Executive Minister's Report
Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council Report

Reflecting on the Year

Seeds of Hope, Roots of Change

Some years back when I was ordained and living in the manse, there was a very overgrown garden in the backyard. It had become a holding place for discarded appliances and bulk garbage. My grandfather who raised a family of 11 always grew his own vegetables, so I invited Pop to spend a weekend with me to help me learn about preparing the ground, planting the seeds and growing my own crops. That was 37 years ago, and I still grow some of my own vegetables. Just last week my 5-year-old niece and I sat at the table and planted seeds inside to get them started. We talked about how amazing it is that a little, hard, dormant, seed when planted and given what it needs; soil, water, warmth, light, it sprouts into something beautiful and sometimes something delicious. A seed must surrender its individual existence in order to produce its fruit; the fruit which gives life and hope for tomorrow. As we see the farms in full swing, preparing the soil and planting the seeds, our theme for this meeting "Seeds of Hope, Roots of Change" is most appropriate. For a moment I would invite you to think about those in your life who have planted a seed of hope for you that was able to help you grow and change to into the person you are today. I also invite you to think about a time when you have planted a seed of hope for someone else.

Isaiah 43:19 *"Behold, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"* I do not believe that we are just called to perceive it, I believe that we are called to be co-creators in it. God calls us into an unknown future; invites us into new challenges, new ways to care and new ways to touch the hearts of others. When we become fearful of the unknown, remember we do not go alone. When we worry that we are not up to the task, remember God has called you, because God knows you better than you know yourself. When we are tired and disappointed, remember that God brings resurrection hope to the most difficult of situations. Society is changing, the world is changing, and the question before us is, where is God calling us as disciples? for *"It is not so much the case that God has a mission for the church in the world, as that God has a church for God's mission in the world***"**. The phrase, attributed to theologian Christopher J.H. Wright, highlights that the church's essential nature is to be sent into the world to participate in God's reconciling work. "Seeds of Hope, Roots of Change".

What We Are About:

I have reflected on this past year in the life and work of our Regional Council. As I have traveled around the Region with some of our leadership team, it was heartening to meet congregational members and their ministry leaders who continue to walk the path of discipleship, who nurture the spiritual life of people, who look after the basic needs of those who struggle; feeding and clothing others. Congregations who work for justice and make a commitment to living with respect in creation. Congregations who walk with the sick, support the grieving and nurture the old and the young. Planting seeds of hope, so that the roots of change are strong. Thank you, for your continued ministry. This has been a busy year and, perhaps more so, a reflective year for our Regional Council; its leadership, our congregations, and our General Council. The following is a summary of some of the work that has been happening in our Region this year.

Regional Council Executive
In September of each year, our Executive takes a two-day retreat to focus on the work of the Regional Council from a higher level, "the balcony" or "birds' eye" view. This year, we focused our time on several pieces of work; the Regional Council priorities, the Toward 2035 whole church initiative, and our Regional Council evaluation.

Regional Council Priorities
One of the confirmations that came from the evaluation of our Regional Council structure was that the five priorities set by the Regional Council do continue to resonate with our Communities of Faith and the Region's leadership. This is good news as the Regional Council Executive understands these priorities as being the work we are tasked support, and the Executive's responsibility is to ensure that decisions about committee structure and its work need to be reflective of the agreed upon priorities. Considering our denomination's call to Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice, the Executive has done some extra work on defining the objectives, and an action plan for each of the priorities. While more work is needed and measurables put in place, we feel that we are beginning to more clearly define the work to better support congregations and the ministries of the Regional Council.

Regional Council Evaluation
After receiving the final report from Jenny Stephens, which you will hear more about at our meeting, the Executive has spent some time looking at the key findings and the recommendations and have assessed what steps we have taken to meet some of the recommendations. While there is more work to do, we have made significant strides forward.

