

MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE – 2021 - 2022

Chairperson	Tricia Gerhard
Treasurer	Donna Brown (resigned September 23, 2021)
Treasurer	VACANT
Member	Ron Brandow
Member	Tim Ellis
Member	Linda Gunningham
Member	Kathleen James-Cavan
Member	Brian Maitland (resigned October 28, 2021)
Member	VACANT
Member	Piotr Strzelecki
Member	Dave Whalley
Executive Minister	Shannon McCarthy
Program Assistant	Jamie Mckay

LIVING SKIES REGIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE REPORT

Over the last two years, Living Skies Regional Council has done its very best to offer ministry, pastoral care, and outreach to its people and communities during a, dare I say it, unprecedented time. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to shape and shift the lives of our congregations and region, and these changes have been the source of grief and creativity. I will admit, this second year of the pandemic has seen many of us growing weary: tired of preaching to cameras, desperately wanting to reconnect with our communities in ways that feel “normal”, and just wanting to get on with the life and work of the church in ways that feel familiar and beneficial. The adrenaline of the first year has worn off, and we have settled into a holding pattern, waiting for the “next thing” to happen.

Now, I'm not intending this report to you to be all doom and gloom. I want to acknowledge and hold space for the myriad of emotions that each one of us has carried and is carrying during this time. I would be remiss if I didn't allow recognition of the grief that we feel because of all we've had to give up and shift away from during these last two years. This grief is connected to the fact that we've had to let go of so many of the things that bring us comfort, that help us to navigate life together, and that help us mark important moments in life. We've forgone worship in person, or we've limited the number of people who can be together, funerals have been postponed or have taken place in smaller ways, community events have been canceled, postponed, or moved to virtual-only, and our daily patterns and routines have shifted and shifted again to fulfill mandates and restrictions. And it has sucked.

Pauline Boss, the author of “The Myth of Closure: Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic and Change”, points out that in the midst of this loss and stress, flexibility and growth can help us adapt and thrive even when the world is harsh. Resilience, this ability to bend and change in order to shape life (and ministry) in a new way all the while acknowledging the changes that have taken place, is a key factor in navigating the grief and loss that has been experienced during the pandemic. Over this past year the communities of faith of this region, their leadership, and the region itself has shown this resilience. This resilience and the changes we have made to meet the needs of our church will last as we continue into the next stages of this pandemic and into our future. It has shown us that we are able to shift when needed and has given us the ability to look with hope into our future as a church in this province.

This is my last term as Chair of the Living Skies Regional Council Executive. As we transition into a new year, I want to highlight some of the work that the Executive has done last year. I am so very thankful for the members of the Executive, who have shown dedication, compassion, and a whole lot of patience as we worked together. We continued to have monthly meetings over zoom, ever hopeful that we would have the opportunity to meet in person – but alas, that was not to be. This past year we bid farewell to Rev Brian Maitland and Donna Brown, with thanks for the time and wisdom they offered. We welcomed Rev. Piotr Strzelecki, Rev. Deborah Springer, and Rev. Kathleen James-Cavan to the executive. I am deeply thankful for each member of this executive. I am also deeply grateful for our Regional staff. Shannon, Jamie, Bev, Heather, Kent, Tracy, Julie, and Madeleine work exceptionally hard for Living Skies. Their gifts of knowledge, compassion, wisdom, and gentle prodding are valuable and essential to the life and work of this Region of ours. And then there are the myriad of volunteers who sit on committees, task groups, commissions, and networks. These are the folk who gather names for nominations, walk congregations through property issues, who navigate pastoral relations issues, who facilitate the Affirming process for the region, help lead youth retreats and clergy gatherings, and many other pieces of work. Volunteers who are essential to the ministry of this region. Thank you for all the ways you offer your time and talents.

So, what did the Executive do this year? Good question. Here are some highlights:

- Established an Affirming Task Group
- Worked on finding ways to support the community outreach ministries and camps here in the region – working with Edge to establish a position for grant support.
- Continued to find ways to support communities of faith during the pandemic
- Discontinued the Regional Assessment for 2021 but established a Community Outreach fund where congregations could donate monies that would be distributed equally among the ministries and camps in the region
- Established a rotational model for Regional Gathering Meetings for the three Regional Councils that Shannon McCarthy is Executive Minister for – a three-year cycle with one in-person meeting and two virtual meetings. In 2023 there will be an in-person meeting in all three of the regions and then in 2024 the rotation will begin with Living Skies having an in-person meeting while the other two regions are virtual, and 2025/2026 will be virtual for our region
- Signed and supported the Interfaith Statement on Climate Change, a letter seeking to support the funding request of the Circles of Support and Accountability program to the Government of Canada,
- Created a Justice Committee and are searching for members to start this work
- Continue to offer mission grants to North and South Saskatchewan Chaplaincies, ICM, RAPM, Micah Mission, Parkland Restorative Justice, United Church Camps, and other ministries in our Region
- Support and resource for letter writing in response to Camp Hope and the change in the Saskatchewan Income Support Program (SIS)
- Support and financial considerations for the implementation of the Rural Connect Program in Living Skies Region
- Financial Support for UCW, clusters, learning opportunities, youth events
- On-going work with the Regional Youth Staff position
- Encouraged participation in the Tri Region Snow and Ice Art competition

These are just some of the highlights of the work that has taken place this year. It hasn't always been easy, but grace has been abundant in our discussions. As we continue our work, please hold the executive, the staff, and the leadership of this region in your prayers. Consider

where you might be able to offer your gifts and skills in volunteer positions. Most of all, know that each and everyone one of you has been a source of support and encouragement to the work of the Region.

As my term ends, and I leave the region to move to Winnipeg, I want to thank you for your support and encouragement over the last three years. Together we've moved into a new church structure, we've tried to figure out how this region will function and thrive in this new way of being, AND we've navigated all of this during a pandemic. Whew. Surely God's spirit is in this place. Friends, you are amazing. You are loved. You are not alone.

Thanks be to God

Submitted with Gratitude,
Rev. Tricia Gerhard,
Chair, Living Skies Regional Council Executive