

Pastoral Relations Report to Northern Spirit Regional Council

Northern Spirit Regional Council provides support and assistance to communities of faith through the work of the Pastoral Relations Commission, three committees - Communities of Faith Support Committee, Lay Leadership Support Committee and Ministry Personnel Support Committee, the Pastoral Relations Minister, Earl Reaburn, and the Regional Council Administrative Support staff person, Kathy Jackson.

The Pastoral Relations Commission

The Pastoral Relations Commission is a decision-making body which holds overall responsibility for Pastoral Relations.

The members of the Commission over the past 15 months are: Lois Belanger, Gaie Goin, Lloyd Henderson, Blaine Gregg, Kimberly Roy and Taylor Croissant. Each year two members, a lay person and a minister, end their service on the Commission and two other people take their place. We are very grateful to Lloyd Henderson, a member of the Commission from its formation, whose term has now ended. We also wish to thank Taylor Croissant who joined the Commission in March 2020, and served until his move in July to Chinook Winds Regional Council.

The Commission meets on the first Thursday of each month throughout the year. This ensures that decisions are made as expediently as possible.

The Pastoral Relations Commission is very appreciative of those who serve the Regional Council as Pastoral Relations Liaisons and Pastoral Charge Supervisors.

Pastoral Relations Liaisons provide training and guidance to Pastoral Charges as they create a Community of Faith Profile and undertake the search for new ministry personnel. There are 17 Pastoral Charge Liaisons in our Regional Council.

Pastoral Charge Supervisors support local governing bodies (Official Boards, Church Councils) when they are without Called or appointed ministry personnel. Often this is done on internet meeting platforms, and especially so during the pandemic. Currently there are 32 Pastoral Charge Supervisors at work in the Regional Council, although this number fluctuates constantly.

Over the past 18 months, the Pastoral Relations Commission has given attention to these tasks, decisions and policies:

- Conflict Resolution Trust Fund terms of reference
- Pastoral Relations Emergency Fund terms of reference
- Recruitment and training of Pastoral Relations Liaisons
- Approval of requests for a change of pastoral relations from ministry personnel, including requests for a change for the purpose of retirement
- Appointment of Pastoral Relations Liaisons to Pastoral Charges in search of ministry personnel
- Approval of Community of Faith Profiles
- Appointment of Pastoral Charge Supervisors when there is no ministry personnel Called or appointed to the Pastoral Charge, or during a leave

- Approval of Calls and appointments of ministry personnel to Pastoral Charges
- Approval of applications for funding to assist Pastoral Charges that demonstrate need with coverage during a minister's sabbatical
- Monitoring dates of sabbatical leaves occurring in the Region
- Requesting Reviews of Communities of Faith under section J.4 of The Manual of The United Church of Canada (2019) and receiving Review reports
- Proposal to the General Council on Quorum at Pastoral Charge Meetings
 - This proposes that ministry personnel serving a Pastoral Charge or a Pastoral Charge Supervisor be required to attend the annual meeting of the Pastoral Charge, and any Pastoral Charge meeting which is called between annual meetings.
- Development of policies (*posted on the Regional Council website)
 - Pulpit Supply Policy*
 - This policy applies to those who provide pulpit supply worship leadership and who are not members of the Order of Ministry, Designated Lay Ministers or Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. It clarifies how many services a layperson or minister from another denomination can provide to one Pastoral Charge.
 - Disengagement Policy
 - This policy clarifies expectations of ministry personnel and Pastoral Charges after a pastoral relationship has ended.
 - Pastoral Charge Supervision Policy*
 - This policy clarifies expectations of Pastoral Charge Supervisors, and requires the Pastoral Charge being supervised to cover all expenses.
 - Stream of Ministry Eligibility Policy*
 - This policy requires that vacant positions be open to application from ministry personnel in all three streams of ministry (Ordained, Diaconal, Designated Lay ministers).
 - Basic Communication Allowance Policy*
 - This policy requires pastoral Charges to provide a minimum annual \$ 900.00 Phone/Communications allowance to ministry personnel. It takes effect immediately for new Calls and appointments, and on January 1, 2021 for all Calls and appointments.
 - Part-time Ministry Guidelines
 - This tool provides guidance to Pastoral Charges who have, or are considering, a part time ministry staff position. The time it takes to accomplish each of the major tasks of ministry is provided as away of building and limiting part time position descriptions.
 - Reasonable Distance Guidelines
 - The Commission discussed whether a limit should be placed on the distance a minister travels when serving two or more Pastoral Charges. A limit was not set, but discussion is expected when contemplating this situation.

Communities of Faith Support Committee

The Communities of Faith Support Committee is responsible for providing guidance and support to communities of faith that are making decisions about their ministry and mission. It is through this committee that the Regional Council exercises oversight of communities of faith. This can include decisions about disbanding or amalgamating. They also provide guidance and support to communities of

faith that are struggling with conflict and diminishing resources. Happily, they also support the establishment of new communities of faith and ministries.

The members of the committee are Vera Engel, Wendy Galloway, Steven Johann and Chang Lee. The committee meets on the second Thursday of the month during the program (Sept to June) year, and during the summer as needed.

Over the past 15 months the committee has given attention to these inquiries and tasks:

- Collection of information about communities of faith for Regional Council purposes (office holders, contact information)
- Receipt of Certificates of Covenant from communities of faith that have established covenant with the Regional Council
- Receipt and review of annual reports from communities of faith
- Creation of guidelines for Establishing Communities of Faith
- Consulting with congregations that are proposing to sell church property
- Offering assistance and guidance to congregations that are disbanding or amalgamating
- Discerning how the Regional Council can provide effective resources and guidance to communities of faith that are experiencing challenge and change

The work of the committee requires sensitivity, diplomacy and confidentiality.

The Communities of Faith Support Committee was approached by the **Property and New Church Development Council** of the former Edmonton Presbytery to become the custodians of a fund for New Ministries Development. This transfer of funds is underway, and will be held in an investment with The United Church of Canada Foundation. The committee will work with the Property and New Church Development Council to establish terms of reference that will continue the intended purpose of the fund. The fund, which is to be called the **Northern Spirit New Ministries Development Fund**, will be available to new communities of faith and ministry projects throughout Northern Spirit Regional Council. The committee will develop an application and evaluation process, and will adjudicate applications. We are very grateful to the former Edmonton Presbytery and the Property and New Church Development Council for this generous legacy.

The committee had the great pleasure of supporting the establishment of a new community of faith in Drayton Valley. Since there were no guidelines from The United Church for how this is to be done in our new organizational structure, the committee needed to create a process. As a result, **Living Spirit United Church, Drayton Valley** was established and is receiving ongoing support.

Lay Leadership Support Committee

The Lay Leadership Support Committee provides support, training and authorization to lay leaders serving a variety of functions in Pastoral Charges and the Region.

The members of the committee are: Tazvionepi Nyarota, Linda Roberts and Lesley Verdin. The committee has met 11 times in the past 15 months. The schedule for its regular meeting time is under discussion.

The committee has worked hard at supporting the **Licensed Lay Worship Leader program** in the Region. They began by identifying and contacting those who had been licensed by Presbyteries, developing a process for renewal of licenses, receiving applications, conducting interviews and making recommendation for license renewals to the Pastoral Relations Commission. There are 14 Licensed Lay Worship Leaders in our Regional Council. Their names and contact information are found on the Regional website.

The committee has tried, with limited success, to compile a list of **Congregational Designated Ministers** serving within our Regional Council. So far, we have been informed of 4 Congregational Designated Ministers. This information was requested on a **Pastoral Charge Information form** sent to all Pastoral Charges in the Region.

When a Pastoral Charge requests that one of its members become a **Sacraments Elder**, this committee arranges for proper preparation for this ministry to take place. There is currently one person in our Region undertaking preparation.

