

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES**Pastoral Relations Commission**

Member	Jen Dresser
Member	Marvin Mackie
Member	Donna Rumpel
Member	Miles Russell
Member	Janelle Shaw
Pastoral Relations Minister	Tracy Murton
Administrative Staff	Bev Diebert

Property Commission

Convenor	Annette Taylor
Member	Bev Kostichuk
Member	George Thurlow
Member	Daryl Woods
Member	Jonathan Zacharias
Member	Bob McPherson
Staff – Executive Minister	Shannon McCarthy

Grants Committee

Convenor	Leslee Whalley
Member	Barry Balls
Member	Vic Wiebe
Member	VACANT
Staff - Minister: Justice / Communication	Julie Graham
Staff – Financial Administrator	Heather Dootoff

Nominations Committee

Co-Convenor	Jeannette Warrian
Co-Convenor	Yvonne Terry
Member	Jordan Cantwell
Member	Nobuko Iwai
Member	VACANT

Regional Council Meeting Planning Committee:

Convenor	Miles Russell
Convenor of the Regional Gathering	Darrell Reine
Member	Chantalle Morrow-Fesciuc
Member	Brian Tudor
Member	Darrell Woods
Staff - Admin	Bev Diebert

Committee on Community of Faith Support

Member	Bill Pollock
Member	Deborah Smith
Member	VACANT
Member	VACANT
Staff – Pastoral Relations Minister	Tracy Murton

Committee on Lay Leadership Support

Member	Tricia Challoner
Member	Andrew Hecker
Member	Doreen Hewitson
Member	Sheila Ivanochko
Staff – Pastoral Relations Minister	Tracy Murton

Committee on Ministry Personnel Support

Member	Joy Cowan
Member	Michele Rowe
Member	Pam Thomas
Staff – Pastoral Relations Minister	Tracy Murton

PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMISSION

The Pastoral Relations Commission (PRC) meets on the 1st Thursday of each month (unless circumstances intervene) September to June via Zoom. Between regular meetings, the PRC uses a variety of platforms including phone meetings, email polls and special Zoom meetings to conduct emerging business. The deadline for submissions from communities of faith or ministry personnel is the Friday previous to the meeting.

The current members of the Pastoral Relations Commission are Marvin Mackie (chair), Jen Dresser, Miles Russell, Janelle Shaw and Donna Rumpel. They are assisted by Tracy Murton, Pastoral Relations Minister and Bev Diebert, Admin Support Staff.

This Report covers from May 5, 2023 to April 15, 2024.

The Commission has approved seven Community of Faith (C of F) Profiles for posting to Church Hub. The PRC has also reviewed many other C of F Profiles with suggestions for clarification. The two areas that typically are deficient are statistics about financial viability and job description for the ministry personnel, particularly in part-time situations.

The PRC appointed 32 pastoral charge supervisors to those communities of faith that are without settled ministry personnel, and one liaison to those communities of faith that are in the process of developing profiles, or to assist search committees. Many of these positions are vacant as it is difficult to find volunteers to fill them.

The Pastoral Relations Commission approved a variety of requests:

Completed calls: three full-time.

Completed appointments: two full-time and 16 part-time.

Change in pastoral relations: 15

Supervised Ministry Education learning sites: 4

Voluntary Associate Minister: 8

Collaborative Agreement between pastoral charges: one completed and several in the discussion stage.

All of the Pastoral Relations Commission Policies can be found on the Living Skies Region website. They are also reported in the "Pastoral Relations Ponderings" section of the "Regional Rambler."

Two requests were sent to the Executive of Living Skies Regional Council:

1. Because of the difficulty in recruiting pastoral charge supervisors, an investigation be made of how paid supervisors could be implemented. This was deferred because the Region is undergoing extensive discussions with regard to dwindling resources.
2. That pastoral charge supervisors and liaisons be paid travel expenses at the General Council rate when travel was required for work on behalf of the Region. This was approved by the Executive. (For 2024, GC rate is 55¢/km)

As the result of a decision made by the Pastoral Relations Commission with regard to a retired minister and a Collaborative Ministry Agreement between two pastoral charges, an appeal was launched with the Judicial Committee of the General Council. An interim decision was in favour of the plaintive, but the final decision will be made by General Council Executive in October. This decision may affect the role of an incumbent minister when a Collaborative Ministry Agreement is negotiated between pastoral charges.

One of the highlights of this year is the development of a Collaborative Ministry Agreement among five Regina and area pastoral charges. Among other benefits, this agreement would see the sharing of the services of 2.5 full-time ministers to meet the needs of these communities of faith in a practical, collaborative way. The sharing of resources, both paid and volunteer will support the ministry and provide stability and financial sustainability for communities of faith.

The Pastoral Relations Commission hopes that this process will provide a pattern for other pastoral charges and communities of faith to implement as human and financial resources further diminish in every part of the Region.

Marvin Mackie (Lay) and Miles Russell (OM) have completed their second three-year term and will be retiring from the Pastoral Relations Commission at the rise of the Regional Gathering. It has been an interesting and rewarding experience serving on the PRC and we wish all the best to the incoming members. Marvin and Miles would suggest that the balance of members (male-female, lay-ministry, etc.) was excellent, but geographically was skewed towards the eastern end of the Region. Perhaps the Nominations Committee could keep this in mind as they recruit new members.

Respectfully submitted
Marvin Mackie
Chair Pastoral Relations Commission

PROPERTY COMMISSION

Background

The purpose of the Living Skies Regional Council Property Commission is to make decisions related to property matters on behalf of the Living Skies Regional Council. The Property Commission makes these decisions within the scope of regional responsibilities as set out in C.2.6 of The Manual and property policies adopted by the regional council. The Property Commission also makes recommendations to the Regional Council (or its Executive) for new regional policies related to property matters. In addition, in September 2019, the LSRC Regional Council Executive gave the Property Commission the authority to approve the disbanding of communities of faith.

This report includes the work of the Property Commission from May 2023 to April 2024. During the year, the Commission has met via video conferencing ten times. The Property Commission is comprised of Annette Taylor (chair), Bev Kostichuk (secretary), George Thurlow (chair of cemetery sub-committee), Daryl Woods, Jonathon Zacharias, Bob McPherson and Executive Minister, Shannon McCarthy.

Communities of Faith – Property/Disbanding Decisions

The Property Commission is keeping a working list of communities of faith that are considering property transactions (sale, purchase, rental, etc) and/or are requesting to be disbanded. As of April 30, 2024, the Commission is in communication with eighteen communities of faith. Two communities of faith have already received approval to list or tender their properties (both churches) and another nine are considering the sale of property. One community of faith is considering renovations or repairs. Nine communities of faith are in the process of disbanding and two are in the process of amalgamation.

We are also in the process of preparing a complete list of manses in Living Skies Regional Council. We have a partial list, provided by General Council, and will be asking attendees at

the regional council meeting to identify other manses in their area.

Since May 1, 2023 the Property Commission has approved the following decisions regarding properties belonging to communities of faith:

Approved Repairs/Renovations

- Regina – Westminster United Church Roof Repair (\$100,000) – April 12, 2024

Approved Sales - date sale approved / date transfer completed

- Shamrock United Church (to town for \$1) – June 9, 2023 / July 25, 2023
- Bethune United Church (to village for \$500) – June 9, 2023 / October 25, 2023
- Strasbourg United Church (\$100,000) – July 14, 2023 / April 10, 2024
- Carrot United Church selling Moose Range Property (\$1,000) – July 14, 2023 / February 16, 2024
- McCord - Grasslands Pastoral Charge Manse (\$45,000) – September 16, 2023 / November 24, 2023
- Radville Pastoral Charge Manse (\$89,500) – December 8, 2023 / December 15, 2023
- Regina - Wesley United Church (\$1,910,000) – December 8, 2023 / February 5, 2024
- Edam - Trinity United Church (to village for \$1) – December 8, 2023 / December 19, 2023

Disbanding

Since May 1, 2023, three congregations have officially disbanded:

- Saskatoon – St. Thomas Wesley United Church – August 18, 2023
- Penzance United Church – March 8, 2024
- Bethune United Church – April 12, 2024

LSRC Properties

Abandoned Congregational Properties

The Property Commission is continuing our work to sell or transfer abandoned properties within the regional council. Some are being transferred to the village or rural municipality and others are being sold to neighbouring landowners. In the past year, the Property Commission has sold three properties. We currently have a list of twelve abandoned properties.

Sales Approved – date sale approved / date transfer completed

- RM of Maple Creek - formerly Methodist Church (empty lot for \$500) – August 18, 2023 / November 15, 2023
- RM of Orkney – formerly Methodist Church (empty lot for \$500) – March 8, 2024 / April 16, 2024
- RM of Rocanville – Hillburn United Church (empty lot for \$500) – March 8, 2024 / April 11, 2024

Cemeteries

The Property Commission is working with a list of forty-two cemeteries that are no longer connected to an active community of faith. Where possible, we are attempting to transfer responsibility to the rural municipality. If the rural municipality is unwilling to take responsibility and no one is currently caring for the property, then we endeavour to find someone to cut the lawn for a fee. There are many cemeteries that are currently being cared for by local individuals or organizations and we are setting up protocols for oversight of these properties. Since May 1, 2023, no property decisions have been made regarding cemeteries.

