

## **SW2024-01 Proposal: Provide Financial Assistance to Shining Waters Region's Congregations**

The future for many communities of faith in Shining Waters Region is uncertain. Declining numbers of adherents/members and falling revenue challenge many. This problem should be addressed in a practical manner. The main purposes of this document are to outline the problem and suggest a possible solution. That solution involves moving funds from the control of the Region Executive to individual congregations, as will be described below.

### **The Financial Health of Shining Waters Congregations**

Communities of Faith are required to submit each year Statistical Information Forms to the United Church of Canada. This section outlines a summary of those statistics for Shining Waters Communities of Faith for the years 2019 to 2022. They were obtained through a request to Susan Jackson, Information & Statistics Coordinator for the United Church. Table 1 shows a summary of that data with the column numbers in yellow being the same as on the spreadsheets received and the Statistical Information Forms.

In Table 1, the number of households under pastoral care (column 5), the total membership (column 16), the identifiable givers to local expenses (column 18), and the number of identifiable givers to M&S (column 19), all show a significant decline from 2019 to 2022. Interestingly, the number of people attending weekly worship (column 20) remains fairly steady, close to 11,000, as does the amount raised by congregational givings (column 32A) at approximately \$26 million. The total amount raised went from a peak of \$63 million in 2019 to \$46 million in 2022. The compensation paid to staff (columns 41 and 42) remained fairly steady although there seemed to be a small decline in compensation paid to other ministerial staff (column 42). Travel expenses (column 43) declined noticeably, probably due to the COVID pandemic.

Table 2 shows the 2022 percentile values of the 154 Region's Congregations for the number of weekly Sunday attendees and the total funds raised. It shows that 25% of the congregations had 25 people or less attending each week with a total revenue of less than \$100,000. These congregations cannot support a full-time minister with all the other costs involved including benefits, expenses of the minister, and the normal operating costs of a church. The recommended minimum ministerial salary percentage increases for 2019 (1.6%), 2020 (1.9%), 2021 (2.2%) and 2022 (1.3%) were reasonable. However, those increases have risen in 2023 (3.4%) and 2024 (6.3%) making it likely that more than 25% of Shining Waters Region's congregations will not be able to afford a full-time minister. This will have consequences across the Region. Because of the increase in housing costs, the Cost-of-Living allowances are also likely to increase placing additional stresses on congregations.

### **Proposed Financial Relief for Shining Waters Congregations**

It is proposed that at least \$600,000 be set aside for distribution to the congregations of Shining Waters. That would amount to approximately \$4,000 per congregation. All congregations would be treated equally, regardless of size, since smaller communities of faith probably have greater need. Some threshold should be set to qualify congregations and it is suggested that they have at least 10 regular Sunday Worshipers. For 2022, this would disqualify six of the 154 congregations,

four of which had no attendance at Sunday worship. New or proposed congregations would also qualify subject to Region Executive approval. Each receiving congregation would decide whether to use the funds for operating expenses or, if it is not needed, to distribute the funds to a local registered charity. The Region should track, on an annual basis, how the funds are being used.

Where to get the funds? It is proposed that a percentage of all property sales go towards this purpose. A Reconciliation Fund already gets approximately 15% of all property sales and it is recommended that at least a similar amount be used for this purpose. Congregations which close would probably prefer their funds be used for this purpose rather than other uses at present. Since a sizable portion of the funds would end up with local charities, it is suggested that the support of some charities now receiving Region funds be reduced or eliminated. These charities are metropolitan Toronto centric, and the new model would help more charities across the Region.

Such financial assistance would help many congregations that are struggling. It would send a message that the Region recognizes the problem and wants to help. It also allows a more equitable distribution of funds to charities across the Region, and in some cases might even stimulate more donations.



## 2022 Statistics Shining Waters Region

	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%
Percentile of Sunday Attendees	15	25	49	85	149
Percentile of Total Funds Raised	\$44,210	\$99,857	\$183,724	\$358,601	\$683,193

Table 2: Percentiles of number of Sunday attendees and total amount of funds raised by congregations during 2022. For example, the median or 50 percentile values are 49 attendees and \$183,724.