



North Toronto Cluster

<https://www.ntcnw.ca/>

March 2023

The North Toronto Cluster is comprised of nine United Churches along the Yonge Street corridor between Bloor and the 401: Deer Park, Eglinton St George's, Fairlawn, Glebe, Lawrence Park, Leaside, Manor Road, Northlea, and Rosedale.*

**Dewi Sant was part of the cluster until they merged with Timothy Eaton Memorial in 2022.*

The cluster started out meeting in person at our churches once a month or so in 2016 and has grown to be one of the largest, self-directed, and proactive clusters in the Greater Toronto Area. Ministers and Chairs of Councils attend the meetings. At first, they were just check-ins in a safe and mutually supportive place, on what each church was up to. However, during the pandemic, we started collaborating on social justice projects, such as providing tents and sleeping bags to people experiencing homelessness. This led to more forms of co-operation: book clubs for cluster members, seminars with guest speakers over zoom on weeknights, and charity projects (see below). We created a website so we could see what each other was doing and invite each other to attend events. We trade tips and wisdom, best practices, and we look for ways we can act together, getting more done than if we were single churches.

The cluster is actively working together on the following initiatives:

Backpack project

A joint project to raise funds and purchase and fill over 400 backpacks for elementary and pre-school students in the impoverished Thorncliffe Park region– Lawrence Park led it in 2021, ESG ran it in 2022 and Northlea is coordinating it in 2023.

Roehampton Shelter Group

We set up an ecumenical group to support a local housing shelter for homeless people to counteract a negative reception by the local community and to let the residents know that the community cares about them. The group is comprised of seven cluster United Churches (ESG, Fairlawn, Leaside, LPCC, Manor Road, Northlea, Rosedale) and First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto. Activities to support the shelter residents include:

- Donating welcome baskets to shelter residents who secure a housing spot. Each church prepares 10 to 15 baskets twice per year with household items (dishes, kitchen utensils, sheets, grocery gift cards, etc.); a couple of the smaller churches pair up for their months.
- In May 2021 we invited City of Toronto representatives to provide an online talk on the drug crisis in Toronto, which affects shelter residents.
- Purchasing garden furniture with a local group to create a rooftop garden.
- Distributing cards and chocolates to the residents with handwritten messages at Easter 2021.
- 2023: Coordinating a knitting group to visit the shelter weekly and teach residents that skill.
- Sharing information about homelessness and signing petitions; some members are joining protests advocating for better services for homeless people.
- Attending a forum on "Housing TO: What's at Stake?" organized by The Ismaili Centre, Habitat for Humanity and Generation Squeeze on March 1st, 2023.

- Hosting an information session on the root causes of homelessness for all NT churches on March 29th, 2023, at Rosedale United Church.
- Inviting shelter residents to attend church services and special events.

Grocery cards

Created a joint project to address food insecurity and to provide \$50 grocery cards to students using Glendon College's campus food bank. We're exploring ways to educate and inform ourselves about the issues and to advocate for change.

Individual church events

Cluster church members are invited to special events, book clubs, and study groups etc. at neighbouring churches.

Pulpit exchanges

The ministers are doing pulpit exchanges and leading joint services between pairings of churches. This will include joint church services for summer worship between some of the Cluster churches in 2023.

Shared choirs

During the pandemic, choirs from some of the cluster churches gathered together online to create beautiful choral music. Choir members continue to sing at special services at neighbouring churches.

Joint youth programming

Pre-pandemic the cluster held youth events monthly with the GO project that rotated location from one church to another. They were scheduled to host a sleepover at a church before the lockdown in 2020.

Indigenous Water Walk with an Elder

This initiative is scheduled on September 30th, 2023.

Cluster meetings

- Ministers and council chairs and/or designated church lay leaders meet every six weeks or so. The meeting chair rotates from one church to another.
- Committee chairs, such as council chairs, treasurers, property, green team, pastoral care, and outreach, meet occasionally to explore issues common to all the cluster churches.
- Church leaders reach out to one another to get contacts for church repairs, tech inquiries, etc.
- Ministers meet every six weeks or so as a group just to hang out, support and commiserate. A nice social gathering over lunch.

Exploring job sharing, and shared property management and rental tasks

We're holding preliminary conversations to consider how this might be done.

Church service with the Moderator

The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne will be speaking to the cluster churches in a joint service, on Sunday, June 18th, 2023, at Rosedale United Church. A meal will be provided afterward in the park.

Cluster website

The cluster website <https://www.ntcnow.ca/> is used to share events, a good deeds page, a link to a green newsletter, etc.