The committee also provides support to members of **Ministry and Personnel Committees** in our Region. One in-person workshop was held in October 2019. A request for another workshop has been received. This will likely be offered online and hopefully in the near future.

During the **Pandemic**, the Lay Leadership Support Committee has discussed how to provide resources and guidance to lay leaders in Pastoral Charges. There have been 6 online gatherings for lay leaders since mid-March 2020, most of which have been offered in cooperation with our sister Regional Councils, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine. These sessions offer updated information, opportunity to ask questions, connect across the wider church and within the region.

Ministry Personnel Support Committee

The Ministry Personnel Support Committee provides support, encouragement and connection to ministry personnel, active in ministry and retired, who are members of our Regional Council.

The members of the committee are Dirk Jessen, Ray Olsen and Debbie Brill. Debbie joined the committee in April 2020, filling a vacancy left by Deborah Springer who moved to Chinook Winds Regional Council in the fall of 2019.

The committee has met 8 times in the past 15 months. They have now scheduled regular meeting for the third Thursday of every month.

The committee has spent time reflecting on how to offer meaningful support to ministry personnel. **“Health, Joy and Excellence in Ministry”** is an aspiration offered by the General Council as a guide for the Regional Council’s work in the area of pastoral relations. The committee sought input, with very limited success, from ministry people on what contributes to health, joy and excellence in ministry, and what it looks like when these aspirations are present.

The committee was approached and has been able to provide some financial assistance to two events held in the Regional Council: **reVITALize** featured 12 people speaking on a number of topics over two days in September 2019 and a number of ministry personnel from the Region were able to attend. In

May 2020, the committee made a contribution toward an event for our Black Clergy network in Northern Spirit Regional Council and guests to hear Dr. Ganz Ferrance address the topic “**Caring for Self in a Pandemic as Racism Continues**”.

The committee asked ministry personnel in the Region to complete a **Ministry Personnel Information form**. The Regional Council uses the information to track significant occasions, to contact a family member in case of illness or death, to know what training and education a minister has and to know what skills and designations a minister has, such as Educational Supervisor. 2/3 of our approximately 175 ministry ministers have returned the form to date.

Caring for retired ministry personnel is an ongoing project for the committee. There are about 100 retired ministry personnel in the Regional Council. The twice yearly gatherings organized by the former Edmonton Presbytery have continued (until pandemic) and attendance has extended beyond the city, but connecting to retirees who live at a distance from Edmonton remains a challenge.

October is **Clergy Appreciation Month**, and in 2019 the committee sent cards to all ministry personnel thanking them for their service to The United Church of Canada.

Providing support to actively serving ministry personnel during the **Pandemic** has been a major undertaking for the committee. Ministry personnel have been meeting online weekly on Tuesday afternoons since March 17th to receive updated information and collegial support, and to share ideas and resources. Diane Strickland has joined the gathering twice to provide insights from a Trauma Specialist/United Church minister perspective. Monique Methot from the Today Family Violence Help Centre made a presentation to the gathering, as did Greg Pickering, an Edmonton Psychologist who spoke about Attachment Theory and Resilience. These weekly gatherings are a well received opportunity for ministry personnel to get to know each other as colleagues and have an opportunity to share ideas and concerns, joys and heartaches with each other.

The Staff

Kathy Jackson and Earl Reaburn work diligently to coordinate and track the variety of tasks, projects, meetings, paperwork and resources of the Commission and committees. There are administrative pastoral relations tasks which are handled in the office such as:

- Issuing Licenses to Perform Marriages
- Approving permission to preside at the sacraments
- Tracking Honorary Associate Ministers
- Keeping files on each Pastoral Charge and each Ministry Personnel up to date
- Providing resources and directing people to information

They are able to keep up, for the most part.

Pastoral relations remains an important way for the Regional Council to support the life and work of communities of faith. There are over 80 people involved in this work on behalf of the Regional Council. We are grateful to all who so willingly share their gifts and graces.

Submitted by Earl Reaburn
September 2020