

REPORT OF PASTORAL RELATIONS MINISTER TO ANNUAL MEETING OF PRAIRIE TO PINE REGIONAL COUNCIL 2024-2025, November 13, 2025

Ecclesiastes 3 is one of the scriptures that reminds us of the variety of activities in life, God's presence through them all and the attitude with which we should engage living: for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven ... The role of a Regional Council Pastoral Relations Minister, at least in Prairie to Pine Regional Council, offers that variety within it and the challenge around managing time for everything engaged with an attitude of pleasure. I am privileged to have been in this particular role since the restructuring on January 1, 2019, and before that, in one of its predecessor roles of Conference Personnel Minister since mid-May 2005. I am extremely grateful for the twenty years engaged in this ministry and the people with whom I have done so; for the experiences that I have been a part of and the skills that I have fine-tuned (even through the mistakes and missteps). That variety has meant attending celebrations of life for ministry personnel and lay volunteers at the end of their journeys; attending services of closure when buildings are sold and/or communities of faith are disbanded; listening to people seeking procedural advice or pastoral support to navigate a complex or sensitive matter or crisis. And then there are the meetings and emails ... SO MANY meetings and SO MANY emails!

The Prairie to Pine Regional Council follows the Pastoral Relations structure established in 2019, which includes the Pastoral Relations Commission and three "support committees" (Lay Ministry/Lay Leadership Support, Ministry Personnel Support, and Community of Faith Support). Each of our committees reports to the Executive of Prairie to Pine Regional Council for final approvals and policy direction. While the Pastoral Relations Commission can make many decisions itself related to its month-to-month work, all pastoral relations policies are recommended to the Regional Council Executive for approval. The responsibilities of each of these committees and the Pastoral Relations Commission, as well as the details of the ministry of each of these groups over the past year, are outlined in their reports elsewhere in this workbook:

Committee on Community of Faith Support: [Committee-on-Community-of-Faith-Support.pdf](#)

Committee on Lay Ministry/Lay Leadership Support: [Committee-on-Lay-Ministry-Lay-Leadership-Support.pdf](#)

Committee on Ministry Personnel Support: [Committee-on-Ministry-Personnel-Support.pdf](#)

Pastoral Relations Commission: [Pastoral-Relations-Commission.pdf](#) and [FINAL-Pastoral-Relations-Commission-Status-Update-2025.pdf](#)

I am extremely grateful for the devotion of the volunteers who engage in this work; for the countless hours that they devote to the tasks; for the skill and competencies they devote to that work, and the flexibility and creativity which they bring to their respective ministries on behalf of the Regional Council.

Additionally, our Pastoral Relations structure works closely with the other bodies where various aspects of our work overlap or require consultation or coordination: Property Commission of Prairie to Pine Regional Council and with General Council deployed staff: Office of Vocation Minister, Laura Fohse and our Growth Animator Jordan Cantwell. Prairie to Pine Regional Council Pastoral Relations Commission continues to be willing to respond to or assist with needs identified by staff relating to Indigenous Communities of Faith and Indigenous Ministry Personnel, Rey Anderson, the Community Capacity Development Coordinator for Keewatin Circle (CCDC) and Tim Hackborn, the Indigenous Office of Vocation Minister.

We are always looking to identify new members to serve within these Regional Council Committees, aware that many Communities of Faith are struggling to find people willing to serve in certain positions or take on certain roles within their own local governance structure, especially those that happen to be the required positions for the viability of the local church: members of the Ministry and Personnel Committees, Treasurers and Chairs of governing bodies. Finding ways to encourage mentoring and the provision of more training opportunities might be a solution to volunteer recruitment, both with the Regional Council structure and Communities of Faith.

One of the biggest challenges in a Regional Council with such a vast geography and uncertain and challenging weather at particular times of the year is keeping connected and providing the training and networking needs of the communities of faith. We try our best through ZOOM meetings and learning opportunities, annual in-person gatherings and email, the Weekly News and the Regional Council website. I am grateful for those people who take the initiative and time to organize cluster gatherings in various parts of our Regional Council and those who make time to attend gatherings that are offered. Many of these cluster gatherings or events happened this past year as the United Church of Canada celebrated its one hundredth anniversary as a denomination. I am grateful for those who take the initiative to read and contribute to the Prairie to Pine Weekly News, the Events Calendars and the website that our communications staff (Cherry Abad and Julie Graham) put together. These are the crucial avenues for dispensing information about activities, educational opportunities, policy changes and sharing faith family news.

