

Prairie to Pine Regional Council Annual Meeting
May 6th and 7th, 2022

Saturday, May 7th at 9:00am
Session 2

Pat Bird, co-chair of the Prairie to Pine Regional Council Executive welcomed everyone to the morning session of the Prairie to Pine Regional Council Annual Meeting for 2022. She reminded folks about the Chaplains – Deborah Vitt and Susie McPherson Derendy as well as their contact information. She explained that yesterday was about *Remembering*, the first word in the theme, and today, is about connections or Reconnecting, the second word. She thanked the behind-the-scenes technical team for the day, who were Graeme Leachman, Chelsea Zacharius and Jillia Meggison. Julia Antonyshyn joined with a couple of announcements. She reminded folks to bring an object for this afternoon that represents your foundation – what grounds you, as it will relate to presentation about our theme. She then opened the morning session with prayer.

The video message from Rt Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator of The United Church of Canada was shown. He talked about how much is going on - COVID, economic hardship, war, climate disaster, and acknowledged it is not easy to understand or live out our faith in such times, but we are doing that, with God, in our neighbourhoods and in the world. This is his last opportunity for him to bring greetings, and he wanted to thank folks for being who they are. He offered Christ's peace to all. (see the [full transcript of his presentation](#)) Julia thanked Richard for his work.

She then invited Lesley Harrison for the second installment of The Masked Singer to raise money for M&S. Julia Antonyshyn announced that \$430 had been raised so far. Lesley reviewed the methods available for donating – CanadaHelps.org, E-transfer and cheques. She reminded the delegates to put their pledges/guesses in the chat box.

The second Masked Singer was a trio. Clue #1 was: this group not only sings and plays their own instruments, but they also share traditional dance in worship. Clue #2 was: they are part of a larger group who immigrated to Canada in 2001, 2010 and 2018 and have been part of the United Church ever since. Julia broke in to tell us that donations to this point totaled \$2, 073. Clue #3 was: the name of the trio was a combination of the language you are hearing and the age category of the singers. They were revealed to be the Nepalee Youth (Jai Mashi).

Masked Singer #3 also sang Volare in a language other than English. Clue#1 was: in this singer's career, they have given four (4) exorcisms. Clue #2 was: they are singing in Italian. Again, a donation total of \$2,808 was announced. The singer was accidentally revealed to be Linda Trono, even before the third clue was offered.

The second theme time of Reconnecting was stories from around the church. The first story was from Michael Blair, the United Church's Executive Secretary. He spoke about a question that has resonated within him - that at a time such as this, there is a person of African decent offering leadership to a primarily European church that is mostly exclusive of people of African decent. This led him to wonder, how do they 'play' together and offered him an opportunity to reconnect with leaders from his heritage. In doing this, he has found energy, wisdom and mentorship as leadership gifts critical to model for those who come after, especially for racialize people. Julia thanked Michael for his presentation and for being here.

Emma Seamone, Chair of the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, shared her experience as a new minister to Prairie to Pine. As she neared the end of her studies, she thought of her ordination and the procession, of family and friends lay on hands, of being in an arena and sharing this experience with her Regional Council community. Last year, turned out not to be like anything she had imagined. No parents, no friends/family/church. And then she had to move in the middle of a pandemic. It was hard to connect with new people, when you only meet folks from the cheekbones up. Only now, is she starting to really meet people – from cheekbones and down. She spoke of what a gift it has been to play a leadership role in the Regional Council meeting and a gift to participate. Julia thanked Emma for her presentation.

Next, Julia invited Gay Boese, who began by acknowledging what a couple of years we've had. Lots to learn, with many challenges, but also good things have happened. Steinbach Pastoral Charge and Niverville Pastoral Charge joined to create United in Spirit Collaborative Ministry. Gay used something from *The Velveteen Rabbit* to describe the process: just like the skin horse says, it took time, and it doesn't happen to fragile people or folks with sharp edges. People had to learn how to listen. COVID jumpstarted the process and helped it to move faster. It encouraged them to work together. So, they formed a joint Worship Team and jointly purchased Rural Connect – so they can worship together, while maintaining their individual identity. They now recognize lay people, and other spiritual leaders, like circuit riders who inspired them. They are now searching for a fulltime minister, something they couldn't have done individually. They are also now sharing an office admin person and have reduced other duplications. They have formed a virtual community, created and lead by lay people. It wasn't easy! First, they had to learn to listen and then arrive at a consensus. They discovered the most important thing is the relationship, and they know there are more moments to come. Gay encouraged others to look for people or groups to partner with and just do it. But a shared vision is crucial and it needs to be lay lead. Julia thanked Gay for her presentation and then introduced the questions for consideration in the breakout rooms – What about these stories resonated with you? What new perspective did they give you? How do we reconnect as a church in a way that includes everyone? Breakout groups considered these questions for about 15 minutes with group recorders being asked to put responses in the google doc, like yesterday.

