

REPORT of THE MODERATOR and GENERAL SECRETARY



The Right Reverend Dr. Richard Bott
Moderator, The United Church of Canada



Nora Sanders
General Secretary, The United Church of Canada

Dear Regional Council Friends;

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..... (Hebrews 10:24-25)

We hear this passage this year, in these times of pandemic isolation, differently than ever before. These days we are not tempted to neglect meeting together, but are *yearning* for the “normal” world when it is safe for all of us to meet together, to worship together, and to serve together once again. And yet we hear these words today with a new understanding of what it means to gather together, with a new understanding of the possibility of experiencing genuine community as we gather and worship through electronic means rather than sitting side by side in our pews.

We are writing to you in the middle of the summer, thinking ahead to your plans to gather for regional council meetings this fall. The usual spring meetings were put off this year with the expectation of meeting in person in the fall, but as the summer progresses, it seems increasingly clear that fall gatherings may be held virtually after all.

Your leadership in these unusual times is so important, and we are grateful to serve God alongside you in the United Church of Canada.

COVID-19

Sometimes in the past few months, it has felt almost impossible to think of anything except the pandemic and how it is affecting all of our lives and the life of our church! This has been a year of unexpectedly rapid and massive change. If you had told any of us as 2020 dawned that in less than three months all the churches would be closed, all the schools would be closed, all the restaurants would be closed, all but “essential” businesses would be closed, vacation trips would all be cancelled, and we would be expected to stay home and not visit with friends or family, we simply would not have believed you. Even in the early part of the year, when these things became realities in China, we felt compassion for the people there, but still could not imagine that we would ever be affected in a similar way.

This is something that none of us have ever experienced before, and it is not something we ever expected to experience. Anxiety and grief are natural and real, but we have also felt deeply inspired by the creativity, innovation and adaptability that our ministers and members have demonstrated. Online worship is vibrant and meaningful, and serving not only our members but also numbers of people who had not been attending church, but have somehow found their way in through our virtual doorways. Bible studies, youth groups, baking nights, book clubs, board meetings, refugee support committees, the National Indigenous Elders Council, and so many more groups and events are all happening through the use of electronic tools. Although clusters and networks were slow to get off the ground after the reorganization of the Church structures, now there are regular ZOOM gatherings of ministry and lay leaders in regional groups, where real conversations take place as they support one another through the changes of these times. The Moderator and General Secretary have both appreciated opportunities to be part of these regional gatherings, perhaps connecting in this way with more of you than it would have been possible to meet in person during the same time period. The General Council Office closed on March 16, initially for “two weeks” but as of the time of writing it has not reopened. We are beginning to bring some staff back into the office this fall, but, especially with our open space layout and close proximity of neighbouring workspaces, it will be some considerable time before all staff are back. Planning for staff to return to the office will take into account the ability of job functions to be performed from outside the office, the health and family situations of staff members. Those working in the office will find that it feels different in many respects with the appearance of masks, lack of access to the common lunch area, limited use of meeting formats, and so on. Fortunately, we have seen staff rise to the occasion and find creative ways of doing their jobs and connecting with the wider church from their own homes. As with other churches and organizations, this experience has given us the opportunity to examine travel practices and question the “necessity” of some of our former ways, and to consider the possibility of some staff doing all or some of their work from locations outside of the office on a continuing basis.

No doubt you are also looking for the learnings from this time, the things that you have found possible and that you do not want to lose in “returning to normal”. We do not know yet what the “new normal” will look like, but it seems most likely that it will be different from what we understood as normal in the past. As we explore these unfamiliar paths, we give thanks that we are doing it together as a church, and with the comfort of God’s ever loving presence.

