

**Executive Minister's Report
Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council Report**

Reflecting on the Year

*One willing heart can't stop a war.
One willing heart can't feed all the hungry.
And sometimes, daunted by a task too big, I tell myself what's the use of trying?
But today, the invitation is clear: to be ridiculously courageous in love.
To open the heart like a lilac in May, knowing freeze is possible and opening anyway.*

Because by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

I have been focusing on the words of this poem this year. It's a much longer poem, but the phrase "To open the heart like a lilac in May, knowing freeze is possible and opening anyway" especially resonates with me as I think about the church and the world. We have experienced unsettling moments this year. We hear everyday of war and violence, and, in some ways, we can feel very helpless. I also know that when we look at the acknowledged and documented decline in our churches and for some of our congregations, we can also feel a sense of helplessness. It is hard to be one willing heart in a sea of despair. As our General Secretary has named very clearly, this is a watershed moment for our church, perhaps for all churches. But I think the words of the poem ring true, "the invitation is clear: we are called to be ridiculously courageous in love" to open our hearts, minds, and imaginations, to believe that we are being called to pursue a hope-filled future for the church. While one willing heart may struggle, many willing hearts can, and will, perceive the new thing that God is doing: 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.

We are standing at a place in our time in history where we need to be bold and make brave decisions, to take risks and make mistakes and pick ourselves up again, to take the learnings and make our impossible happen. I was gifted a book entitled, "*The Impossible Takes Longer*". It speaks to things that were once thought impossible that are of course now commonplace. 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.

What We Are About

This has been a busy year and, perhaps more so, a reflective year for our Regional Council; its leadership and 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 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 pillars as being the work we are tasked to support, and the Executive's responsibility is to ensure that decisions about committee structure and work being carried out needs to be reflective of the agreed upon priorities/pillars. Considering our denomination's call to Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice, the Executive has done some extra work on defining the pillars, their objectives, and an action plan. 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 ministries. To see the Pillars, the objectives and action plan please see the following link: <https://ucceast.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Strategic-Plan-Revised-March-13-2025.pdf>.

Regional Council Evaluation

After receiving the final report from Rev. Dr. Jenny Stephens, the Executive made the decision to engage a consultant from Integrated People Solutions. The Executive embarked on a commitment to four sessions. Each session was a four-hour working session with a focus on information gleaned from our evaluation, and from there helping the Executive to forge a path forward for our Regional Council. You will receive a progress report from the Executive at our annual meeting. We will also be asking for some feedback from our table groups about the progress and the way 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 discernment. This year at our annual meeting, everyone will be invited into a workshop to have further discussion about the future for our church in our Regional Council and partially in our Communities of Faith.

As part of that continued discernment and conversation, our Executive, will be to assessing our current policies to determine if the 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 Toward 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 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 in our evaluation is a feeling of isolation or disconnect in the Region, a disconnection of Communities of Faith to the Region and from our neighbours. In the new denominational 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 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 approved a proposal to hire a Cluster Animator. After securing a grant we were able to hire for that position. Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt has been working with us now for the past 18 months as our Cluster Animator and has been in contact with all areas of our Regional Council. You will see her final report in the Regional Council reports. As Robyn's term with us is now complete, the Executive will be looking for ways to further support clusters. Part of that support is through our Regional Ministers, whose job descriptions have this piece of work.

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 for offering.

The purpose of the institute is:

- 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 ministry personnel and then it will expand it 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 maybe monthly conversations on Zoom, clergy retreats or personal conversations with staff. Another part of the work is to provide skill development and to the end we are working with Credence & Company to provide learning cohorts focused in several different areas, congregational leadership, conflict and communication, and nurturing equity, diversity and inclusion. 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 of Directors, have been engaged in a conversation with the Women of First Light about the Tatamagouche Centre itself as a possible repatriation (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 considered a place of healing for all people who gather there. The MOU, which solidifies our commitment to move forward with the repatriation, has been signed and meetings continue to be held between Women of First Light, the Tatamagouche Board of Directors, the Regional Council Property and Finance Committees and myself as Executive Minister. This is a slow process, which 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, each of our Regional Councils will have a staff person deployed to the Regional Council to work specifically with Communities of Faith on renewal, invitation, and stewardship and will work with our Regional Council with supporting emerging Communities of Faith. We are excited to have extra staff dedication to supporting our Communities of Faith 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 through 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. Robyn Brown-Hewitt, has been working with us now for the past 18 months as our Cluster Animator. Many of you would have had an opportunity to speak with Robyn discerning the best way to create our cluster gatherings for our Region and how to help them be sustainable. Robyn will conclude her work on this project May 31, 2026. Thank you for all your work and learnings you have shared.

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 and in our Regional Council, we will have Rev. Dr. Sharon Ballantyne as our Growth and Stewardship staff, while our other two Regions will see new staff hired.

Rev. Lloyd Bruce has been hired for the position of Regional Minister for Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters. 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 the 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, the three Growth and Stewardship staff will also be working 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 Minister for our three Regions on a contract until the month of August, when the new person will begin their role. Announcement for the new staff will be forthcoming.

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 David Hewitt, Rev. Catherine Stuart, Rev. Dr. Sherpherd Munikwa, and Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt. 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 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 divisions and committees and to 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: to be ridiculously courageous in love. To love as if it matters, as if the world depends on it”*.

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister