

Growth And Stewardship: What's Happening, What's Changed?

On July 1, 2026, the previously distinct roles of *Growth Animator* and *Stewardship Animator* - became one new role - the *Growth and Stewardship Animator*.

You might be asking: why this change? Well, we discerned that there was a strong wisdom to integrate growth and stewardship. They are, after all, interrelated elements of Christian discipleship. Put simply, it's hard - if not impossible - to do one without the other. While affirming the integrity of each element, it made sense to engage them together, rather than as siloed.

Going forward, every United Church of Canada Region will have an Animator who is on call to support communities of faith, networks and clusters in all the elements of growth and stewardship. We do this in collaboration with Regional Staff and Volunteers. This work is part of the brand-new *Growth and Stewardship Unit* of The United Church of Canada!

Who Is Where in UCC East?

Growth and Stewardship Animators are what we call "deployed General Council Staff" - meaning that we work for the national church - but are working in our respective Regions to support the grassroots of the church.

In UCC East, Rev. Dr. Sharon Ballantyne will continue as Animator for the Bermuda Nova Scotia Region. She can be reached at sballantyne@united-church.ca.

Rev. Rob Shearer has started to work in the Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region on June 1 - and he can be reached at rshearer@united-church.ca.

We expect that a new Animator for First Dawn Eastern Edge Region will begin in late 2026 or early 2027. Until that time, Sharon and Rob will both be working FDEE - so please do drop both of us a line if you're in FDEE and you'd like to chat! We'll be making several trips there in the months to come, including the clergy retreat in October.

All of us work both online and in-person, depending on the nature and location of the work. If we can combine a few events in a geographic area, that helps us be better stewards of funds and God's creation!

We Work as A Collaborative Team!

Please note that we work *together* across UCC East!

Having (eventually) three Animators in the three UCC East Regions will allow us to work collaboratively across the Regional boundaries - as each of us bring different skillsets and passions to this work.

And we work in close collaboration with Regional Staff and volunteers – Executive Minister, Regional Ministers and Program Staff, New/Future Directions Committees, Executives, and more.

But What Can We Actually Do?

You might wonder - what can a Growth and Stewardship Animator do?

Towards 2035 invites us as a Church to “strengthen invitation, invigorate leadership and embolden justice.” Our stewardship resources speak of “inspiring, inviting and thanking.” Our strategic plan as a denomination calls us to focus on “deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice.”

Taking all of those together, there are quite a few concrete ways we can come alongside you - and here are some of them:

- We can hold **in-person or online workshops** for leaders in communities of faith to help you prayerfully articulate your ‘why’, or to help you to name the Good News that you might share as you seek to renew your call to be Christ’s Church at this time and in your context. We can facilitate conversations about strengthening invitation, Toward 2035 - or come alongside your own initiatives to try new (or ancient / renewed) things, articulate a vision, purpose or core values. These gatherings can be custom tailored for your needs, involve spiritual practices - and speak into our denominational goals as we look [Toward 2035](#).
- We can come alongside you as you learn who your neighbours are. One way we do this is by providing **customised, local demographic information** in an easy-to-understand and graphically compelling format. All you have to do is ask and we’ll send it to you (usually within a week)! We’re open to connect after that to help you to interpret and engage that information!

- We can help you to **talk about money in church** (gasp!) - and even do it in a UCC-friendly way! We view stewardship as one element of discipleship (no, not as fundraising - but as discipleship!). You can take our tried and tested [on-line stewardship courses](#) and we'll provide accompaniment and follow up afterwards as you live into your stewardship plan.
- We'll support you if you're feeling called to **start a new community of faith (or 'church plant')**. This new community might exist to engage a migrant or diasporic group - or perhaps create an expression of worship or intentional Christian community that fits in our UCC 'big tent' - but is not yet available where you are. It could be a standalone plant - or a new expression within your existing community of faith/pastoral charge. We'll work together on vision, budget, granting support and how this can fit into the structures of your pastoral charge or Region.
- We can **attend retreats, visit networks and clusters**, and work and network with any part of the church. We're happy to be a listening and reflecting ear, be resource people, or even occasionally preach a sermon!
- We can help your community **access both regional and national United Church grants** in order to enliven your ministry and presence in your context.
- We are "United in Prayer" - and **we provide a space to pray together, weekly**. We gather on Zoom each Thursday at 1pm Atlantic / 1:30pm NL for an online prayer time which is both contemplative and liturgical - and where we pray for needs of the church. You're invited to come along (just email us for the zoom/registration link), or else to send us what you'd like prayed for.
- We can connect you with the [100 Tables initiative](#) - getting you a picnic table which your community of faith might transform into a site of welcome that reflects the church's commitment to live out God's call to love and serve and incarnate!

These are the kinds of things that we Growth and Stewardship Animators do. Maybe there's something else you'd need that's not on this list. If so, drop us a line - it can't hurt to ask!

In it all, we really do hope to come alongside the work that God's Spirit is calling us to, as we, together, seek renewal - and to deepen the invitation into the liberating and life-changing Story of Jesus.

Please do contact Rob if you're in FSLDW, Sharon if you're in BNS - or email both of us if you're in FDEE. We look forward to hearing about what God is already doing, and how we might come alongside you in that work.