Julia Antonysyn welcome folks back to the main session and introduced Silas Lee of the Winnipeg: Chinese United Church. Silas was born in China and come to Winnipeg as a child – was raised, married and worked here. For years, as an adult, he attended an English-speaking church and only returned to the Chinese Church a few years ago. That was inspired by a

question at a meeting about 8 years ago. He was asked – how does your church honour your mother and father? Silas said that honour is usually in a home setting, but what about in church? We often honour children, but maybe it is time to honour our elderly. Our duty is to honour them. When he returned to the Chinese Church, he thought it would honour his parents. Over the last few years, the demographics have changed. Seniors are not that mobile, and numbers of people attending church have decreased. Then, the pandemic made things worse. A few people talked or gathered informally. The church can't afford paid ministry, only lay lead us. And we don't use my technology due to the age of congregants, most of whom don't have a cell phone or computers, or don't know how to use them. So, during the pandemic people would phone one and other. Silas used his computer to send out uplifting messages to the few computer users there are. He summed up by saying the pandemic forced them to think of new ways to do things. He hopes the pandemic will soon be over, so people can meet face to face, once again. Julia thanked Silas for his presentation.

A video from Knox United Church in Brandon was shown. They talked about 'What is the need in the community not met yet?' They discussed with the community and asked how can they help. As they live out this question, relationship building with community partners continues to grow and they are making new connections within the community. Their Green Team is making use of technology. Through Zoom, they have grown partnerships outside of the city. Debby Dandy told about a reconciliation meeting held on Zoom that included people from outside the city. They continue to meet every month to keep up the relationships. Bernie Webber, Choir Director spoke about their live-streamed services that have touched folks who are not usual attenders – both near and far. This is also a welcome resource to shut-ins. Conversations with service groups and multifaith folks during COVID, as well as access to equipment and other worship resources have helped to develop a tight knit group to do the planning. Julia thanked the folks at Knox in Brandon for their presentation and sent everyone back into breakout rooms to discuss and reflect on these to videos.

After about 10 minutes, Julia welcomed everyone back to the main Zoom room to continue. The next video was from 1 Just City, an outreach ministry in Winnipeg where all people are accepted, where anyone can eat, create art, listen to music and more. This is a place that values the under loved and the under served. Find out more at <https://www.1justcity.ca/>

Emma Seamone invited William Simmons from UCRD / United Church Bookroom to share some information about new products. The first book William talked about was *My Daily Discoverment – 40 Days of Vocational Discernment for Young Adults* by Andrew Hyde. The second was *For the Sake of the Common Good, Essays in Honour of Lois Wilson*. And coming in June is *Building God's Beloved Community*. Please check us out on Face Book and Instagram.

Vicki Nelson, of the Philanthropy Unit was welcomed by Emma Seamone. After introducing herself as the Community of Faith Stewardship Support person for the west, Vicki talked about the ripple effect of generosity and that small things can have a big impact. Encourage generosity, but remember to respond with gratitude. Just like a drop of water into a larger body, our impulses of generosity often lead to other experiences – like joining a board or

committee. And although talking about giving can be hard, there is help. The workshop, *Called to Be the Church – The Journey* is a great resource. In it you learn about stewardship best practices and get some help with a stewardship campaign for your community of faith, including reports, next steps and some coaching from others who have been through it. Vicki explained she is also a rep to the United Church Foundation. One of their services includes grants to United Church Ministries, including congregations. They also offer resources for future planning. Vicki summed up by asking folks to join with others to make a better world, through providing COVID vaccines to under served communities, or support people through the crisis in Ukraine. Your generosity ripples out of your community, to the region, to the nation, and to the world. She then provided her email address and phone number so people can contact her.

Diane Dwarka and Pat Bird, Co-Chairs of the Regional Executive; Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister and Michael Blair, General Secretary of The United Church of Canada were all called upon to offer their reports. Diane pointed out that their printed reports can be found [in the workbook](#). Diane shared that the revision of the Prairie to Pine Land Acknowledgement was a highlight of hers, for the past year. Shannon added updates to her written report: the audit is not yet ready as they are still working on it; it was a very busy year, with the regional council office moving to the Centre for Christian Studies building and the reorganizing how we work – to include some working from home. Policies continue to be updated as well as the way things are done. Newsletters and event lists are ways we are trying to provide information and always appreciate feedback. She asked delegates to “remember, we have only been doing this for three years”. It is hoped that soon links will be available for grants and funding that are available to communities of faith. Shannon thanked Co-chairs, Diane for her service for the last two years and Pat for her one year and looks forward to working with her for another year. She thanked Nominations who are always looking for people. She reminded delegates to think about what they can offer and how they can contribute to this community. Shannon then thanked the staff of Prairie to Pine for their work over the last year. In response to a question, she expressed hope that a directory will be available this summer. Shannon then introduced Michael Blair, General Secretary.

