

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Communities of Faith Commission
Wednesday, January 18, 2023**

The Communities of Faith Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on Wednesday, January 18, 2023 via Zoom. The meeting began at 9:30 a.m.

Present:

Chris Bennett (Chair), Carolyn Harding, Calin Lau, Amy Lee, Kevin Logie, Tom MacNeil, Sandra Nottegar, Eric Nyarko, Harry Ramsaran, Patti Rodgers, Gloria Tozek

Staff: Jody Maltby, Diane Matheson-Jimenez, Kim Uyede-Kai, Jeffrey Dale,
Rachael Howes

Guests: Jim Keenan, Anne Hepburn

Welcome, check in and prayer

Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Harry Ramsaran gave an opening prayer and an acknowledgement of the land.

Shining Waters acknowledges our commitment to being a safe place for all people to gather and participate in our Region.

The chairperson constituted the meeting in the name of Jesus Christ.

There was a time of check-in.

Agenda

The Agenda was amended to include;

-under Community of Faith Updates, the item: *Bala, funding for mediation.*

-under Community of Faith Updates, an update on Community Ministries

MOTION Calin Lau / Tom MacNeil that the Agenda of the meeting be accepted as amended.

MOTION

CARRIED

Minutes

MOTION by Carolyn Harding / Kevin Logie that the Minutes of the meetings of the Communities of Faith Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council dated November 16, 2022 be approved as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

Email Votes and Staff Approvals

- Victoria Square, Markham
approved the lease agreement between Victoria Square United Church and Little Valley Montessori dated December 2022.

approved the amendment to the lease agreement between Victoria Square United Church and Stonebridge Baptist Church dated December 2022.

- Keswick-Ravenshoe
approved the request of Keswick United Church to access up to \$75,000 from their Manse Fund to cover the salary and benefits of the minister for the period January 1st, 2023 through to September 30, 2023.
- North York Korean
at the request of consultant Rev. Richard Choe, recommended to the Pastoral Relations Commission that North York Korean United Church be permitted to commence a search for a short-term supply minister

In accordance with Shining Waters Regional Council policy, the following decision was made by the Staff Lead;

- on December 20, 2022 approved a request from Alderwood United Church, Toronto to use up to \$25,000 of capital from their Manse Fund toward the minister's compensation.

Communities of Faith Updates:

- Port Carling United Church (*Diane Matheson-Jimenez*)
This commission made a motion in November to support Port Carling to work through mediation. They have decided that this is not the right time to proceed with mediation since other issues have arisen that need to be addressed.
- Bala United Church (*Diane Matheson-Jimenez*)
Bala is moving ahead and are fully committed to working through a mediation process.

MOTION by Harry Ramsaran / Sandra Nottegar that the Communities of Faith Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council approve the expenditure of funds, to a maximum of \$15,000, from the appropriate line of the regional council budget as directed by the Finance Administrator Janet MacDonald, for the proposal from Credence and Co. on Bala United Church.

MOTION

CARRIED

- Timothy Eaton and Dewi Sant, Toronto (*Diane Matheson-Jimenez*)
They are having a celebration of their amalgamation. There will also be a new covenant with the regional council as they are a new community of faith. Word will go out to the broader region about the celebration.

Diane asked if any commission member would be willing to join her at the celebration on January 29th to bring greetings on behalf of the regional council. Eric Nyarko agreed.

- Windermere, Toronto (Jody Maltby)
They have been exploring their options and have let us know that they have made the decision to pursue a possible partner for amalgamation. They have plans to continue their community outreach work.
- Bayview, Toronto (Jody Maltby)
Bayview is exploring their options. They have a congregational meeting this Sunday and they are hoping to pursue an amalgamation.
- Cheltenham & Trillium, Mono Mills (Jody Maltby)
This Commission approved their disbanding as of December 31st. Kindred Works are recommending the sale of both of the buildings and that will go to the Executive on February 6th.

We have received a proposal from both churches for the disbursements of the 10% of their assets. It was decided to wait until the buildings are sold to give approval of the disbursement of assets.

- Sandhill, Caledon East (Jody Maltby)
Sandhill is working towards closing. They had not been meeting during the pandemic and membership is down. Jody has been in touch with Toronto United Church Council to support them.

Property policy update (Jody Maltby)

It has been noted that our property policy focusses on what to do with physical property and does not specifically identify what to do with any financial property. *The Manual*, Section G, defines what congregational property means and it includes land, building, money, investments, etc. So, the property policy will be updated to include this and will go to the Executive in February.

- St. Paul's, Brampton (Diane Matheson-Jimenez)
St. Paul's was under review in 2022. The work initially was around finances. As they have been gathering documentation and starting to do the work of proper budgets, they realize there are some inconsistencies and there is some investigation into that. It is a very difficult time for them and Diane will keep the Commission updated as matters unfold.

