

ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT OF SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

Regional Meeting Report

Our regional meeting theme for this year is *So What? Faith in Action*. This has been a challenging third year for the regional council (Covid related), communities of faith and The United Church of Canada as we live out our new Covid reality. Staff and volunteers have worked countless hours preparing, changing, experimenting, and succeeding in continuing as Church in new and creative ways. As an Executive, we have heard stories of sacrifice, perseverance, hope, success and also deep fatigue. We have also heard stories of worry, stress, frustration and struggle. As a region, as community, we give thanks, we continue to be on a long journey together; we celebrate the resilience of our churches and the expression of the Gospel in many new and creative ways. Reflecting on pandemic experience raises many questions about how we approach ministry, how we serve each other, and finally our role as a Church in society.

Connecting within our Regional Council

This past year many of our communities of faith, outreach ministries, and camps have struggled figuring out our new normal! Folks have used their phones, mail, video (Zoom/YouTube) for church. Most communities of faith have returned to offering in-person worship and many have continued offering live streaming too. We have continued a ministry of caring and support, and we have continued in new and creative ways. Volunteers, music leaders, ministry personnel, camp staff, outreach staff, and congregational support staff have all worked tirelessly.

As a regional council, the region has hosted Zoom gatherings for both Ministry Personnel and Lay Leaders for support, updates and education. Our website/newsletter continues to be a key tool for communication within our regional council. Many local, and a few regional, networks and local groups have also met to connect, learn, challenge, listen, and work together. The Executive also celebrates the significant work of the regional council commissions and networks/clusters and informal gatherings of United Church folks/community members.

Work of the Regional Executive

Our Executive meets monthly (with the exception of the summer) and does the work of the regional council when our region is not meeting (C.3.1.1). Often the Executive has a very full agenda which includes oversight of the regional commissions, regional finances, regional policy, regional meeting, emerging work, and the Executive Minister and staff.

The draft 2023 budget will be presented at our regional council meeting. This past year's spending reflects an unusual year with Covid-19. Staff travel has been down dramatically but support to communities of faith increased. We continue with a 5-year budget projection, a requirement of our bylaws, to be updated yearly.

Part of our work as a regional council is to develop more dependable income to support the work of the regional council and the work of granting by the regional council. In 2020, we joined in on a formal partnership with Kindred Works (formally the United Property Resource Corp.) to develop rather than sell property. The property would create housing (including affordable housing), regular income, and some regional community space for the regional council. Our first

project will break ground late spring 2023 in Orillia, with other projects starting in the months and years to come.

Monthly Work of the Regional Council Executive

If you are interested in a detailed account and overview of the work of the regional council Executive, please see the Digest of Actions, which will be received for information at our regional council meeting. The digest offers an itemized account of the regional council Executive since our last regional council meeting. It also gives you an idea of the monthly variety and work of our Executive. We have also added a new link to our webpage which offers a close look at our finances in one location, including audited statements as they are completed by the auditors. Covid-19 has slowed our audits as the auditors prefer in-person meetings, however, we have made significant progress in 2023.

Working towards Right Relations, Anti-Racism and Equity

The United Church of Canada is working towards becoming an anti-racist institution. For the United Church it means encouraging the General Council office, regional council offices and communities of faith, and even Canadian society to pause and reflect. The United Church has allocated staffing and resources for both General Council staff, regional staff, and Ministry personnel. The United Church is offering training, learning opportunities, and discussion groups as part of a strategy of becoming an anti-racist Church. Practically, the Canadian Shield Regional Council and Shining Waters Regional Council staff have joined together on a one-year journey of reflecting, learning, re-learning history, theological reflection, and discussion on how to become an anti-racist Church and work towards right relationship. Staff from both regions meet together bi-weekly to talk, learn, challenge, pray, reflect, and discuss on a path toward becoming an anti-racist church.

Both regional councils have encouraged equity conversations at the Executive level, commission and committee levels of the church. The regional council continues to lift up our commitment to equity across our work. We are beginning to live into our new pattern of equity leads being named by each commission.

We continue to work at and celebrate Shining Waters Regional Council as an Affirming regional council and support community of faith conversations too!!!!

Staffing

In 2022/2023, we saw more transition of staff in our regional council. Susie Henderson decided to leave Shining Waters Regional Council in December of 2022, as she explores new work. Susie served as Communities of Faith Minister for Equity and Innovation. Rachael Howes will transition into retirement at the end of May 2023, where Susan Whitehead will become the sole Executive Minister's Administrative Support staff. Dale Hildebrand transitioned to part-time in 2022 and will fully retire in 2024 (date still tbd). I have deeply appreciated Rachael and Dale's work with the regional council and they will be missed. In 2023, in anticipation of Rachael's retirement, we hired Kathleen Wolfe, administrative support. We also added Celio de Andrade Santos Jr., administrative support, as a way of supporting program staff and working with less program staff for the regional council. Celio and Kathleen will work for both Shining Waters Regional Council and Canadian Shield Regional Council.

I continue to deeply appreciate working with Jody, Susie, Jeffery, Kim, Dale, Todd, Celio, Donna, Rachael, Susan and Kathleen. We are blessed with incredible staff who have worked tirelessly over the past year. Thank you!!!! I am also grateful for our Executive and President David Leyton-Brown who have provided attentive leadership throughout this year. Thank you!!! David returned as President to finish the term for Betty Lou McNabb, who needed to resign for personal reasons.

2023 marks the start of the implementation of The United Church of Canada (UCC) Strategic Plan (2023-2025). Sharing the introduction of the UCC Strategic Plan (found on the UCC website) it states:

“In partnership with regions and the Indigenous Church, the national ministry will dedicate focus, energy, and resources to revitalizing the church towards a vibrant future. We will renew by strengthening existing communities of faith towards transformation. We will create by encouraging the development and sustainability of 100 new communities of faith, with a particular focus on churches that serve migrant communities. And we will invite by investing in sharing our unique witness with neighbours across the country and encouraging participation in our ministries, communities, and campaigns. This passion for growth will be enabled by leadership development, supported by denomination-wide strengths, fostered by justice campaigns and climate initiatives, and realized alongside Indigenous pathways. Our priority plan pulls key activities in each of these strategic objectives into service towards dynamic growth. Daring Justice. This is our Call, grounded in our statements of faith, right relations commitment, and core values, but articulated anew for this time. Along with our Call, is a Vision to become “a bold, connected, and evolving church” as disciples of Jesus in this place.”

(The United Church of Canada Strategic plan 2023-2025 document)

In the near future, the General Council office, in consultation with the regional councils, will hire six (6) Growth Animators (full time positions) to support the work of growth and renewal for The United Church of Canada.

The strategic plan has much more detail! See The United Church of Canada website for the most up-to-date details.

As we look forward, I give thanks for the support of my family this past year. I give thanks to God for the grace of community, the love and support of the Spirit, and the message of God’s love and grace through Jesus Christ, which has provided incredible hope during a very challenging year.

Peter Hartmans (Rev.)
Executive Minister