

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH COMMISSION

The Communities of Faith Commission's continues with a focus on its mandate to provide approvals related to loans, lease agreements, sale of property, governance changes, property development, and collaboration agreements. Once again this year we share much of this work across task groups that consider these approvals and are grateful for the work that members put in between monthly meetings of the full commission. This permits us at the meetings of the full commission to consider how this group can support the strategic direction of the church and region and take time with policy issues that effect all communities of faith.

This year our policy work included updates to policies related to the distribution of funds generated from the sale of property as churches close or amalgamate. The Commission also recommended a change to the policy and process for initiating financial appeals to communities of faith. This work was part of the commission's work in response to the community ministry proposal that was approved at the 2023 AGM. Through contributions from the sale of properties progress will also be made toward the goal of endowing community ministries with funding to sustain existing and to seed new ministries in the region.

Along with updates on policies over the year, in September the Commission took up a discussion of the theology of property and how we can be informed by our faith to disrupt our thinking about some of the patterns of power and possession that underpin views of property in our denomination and wider society. No policy recommendations have yet emerged from these discussions, but the conversations continue and this reflection is beginning to inform our work supporting our communities of faith and the strategy of the church.

This year we have also turned our attention to two of the most pressing decisions that many communities of faith face – amalgamation or becoming a lay-led congregation. For amalgamation, the staff have prepared a toolkit to help congregations work through the amalgamation process and decisions; and we are working to provide similar support for congregations that are considering the option of becoming a lay-led congregation.

Once again this year, the commission met jointly with our partners in the Pastoral Relations Commission to consider issues of common interest and identify opportunities for discussion and collaboration. At this year's meeting we discussed at some length the possibilities for collaborative ministry and a collective approach to lay-led ministry. This and further discussion of how communities of faith think through transitions, how we as a region can support faith leaders during these changes, how commissions can support congregations as they discern a future path and when appropriate disband set a foundation for the work that these two commission will take up in the years ahead.

The shape of communities of faith continue to evolve with two new amalgamated congregations (Bayview and Cummer Avenue, and Forest Grove and Jubilee United), proposals for lay led ministries, a proposal for an ecumenical shared ministry, and continued partnership with Kindred Works who help congregations find building partners and sustainability.

Over the course of this past year, we have reviewed and approved a wide array of changes that we pray see the region putting our energies into the right places to plant the seeds of new communities of faith and giving care and new homes for those where the difficult decision has been made to disband. As always we are deeply grateful to the staff and volunteers who travel with communities as they make their way through these changes. And it should also be noted that as difficult as these changes can sometimes be, we are resolved in doing this work in the knowledge of God's abundant love and optimism to see us all on a sustainable path for our church.

As chair of the commission, I once again thank all of the members of the commission and the professionals that support our work for their dedication, wisdom, and care in all the deliberations we take up.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Bennett