COMMUNITIES OF FAITH COMMISSION

The Communities of Faith Commission continues to focus on its mandate to provide approvals related to loans, lease agreements, sale of property, governance changes, property development, and collaboration agreements. As is our practice, we share much of this work across task groups that consider many of 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.

The message of Toward 2035 – that we should discern what God was calling us to become – guided the work of the commission this year. Four areas of work are highlighted in this report, all of which were focused on how we can support communities of faith as they discern their path and reckon with some of the difficult choices that must be made in pursuit of this future.

This year's highlights include:

- Updating our Property Policy and the decision-making process
- Building a policy and structure in support of First Third Ministry (children, youth, young adults and their families)
- Policies and training related to Pastoral Charge Supervision and Intentional Interim Ministry
- Building on the Let's Connect program that offers networking, learning, and support to community of faith leaders on a variety of topics that they must navigate. The report on this successful and well-attended program is appended to this report.

With respect to the Property Policy and processes, the commission took up a review to ensure that the policy provides clarity for communities of faith as they consider property sales or land leases that arise from discussions about sustainability, amalgamation, or seeding new ministry. In the course of approving plans, the commission needs to define and evaluate congregational viability. The commission agreed that there need to be clear, but flexibly applied metrics and that if the commission is going to withhold approval it should be based on a policy and consistent decision-making process. Further, the commission looked to build consistency into how the funds that flow from property sales and land leases are shared across local and regional priorities.

One of the region's responses to the Toward 2035 report needs to be a deliberate strategy for attracting younger people to the United Church in our region. This past spring, the Communities of Faith Commission supported the establishment of a committee to build a policy to underpin

First Third Ministry in the region. Work will continue over the fall and into next year with a new committee that has been established as the Shining Waters Intergenerational Ministry (SWIM)

As part of the commission's work (in partnership with the Pastoral Relations Commission) to support communities of faith working through transitions, the staff and volunteer members worked together to develop new policy and training supports for Intentional Interim Ministry and Pastoral Supervision roles. In both cases, the region is moving to expand the resources and leadership available by providing training for a wider range of individuals supporting each of these policies and programs. Look out for communications on both programs coming later this fall.

As in other years, staff and commission members have reviewed and prayed on a wide array of local decisions that continue to highlight for us how blessed we are to have lay leaders and ministry personnel who faithfully discern paths toward sustainability and cultivating new communities of faith, while 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. As I end my term as chair, I reflect on what a privilege it has been to work with 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.

Faithfully submitted, Chris Bennett

Let's Connect!

Let's Connect is a joint program of Shining Waters and Canadian Shield Regional Councils with staff leaders, Andrea Allan (SWRC) and Diane Matheson-Jiminez (CSRC and SWRC). It is a series of online networking, learning, and support gatherings designed primarily for lay leaders and community of faith leaders. The goal is to help people serving in congregational leadership roles gain practical skills, share experiences, and stay connected with others across the region.

"These connections really make a difference."

Through Zoom webinars that happen 5 to 6 times a year, participants have access to:

- Conversations on topics relevant to congregational leadership.
- Opportunities to learn from United Church staff and guest presenters.
- Practical training for specific leadership roles such as trustees, council members, and other congregational leaders.
- Space for discussion, visioning, and mutual support among leaders from different communities of faith.

The program helps lay leaders feel more confident, informed, and connected as they navigate governance, administration, ministry, and change within their communities of faith. It is part of the Regional Councils' broader effort to support congregations as they adapt and experiment in changing times.

Some Recent Events:

October 2026,	A Duty of Care for Everyone, with Guests Shawn Redden and Laura Black
April 15, 2026,	Trustees Tune Up, with Guest Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa
Jan 28, 2026,	UCC Statistics and Assessments, with Guests Harry Li and Jennifer Henry
Nov 19, 2025,	Navigating Change pt 2, with Guest Peggi Ridout
Oct 21, 2025,	UCC Church Archives, with Guests Kyle Pugh and Jocelyn Oprzedek
Sept 24, 2025,	Navigating Change, pt 1 with Guest Peggi Ridout

For resources and video recordings check out:

https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/communities-of-faith/lets-connect-lay-leader-resources/

"The seminar was very well run and educational. Kudos to all those involved."

"It was a wonderful webinar, full of information from start to finish. And the speaker was terrific."

"I found the whole presentation very informative and answered questions that I have been wondering about. It was excellent. Thanks."

"It was great to see so many people join… reminded me that we are part of a larger whole. Not just on our own."