Moats Land

A Joint Moats Committee has been formed with St. Andrew's College. The creation of this committee will allow the College and the Regional Council to work together when we consider offers for surface or mineral rights on the Moats Land. With the recommendation of the Property Commission, the LSRC Executive has approved the negotiation for the sale of the surface rights of the Moats Land with the understanding that the Living Skies Regional Council and St. Andrew's College would continue to own the mineral rights. In January, 2024, the Commission approved the hiring jointly with St. Andrew's College of Aaron Ludwig of Kohaly, Elash Ludwig Law Firm for the purpose of exploring the sale of the Moats land surface rights.

Bequests

The Property Commission is currently working with lawyers to argue that Living Skies Regional Council is the appropriate recipient of bequests that have been made to two disbanded United Church congregations.

Property Handbook and Policies

The Property Commission continues to update the *Handbook on Church Property Matters* and the *Property Policy and Processes* document, as required. Current versions of these documents are available on the *Policies & Guidelines* page of the Living Skies Regional Council website <https://livingskiesrc.ca/governance-admin/policies/>

Bequest Policy

The Property Commission provided a draft bequest policy to the Executive for their February, 2024 in-person meeting. The policy was approved by the Executive and is now available on the LSRC website.

National Consultation on Property

At our July meeting, the Commission heard a report from the National Consultation on Property that took place on June 13, 2023. The attendees agreed it was helpful to talk to other people in The United Church who are working on property issues. As a result of the consultation, the Commission has requested 1) an inventory of resources (e.g., architects, realtors, lawyers, etc.) and 2) the formation of a small group interested in working with cemeteries.

Conclusion

On behalf of the members of the Property Commission I want to acknowledge what a privilege it is to work with communities of faith during the difficult process of transition and closure. I also want to recognize the large workload that this small group of people has undertaken. Much appreciation to all the members of the Property Commission for your dedication and compassion as you work to support communities of faith through a process that is often spiritually, emotionally, mentally and even physically challenging.

Respectfully Submitted by
Annette Taylor
Chair, Living Skies Regional Council Property Commission

GRANTS COMMITTEE

The Grants committee met three times by zoom in 2023 and met face to face in October for the first time since the pandemic started. Members of the committee are Leslee Whalley, Chair, Vic Wiebe, Barry Balls, and staff support Julie Graham and Heather Dootoff. We have been approved by Executive Council to have up to 5 people on the Committee. You do not need special financial knowledge to be on the committee, just a commitment to assess applications and allocate the grants from Mission Service. The grant amounts allocated for 2024 are listed at the end of this report. Applications for 2025 are now being accepted until the August 31 deadline. The application form information is posted on the Living Skies Regional Council website. The Regional Assessment Fund grant is available to Mission Support recipients for initiatives of sustainability not developed through EDGE. The committee is also working on criteria and an application form for the extra assessment collected. The Living Skies funding page is complete but it will continue to be updated as needed. It can be found under Resources/Funding on the website. The information provided is for grants available through the National Office, Mission Support, and Living Skies Regional Council. Regional Council funding is from monies left to the region by various former presbyteries, Saskatchewan Conference, and other groups. Information on forms for the various grants is also posted on the funding page. There is a great amount of information about grants available for any community of faith. There have been some grants allocated from the Ina Grafton Gage Grant and the Meewasin Valley United Church Outreach Fund. The Grants Committee continues to work with the executive in getting the information out regarding grants. Please contact Leslee Whalley (ldwhalley@sasktel.net) with any inquiries about Living Skies Regional Grants.

Allocation of M & S Grants for 2024 totalling \$125,000

Camp Tapawingo –	\$ 2,000
South Sask Hospital -	\$20,000
North Sask Hospital --	\$20,000
U of Sask Chaplaincy -	\$ 5,000
Regina Anti-Poverty(RAPM) –	\$35,000
Riverbend Integrated Community(ICM) –	\$25,000
LaRonge United Church	++++++
COSA – South Saskatchewan	\$ 1,500
Parkland Restorative Justice –	\$ 2,000
Wellman Lake Camp	\$ 1,000
Prairie Centre for Ecumenism -	<u>\$ 1,000</u>
	\$112,500
	++ <u>\$12,500</u>
	\$125,000

+++There is \$12,500 being kept in reserve for LaRonge United Church should they call a minister in 2024. If not, it will be added to the money allocated in 2025.

Respectfully submitted by
Leslee Whalley

LIVING SKIES JUSTICE COMMITTEE REPORT

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?” *Micah 6:8*

Membership & Opportunities

The team currently consists of the following members:

- Rev. SunDo Hyun (Serving Grace United Church, Meadow Lake, SK.
- Chantalle Morrow-Fesciuc (Riverbend Integrated Community Ministries, Inc. Saskatoon, SK), icmsaskatoon@gmail.com
- Rev. Jon Worrall (Serving Melfort United Church, Melfort, SK), rev.jonworrall@gmail.com
- Staff support: Julie Graham (Regional Council Minister) jgraham@united-church.ca

The Living Skies Regional Justice Team is a new body within the church. The ideal number of team members is a minimum of six, maximum of eight. As of the time of writing this report, the team is in need of more enthusiastic members!

The Justice Team welcomes anyone who is interested in serving the broader church and is passionate about any of the numerous social justice issues and ministries to apply for membership.

Furthermore, the team remains open to hearing from any individual or group who would like to provide feedback or information about their ministry and/or related concerns.

Tasks

Pursuant to the designated tasks in the “Regional Council Justice Team Mandate and Terms”, the team has earnestly committed itself to routinely provide an open and safe meeting space for members and ministries to interact, educate, and collaborate both with the Justice Team and each other on all social justice issues.

After an engaging discussion and collaboration, the team concluded that the most practical and effective gathering space was via Zoom. The team hosts/facilitates “Open House” gatherings.

In order for the Justice Team to adequately and effectively identify humanitarian and environmentalist priorities for the Living Skies Regional Council, the team needed to engage with its members and social justice ministries.

These gatherings provide the opportunity for the Justice Team to not only foster and develop connections and relationships with networks, but to educate – to hear from those with direct knowledge and experience of the most pertinent and pressing issues which affect creation and its inhabitants, and how the Region should best address them.

Open House Gatherings

Open House #1:

The team held its first Open House gathering on February 20th. This Zoom gathering was intended to provide a platform for individuals involved in social justice ministries to connect with others and relate their passionate work, as well as inform the team about their needs and how the Region can best assist them in their endeavors.

The team heard from people involved in diverse areas such as:

- The Micah Mission (<https://themicahmission.org/>)
- Faith Reigns Community Program
- Regina – Wesley UC Social Justice Committee
- Kairos Regina
- UC Climate Awareness & Environmental Justice
- Refugee Crises

- Parkland Restorative Justice
 - Kairos Prairies North Decolonizing Working Group
 - ICM Saskatoon: anti-poverty and anti-racism work
- The next Open House was held on April 16th.

Open House #2; “What Matters Most to Our Province?”

As the province is heading into an election, the team concluded that space should be provided in order for any concerned persons or ministries to share their concerns, fears, and hopes pertaining to the election. The team wishes to nurture meaningful and genuine dialogue/conversation about potential strategies for ministries and the Region to undertake or pursue.

Matters that were addressed included the following:

- Universal income and anti-poverty measures: Saskatchewan has the lowest minimum wage in the country (\$14.00 per hour), but studies have shown that the bare minimum required for living in this province requires the minimum wage to be drastically increased (\$18.00 per hour).
- Climate issues/policy: globally, we are at or passed the point of no return – we will need drastic and costly actions to combat damage done to creation. SK Energy needs directives to begin shifting workforce into other forms of energy, investment into renewable energy sources, funding for public transit, bicycle networks, etc., so the province does not need to focus as much on the de-carbonizing process.

Closing

As previously stated, the Living Skies Regional Justice Team is a young body within the church, but it is an appendage of the body of Christ which remains dedicated to inclusivity, education, partnerships/collaboration, and deliberate, decisive action as it collectively discerns how the Spirit calls the Region and the church to be the hands and feet of Christ.

NOMINATIONS

The work of the Nominations Committee is to “gather a slate of nominations for the officers of the Regional Council and its executive, commissions, committees, task groups, steering committees, or teams. It also provides nominations for unexpected vacancies or new positions which occur during the year.” (From the Structure Document of the Living Skies Regional Council.)

The year began with a problem of transferring the committee’s email address, that was connected to the past chair’s personal cell phone number, after it was discontinued. With the problem finally resolved, and armed with two new energetic members, and a new staff member we resumed our task of filling vacancies.

As mentioned previously, the work of our committee is to try and fill vacancies within the structures of the Regional Council. This year however, we were additionally tasked with putting together a slate of Commissioners and Alternate Commissioners for General Council 45, to be held in Calgary in 2025. Besides word of mouth, emails, and phone calls, we advertised by promoting the work of the various committees through the Regional Rambler in addition to the website.

