Hugh Ellis
President

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times". These opening words from the Charles Dicken's classic, A *Tale of Two Cities,* have come to mind several times in this past year.

This has not been the year I had planned for my presidency. I had some plans, yet God had something else in mind. My diagnosis of pancreatic cancer came less than 24 hours before I was installed as president of the FSLDW Regional Council. At that point I had no idea what might lie ahead.

I have a whole new respect and understanding for anyone who has walked or accompanied someone on their cancer journey. Walking a mile in another person's shoes has been an exercise in understanding and humility.

Initially I learned how humbling a cancer diagnosis and chemotherapy can be. It controls almost every aspect of your life. Your routine, energy level, memory and your ability to complete even the simplest of tasks are affected. It takes control of your calendar.

As I write this message on a beautiful sunny but very cold winter's day, I am reminded of the words of Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

These words have been my lived experience to date. I have received the best of medical care. I have been supported by my family and friends. I have experienced the love and grace of God from my local and regional church families. The Regional Executive and the Regional Staff have stepped up to fill in for me whenever required. I have been truly blessed in so many ways. Grace surrounds me constantly.

So far, I have been able to chair two of our Regional Executive Meetings. I continue to support the fostering of Regional Cluster Meetings in each zone of the Region to enhance both local and regional communication. I cannot over emphasize the importance of local Pastoral Charges and Communities of Faith electing their designated number of representatives to the Regional Council.

This is the essential framework on which our governance model and communication system is built.

In addition, the completion and timely submission of the Annual Pastoral Charge Survey allow us to update our records to efficiently connect to leadership within each pastoral charge as the need arises.

The information sharing process about *Towards 2035* began in 2025 and will continue through 2026 and beyond. This reflective conversational process will allow each pastoral charge to look at their strengths and weaknesses and create the right plan for their future. The church is not immune to the changes we see and feel taking place in the world and yet, the need for community, justice, peace and a craving for spiritual guidance continues to grow. How do we meet these needs and become "church" outside the secure and comfortable walls of our routine Sunday morning worship? Our very future may lie in the answers we find to that question.

As a region we need to support the Self Assessment process whereby we evaluate our local governance and adherence to the essentials what is required of each pastoral charge by the Manual. We also need to find ways to better support our retirees, pensioners and pension survivors. A renewed task force has been created to evaluate what might be done to better provide that support.

We live in a world where things are not as they once seemed. Political alliances and trade alliances are rapidly changing. The rich become often outrageously richer wielding their wealth as power. We have seen how fear and violence can be used to force and justify political agendas. Immigrants are branded as villains and criminals. Our worldwide population of refugees continues to grow as powerful actors occupy and carve out territory for their own benefit. The magnitude of issues overwhelms us by times, until we remember that charity and empathy begin at home, often with the smallest acts of kindness and concern.

Be a point of hope and light no matter how insignificant you may think it to be. It is never insignificant to the recipient. A candle does not loose any of its brightness by lighting another candle. May each of your lights continue to shine brightly!

**What can I do? What can I bring?*
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy, I'll say a prayer
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

Blessings and peace,
Hugh

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