Budget cuts

When so many things “shut down” in mid March because of the pandemic, we were less than two weeks away from the spring meeting of the General Council Executive. This was to have been an in person gathering with a focus on identifying strategic priorities to offer to the church for discussion leading into the 44th General Council. There was one significant piece of business of the agenda, the approval of budget principles to guide the 2021 budget of the General Council Office. Given the circumstances in which this meeting was held (electronically), with so many immediate practical concerns in people’s minds, the “big picture strategic” work was deferred, and the focus shifted to the budget decisions that were needed. Although it would have been nice to avoid the difficult budget decisions too, this was not possible with church revenues are going down, as the size of our membership and number of congregations goes down. This has been a reality for some years and is accelerating. If anything was changed by the pandemic, it is the likelihood that even more

serious reductions will be needed as a result of the economic fallout that accompanies the pandemic shutdown.

The budget principles that the General Council Executive approved on March 28 require the 2021 budget to be about \$4 million smaller than this year's budget. These reductions will be roughly divided between grants and staff. Grant recipients have already been notified of the reduced grant levels that will apply in 2021, and this includes reductions in the Mission and Service allocations to Regional Councils. Staff reductions were made this spring and summer, so that severance costs could be borne within this fiscal year.

Anti-Racism

The issues raised by racialized and Indigenous participants at the unplanned, passionate, and painful discussion that ended the General Council 43 meeting in Oshawa, and the ongoing presence of systemic racism within our church, have been a major concern and area of work for this Executive of the General Council.

Early on in its tenure, the GCE set up an Anti-Racism Working Group, and they have been working hard to lift up issues of racial injustice, and to seek practical measures that will make a difference. Their [report](#) to the General Council Executive in March of 2020 lifts up the work done and the directions identified for further work.

The White Privilege Working Group has gone through some transitions in membership this year, and the willingness of Shannon McCarthy (Regional Council Executive Minister for the Prairie to Pine, Living Skies, and Northern Spirit regional councils) to take on the role of chair provides an important basis for partnership in this work between the General Council and Regional Councils. These two Working Groups, along with the Reference Group for Indigenous Peoples and the Reference Group for Racialized Peoples, and the staff that support them, will be meeting in September to discuss coordination and clarification of the work and to develop an outline for the United Church's Anti-Racism Strategy. We will be in conversation with Regional Councils as the anti-racism strategy is being developed.

Meanwhile, with advice from racialized staff, and oversight from both Working Groups, revisions have been made to the General Council Harassment policy to clarify its application to racial harassment, and the process that are available to activate it. The revised policy is slated for approval by the sub-executive this summer and will be in place by the time you meet this fall. Information and training will be available to help everyone become familiar with the scope and requirements of the revised policy.

We have been working closely with Anglicans and Lutherans, and with others from the Canadian Council of Churches, to express our shared commitment to the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, with links to statements in [March](#), [June](#) and [July](#). In June, the General Council Executive released a statement expressing clearly its conviction that [Black Lives Matter](#) to the United Church. The Moderator has also written to the Prime Minister to express strong support for the national recognition of August 1 as [Emancipation Day](#), to mark the abolition of slavery in Canada. If you want a practical step that you can take, we encourage you to write your own letter to

the Prime Minister on this topic. Feel free to use the Moderator's letter as a model.

GC43 Commissioners will know that when the General Council was recalled in June to consider whether the next General Council meeting should be delayed, a [proposal](#) outlining a number of steps to combat racism was received. Although this proposal was received too close to the time of the meeting to allow for adequate discussion and preparation by commissioners, its principles received clear support and it was referred to the General Council Executive for further work with the expectation that there will be a report back to the next electronic recall of GC43 on October 24.

Those present in Oshawa, and those following closely the business of the General Council there heard clearly the importance of acknowledging and addressing racism. Even still, one challenge is that many United Church people assume that OTHER people are racists, and that racism is an individual and overt act as opposed to a system. We have denounced racism as a church. But some among us—particularly those of us who are White—may not really understand that although we oppose racism, we are part of racist systems and institutions, whether we realize it or not. The sad murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis has generated wider discussion and a deeper recognition of the systemic racism that is part the world in which we live. Many in the church have been educating themselves about White privilege, deepening their commitment to anti-racism work, affirming that Black Lives Matter, and following through with tangible actions that support our words. Too often, people believe that racism is a particular issue in the United States, or a problem outside the United Church. But racism actually relates to each of us, and is present in our own church. The good news is that understanding the reality of racism provides the basis for doing something about it, for speaking up when we hear inappropriate conversations, for sharing resources that have helped our own learning, and for pushing for social, institutional, and political changes that will bring about true respect, safety, and equality of opportunity for all.