This past year saw the creation of an Affirming Committee, and also a revised Justice Committee. We are working hard to ensure not only diversity and geographic location among

the members of the various groups, but matching talents as well.

We would like to thank ALL who have agreed to take on new roles as well as those who took time to discern, even when the answer was no. We'd like to thank all whose terms are coming to an end in June of 2024, and those who are concluding roles being served. We deeply appreciate your time, your gifts, and your dedication to the work of the Living Skies Regional Council. We would also like to acknowledge and thank Regional Council staff Bev Diebert and Julie Graham for all of their support in our committee's work, as well as Tracy Murton, Shannon McCarthy, and Darrel Reine and the Regional Council Executive for their support, wisdom, and direction in our work.

At the time of the writing of this report, we have a number of vacancies and opportunities to serve within the Regional Council. We will continue to keep updated lists on the Nominations page of the Regional Council website. We cannot do this work alone, we need your help; so, if you are interested in a particular role, or know someone else who might be, we would be happy to hear from you anytime. You can find our nominations form on the Regional Council website, and it can be filled in and submitted online. Once we receive the forms, our committee then makes some decisions, and forwards names to the Regional Council Executive for consideration. We hope you will have an opportunity to check out the slate of Nominations, and consider the vacancies and opportunities which are available.

Thank you, and blessings,
Jeanette Warriar (Convenor) on behalf of the Nominations Committee
Yvonne Terry, Jordan Cantwell, Nobuko Iwai, Jeanette Warriar
Email: livingskies@united-church.ca

PASTORAL RELATIONS STAFF REPORT

The items that are contained within the portfolio of Pastoral Relations Minister are varied and eclectic, involving so much more than what the title suggests. From supporting communities of faith discerning next steps in assessing their pastoral relations needs to gathering Licensed Lay Worship Leaders for support and learning to walking with ministry personnel in situations of conflict, health concerns or change, each aspect of my portfolio is rich and meaningful. As a Regional Council, we continue to feel the impact of the pandemic as more and more communities of faith are finding their people and financial resources dwindling to the point of closure, or are finding hope-filled ways to collaborate with neighbours in the ministry that is all of ours. Over the past year, I have been privileged to facilitate collaborative ministry gatherings in 4 different locations around the province, witnessing both the struggles and the commitment to being the church in our corner of the world. It is inspiring and challenging as we all come to terms with the changing face of our communities, knowing that the role of the church must continue to adapt.

One exciting new initiative comes from the inspiration of our hospital chaplains, Emily Carr and Lorna King. Called "Equipping the Saints", we have offered 4 online gatherings for lay leaders interested in or already engaged in pastoral visiting as a space for learning and support. Through case studies, learning about boundaries, and basic visiting skills, to understanding the 4 C's of pastoral visitation (cause, control, care and connection) with Michele Rowe, to sessions on "what is pastoral care" and "exploring grief and loss" with Brian Walton, lay leaders have continued to build skills and share resources to equip themselves for the ministry of pastoral care. We are fortunate to have all of these leaders in our midst, and grateful for the passion of our hospital chaplains. Stay tuned for fall opportunities!

The work of the Pastoral Relations Commission is found elsewhere in the docket, written by Marvin Mackie. This represents the work of a dedicated group of folks who thoughtfully and carefully read many, many documents, ask the hard and faith-filled questions, and offer support and insight in the many contexts of ministry throughout our Regional Council. Deep gratitude to Marvin and Miles Russell who finish terms on the Commission, having begun in 2019. Their wisdom, experience, grace and humour have helped to navigate through many different scenarios, and to establish policies and practices that are grounded in the context of Living Skies Regional Council.

Committee on Community of Faith Support

This Committee continued its work in supporting communities of faith throughout the Regional Council. Due to capacity constraints, there was limited ability to respond to all of the concerns that were raised in the reading of Annual Reports and Self-Assessments last year. However, this did not alter the faith-filled approach to diligently reviewing information that was submitted and highlighting areas for growth. Gratitude to Deborah Springer and Pam Thomas who assisted once again in the reading of reports on behalf of the Committee, providing focused feedback for the Committee to wrestle with. At the time of writing, 76 Annual Reports have been read and reviewed to ensure the basic elements are included – operating budget for the coming year, financial information having been independently reviewed, observations from the governing body, reflections from ministry personnel or pastoral charge supervisor, minutes from the previous annual meeting, and a membership report. The vast majority of reports did contain all the necessary components and the Committee would encourage folks to [review the criteria](#) for next year's writing. This is especially true in the requirement for an independent review of the financial books. The Committee also met with Jordan Cantwell, Growth Animator, to discern how the work overlaps, and to clarify lines of communication moving forward. Finally, the Committee reviewed the governance structure for 1 community of faith to ensure compliance with polity and process. This is a time of transition for the Committee as we recognize with gratitude Deborah Smith who completes her term, having played a significant role beginning in 2019 in the development of policies and practices, sharing wisdom from presbytery pastoral oversight days and imagining new ways of supporting communities of faith.

