

## **SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORT 2025**

### **Origin: Shining Waters Regional Council**

The Shining Waters Regional Council (SWRC) Meeting theme for this past year was “Sanctuary: Towards a Kingdom of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation”. This has been a challenging three years for the regional council, communities of faith and The United Church of Canada. We continue to walk through the post-pandemic reality together. It has taken many months for many communities of faith to recover from the challenges of the pandemic, with many other communities facing a new reality. The pandemic did afford opportunity for many communities of faith to experiment and meet in new and innovative ways, including continuing hybrid worship and meetings.

### **Church in New and Creative Ways:**

Staff and volunteers have worked countless hours preparing, changing, experimenting, and succeeding in continuing as Church in new and creative ways. As an Executive, we have heard stories of sacrifice, perseverance, hope, success, and also deep fatigue and we have also heard stories of worry, stress, frustration and struggle. As a region, as community, we give thanks and we continue to be on a long journey together; we celebrate the resilience of our churches and the expression of the Gospel in many new and creative ways.

SWRC has supported, worked with, and considered The United Church of Canada Strategic Plan, in partnership with the regional council Executive and Commission work. Our four regional council Commissions, specifically the Communities of Faith, Pastoral Relations, Intercultural and Diversity and Social Justice and Ecological Commissions, have supported, challenged, and considered specific work of the regional council.

The Shining Waters Regional Council, in partnership with both communities of faith and outreach ministries, have struggled addressing the local challenges across the regional council for folks who are unhoused and underhoused, confronted meeting the needs for basic income, food security, and the challenges of poverty. We have worked at living out being an affirming regional council, supporting youth, faith formation, and becoming an intercultural and diverse Church. The regional council has supported Kindred Works with the development of four sites and partnering through the regional trust around maintaining former church property for future ministry and outreach. We are so grateful for the many volunteers and staff who partner to support and promote the work and ministry of the regional council.

### **Our Regional Council Between 2022 and 2025:**

Since 2022, with the transition out of the pandemic period, many of our communities of faith, outreach ministries, and camps have struggled with returning to a new normal! With communities of faith returning to offer in-person worship by the beginning of 2022, many added hybrid worship and started offering more frequent meetings online for study, meetings, and connection. We have continued a ministry of caring and support and we have continued in new

and creative ways. Volunteers, music leaders, ministry personnel, camp staff, outreach staff, and congregational support staff have all worked tirelessly. We have also faced the challenges of post-pandemic fatigue.

As a region council, distance can be a barrier to meeting in-person and a primary tool for connecting continues to be online gatherings, for both Ministry Personnel and Lay Leaders for support, updates, education, and townhall meetings. Our website/newsletter “Currents”, continues to be a key tool for communication within our regional council. Many local and regional networks and local groups have also met to connect, learn, challenge, listen, and work together. The Executive also celebrates the significant work of the regional council Commissions, Committees, networks/clusters, informal gatherings UCC folks/community members, and active UCW groups across the regional council.

In 2024/25, the Executive spent a significant amount of time considering our ministry now and, in the future, including participation in a joint retreat with the Canadian Shield Regional Council Executive in the fall of 2024. One of the primary focus of the retreat for our Executive is supporting communities of faith in the next 5 to 10 year and beyond. This theme and work are similar to the Towards 2035 work of General Council. The retreat also spent time focusing and discussing the strategic plan - Deep, Bold and Daring Justice – as well as how to focus on how to support communities of faith and ministry personnel and how do we as a regional council, support each other. The Executive continues this work, in partnership with Commissions and the UCC, especially the UCC growth unit.

A newer resource for connecting regularly is “Lets Connect Lay Leader Resources” work of the regional council. SWRC offers these events several time a year with a variety of foci. The website offers recorded copies of events as a resource:

<https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/?s=Lets+connect>

Our Shining Waters Regional Council Executive meets monthly (with the exception of the summer) and does the work of the regional council when our region is not meeting (The Manual 2025 C.3.1.1). Often the Executive has a very full agenda which includes oversight of the regional Commissions, regional finances, regional Policy, annual regional council meetings, emerging work, and the Executive Minister and staff.

The Executive celebrates volunteers within the regional council who have also organized a number of connecting events between communities of faith and Ministry Personnel, both locally and across the regional council.

### **Festival of Faith 2025:**

In June, both the Shining Waters Regional Council, in partnership with the Canadian Shield Regional Council, will join together to mutually plan another Festival of Faith for June 13-15, 2025 in Sudbury, Ontario. The Executive receives regular updates from the planning team and is grateful for their work and planning this big event.

**Working towards Right Relations, Anti-Racism, and Equity:**

The United Church of Canada is working towards becoming an anti-racist institution. For the United Church, it means encouraging the General Council Office, Regional Council Offices, communities of faith, and even Canadian society, to pause and reflect. Through the partnership of the United Church, together we offer training, learning opportunities, and discussion groups as part of a strategy of becoming an anti-racist Church. The United Church offers a wide variety of resources, videos, workshops, and printed materials, which provide key support for our Anti-Racism and Equity work of the regional council. The Commissions also support Anti-Racism and Equity work through both policy and education.

Both regional councils have encouraged equity conversations at the Executive and Commission level, and committee levels of the church. The regional council continues to lift up our commitment to equity across our work.

We also continue to work and celebrate the Shining Waters Regional Council as a Affirming regional council, with both staff and volunteers working both regionally and in local communities of faith to support diversity and living into being Affirming across our vast Church. It has been a little over 4 year since Shining Waters Regional Council celebrated becoming an Affirming Region!

SWRC has encouraged equity conversations at the Executive and Commission/Committee levels of the church, continuing to lift up our commitment to equity across our work. We are beginning to live into our new pattern by the naming of equity leads in each Commission. We continue our journey towards Living into Right Relations, particularly the Intercultural and Diversity Commission (IDC) and the Social Justice and Ecological Justice Commission (SEJC) have worked hard at supporting a just, diverse, and equitable Church and society, with a focus on leadership, learning, and transformation. The SEJC has also supported proposals in the past three years that promote advocacy/educational work through communities of faith and advocacy work to the provincial and Federal governments, focusing on these challenges with an emphasis on housing, safe injection sites, guaranteed annual income, and working for justice in Israel/Palestine.

**Youth Ministry:**

The pandemic had a major impact on regional youth ministry. We recently hired a new part-time Youth Minister to support the work of youth ministry within both Shining Waters Regional Council and the Canadian Shield Regional Council. Our most recent in-person youth event was hosted by five regional councils, both in Guelph and Thunder Bay, which included the GC45 Youth Forum contingent. Key youth ministry also continues in SWRC in partnership with the Toronto United Church Council and four (4) UCC Incorporated Ministry Church Camps. The camps include Camp Big Canoe, Camp Simpresca, Camp Scugog, and Sparrow Lake Camp. We are grateful for the many volunteers who support this important and vibrant ministry.

**Work with TUCC, The United Church Property Corporation, and Kindred Works:**

The UCC Incorporated Ministry and TUCC (Toronto United Church Council), have supported local communities of faith, camping, and outreach for 130 years. This partnership continues in SWRC with support focusing on innovative ministry, granting, investing ministry funds, property stewardship, property management at the regional council level, and effective ministry planning. Learn more at: <https://www.tucc.ca/about-tucc/>

Shining Waters Regional Council is partnering with the United Church Property Corporation, both at the community of faith level and regional level. Kindred Works is supporting a number of projects within the regional council including four (4) regional council projects:

- Regent Park (Orillia, ON): The Regent Park project, which is currently under construction, will deliver forty-eight (48) units, with sixteen (16) of those designated as below-market-rent units. Construction is expected to be completed in September 2025, and leasing will commence shortly thereafter.
- Greencedar (Scarborough, ON): The Greencedar project is a planned 11-storey, 155-unit mass timber development located in Scarborough, Ontario, which will include forty-nine (49) below-market-rent units. The target is to begin construction in the Q2 quarter of 2025. Municipal planning approvals and financing have been completed.
- Wexford Heights (Scarborough, ON): The Wexford Heights project is a planned 12-storey, 148-unit mass timber development that is targeting forty-five (45) below-market units. Construction is expected to start in Q4 of 2025.
- Wilmar Heights (Scarborough, ON): There are ongoing concerns from the City regarding the sewer capacity, which is hindering the pursuit of development at the Wilmar Heights site. The property management team has taken action to help stabilize the building from a rental income perspective.

The United Church Property Corporation, in partnership with the regional council and Kindred Works have also created a regional trust. The trust creates a place to manage, maintain, support, and hold properties for both rental income and future development for ministry.

**UCC Incorporated Ministry:**

Along with our Camps mentioned earlier, the regional council support a number of Incorporated Ministries which support outreach and housing, addressing the challenges for the unhoused, underhoused, food instability, advocacy, justice and community support and outreach. These Incorporated Ministries are key leaders within the regional council who expand the ministry of the United Church with many volunteer and staff hours; their ministry is deeply appreciated.

**Work and Support of Ministry within The Regional Council:**

The regional council, through its Commissions, are involved in a wide variety of ministries, focusing on support to communities of faith and Ministry Personnel. Support and conversation focusing on inter-cultural and diverse communities, emerging communities of faith, ethnic-focused ministries, and ministry to new Canadians continue within the regional council. Both the Pastoral Relations Commission and Communities of Faith Commission, and their teams, focus on supporting communities of faith who are in transition with Ministry Personnel and partner with

communities of faith through amalgamations and also sharing buildings with more than one United Church or other faith communities. The regional council has seen a surge in partnership conversations within existing communities of faith focusing on collaboration, clusters, and amalgamations. We see this as a hopeful sign that people are energized to continue to gather as communities of faith in new ways, rather than closing. The regional council is walking with congregations as we make faithful decisions related to property together.

The regional council staff and local communities of faith staff have faced significant cost of living challenges for Ministry Personnel, and this challenge has in turn, made it difficult at times for communities of faith, who are searching for new Ministry Personnel within the regional council.

The Shining Waters Regional Council continues to support a number of new ministries, including a United Church French Congregation and also a number of communities of faith with Canadians who are new to Canada. We continue to work with the UCC Growth Department, focusing on emerging communities of faith.

We celebrate the resilience of our communities of faith and outreach ministries across our regional council and express deep appreciation for their resilience, innovation, and Deep, Bold and Daring discipleship across the Shining Waters Regional Council.