We are in the process of recruiting an Anti-Racism and Equity Officer who will serve in the General Council Office and report directly to the General Secretary. This person will ensure that the various pieces of related work are coordinated, that information about the work is shared, and that learning opportunities are widely available.

Anti-racism work needs the leadership of the General Council Office, but also needs the commitment of United Church people in every Regional Council, and in local communities of faith. If you are doing work in this area, or have suggestions for us, we would be grateful to hear from you.

National Indigenous Council

The National Indigenous Council is now a year into its new structure. Through the first ten months of the life of this new body, they were ably supported by Cheryl Jourdain, former Speaker of the All Native Circle Conference, who had agreed to provide interim leadership through a transitional period. As of July 1, Murray Pruden has been serving as the Executive Minister for Indigenous Ministries and Justice. The General Council Executive looks forward to working closely with the National Indigenous Council to advance the commitments made when the 43rd General Council accepted the Calls to the Church from the Caretakers of the Indigenous Circle.

United Property Resource Corporation

The establishment of the United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC) was approved by the General Council Executive in April of 2019 and got started in the months that followed. It is continuing to scale up quickly to achieve its mandate of becoming a trusted real estate advisor and support to faith communities by leading real estate initiatives on their behalf.

UPRC will work to ensure projects are commercially viable and support the mission of the community of faith and the United Church of Canada. This includes the development of safe, stable, and affordable housing for all Canadians while maximizing the social impact to achieve the highest possible economic, environmental and social benefits. UPRC has formally executed the agreement with Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation (CMHC) and is continuing to advance UCC real initiatives working alongside local faith communities.

The UPRC board is chaired by Don Hunter, who previously served on the General Council Executive as chair of the Permanent Committee on Finance. The first two staff of the corporation are Kris Tavella, who formerly did related work as part of EDGE, and the Chief Executive Officer Tim Blair, who began this spring in the midst of the COVID shutdown. Tim brings 20 years of real estate investment banking and private equity experience, and a strong commitment to the social values of the United Church, to the work.

This corporation has been created as a resource to the church, and either Tim or Kris are happy to hear from congregations and regional councils who have questions about property issues. You can expect to hear more announcements about the United Property Resource Group this fall.

(tblair@united-church.ca or Ktavella@united-church.ca)

Recruitment of new General Secretary

At last October's recall meeting of the 43rd General Council, the General Secretary shared the news of her wish to retire in the fall of 2020. A Search Committee was appointed (chaired by the Moderator). and, after a bit of delay because of COVID-19 distractions, they concluded interviews in August, and came to a strong consensus in their recommendation, which was approved by the General Council Executive on August 27.

[Michael Blair](#) will begin his term as General Secretary of the General Council on November 1. Many of you will already know him..... and we are excited about the excellent experience and faithful vision that he will bring to this new role. Nora Sanders will continue to serve until the end of October.

[GC 44 Delayed until 2022](#)

At a special electronic meeting held on June 20, 2020, Commissioners of the 43rd General Council made this decision to delay the 44th General Council from 2021 to 2022. Given the uncertainty caused by the Global pandemic, this decision was made having in mind the health and well being of all participants, including Commissioners, global partners, staff, and guests.

The revised dates for GC44 have been set for July 22–26, 2022. These dates were selected based on the original 2021 dates, availability of the venues, and the UCW 60th Anniversary celebration which is scheduled to be held in Sydney Nova Scotia, July 11 – 15, 2022.

Deadlines for GC44 are June 14, 2021 for electing Commissioners and October 29, 2021 for submitting proposals.

Richard Bott, Moderator

Nora Sanders, General Secretary

On behalf of the General Council Executive

REPORT – REGION COUNCIL EXECUTIVE CO-CHAIRS



Lori Stewart
Chair



Kwang Beom Cho
Chair

The United Church of Canada marked a new beginning amid long hours of discussion and planning. It was the beginning of hope.

In history we know what kind of ministry we have had as a United Church, for justice, for peace, for the creative world, for human rights, for the kingdom of God. But we also confess that we have destroyed the creative order, were unjust, had a narrow sense of human rights, and had a sense of superiority, discrimination, and inequality.

We wanted to look inside us at the contradictions and change it with the "Missio Dei/Mission of God" theology and the blade of the 'Social Gospel'. We seek to form communities of faith that change not only on the outside shell, but also from the inside to the whole new, qualitatively.

In this great change, many people ask, "Is the United Church dying?" There are two answers to this question. We are "waiting to die (close)", but if this is the answer, we are done. Or we are "doing something before dying (closing)". If this is our answer, there is still hope for us. What stands in the way of this hope is the fear and uncertainty within us, within the communities of faith. We need courage now. This courage is not courage without fear, but the courage to take a step forward even if we have fear.

So, the seed of hope has been sown in our United Church. We continue to answer the question pose to Jesus', "Who is my neighbor?" in order to sprout, stem, leaf, and bear fruit from this seed. Then we hope to unite with our neighbors, the weak, those in need, and build a community together.

Jesus did his best in his life until the end. His death was not a failure or a setback. His death brought people back to life as hope, resurrection, and wholeness. We continue to do what we have to do as seeds, salt, light, and hope for the kingdom of God.

As Co-chairs of the Executive of a Regional Council which started with hope, we also agonized and agreed on how important it was to have an Intercultural perspective and from this point of view we wanted to renew our Region.

The first gathering of the Executive, which was face to face in September 2019, provided a chance to get to know one another and to reflect on how we might embrace intercultural values and norms in our work. The Calls to Change, from the Regional Council Meeting, and our desire to become a more intercultural church body led us to take time at this first meeting to look at characteristics of white, dominant culture and seek antidotes and alternative ways of doing things. At a later meeting Ha Na Park assisted us to explore further how to decolonize our governance.

We identified the following ways in which we would be attentive to intercultural ways of doing things at meetings:

- Seek to understand and get the whole story rather than react to something we've heard only part of
- Value all voices
- Be patient as we allow each other time to express ourselves
- When we disagree with something, we will notice what is happening to us and seek to find out why
- We agreed that we would try a consensus decision-making model
- Without engagement and communication, true invitation and interaction is not possible.

We asked "what would decolonizing governance look like?" and noticed:

- We do better with intercultural sensitivity when we are not rushed
- Traditionally meetings are agenda focused rather than suited to relationship building.
- If the regional council wanted to include indigenous and intercultural members in an annual meeting, there would need to be more conversation, and the other calls to change would grow naturally out of that
- If we held a meeting with no agenda, what would happen?

The Annual Meeting Planning Committee took this discussion to heart in their preparations, seeking to minimize the time devoted to business, and allow more time for program and conversation. Unfortunately, with Covid 19 and the decision to meet electronically, the plan had to shift. With less time available, it may mean we are again agenda focused. However, we continue to ask the questions and seek a new way.

Communication

Communication was named as a huge priority by the Listening Team when we last met as a Regional Council. The Executive agreed to hire a staff person, who would have communication as one of their responsibilities, the position to be shared with the other two Regional Councils in the prairies. Julie Graham started in the New Year as Regional Minister for Justice and Communication. She made the completion of the website a priority and collaborated on a work plan with Jamie McKay and other staff.

The website was launched in March. It is hoped that having a staff position and the website will alleviate some of the communication problems. Following that big push, Julie was able to consult the region about our expectations and goals for her work in the Justice portfolio and for ongoing communication work.

Grants

We appointed a Grants Committee in September who reviewed the applications and presented a proposal about how to disperse funds for Ministry and Mission Support Grants. We agreed to accept the recommendations. The Regional Council Executive is now the body to approve requests for grants going to Church Development Inc. We received an application from Augustine United and forwarded our decision to CDI for their decision making.

Finances

We received regular Financial Reports at our meetings. Thanks to Heather Dootoff's hard work and Valerie Beckingham's collaboration, a detailed budget was prepared for 2020. Since 2019 was a transition year, it was not a typical or normal year to provide us with a good picture of what our actual costs would look like. As structures continue to evolve, so will the budget. The budget was adopted as presented. During 2020, expenditures for the region have been less than budgeted because of Covid 19 but major costs such as salaries and leases remained the same. An audit was completed for the 2019 books by BDO and the Executive approved the Audited Financial Statements as presented.

An accounting of money at our disposal from presbytery and conference transfers was prepared as a framework for a decision about how to deal with requests for money. An ad hoc Strategic Budgeting Committee was formed to propose priorities and criteria for dealing with requests for funds. That work is ongoing; however, the Executive did approve to provide funding for administrative support for Church Development Inc out of the funds transferred from Winnipeg Presbytery.

Pastoral Relations

We received reports and approved motions from the Committee on Community Support and the Committee on Ministry Personnel Support. We received decisions made at the Pastoral Relations Commission.

We worked on a number of Pastoral Relations policies:

- Pastoral Charge Supervisor
- Length of Appointments
- Part-time Ministry
- Cooperative Ministry Arrangements—name changed to Collaborative Ministry Agreements
- Marriage License Registration Policy

We agreed to the following processes:

- To request Formal Association
- To use the Yearbook guidelines for specialized ministries or other appointments
- To definitions for Other Ministry Employment or Regional Council recognized ministries.
- To use the criteria in Pastoral Relations: Engaging and Supporting (2013) to define Regional Council recognized ministries
- To make retired DLM were made members-at-large in the Regional Council
- A Conflict Resolution Facilitation Process

We approved governance documents for trial use at Prairie Spirit United Church and St. Charles Headingley. We approved the Ecumenical Shared Ministry between Neepawa UC and St. James Anglican Church.

We granted licenses to do sacraments to Eleanor Thompson and to do sacraments and weddings to Zack Kakegamic.

Covenants

The Committee on Community Support urged the Executive to create our own Covenant as our commitment to the Communities of Faith who are preparing their Covenants, and this was done.

We also agreed to accept and sign the covenant with Ministries in French. This covenant is about the United Church's intention to support Ministries in French and to have a network of Ministers who can lead churches in French across the country.

Property Commission

We dealt with recommendations that came to us from the Property commission. We agreed to disband Kelwood United Church and appointed trustees to deal with property matters, should they be needed. We also amended the Regional Council property policy so that congregations are no longer required to seek the consent of the Property Commission before they can use the currently restricted funds from the sale of a manse for their ongoing mission and work.

Equity and Diversity Committee

Executive received two proposals: A draft Affirming Vision Statement and Terms of Reference for the committee. These documents have to be approved by the full court in order for us to become an Affirming Region. We were also asked to review the Regional Council Responsibilities document.

Black Lives Matter

There is ongoing conversation on how can we support racialized clergy and members of our Regional Council. On behalf of the Council we wrote a letter specifically naming Black Lives Matter. Another thing being looked at is providing a safe space to our racialized clergy to have the conversations that they need to have and see if there are resources that our regional council can offer. We also are thinking about ways to provide space for white members of our Regional Council to have conversation about white privilege

Nominations

We received regular reports from the Nominations Committee with recommendations for new members for various committees and responsibilities, and approved those appointments.

We also agreed on the following process for appointing the chair(s) of the Executive:

- to have the possibility of co-chairs as an option but not mandatory
- If there are co-chairs to have them serve staggered terms
- If someone serves as chair elect rather than co-chair it be expect that they would stay on for an additional year as past chair after serving as chair

Governance

The Nominations Committee was asked to create a draft of a structure document for the governance of the Prairie to Pine Regional Council. This is a work in progress.

We considered how to respond to requests for official United Church representation to various events e.g. ecumenical services, board meetings of camps. We decided that this need not be the Co-chairs but could be people from relevant networks or who are available locally.

Incorporated Ministries

We received and responded to correspondence related to Incorporated Ministries. The Council Executive is responsible the appointments of United Church representatives to boards of Incorporated Ministries within our Region. We approved the following: Wellman Lake Board members, representatives to the University of Winnipeg Board of Regents, Prairie View Lodge Board of Directors, Church Development Inc. Board of Directors, Rock Lake United Church Camp board, and the United Church Halfway Homes board.

Covid 19

The shutdown of workplaces due to Covid 19 meant staff moved to working remotely from home. It meant they had new tasks related to planning, dealing with financial implications, communicating protocols, and supporting ministers and communities of faith.

In March we made the decision to cancel the in-person Regional Council meeting. The staff and Planning Committee completed cancellations for the spring meeting. We are grateful to the Local Arrangements and Planning Committees for all their hard work and commiserate with them in having everything end so abruptly.

Judy Hare put together resources on what congregations need to know and do for Covid 19 protocols related to closing and re-opening. She also hosted regular Zoom meetings to keep lay people and ministers informed of what was happening and to provide support.

Thank You

Throughout the year we have made many decisions concerning how we will operate as a Region. This work makes us aware of the huge foundation laid by the Regional Commission before us. Their groundwork made it much easier as we continued to build.

We congratulated Grant Queskepow from the Executive, who became a member of the National Indigenous Elders Council. Rob Smith, Tim Crouch, and Barbara Miller all resigned during the year, and Jamie McKay went on medical leave but, thankfully returning to work before the Regional Council Meeting. Shannon McCarthy helped guide our work. When she was on Sabbatical for three months, Judy Hare ably stepping in as Acting Executive Secretary. We welcomed Valerie Beckingham as Treasurer. Many of the chairs of commissions and committees joined the meetings from time to time for input, decisions, and to help us with our work.

We are so grateful to everyone. A big thanks to the current members of the Regional Council Executive: Erica Wiebe, Sandra Rex, Grant Queskepow, James DeBeer, John Oussoron, John Robertson, Diane Dwarka, Pat Bird, Valerie Beckingham. Their patience, willingness to embrace change, presence at meetings, and faithful hope in new possibilities meant that together we were walking the path of hope towards a new future.

Kwang Beom Cho and Lori Stewart
Co-chairs
Prairie to Pine Regional Council Executive

REPORT of the OFFICE OF VOCATION MINISTER



Karen Medland
Office of Vocation Minister
Northern Spirit, Living Skies, and
Prairie to Pine Regions

Greetings in the name of Living God who by the Spirit moves and works amongst us, and who gave us the life of Jesus to teach us what it meant to be people of faith.

I cannot believe that it is over a year since we last gathered together. In the time since then I have been busy working with your candidacy board to support inquirers and candidates. They had a couple of in person meetings where they interviewed several inquirers and candidates. Since the pandemic they have been meeting, like so many of you, online which has added an interesting aspect to the interview process.

There has been an increase in the number of inquirers in the system and many of them have successfully become candidates. We have at present 36 inquirers and candidates in the three regions that the candidacy board are responsible for. If you are personally interested in paid accountable ministry in the United Church of Canada please email me for further information.

Although Church Hub continues to challenge many of us, especially anyone like me who uses a mac, I appreciate the willingness to engage in our new processes. The level of reporting for annual declaration continues to increase as we become more familiar with the new process. We are still waiting on all the mandatory training being moved from paper file to your profiles, but if you have any concerns about it please email me.

I continue to support mandatory training by being one of the online instructors for the boundaries training. These workshops continue to help us all be aware of the complexities of our world. The refresher on social media is very relevant at this time.

Finally, as the Office of Vocation Minister for your region if there is anything I can do to support your work please let me know.

Yours in Christ

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