

Dear friends of the Northern Spirit Regional Council,

Greetings in name of the Crucified and Risen One.

Another year has come and gone since our last Council Gathering, and still we find ourselves in the midst of the pandemic. In the year that has been, so much has changed. With the swift advent of vaccines there is finally light at the end of the tunnel. With God's help, many of the disciplines and restrictions we have endured together are loosening. There is much vigilance still required, but it feels as though a corner has definitely been turned.

The year of the plague has left no one untouched, and St. Andrew's College (like so many other venerable institutions) has been buffeted by the storm. On top of covid, the College has also experienced the unexpected withdrawal of the University of Saskatchewan from a 40+ year lease relationship and the termination of pay-for-fee-services. These emergent financial challenges have resulted in a massive loss of revenue. As we begin to evaluate and seek new tenant relationships, it will take some time (probably no less than three years), before that revenue stream is renewed. With this reality in mind, the Board of Regents gathered in late February to make some very tough and prayerful decisions. Closure was seriously considered. In this time of discernment, the college was able to rely on the fall 2020 approved strategic plan. With this resource in hand, it is clear that the College still has a role to play in God's ongoing mission here on the prairies, and beyond.

The gut-wrenching decision was also made to inform all five faculty that, owing to the end of the academic program in June 2023, all positions will also end. New positions will be developed for the new program, but the number will be reduced to two faculty and one education director. As you can imagine, this has been a hard reality for all of us to come to terms with, especially faculty, who are much beloved in the College community.

The course of action which the Board chose was a path of radical renewal. The financial reserves of the College will be utilized for bridging to 2023, at which time a new academic collaborative curriculum with the Saskatoon Theological Union and increasing our commitment to continuing education will be implemented.

While we do not yet know the final shape of the academic environment, we know that it will include closer cooperation with our Saskatoon Theological Union ecumenical partners, it will entail a shift to intensive courses and a hybrid delivery model that will expand the College's reach for distance students, and it will include a major enhancement of the life-long learning and community education program. This latter feature may prove to be the most significant, as we seek to reach out into other communities beyond the church. SBNR (*spiritual but not religious*), social justice, and secular professional development and leadership programs will be fleshed out. The College will seek to re-engage with the local grassroots church to provide responsive programming for lay and clergy leaders, filling a void left by the closure of Calling Lakes Centre (PCTC) a number of years ago.

The take-away is that though these are challenging times, they are also exciting times for the College. New members of our Development Committee are bringing fresh ideas and energy around international recruitment abroad and intercultural engagement here at home. The hiring of a Recruitment Officer last year has galvanized a commitment to expand beyond the familiar catchment areas into the wider world, and to review every aspect of what the College does through the lens of recruitment (otherwise known

as evangelism!) And the agility with which the College shifted during this past year into offering remote learning, worship, and community-building bodes well for our continued mandate of providing *theological education to embody compassion, hope, and justice*.

So, in the midst of loss, there is new life! The College is relying heavily on our Strategic Plan. Though the timelines have been accelerated by the pressures of the past year, we are sticking to the course upon which we believe Spirit has been inviting us. To that end, we are happy to provide the Regional Council (and its Communities of Faith) opportunities to support the vital work which we do. Here are several concrete development programs we would like you to consider and share widely:

- The 2021 #NoGalaGala

This year's event features our own Registrar, Greg Torwalt. Greg is not only a wizard of a registrar, but he is also a successful recording artist and founding member of the band Too Soon Monsoon. This concert is available online for exclusive viewing by ticketholders, and contains music, conversation, and guest appearances that include student reflections and an introductory meditation with our Pastor in Residence. <https://bit.ly/39ShU2T>

- Companions of the College

This new initiative of St. Andrew's College builds upon its ongoing commitment to develop deeper relationships with supporters and friends. College Companions are those who have committed to support the college, on an annual basis, at one of two initial tiers:

1. Cypress \$500/annum with a yearly commitment to increase the gift by 10% annually; and,
2. Tamarack \$1 000/annum with a yearly commitment to increase the gift by 5% annually.

This initiative invites new donors to give at these levels; existing supporters, at either of these two-tier levels, are invited to commit to the annual increase. Each tier will have access to ongoing new digital content, which the college has and will continue to create:

1. Cypress: This donor level will have access to the College Sunday Digital Worship Library. This resource allows individuals and faith communities to download and/or stream full worship services developed by members of St. Andrew's. Currently there are 6 worship services, which range from thematic to stand-alone. The college will be adding at least 2–3-year new worship experiences per year; and,
2. Tamarack: At this donor tier, supporters will receive access to the College Sunday Digital Worship Library and exclusive access to all previous and future #NoGalaGala events. Currently the college has hosted two online premieres and intends to have 1-2-year.

If you or your faith community want to know more about this exciting initiative and the digital resources which accompany the tiers, please contact Melanie Schwanbeck, College Secretary, [melanie.schwanbeck@usask.ca](mailto:melanie.schwanbeck@usask.ca).

- College Sunday Digital Library

St. Andrew's College has a long tradition of visiting communities of faith, large and small, to bring greetings, share the Gospel, and strengthen our bonds with the wider church. The covid era has invited us to consider innovative ways to continue that tradition, and so we are pleased to offer our new College Sunday digital resources. These include a growing digital library of full worship

services, including sermons, hymns, liturgical notes, and conversation-starter questions. Current themes include leadership, stewardship, compassion, vocation, humility, and much more.... For more information, contact Melanie Schwanbeck at the College office ([melanie.schwanbeck@usask.ca](mailto:melanie.schwanbeck@usask.ca)).

- Classroom Enhancement Initiative

As the college prepares for renewal over the next few years, we are also continuing to update our classrooms to offer hybrid learning This will allow students to learn together whether onsite or remotely. Please consider giving to the College's *Second Century Fund*.

Above all, we would ask for your continued prayers. St. Andrew's has been a vital part of the United Church landscape here in your Region for over a hundred years. During that time, three things have remained constant: challenge and change, the resilience of prairie folk to adapt and endure, and the faithfulness of the Creator to see us through. The College shares in the same burdens and joys which mark the reality of our Communities of Faith ... we do not stand apart in some famed ivory tower! We know what it is like to have to make tough decisions about existential questions, and to listen for the Spirit's guidance on the long journey of faith. So please continue to pray for us, as we pray for you.

And may the peace of Christ dwell within you richly, this day and always. Amen.

Dea. Dr. Richard Manley-Tannis