

Proceedings notes,
Northern Spirit Regional Council meeting,
October 14-15 2022



Key links to more information shared during the meeting

(All submitted reports and meeting documents are posted on the Regional meeting page. Notes taken during small groups are posted as a separate document on this page.)

[Ashmont United and gift to Acimowin Opaspiw Society](#)

[Nominations Committee website page](#)

[Networks and Clusters page](#), including info and link for funding application

[2023 salary schedule](#)

[Financial handbook for congregations](#) (please help Treasurers be aware of this resource)

[Funds being collected for Hurricane Fiona damage on the East Coast](#)

The sign that was behind Laura Fohse that many admired and that you too can access!

<https://www.uccresources.com/products/be-the-church-graphics-kit>

[Moderator Carmen Lansdowne's Facebook page](#)

[Moderator's nominee video](#)

General Council discussion:

Indigenous United Church: [Caretakers' Calls to the Church](#)

[General Council 44 proposals and decisions](#) (a lot of documents here- take your time navigating through)

[News from General Council 44](#)

Evening, Friday October 14 2022: Susan Waldie

Lesley Penny, Meeting Convenor, opened the gathering at 7:00 pm with a Welcome, a Land Acknowledgement (written by Peter Chynoweth for the Gathering resource), a reminder of our Zoom manners, and thank you for all the volunteers who assisted with this time together.

Deborah Hoekstra led us in opening worship. The hymn video was prepared by Darryl Dewalt from Camrose United Church.

Helen Reed, Chair of Northern Spirit Regional Council, introduced the theme “United in a Time of Change”. Reflecting on the past three years, she reminded the gathering that with the introduction of the new structure, the region assumed new responsibilities. In Northern Spirit we are also sharing staff with two other regions, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine. This has required compromise, patience, and flexibility.

Just as the regions were beginning to adapt, the world was changed by Covid. Reduced opportunities to meet in person impacted how the region could define its role and work on what was new. Together, we are still taking baby steps. We do remain committed to working with each other.

However, we must realize that there are still vacancies in committees at the regional level, places without Ministry personnel, and struggles within our Communities of Faith (CoFs). How are we prepared to move forward – sharing talents and working with compassion? These new chapters need to be written and will be so with God’s actions and by grace as we move to be the presence of God in this time and place.

The group was invited to join in small group discussion focusing on three questions.

1. How has the Church proved to be vital (or not) during these shifting times?
2. How has your spirit and your community of faith’s spirit held strong or waived?
3. How did the CoF stay connected within the CoF and with other CoFs?

At 8:05 the gathering was called back together. Monica Rosborough talked about the experience of the church in Athabasca. Although she continues to pray daily that they can meet the budget, she is full of hope. She told the story of Fredrick Douglas. Even when faced with adversity as a captured slave he yelled to the people “Is God dead?”. Four things that keep Athabasca United Church grounded are:

1. Keeping their Mission Statement in mind.
2. Listen and then respond.
3. Maintain healthy relationships. Don’t be afraid to talk about the “elephant in the room”.
4. Their relationship to the wider church.

The floor was turned over to the Linda McLaren, Chair of the Affirm task group, and her team. Linda referred the region to the details included in the task group report. They are preparing to bring a motion to the Northern Spirit Regional Council (NSRC) meeting in May 2023. Between then and now they will continue with the education pieces they have been doing. Before May 2023, they need to write a Vision Statement and outline the steps to move forward. The motion is the formal declaration the Region is Affirming, but the work of living out that declaration is ongoing. The plan is to celebrate this step at the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Region.

Q and A: How do you feel about the timeline? What do you need to be prepared for May 2023?

1. Does the Region declaring itself to be Affirming require that all CoFs need to be? Short answer is no. All NSRC committees, commissions and task groups need to uphold that standard. All events of NSRC need to be Affirming.
2. How many CoFs in the region are Affirming and how many of the other regions are affirming? Eli Carter Morgan did some quick research. They calculate that there are 18 Affirming CoFs and likely another 8 in process. Many of the other regions are Affirming but they could not give a firm number at this time.
3. Can the team prepare a short – maybe 10 minute – video for use by the Cofs in the Region? There are some video materials available already. If further clarification is needed, a CoF should get in touch with the task group.
4. Can we have more clarity around what Affirming includes and what it does not include?
5. The gathering was reminded that while the focus of Affirm is on the LGBTQ2S population, the second paragraph also includes justice issues for many diverse populations.
6. As an Affirming Region, would NSRC then only gather in a “safe” space? How does impact mobility challenged persons?

Mervin Gallant closed the evening with prayer.

