar by raising expectations and drawing attention to the needs of elders.

Program Statistics



Online Courses	In a Box	On the Road
Total Registrations: 105	Total Orders: 387	Total Attendance: 651
Total Students: 80		
Students in 2+ courses: 19		

Evaluation – Elders’ Institute In a Box

There are many strengths of the “Elders’ Institute In a Box” program. It is inexpensive and can be 100% computer-free. It can be used by individuals and by groups and is easy to obtain, easy to use, and easy to present. The time commitment for elders is more than what is required by an Elders’ Institute On the Road event and less than the time needed to participate in an online course. It provides an opportunity for elders to interact, is a good tool for pre-ordination training and continuing education, and can accommodate a wide variety in numbers of participants. With

the first course, participants heard about the course in numerous ways and the word-of-mouth publicity has been very high. An additional five titles are in development.

Davida Stewart, an elder at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, covenanted with five other elders to do an in-depth study of *The Role of the Elder*. In this group were two elders who have been serving for over thirty years, one for over fifteen years, one for ten years and two who were ordained in the last year. After studying each lesson, the group members then presented an overview at a Session meeting. This process stimulated much discussion and sharing which was the most important aspect of the course. One elder said that he would gladly do the whole course again and others suggested that parts of it would be excellent for recruiting potential elders. Davida shares: "It has challenged us and made us look at our role in a different light – it was an awakening and an encouragement. It made me want to be bold and daring."

Evaluation – On the Road

The "Elders' Institute On the Road" program has the benefit of being able to reach large numbers of participants, which in turn provides an experience of commonality and a sense of the larger church. These events enliven sessions that attend together and stimulate thinking and learning. The energy created can be a catalyst for more training and education and can whet the appetite for other learning opportunities. They are a comfortable starting point for many elders as they are time-limited and require little effort to participate. This program personalizes, or puts a face on, the Elders' Institute. In addition, the Elders' Institute provides leadership but publicity, registration, and hosting arrangements are coordinated locally.

David Brough, an elder at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg, has taken two Online Courses with the Elders' Institute. It was after participating in his first course, *Hope and Hospitality: A Primer on Evangelism*, that David approached his Session about holding a Session Retreat through the "Elders' Institute On the Road" program. Twelve ruling elders and their teaching elder participated in a two-day retreat held outside Winnipeg. David and the other elders found this retreat to be a time to build relationships, to become a better team, and to better understand their roles and responsibilities. They described the weekend as a time of "...fun, laughter, freedom-to-be, dialogue, fellowship..."

Evaluation – Online Courses

An important strength of the "Elders' Institute Online Courses" program is the in-depth nature of the courses which provide students with new ideas that trigger thoughtful responses that can be applied in their own congregations. Students also experience significant personal and spiritual growth through these courses. The use of this new educational technology enables students to interact with elders from across the country, to share their experiences, to see similarities in their congregations, and to benefit from the access to expert instructors from different parts of our denomination. The small group setting provides a positive learning environment as does the attention to the specifics of online pedagogy. Students receive quality technical support that both enables them to engage the course well and to improve their computer skills generally. Two key benefits of this way of learning are flexibility related to when and where students can access the course, that is, asynchronous learning and remote access. Online courses include a variety of ages, locations, levels of education, and experience and serve to equalize voices in the online

classroom. The core catalogue of courses together provides a holistic picture of what eldership is about. Several students have participated in two or more online courses.

Sepkje Lind, an elder at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kamloops, has taken three Online Courses with the Elders' Institute. After participating in *Youth Ministry Matters: A Guide to Envisioning and Enabling Effective Youth Ministry*, Sepkje started a "Dream Team" in her congregation. This team has done an assessment of their congregation's strengths and weaknesses and has begun to implement creative ways of being more inclusive of youth and young adults in the worship and life of the congregation. Sepkje says she "became a more capable elder in lifeskill situations in family visitations in the congregation" after participating in *Pastoral Care for Presbyterian Elders*. When asked about the value of Online Courses she suggests that we "absolutely continue this great method of teaching elders across the nation."

