

CONSEIL RÉGIONAL NAKONHA:KA REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORT

Origin: Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council

Executive Summary

In a societal context that prides itself culturally as a secular one, the Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council is working to push boundaries, speak to a society that has all but forgotten about faith, navigate a hostile government, live out our prophetic call as a justice-seeking people, research and innovate in every possible way, while supporting our communities of faith that face enormous challenges, in both of Canada's official languages. We're constantly looking for ways to ignite creativity and imagine the church of the future. In many respects, our secular context has a 10-year head start on the future in comparison with most of the rest of Canada. We need to be bold and daring. What have we got to lose?

New Ministries with Diasporic Communities

Our Regional Council is working to establish a series of new ministries, predominantly in French and most within the context of the diasporic communities. Working with existing congregations as incubators or hosts, the development of these emerging communities of faith has some challenges. Financially, emerging communities are not the most established and host communities are not eager to lose possible rental income when they are often struggling to make ends meet. Finding ways to develop a sense of shared ministry rather than landlord/renter relationships seems to be key to success. Linguistically, the emerging and host community do not always share common language, which adds a layer of complexity to a relationship. Culturally, there is a desire on the part of the emerging community to sustain some of their previous church experience through music and worship expression, funeral and wedding rites that are different from typical United Church traditions, and church governance norms that are often a culture shock for those who are new to church polity. Having cultural interpreters, emerging church accompaniment and partnership is key to navigating these intercultural dynamics in a way that is not colonial and is open to transformation. There are currently five communities in various stages of moving towards recognition as congregations of the United Church of Canada.

In addition to the new communities being established, there are also examples of long-standing communities of faith that have made an intentional invitation and outreach to newly arrived Canadians and are seeing significant growth in their worship services and events. These communities went from relatively small suburban churches to vibrant, intercultural, dynamic sacred spaces that have been re-energized.

Ministry with People in the First Third of Their Lives

In addition to establishing ministries in diasporic communities, our Regional Council is working to develop ecumenical and innovative ministries with young people. Saint Martha's Chapel (Chapelle Sainte-Marthe) is an ecumenical ministry that was established a number of years ago and is currently undergoing transformation and growth. It is a partnership with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. Youth gatherings in the region

have been frequent in addition to our summer camp program. One such event held in December 2024, *Ré-unis*, gathered over one hundred youth and young adults who were predominantly Francophone for a vibrant weekend of discussion, worship and social connection. We are discovering that ministry to young people with deep theological connections and roots (largely from the diasporic communities) is quite different than with those who have no roots in church at all. Communicating and programming for these two audiences is going to be targeted differently and is key as we move forward in welcoming youth and young adults into our church.

Calls to Ministry

God seems to be doing something new in our midst. Despite the challenges we face in a secular culture with vulnerable congregations, we also seem to be dealing with a disproportionately high number of candidates for ministry. It is exciting to see candidates being involved in all aspects of the church's life and in the wider community. Each of them brings a passion and perspective of the church that we are sorely needing.

Indigenous Ministry and Justice

Our regional council holds a deep passion for indigenous justice and work towards right relations. In 2023, the launch of the Mohawk Bible translation was celebrated as the lifetime work of one of our key indigenous elders, Satewas Harvey Gabriel. We helped to fund the publication, shared copies with each of our communities of faith and honoured the work through multiple celebratory events. In 2024, we offered content to the regional council to help build fluency in the work of indigenous justice through the *Respect and Kanoronhkwa'tshera* project so that settler communities of faith could be equipped with a deeper sense of the history and context of this work. A team was also assembled to communicate with all pastoral charges on the importance of voting on the Indigenous Church remit in 2023-2024. We joined and celebrated the first ordination in the Indigenous Ministries stream of a candidate in our region, Rev. Robert Patton.

Finance and Extension Board

We benefit greatly from a long-standing partner corporation that is a significant funder of our ministries and the regional council itself. In recent years, the Finance and Extension Board has been working to align priorities with our investments, has initiated conversations about how multiple ministries collaborate and has worked to see the bigger picture of the region. In many respects, they are returning to their original mandate and reemphasizing the 'extension' piece that has been less prominent during years of church decline. Furthermore, they support ministry personnel with a generous sabbatical fund, have been working on analyzing congregational financial health, offer grants to students and are currently working on a special project to have all oil tanks and furnaces in church buildings replaced with cleaner and more secure options.

La Table des ministères en français

While *La Table* operates across Canada, its mandate makes it highly relevant to our ministries in Québec. We have a good working relationship with this Francophone body of the church, including having a representative on our Executive. Since so much of the growth we are experiencing in our region comes from the French-speaking population, this is increasingly important to us as we navigate our way into the future.

