

It is hard to believe we are once again gathering for our Annual Meeting, it seems like yesterday we were meeting at Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, in 2023; now in 2024 we are at Dalhousie Agricultural College, in Truro. Due to availability of locations and as it was our turn (Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council) to meet first this year, it has been 11 months since my installation as your President.

I was ill for 5 months and unable to visit my Communities of Faith or attend many of my meetings. I was very thankful I spent my other 6 months as follows: **I attended:**

Funerals for Ms. Hannah MacLean; Nancy Whitney-Latham, DLM; Rev. Lorna MacQueen; Rev. Alison Etter (live stream); Rev. Shelagh McCulloch-Taylor. Past President, Janet Sollows, attended Rev. Robert (Bob) Zinck's funeral on my behalf. Thank you Janet!

ZOOM meetings for Division of Services & Support; Division of Ministry Resources; monthly meetings of the Annual Meeting Planning Committee; Pastoral Relations Committee; Financial Accountability & Investment Committee.

ZOOM meetings with the Executive of Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council. Also, an in-person all day session last October, 2023, in Truro.

ZOOM meetings with David Hewitt, Regional Minister BNS & Rev. Heather Sanford, Regional Minister NF/Lab re: 44th General Council.

ZOOM meetings with Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, plus 3 Regions of Presidents and President Elects.

ZOOM meetings with The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of UCC and The Rev. Michael Blair, General Secretary - plus 16 Regions of Presidents & President Elects to prepare for 44th General Council.

ZOOM meeting as President, to the 44th General Council in the fall 2023.

Attended in person: Camp Berwick - my first time. I loved the serenity and peacefulness while walking among the hemlocks as these are magnificent. You can walk around enjoying the beauty of these enormous trees or sit among them reading your favorite bible passage or book you've wanted to read all year. Staff went out of their way to assist any request. I went to the Tatamagouche Centre for the Justice, Mission and Outreach Committee retreat last November. Another first for me. I enjoyed my time immensely. Staff are extremely helpful and friendly. I attended the Atlantic School of Theology Convocation at Saint Benedict Parish, Halifax, May 4 (as part of the processional).

Communities of Faith I visited: Amherst Masonic Temple (basement) for Disbandment of Immanuel United Church, Amherst; Lorneville United Church, Northumberland PC (retirement of Ministry Personnel); United Protestant Church, Sydney River; Middlewood United Church, Petite Riviere PC; Rivers of Grace United Pastoral Charge and the Trinity Anglican Church joined together to become a Collaborative Ministry for the community of Digby - believed to be the first of its kind in Nova Scotia; Orchard Valley United Church held a Rededication of their Building & a Covenanting Service for Ministry of Youth/Young Families, New Minas; St. Stephen United Church had their Affirming Service, Amherst, I was asked to present it to the Affirm Committee Chair; I was presented after church with a PRIDE pin and bracelets from

members of the congregation; Calvin United Church, New Waterford - World Wide Communion Sunday.

Webinars preparing for AGM 2024 - GC Commissionaires, Proposals, Orientations - April 30; Division Reports, Budgets, Audited Statements - May 2; ZOOM meeting for AGM run through - May 1.

Regarding REMIT #1, the National Indigenous Council for establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Organization within the United Church of Canada was extremely pleased to hear the results of the remit as follows: ALL 16 Regional Councils, the National Indigenous Council and 80% of Pastoral Charges participated in this vote. This included 81% of active Indigenous pastoral charges.

The National Indigenous Council and the 16 voting Regional Councils: YES: **17** NO: **0**
Pastoral Charges: Voted YES: **1482** Voted NO: **93**

In addition to the numbers stated, the **20%** of Pastoral Charges who did not vote also had their non-vote registered as a "**no**", as per the terms of this category of remit. There is a lot of information on the United Church of Canada website.

The Affirming Celebration for Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council of the United Church of Canada will take place on **Saturday, May 11, 2024 @ 8:30am** in Jenkins Hall, #23 on campus map, Dalhousie Agricultural College (Dal AC). We voted unanimously at our 2023 AGM to become Affirmed. Affirm United will be in attendance to present us with our certificate. This has been a long process and very deserving for every person within Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council. Please plan on attending to show we are a voice and support for people of all sexualities and gender identities and expressions.

Our Strategic Plan consists of 3 Pillars: **1** - Discipleship, **2** - Mission and **3** - Leadership.

Pillar 1: Promote the importance of discipleship as core to the strengthening, vitality, and sustainability of Christian community. Offer programs for members to deepen their connection to God in their Community of Faith and mission.

