

# Woodlawn United Church



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March 27, 2018

Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell  
42nd Moderator of The United Church of Canada  
316 1st Street West  
Delisle, SK S0L 0P0  
&  
Nora Sanders, General Council Secretary  
United Church of Canada  
3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 200  
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

Dear Rev. Cantwell and Ms. Sanders:

## **Re: Changes to the United Church of Canada's Governance Structure**

Hello from Woodlawn United Church in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

We are writing this **letter of concern** on behalf of Woodlawn Church Council which met Wednesday, March 21, 2018.

As part of our regular agenda, we receive reports from our Halifax Presbytery representatives as well as our ministerial team. In both reports, extreme frustration was expressed about the reasons behind the governance changes currently in process as well as the process being utilized to implement the changes. First, to be clear, we do not object to changes that will see the administration and governance of the church become more efficient and responsive.

However, the issue that we are most concerned about is there seems to be very few people "in the know" or well informed in regard to the proposed changes.

The ministerial team at Woodlawn has expressed concern and frustration over not knowing what is happening and what the outcome of the proposed changes will be, even after reading all the available resource materials. Our Halifax Presbytery reps share this frustration. When they inquire about why and how on various points, the response from the Presbytery Executive is, "We don't know what is going on either".

If this concern is coming from one of the largest United Churches in eastern Canada, how must the smaller, more rural charges feel? How are we all supposed to prepare for these changes when we are not getting clear answers to our questions and concerns? It is this type of approach/process that leads to dissension and unease in the rank and file, otherwise known as the core of our church.

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We participated in the webinar related to the Boundary Report which establishes new pastoral charge groupings known as Regions. Here in the Maritimes, we have had one Conference Office and its staff serving NS, NB, PEI and Bermuda for many years. Now, faced with increasing costs across the board, we, the United Church, are theoretically trimming our governance models to 'save money' and 'reduce costs'. So, as part of this cost saving process, the proposal from the Boundary Commission was to create two Regions where we now have one, each with all the additional administrative costs which formerly served one "Region" i.e. Conference.

We, through Halifax Presbytery, were asked to vote to support this division. There was no information available as to how these new Regions would be staffed and what their respective functions would include, etc. So the essence of the discussion was confusing. When asked about the supporting data to support the recommendation, it was not available.

Surprisingly, the Presbytery voted to support the proposed change! It demonstrates that the blind does indeed follow the blind. When asked how the Court could support this direction the response was, "We are basically being told what will happen. Our vote opposing this change would have no impact on the decisions that are already made (in General Council). This is not the appropriate nor fair way to govern. Even if **this** is not 100% correct, it is the perception. We in the United Church have a structural problem from the top down.

We at Woodlawn United are asking for a thorough review of the process and the provision of supporting data presently missing to support the direction in which we are headed.

We look forward to a timely response to our concerns.

Yours in Christ,

  
Cathy Kay, Co-Chair

Woodlawn United Church Council

  
Diane Avery, Co-Chair

Woodlawn United Church Council