

**Living Skies Executive Minutes
March 28/29, 2025 via Zoom**

DAY 1: March 28, 2025

EXECUTIVE PRESENT	Darrell Reine (Chair), Doug Haroldson, David Mugadzi, Amelia Takau, Piotr Strzelecki, Deborah Springer, A quorum was present.
REGRETS	Dale Worrall (Treasurer), Deborah Smith,
STAFF PRESENT	Shannon McCarthy (Executive Minister); Julie Graham (Justice & Communications Minister); Heather Dootoff (Finance Administrator), Bev Diebert (Administrative Support); Tracy Murton (Pastoral Relations Minister);
CALL TO ORDER	Darrell called the meeting to order at 9:32 am. David Mugadzi led us in reflection & prayer. Tracy Murton led us in some community building.
APPROVAL OF AGENDA	We reviewed the agenda.
APPROVAL OF MINUTES 034-2024/2025	It was agreed by consensus: That Living Skies Regional Council Executive approve the minutes of February 27, 2025 as distributed.
INCORPORATED MINISTRIES	NA
CORRESPONDENCE	
Email from Peter Prebble	We received an email from Peter Prebble from the Saskatchewan Environmental Society, thanking Darrell for the special letter of support regarding the Nisbet Forest. Received for information.
Green Spirit Chaplaincy	We were provided with their monthly report. Received for information.
INTRO TO PROPOSALS	Laura Sundberg joining the meeting to introduce three proposal that are being presented at GC45 this summer. These proposals are going to be brought by other regional councils so there is no benefit to us sending them as well. Proposal 1 – Definition of Anti-Palestinian Racism.

Laura began by explaining what the Nakba is. The Nakba is defined as a catastrophe. After World War II, there was a proposal to create new separate states for Arabs and Jews. This was rejected by the Arabs and eventually led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. During this time, many Palestinians were forced out of their homes and into the West Bank where they had title to the land. The Arabs believed they would eventually go back to their homes, but never did; Jewish refugees /settlers had moved into their abandoned homes. In 1967, more land was taken from the West Bank, where the Arabs / Palestinians had been moved to and where they lived under military rule. In 1990, there was another Jewish expansion into the Palestinian territory. Palestinians formed military and political groups to fight back. During the Oslo Accord, the peace process failed, because the belief was the Israelis were not bargaining in good faith. Israel has continued to kick Palestinians out of their own homes.

This proposal is about Anti-Palestinian Racism and about denying the Nakba and assuming all Palestinians are terrorists. Even in Canada, speaking in support of Palestinians can be concerning. If someone is of Palestinian heritage, they live with a fear of being harassed for speaking out or being told to “go back to where you came from”. Laura shared at a recent local meeting of Canadians for Justice in the Middle East, someone shared “that people will listen to white people, but don’t listen to us” (people of Palestinian or Arab descent).

Proposal 2 – The IHRA Antisemitism Definition – a Threat to Charter Rights.

Laura shared that this defines what is antisemitic and what isn’t. The people behind this proposal are asking the United Church to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) instead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. In more than half of the IHRA definitions of anti-Semitism, it refers to the state of Israel in different definitions. This is contributing to the fear of criticizing Israel only to be labeled anti-Semitic. Laura then showed a You-Tube video on the JDA to help people learn and recognize antisemitism. This proposal is asking the church to adopt the JDA over the IHRA definition or at least use it as a supplement to the IHRA. It is also asking to share this with the Canadian Government and other governments that have adopted the IHRA working definition, suggesting it is a better definition and fits with Canadian’s right to freedom of expression. And, they are asking for more educational resources about this topic. For clarification, Julie Graham added, the IHRA definition often refers to the state of Israel as being the same as Jews world wide. In the JDA they are not defined in the same way. Julie also mentioned a Mike Milne article on the Broadview website that discusses this. Laura said that anti-Semitism is being weaponized in the academic field and the JDA unpacks that.

Proposal 3 – Rejecting Christian Nationalism

The current Trump administration in the United States is filled with Christian Nationalist. They are bringing a specific tradition forward and this is starting to move into Canada. It threatens the very principles in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Christian Nationalists have an investment in supporting the Netanyahu

government and the extreme form of Israel. The right wing / evangelical church supports Israel without any question and there are ripples of this that are moving into Canada and The United Church of Canada. This proposal is asking to create a statement rejecting Christian Nationalism. The Saskatchewan cluster that Laura is part of is working on a program with UNJPPI relating to the land / displacement (similar to the Blanket Exercise). The USA support for Israel, helps them get a foot into the middle East and the military complex gets lots of money for the US by way of jobs and sales of military equipment. Because of over use, the fear of being labeled 'anti-Semitic' is losing its clout. Canada is not shipping any more equipment to Israel, but it is still honouring past contracts. This proposal asks us "where does our faith ask us to be? Where are our value, mission, etc?." The United Church is partnering with the Mennonites in this endeavor.

035-2024/2025

It was agreed by consensus:

That Living Skies Executive take no action on Definition of Anti-Palestinian Racism, The IHRA Antisemitism Definition – a Threat to Charter Rights and Rejecting Christian Nationalism based on the understanding that they have already been sent to General Council 45 from other Regional Councils and that they can be dealt with using the Justice Based Principles established by General Council 44. Further, that we thank the Living Skies Just Peace task group for their continuing work, and emphasize the importance of Palestine and Israel Just Peace work in the context of our Regional Council and Saskatchewan.

TOWARDS 2035

Shannon presented the Towards 2035 document. Discussion ensued.

This document continues to be confidential, except for General and Regional Council's staff and leadership. It will soon be presented to General Council Commissioners and then this fall it will be rolled out to Communities of Faith.

STAFF REPORTS

**Justice &
Communications**

Julie reported.

On May 1 we held an event on Unmarked Burials and Missing Children. Many positive comments were heard.

The Blanket Exercise (about the loss of Indigenous Lands in Canada and the USA), is being used as a basis for a new Palestine Land Exercise. A couple of folks from the Just Peace groups have participated in this project with other denominations. We are hoping to roll it out in the near future.

Still fighting with Mailchimp and the websites.

Admin

Bev reported.

Things are continuing as usual. Next week she will start collecting reports for the 2024 Annual Report for the Living Skies Regional Council.

**Pastoral Relations
Minister**

Tracy reported.

Lay Leadership Support Committee – the committee is hosting conversations with Licenced Lay Worship Leaders (LLWLs). They have been stunned by the number of services covered by LLWLs. They will be having a small group gathering for support, care and education.

Ministry Personnel Support Committee – this committee is down to 2 members, so their work is at a standstill. They will soon be meeting with retired ministers. They hope the plan for Diane Strickland to attend the Celebration of Ministry weekend in May to offer some leadership still happens.

The Committee on Community of Faith Support is receiving annual reports and they have readers reading them. The committee then follows up, often asking how they can support them. A big part of this work, is helping people deal with 'difficult to work with' people. We are running out of pastoral charge supervisors, many of whom resign because of difficult people. There are more open positions that people to fill the roles.

036-2024/2025

It was agreed by consensus:

That Living Skies Executive approve the governance structure of Knox-Metropolitan United Church (Regina).

037-2024/2025

It was agreed by consensus:

That Living Skies Executive endorse the development of the Cooperative Ministry project in South-East Saskatchewan, and support the request to suspend regular governance requirements for the 2-5 year experiment in favour of joint governance initiatives. This would include suspending the requirement of local governing body meetings, annual statistics and annual assessments.

Concerns were expressed about this project, but Tracy said they will work with the National Office to work things out. They are trying to adjust the workload in a part of the regional council that doesn't have many ministers. Cooperation is doing it differently. Shannon suggested it is worth supporting the conversation with the General Council staff.