Treasurers/Finance Committees

There was some discussion around congregation treasurers and bookkeeping.

The treasurer's role is one of the most challenging for churches to fill. Could we do a proposal to General Council asking that the language in *The Manual* be shifted to have it

say a *majority* of the governing body be full members of the United Church and specifically give permission for the Treasurer to not necessarily be a full member of the United Church.

Is there a way we can come up with best practices for the treasure position, without the bookkeeping piece? Part of the role of the new regional council Finance Committee will be some support for congregations, so there might be a piece of work around creating some best practices.

What ways can we support communities of faith to contribute to limiting their risks and vulnerabilities around finances? It was decided that Jody, Diane, Chris, Patti, Tom and Harry have a chat to begin a conversation around this, and have it come back to a future meeting for a more detailed and structured discussion.

- Wasauksing United Church, Parry Sound (*Kim Uyede-Kai*)
Wasauksing has been without Ministry Personnel for some time and the congregation has continued. They have a food bank and have been active throughout the pandemic making sure people in the community have what they need. Jen Colson is now their lay worship leader and will be going to Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre for training. They may be looking at a Congregational Designated Minister designation. Paige Rice has been doing outreach and community work. Paige and Jen will be attending the Living Into Right Relations Circle on January 26th.
- Toronto Urban Native Ministry (TUNM), Toronto (*Kim Uyede-Kai*)
There has been a gap in ministry since Evan Smith left in the Fall. As well, the Anglican minister who was doing outreach work as well is going on a year and a half maternity leave. So that leaves only one outreach worker to do a massive amount of work and the Board is trying to figure out a way forward.
- Community Ministries – *Jeffrey Dale*
The group met again this week and will be meeting monthly until the regional council meeting. They are preparing a proposal(s) around the three community ministries and community ministry as a whole within the region, for the meeting in May. If something needs to come to this commission around the proposals, it will come in March. The community ministries are grateful for the support of this commission.

Review List of Task Groups – *Jody Maltby*

Jody reviewed the task groups and the members on them. There are new members of the commission that are not on a task group. Tom MacNeil volunteered to be on the governance task group. Eric Nyarko will reflect on which group to join.

Jody will support the Governance Task Group for the near future.

Lay Leaders Forums update – *Diane Matheson-Jimenez*

Diane is taking on the support of the forums. The next one is planned for February 15 in the evening when Jennifer Henry will speak about The United Church of Canada Strategic Plan. The format will be the presentation by Jennifer and then a question and answer time.

Diane asked for a commission member that would be willing to act as a host for that forum. Sandra Nottegar agreed.

The meeting took an all-purpose break

Intentional Interim Ministry Committee - presentation

Jim Keenan and Anne Hepburn of the Intentional Interim Ministry Committee joined the meeting. Chris welcomed the guests and expressed gratitude for intentional interim ministry, and the discernment that can come for churches through interim ministry.

Anne Hepburn began the presentation with a time of grounding. Jim Keenan then presented on the transformed cultural situation that they've found from all the interim ministry the committee has been experiencing; looked at what that means in terms of ministry and interim ministry today from the experience and wisdom the committee has garnered so far; and what that means in terms of interim ministry opportunities in this region.

He spoke about;

- The pandemic and the effect it had on churches; a lot of communities of faith were not adapting to the reality of their communities and the pandemic lockdowns brought that to the forefront but, so far, many have not been able to see how they can adapt to the new cultural situation, as there's no going back to the old ways.
- A key point to churches being able to move forward and thrive is the distinction between mission and method. In many cases, churches have mistaken the method for the mission. If churches take on defining what God is calling them to do in their particular location and then decide what method they are going to use to be faithful to that mission, it puts church in a different way.
- We do have a good story and what we have to do is learn how to tell it in the contemporary environment.
- Most of the United churches developed as neighbourhood churches. So, the main focus when a congregation is trying to discern their mission and how to carry that out in actions and realistic ways, is that they see themselves as very much part of the neighbourhood that they are in, and if they have become alienated, to start reaching out and start getting involved collaboratively with people in the neighbourhood.
- Interim ministers are trained to be able to provide the leadership required for this kind of change, from thinking of the church as the mission to the church essentially just as the method; any buildings, etc. are to sustain the mission, they are not the mission themselves.
- The classic way interim ministry was done has changed. Culture transformation and change is all the situations we find in interim ministry, and interim ministry itself provides the tools for that. Typically, in interim ministry, there are goals that the congregation wants to go through, they begin by looking at the history of the congregation and, through that, they look at how their leadership functions, how their governance functions, how well they actually nourish the gifts that are in the congregations and bring that forward, and integrate it in the corporate body; and look at their internal and external relationships. If they are going to be an influencer in the

neighbourhood, what are their external relationships like, what is their relationship like with the United Church as a whole, then they begin to look at very clearly defining their mission and how they do that in their particular neighbourhood, and then they move forward and call a new minister who is going to help be their leader as they move their way forward.

- Certainly, there are many churches that would benefit from going through the process of interim ministry. The question is where does the money come from to do this? How do we provide interim ministry when it is needed; often it is needed in a congregation that literally doesn't have the funds to pay for an interim minister.
- There are some churches that would benefit from intentional interim ministry and there are some other churches that face challenges but may not benefit, or there may be ones that have a simple problem. Do we use interim ministers to do quick fixes?
- Before we place an interim minister into a congregation, could we do a quick pre-moving-forward process looking at the basic financial state of the congregation, their relationships, how imbedded they are in the neighbourhood, and find out, looking at the demographics of the congregations, where they fit in the neighbourhood and what are the opportunities for them to connect and make friends. That kind of quick scan may turn up recommendations or certain ways in which they can collaborate in the community. There may be situations where it is very difficult to see them surviving and thriving and carrying out a mission, and that is something we could consider, and we could move into having interim ministry.
- We've got some very good interim ministers in this area.

Anne Hepburn spoke about the fact that the cost of an intentional interim ministry is usually higher than a called or appointed minister. This often comes at a time that is particularly onerous for a congregation in need. The committee has articulated some strategies to respond to this. One is that an intentional interim minister could work remotely with the current minister. Sometimes an interim minister can come in on a half-time basis and focus more on the interim work and put aside anything that is extraneous. It would be ideal if funds could be set aside regionally to assist churches in need in interim ministry as a way to invest in a congregation that had a future and help them to move forward positively.

The Commission members asked questions and there was further discussion.

A couple of take-aways identified were;

- do we have all of the assessment tools we need to identify those communities of faith where intentional interim ministry can be the right answer for the challenges they face?
- if we develop a strategy, how do we fund it to allow us to identify those places where we can support the work of interim ministry when the resources may not be there in the individual community of faith.

Jim and Anne were thanked for their presentation and left the meeting.

Conversation about Communities of Faith in discernment/transition

- Chris mentioned that there are a number of conversations the commission needs to take up because there are going to be pressures for this commission. In some cases, they

will be very structured conversations, and in some cases, we need to start just sharing some of our experiences and wisdom so that we can perhaps give some general directions to our staff and also to prepare ourselves for what will become decisions. Today is one of the cases of a start of a conversation that will get more detailed over the next number of months. It flows from observations of the future of communities of faith as we all return from the pandemic and wonder whether we are where we want to be, and this is the church that is going to be a gift to our communities in the future, and how can we ensure we position ourselves to do that.

- The General Council has done a re-assessment on the cost of living group assignments. Every congregation in The United Church of Canada has been assigned to a cost of living group, and instead of congregations determining their own housing allowance, it is factored into the minister's compensation package based on the cost of living group of the congregation. In Shining Waters, 48 communities of faith are moving up a cost of living group, and 44 of those are north of Highway 407, so a lot of them are smaller, rural churches. And this is in addition to some pretty significant increases in insurance premiums in the last few years, and with what we're hearing from congregations about their concerns still re-emerging from the pandemic, it is a real concern.
- Often when a congregation starts into a conversation of possible redevelopment and they have a good site, the length of time could be 5 to 10 years before they realize any income; how do they survive in the mean time?
- Some communities of faith don't know how to make the decision to disband taking the emotion out of it. They don't know how to do the assessment in a way that is going to help their congregation look realistically at their future.
- How do we help congregations figure out what their spark is? Some congregations might have a property that is ideal for development but no vision for ministry and/or no energy to engage in ministry. Can we help them create a ministry vision that is going to move them into the future, or help them recognize that their legacy is their building being used in a different way? How do you have those conversations?
- A take-away from the discussion is we should be doing some kind of information gathering around our communities of faith, probably building on some of the work that we did last year; perhaps to do some detection of where we can support where there are strengths and perhaps get the lay of the land that can help us direct the resources more effectively.
- Good Friday Collective - Diane told the commission that this group is a broad-range of people tasked with helping communities of faith determine when it is time to end and, if it is time to end, to do it with dignity. Some of the work is being offered in Canadian Shield and the hope is that it will be offered to Shining Waters as well. One of the pieces of work is a workshop opportunity to talk about deficits, i.e. what do you do when you don't have enough money, enough people, enough energy, and what are some small practical things communities of faith can do when they feel they have a

deficit. The Good Friday Collective offers some good tips and strategies and it is a way forward.

We want the Commission to be a contributor to the health of all communities of faith across the region and help them enter into some of these conversations. How do we persist and how do we continue down what is a challenging path but one we have to take? It is hoped we can work together as a commission, and also support our staff, as we can develop some tools to take to the communities of faith to start these conversations.

Next Meeting

February 15, 2022 at 9:30 a.m.

Closing

Chris Bennett offered everyone blessings and the meeting closed at 12:33 p.m.

