

EXECUTIVE MINISTER'S REPORT REGIONAL COUNCIL 15

Reflecting on the Year

Margaret Wheatley, in her book *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, said; “There is no greater power than a community discovering what it cares about. Ask *What’s Possible?* not *What’s wrong?* Keep asking.”

I believe that as a regional council, as Communities of Faith, and as individuals, throughout this pandemic we have been discovering what it is that we care about. I remember the first time that the congregation I attend was permitted to have congregational singing. After the service, many spoke of being brought to tears as they stood and sang the story of our faith together. Families that have been separated, now being able to be together and embrace one another. When we shut down, we, as a community, found out very quickly how important our faith, our family, our friends, and our future together, really was to our wellbeing. We began to ask “what’s possible?” and we began to invite everybody to work together on what was possible. In the midst of a pandemic, we were able to continue to be the church, to be present to one another in ways we would never have dreamed. We found out that relying on human goodness helped us to stay together, while needing to be apart. As we come out the other side of this pandemic, I encourage us to not forget the valuable things that we have learned as a community. As families and congregations, let us remember and hold on to what matters. There may be some things that we have had to let go of that we may not want to pick up again. Let’s look at this time as a “new time to reimagine community”, may we be communities that are deeply authentic. I encourage you and your faith community to notice what you really care about, and have conversations about that, and, as Margaret Wheatley tells us, trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

What We are About:

This year has been a continuation of providing support to our ministry personnel and our communities of faith with information and tools to maneuver through the highs and lows of the pandemic. The region has continued to provide the zoom links and conference calling numbers for communities of faith free of charge. Our executive, divisions and committees have worked hard to be responsive. Each has been working hard to ask the question “What is Possible?” and continue to discern their role and call to ministry for the region. As we have worked with our mandates, some committees discovered that changes were needed to reflect the reality of their work, and in those cases mandates and policies were updated in order to be more responsive. A heartfelt thank you to all those who answered the call to discipleship and have taken up positions on divisions and committees that have kept the wheels of our region moving along some very difficult roads.

The region has been busy. The reports from the divisions and committees share the work of faith that has been both challenging and rewarding. The region has led learning events, book studies, film studies, monthly conversations with ministry personnel, budget assessments, grant funding, audited statements, living faith stories, self-assessments, changes in pastoral relations, retirements and anniversaries, incorporated ministries, newsletters, calls for justice, stewardship, chaplaincy, affirming discussions, licensing, retiree support, conversations about viability, cooperative and shared ministries. The vision of the regional council: *To become a transformed, courageous,*

Spirit-filled community, risking discipleship based on the radical love of Jesus; is who we strive to be. Through all we have accomplished this year, may it continue to be so.

Regional Council 15, The United Church of Canada and The Wesleyan Methodist Church in Bermuda have been working on redeveloping our relationship. This work was overseen by a task group which consisted of Janet Sollows, Faith March-MacCuish, Michael Blair, Adrian Hartnett-Beasley, Herbert Siggins, and Jacki Zuill. Late in 2021, the individual congregations in Bermuda, as well as the Synod, voted in favour of being in an associate relationship with the United Church of Canada. That relationship is to be lived out through our regional council. The agreement is now before General Council 44 for final decision. Thanks to the task group for its work over this past two years.

At the annual meeting last spring, we approved our strategic plan. The focus of the plan is on three pillars: Discipleship, Mission and Leadership. Each division and committee were asked by the executive to put together their action plan with the focus on the three pillars. The executive was energized with the commitments of the divisions and committees for their work in the region. The executive will be assessing where the gaps may be, and will be looking at ways to fill those gaps. Each staff person is also looking at their work through the lens of the pillars.

The region is in the initial planning stage of the possible start of an Institute for Health, Joy and Excellence across the three eastern Regions. We are excited by the possibility, and there will be more shared throughout 2022 as we continue to do our research.

Through the Children, Youth and Young Adult committee and staff, there was a request of the executive to approve a task group to reimagine the youth and the intermediates program for the region. That task group is taking this year to do its work, and we are waiting with excitement the possible outcomes from the task group's work.

Future Concerns:

Reggie McNeal told Leonard Sweet in Sweet's book *So Beautiful*, "***These are the best of times to be the church. These are the worst of times to be the church.***" Bob Farr says, "***I do not know why we are the chosen leaders (lay and clergy) who are being called upon to lead the church at this time. But in fact, we are and so we must***"

Some of the concerns that we have been hearing from our communities of faith in the region, and in the church as a whole, is the concern over shrinking congregations, growing expenses, and lack of volunteers to carry the load. These are conversations we need to continue having. We need to speak openly and honestly about our reality, and at the same time, we need to recognize that while, at times, it feels like it is the worst of times, it may also be the best of times as we reimagine community through bold creativity. We encourage our communities of faith to be bold and consider cooperatives, partnerships and pilot ministries. It is our hope that all of our congregations are able to have vibrant ministries. When we are able to articulate what it is that we care about, and we are so completely convinced that we believe that God has called us to it, we will, as a people, make it happen. So, let's change the culture of naming what's wrong, and begin to ask; what's possible? The Regional Council, its executive, divisions, committees, and staff are continuing to have these discussions, and are hoping that together, all of us can be the church we are called to be in our time.

People have shared feelings of disconnection from the wider church and from each other. It is unfortunate that as we began our new regional structure, we also experienced a worldwide pandemic that caused shutdowns, isolation, and closures. As we begin to come out the of the pandemic, we are beginning to ask “what is possible” as we rebuild our communities and our relationship.

Thank you to our Volunteers:

Our Executive, divisions and committees are comprised of faithful volunteers that have been very busy with the work of ministry for this region. None of this work is done by one person. You only have to look at the reports to see that there is a lot of work on the ground happening on a daily basis. Thank you, thank you, to all who have contributed to the region’s life and work. A special thank you to our President, Jane McDonald, for her leadership and guidance.

We ask that if you know of someone who would like to contribute to the life and ministry of the region, please encourage them to look at the nominations report on the website, and encourage them to be in touch with the Nominations Committee so they can help them and discern their place to serve.

Good Bye to Staff:

On June 30, 2021 Laura Hunter our Minister for Justice, Mission and Outreach finished up her ministry with the three regions and we were able to celebrate with her and wish her well at our AGM last spring. The process and search for our new Minister for Justice, Mission and Outreach began in June and concluded in November, with the announcement of Rev. Sherpherd Munikwa as the successful applicant. Welcome to the Region Sherpherd! Blessings on your ministry.

Thank you to our Staff:

All of our staff have worked hard over this past year to support our communities of faith, our ministry personnel, our lay leaders, the executive and its divisions and committees. I take this opportunity to thank each one of them for their continuous support, faithfulness, professionalism and ministry.

Conclusion:

Sharon Salzberg, said, “only love is big enough to hold all of the pain of this world”. Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God, love neighbour, and love self. May our ministry, whatever the next reiteration is, be filled with love.