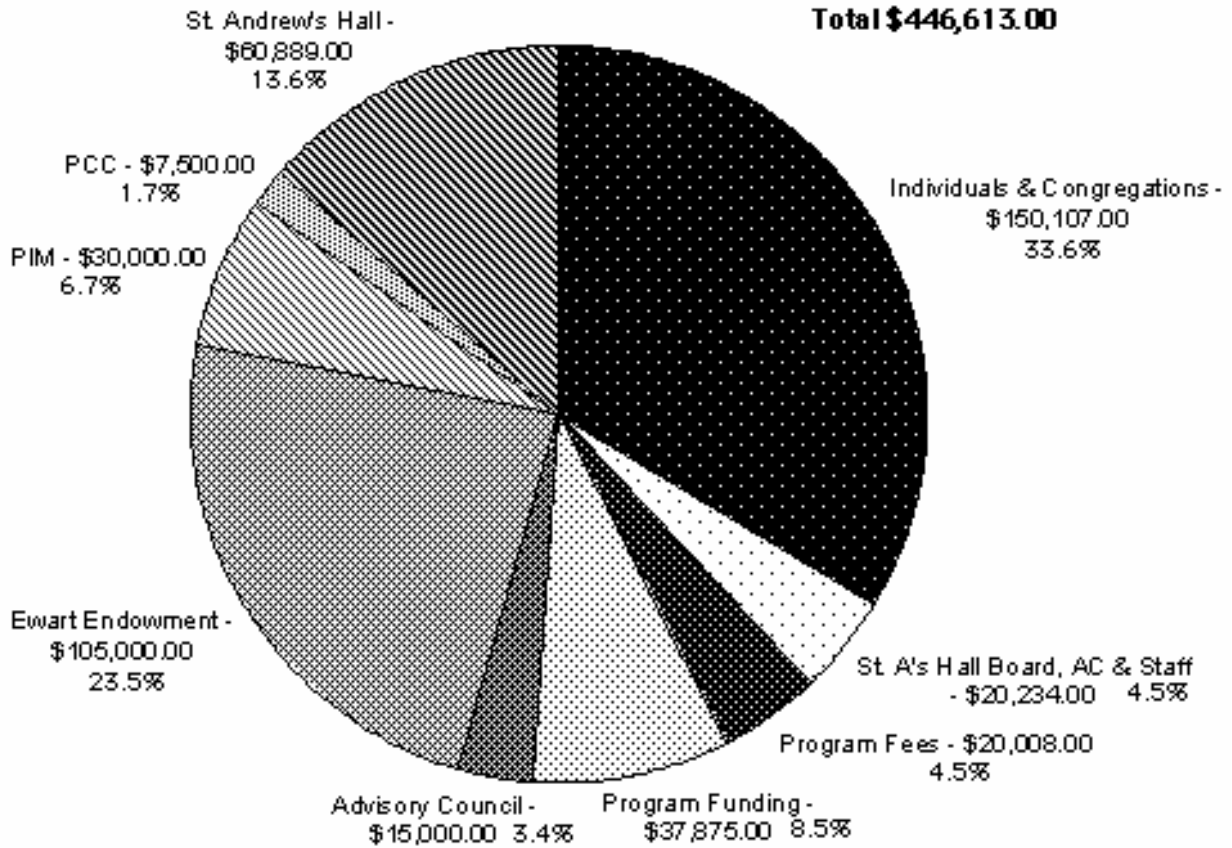
Funding

The pilot project has been funded in a number of ways. In total, over \$445,000 has been raised for the pilot project. Currently, our budget is approximately \$200,000 per year. The fees charged for each program are set so that they will keep the programs accessible while covering some of the costs of offering the program. Our initial hope that, upon completion of the pilot project, this ministry would become self-sustaining has not proved to be the case. Nonetheless, we are convinced by both the obvious need and achieved success of the pilot project that this ministry should be continued, and that it deserves the support of the denomination. St. Andrew's Hall continues to see the Elders' Institute as part of its mission to provide theological education and is seeking ways to support the program financially. We believe that elders' education is part of the mission of St. Andrew's Hall, but is also a broader mission of the church and we challenge the church to take ownership by providing a portion of the funding. We expect future funding will be developed from several sources including program fees and an ongoing fundraising program. However, we believe that the Institute needs the security of an annual contribution to the budget in order to continue this ministry.

St. Andrew's Hall is therefore committing its own resources to this ministry in the following ways:

- In the short-term, St. Andrew's Hall has pledged up to \$110,000 to meet the budget for the pilot project.
- In the mid-term, St. Andrew's Hall will seek a loan to fund the Elders' Institute over the next 2-5 years.
- In the long-term, St. Andrew's Hall will repay the loan and include the Elders' Institute in its Operating budget through proceeds from the development of property.

Funding Statistics



Funds designated for specific purposes often have multiple sources. The breakdown of those sources is given below:

Program Fees	Program Funding	Advisory Council
Online Courses: \$13,279	<i>Online Courses</i>	The Presbyterian Church in Canada: \$10,000
On the Road: \$6,679	Presbyterian Innovative Ministries: \$7,500	The Women's Missionary Society: \$5,000
In a Box: \$50	Priscilla and Stanford Reid Trust: \$7,500	
	The Presbyterian Church in Canada: \$15,000	
	Agnes Davidson Family: \$2,550	
	St. Andrew's Hall: \$2,500	
	<i>In a Box</i>	
	The Experimental Fund: \$2500	
	Donations: \$325	

Conclusion

We have taken the concept endorsed and commended by the General Assembly and made it a reality. The Elders' Institute in its pilot project period has proven the concept and clearly established the likelihood of continued success. The response to the programs has revealed how much more can be done as the Elders' Institute seeks to serve God's church and to engage and encourage leaders. We now seek the continued support of the denomination to help us fulfil the task that you have set us. The mission and goals of the continuing ministry of the Elders' Institute are as follows:

Mission Statement: *To provoke Canadian Presbyterian elders and other leaders to lead the church into more faithful, effective and wise ministry and mission.*

Goals:

1. To improve the confidence and performance of elders in designing the ministry and mission of the church.
2. To equip elders in their five areas of responsibility as prescribed in the Book of Forms – supervision and oversight, membership and pastoral care, worship, Christian education, and stewardship and mission.
3. To develop the Elders' Institute's role in enabling leaders to discern a call to eldership, in encouraging an understanding of eldership as servant leadership, and in assessing the needs of elders and of the church.
4. To make designated programs available to other church leaders.

Thanksgiving

We thank Rev. Dr. Hans Kouwenberg for his gifted leadership as the Interim Convener of the Advisory Council. We also thank the members of the Advisory Council for their commitment, enthusiasm, and hard work – Dr. Norah Lewis, Mr. David Jennings, Mr. Leslie Young, Ms. Bernice Shih, Mrs. Gretta Redahl, Mr. Spencer Edwards, Dr. Mary Rogers, Dr. David Stewart, Mr. Claude Meslage, Mrs. Davida Stewart, Mrs. Cheryl Weeks, Mrs. Barbara McLean, Rev. Ian Morrison, Rev. Dr. James Czegledi, Rev. Dr. Beverly Cushman, Ms. Joan Stellmach, and Ms. Helen Anderson.