

# Communities of Faith Commission: Ministry Plans for Communities of Faith including Covenants, Living Faith Stories and Self-Assessments

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## PURPOSE and REQUIREMENTS

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance, clarity and resources for the development of ministry plans by communities of faith. Sharing ministry plans with the regional council is a requirement of the covenant between communities of faith and the regional council to strengthen the ministry we share. Awareness of the different types of ministry throughout the regional council provides an overview to inform plans, determine required support and identify needed resources.

Each community of faith is to have an up-to-date ministry plan to:

- 1) identify and describe their ministry and vision, and their direction(s), goals and action plans for next steps,
- 2) regularly evaluate and assess their plan to be responsive to their lived experience, emerging possibilities, and context,
- 3) be clear about their covenant with the regional council which identifies purpose and relational partnership within the denomination.

The ministry plan includes three components:

- 1) the living faith story to describe how God is calling them to be the church in this time and place
- 2) the self-assessment when a community of faith regularly assesses their living faith story and their mandatory requirements
- 3) the covenant of the agreement between the regional council and each community of faith which includes commitment to policies and purpose, and the mutually approved community of faith governance structure and current leadership model.

The Manual requirements for these three components of the ministry plan are:

*Note: The Manual speaks of the mandate for a community of faith profile in I.1.4.1. The living faith story and the financial viability report have been identified as required components of the community of faith profile in the national pastoral relations process and in this policy on ministry plans of Shining Waters Regional Council. Regular updates to these aspects of the community of faith profile provides tools to assist in the ongoing planning and deepening development of the identity and intentions of a community of faith.*

### I.1.4.1 Community of Faith Profile (*Living Faith Story and Financial Viability Report*)

The community of faith is responsible for preparing and regularly updating a community of faith profile and filing the profile with the regional council. The regional council is responsible for reviewing the community of faith profile and ensuring that it meets the requirements of the applicable policies and procedures.

### G.1.2.2 Regular Self-Assessments

Congregations and other communities of faith are responsible for doing self-assessments of their ministry regularly. They must reflect on their understanding of their identity and their community context. They may consider a) their accomplishments; b) the present opportunities and challenges; and

c) the resources required for meeting those opportunities and challenges. They must file a report of the self-assessment with the regional council. The regional council participates as a partner in this review, offering resources and support from the wider church.

#### B.1.3.1 Terms of Covenant

A community of faith is recognized by the regional council through a covenantal relationship with the regional council. ... The terms of the covenant include a) the governance requirements for the community of faith in these bylaws; b) any applicable policies set by the General Council; and c) any other terms that the community of faith and the regional council may agree to include within denominational policies.

### **BACKGROUND**

Living faith stories and self-assessments are intended to be evolving working documents that inform the direction and vision of the community of faith. It is hoped that the content will be developed in a consultative manner through conversation and reflecting together as a community.

The commitment to provide updates to living faith stories through self-assessments is a component of the covenant between communities of faith and the regional council as together we seek to live the mission of our regional council to encourage and connect communities of faith.

#### ***LIVING FAITH STORIES***

The living faith story articulates the community of faith's ministry focus. It identifies what is key to the community of faith—the "why" or purpose of its life.

All communities of faith are expected to develop a living faith story, review it regularly, and share it with the regional council so that support can be programmed. The living faith story is an opportunity to tell a story about where God is leading the community of faith.

The living faith story can be written—or it could be an audio or video recording of the community of faith telling their story.

A community of faith may use one of the following as their living faith story:

- A recent ministry profile, list of mission and ministry priorities, living ministry profile, ministry articulation profile, or essence statement from an Effective Leadership Project.
- If your community of faith has recently participated in a visioning exercise with EDGE, you could use your ministry goals, vision statement, and current realities articulated in that work.
- A narrative budget and other applicable material (that names your ministry both within and beyond the community of faith) from the Called to Be the Church giving program ([www.stewardshiptoolkit.ca](http://www.stewardshiptoolkit.ca)) could be suitable.
- Use an existing vision or long-range planning document.
- Finally, of course, you can develop a unique, original living faith story, which articulates the ministry of your community of faith.
- There are resources available on the Shining Waters website that have been developed from the pastoral relations handbook for those who wish to create a Living Faith Story based on the eight categories of ministry associated with the search for a new minister.

## ***SELF-ASSESSMENTS***

In Shining Waters Regional Council, self-assessment updates are required to be submitted every three years. The self-assessment helps a community of faith to identify policies and practices which may need to be updated and is a tool for assessing the work of the community of faith.

Resources for a self-assessment can be found on the regional website.

In the Shining Waters Regional Council, the self-assessment includes

1. Annual Report - as approved at the annual meeting
2. Annual Financial Statement as approved at the annual meeting and/or a Financial Viability Report created for the search for a new minister
3. Review and update of the following:
  - ChurchHub Profile
  - Living Faith Story
  - Governance Model
  - Policies required by law and by United Church of Canada polity

Please use the Self-Assessment Checklist form to assist with this work. The checklist is a guide to help communities of faith learn about the requirements and best practices for their ministry. If the review identifies specific policies or practices that are not currently in place, these can be identified as goals to be accomplished. A plan to complete a number of these goals each year until the checklist is complete could be created by the governing body. The governing body determines how this work will be done. For example, specific parts of the checklist may be assigned to various committees, who will report back to the governing body.

Additional information the Community of Faith may wish to add to describe your ministry more clearly:

- a. Mission statement, Core Ministry Statement, Strategic Plans
- b. What are you most proud of this past year?
- c. Information about what is happening in Clusters and Networks you are connected to
- d. Stewardship Projects
- e. Work done in Anti-Racism, Indigenous Relationships, Sexual Orientation projects
- f. What would you like to share about your community of faith with Shining Waters Regional Council?

## ***RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MINISTRY PLAN IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH***

It is the responsibility of the governing body to determine how the ministry plan will be developed and incorporated into the life and the work of the community of faith.

It is the responsibility of the governing body to ensure that any updates to the covenant are duly signed and returned to the regional council. Ensuring that the community of faith is knowledgeable about the covenant is the responsibility of the governing body.

The living faith story and the regular self assessment require the approval of either the community of faith or the governing body depending on the governance model and its requirements for approval of visioning plans. The more broadly the living faith story and the self-assessments are engaged, the deeper the commitment will be to the vision and ministry plan it reflects.

### ***SUBMITTING AND STORING LIVING FAITH STORIES AND SELF-ASSESSMENTS***

Living faith stories are submitted to the regional council through email to [swrc@united-church.ca](mailto:swrc@united-church.ca) . Self-assessment summaries are submitted to the regional council through the online fillable document.

It is strongly recommended that after submitting updates to the regional council, communities of faith store their living faith story and self-assessment on their ChurchHub church profile page in the storage section along with other important documents. The documents will then be available to current leaders which eliminates the concern of locating them on someone's computer.

### ***WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MINISTRY PLANS***

Living faith stories, self-assessments and signed copies of covenants will be available to staff of the regional council, consultants working with the regional council if needed, members of the Communities of Faith Commission and members of their working teams who are focusing on this area of responsibility of the commission.

Living faith stories and the financial viability report that is part of the self-assessment will be available to pastoral relations liaisons for the communities of faith they are supporting in the pastoral relations process.

### ***HOW WILL MINISTRY PLANS BE USED IN THE REGIONAL COUNCIL***

It is the responsibility of the Communities of Faith Commission of the regional council to oversee living faith stories and self assessments of each community of faith. They will be considered with a prayerful lens of interest and celebration of the particular ministry of a community of faith to identify support and resources as well as ascertain that policies and requirements are followed.

The commission will also be looking for emerging patterns from the ministry throughout the whole regional council that identify trends, and required support and resources to provide insights for planning.

### **COVENANTS BETWEEN SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL AND COMMUNITIES OF FAITH**

Shining Waters Regional Council and communities of faith work together in mutual respect as part of The United Church of Canada. Together we celebrate God's presence, seek justice, live with respect in creation, and love and serve others. A covenantal relationship, intentionally entered into between a community of faith and the regional council, is an important symbol of our commitment to one another to support and encourage the ministry we share.

Covenants between communities of faith and the wider church have been in place since the Basis of Union of The United Church of Canada to articulate an understanding of mutual accountability and support. The Manual identifies that a community of faith is recognized by the regional council through a covenantal relationship with the regional council:

#### **B.1.1 Definition**

A community of faith is any community of people within the United Church that

- a) gathers to explore faith, worship, and serve; and
- b) is recognized as a community of faith within the United Church by the regional council through a covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council.

There are many kinds of communities of people that may be recognized as communities of faith: pastoral charges, congregations, outreach ministries, chaplaincies, faith-based communal living, house churches, online communities, and others.

Communities of faith may be intended as time-limited, transitional, or ongoing.

### **B.1.2 Transition: Congregations, Pastoral Charges, and Other Local Ministry Units Existing before January 1, 2019**

All congregations, pastoral charges, and other local ministry units that existed prior to January 1, 2019, automatically continue as recognized communities of faith as of that date.

A congregation is a group of people that meets for public worship, and that has been formed as a congregation of the United Church. A pastoral charge is a unit of organization that consists of one or more congregations.

### **B.1.3 Covenantal Relationship**

#### **B.1.3.1 Terms of Covenant**

A community of faith is recognized by the regional council through a covenantal relationship with the regional council. The community of faith and the regional council have the flexibility to negotiate and create a covenant that is responsive to the contextual reality of the community of faith and its unique needs and challenges. The terms of the covenant include

- a) the governance requirements for the community of faith in these bylaws;
- b) any applicable policies set by the General Council; and
- c) any other terms that the community of faith and the regional council may agree to include within denominational policies.

#### **B.1.3.2 Changes to the Covenant**

The terms of the covenant may be changed from time to time within denominational policies with the agreement of the community of faith and the regional council.

#### **B.1.3.3 Transition: Congregations, Pastoral Charges, and Other Local Ministry Units Existing before January 1, 2019**

The terms of the covenant between the regional council and a community of faith that existed as a congregation, pastoral charge, or other local ministry unit before January 1, 2019, are

- a) the governance requirements for the community of faith in these bylaws;
- b) any applicable policies set by the General Council; and
- c) any governance requirements already approved by the presbytery for that congregation, pastoral charge, or other local ministry unit.

The covenant between Shining Waters Regional Council and each community of faith will include:

1. a signed covenant agreement;
2. a governance structure approved by the community of faith and the regional council that frees people to live out their commitment to God and to each other (Section B.2.1.7 of The Manual, 2023).
3. a Living Faith Story, as required by Pastoral Relations policy, that articulates the community of faith's ministry focus.

The covenant will be officially recognized and acknowledged through two steps:

1. a motion of the governing body of the community of faith and
2. a motion of the Communities of Faith Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council.

The covenant will be signed by the chairperson of the governing body of the community of faith and the chairperson of the Communities of Faith Commission. A signed copy will be sent to the community of faith and kept on file with the region.

The covenant may be updated as required every five years to include current policy requirements and relational components to support a healthy life-giving relationship between the region and the community of faith.