

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH COMMISSION

The mainstay of the Communities of Faith Commission's work continues to be approvals related to loans, lease agreements, sale of property, governance changes, property development, and collaboration agreements. In the past year, we have established task groups to consider these approvals and that has been working well, both in terms of better conversations in the task groups and more room in our plenary agenda for wider concerns.

In January 2022, we began a strategic planning process to guide our work over the next three to five years. We began our planning day by reiterating that the aim of the Communities of Faith Commission is to offer support and guidance to communities of faith and to serve as a point of connection between local ministries and the wider church. We worked together to identify key strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the areas of ministry; property and finance; and governance and leadership. We considered our work in light of the emerging national vision of Daring Justice, Bold Discipleship, Deep Spirituality. In our own context, we affirmed three strategic directions: deepening connection; encouraging transformation; and renewing and supporting leadership. Within those areas, we identified a series of goals, with the top priorities as: strengthening connection between communities of faith and the Shining Waters Regional Council; connecting rural and small ministries for resource sharing, and helping small/rural communities of faith imagine new possibilities for ministry.

We are still in the midst of rolling out a workplan in response to these directions. We have agreed that we will focus on the direction of "deepening connection" with the goal of "strengthening connections between communities of faith and Shining Waters Regional Council." As we head into the spring, we will build a multiple-year workplan to keep our vision focussed on these wider directions in addition to our ongoing responsive work. We found that the time to stop and reflect on the bigger picture and where we have been since 2019 was well spent and a rich undertaking.

Policies that were updated in this period:

- Intentional Interim Ministry Committee (February 2022)
- Review policy (February 2022)

The Intentional Interim Ministry Committee (IIM Committee) was formed in 2019 after the creation of the Shining Waters Regional Council through restructuring. The IIM Committee is charged with making recommendations to the Communities of Faith Commission with respect to interim ministries across the region. The work of the Committee is guided by General Council policies regarding interim ministry. The IIM Committee receives staff support from the Regional Staff Lead and Communities of Faith Minister.

From our learnings over the past several years, our policies and procedures have been clarified, particularly with respect to responding to a request for interim ministry by a community of faith, as well as when interim ministry for a congregation is mandated by the Communities of Faith Commission.

While we are the committee charged with making recommendations regarding the where, when, and how of interim ministries in Shining Waters, our secondary purpose is to provide support to our interim ministers, the regional reps appointed to serve on transition teams, and to partner with the Communities of Faith Commission to support congregations in the Intentional Interim Ministry process. We also see our committee playing an important role in communicating the importance of interim ministry and the promotion of interim ministry as a viable option for ministers to consider.

The Commission received the work of Karen Hilfman Millson related to a resource for Living Faith Stories and a process for Covenanting and Self-Assessment with communities of faith. These materials are still a work in progress and will take shape in the upcoming year as we take up the work of deepening our relationships with communities of faith.

Currently there are 36 Affirming communities of faith in our region and a growing number of communities who are on the journey of the affirming process with Affirm United. As part of our commitment to be an Affirming region, we aim to support and grow these ministries across the region. We appreciate the offerings that have been made thus far by communities who are sharing their Affirming journeys in a video library.

Our focus has been in supporting Affirming Communities of Faith through resources, networking, and staff support. We are planning for a presence in Pride celebrations and fall resources for Affirming communities of faith. In the future, we will collaborate with the Pastoral Relations Commission to ensure an equity lens is a part of Living Faith Stories.

The Commission wants to express our gratitude to the leadership of communities of faith in these challenging times. We know it continues to be difficult and the road ahead is uncertain. At the same time, we see many examples of ongoing and adaptive ministry that gives rise to hope. We give thanks for your faithfulness and resilience, and we will strive to accompany you along the way.

Respectfully,
Gloria Tozek, Chair