THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL

Notes of the strategic planning session of the
Communities of Faith Commission
Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Present
Chris Bennett, Carolyn Harding, Amy Lee, Kevin Logie, Cindy Randall, Patti Rodgers, Gloria Tozek, Harry Ramsaran, Calin Lau, Sandra Nottegar

Staff: Susie Henderson, Jody Maltby, Kim Uyede-Kai, Rachael Howes, Jeffrey Dale
Guests: Jennifer Henry, Sharon Buttery
Regrets: Diane Matheson-Jimenez

Gathering
We began with a territorial acknowledgement lifting up the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant and an equity reflection. Jennifer Henry engaged the group in a reflection based on John 2: 1-12, the wedding in Cana story.

Community Jamboard: Why the Community of Faith Commission Matters to Me
People shared a note about why the Commission work matters.

- It's the big picture of the region
- We keep the big picture view, but also the local church perspective
- It's the importance of wider church connections and support – we are not alone!
- It's helping communities of faith see outside the box and celebrating possibilities and connections beyond their walls
- We offer support and guidance
- We are caring for and supporting and nurturing communities of faith
- We are supporting local faith communities as they face complicated high stakes decisions
- We provide support, guidance and encouragement to smaller rural communities
- We are developing and communicating strategies to live out the church's mission in this region
- We see the resources and tools that can bring about change

Goals for the Day
At the end of the day we will have

- Reflected on the significance of our work as a Commission;
- Identified key trends, external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses in our present context;
- Engaged with the vision, call and strategic objectives of the wider church;

- Identified no more than 4 strategic directions that can be drafted into goal statements for the CoF Commission's next 3 years.

Review Regional Maps
Sharon Buttery, Edge staff reviewed the connections that can be drawn using the layers of the regional map that draws data from the UCC yearbook and the government census.

Reflecting on the Present
We began by recalling the information that we have collected to learn more about our current context:

- Big picture document and summary videos (on the strategic planning page of our website)
- Regional map
- Our policy background
- Pastoral Relations Equity Project report
- The regional anti-racism statement

Group Reflection
Working in three groups, the Commission and staff worked together to identify key strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the areas of ministry; property and finance; and governance and leadership.

The virtual boards are available below. Here are the notes from each board.

BOARDS #1-4

***notes were highlighted as significant**

	MINISTRY	PROPERTY + FINANCE	GOVERNANCE + LEADERSHIP
STRENGTHS	• ***Intercultural ministries andcommission** • ***Affirming communities of faith—need more** • ***UPRC is a lever for partnership** • Clusters and networks • COVID boosted tech change and showed capacity to change • CoF is more than congregations, camps, community ministries • People can join from outside geographical boundaries • Nurturing mission of CoF • Collaborative agreements and shared ecumenical ministries are emerging	• ***Passion for the future of the church** • ***Caring** • Build commission from people that can support congregations • Consult with UPRC and TUCC before decisions • Range of experience brought to commission by individuals • Significant wealth in property	• We can encourage positivity and hope • Small churches can be nimble • UCC has good admin structure/experience
OPPORTUNITIES	• ***Reimagine community ministryas community of faith** • ***Destination congregations (not geographically based)** • ***Outreach/new intercultural ministries/challenge to strengthen governance** • ***40% new immigrants are Christian** • More immigrant communities interested in social justice, i.e. new Hong Kong folks	• ***Potential in UPRC – criticalresources in buildings;** • ***Think outside the walls** • We don't have to be experts in everything, bring expertise from outside • Resources embedded in buildings are critical to our future • We want to be a valuable partner • Partner with Alliance to End Homelessness allows us to pastor to first responders who are burnt out • Faithful footprints	• ***Shift in volunteer cultureto tasks not positions** • ***People are seeking community** • ***Learning to adapt/flex** • COVID questions our membership criteria and boundaries

	MINISTRY	PROPERTY + FINANCE	GOVERNANCE + LEADERSHIP
WEAKNESSES	• ***Resistance to change/fear** • ***Rural areas need to be better served** • ***Lack of access to technology/financial barriers** • ***Losing skills from the church/need regional support** • **Dilemmas for some folks on zoom** • Collaborative agreements and shared ecumenical ministries not many of them • Lack of support for lay lead communities of faith • Challenges to respond to innovative ministries • Concern for rural communities of faith with aging populations and how to maintain a UCC presence • Many churches don't know how to be in relationship with newcomer communities • ½ CoF have less than 40 people	• ***CoF view commission as punitive/bureaucratic** • ***Rural areas are underserved** • ***Clarify our property role** • We don't say no to anything so we don't support everything as well as we could • How can we let congregations know we are here for them? We oversee too many congregations, can't connect as much as we would like; • Weakness in CoF themselves to properly make decisions re: property and finance • Churches think they have to do it themselves and don't have the resources to do so	• ***Technology --Lack of access and incentive** • We can be rigid about structure • COVID questions our membership criteria and boundaries • "This is how we do it" • Infrastructure for community ministry is not built for continuity • Aging population • Losing leaders • Missing generations • Difficult to fill volunteer roles • Lots of administrative burden on few people • Leaders are tired and overwhelmed
THREATS	• ***Inequality and racism** • **COVID** • Housing/living affordably • Technology uneven distribution • Secularization rising • Big trend of decline • Very sudden changes in demographics • Challenge that more conservative forms of Christianity appeal	• ***Lose tax exempt status** • ***Decline trend = lack of investment** • Climate emergency changes everything • COVID reveals dependency on rentals	• ***Technology --Lack of access and incentive** • COVID harms Indigenous communities • WASP churches don't reflect the community – how do you grow? • Uneven distribution of income/resources affects access to technology and capacity to adapt