Michael relayed that a perk of COVID has been the ability to be in multiple places in a very short amount of time. He began by expressing his appreciation for Shannon’s leadership. He then offered updates to General Council #44, that is happening this year. It is historic in several ways: This will be the first time in 96 years that General Council will be virtual (thanks COVID). It will also be the longest in the history of the church – 7 months. It will be the first General Council in the new structure and the new way of doing things. There are a limited number of proposals – only 56, the smallest number ever dealt with, but challenging none the less. Michael voiced appreciation to the commissioners who have risen to the challenge. They are participating in 3 parts – learning sessions, discussion sessions, and then decision sessions. In the past, proposals came, were vote on and everyone moved on. But in the new way, the learning sessions are about hearing what the problem is and what is being discussed. What we see in the initial proposal, might not be what we eventually vote on. A benefit of these sessions being held over 9 weeks, is that there isn’t a 300 page document that has to be read in a short sitting; It has been broken down into smaller pieces. Priorities will craft the proposals and

recommendations for the decisions. Also, on August 7th, 2 weeks after the final decision session, we will install our new Moderator. Throughout, we will have lots of global, ecumenical and other Inter-faith guests.

He offered some upcoming highlights: on May 11, the Indigenous Church has invited the wider church to an online event to listen to the proposal about where they want to be. On May 12, Global, Ecumenical and Inter-faith folks will again meet online to discuss the climate crisis. And on June 1, the Church, with its Ecumenical and Interfaith Partners, will host an online event to discuss urgent issues of increasing inequities, injustice and deepening polarizations.

During a time for questions, John Oussoren asked about Kindred Works, a project of the United Property Resources Corporation (UPRC), and why all of the projects are centered in southern Ontario. Michael explained that this project is about re-purposing church sites and that these properties are offered for re-development. At the moment, the City of Toronto has set up a team to work with UCRC and that has facilitated the number of projects. There are plans from other parts of the country for redevelopment that are in early stages. But, it all takes time – 5 or more years.

Dawn Rolke, offered her appreciation for the listen/discuss and decide process. Michael responded by saying we are moving away from imposing decisions with little or no listening or discussion. It sometimes takes time to mine the wisdom in a discussion. There is lots of work to be done around the commitment to hear differences in values and from different and quiet voices to determine what we hold dear. He added we will continue to do and live into this work.

Ken Thomas, Chair of the Prairie to Pine Property Commission added there are a number of churches talking about re-purposing, but those buildings are being used in ways other than for new housing. UCPC offers a broader use of buildings and opportunities for continued use for our buildings than just housing.

Donna Kennedy commented on the lack of good representation from Northern Churches to Prairie to Pine Annual Meeting. There are lots of challenges including technical issues, but she feels that it is a privilege to work with the wider church. She told the gathered she has been named an elder to the National Nominations Committee and there is a real lack of lay people. She asked – how do we get people to become involved, where they are not comfortable and might not understand what they are getting into?? Delegates were left with this question. Shannon thanked Michael for his presentation.

Pat Bird brought up what are the responsibilities for Regional Council delegates. From Presbytery, delegates were able to bring news and conversation back to their home congregations. But that has been lost in the new structure. She asked that delegates stay involved /committed and to continue to highlight what they learn through the website and newsletters with their congregations. Shortly, a letter will go out to Communities of Faith that will ask what they are liking about the new structure and what needs are not being met.

Betty Kelly, Chair of Nominations, began by commenting on how timely the theme of *Remembering, Reconnecting and Re-visioning* is. With the loss of presbyteries, it is a real gift to be involved in the wider church. But who should be called? Through the eyes of revisioning, we are looking at what it would take to do things differently and to get more people involved. We have more people who are stepping up and getting involved. Betty thanked those she has worked with and share now that her term is over, the new Chair will be Joey Dearborn.

Diane Dwarka offered her thanks to Betty for her work on Nominations and added a couple of announcements. The Zoom link will remain open over the lunch hour. The group will reconvene at 1:00pm. And she reminded people to bring an object to the afternoon session that inspires. She then asked the gathered to join in Grace. All participants broke for lunch.