Toward 2035
By now, most of our Communities of Faith will have at least heard of the whole church conversation Toward 2035. As our General Secretary named *"One hundred years ago, [The United Church of Canada] began with faithful people seeing the possibility God guided them into, right there in the place they called home. We are convinced that God still calls, and that we can respond —we are not alone".*

Toward 2035 is an invitation to prayer and a whole-church conversation about the future of God's call to The United Church of Canada. When we say whole church, we mean all of us—Communities of Faith, Regional Councils, and the General Council. It does not mean a one-size-fits-all solution, as we need to be contextual in our initiatives. Considering that call, our Executive and our Regional staff have begun the conversation by offering presentations at annual meetings, hosting webinars for ministry personnel and lay leaders and now preparing for conversations in cluster groupings and with individual Communities of Faith to support their discernment for their future ministries. As part of that continued discernment and conversation, our Executive will be to assessing our current policies to determine if our policies are in line with the priorities of the Regional Council.

General Council Priorities
The General Council has also been working on their strategic plan and this plan does, of course, intersect with the Regional Council's life and work. This is a three-year plan, which will take us into 2028 of the Towards 2035 initiatives. The General Council has been doing extensive work with their priorities of Growth, Leadership and Justice. In April of 2026, staff from the Regional Council and General Council

met to work collectively on these three priorities, the objectives, and the actions associated with this work. More will be shared around these strategic priorities; which will see extra support given to Communities of Faith and Regional Councils in programing, policies and practices for ministry personnel. For Communities of Faith, there are significant initiatives around the themes of strengthening invitation, renewal, and emerging ministries, as well as work with congregations to engage in contextual justice initiatives.

Cluster Gatherings

One of the things that we have heard from our Communities of Faith and our leadership is that Regional Council members, ministry personnel and Communities of Faith crave more connection. In the new denomination structure, the concept of clusters and networks was to be something that happens organically. Meaning if Communities of Faith or groups of people felt it was important to be connected, they would develop a cluster in their area and that would fill the gap of isolation and help with the development of initiatives and resource sharing. In our Regional Council, the experience has been mixed. Some clusters that were operating prior to restructuring continued into the new structure, some new clusters developed organically, however there were gaps. In recognizing these gaps, the Regional Council, through a small communication and renewal working group, have helped to organize clusters and support established clusters in our Regional Council. Organized primarily by our Regional Council President; staff and Executive leaders have held one meeting with each of our cluster areas. The hope, of course, is that these clusters will continue to gather. It is our hope that all congregations will be part of a ministry cluster.

Health Joy and Excellence Institute

After the passing of Rev. Kendall Harrison in March of 2025, the work of the Health, Joy and Excellence Institute took a little bit of a break as we were awaiting the position to be filled, so that the Regional Minsters and I could continue the work of the Institute and create a three-year plan.

The institute recognizes that:

> Good management practice recognizes that providing supports and developing skills are important to improving performance. Ministers, and other leaders, come into their roles with a range of education and experiences which equip them with many of the skills required to do the work. However, professional development is important to continuous improvement and to addressing the new challenges which arise.

It is significant to note that every time ministry personnel and lay leaders develop their skills or receive support, it benefits their personal development, but it also creates the possibility for them to play a leadership role in applying this new skill in their Pastoral Charge and bringing information back to other leaders to help in their development. To that end, the Institute's priority is supporting and nurturing ministry personnel and then it will expand its reach to lay leaders. Part of the work is to make sure that clergy have a way of connecting with each other within the Regional Councils, which may be monthly conversations on zoom, clergy retreats or personal conversations with staff. Another part of the work is to provide skill development and, to that end, we are working with Credence & Company to provide learning cohorts focused in several different areas. More information will become available as we continue our conversation with Credence & Company.