Committee on Ministry Personnel Support

The work of this Committee continues to be responsive to the emergent needs of ministry personnel. From planning retreats for active ministry personnel to brainstorming ideas for retired ministry personnel to agonizing over colleagues who are struggling physically or spiritually, the challenge to meet the needs is great. This year the Committee hosted two ministry personnel retreats in the fall, one in Regina and one in Saskatoon, called "Couragivity: creative conversation with self, others and God". With leadership provided by members of the Committee and supported by Jordan Cantwell, Growth Animator, ministry personnel spent a lovely day together learning, sharing, and being community. Gratitude to folks at Sunset United Church in Regina and Mayfair United Church in Saskatoon for hospitality and space to gather. Ministry personnel were also invited to share an Advent resource that was collated and distributed as a means of collegial collaboration. Support to retired ministry personnel occurred in two ways: bi-monthly online gatherings, and lunch prior to the Regional Council Gathering. The bi-monthly online gatherings for Voluntary Associate Ministers (which are ministry personnel who continue to perform the functions of ministry and are either retired or without a call or appointment) have become a joy-filled opportunity for connection and support. However, these do not replace the gift of in-person time and therefore all retired ministry personnel have been invited to lunch prior to the Regional Gathering. The Committee acknowledges that while there are similar gatherings of pensioners in Regina and Saskatoon, folks outside of those centres continue to feel the absence of presbytery. Therefore, further exploration of means of support will continue this fall, especially given the lack of a Regional Gathering in 2025. The Committee also developed a document of [Best Practices for](#)

[Retirement](#) with useful information for both ministry personnel and communities of faith as they navigate the changing nature of their relationship with one another, and provides recommendations for the various contexts around the Regional Council. Two members of the Committee, Joy Cowan and Michele Rowe, completed their terms this year, having brought much laughter, creativity, passion, and deep care for the well-being of ministry personnel in our Regional Council; we are grateful for their gifts.

Committee on Lay Leadership Support

This Committee continues to offer support and policy development for lay leaders in the Regional Council. With responsibility for the renewal of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders every 3 years as well as training and authorization for Sacraments Elders, there are many opportunities for engagement. In the fall of 2023, 4 Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (LLWLs) had licenses renewed and 1 person was licensed for the first time. In the spring of 2024, 9 people had licenses renewed. The renewal process includes a letter of affirmation from the local community of faith, reviewing documents, and a conversation with members of the Committee. Gratitude once again to our volunteer conversation partners – Debra Berg, Sheila Lavender, Jim Tenford and Brian Walton. These folks bring wisdom and perspective to the process, and their participation is much appreciated. There are currently 44 LLWLs offering worship leadership throughout the Regional Council with diligence, competence, and deep faith. Last fall the Committee also finalized revisions to the [LLWL policy](#), seeking consultation and feedback in order adapt the policy to the particular contexts in Living Skies. Clarity and support were incorporated into the policy to ensure licensed lay worship leaders had opportunities for ongoing connection to the Committee and accountability to the Regional Council. The Committee also engaged Marg Janick-Grayston to facilitate an online prayer-writing workshop in January. This opportunity was received with gratitude for Marg's wisdom, creativity, gentle process, and deep commitment to support for LLWLs. The other piece of the portfolio for this committee, Sacraments Elders, is supported primarily through the annual online training. This spring, Andrew Hecker, Doreen Hewitson and Piotr Strzelecki offered a training session attended by 4 folks seeking a license, and 2 folks seeking a refresher. The engagement of participants in this online opportunity fulfills the screening requirement, together with support from a mentor. This spring, licenses to administer the sacraments were renewed for 30 Sacraments Elders who provide an opportunity for our communities of faith without ministry personnel to continue to celebrate the important rituals of the Christian tradition. In addition, 1 new license was granted, with the potential for others later this year. The Committee will miss the presence of Andrew Hecker who has served since 2019, offering incisive questions, policy clarity, and humour to the work.

Final thoughts

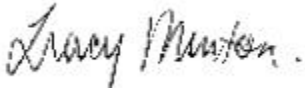
There are more communities of faith without called or appointed ministry personnel in our Regional Council than those with. This means that our reliance on volunteers to support the ministry in all of our communities of faith continues to increase. We are richly blessed in Living Skies Regional Council with incredible volunteers supporting the work of pastoral relations on our Regional Council committees and commissions, serving as pastoral charge supervisors and pastoral relations liaisons, leading worship as Sacraments Elders, or participating in the leadership of communities of faith on governing bodies, ministry and personnel committees, search teams, trustees, and any number of other committees that intersect with the role of pastoral relations. Each of these tasks involve specific skills and gifts; many people serve in more than one of these roles, and many are also filled by our Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. The wisdom, discernment, care and faithfulness that I am privileged to witness and support over Zoom and by phone is inspiring and humbling. I invite you to take a moment to express gratitude to any and all that you see offering leadership in your community of faith and beyond.

The ministry personnel in our Regional Council, both active and retired, are an incredible source of inspiration and wisdom. This year at our Regional Gathering is a unique opportunity

to celebrate designated lay ministers as we ordain 12 and commission 1. The decision of the General Council to establish the process for granting testamur to these folks and subsequently recommending ordination or commissioning represents one way to affirm the life-long call to ministry they have offered in our midst. I also want to recognize the many dedicated and long-serving designated lay ministers who chose to retain their lay ministry status and celebrate the years of faith-filled ministry they have offered and continue to offer among us. There is no question that the work of all of these folks is critical in the ongoing capacity for communities of faith to worship, participate in the sacraments, and receive pastoral care throughout our Regional Council, especially in our rural contexts. We are richly blessed by the presence of these ministers.

My final word of gratitude is always reserved for Bev Diebert who thoughtfully and competently supports the work of the Regional Council and pastoral relations. She answers questions by telephone and email, creates documents, minutes and reports, patiently waiting for me to complete my responsibilities, and never comments on my organizational strategy (or lack thereof) or my questionable punny jokes. One of the gifts of working for the United Church of Canada is the capacity to take sabbatical time every 5 years. As I prepare for this opportunity this summer, I am mindful of the privilege and responsibility in my work. While there are many days where my work is filled with hard conversations with both ministry personnel and members of communities of faith, there are also days filled with laughter and tears of joy at the stories of resilience, faith and vision that I encounter. I am honoured, humbled, and richly blessed to do this work on behalf of the Regional Council and look forward to returning in October. As we all head into this time of summer rest and renewal, I leave you with the words of Richard Wagamese: "Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That's the trick of it, really. Open yourself to everything, and everything opens itself to you."¹ May you find moments of such opening today and in the year to come.

Respectfully submitted,



Tracy Murton
Pastoral Relations Minister

MINISTER FOR THE OFFICE OF VOCATION

Prairie Candidacy Board

The Prairie Candidacy Board has been hard at work supporting 27 individuals on their journey through the Candidacy Pathway. We have an amazing and diverse board consisting of: Chair Rob Smith; Vice-Chair Doreen Hewitson, Aurora Espenant, Chewe Mulenga, Mary Annan, Mokwadi Basele, Salesi Takau, Shirley Goodrich, SunDo Hyun, Wayne Youngward, Hugh MacGregor, Keith Hall, and Rick Burton.

Of the 27 engaged with the Candidacy Pathway: 5 are from Prairie to Pine, 8 from Living Skies, 9 from Northern Spirit and 5 are from other regions. We have 1 in the Designated Lay Ministry stream, 6 in the Diaconal stream, and 20 in the Ordained stream. We have 5 candidates in Supervised Ministry Education (SME). 4 candidates are completing the pathway in 2023, 3 will be ordained in Living Skies Regional and 1 will be ordained in Northern Spirit Regional Council.

The Prairie Candidacy Board has engaged in equity, diversity and anti-oppression training as

¹ Wagamese, Richard. *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*. Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., © 2016, p. 58

mandated for all General Council committee members. They are committed to take into account a diversity of realities and experience among interviewees. These include cultural, language, physical, visual, auditory, and neurodivergent considerations. They will continue to learn, adapting and adjusting our practices in the process.

Admissions Committee

(below are excerpts from the Office of Vocation Accountability Report prepared by the Rev. Norm Seli, chair of the Board of Vocation, and the Rev. Marlene Britton, Director of Policy and Programs for Ministry Personnel)

The number of ministers in the Admission process reached 200 people in 2022. This led to a shortage of accompaniers meaning that ministers expressing interest in admission were told there were dozens of ministers ahead of them waiting to speak with someone about applying for the Admission process. For those who reached the entrance or final interview stage, there was a queue of approximately three months before an interview slot was available. Most significantly, the Admission Board noted an alarming reality: when it came time to seek an admission appointment, the process was not functioning equitably for racialized ministers. Consequently, we entered 2023 with the Admission process paused. Throughout 2023, the focus of admission work has been on addressing these bottlenecks and inequities.

