

Executive Minister's Report Regional Council 15

Reflecting on the Year

The theme, "The Story of our Discipleship"

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This statement is both simple and complex. It is also more than just a suggestion, it is a command. When we say yes to the call to discipleship, our personal story begins and we enter a collective story. We are invited to join the great cloud of witnesses who have laid the very foundation that we are now able to walk. It is important that we ask ourselves the question: Is Christ's love being manifested in what "I", "we", are doing and in how we are responding. May it always be so.

The Moderator said, when she was addressing the United Churches of Dartmouth in April, that the United Church made the decision to reorganize and at the same time, the whole universe decided to reorganize. We are now trying to gain an understanding of what exactly that means for us as a church and as a society. We are only now beginning to recognize what I call the collateral damage from COVID-19. The impact on our communities of faith, its members, lay leaders and our ministry personnel, is still being discerned. We are still dealing with the stress of the financial impacts, people not returning to the pews in pre-pandemic numbers and members feeling they are unable to take up the responsibilities for the life and work of the church in the same way. We are hearing more and more about our foodbanks having doubled the number of clients that need their help. Food security is a real concern. The stress is causing people to be less tolerant of others and I have heard stories about people becoming angry and lashing out in places like grocery store line ups. There is an anxiety about the future and we are all noticing that people are feeling more on edge as a society.

There is an increase in the number of our congregations making the difficult decision to close their buildings and disband their congregations. Some congregations are looking at the possibilities of closing their buildings and meeting as a congregation in a setting that frees them from the overhead expenses. Some are looking at collaborative ministries and pilot projects. We have also realized that through the pandemic and through the organizational change, we collectively have still found ways to be the church. We have offered hope and have had the courage to look at ourselves in new ways. As the church, we need to ask ourselves: How do we continue to show up and bring a message to the world that is so desperately needed.

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What We Are About:

In the fall of this year, our Executive took some intentional time out to discern their role as governors. We shared in a bible study on the region's strategic plans of three pillars; Discipleship,

Mission and Leadership. The time spent in study and discernment was both rewarding and challenging.

We then moved into a time of Strategic Planning, and focused on the roles and responsibilities of the region, and making sure the responsibilities are being covered within our governance structure through the work of our Divisions and Committees as well as our Executive.

The Executive then began to explore the strategic plan and how we would continue to live these priorities out through the Divisions and Committees.

There continued to be, as part of the work of the region, retreats and learning events, budget approvals, grant funding, investments updates, audits, community of faith support, Living Faith Story, and Profile and pastoral relations support, support to retirees, support to our incorporated ministries. Calls for justice, stewardship support, chaplaincy support.

We continued to have conversations about viability, cooperative and shared ministries. We have been looking at how to support communities of faith in ending well with dignity when they have determined that they are at the end of their life cycle. We are also encouraging Communities of Faith to be brave to and to look outside the box to try something new and not be afraid of failure.

As part of the region's work, we continue to explore the initiative for the institute of Health, Joy and Excellence of our ministry personnel. The three Regional Ministers, along with the Office of Vocation Minister, myself, and our volunteer consultant have been meeting with focus groups, ministry personnel and lay leaders to seek input on the work of the institute. This is a joint initiative by the Regions East. This initiative was started because it is the responsibility of regions to operationalize the goal of Health, Joy and Excellence which is *"to provide leaders and communities with opportunities for learning and environments of sharing to enhance their skills, focus their energies and celebrate their practice"*.

Regions are very aware of the stresses pastoral charges are facing and the responsibilities that fall on lay leaders and their ministry personnel. Targeted developmental opportunities and supports will help ministry personnel and communities of faith better manage these challenges. While each of the three eastern regions may have different strategic priorities, there are areas where their cooperative efforts will help maximize the benefits that can be gained from their individual resources, expertise and diversity.

Educational Webinars/Events

The Divisions, Committees and staff have made a commitment to provide monthly learning events for our Region. This year we have had workshops on Governance Structure and Ministry and Personnel Committees, Nero-diversity and How to engage a Living Faith story process. There will be more educational events named for the fall of 2023.

Future Concerns:

The concerns that I would share, I know you all share. The dwindling of resources; both financial and people. The increased cost that is falling on fewer people. The workload of our members and our staff; both regionally and in our communities of faith. In this time in the history of the church,

we need to dig deep and consider the story of our discipleship. I believe that we as a church have a unique voice in the world. I believe the church will continue to change, but in the midst of change, the call is for us to remain faithful. We are in transition as a church and as a society. Transition is messy, but I fully believe that God is in the mess with us. It takes all of us to be the disciples that Jesus has called us to be and I believe we are up to the task. Thanks be to God.

Thank you to our Members:

The vibrancy of our communities of faith and our region is realized through the interconnected actions we take to support one another. It is because of you that our congregations have been supported and cared for and have begun to be able to recover from the effects of the pandemic. None of this work is done by one person, it takes all of us. Your discipleship has helped to weave God's love through our region and connect us as a community.

Thank you to our Staff:

This year, we said good-bye to Tracey Rose from the Sackville Office. Tracey decided to make a move to Alberta and is closer to her family. From all reports, she is doing well, working and enjoying her little granddaughter.

We welcome Shari Kaster, Office Administration and Communication staff in Regional Council 15 and Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters. Shari has fit into our staff team so well, and her work with us is so very much appreciated.

This year we have two anniversaries. Leona Laundry with 15 years of service. Leona is located in the St. John's Office and is a staff support to Catherine and Shepherd along with other administration duties, archives and bookstore. Kendall Harrison is celebrating 25 years of service and is the Regional Minister for Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council. Congratulations and thank you for your years of faithful service.

All of our staff have worked hard over this past year to support our communities of faith, our committees, our ministry personnel, and our laity. I take this opportunity to thank each one of them for their continuous support, faithfulness, and professionalism. There is never an ask that is too big or a task that is too small for our staff. If you have an opportunity, please take the time to show appreciation.

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister