

TRI-REGION STAFF SUPPORT COMMITTEE REPORT

In many ways as we learn to live in this time of pandemic, it seems as if the changes made to the structure of our denomination over the last couple of years are a distant memory. In some ways it seems as if we have been living in this new, re-organized way forever as we deal with new and more immediate changes to how we must be church. However, in reality, we are still living into our new reality as regions and the shared work we are about as the three Atlantic Canadian (and Bermuda) Regions of the United Church of Canada. We, the members of the Tri-Region Staffing Committee especially feel the growing pains as we continue to try and determine what our role is and what the expectation is for the work we are called to do. Including our first meeting on October 1, 2019, we have met five times on October 1, December 2, January 14, January 21, and February 20 (not including numerous meetings the team who did the hiring for the new Regional Minister for Children, Youth and Young Adults held).

The Memorandum of Understanding signed by all three of our Regions was updated and approved by all three regions in the winter of 2020. The Staff Committee will recommend updates and changes, as needed, to the Executive. The changes for 2020 were made to include the new staff person for Children, Youth and Young Adults and an update to the language for the cell phone use as a reimbursement of expenses for a percentage of the cost of cell phone up to \$65.00 per month, rather than cell phone allowance.

As stated in the Terms of Reference, this committee's responsibility is to:

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this model, including how the cost-sharing arrangements are working and help to identify improvements in this arrangement from time to time
- Share experiences and insights about transitional work, including the possibility of any other shared projects.
- Provide support for all staff employed by the Regions and work with the Executive Minister in regards to working conditions and responsibilities.

Much of our time together as a committee has been spent in reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding and Terms of Reference and discerning our role. We struggle as a committee to clearly define our role. Some interpret it as simply being a bridge between the staff and the regions as we interpret the system for staff and report back to the regions as to whether the staffing model we have is effective. Others of the committee see our Staff Committee role as more one of support to staff and even to advocate for them and in no way meant to act in a supervisory or bureaucratic role.

The direct supervision of staff is the responsibility of our Executive Minister, who herself is supervised by the UCC's General Secretary. We do act as a sounding board and place of consult for the Executive Minister as she keeps us apprised of her oversight of staff but staff issues remain the pervue of the staff members' immediate supervisor. When we met with the staff, they helped us, as a committee, to see that they do not expect us to be a place of pastoral care for them but that our offering of support in a more general sense would be welcome. So, we have come to understand that our primary role is supporting the Executive Minister in her role.

In early December we invited all of our staff from the three regions to join us via Zoom for a “get to know you” session. Just to be able to put a face and voice to a name and to be able to be present to one another helped us, as a committee, feel our way into what is expected of our role. Each staff person was given the opportunity to speak about their role as well as the benefits and challenges they have encountered as they live into their new roles in this new system. As we continue to find our way into this new system as church, not having committee positions fully filled with volunteers means an extra burden for staff and we ask all church people in our regions to prayerfully discern where they might offer their gifts in serving in roles that are not filled. The new technologies and work commitments also means that we were clear to offer support to our staff. Especially now through this time of pandemic where they are working from home and facing especially trying times as they figure out roles and responsibilities, we are thankful for the ministries all of the staff carry out for and with us. We have also had one staff member in the Sackville office on maternity leave to end in June of 2020.

With great thanks for her ministry amongst us, in the Fall of 2019 we said good-bye to Lauren King as they left the Youth and Young Adult Minister position. At the time of their departure, it was discerned by the Regional Executives that we would change the name of the position to better reflect that children are also a significant part of the demographic served by this Regional Minister. In late Fall, Derek Ellsworth, Martha Vickers and Paula Gale, members of our committee representing the three regions, along with Rev. Faith, carried out the hiring process for the Children, Youth and Young Adult Minister position. We were pleased to welcome to it Rev. Catherine Stuart, who began work mid-Winter 2020. As a result of her entering the hiring process, Rev. Scott Stuart, her husband, who represented Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters on this committee, had stepped aside and we are now seeking a replacement for him on this committee.

Instead of naming a permanent secretary for this committee, we decided amongst ourselves that the three members who are responsible for reporting back to their regions, and thereby sit on those executives, would rotate quarterly the responsibility of note-taking, producing minutes of our committee meetings and writing the Executive reports for each of the regions. As a tri-region committee, we felt it important that we would have one common report from our work that would be the same report shared with each of the three Executives.

As we continue to live into our role on this committee, we consider the possibility of having committee members paired up with individual staff as a check-in and support. We have sent cards of support to our staff this Spring in light of the difficulties of and new realities Covid-19 has placed on them, as well as the tragedies experienced in and by the people of Nova Scotia especially. We pray that God will continue to guide our work and help us to be of the best service we can possibly be.

Faithfully Submitted by Reverend Paula Gale for the Tri-Region Staff Support Committee

Rev. Lesley Hamilton, Region 15 Reporting Member

Rev. Derek Ellsworth, Region 15

Rev. Paula Gale, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region Reporting Member

Rev. Paul Vardy, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region

Ms Martha Vickers, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Reporting Member

Vacancy, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters
Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, Tri-Region Executive Minister