Pillar 2: Engage Communities of Faith in defining their part in God's mission. Create educational material and present seminars that help Communities of Faith define and live their mission. Establish a hospice team equipped with the skillset to accompany dying/grieving Communities of Faith through a process of closure. Assess CoF's organizational health based on best practices and help provide tools/guidance for their next steps. Research, review and analyse what viable opportunities may exist for creating mission and spirit-filled communities.

Pillar 3: Develop curious, faithful, brave leaders. Offer leadership training for ministry personnel and laity. Explore and research new models of ministry in other jurisdictions and denominations and share with Communities of Faith. Create leadership cohorts focused on organizational excellence and leadership development. Create a template for CoF's leadership that will encourage them to reflect on their future needs. Explore and share new models of congregational governance to ensure they are serving Communities of Faith in achieving their mission.

Priorities - Building trust between BNS and CoF's. Building youth networks. Build communication strategy. Support Ministry Personnel and lay leaders. Support CoF in renewal of their call to discipleship.

Executive Brainstorming - When you think of church, what do you truly care about?

Gospel being shared by word and deed. Bearer of hope, faith and love in the community and the world. Loving CoF. Meeting needs. Place where faith is deepened through worship, fellowship, study and service. People walk with them on life's journey - through baptism, marriage, saying goodbye; being with them in both happy and sad times, as part of a community; seeing them grow and succeed, learn and celebrate. People I interact with daily within the wider church. Helping to create disciples and being one. Building connections with each other and with God. Justice, challenging the status quo, building partnerships. We used to be a place for youth, then a thin place, but now we aren't. Making a network of people who have Jesus at the centre of their lives. Creating/offering a space that is safe, where the social norms and rules that exclude and harm people or set aside in favor of creating a different environment and community. Making available a community that meets people in their loneliness. Efforts to learn, grow, change, improve and evolve.

When you think of church, what is it that disturbs you?

Lack of faith that the church is eternal. Leads to fear, conflict and grief. Lack of faith that God is always with us. Many ministers feel unappreciated by the wider church. Our youth programming. HOW 1 voice can undo change. Conversations not happening. Fear/anxiety of the elephant in the room. Disparity between national/local aspirations. Lack of collaboration. Growing number of vacancies but little talk about how to work together as congregations and committees. Everyone is working alone instead of sharing gifts and ideas with neighbours. Ultimate lack of faithfulness. Congregations that would rather close than change. Prioritization of buildings over people/mission. Exclusion, viewing oneself as unique or different. Decreasing membership. Not feeling secure in the future. Lack of young families. Lack of outward vision. Lacking a Faith or Christ focus. Attitude that our denomination is the only "right" one. Too much energy, focus and resources used on buildings and institutions. Resistance to change. Some people tend to want to run things their way without listening to what others may think! The majority of rural churches will be gone in 5 to 10 years.

I am sure each of you can come up with many other scenarios as to what you care about in your community of faith and what bothers you? These are difficult times for the church and for the people who are a part of it. We may have to begin anew, starting the process of meeting in people's living rooms or at kitchen tables, discussing the bible and what God means to us as individuals as well as a denomination. I have spoken with many older members who remember this happening before 1925 and afterwards. We may have to set aside our buildings and sanctuaries as difficult as that may be, to survive as a church. I wonder if we lose our churches, halls, volunteers, Ministry Personnel, Ordained and Lay, would people really care? So many have resigned from committees at the local church, regional and national levels. Those who have remained are feeling burnt out. It is very upsetting to me that being an Elder within a CoF was once an honour and a privilege, but sadly today, many churches and its members feel it has no meaning to them.

I wish to thank Rev. Faith March-MacCuish and her Staff for everything they have done for me during my Presidency. It couldn't be easy with a very sick president, and yet, any time I needed assistance, both Jenn and Jennifer (as well as Shari) were there to help. Faith has been a godsend as she seems the more work placed upon her shoulders, the more she accomplishes. Past

President Dr. Sandra Tomsons has been truly a gift from God this year. Sandi chaired our Executive Meetings when I wasn't well enough to attend and I appreciate Sandi stepping in for me more than once. Words can never express how grateful I am to you, and every member of the Executive as well as my Division of Services and Supports where I chair Stewardship. I am going to miss those whose time has come to an end on our Executive. Time has flown by so quickly these past 11 months. I look forward to working with Rev. Donna Tourneur, President Elect over the next year as she transitions into the role of Presidency in May and I begin my new role as Past President.

In Peace and Hope,

Shauna MacDonald
President
Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council