

Report to Prairie to Pine, October 2024: Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister

We are now five years into the restructuring and a couple of years from the lockdowns of COVID. It feels like Prairie to Pine is finding its footing. As we reflect on 100 years as a United Church we recognize the shortness of our existence as Regional Council as part of the whole, yet we are in a time of massive change in society and how we exist as the church in our communities. Sometimes we forget to be gentle on ourselves and recognize the grief and exhaustion that comes with constant change. I want to say “Well done good and faithful servant” to all of you who are offering your time and energy to the church across all of our councils.

Restructuring evaluation

There will be an opportunity to evaluate the new structure and how it is meeting the needs of the church over the next two years; we know that this change has not been perfect and that it has felt like the decision-making structures are farther away than ever. Our hope is that we will continue to find ways to communicate what is happening at the regional council, to continue building relationships with communities of faith, and to do the hard work of justice and equity-seeking.

Thank you to the Executive

I want to give a huge thanks to the Prairie to Pine Executive for all their work and prayerful consideration of the work of the Regional Council. They make hard decisions with care and compassion, trying to always keep the best interests of the communities of faith and the regional council at the forefront. I especially want to thank Erica Wittevrongel for serving as chair for the last year, and to Pat Bird who backed her up as past-chair when necessary. A warm welcome to our new co-chairs Dawn Rolke and Lynne Sanderson.

Thank you to many, many volunteers and elected leadership

It is important to remember that the majority of the work of the regional council is done by volunteers. Filling all of the opportunities on our lengthy list of commissions, committees, task groups, and boards would take a lot of people (over 100). We continue to need people who are able to step up and offer their gifts and talents on a variety of committees and commissions. I want to thank those that do offer their time, and challenge those who feel disconnected to offer their time for one of the various committees, commissions, or networks, and clusters that can help us be more connected and build community. WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER!

Regional Council and deployed staff

I want to thank the staff of the Regional Council for all they do, their commitment to the church, and the personal sacrifices they make to do this work.

Although our staff list looks long, it is important to remember that we only have two full-time staff: Judy Hare, Pastoral Relations Minister, and Cherry Abad, Office Administrator; and one part-time, Twila MacNair, Youth and Young Adult Minister (.5 FTE) that work only for Prairie to Pine. Erin Acland is .8 FTE now up from .6 as she takes on assisting with Living Skies Archives.

The rest of the staff work for three Regional Councils. Julie Graham, Justice and Communications Minister; Chantal Winslow, Executive Assistant; and

Heather Dootoff, Finance Officer is moving to .5 FTE serving three RCs as she transitions towards retirement.

As Executive Minister, I work for three Regional Councils as well as sharing some of my time with General Council responsibilities.

Staff cannot be part of all the pieces of work of the Regional Council; there is a limit to our finances and to our capacity to do all the work. Despite that, your staff do an incredible job. When you do the math on all these positions it is around 4.5 full-time equivalent (FTE), which is a significant cut compared to when Prairie to Pine was the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario and we had 6 FTE plus 2 Winnipeg Presbytery staff.

We are also grateful for the three staff people deployed from General Council to Living Skies: Growth Animator, Jordan Cantwell (1/3 time with Prairie to Pine); Laura Fohse, Office of Vocation Minister across the three Regions; and Vicki Nelson, Stewardship Animator for BC right over to NW Ontario, so 1/5 time with our Region.

We need to find new ways to do the work that we are called to do through clusters, networks, community partnerships, and working ecumenically. Thank you to the many communities of faith, ecumenical shared ministries, community ministries, and camps, and our many community and ecumenical or interfaith partners who continue to show us all how to offer ministry in new ways.

As we begin the United Church's 99th year looking towards our centennial in June 2025, it is an important time to reflect on who we have been, our celebrations, and the milestones of what we have been as a denomination as well as recognizing our mistakes. We also need to work together to discern what we are called to be for the next 100 years.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon McCarthy (she/her),
Executive Minister.