Daring Justice

Our region benefits from the presence of two vibrant incorporated ministries: Montreal City Mission and Saint Columba House. They both provide fantastic and unique ministries, serving local communities, vulnerable populations and new Canadians. Montreal City Mission was recognized in 2022 by the CBC as Charity of the Year.

Our strategic plan has us exploring a model of Justice Disciples where each community of faith has a lead volunteer on justice issues. These leads would be given resources and support to work with their community on those issues.

Communications

In recent years we've put additional focus on media relations, particularly around our Regional Council meetings making statements, issuing press releases and making a point of being present in the public sphere. As our provincial government becomes increasingly aggressive towards public expressions of faith, bans worship in parks and public spaces, prevents the wearing of religious symbols by public servants, teachers and health care professionals, finding our way into the public sphere is more important than ever. In 2024 we held a media relations workshop to give those in our communities of faith an opportunity to gain confidence in having a public voice.

Internal communications and relationship building with our communities of faith is also a high priority. Beyond regular newsletters, we have a visiting team that is working to have meals with our congregations and build trust and understanding so that we might truly feel connected. We've established four clusters who work together and share experience with one another. This continues to be a priority for us. Our Community of Faith Support Minister prioritizes these connections and linking communities to support in whichever areas they may be struggling.

Dynamic Worship

We hosted a very popular Worship Showcase that allowed people to experience different forms of worship and experience that are provided by communities of faith. It was a good way to generate creativity and innovation when it comes to meeting the spiritual needs of those who are seeking. Our first offering was in 2024, but we are considering offering this again in future years.

Resonance

In June 2025, we partnered with Montreal City Mission to offer a conference on the spiritual echoes of a secular society called Resonance 2025. Held at the Palais des congrès in Montreal with a series of excellent speakers and experiences, the conference sought to offer a space that could be established for deeper, meaningful discussions. Music, art, reflections and workshops were at the heart of the experience. The conference was offered in English and French and the Regional Council held its meeting on-site so that there were opportunities to connect members with the wider community of thought on these issues.

Personnel

We celebrated the fantastic ministry of Rev. Rosemary Lambie as she retired in late 2022 as our Regional Executive Minister. We welcomed Rev. Éric Hébert-Daly into this role at the start of 2023. In mid-2024 David-Roger Gagnon moved to New Brunswick to serve a ministry in Moncton and we decided to use this time to bring on a modified role of Community of Faith Support Minister. Dr. Esther Guillén took on this role at the start of 2025. We also saw our long-time Communications and Administrative Assistant Judy Coffin retire from her role in December 2024 and brought in Aviyah Abrams into this role at the start of 2025. We continue to benefit greatly from the work of Shanna Bernier as our First Thirds Minister, Rev. Dan Hayward our Pastoral Relations Minister, Joel Miller our Executive Assistant, and Brian Ruse our Finance Administrator.

We are also pleased to have a number of people who support our region from the General Council Office: Rev. Tim Hackborn and Rev. Caroline Penhale serving our region from the Office of Vocation, Rev. Tori Mullin as our Growth Animator, Martha Pedoniquotte as the Community Capacity Development Coordinator for Indigenous Ministries and Roger Janes who is the Community of Faith Stewardship Support and Philanthropy for our region.

Strategic Plan

Here are the activity streams from our strategic plan adopted in 2023 and will evolve through the discussions regarding Towards 2035:

1. *Build and strengthen relationships between Regional Council and communities of faith*
2. *Establish a rural forum*
3. *Create at least 7 new communities of faith*
4. *Implement a targeted communication plan*
5. *Expand the regional justice network*
6. *Explore options to stabilize core funding for UCC community-based ministries*
7. *Strengthen Discipleship and Evangelism*
8. *Invigorate worship*
9. *A comprehensive plan for First-Third Ministries*
10. *Strengthen the regional environment network*
11. *Facilitate involvement of UCC churches in climate emergency response*
12. *Explore alternate structures for the Regional Council Executive*
13. *Align financial decisions with activity streams of Strategic Plan*

Looking Forward

There are many reasons to fear the future, but there are also many reasons to feel confident that there is a future for the church. We feel that finding ways to meet the needs of the spiritually-hungry (of which there is a growing number) is key to our church's future. Many younger people have voted with their feet because they don't understand the purpose of churches, haven't found our offerings to meet their needs, or are influenced by pop culture which relegates the church experience to a form of coercion/thought-control, hypocrisy or reality-denial. We are uniquely positioned to offer a counter-narrative and meet those needs if we can find ways to be creative, contextual and relevant. This is our challenge, but we are convinced that it is possible.

Submitted by Norman Robert Boie, President
Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council