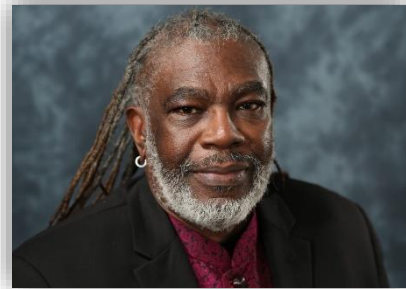


## REPORT of THE MODERATOR and GENERAL SECRETARY



**The Right Reverend Dr. Carmen Lansdowne**  
*Moderator, The United Church of Canada*



**Rev. Michael Blair**  
*General Secretary, The United Church of Canada*

**From: The Moderator & General Secretary**

***2 Corinthians 3:12 "This wonderful hope makes us feel like speaking freely." (CEV)***

### **Members of the Regional Council:**

As you gather in this post-resurrection season of our common faith may you find encouragement and hope. We are reminded that the resurrection is both a sign of hope and an invitation to embrace new possibilities and imagine new realities. The post-resurrection stories in the gospels – Thomas' doubt and faith, Mary hanging unto the robes of the resurrected Jesus, the various appearances of the resurrected Jesus and the disappointment and disillusionment of the disciples are reminders of the invitation to embrace a new way in the world. May it be so.

Greetings from the Office of Moderator and General Secretary and also on behalf of the staff team at the General Council Office. It is a privilege to offer you this update on some of our common work.

### **Moderator's Initiative - ASPIRE Events**

The Moderator has identified the opportunity to engaging in some strategic changemaking conversations as part of her focus for the triennium. In order to facilitate this opportunity, the Moderator will be hosting a series of events across the country for the next two and a half years. These events to take place starting Fall 2023-Spring 2025 will include:

- **Public Workshop:** A weekday workshop with the primary audience being corporate sector, to engage in future design thinking to inspire actions that promote human prosperity in a flourishing web of life.
- **Public Lecture:** A public lecture (not live streamed) in the 12 locations where the public workshops will take place, tailored to the context and open to the public (church and non-church)
- **Theological Symposia** – in partnership with theological schools
- **Church Workshop:** Weekend workshop (Saturday) in the region where the Public Workshop will be held; same content as the Public Workshop, but with theological and biblical rationale/reflections and focused on imagining flourishing ministries and communities of faith; can also be a stand-alone day-long event during other travel.
- **National Book Club** (including 4 events in 2024/2025 that are "Centennial Editions" by invitation of the Centennial Committee). A type of "UCC Reads" event, hosted by the ChurchX platform, where the Moderator shares her love of books with the wider church, and engage in conversations about what Canadian prosperity in a flourishing web of life might look like.

- **Leadership School** which is being developed – focusing on strengthening excellence in leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup>

Look for forthcoming information about these events in your region.

**Remit 1 Update:** The process began on March 15, 2023, and will be completed on March 31, 2024. [Information about the remit](#)—which includes a study guide, background materials, as well as voting cards can be found at the link.

**Strategic Plan:** The Call and Vision continue to move across the church, with significant engagement by regions and communities of faith in worship, visioning, governance, and education. Linked to the overall Strategic Plan, we have reached the milestone of first quarter reporting on the Operational Plan for 2023. This is a key achievement not only in strengthening the results orientation and strategic alignment to the work but also addressing how we work, aiding in both transparency and accountability. We have also worked to align the activities to the 2023 budget. We continue to focus on increasing capacity through training managers and staff, developing tools for addressing work overload, and streamlining access to internal office supports. Consistent in our plan development goals is a focus on alignment with the strategic objectives, collection of data to inform decision-making, clear lines of accountability, and efficiency and improvement in systems.

**Grants Review:** As part of the strategic operational planning process and the budget process for 2023-24, we are engaging in an internal review of all the General Council Office grants and funding programs. The review is intended to enable us to align our funding priorities with the Call and Vision as such it will be a broad and in-depth research project, to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative information and data to ensure a thorough and context-sensitive analysis of the grants and funding programs. It is expected that a quantitative and financial analysis will provide a clear understanding of the distribution and magnitude of our current grants. As part of the review, external research and best practices are being engaged to ensure that grants and funding programs are in line with industry standards and institutional best practices.

**The Bringing the Children Home** program continues to respond to the ongoing work of locating and identifying unmarked burial sites on the grounds of former residential institutions in a way that affected communities deem appropriate. We are engaging with communities impacted by the finding of the burial sites on their terms.

**Captive Insurance:** The new insurance plan was launched on schedule effective December 1, 2022. The implementation was very rushed in order to deliver the target premium savings as early as possible. This required considerably more staff time than expected and there have been considerable delays in renewal activity – primarily related to connecting with the right person locally. New entrants are now being processed as well, and there is considerable interest. Commercial insurance rates continue to increase markedly due to inflation and industry-wide trends. The program will inevitably need to pass on some of these costs but is projected to deliver the promised \$1+ million savings to congregations. A number of enhancements will be introduced in time for the first renewal in December 2023.

**Centennial Planning:** The Centennial Committee continues to fulfill its mandate of curating events for the celebration of the centennial in 2025. They have developed some guiding principles for the various activities ([Guiding Principles for Centennial Commemorations](#)). The United Church of Canada institutions that are planning events can submit the following ([Form](#)).

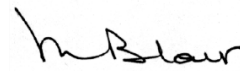
**Office Move:** The General Council Office move is planned for the first quarter of 2026. The office will be located at 300 Bloor Street as part of Bloor Street's redevelopment. The office will be part of an ecumenical partnership shared by the national offices of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Anglican Church in Canada. All three national archives will also be located on the site

**Future of work:** The General Council Office continues to operate as a fully hybrid workspace. Moving to remote working has enabled the General Council office to recruit from a broader base of potential employees. We are grateful for the opportunity, even as we think about the future of work.

***"Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship and daring justice."***



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne  
Moderator



Rev. Michael Blair  
General Secretary General Council

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#### REPORT – GENERAL COUNCIL OFFICE REPRESENTATIVE



**Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball**  
***Executive Minister, Theological Leadership***

Jennifer is currently the Executive Minister, Theological Leadership at the General Council Office (GCO). Jennifer is an ordained minister in the United Church and earned her Ph.D. in Christian social ethics through Emmanuel College and the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology. She is originally from the Prairies and currently lives in Saskatoon.

Jennifer was settled in New Brunswick and served three years in the Blackville pastoral charge in New Brunswick.

After settlement, Jennifer moved to Toronto for doctoral studies. Throughout her doctoral studies, she worked part-time with various organizations, including the Student Christian Movement of Canada, United Church congregations, and in the General Council Office, as well as teaching at

Emmanuel College and Queen's School of Religion. Upon completion of her doctoral studies, Jennifer became the director of the Designated Lay Ministry Program (Calling Lakes Centre and then St. Andrew's College). She served as director for almost 10 years. Jennifer was most recently the Program Coordinator, Ministry Vocation at the GCO, with responsibility for Candidacy Pathway policies and for supporting the work of Candidacy Boards and Office of Vocation ministers throughout the country.

She is passionate about eco-theological ethics and the climate crisis. In her spare time, she likes to garden, knit, bird-watch, and most recently, play pickleball. During the long prairie winters, Jennifer and her partner like to build snow forts and create ice art, as a way to practice gratitude for the seasons and the gifts of the earth throughout the year.

### REPORT – REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE CO-CHAIRS

**Patricia Bird**  
*Chair*



**Erica Wittevrongel**  
*Chair*



Greetings all,

This is very exciting, writing this report and knowing that we will be gathered together for the Annual Meeting.

I have enjoyed my two years as Co-chair of the Prairie to Pine Regional Council. My term as co-chair with Erica Wittevrongel has gone by so quickly. We carved out our style of working together very early and chose to alternate organizing and leading our monthly Executive meetings. This has allowed each of us to stay informed of the business of the Regional Council but also put our energies into other areas of need. Erica and I had some shared experiences which will overlap in our reports but we also had chances to represent the Regional Council individually.

The year started with Erica and I presiding at the Celebration of Ministry on June 26 in Kenora at Knox United Church. There we celebrated the Ordination of Susan Girard and the Admission of Rev. Carrie Martens, Rev. Chewie Mulenga, and Rev. Schalk Naude into the Order of Ministry of the United Church of Canada.

We both participated in GC44 as Commissioners and celebrated the Installation of our new Moderator Rev Carmen Lansdowne on August 7.

Heather Lea and I attended and participated in a Service of Celebration for Neepawa United Anglican Shared Ministry (NUASM) on October 16 in Neepawa for the recognition of two years together.

The Annual Meeting Planning Team was called together in September. After spending the last three years developing skills at providing online events, it is now a challenge to remember all the details of meeting in person.

Diane Dwarka and I attended and participated in the service for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. An Ecumenical Service in Winnipeg hosted by St. John XXIII Church on Jan 22.

I participated in a media event panel on February 16 at Broadway Disciples Church to share solidarity and support for those who have been and could be affected by Freedom Convoy participants. While occupation of the streets by the Legislature did not happen on Feb 17, the importance of coming together and voicing concern was important.

Shannon McCarthy, Tricia Gerhardt and I attended the Annual Meeting of Rock Lake Church Camp on April 16 in Crystal City at Rock Lake United Church to look for ways the Regional Council can support the camp.

Work continues on the Structure Document Task group with Teresa Melnychuk, Diane Dwarka, Shannon McCarthy, and Julie Graham. We have completed a standardized document that outlines the purpose and structure of each area of the Regional Council Executive. Special thank you to Teresa for her work in organizing this information into such an easily usable form. Work will continue on a more detailed document defining roles and responsibilities.

Thank you Erica, it has been great Co-Chairing with you. Thank you to all who have worked so hard for our Regional Council. To all those in staff positions, we could not function without your dedicated work. To all who volunteer to lead and participate in committees and projects of the Regional Council, we could not function without your dedicated work. Thank you to the planning team who worked hard to make our Annual Meeting a time of learning and fun on top of the business of Prairie to Pine Regional Council.

This is a journey. We are all pilgrims on this journey of growth and cooperation. Fellow travelers on the road. We are here to help each other. Walk the mile and share the load.

*Patricia Bird*

*Co-Chair*

*Prairie to Pine Regional Council Executive*

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This past year has been a time of learning and growth. As my first year in an active role as Co-Chair, it was a chance for me to become better acquainted with the areas of work being done across our region.

The Regional Executive continued to meet on a monthly basis. Pat and I took turns leading the meetings. Our meetings always start with a short check-in or worship which was facilitated by a member of the Executive. I appreciated the opportunity to hear the variety of interpretations that these times of togetherness included. Although prayer was often included, facilitators also included thoughts and

questions that encouraged the Executive to creatively interact with the Creator outside of Sunday worship.

There were several events throughout the year that I was able to attend as a representative of the region:

**Celebration of Ministry Service:** On June 26, 2022, Pat Bird, myself, and the staff of Prairie to Pine Regional Council officiated the service celebrating the admittance of Rev. Carrie Martens, Rev. Chewie Mulenga, and Rev. Schalk Naude, and the ordination of Susan Girard. The service took place at Knox United Church in Kenora, ON. The congregation of Knox went above and beyond to ensure that the space, technology, and food needs were met for this service.

**General Council 44:** Over the summer I was one of 14 commissioners representing our region who attended the virtual gathering of the General Council. The longest meeting in history, beginning in February 2022 and ending in August 2022, this meeting encompassed important issues that the commissioner groups were able to address in their times of conversation.

**We Are All Treaty People Celebration (WAATP):** On September 18, 2022, Diane Dwarka attended the WAATP celebration at The Forks National Historic Site where Indigenous People, Settlers, and Newcomers shared what Being Treaty meant to them.

**Service of Remembrance for Queen Elizabeth II:** On September 19, 2022, Diane Dwarka and I attended the service of remembrance that took place in the Anglican Cathedral in Winnipeg. The service incorporated elements from different faiths and included acknowledgments from political figures. Peguis First Nation Chief Glenn Hudson was asked to speak and reflected on the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. One of the highlights of the service was the music. The service included familiar hymns sung by the choir, sung elements shared from the Jewish tradition, and drumming shared by members of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

**National Gathering of Presiding Officers:** On November 30, 2023, I attended a gathering that included General Council staff, and presiding officers and/or representatives from regions across the country. During that meeting the Moderator shared her plans for the coming year, focusing on the terms: flourishing, encouraging, and dreaming. This meeting was also an opportunity for the regional representatives to share highlights and wishes from their regions.

**Tri-Region Gathering:** On February 16, 2023 staff and representatives from Prairie to Pine, Living Skies, and Northern Spirit gathered to discuss the needs of their regions, and share ideas. It was agreed that these types of meetings should continue to occur throughout the year. The next meeting is scheduled for June 2023 and will be a chance for introductions to new representatives, and the continued sharing of ideas.

