

Living Skies Regional Council
The United Church of Canada
2nd Annual Meeting
October 28, 2020

Community Building, Listening and Discerning

Rob Reed, Convenor for the Annual Meeting, opened the meeting, and commented on how much easier it is to do this meeting in-person. He was relying on the staff for technical support, noting that the Prairie to Pine and Northern Spirit Regional Councils' meetings had gone well.

Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister, introduced herself and provided an orientation to the Annual Meeting sessions, advising that, just as when we have had face to face meetings, in our Zoom gatherings, we have divided decision-making into "Listen, Discern, and Decide". Tonight, we will focus our time on Listening and Discerning, education pieces no voting tonight. Next Wednesday, when we meet, we will formally constitute the Zoom gathering as a meeting, and focus on Deciding. Tonight, we will welcome questions for clarification and discussion, and we will welcome feedback on how proposals might be changed so that we are all ready to make decisions next week. More information about the remit process will be provided at that point in our agenda as well. All members and visitors are invited to participate fully this evening. Those gathered were reminded that when anyone speaks, they must identify themselves for the participants joining by phone.

Rob invited those gathered into a time of worship, by lighting the Christ Candle, a sign of the gathered Christian community.

Darrell Reine, a member of the Planning Team, acknowledged that the meeting was held on the territories of treaty peoples and the homeland of the Metis people, reminding us that with a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration, we are all treaty people. The delegates were invited to name the treaty number of the place where they were located in the Chat.

Deb Anderson-Pratt provided a smudge to bless this time together and to acknowledge her peoples, and show respect for ours.

Rob Reed introduced the readers, who read Luke 17:20-21 in three languages: SunDo Hyun in Korean, Susan Reed in English, and Salesi Takau in Tongan.

Rob reflected on the scripture, the understanding of which provided a defining moment for him. To consider that the reign of God is already in our midst and that it is possible to encounter God's reign anywhere has remained with him, as well as the recognition that he has a place as a co-creator of God's reign.

These verses from Luke's Gospel were chosen as the scriptural foundation for the theme of the Annual Meeting, "Right Where We're Supposed to Be" If the in-person meeting had gone as planned, the Theme Presenter, the Rev. Cameron Trimble, CEO of Convergence, would have been able to engage the delegates in exploring the notion that the reign of God is in our midst.

Rob continued his reflection by commenting that, more than seven months into living during a global pandemic, navigating church in a time of public health orders, sanitization protocols, distancing and restrictions on gatherings, and the challenges of not being able to do things the way we have always done them, we are more than seven months into learning new things, adapting many things, and wrestling with everything, as we continue to be the church in ways that we need to be.

Delegates were reminded that COVID-19 is only one of the challenges faced by the church, including missing and murdered aboriginal women, hate graffiti and abuses against LGBTQIA2+ siblings, racial discrimination, a jeopardized environment, increased aging and declining human and financial resources in our churches, political instability, rampant poverty, escalating violence ...

We may want to be somewhere else, but we are not. Right here and right now, where we are supposed to be, God's reign resolutely in our midst. We are called to witness to God's transforming the world, not to simply wait for somebody else to fix it.

Rob concluded his reflection by suggesting that we channel whatever it is that God is all about, and live that, here and now, because we are right where we are supposed to be, in the midst of the reign of God, empowered by the transformative love of God's Holy Spirit, and strengthened by the Good News of Jesus Christ. "May we be the ones to join with God, in bringing into being God's reign of compassion and justice. Amen."

Hoeun Lee, a member of the Planning Team, led a closing prayer, concluding with the Lord's Prayer said by delegates in words and languages chosen by them.

Shannon McCarthy outlined the agenda for the meeting: listening and learning about two proposals and the Remit. Delegates were advised that any member of the Regional Council and any Community of Faith can make proposals to invite action or decisions that are within the authority or ministry of the Regional Council.

The Proposal, *Banning Conversion Therapy in Saskatchewan*, was presented by Charlie Klassen, Grosvenor Park United Church, Saskatoon. Charlie provided an introduction and background to the proposal, advising that Conversion Therapy is a form of treatment to change sexual orientation, gender identification, etc. At best it doesn't work, and at worst it causes psychological issues, including depression and suicidal ideation and attempts. The proposal seeks the support of the Regional Council by (1) submitting a request to the provincial governments to ban conversion therapies within Saskatchewan; (2) encouraging communities of faith to understand why conversion therapies are so detrimental to the health and well-being of so many of the lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual of our young folks, and to write to the Province of Saskatchewan stating opposition to conversion therapies; and (3) and by encourage all Affirming and 2SGBTQIA+ supportive communities of faith to investigate local bylaws related to conversion therapy, and to become aware of the forms conversion therapy may take in their own communities. It was noted that the City of Saskatoon has initiated a bylaw banning conversion therapies as business practice in Saskatoon, and that the presentation to the Province of Saskatchewan has garnered no action thus far.

Delegates were invited to ask questions for clarification, or to add them to the Chat. In addition, comments and questions can be submitted to the proposal originators by email to:

livingskies@united-church.ca. The full text of the proposal was published in the Annual Meeting docket: <https://livingskiesrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SecG202.pdf>.

Shannon McCarthy introduced Remit 1: Amendment to Basis of Union Article 10.0 on Ministry Personnel. She began her presentation by explaining that Remit 1 is the first remit since our new governance structure was put in place, and that it was authorized by the 43rd General Council. A Category 1 Remit is used to address wording or editorial changes to the Basis of Union, including, replacing existing words or phrases with updated terms, and changing the gender language used for human beings in the Articles of Faith. Category 1 Remits are only considered by Regional Councils. The Regional Council must reply that they are either in favour or not in favour of the remit. They may not include conditions or comments with their reply. If 2/3 of all Regional Councils reply that they have voted in favour of the Remit, the General Council may declare that the Remit has been approved and come into effect in March 2021.

Shannon gave the background to Remit 1, advising that the 43rd General Council, in 2019: (i) approved a change to Article 10.0 of the Basis of Union to be inclusive of persons of all gender identities; and (ii) authorized this Category 1 Remit to Regional Councils to test the will of the church with respect to this change.

The Question: Does the Regional Council agree that: (a) the Order of Ministry be open to persons of all gender identities; and (b) the Basis of Union be amended to reflect this change as follows: **10.0 The Order of Ministry shall be open to persons of all gender identities.**

Current Wording: 10.0 The Order of ministry shall be open to both men and women.

Questions for clarification were invited, and it was noted that we do not have the capacity with Zoom for a secret ballot.

Charlie Klassen (they/their) spoke personally to the Remit as a non-binary person, reflecting that in a lot of narrative, they don't exist, and so the language used needs to be changed. Changing "all men and women" to "persons of all gender identities" includes everyone.

Discussion of the proposal was held, and included these thoughts:

- Concern that we not become more divisive in our language as the new wording alludes to a small group
- As with the "Black Lives Matter" movement, the specific wording of the remit makes it clear that gender identity is not a barrier
- This is a really important change for right now: including women in the Article was a big thing when they were included, and so is this for those who identify as non-binary

A point of order was raised, reminding the delegates that comments in the Chat are not visible to those joining by telephone. Shannon McCarthy advised delegates to speak out loud, and to limit discussion in the Chat.

Discussion continued:

- There are other barriers to inclusivity, including those excluding aboriginal persons, and those with disabilities
- The UC Candidacy Board does not prohibit a candidate for any of these things: it focuses on readiness, suitability and promise for ministry

- Because there has been so much gender exclusion, this wording is terrific

Rob Reed reminded the delegates that questions and comments could be submitted to livingskies@united-church.ca

To make the transition to the next proposal, Cam Fraser and friends sang a silly camp song, “There was a Great Big Moose”. Rob Reed thanked Cam for the fun, but a request for an encore was ignored.

The Proposal, *Removing or Reducing the 20% Extra Regional Assessment Regional Council Assessment for 2021*, was presented by Tricia Gerhard, Regional Council Executive Chairperson. Tricia led a walk-through the document (posted as part of the meeting docket: <https://livingskiesrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SecG202.pdf>). The proposal came from the Executive in response to letters and telephone calls expressing the challenges faced by communities of faith to be able to afford the extra 20% above their regular assessments, and their operating costs (even before the COVID pandemic). Tricia outlined the background for the decision at the 2019 Annual Meeting that authorized the 20% additional assessment for 2020 and 2021. At the time, it was a response to the grant requests from Community Ministries exceeding the funding available, and the need to support Community Ministries looking for strategies towards new or existing work that supports long term sustainability. The assessment was not intended to go towards regular operating budgets of these ministries.

Rob Reed invited the delegates to ask questions for clarification, and discussion of the proposal included the following points.

- About 8 letters, and several telephoned comments expressing the challenges of meeting the additional assessment were received through the Community of Faith Support, and the Regional Council Executive
- The role of the Edge Network is to offer funding and peer and staff support to new ministry and those changing focus ministries, and to help with access to grants and funding: <https://www.united-church.ca/edge-network-ministry-development>
- The possibility that there is middle ground between 0% and 20% additional assessment; suggestions could be added to the Chat or emailed to livingskies@united-church.ca
- The originators agreed to consider questions and comments submitted and were willing to make changes to the proposal if indicated
- Questions and concerns about how the money raised in 2020 is being used, and if there is evidence of ill-use; questions about capital vs operational funding; the intention of the funding
- It was clarified that this is not a rescinding of the motion from the 2019 Annual Meeting, but a new motion setting a new direction based on new information and changed circumstances
- In encouraging congregations to support at least one Community Ministry, it seems that a return to designated giving is becoming a reality
- A Community of Faith’s future assessment is reduced by giving to other United Church ministries
- Over \$500,000 is given to Mission and Service from Saskatchewan
- A question was asked about how this assessment impacts Community Ministries alongside national cuts to grant funding: the Regional Council has assets to prevent cuts from impacting mission grants
- We want to reach with outreach ministries to find sources of funding outside of the church; M&S givings are not growing; the additional assessment was not used to increase mission grant funding
- Community and outreach ministries are doing important works

- During this time of Stewardship campaigns, we may have a greater increase in givings when need is expressed
- Many small churches are struggling: if the additional assessment is reduced to 0% for 2021, it can always be raised again for 2022 or sometime in the future
- Community Ministries and small churches are often asked to find funding outside the church and most are already constantly doing this; and many Board Members are wearing community of faith and Community Ministry hats
- Please let us not see Community Ministries as a burden
- It is not possible to know how much the 20% has raised as assessments are still being received, and the General Council allowed deferment of payments due to COVID
- Indigenous Ministries are hanging by a finger on the cliff, with no funding without grants: United Church funding for Indigenous Ministries is funneled through the General Council Indigenous Ministry and Justice Council
- There is still funding left from the 2020 assessment to assist Community Ministries
- We could consider changing the proposal to a suggested goal, and not mandatory
- It would be helpful to have more information, i.e., financial statement, number of Communities of Faith, and budget: the 2019 financial statement is in the docket (<https://livingskiesrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SecG202.pdf>, monthly 2020 statements are available, and there are about 198 congregations, many of which are small and not served by ministry personnel
- This additional assessment was not for operational costs of Community Ministries, and 2021 Mission Support will continue at the same level as in 2020.

At the end of the time allotted for discussion, delegates were reminded to add additional comments and questions to Chat or to send them by email to livingskies@united-church.ca.

Lay and Ministry Personnel delegates in the were invited to take the two proposals and the Remit and have conversation with others to help clarify their role in the decisions to be made on November 4.

It was reported that, if there are wording changes to be made, the Business Committee will suggest changes to the proposal, and then amendments can happen at the meeting.

At the end of the discussion, delegates were advised that a reminder would be sent out next week with the link for joining the November 4 meeting.

Delegates were asked to review the docket, and to have conversations with others.

At the November 4 session, there will be a service to acknowledge celebrations and sorrows, which will include communion, so delegates were reminded to have communion elements handy.

Rob Reed led a closing prayer, acknowledging COVID fatigue, and asking God to bless us with the discomfort, anger, tears, foolishness and what we need to be able to witness to God's reign in our midst.

The delegates were thanked for their participation, and the meeting concluded at 9:07 p.m.