

Gabriola United Church and St. Martin of Tours Anglican Church come together as Christ Church Gabriola

The 7-year journey began in 2010 as a simple rental arrangement between Gabriola United Church and St. Martin of Tours Anglican Church. From sharing a building (with St. Martin's as the tenant), the relationship slowly evolved to sharing a minister, to sharing activities and projects, and to worshipping together. A final step was taken this past summer when members of both congregations voted overwhelmingly to form a full ecumenical partnership by sharing assets equally and by choosing a new name – Christ Church Gabriola.

Co-chairs Betty Schultze and Rob Brockley described the new shared ministry in different ways. According to Schultze, the process has been a bit like preparing for a marriage or loving partnership. "Early on, you take time to get to know each other, to share experiences, and to build trust. As time passes, you may examine the benefits of living together and sharing resources. Finally, you may recognize the depth of your shared values and decide to make a permanent commitment." Brockley says "Over time, the two congregations simply recognized that we would be a much stronger, and more effective, community of faith by joining together. Rather than be divided by our different traditions, we've chosen to be bound by our shared ideals of justice, compassion, love, and peace." He says the collaborative partnership of Christ Church Gabriola "seeks to be a positive example of ecumenical relations on Gabriola Island and beyond." After several years of inward focus on forming and structuring the new partnership, both co-chairs say they are looking forward to putting their energies into spiritual growth and an outward focus of ministry to the Gabriola community and beyond.

The Shared Ministry Agreement describing the partnership includes the following statement of purpose: "This new relationship will challenge and enable us to live more purposefully and completely as Christians; it will foster inclusiveness, respect for diversity, wider perspectives of understanding, acceptance of discomforts, a willingness to learn and to grow together in our common faith, and a commitment to care for each other." Schultze says "all are welcome to join our journey of faith regardless of age, gender identity, health, race, sexual orientation, differing abilities, or economic circumstance."

Christ Church Gabriola maintains formal ties with the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia and the Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery of the United Church of Canada. However, Brockley says "many members come from other denominations and some have no previous denominational affiliation". Worship services (Sundays at 10:00 am) blend elements from various Christian traditions and include extensive lay participation. The congregation recently approved a call for a new minister. The Rev. Karen Hollis will begin her ministry at Christ Church Gabriola on January 1st.