

**Proposal to the regional gathering of Living Skies Regional Council,
28 October and 4 November 2020**

Title: Removing or reducing the 20% extra regional assessment for 2021.

Origin: Living Skies Regional Council Executive

What is the issue?

In 2019 the Living Skies Regional Council held its inaugural Regional Council meeting in Swift Current. During that meeting conversation focused on the ongoing financial support of the Regional Council's twelve [Community Ministries](#) which had been receiving Mission Support Grants from the national church, and additional support from presbyteries and SK Conference. Decreasing Mission Support Grants and the financial and relational impact of the end of presbyteries raised concerns in the council about the longer term viability and sustainability of these ministries.

After much discussion it was decided that a 20% regional assessment **in addition to** the regular assessment would be collected in 2020 and 2021 only, with the funds dedicated to supporting community ministries. Please see this October 2019 [letter to all communities of faith](#) for details. The anticipated revenue for 2020 is \$110,000. Later discussion in the Executive and its Regional Assessment Task Group clarified that the goal of the assessment funds was to support strategies towards new or existing work that supports long term sustainability, and is not intended to go towards regular operating budgets of these ministries.

Why this issue is important:

Over the last year the Executive has received several letters from Communities of Faith indicating that the additional regional assessment was creating financial strain and that governing bodies were having to decide whether or not they were able to pay the Regional Assessment. Concerns were also raised around how the additional assessment was going to be used within the Region. These concerns were present even before the COVID pandemic created great financial strain for many Communities of Faith.

At the same time, the Regional Council is aware of the importance of each of these ministries to our life and ministry. Their ministry ensures a United Church presence, commitment, and witness in parts of the wider community where we might not otherwise have a presence. The impact of long-term declines in Mission Support Grants via Mission and Service givings, the loss of funding and (perhaps more importantly) relationships through presbyteries, and changes in social contexts in Saskatchewan, all add to the pressure facing community ministries. In both 2019 and 2020, the Executive took funds from its operating budget or funds from former presbyteries or Conference to make up the reduction in Mission Support Grants. However, this will not be a permanent option.

How the Regional Council might respond to this issue:

Hearing these concerns, and recognizing that the current global pandemic is causing unforeseen financial strain within communities of faith, the Living Skies Regional Council Executive makes the following proposals:

- To respond to community of faith needs in this time of crisis by removing or reducing the special 2021 regional assessment of 20%;
- The Regional Council will continue to support the Regional Council Community Ministries by using the 20% assessment funds collected in 2020 to help them find ways to be financially sustainable and vision new ways of carrying out their ministry. We acknowledge and affirm the importance of these ministries, and continue to seek ways to ensure their support.
- To respond to mission-supported ministries' needs by:
 - again inviting them to name their needs, this time through at least one online consultation and in ongoing conversations with groups of ministries;
 - by continuing to promote their ministry, resources, action requests, and needs through Regional Council communication channels as requested.
 - by assessing with them which needs are financial and which are related to other concerns, such as finding new volunteers, improving communications, building new relationships, adapting to changing contexts in Saskatchewan, etc;
 - by connecting them to long-term sustainability resources in the EDGE Network and elsewhere, using the proceeds of the 2020 20% regional assessment to cover related costs.

Proposal:

That Living Skies Regional Council (LSRC) reduce the special regional assessment for 2021 to 0% and that instead, funding that is available from the 2020 assessment be directed to assisting community ministries within the regional council to explore and develop diverse ways of becoming more financially sustainable.

That LSRC encourage communities of faith to support at least one community ministry.

That the Executive and the Regional Assessment Task Group set up at least one meeting with the mission-grant supported ministries, and at least one meeting between them and the EDGE Network.