Morning, October 15, 2022: Bev Diebert

At 10:00am on October 15, 2022, Leslie Penny, Annual Meeting Convenor, welcomed about 90 people to the Saturday morning session of the 4th Annual Meeting of Northern Spirit Regional Council. She acknowledged the music leadership of Darryl Dewalt, Minister of Music at Camrose United Church for providing the music for the hymns this weekend. She then asked the gathering to join in the opening hymn, *Moved by the Gospel* (VU# 394). During announcements, she reminded folks to read the Northern Spirit weekly newsletter and to check out the Facebook page as well as both, the Regional and the Community of Faith calendars to keep yourselves informed of what is going on. She thanked Sharon Adams for preparing the inspiring logo for this meeting, based on the theme, *United in a Time of Change*. Eli Carter-Morgan opened the meeting with prayer.

Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister, welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an update on some work within the Indigenous Ministries in Northern Spirit. She told the history of two churches being gifted to the Indigenous Church in an act of Reconciliation. First, about a year ago, General Council received a letter from the Acimowin Opaspiw Society on Saddle Lake Cree Nation asking if they would consider giving them the church in Ashmont. The church had been closed for a while and the Trustees had been trying to sell it. She contacted the Trustees to discuss the proposal, not knowing how they might feel about it. The next day, they contacted her to say ‘yes’! To see the full story, [click here](#). In the spring of 2022, Charlene Burns, our Community Capacity Development Coordinator, and her partner Russ, along with Shannon

were invited to a Round dance to celebrate. At that event, in the midst of a conversation, Russ jokingly said to Shannon, “I’ll take a church”.

About that same time, Beverly United Church in Edmonton was offered back to the Regional Council. It had closed before the pandemic with the hope that the Bissell Center would be able to use it. After the Center looked at their programming and their needs, they decide that they couldn’t use the facility, but generously continued to manage the site until other arrangements could be made. Shannon contacted Russel Burns and the Central Alberta Spiritual Society to see if the building would work for them. They were looking for a space in Edmonton to gather for programs, ceremonies and wakes and a place to have a space outside for a sacred fire. Russel was amazed and so grateful for the offer. The Society quickly accepted. They are hoping to soon have a ceremony with former member of the Beverly United Church to celebrate.

Shannon then offered an opportunity for questions or comments. Deborah Hoekstra, the last minister at Beverly United Church, suggested that members of the congregation will be very grateful to have their church being used in such a manner.

Leslie Penny thanked Shannon for sharing this good news and asked for the Nominations report.

Marilyn Carroll, who left the committee suggested that folks look at the [submitted report](#). Terms, skills and vacancies have been added. Brenda Simon, a current member of the committee added, they are still working on getting good job descriptions to include. She thanked Helen Reed for her help in this endeavor. Leslie Penny, then publicly thanked Kathy Jackson for her long and dedicated work, on this committee as well as others, over the last 25 years. She added Julie Graham has stepped in to support to this committee. Earl Raeburn, Pastoral Relations Minister, reminded folks that everyone involved in wider church work was invited to participate by someone. He asked everyone to “Be that someone!!!” Several committees than need more members were mentioned – including the Lay Leadership Support Committee, Nominations and the Annual Meeting Planning committee.

<https://northernspiritrc.ca/about-us/get-involved/>

Donna Kline, Treasurer for Northern Spirit Regional Council began her report by thanking Heather Dootoff for keeping the region’s financial records. She reviewed the [audited financial document](#) for those gathered. While waiting for questions to be posted to the chat, Leslie Penny thanked both Donna and Heather for their excellent work. A question was asked about different grants to support the Regional Council. Donna responded that grants have different rules and different situations, but all require an application.

<https://northernspiritrc.ca/documents-forms/funding-ministry/>

Helen Reed added that notifications are included in the newsletter. The next question was about the formal process to approve financial documents. Helen Reed, Executive Chair, responded that they are approved by the Executive. Monica Rosborough thanked the Regional Council for the funds she was able to use to host a Blanket Exercise. Rev Linda McLaren

suggested that needs needed to be prioritize and communicated to the Executive to help them determine the Regional Council's needs. Also, there is support for Clusters and Networks. <https://northernspiritrc.ca/networks-and-clusters/> This includes a funding request form. <https://form.jotform.com/210405022357038>

Shannon McCarthy was then called upon to give her Executive Minister's Report. She began by thanking those working on behalf of Northern Spirit Regional Council – Gord Waldie, former Chair of the Executive, who just finished in the spring and, Helen Reed, who just started in that position. She also thanked the other members of the executive who have lots of work ahead. In September, they had a face to face meeting that allowed both past and present Executive members to take part. Next, Shannon thanks the Nominations Committee for doing the hardest job in the church. She continued that we have been a Regional Council (RC) for almost 4 years and 'your sabbaticals should now be over'. She asked the gathering, 'as RC Reps, what committee are you on?? What can you offer or be willing to do?? It doesn't have to be within the formal structure – you could create a cluster or serve on a network'. She concluded by thanking the staff, particularly Kathy Jackson, who has gratefully disconnected after service 25 years in the wider church in Alberta. She shared that the Executive gifted Kathy with a 5 leaf broach (1 leave for every 5 years of her ministry) as a token of their appreciation.

She went on to thank the rest of the staff team: Earl Reaburn, Julie Graham, Heather Dootoff, and Leanne Templeton for all they hard work. She thanked Jess Beckerley, who has been hired to cover .4 time of Kathy's work, primarily in the Pastoral Relations area. Another person may have been found for the other .6 part of the job, but those details are still being worked out. She thanked Bev Diebert, from Living Skies Regional Council, who is temporarily helping to do the newsletter and responding to the Northern Spirit Email, as well as taking notes this morning.

As well as the RC staff, Shannon thanked the General Council deployed staff: Vicki Nelson, who is the Community of Faith stewardship support person for Pacific Mountain, Chinook Winds, Northern Spirit, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine Regional Councils. You will hear from her this afternoon.

New to Northern Spirit and the Office of Vocation Minister position is Laura Fohse. Laura was given an opportunity to introduce herself and told how glad she was to be able to put some faces to names she recognized. She gave thanks for the members who are working with candidates and those in discernment. Currently, she is working with 32 candidates and discerners from over the Northern Spirit, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine Regional Councils, 8 of which are from Northern Spirit. She also acknowledged the Prairie Candidacy Board and their work and thanked Adam Hall for his leadership as chair of the Prairie Candidacy Board. Laura concluded by saying she looks forward to making connections with the folks from Northern Spirit. Shannon then told that the Program Assistant position is currently being advertised and will soon close.

Shannon concluded her report with an explanation about future annual meetings. The three regional councils agreed to use a 3-year cycle starting in 2024 with Living Skies, then Northern Spirit in 2025 and Prairie to Pine in 2026. While each is doing their in-person meeting, the other 2 regions will meet electronically. The advantage to this is savings in time, costs and environmental impact. While recognizing that this isn't perfect, it will still allow us to connect on a regular basis. In 2023, each regional council will meeting in person. The dates for Northern Spirit meeting are May 4 – 7. If you have further questions or concerns, you are always welcome to call or email her. (smccarthy@united-church.ca)

Leslie Penny offered a huge thanks to Shannon on behalf of all of the gathered.

Chair of the Executive, Helen Reed, then presented the video introducing the new Moderator, Right Reverend Carmen Lansdowne. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOFcNb-XB1A>

Helen asked 2 other Northern Spirit General Council Commissioners to share what they believed were 2 or 3 proposals or decisions that impacted Northern Spirit. Gord Waldie, former Chair of the Regional Council Executive, came forward. The first issue Gord discussed was the relationship between Indigenous Church and the Settler Church. About 36 years ago, a formal apology was offered. It was received, but not accepted and has still not been accepted, since we are still living into the apology. The proposal that came to this General Council asked for a remit to allow the Indigenous Church to authorize them to adopt a new structure within The United Church of Canada without actually being seen by the settler part of the church before the remit. By doing it this way, we are respecting the [Calls to the Church](#) that were presented and accepted at 2018's General Council meeting and giving the Indigenous Church the right to self determination, **not** on settler terms.

The second issue that Gord choose to highlight was the new Church sponsored Captive Insurance Plan. As insurance rates continue to rise, the United Church has decided to run its own self-insurance plan. It is hoped that this will help save costs for churches and congregations. They will take 3 million dollars from reserves to underwrite it. It was fully explained in the September Treasurer's webinar. Please feel free to get all the details from there: <https://youtu.be/fpBhCkKg7pE> The hope is that this will save 10 – 15% on premiums. Helen then thanked Gord for his presentation.

Next Peter Chynoweth offered his 2 issues: 1) On-line General Council began in February and concluded in August with the in-person installation of the new Moderator. Most of the meeting was not face to face, but was still very powerful. Peter asked if it will happen again? And no one knows, at this point, but is the planet healthier because we met this way? Is the church better or worse for meeting this way? His second item was on the change to reduce the church's carbon emissions. In 2018 the target was to set to reduce by 80% by 2050, but this year, it was changed to reduce it by that much by 2030. Can the General Council even do this, without requiring something from local communities of faith?

Shannon offered that proposals and more information [could be found at this huge link](#).

Helen Reed then offered her 3 pieces important to Northern Spirit. First, was an addition to the new Manual requiring called or appointed ministry personnel to be at the congregational meeting, that was clarified by the General Secretary. In the previous Manual, this was not a requirement. Helen asked, what implications are there for you and your congregation? Second, was the criteria for ending a pastoral relationship, that was brought forward by Northern Spirit Regional Council. Executives differed on this. News blurbs issued during the meeting could be found at: <https://generalcouncil44.ca/news> . Lastly, was the mileage rate that the General Secretary shared. It was raised to \$0.46 in 2022 and will rise to \$0.55 in January 2023. More details can be found at: <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2022-09/salary-schedule-ministry-personnel-2023.pdf>

Helen then asked folks to discuss in small groups, what strikes you about these pieces and, what supports does your congregation need? The 85 people gathered then broke into small groups for 25 minutes to discuss these questions. Julie Graham provided a Google form for breakout rooms to record their thoughts to pass onto the Executive.

Following the small group discussion, Leslie Penny welcome Blaine Gregg, Ministry Personnel at Spirit of Hope United Church in Edmonton to bring us a good news story. Blaine began by giving us the creation story of the Community of Faith he serves. Please see the separate PDF of this presentation.

What they have discovered is that 1+1+1+1 does not equal 4. Nearly half of active congregants in the four churches did not join the new pastoral charge. The renovations during the pandemic were more difficult than planned. Amalgamation is an **end** to who they were separately, but they did create something **brand new**. They now pay regular attention to the operating budget, are proactive with their communication, and are intentionally living into their Vision Statement. For more information see <https://www.spiritofhope.ca/about-us> .

Leslie Penny thanked Blaine for his presentation and added she looks forward to see what new is coming from them. Just before people broke for nourishment and refreshment, Blaine offered Grace, saying God goes with us, where ever we go. The meeting broke at 12:15 and planned to reconvene at 1:45pm.

Afternoon, October 15, 2022: Susan Waldie

“Great is Thy Faithfulness” played and recorded by Darrel Dewalt called the gathering back together at 1:45 p.m.

Lesley Penny, Meeting Convenor, introduced Vicki Nelson, Stewardship Animator for Western Canada. Vicki asked everyone to close their eyes and reflect on when we learned to pray, when we learned to be in worship, when we learned about injustice, and when we learned to be generous. Vicki introduced the “Discipleship Flower” to remind the gathering that generosity is one of the petals. She talked about “Called to be the Church – the Journey”. This one of the stewardship programs available from the National Church. She also outlined her role in

Stewardship Education and some of the ways she can work with CoFs. She provided updates on relief campaigns such as funds to assist with rebuilding following Hurricane Fiona. Vicki can be reached at vnelson@united-church.ca.

Executive Minister, Shannon McCarthy, and Region Chairperson, Helen Reed, reviewed the structure of Northern Spirit Regional Council (NSRC). In Q and A scenario, they addressed the question “Who are you going to call?”. The short answer seemed to be call Earl, but that is not actually true. They referred everyone to the information and contacts on the NSRC website, www.northernspiritr.ca The committees and commissions of the region are available to help, but this is only possible when a CoF identifies that they need help.

The gathering then broke into breakout rooms to discuss:

1. How do we move forward?
2. What does re-visioning look like?
3. How does the theme “United in a Time of Change” reflect this?

Notes from these groups are available in a separate document. When we came together in the large group, Shannon McCarthy added to the discussion of who to call. She reminded the group the two other staff people – Leanne Templeton, archivist for NSRC and Julie Graham, Regional Minister: Justice and Communications – have much to share with a CoF.

“Words of Wisdom: Changing the Direction of the Conversation” Chairperson Helen summarized the discussions reminding us that we are all friends and neighbours in the church. In this time together we have been able share each others’ troubles and successes and to remind ourselves that we can learn from each other. We are stronger in community. God continues to bring us together.

Leslie Penny from Barrhead United Church shared the Barrhead story. The building in Barrhead had been built when the church had people to fill it and people to care for it. Members of the CoF had great attachment to the building. The decision to sell the building and rent in downtown Barrhead was difficult. The experience of the CoF going forward is now positive. Attendance at worship is increasing, they are starting an ecumenical choir for the Christmas season, and most importantly they now have finances and energy to focus on Mission and Ministry.

Monica Rosborough and Catherine Maclean introduced to the work in progress to produce a new music resource for the church. This resource will give the church access to new resources in areas that have been overlooked – voices of minority groups, hymns of Lament, and music that reflects some newer theological interpretations. The plan is for this digitalized resource “Then Let Us Sing” to be available for 2025. There is no plan for a new print hymn book.

As this was a gathering and not a meeting, there was no need for closing motions.

Deborah Hoekstra led us in worship including a communion service to close our time together.

