

MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE – 2020 - 2021

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

This past year has been a mix of challenge and success with the Executive continuing to navigate leadership and decision making during the on-going Coronavirus pandemic. To be honest, we had been hopeful that life would return to a closer semblance of normal by the time we would need to gather for our Regional Council Gathering, but as we well know, that is not the case. However, pandemic or not, the work and ministry of the Regional Council, and in particular the Executive, has continued.

The Executive continues to meet virtually once a month to do the work of the Region. Over the past year, we have continued to uphold the dedication of the Region to its Community Ministries through ongoing work to find ways to not only financially support their work through grants but also to work together toward continued and independent sustainability so that the Community Ministries can continue offering their needed and important service and ministry well into the future. This process is on-going, with a task group of the Executive looking at how to offer this support in partnership with the ministries.

During the past year, the Executive has worked along side several committees and commissions to ensure that the pastoral health of our communities of faith and their leaders - both clergy and lay – continues to be supported; that property, grants and nominations decisions are recognized and honoured; and that the on-going work of task groups and planning teams are supported.

The past year has brought many issues for the Executive to discuss and find ways to either offer response or education. Some of the issues that came to the Executive in 2020 include:

- The United Church Remit regarding the movement to gender neutral language in the Basis of Union
- Communication needs of the Region in particular the establishment and launch of the Living Skies Website
- Financial status of the Region
- The homophobic vandalism of churches in Saskatoon
- The Regional Assessment of Communities of Faith
- Pandemic response and support
- Universal Living Wage
- Racism and anti-racism within the church and the movement to becoming an intercultural, anti-racist church
- Increased health insurance premiums faced by retirees

This is just a small glimpse of the work of Executive. As you can imagine the Pandemic and our response to it has taken up a lot of time and has slowed down a lot of the work done in the Region.

There are many things that we haven't been able to get to. We are sharply aware of the need for a Regional mission and vision statement. We are aware that we need to discern practical and supportable ways to function as a Region given the reality of decreasing National Church funding. We know that there will be much on the horizon for us to wrestle with as we live into the reality of a post pandemic church.

There are days, I admit, where it feels like we are just hanging on. That the Executive is too busy trying to "keep the lights" on to give time to dreaming and visioning. When these moments threaten to pull me under, I find that taking a moment to give thanks helps to refocus my thinking. When my thinking is refocused, I am better able to see the work of the Executive and the Region in light of the justice seeking, life affirming decisions made.

So I want to end my report with gratitude. I am deeply grateful for the continued dedication, wisdom and passion of the Executive members. Yujene, Dave, Brian, Tim, Linda, Cam, Ron, and Donna have worked hard and with deep integrity over the past year. This Executive, this group of leaders, continue to gather and to work together to make sure that our Regional Council lives out its truth and its ministry. Did you know that we've never met in person? We only know each other as a virtual gathering! I am deeply thankful for the gentle, calm presence that Rob Reed brings to our meetings. In his role as Annual Gathering Convenor Rob gracefully navigated the challenge of a virtual gathering. Most importantly, I am grateful for his support and care throughout this last year. Together Rob and I work to represent the Region pastorally and administratively.

This Executive works with the finest Regional Staff in the country: Jamie, Bev, Kent, Heather, Tracy, and Julie. This Region and the Executive are continually blessed by the gifts these folks bring to the work they do. There are not enough words to truly express the gratitude that the Executive and I have for our staff. All of them have shifted and adjusted to the changing dynamics of the church during this pandemic year with grace and integrity. The creativity, compassion, and dedication each of them has given to their work and this region is incredible. This past year has not been easy for any of them, and the workload is immense. "Thank you" does not cover the gratitude we hold for each of you.

Our Executive Minister, Shannon McCarthy, has the joy of not only working with Living Skies Region. Shannon has the unenviable task of dividing her time across three regions. Even though travel has not been possible this year, Shannon has maintained her connections with each region in endless zoom calls, phone calls, webinars, and text messages. In the past year, Shannon has continued to offer us strong leadership and incredible presence. Her knowledge, support and patience (and her sense of humour) are so appreciated, not only by the Executive but also by me.

Living Skies Regional Council and the Executive continue to show me what it means to be resilient. The church is important to the people of Living Skies Region. It is my honour to be the Chair of Executive and in my role, to represent this Region in the province and the country. I celebrate you, your faith, and your prairie resilience. May you always know that the Executive and it's Chair are here to support you, and to walk beside you as we do this thing called faith together.

Respectfully submitted with gratitude and love,
Rev. Tricia Gerhard,

EXECUTIVE MINISTER REPORT

Here we are at another Annual Meeting, and once again it is online, it goes without saying that this has been a year like no other in our world or for the church. It is hard to believe that we have been through two 'pandemic' Easter seasons now and we are doing the work and worship of the church in ways that we never have before, we are learning and refining, discovering and connecting in new ways. As we reflect back on this time I believe that we will see that this pandemic has shifted some of our work patterns permanently.

Since our last gathering I have been asked to preach and send greetings in worship services I might not have been able to if the services were held in person and that has been a gift. I have been able to enjoy the worship leadership of so many more of you than I was able to do previously and that has been a pleasure.

Technology has continued to make the work of our Regional Council Executive, commissions and committees possible through the various lockdowns and distancing restrictions. However, as many of you can attest zoom fatigue is real and we need to take deliberate time away from our screens for our own physical and mental health. The Executive has worked hard to make good decisions and to build relationships, to discern and discuss. I want to thank them for their work, it hasn't always been easy but they have done it with grace and patience. I particularly want to thank Tricia Gerhard, Chair of the Executive, for her dedication to this work, and for the strong voice she shared representing our Regional Council at the Provincial level, navigating the health of our congregations with government and other religious leaders. Thanks as well go to Rob Reed, Convenor for his leadership. We wish Rob well as he finishes his term as Convenor at this Annual Meeting, I have appreciated his sense of humour and patience as we navigated doing our Celebrations of Ministry in unprecedented times.

Your Regional Council staff have continued to work through the pandemic, to provide resources and advice, to offer council and support. I want to thank them for their continued dedication to their work, their persistence in difficult times, and their patience in navigating the shifting sands of the pandemic.

As we look towards fall 2021 and 2022 I hope that we can celebrate together all that we did to continue worshiping and working together as the United Church in Living Skies Regional Council, to take pride in new skills learned, difficult times shared, and the shared commitment to keeping our members and communities safe.

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