

MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE – 2019 - 2020

Chairperson	Tricia Gerhard	Treasurer	Donna Brown
Member	Ron Brandow	Member	Tim Ellis
Member	Cam Fraser	Member	Linda Gunningham
Member	Brian Maitland	Member	Yujene Oh
Member	Dave Whalley		
Convenor of the Regional Gathering	Rob Reed		
Executive Minister	Shannon McCarthy	Program Assistant	Jamie Mckay

LIVING SKIES REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE REPORT

It has been a year since we gathered for our inaugural Living Skies Regional Council Gathering in Swift Current, and what a year it has been. Your Regional Council Executive has been working hard on your behalf, and it has been my privilege to be in team with these fine folks as Executive Chair. I have to admit, that when I volunteered to take on this position last year, I might have done it with a different vision of what chairing executive would look like. After all, my experience of Executive had been exclusively under the old structure. I do not regret taking on the task (most the time), and part of the reason for that is the amazing team that makes up the Executive and the Regional Council staff.

Before I launch into a litany of the things that we have done as an Executive, I want to offer some gratitudes first. First, it goes without saying (except here I am saying it) that the leadership of our Regional Council staff and Executive Minister has been exceptional. Shannon, Jamie, Tracy, Julie, Bev, Kent, and Heather have carried their workloads with grace, wisdom, humour, and compassion. Their gifts and skills offered to the Region have helped not only the Executive, but Communities of Faith, Clusters, Networks and Community Ministries (RAPM, ICM, chaplains, prison ministry camps etc.) make sound, faithful decisions and they have pushed, when appropriate, for thinking outside the box. Thank you. We are fully aware that this past year has not been easy for any of you, so we are deeply grateful for all that you do.

This was the first year where the role of President was split into two positions: Convenor of the Annual Meeting and Executive Chair. Rob Reed was acclaimed into the Convenor role last year, and I am exceedingly thankful for that. In the past year, Rob has been the voice of support and vision for the Executive and the Region. He has spoken and written words of support, care, and guidance for the Region in the wake of structure change, cancelled events, shooting violence, and pandemic restrictions. There is deep gratitude for his calm, pastoral, and witty presence – even though he does play the banjo.

The Executive – this fine team of eight dedicated folk agreed to be part of this leadership team and I am hoping that they haven't regretted it too much. We are a diverse group of people who are dedicated to the life and work of this Region and to the Church as a whole. This is witnessed by their willingness to meet monthly, take on extra tasks, and to deal with decisions in a timely and faithful way. Brian, Cameron, Dave, Donna, Linda, Ron, Tim and Yujene have worked together with integrity, grace and a huge amount of patience. As chair, I am deeply thankful for each of them.

The Region – in the midst of the structural change and the ultimate settling into this new way of being, the roles for members of the Region has shifted and changed. Some of you saw the end of roles you have held for years, others saw the things you were passionate about put on

the back burner. But in the midst of all the change and shift, you have stepped up and into new opportunities. So much of the work that happens in the Region requires the volunteer time of both lay folk and clergy – there were new committees to set up, existing committees that now needed to find new ways of functioning... the opportunities have been numerous. Without these committees, clusters, task groups and networks, the work of the Region would not happen. Thank you. Thank you for sharing your time, and your skills. And if you aren't involved at the moment, and would like to be... well, I am sure there's a position out there just for you. Please be in contact with our Nominations Committee – they'd love to hear from you!

So, now you might just be wondering what the Executive has done this year. As you can imagine, there was lots to do, some of it fun and some of it heart-wrenching. There have been moments when we felt like we were simply spinning our wheels, rubber stamping decisions, and doing our best to keep the lights on in the Region. Other times we were paving the way for new ways to be church, dreaming about the future of our Region, and thinking about the vision and mission of Living Skies. Here are a few things that the Executive has done in the last year:

- Supporting the work of our Regional Staff
- Making decisions regarding policies and structure format
- Creating efficient methods of communication
- Establishing and distributing bridging grants for Regional Ministries (Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry, Inner City Ministry, Camps, the North and South Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincies etc)
- Budget and finance administration
- Support for Regional Gathering Planning Committee
- Assessment follow up
- Renewing the contracts for Kent Mohn, Youth and Young Adult staff person
- Renewing and sharing the contract for Julie Graham, 1/3 shared position
- Conversation and decision making around issues in pastoral relations, funding requests, support of Indigenous Church, establishing task groups to work on Assessment usage, vision and mission of Region, working on process for establishing the mission and vision of Living Skies Regional Council, establishing supports for ministries and camps around funding and fundraising.
- Seeking ways to share ministry across the three regions (Northern Spirit, Living Skies, and Prairie to Pine) in terms of staff and programming.

