

President's Message

"You, Creator God, have searched me and you know my ways.
You perfectly understand me. It's my cause of praise.
I cannot escape your presence in air, land or sea.
Your arms of love and protection are always with me."

-More Voices 131 You, Creator God, Have Searched Me

This year has been one of great joy and challenge as I stepped out to serve as your President. It has been a year of discovery in many ways—discovering just how far it is to drive from Inverness, to Bathurst, to Shelburne, to Bedford, to St. Andrew's and to fly to Bermuda! Discovering how many different kinds of casseroles and soups, sandwiches, cakes and pies you all love to feed each other! Discovering the diversity of the ways we worship together, provide outreach to our communities, face challenges, celebrate lives of ministers who answered the call, chair Presbytery and Synod meetings—the one thing that I found that this discovery has in common is an overwhelming sense of welcome I felt in every corner of our Conference! I witnessed to the struggles and questioning, facing difficult decisions, and celebration. In the midst of it all, I was greatly encouraged by your willingness to engage each encounter with grace, to go deeper into conversations and important issues, despite maybe a bit of disillusionment or temptation to throw up your hands. Seeing numbers dwindle, selling properties that have stood as beacons in communities, and burying faithful loved ones are not easy tasks but I believe that the Spirit has and continues to guide you well. I also heard much singing and laughter so we still have a lot for which to be grateful!

The deep truth that I've found across our Conference and even beyond when I visited our Maine Conference friends is that we really are seeking to know the God who has created and is creating. We are truly hungering for times and places where we can come together and celebrate who we are, wonderfully created in God's image. That image might look or feel differently depending on the situations we are facing but the understanding that God is still speaking (the official slogan of the United Church of Christ) is alive and well with people of all ages. In the midst of tragedy, such as the flooding in Sydney and Inverness-Guysborough Presbyteries, the hurricane in Bermuda, and the attacks on Orlando and Quebec City, to name a few, our church family reached out and helped to make the love of God known. It inspires me that we are still trying to figure out how we are going to continue to be the United Church of Canada across the Maritimes, in the Gaspé and be in partnership with the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Bermuda. These are not light questions, taking a great deal of consideration and prayer. I believe that with perseverance, courage, and the willingness to take leaps of faith, we will be able to "Seek Other Cs" with integrity, humility, and grace. We are called to BE the church in such a time as this!

It has indeed been an honour and a pleasure to serve as your President. You have welcomed not only me, but Scott and Ethan, into your midst. Having grown up in the Conference, coming through IAC, YF, and various other leadership roles, Maritime Conference really is my church home and holds a special place in my heart. This year has grown my understanding of family, and has enabled me to hold to the words of Psalm 139 that say, “there is nowhere we can go to flee the presence of our God”. It has taught me that through great adversity and questioning comes great faith and understanding. For each of you and all of the gifts you share with your communities, Presbyteries, Synod, and with our Conference, I give thanks and praise that you have been fearfully and wonderfully made by God, whom you so willingly and tirelessly serve.

May you continue to know the warmth of the Light of Christ.

Love and Blessings!

The Rev. Catherine Stuart

“You created light and darkness and you love them both.
You blessed the womb of my mother, you brought me to birth.
In your image and your likeness wonderfully made.
I will lift my voice to praise you, you are God indeed.”
-More Voices 131 You, Creator God, Have Searched Me