

**Executive Minister's Report  
First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council Report**

**Reflecting on the Year**

**"Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a Catch" (Matthew 5:1-11)**

**In you there is a vision, in you we learn to dream.  
When all we see is desert may you be our living stream.  
In you there is a future, in you we find our way.  
When hope has shed its brightness, may you show us a new day.  
(MV#84 v.2)**

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 church and for some of our congregations, we can also feel a sense of helplessness. I imagine, for some of us, we may feel like the disciples; "we have worked all night, and we have caught nothing." And yet, when Jesus calls them to do something different, they responded, "Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets." Sometimes it may feel like we have worked hard long into the night, and we still find ourselves in a place of struggle. And yet, I believe that God still speaks and calls us forward into a place of faithful witness.

What does it mean for us as followers of the risen Christ, to go deep. As the Poem by Rosemary Trommer says, "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. To explore and nurture the stories of our faith, to allow our spirituality to be deeply felt, and to really hear Jesus' reassuring words, "Do not be Afraid." As our General Secretary has named very clearly, this is a watershed moment for our church, we need to go deeply into our "why"? 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". That is our "Why". 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. **"To love as if it matters, as if the world depends on it."** I believe God is showing us a new day.

**What We Are About:**

I have reflected this past year on the life and work of our Regional Council. As I have traveled around the region, it is 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. Thank you, for putting out into deep water and 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 the fall 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 priorities as being the work we are tasked to support, and the Executive’s responsibility is to ensure that decisions about committee structure and its work needs 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 Communities of Faith, the leaders and the ministries of the Regional Council.

## **Regional Council Evaluation**

After receiving the final report from Jenny Stephens, the Executive has made the decision to engage a consultant from Integrated People Solutions to work with us to assess the recommendation of the evaluation and to prepare a way forward from the learnings. This work will begin in the fall, and we will have a progress report in the new year.

## **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. 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 and the work of Towards 2035.

## **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 2025 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.

### **Pastoral Units**

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 that there are gaps. In recognizing these gaps, the Regional Council, through the Future Directions Team, presented the proposal of Pastoral Units. A Pastoral Unit would be formed with a number of pastoral charges that would support one another. The purpose is to enable pastoral charges to form stronger friendships and be able to share frustrations and successes with each other. To enable clergy and parishioners to share resources and use their gifts to enrich and strengthen the entire unit and if a pastoral charge within the Unit is unable to obtain a settled clergy, then the other clergy within the Unit would provide essential services to the vacant charge. It is our hope that all congregations will be part of a Pastoral Unit. While we have struggled this year to identify and gather these units, it is named as one of the priorities moving forward for 2027-2028.

### **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 Ministers 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 that 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.

### **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**

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. We wish Roger well in his retirement.

Rev. Rob Shearer has accepted the position of Stewardship & Growth Animator, serving Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters and First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Councils. Rev. Sharon Ballantyne and Rev. Rob Shearer will both serve First Dawn Eastern Edge. We anticipate that First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council will have our position filled by January 2027. Once we have our full complement, 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.

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 Ivan Gregan, to the position of Office of Vocation Interim Minister for our three regions on a contract until the end of August. 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 Alison Piercey, Jennifer Taylor, and Leona Laundry. Our program staff including, Heather Sandford, Catherine Stuart, and Shepherd Munikwa. Thank you to our deployed staff, Sharon Ballantyne, and 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”*. Rosemary Trommer

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish

Executive Minister