As of December, 2023 there were 126 ministers in the admissions process – 53 of which were seeking appointments. There were 15 ministers admitted in 2023.

Below is a list of other committees of the Office of Vocation and a brief description of what they do. Information taken from [Office of Vocation: Structure and Responsibilities May 2023](#):

Board of Vocation is the elected member body accountable for the work of the Office of Vocation to the General Council.

Standards for Accreditation Committee implements the policies set by the General Council by recommending standards to the Board of Vocation. These standards are to contribute to the effectiveness of ministry personnel in their leadership in communities of faith and beyond, responding to God's call.

Credentialing Committee responds to applications from ministry personnel for intentional interim ministry, educational supervisors, readmission, ministry partners, military chaplains and other chaplains as required.

Response Committee is responsible for receiving and addressing concerns and determining the most appropriate process or committee to address eligible concerns.

Remedial Committee is responsible for ensuring compliance by ministry personnel; assessing and deciding whether to accept an investigator's findings in relation to allegations of misconduct; assessing and deciding whether to accept a reviewer's report findings with respect to the effectiveness of a ministry personnel; determining the appropriate disposition of substantiated concerns.

My Highlights

As Vocational Minister I am provided with many opportunities to connect with ministry personnel and candidates for ministry. These interactions are a highlight for me. Whether I'm sharing resources with someone seeking information on things like retirement and sabbatical or listening to someone share about struggles in their pastoral relationship, I feel immense gratitude for the commitment, compassion, and faithfulness of our ministers. There is not an easy vocation and I appreciate any opportunity to support them along the way (even if it's just to problem solve a ChurchHub fail).

I am responsible for facilitating many of the mandatory boundaries trainings. I'm aware this isn't everyone's favourite learning opportunity but I appreciate those who show up, engage, and share their experience, strength and wisdom with each other. We are working at updating the trainings to ensure they are relevant and interesting to the participants.

In 2023 I began offering monthly Zoom gatherings to ministry candidates. Some months we are joined by a guest with some expertise and other months we just show up and check in with each other. This is an opportunity for them to share their celebrations and frustrations on the Candidacy Pathway with each other and offer encouragement.

I most frequently encounter God through interactions. Connecting with others grounds me and reminds me by whom and to what I have been called.

Rev Laura Fohse,
Minister for the Office of Vocation
Northern Spirit, Living Skies, and Prairie to Pine Regions

GROWTH ANIMATOR – PRAIRIE REGIONS

Greeting, good people of Living Skies Region!

I am so happy to be joining you this year as your new(ish) Growth Animator. I started in this role in November 2023. Since then, I have met with folks from over 22 communities of faith in Living Skies, as well as gatherings of the Regina and Saskatoon Clusters and members of the Regional Council Executive and its committees and commissions. I have been in conversations and workshops with many of you in-person or online and spoken with several of you by phone.

As your Growth Animator, my role is to support communities of faith who want to strengthen their invitation, deepen their discipleship, and grow their ministries. I partner with regional staff to address regional priorities and identify potential areas for growth and collaboration. I also respond directly to invitations from communities of faith who want to explore how they can partner with others and become more effective at welcoming, attracting, retaining, transforming, and sending disciples into the world.

The Growth Department is funded through a special bequest to The United Church of Canada, from someone who believed that the United Church has a future. That belief is at the heart of the whole growth initiative. We believe that God is calling the United Church to deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice for the sake of the world God loves. This call is an invitation to all of us to imagine a future for the church that is vibrant, brave, humble, connected to our neighbours, rooted in Spirit, and transformational... and then to live into that vision God has given us.

Through a combination of deep conversation, workshops, practical tips and tools, and resources from the wider church, I can work with your community of faith to help you clarify God's purpose for your ministry and make a plan to pursue it. As you put your vision into action, I will accompany you and share resources to help you meet your objectives. I will pray with you and for you, and continually remind you that you are not alone in your struggles and hopes.

It has been an incredible privilege to work with so many of you and to hear about what God is already doing through you and the dreams you have for growing the impact of your

ministry. As we continue to journey together, I hope that God will expand the number of communities of faith engaged in this work of renewal and growth. I look forward to hearing your stories, learning about your ministries, the joys and struggles you are experiencing, the opportunities and challenges facing your community of faith, and where the Spirit is calling you to a future of deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.

In faith, hope and love,

Jordan Cantwell
Growth Animator – Prairie Regions
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