Lunch
We shared, God Bless to Us Our Bread from Westwood Hills Congregational Church Singers in Los Angeles: Julie Hinton, Jade Clavesilla, Marco Rodriguez, Yasu Ichikawa.

United Church Vision and Call

Vision
Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

Call
Daring Justice, Bold Discipleship, Deep Spirituality

Visioning Captions
We worked individually to envision ten years into the future, in this place, in our context, by creating captions describing 'the news'.

- SW region hires minister to lead regional environmental sustainability cluster seeking net zero carbon footprint for all properties by 2030
- SWRC discovers joy, renewed purpose and humility in living in creation where the Spirit dwells
- Simcoe District United Church meets in their forest sanctuary for their intergenerational monthly contemplation and action gathering
- 80% Community of Faith are walking towards becoming Affirming
- UCC IS anti-racist church, bias and barrier free
- Ribbon cutting ceremony with church leaders, social agencies and municipal leaders in partnership to create sustainable affordable housing complex
- United Church opens new LGBTQ+ community centre in Scarborough --worship, meals, SALSA!-- neighbours overjoyed!
- space to listen to Indigenous peoples
- Downtown church and lands returned to Anishinaabe Friendship Centre as site for community resource space
- Local United Church opens a food sharing, furniture sharing facility for new arrivals
- SWRC commits 5 million dollars to support local ministry programs
- United Church is a hub for new social enterprise in building strong local economies
- Faith in action, listening to one another, sharing a meal, helping a child
- SWRC CoF are practically reflecting the image of intercultural God in word, worship, education, ministries and becoming a vibrant and uplifting welcoming church

- SWRC supports the online presence of United Churches across the region through regional hubs, building capacity and other good stuff (rural)
- SWCFC continue to support cof in regular Sunday worship
- The strong presence of ministry for racial minorities so that people know where to go to offer and to get help materially, spiritually, politically

Strategic Directions
Jennifer Henry presented the national strategic directions and described the process that created them.

National Strategic Objectives
- Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World
- Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and Innovating for Bold Discipleship
- Nurture Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources
- Deepen Climate Integrity: Living Climate Commitments
- Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith

Integrating Our Context
We identified key words from our SWOT analysis and directions from our visioning captions and organized them under the same headings as the national objectives. We added the objective of worship and spirituality as this is more of a regional than a national role.

TOWARDS DIRECTIONS

BOARD #5

DIRECTIONS	**Deepen Climate Integrity: Living Climate Commitments**	**Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World**	**Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and Innovating for Bold/Effective Discipleship**	**Nurture Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources**	**Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith**	**Deepen Spirituality and Strengthen Worship**
KEY WORDS/CONNECTIONS TO OUR ROLE	• Making decisions about buildings • Loans toward Faithful Footprints	• Support Indigenous ministry from property sales • Proactively join land back movement • Encourage Affirming ministries in governance reviews	• Grow youth/young adult leadership • Culture shift to bold discipleship • Intentional interim ministry connections • Lighten governance obligations • Support lay led congregations	• Collaborative ministry agreements • Income streams to support ministry from property sale • UPRC • Share tech resources to support new forms of ministry, regional hubs • Coordinate decision makers, UPRC, TUCC, EDGE round table? • Partnerships with local agencies • Community ministries as CoF	• Intercultural strength • Outreach to new communities • Partnerships outside UCC walls, interfaith, ecumenical, • Community building	• Share tech resources to support new forms of ministry, regional hubs

Closing
Thanks to all who gave the day to consider our shared work going forward.
Thanks to Jennifer Henry for connection and inspiration. Thanks to Amy Yea Kyong Lee for singing us home.

Closing Prayer
God of immeasurable grace,
Bless us with spirituality as deep as the ocean;
Call us to a discipleship as bold as the saints;
Compel us to a justice as daring as the Redeemer's love;
In name of our Impossible Hope, Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Next Step
Identify an editing team to frame directions and goals for the Commission to consider at our next meeting on February 16, 2022.

Links
Strategic Planning page on our website
Wedding in Cana Reflection
Why It Matters Board
Regional Maps
Working Boards
God Bless to Us Our Bread