Like all employers within Canada, the churches within Prairie to Pine Regional Council are impacted by decisions made within the Immigration system: timelines and standards related to the approval of initial work visas and the renewal of those visas; timelines and standards related to applications for permanent residency. The primary source of ministry personnel to fill positions within Prairie to Pine Regional Council over the past few years is Ministers coming from other denominations and other countries through the Admission Program of the United Church of Canada.

As a Regional Council, we are also grateful for retired ministry personnel (pensioners) who willingly keep their credentials and mandatory training up to date and are in formal association covenants with Communities of Faith who assist in the ministry of the wider church in supply appointments, as pulpit supply, Pastoral Charge Supervisors, members of Regional Council Committees or Commissions. Other pensioners share their gifts and skills within the Communities of Faith with which they worship.

There are complex and conflicted situations that are best addressed through in-person connection and people with specialized training. This past year, there has been a higher number of these. I am grateful for our Pastoral Relations Liaisons willing to work with me to engage these situations in the initial stages, and grateful that the United Church of Canada maintains support for people with special training like **Conflict Resolution Facilitators and Reviewers**, to assist in these situations. Finances to assist in accessing people with such expertise are now acknowledged.

As we look at the overall picture of the Prairie to Pine Regional Council at this point in time, I offer the following comments by way of an overview of this past pastoral year:

- Fewer communities of faith overall (128 non-Indigenous Pastoral Charges; 18 Indigenous Pastoral Charges) and significant areas of the Regional Council with limited paid accountable ministry leadership (Northwestern Ontario; southwestern Manitoba; the former Northland Presbytery area);

- An increased number of communities of faith that are worshiping in spaces other than a church building that they own, and an increasing number of churches that are sharing their church buildings with community partners;
- An increased number of communities of faith that are sharing ministry personnel and ministry with one another in a Collaborative Ministry model;
- An increased number of Communities of Faith initiating conversations about their future;
- An increased commitment of communities of faith who are lay-led, engaging in lay training opportunities for pastoral care visitors and sacraments elders;
- As of October 31, 2025, 43 Ministry Personnel engaged in full-time ministry during the pastoral year, among those, 3 from other denominations serving ecumenical ministries, and 13 collaborative arrangements serving 26 communities of faith in full-time equivalent positions (FTE), 3 in the admission process, and 5 Pastoral Charges in search for FTE positions;
- 14 Ministry Personnel were in part-time employment, including 7 retired supply, 2 candidates and 1 collaborative ministry; 2 in search for PTE positions (including 1 supervised ministry education learning site);
- 46 Pastoral Charges have been without paid accountable ministry leadership for a year or more, and some have not yet/or are not intending to engage in the profile/search process;
- 11 Self-described “minority” ministry personnel serving in non-indigenous ministry settings

The work of the Pastoral Relations Minister, while consistently busy, has times when the volume of meetings and emails can lead to delays in my responding to inquiries about less time-sensitive or urgent matters. I am grateful for the patience and understanding of people during these times and for the assistance of experienced volunteers who can tend to some of these matters.

In addition to all of the volunteers named above, I am deeply grateful for all of the staff teams I am privileged to work with: to our own Prairie to Pine team; the Tri-Region staff from Northern Spirit, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine; the Pastoral Relations and Community of Faith Support Ministers in other Regional Councils, each group contains people who are wise, experienced, compassionate, and deeply committed to the work that is all of ours. I am especially grateful for the competence and patience of Cherry Abad, the Regional Council administrative support, her flexibility around scheduling her in office days and her tolerance of my frequent need for assistance with technology.

I close with this prayer from Eric-Milner -White (Voice United page 915):

“Eternal God, you call us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
By path as yet untrodden, through perils yet unknown.
Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go,
But only that your hand is leading us, and your love is supporting us:
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Respectfully submitted,

Reverend Judith (Judy) Hare,
Pastoral Relations Minister