One of the hardest decisions that we deal with surrounds funding. As it is well known, the grants that we receive from the National Church fund our Regional Council Staff (1/3 of Julie's contract, and 100% of Tracy, Heather, Kent, and Bev). This money also funds our clusters and networks, grants for Ministries and Camps, and shared costs such as rent, equipment and supplies, among other things. In our first year as a Regional Council we ran into the challenge that the amount of money we had available for the grants requested by the Ministries (such as RAPM, ICM, prison ministry, chaplaincies and camps) could not cover the entire amounts requested. Without Presbytery, some of the ministries that received funds from Presbytery alone now had to apply to the Region. This meant that the amount of money that we had left for grants had to be spread farther. This is much the same this year as well. The Grants Committee has been responsible for the incredibly hard job of distributing the grant monies. The reality is that the grant requests were not given in full. Many of the ministries received significantly less than what they needed.

At the 2019 Regional Gathering, it was decided by the court that there would be a bridging fund of \$100,000 put in place to help our ministries fill in the funding gaps for 2019, and that there would be a Regional Assessment collected from the Communities of Faith that would be

used to help these ministries in 2020 and 2021. The bridging money was distributed as equitably as possible and now, a task group is working through how the Regional Assessment can be best used to support our Ministries and Camps. We are very aware that this Regional Assessment addition has been a challenge for some of our Communities of Faith to meet, and we appreciate the feedback and concerns you have voiced over the last few months. Finding more money in already tight budgets isn't easy and we were hoping to have further conversation about the assessment at the 2020 Regional Gathering. With the cancelation of this event due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are looking into other ways to engage in conversation regarding the Assessments.

It's been a full year in the new Governance Structure, and while there are still some bumps and curvy roads on this journey, I believe that we are doing the very best we can be. Not everyone will be happy with the decisions made but that is the reality of working as a community. What is important is that as a Region we work toward creating a church that reflects our common vision of what church in Living Skies looks and acts like. Most of all, like most communities and life in Saskatchewan, the church here is resilient. This next year we will work together on identifying and fleshing out our Vision and Mission as a Regional Council, as well as making decisions around how to be church in this time and place. We've faced challenges this last year, culminating in the Coronavirus Pandemic that has changed the way we do church, and despite these challenges, the church still remains an ambassador of God's presence in the world.

People of Living Skies Regional Council, you are the hands and feet of the Holy in this place. As we step into the next year of our life together, may we do so with confidence, faith, grace and love, so much love. Blessings to each of you.

Respectfully Submitted,
Tricia Gerhard,
Chair, Living Skies Regional Council Executive.

EXECUTIVE MINISTER REPORT

Well this has been an interesting year in the lives of our Regional Council! This was our first full year in operation with the structures that we created through the transition, and just when we thought things were running smoothly and we were getting in a groove...COVID 19 happened. So here we are in the fall of 2020 having online meetings that were originally supposed to happen in May and June, and life has changed dramatically in the last 6 months.

I was blessed to be able to take a Sabbatical in December, January and February to read, study and get in some needed Sabbath. That seems like a very long time ago now! I do want to thank all the staff who covered for me, especially the three Pastoral Relations Ministers: Judy Hare, Tracy Murton, and Earl Reaburn. They took on the difficult job of doing their own work as well as taking on some of mine and I truly appreciate it.

The Regional Council Executive has continued the work of establishing procedures and connections for the Regional Council, trying to vision and set the goals for the ongoing work of the Regional Council. They have tried to do this while also learning what it means to be intercultural and make decisions in a new way. We are also committed to working with all the councils of our denomination to work towards becoming an Anti-racist church. Thank you to the Executive for their commitment and faithfulness!

Much of the work of the Regional Council is still about establishing relationships with Communities of Faith, Incorporated Ministries, Camps as well as trying to enable the formation of clusters and networks. There are many demands for time, attention and financial assistance and unfortunately your Executive has had to make hard decisions about where to allocate staff time, financial resources and people resources. We are also committed to working with all the councils of our church to work towards becoming an Anti-racist church.

The transition from Conferences and Presbyteries to Regional Councils is still new, luckily one of the blessings of that transition is that we were in a better position when we were forced to work from home due to COVID 19, because all the staff are now using the same laptops and software programs we were able to adjust quickly. During this time I think our staff did an amazing job maintaining connection, providing support, calmly offering as much information as possible and thanks to our new websites we were able to communicate quickly! Special thanks to everyone who got the websites up and running just in time, especially Jamie McKay, Julie Graham, Cherry Abad, Bev Diebert, and Kathy Jackson. It was also a benefit that many of our committees and commissions were already familiar with Zoom and we were able to make decisions quickly to support Ministry Personnel and Communities of Faith in this difficult time.

I am always amazed at the ability of our church to come together during difficult times, I am confident that regardless of the challenges that the year ahead will bring the people of our Regional Council will meet them head on with prayerfulness, determination and faithfulness.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shannon McCarthy,
Executive Minister
Northern Spirit, Living Skies, and Prairie to Pine Regional Councils.