Finance

Heather reported.

She is having conversations with Indigenous Ministry and Justice about moving the funds she is holding from All Native Circle. River Bend Integrated Community Ministries (ICM) has received the \$20,000 they requested. No updated figures have been received from the Auditor yet.

Executive Minister

Shannon reported.

The Towards 2035 project is taking up a chunk of her time, working with other General Council staff on it.

With General Council being held this year, there is lots of stuff going on, and the workload has increased.

Trust documents have been signed so there is now the ability to move church titles into a Trust.

Some training of General Council Commissioners was done last week, with more being done soon.

She is also planning an annual meeting for Northern Spirit and will be participating in the national 100th Anniversary celebration as well as Living Skies' Celebration of Ministry and 100th Anniversary Celebration.

The meeting ended for the day at 4:30 pm

Day 2: March 29, 2024

EXECUTIVE PRESENT

Darrell Reine (Chair), Doug Haroldson, David Mugadzi, Amelia Takau, Piotr Strzelecki, Deborah Springer,

A quorum was present.

REGRETS

Dale Worrall (Treasurer), Deborah Smith,

STAFF PRESENT

Shannon McCarthy (Executive Minister); Julie Graham (Justice & Communications Minister); Heather Dootoff (Finance Administrator), Bev Diebert (Administrative Support); Tracy Murton (Pastoral Relations Minister);

CALL TO ORDER

Darrell called the meeting to order at 9:40 am. Piotr Strzelecki led us in reflection & prayer. Tracy Murton led us in some community building.

STAFFING PROPOSALS

Justice position

Julie asked the Executive when considering staffing needs to please remember the Justice work – think forward.

Shannon reminded everyone to consider what are our priorities? What staff do we need in our Regional Council to make the United Church work to and in 2035.

Pastoral Care position

Tracy has been working with the recently resurrected Rural Pastoral Care Network and proposed 4 part-time positions – 10 hours each (one full time equivalent) based around the province (see the document for details).

Shannon wound up the conversation by asking if we had a million dollars, is this the staff we would want to hire? She asked “if we are going to dream – what is it?” She asked the gathered to think about it.

A final decision was not made and it will be brought back to the April meeting.

**PURPOSE OF
REGIONAL REPS**

Tabled

**EMERGENCY &
LEGACY FUNDS FOR
CONGREGATIONS**

Heather, Doug and Dale have met once and need to meet again to touch base.

DON ELLIOT TRUST

Tabled

**100th ANNIVERSARY &
CELEBRATION OF
MINISTRY**

Tracy Murton reported on the progress of plans.

There will be a 2-day event on Saturday, May 24 and Sunday, May 25 at Grace Westminster in Saskatoon, with the theme ‘Who is the United Church called to be?’. We are hoping Diane Strickland will come and provide in-person leadership on Saturday morning. There are workshops planned for the afternoon – LLWLs, GreenSpirit, Naloxone training and Jordan Cantwell doing something about Growth.

The Celebration of Ministry banquet will be held at 5:30pm and the Celebration of Ministry Service on Sunday morning at 10:30am.

We hope to have some of the workshops available on Zoom.

The registration will be ready shortly, with an invitation to the Gathering, and no expectation that anyone must attend. We will also be marking the 100th Anniversary.

Tracy then shared the proposal that Living Skies Regional Council offer up to \$200 each to communities of faith that would like some support to host an Anniversary Celebration.

038-2024/2025

**It was agreed by consensus:
That Living Skies Executive approve \$200 per community of faith in support of
hosting an Anniversary Celebration.**

OTHER

Shannon informed the gathered that an agreement has been signed with Grace-Westminster (Saskatoon) to hold the archives for the Regional Council and that things are moving forward.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be April 22 at 3:30 pm.

ADJOURNMENT



Darrell Reine, Chairperson

Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister