

It has been several months now since Peel Valley congregation began the process to call a Minister. The council leadership has attended many meetings and has had formal and informal conversations with Presbytery and other Tamworth Uniting Church congregations. The leadership has also met with Presbytery and the Pastoral Relations committee to discuss Presbytery's proposal for our congregation.

At this point in time, it is our view, there is little Presbytery has offered that would benefit Peel Valley.

We've accepted this will not be a swift or straightforward process.

I believe the questions Presbytery would like us to consider are "What do you give up, when you share what you have in community? And what do you gain?"

So how will we move forward while we wait for compromises or decisions to be made? What will Peel Valley "look like" in the future?

The moderator of the Uniting Church of Canada has been working with many congregations facing similar challenges. This is the message she will be delivering to her flock this Sunday.

In today's gospel reading about the good shepherd and the sheep, Jesus says :

*He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

The problem we are facing, I believe, is in coming to recognize and know the voice of Christ our Shepherd in the midst of all the voices that speak around us and how to recognize and know the voice of Christ our Shepherd in the midst of all the different voices that speak within us - within our own hearts and minds.

How do we listen, challenge or accept the words of those who are our brothers and sisters, those, who speak to us about critical changes to our congregation and make suggestions which do not fit with our plan for our people.

Because of our trust for these people of our church, we sometimes uncritically accept all that they have to tell us, as being the voice of Christ speaking to us.

Or, because of our lack of trust in these people of our church, because of our conviction that they do not understand us, or listen to us, we end up regarding them, who are our brothers and sisters in the faith, as the enemy. And all that they have to say, when we don't like what they say, we see as not being anything at all like the voice of Christ, and we flee as sheep from one who is not their shepherd.

It is a problem...how do we decide what the Lord is telling us? How do we know what we are hearing is right or wrong, good or bad?

It is not enough for us to say that what some people tell us, in the name of the Lord, about this or that matter, is right or wrong.

We need to listen to the various voices around us and those within us and then, in prayerful reflection, in study of the word and in quiet and peaceable dialogue with others, whose wisdom we know to be Christ like, ask ourselves - "What is it that Jesus would have us do?"

Such questions can only be answered by us - and for us – as individuals and as a congregation if we enter into a relationship with the Lord and with one another, a relationship like of the sheep to the shepherd and each sheep with the rest of the flock.

Pray – Listen – Pray some More - and even then the answer that we receive in our heart may not be the same one that comes into the heart of another.

If we persist in listening to and following the voice of our Shepherd in the little things, the things that relate to how we ought to love God and how we ought to love one another, and if we devote ourselves, as did the first church after the day of Pentecost, to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, then we will discover an ever increasing clarity within us about what God is saying and about what God wants us to do; and we will discover too an ever increasing sense of peace among us and within us, a peace that endures, a peace that brings praise and glory to our God because of what others see in us.

*If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)*