My move to Saskatchewan in October 2022 meant that I wasn't as able to attend important events in Manitoba. I'd like to thank Pat Bird, Diane Dwarka, and the Prairie to Pine Staff for being flexible and taking on those responsibilities. I would also like to thank all of the members of the Regional Executive

and corresponding members for their work over this past year as we continue to live into our commitments as representatives for those who call Prairie to Pine home.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Erica Wittevrongel  
Co-Chair  
Prairie to Pine Regional Council Executive*

### REPORT of the OFFICE OF VOCATION MINISTER



**Rev. Laura Fohse**  
***Office of Vocation Minister***  
***Northern Spirit, Living Skies, and***  
***Prairie to Pine Regions***

I stepped into the role of Vocational Minister in August of 2023. There has been a very steep learning curve and I am grateful for the patience extended as I learn the ropes.

I am also grateful for the many opportunities I have had to become acquainted with ministry personnel across my three regions. It is a privilege to be invited into discerning conversations with respect to sabbaticals, retirement, and vocational clarity. I have been able to join the Zoom ministry gatherings in Northern Spirit and Living Skies (Prairie to Pine still to come). I have also enjoyed seeing many of you at the professional boundaries refresher workshops – both in-person and online. I was able to facilitate in-person workshops in Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg. Last fall I participated in a clergy retreat offered by Living Skies Pastoral Relations Minister, Tracy Murton and this April I was invited, by the Prairie to Pine Committee for Ministry Personnel Support, to offer a similar retreat in that region. It is my hope to also offer a retreat, in conjunction with an in-person professional boundaries refresher in Northern Spirit Regional Council next fall.

#### **Prairie Candidacy Board**

The Prairie Candidacy Board has been hard at work supporting 29 candidates on their journey through the Candidacy Pathway. We have an amazing and diverse board consisting of Chair, Rob Smith; Aurora Espenant, Brenda Curtis, Chewe Mulenga, Doreen Hewitson, Mary Annan, Mokwadi Basele, Salesi Takau, Shirley Goodrich, SunDo Hyun, Taeil Yang, and Wayne Youngward.

Of the 29 candidates, 9 are from Prairie to Pine, 12 from Living Skies, 7 from Northern Spirit, and 1 from another region. We have 4 in the Designated Lay Ministry stream, 8 in the Diaconal stream, and 17 in the Ordained stream. We have 12 candidates in Supervised Ministry Education (SME). 8 candidates are

completing the pathway in 2023 - 2 will be commissioned, 2 recognized, and 4 ordained.

### **Oversight and Discipline of Ministry Personnel**

Over the past year, there has been a focus on deliberately consulting with regional councils through an increased number of case conferences, during the informal phases of oversight and discipline proceedings.

As the response committee continues its work there is recognition of the need for more trained investigators, reviewers, and consultants, as some people have stepped away from the work, for a variety of reasons.

The Office of Vocation takes seriously its responsibilities with respect to ensuring standards for accreditation are being met. These include annual declaration of criminal charges and mandatory training. The Standards Committee reviewed the Ethical Standards for Ministry Personnel and the Board of Vocation approved changes to better include guidelines for social media and digital technology.

### **Admissions Committee**

*(Admission work is now staffed by Sarah Bruer in the Office of Vocation, this is her summary)*

If you go to the United Church of Canada website and search for admissions, you'll find that the admission process is currently not accepting new applications. This pause does not mean that our work with admission ministers is paused. It is merely allowing us to focus our energy on supporting the 194 ministers who are already at various stages within the admission process.

In 2022, the Admission Board conducted 36 interviews; and another 12 have already been conducted in 2023. Meanwhile, the Matching Commission is piloting a new program that we hope will make it easier for Admission Ministers to find the appointments they need to complete the admission process, with five ministers looking forward to joining us this year. Having come through such interviews and appointments, this spring we are collectively celebrating with 11 ministers who have completed the admission process and will be admitted to the Order of Ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Again, thank you for your patience and support as I adjust to this ministry. I welcome every and all opportunities to connect with ministry personnel in Prairie to Pine, Living Skies, and Northern Spirit Regional Councils. My contact information can be found on each of the regions' websites. If you see me at the regional council gathering, please flag me down and introduce yourself.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Laura Fohse  
Office of Vocation Minister for Northern Spirit,  
Living Skies, and Prairie to Pine Regions*