

Regional Rambler

Living Skies Regional Council The United Church of Canada



April 29, 2020

1. **Living Skies News:** Changes to **Ongoing Regional check-ins and support (Tues & Weds)**; The NSHC Board requests feedback; Responses to the mass murder in NS; Financial Decisions during Pandemic; Re-open Sask. Plan; General Secretary job posting; Racism during the Pandemic; Annual Declaration for MP; Congregational givings; Camp Wellman; Refugee sponsorship during “distancing”; Voluntary Chaplains; A Trans Christian Faith Perspective; Spiritual Directors; Make a difference with letter writing: Str8 Up;
2. **Wider Church Information:** National COVID-19 updates; **National Time Sensitive Webinars: April 29** - Congregational finances during the pandemic, part 6 and **April 30** - Congregational programming; United in Learning webinars... continue!; Emergency financial information: new web resources; Governance During the Pandemic;
3. **Upcoming Learning Opportunities: Final Call:** Affirming Connection event – May 2; Eco-Commoning project; Living Skies Event Calendar Highlights;
4. **Reminders:** Financial Name Change; Video Resources on trauma and self care; A second COVID_19 letter to MP from Adam Hanley; MP Re-appointments; Worship resources;

1. Living Skies Regional Council News:

Changes to ongoing Regional check in and support meetings:

The Regional Council will continue with **Tuesday ministry personnel check ins** that are Region-specific. Please see your Regional Council’s Events calendar or check with your Pastoral Relations Minister.

Lay leadership Wednesday evening meetings are being cancelled after this week. We will gather as needed as the situation continues to evolve. Watch your newsletter and Facebook for invitations!

Topic for April 29: Members of Ministry and Personnel Committees. Please share this note with your M&P committee! **6:30 PM in SK**; Meeting link for all Wednesdays: <https://united-church.zoom.us/j/978525442>

(Do not post this link on social media or your congregational website, please. Share it by email.)

The Northern Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy Board would like to invite you to participate in a very important task. As we move to create a *Community of Faith Profile* for the vacancy that will occur upon the retirement of our current Chaplain, Rev. Cathy Coates, June 30, 2020, we seek your wisdom. Please reply to the following question **by May 08, 2020** so that we might include your feedback as we continue to discern how this important ministry will continue. **Question: How has the Northern Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy impacted your ministry?**

We sincerely thank you for taking a few minutes to respond and ask that you hold this work in your prayers. **Please send an email** response to rhoenecke@sasktel.net (Sandy Hoenecke, Treasurer, NSHC)

Responses to the mass murder in Nova Scotia With the rest of the country and church, and with the people of Region 15, we mourn the enormous violence and trauma created by one person. We pray, mourn, and act with the affected communities and with grieving families and friends. [Please see this message from our Moderator.](#)

Rob Reed and Tricia Gerhard have written a letter to the people of Regional 15 (Nova Scotia and Bermuda) extending our deepest sympathies. To see the full contents of the letter, [click here.](#)

Staff from Living Skies Regional Council have put together a document titled **Financial Decisions during Pandemic**. [To see the document, click here.](#)

Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan - We have received a number of questions regarding the provincial government's plan to move forward with lifting restrictions. We have sought some clarity from government officials, and have confirmed that the rules in place include communities of faith. Therefore, the maximum number of people permitted remains at 10 until Phase 3, which has an unknown date, and then it only increases to 15. The number increases to 30 in Phase 4, again with an unknown date, and again, including social distancing. These rules would include gatherings for funerals and weddings.

The General Council Office is developing a list of considerations for determining the appropriate time to resume in-person gatherings which we will forward once available. These include the average age of participants, the possibility that new people may join (based on the increased numbers we are seeing online), and the possibility of spreading the virus through common worship components such as singing and communion.

A return to in-person worship will require very careful preparation for the community and the building alike, whenever this finally occurs. It is also possible and even likely that restrictions that were eased will need to be tightened again, and public worship will have to cease again if the virus re-surfaces. Keeping our buildings closed allows us to practice maximum care for our communities, to focus on a good return plan, and to do so while continuing to offer and explore creative options for care, community, and worship.

Our communities have a high proportion of people who are high risk should they contract COVID, from health care workers to elders and those living with disabilities or compromised immunity. We cannot take risks. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Tracy Murton, Pastoral Relations Minister (tmurton@united-church.ca) or Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister. (smccarthy@united-church.ca)

General Secretary of the United Church: job posting As many of you know, the United Church General Secretary, Nora Sanders, will be retiring later in 2020. The search process to find her successor is now underway. Details can be found on the United Church of Canada web site: [General Secretary Position Post](#). The deadline for applications is June 19, 2020.

Racism during the pandemic: A United Church member reflects From the beginning of this pandemic, incidents of racism against Asian communities and individuals have marred our communal response to COVID. [In this reflection on racism and COVID](#), Kim Uyede-Kai notes that "The curve of the escalation of the disease of racism is rising with the curve of the escalation of COVID-19. While there is presently no vaccine against either disease to stop the spread of both, COVID-19 will eventually be eradicated. Racism will continue to mutate unless we make collective efforts to stop the spread." She concludes with practical suggestions that could help us identify and address racist comments and acts in our day to day conversations and relationships.

Annual Declaration for Ministry Personnel From April 1 to June 30, ministry personnel (including candidates in Supervised Ministry Education appointments or other appointments) will be able to submit their annual declaration on criminal charges form on ChurchHub. This form needs to be filled out no later than June 30, 2020 to remain compliant, including being eligible for calls or appointments and for licenses for sacraments and marriages.

To fill out the annual declaration, log in to [ChurchHub](#) and "My Ministry Page." Look to the right for the "My Professional Requirements" box and then select the "Annual Declaration 2020" link. If you completed your annual declaration anytime from January to March 2020, then you actually were completing your 2019 annual declaration. You will need to log into ChurchHub and complete your annual declaration for 2020. Please contact the [Office of Vocation](#) if you have any questions.

Congregational giving at a time like this In many ways, the church can now reach out further than before. Our doors may be closed, but funds are still needed. Please see this excellent overview of options for giving regularly and at a distance, and share this in your community of faith newsletter. It covers the steps for PAR, an overview of Canada Helps, and more: <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/congregational-finances-and-covid-19>

Camp Wellman (from just inside the Manitoba border) is hoping to open for campers this summer. [Please look here for more information.](#)

Refugee sponsorship during “distancing” The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) is a service and coalition that’s often been very helpful to United Church communities of faith involved in the crucial ministry of welcoming refugees to Canada. The distancing we’re all practicing makes some aspects of sponsorship and support very difficult. But if you’re sponsoring a person or family, [here’s a helpful bulletin of suggestions from the RSTP.](#)

Voluntary Chaplains The Committee on Ministry Personnel Support has gathered together a group of 5 people who have offered to serve as Voluntary Chaplains for ministry personnel in Living Skies Regional Council. The recognition of the ongoing isolation and the unique challenges to ministry during this pandemic has created a call to ensure ministry personnel have the support and resources that might be needed for health, joy and excellence in the practice of ministry. The list of ministry personnel has been divided regionally amongst the chaplains who will endeavour to contact each individual by telephone or email. While each minister has been “assigned” a chaplain to make the initial contact, all of the chaplains are available during this time for conversation and support. The Committee wishes to express its deep gratitude and appreciation to Cathy Coates, Joan Rennie-Laing, Deborah Smith, Jackie Van’t Voort, and Heather Wyatt for their willingness to serve in this way.

A Trans Christian Faith Perspective Some time in the fall, delegates to Regional Council gatherings/ annual meetings will be voting on Remit 1, which proposes renewed, gender inclusive wording Basis of Union wording about who can become a minister in our church. If you’d like to talk further about this important change, and explore how to have good intro conversations about trans and non binary identities, please contact Julie Graham, Justice and Communications staff, jgraham@united-church.ca Watch this recorded 90-minute webinar where five trans and non-binary people share a little of their personal stories, and how their Christian faith has made a difference along the way. Hear about how they understand their gender identity, why language is important, and why the church has been an important part of their lives. [Click HERE](#) to access the recording as well as to find *Resources for Going Deeper*.

Spiritual Directors The Committee on Ministry Personnel Support is putting together a list of Spiritual Directors within our Regional Council who would be available to offer spiritual direction for people within the region. The list would be available on our website for people who are looking to engage with a Spiritual Director in the region.

If you are would be willing to be on the list please contact Bev Diebert (bdiebert@united-church.ca) to give your consent and your contact information.

Make a difference with letter writing: Str8 Up is based in Saskatoon and is a community based and supported gang exit program. It helps gang members leave their gang behind and supports them in moving into a life free of violence. That demands commitment, support, and relationship. Relationship is a particular challenge in these times, so we're being invited to join in letter writing. Please have a look at this [Facebook event](#) for details or email Emily Carr at emily@str8-up.ca

Str8 Up shares space with our own Integrated Community Ministries and with Micah Mission, and all three serve an area of the city that is deeply under-served and vulnerable because of trauma, racism, and colonization. People from all over the province live there.

2. Wider Church Information:

National COVID updates – Note: important update on emergency loans and other funding below. Please continue to use your community of faith channels to share these.

National Time-sensitive Webinars

April 29: Congregational finances during the pandemic. This continuing Wednesday series keeps us up to date on financial aid that continues to evolve rapidly. Webinars are recorded and can be watched after the fact. Times: **5:00PM in SK**; Access this through [United in Learning](#) or the [national church's YouTube channel](#).

April 30: Congregational programming During the pandemic, United-in-Learning is offering a weekly series for ministers and church leaders, with just-in-time skills and reflections intended to help us all respond to the unusual situation we find ourselves in. If you have specific requests or suggestions for future topics, please [CLICK HERE](#) to email us! [Here's full information on this weekly series](#).

The continuing [weekly financial webinars at United in Learning](#) are also an important support, but please be aware that information in the older recorded webinars has likely changed.

Emergency financial information: new web resources

[Your homepage for all COVID related finances is here.](#)

The national church has now shared a new summary of [United Church-related emergency financial options](#). This includes a [bridging loan application form](#) that will be approved through your Regional Council. This is the first time in living memory that emergency loans on this scale are available to communities of faith nationally. This program is made possible by a \$3 million grant from [The United Church of Canada Foundation](#). The money comes from the generous bequests of members over the years. Their gifts are ensuring the future of the church.

Please note that the \$40,000 CEBA loan is now off the table.

Please review all information carefully, as the order in which you proceed is important. [Here's an overview of things you'll need to consider](#) as you make a financial plan.

Governance during the pandemic - Several important updates and clarifications were released following last week's meeting of the General Council Executive. Congregational governance: [a governance overview is here](#), and a [specific resource is here](#). There was also a [temporary amendment to some key pastoral relations policies](#).

3. Upcoming Learning Opportunities:

Final Call: Affirming Connections online day May 2 Life does go on! And Alberta's Affirming Connections invites us to continue our LGBTQIA2S+ journey all the more in the midst of this pandemic. They've opened this all day event to Affirming leaders and seekers everywhere. For full details please see your Regional calendar and the [registration and agenda link here](#).

Eco-Commoning project online national events, May 21 Join us online to think creatively about commoning, social innovation and social enterprise in communities of faith. Take part in an interactive key-note presentation from Rev Dr Ted Reeve and The Very Rev Bill Phipps on how the social/economic theory of "communing" applies to spirituality and communities of faith; engage with local stories and take-part in conversation-style action planning and reflection through the World Cafe model. Prairie resource people who are part of local "eco-commoning" will join us. [Full details are available here](#).

Events in Living Skies: highlights - All of these are posted on the Living Skies [Events calendar](#).

May 2: Affirming Connections event <https://affirmingconnections.com/>

May 21-23: Regional Gathering / Service of Praise and Celebration (Humboldt) – cancelled

4. Reminders:

Financial Name Change The official name has now been changed on the bank account. Cheques should now be made out to “*Living Skies Regional Council*”. Please pass this to anyone who may send a cheque to the Regional Council office.

Video resources on trauma and self care Rev Diane Strickland specializes in helping us survive and recover from community and personal trauma and has been involved in crisis care and recovery in High River and Fort McMurray, AB. She offers an [overview on supporting one another](#) here, and these videos offer further “pandemic practicums”. Please share- and thank you, Diane.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUIX9OaerzI&t=34s>

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/KlrJZE2I9aQ>

[A second COVID-19 letter to Ministry Personnel from Rev. Adam Hanley](#), Program Coordinator, Ministry Personnel Vitality, Office of Vocation

Ministry Personnel Re-appointments – if the pastoral relationship with your ministry personnel is due for renewal in June, it must be completed via ChurchHub this year. This requires that both ministry personnel and communities of faith have active ChurchHub accounts. If you have questions regarding your ChurchHub account, please contact Tracy Murton (tmurton@united-church.ca). If there are no changes to the terms of the appointment, the reappointment requires approval from the governing body only, so see the information on the Regional Council website about guidelines for those meetings during these times. Prior to the meeting of the governing body, click “send draft email” which will send a draft copy of the form to the Regional Council for review.

Worship resources The questions about everything from technology to music licensing continue to fly. Here’s your home base for some national resources: <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/tools-worship-during-covid-19>