Reparation

As part of our commitment to the Calls to the Church coming out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, our Region; through my office, the Property Committee and the Tatamagouche Board, have been engaged in a conversation with the Women of First Light about the Tatamagouche Centre itself as a possible rematriation, (return of the land) to the Indigenous people whose ancestors were the caretakers of the land on which Tatamagouche Center is located. This place has been the place of Peace and Friendship and is considered a place of healing for all people who gather there. The Memorandum of Understanding, which solidifies our commitment to move forward with rematriation, has been signed and meetings continue to be held. While this is a slow process, it needs to be, so that we continue to build relationship and move forward in a good way.

Things of interest

Growth and Stewardship

As part of the General Council's work and reorganization of the work of Growth and Stewardship, two departments have been combined and new positions created to further support Communities of Faith in Regional Councils. Therefore, a staff person will be deployed to the Regional Council to work specifically with Communities of Faith on renewal, invitation, and stewardship, and will work with our Regional Council in supporting emerging Communities of Faith. We are excited to have extra staff dedication to support our ministries as we look toward the future.

General Council Evaluation

General Council has completed their information collection and continue to discern the learnings from the information gathered. At General Council this year, the Commissioners were given a brief overview of some of the findings. One of the interesting, but not surprising things, was that some of their learnings mirror the information we heard from our Regional Council evaluation. As with the Regional Council, the General Council continues to work though the findings and discern what that means for the continued work of the church through its priorities and strategic plan. We will hear more about that as the work continues.

General Council 45

The General Council 45 met in Calgary, Alberta, in August 2025. If you are interested in reading about the work there and the work since by the Executives, please go to the General Council news website https://generalcouncil.ca/news for updates and information.

Staff Updates

This year we have had some changes to our staff compliment. We said Goodbye to Oluwaseyi (Seyi) Adeyemo, who transitioned from our office to work in Alumni Affairs at Mount Allison University. We certainly wish him well in his new job. With his departure, the staff committee and I began the search process to fill the position, and we were very pleased to have Shari Kaster, who was a former employee with our office, return to the now full-time position of Communications and Office Administration. Welcome back Shari, we are so happy to have you join our team once again.

Rev. Roger Janes retired in December. In conversation with him, he is doing well and is enjoying his retirement and is part of a singing group in his home church. As mentioned above, there has been a reworking of these positions.

Rev. Lloyd Bruce has been hired for the position of Regional Minister for Pastoral Relations and Community of Faith Support. This means that we have our full compliment of Regional Ministers, which is a gift as they work in collaboration with one another and share initiatives across our Regions.

Rev. Rob Shearer has accepted the position of Stewardship & Growth Animator, serving Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters and First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Councils. Once we have our full compliment, one Growth and Stewardship staff in each Regional Council, these three positions will work in collaboration with each other and our Regional staff for the best possible outcomes for our Regional Council work.

Rev. Andrew Richardson left his position as Office of Vocation Minister for our three eastern Regions and has taken a new position with the General Council, as Director Emerging Ministry Leadership, Co-Director Office of Vocation. We welcome Rev. Ivan Gregan to the position of Office of Vocation Interim Minister for our three Regions on a contract until the end of August. Rev. Don Sellsted has accepted the full-time position and will begin as our Office of Vocation Minister on August 1, 2026. A warm welcome is extended to Don!

Thank you to our Staff

Thank you to all our staff. Our administration and archives staff including Jennifer Whittemore, Shari Kaster, Jennifer Taylor and Sarah Wallace. Our program staff including Rev. Lloyd Bruce, Rev. Catherine Stuart, and Rev. Dr. Sherpherd Munikwa. Thank you to our deployed staff, Rev. Dr. Sharon Ballantyne, and Rev. Ivan Gregan. All 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.

Thank you to our Committees and Members

The vibrancy of our Communities of Faith and our Region is realized through the interconnected actions we take to support one another. Thank you to our Elected Regional Members to the Regional Council for continuing to connect us. Thank you to our committees and all members who have engaged by offering yourselves, your time and your skill sets to the work of discipleship in our Regional Council. None of this work is done by one person, it takes all of us. *"The invitation is clear: let us continue to plant seeds of hope, and create roots of change, the world depends on it."*

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister