

FUNDY ST. LAWRENCE DAWNING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORT

Origin: Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council

Who Are We:

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council is comprised of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and the Gaspé region of Quebec.

Our Call:

Our region's call is to embody an active and faithful reflection of Jesus' ministry in the world; Affirming and respecting people of all sexual orientations, genders and gender identities, in particular different abilities, ethnicity, skin colour, culture, age, geographic location, economic circumstance and mental and physical health in all aspects of its life and work.

Land Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge that we are located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People, and we acknowledge them as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet), and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. We are all Treaty people.

What We Are About:

As we look forward to the future, we are very aware that we need to be realistic about what we are experiencing as a church. We are aware that we collectively are sharing a sense of grief as we recognize that we are not the church that we used to be. However, as Rev. Dr. Anna Robbins said in a presentation she gave.

"I think we get caught in a place that makes it hard to discern the reality of the past. I think we get stuck in a place of nostalgia, the word nostalgia is formed from the Greek word, nostos – return home - algia – longing. A longing to return home, a longing that comes with a pain to return home. A longing for a home that no longer exists and perhaps never existed. Nostalgia, is an idealization of the past that overlooks the flaws and may even capture the negative and anoint them into something good. We change what was to an ideal and forget about the painful parts and about who was in and who was out, we create a nostalgic fiction about the way things were. We remember how things were when really, they were not."

We are hardly the first people to experience this. There are stories shared in scripture that speak to people longing to go back and forgetting that God was leading them to a new reality. Maybe we are doing some of that when we think about the church of the past, and we get tired of God wanting to lead us forward.

As we look at our church realistically in our region, we are aware of the decline that we have all been experiencing. We have 113 Pastoral Charges. Most of our pastoral charges are rural. Most of our pastoral charges are multi-point. In the midst of experiencing change and decline, we have made a commitment to live into our discerned call.

What's Happening:

We are an affirming region. As part of our commitment to our call, we understand ourselves as a people always striving to become affirming. It is a continued journey in which we have all made a commitment to learn and grow, to know better and to be better.

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region core values are:

- Its relationship with its Communities of Faith, Ecumenical Partners, Indigenous Communities and differing faith traditions. We strive to build healthy relationships based on trust and respect.
- Diversity as modelled by Creator's good creation and strives to affirm that presence and love in all our actions and relationships.
- Open, honest and genuine communications both within and outside the organization. We strive to see the Spirit at work in all of our communications.
- Celebration of community in all the seasons of life. We strive to share in that life with all of creation.

Regional Council Priorities:**Three New Communities of Faith**

Through a working group of the Executive we work to:

- Define "new" Communities of Faith
- Have conversation and plant seeds for emerging expressions of church
- Research possible areas for emerging expressions: (Newcomers, Geographic, Language specific, Virtual, Queer Church, Ukulele Church, etc.).
- Learn Radical Welcome
- Identify best practices for church planting
- Identify leadership needs and training
- Identify funding needs and act as a support to congregations that have a vision for a new expression of ministry

Communicate/Invite/Renew

Through a working Group of the Executive we work to:

- Enhance communication between local communities of faith and the region
- Provide orientation and training to elected and prospective Regional Council members
- Encourage and foster the creation of regional cluster meetings to promote community and enhance cooperation and communication between geographically grouped communities of faith
- Keep a list of communication tools used in the region and enhance where needed
- Highlight the Spark Newsletter and share stories from pastoral charges

- Create a “who to call” reference sheet; welcome packages for those who are new to the region;
- Create a short video about the regional resources;
- Create highlights page about the regional executive meetings for community of faith boards.

Support for Ministry Personnel

Through the development of the Health, Joy and Excellence Institute we work to:

- Provide leaders and communities with opportunities for learning
- Provide environments of sharing to enhance skills, focus energies and celebrate ministry practices
- Encourage local networks of clergy, clergy retreats, etc.
- Value the work of teams that assist clergy in their pastoral charges (M&P Committees etc.)

Education

Through the Faith, Formation and Education Committee we work to:

- Provide workshops and in-person/online educational opportunities
- Provide worship resources to congregations, including sermons for lay-led services
- Create a list of material and resources available to congregations for their ministries

Some of the exciting things that are happening are:

- Cooperative and shared ministries are emerging in our region.
- Communities of Faith are choosing vitality, creating their vision and action plans, that are different than “the way we always did it”. They are making the bold commitment to continue to be the church and have a United Church presence in their community.
- Communities of Faith are discerning their life cycle and making the faithful decision to end well with dignity and purpose, rather than fading away.
- Communities of Faith are looking outside the box to try something new with both success and failing forward; learning and trying again.

Cluster Gatherings:

As part of our call, and understanding the need to have communities of faith reconnect with each other and the region, the Regional Council through a communication working group has been developing geographical clusters. The purpose of the clusters is:

- To enhance communication between local communities of faith and the region
- To provide orientation and training to elected and prospective Regional Representatives to Regional Council.
- To encourage and foster the creation of regional cluster meetings to promote community and enhance cooperation, communication and support between geographically grouped communities of faith.
- To provide information on the Regional Governance Model and Staffing

Health Joy and Excellence Institute:

Providing a place for Ministry Personnel to return to their “why” and be nurtured in their vocation. The three eastern regions wish to undertake this initiative for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is a responsibility of regions to operationalize the goal of this Institute which is:

“to provide leaders and communities with opportunities for learning and environments of sharing to improve their skills, focus their energies and celebrate their practice”.

Beyond this, the regions are also very aware of the stresses pastoral charges are facing and the responsibilities that fall on lay leaders and their ministry personnel. Therefore, we want to target developmental opportunities that will help ministry personnel and communities of faith better manage these challenges.

In addition, good management practice recognizes that providing supports and developing skills are important to improving performance. Ministers, and other leaders, come into their roles with a range of education and experiences which equip them with many of the **skills** required to do the work. However, professional development is important to continuous improvement and to addressing the new challenges which arise. To this end, General Council plays a role through its Office of Vocation in providing some professional development opportunities. Similarly, there are a number of **supports** provided from all levels of the organization. However, in both the development of skills and the provision of supports, there is room to focus on issues specific to these Regions and deliver them in formats best suited to the local environments.

It is significant to note that every time ministry personnel develop their skills or receive support, it benefits their personal development, but it also creates the possibility for them to play a leadership role in applying their skills in their Pastoral Charge and bringing information back to other leaders to help in their development.

The exploration of this joint initiative recognizes that each of the three Regions may have different strategic priorities, however there will be areas where their cooperative efforts will help maximize the benefits that can be gained from their individual resources, expertise and diversity.

Subject Area 1: Living Faith Application

The Living Faith Categories are the cornerstones of our ministry and are the basis for many ministerial position descriptions. While most ministry personnel have skills/knowledge in these categories, the changing environment requires we revisit these and look for creative ways to approach achieving our goals in each category. By way of example, using peer groups could be a useful mechanism for learning and sharing differing approaches to each of the Living Faith Categories which might open up new and creative ways of proceeding with this work. For the purposes of this document the Living Faith Categories are defined as:

Discipleship - Providing opportunity for faith exploration, dialogue and formation in discipleship (e.g. Sunday School, youth programs, UCW, and other adult groups, spreading the gospel).

Justice and Outreach - Reaching out to the vulnerable and marginalized, striving for equity and justice as well as living in good relationships (e.g. community gardens and food banks, advocating for the poor, sponsoring refugees).

Leadership - Identifying, developing, empowering and supporting lay leadership (e.g. training for lay leaders, life-long learning, and sharing faith stories).

Ministry Partnerships - Connecting with other levels of our own Church, connecting with other Churches and community organizations (e.g. learning from/working with them).

Pastoral Care - Compassionately supporting people and transforming lives (e.g. responding to the spiritual needs of those with addictions, in hospital, bereaved, with serious health or relationship issues).

Stewardship - Faithful living through use of time, talent and resources as well as care of creation (e.g. current revenue and its uses, initiatives compared to need).

Worship - Communal expression of our faith in public ritual, which is fulfilling, reflects the United Church of Canada values and is welcoming and accessible (e.g. different forms of worship).

Subject Area 2: Management Theory

There are a number of key management practices that are extremely transferrable across professions. These areas lend themselves to “course” structure or a speaker series and could be made available to individuals at their own pace or in group offerings. By way of example:

Planning - includes understanding strategic and operational planning, time management as well as project management. Ministry personnel will gain skills to provide leadership in supporting this work within the Pastoral Charge, as well as in managing their own responsibilities.

Human Resource Management - includes such areas as team building, conflict resolution, communication, facilitation, motivating creativity, inclusion; all of which will enable ministry personnel to resolve issues and maximize results in their community of faith.

Evaluation - applying the problem-solving approach, understanding process evaluation and design, as well as the principles of change management can assist ministry personnel in moving forward on their own mission/goals as well as providing leadership to assist their communities of faith in these areas.

Subject Area 3: Self-Care

Having a range of supports available to assist ministry personnel in self-care; mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually, is important. Keeping ministry personnel healthy and joyful helps them better fulfil their roles and also provides them with a deeper understanding in providing similar support to others. Using retreats, reading exercises and mentorship approaches may be useful in this area. By way of example, topics could include:

- Dealing with Stress;
- Mindfulness;
- Work – Life Balance and Staying Healthy; and
- Spiritual Renewal.

Subject Area 4: Basic Orientation

While there are some standardized processes and each Region and Pastoral Charge may have different approaches, it is worth exploring the “must have” information we want ministry personnel to have when first employed in a new Pastoral Charge regarding personnel issues, administrative requirements, strategic plans, living faith priorities, etc.

Subject Area 5: Just-in-Time Training or Supports

This would focus on critical issues which arise suddenly, such as the pandemic, but would also be mindful of areas requiring new ways of thinking, such as inclusiveness or youth ministry. Those who are working within the system are certainly aware of the types of issues with which ministry personnel and Pastoral Charges are struggling. As part of a comprehensive approach to Health, Joy and Excellence in Leadership we will want to have a structured way of gathering information on priorities in this area and delivering skills training or supports in a timely fashion or as part of an annual “Just-in-Time” event.

Subject Area 6: Individual Development Plans

While some ministry personnel are continuing their professional development on an individual basis, a structured approach to establishing a “learning plan” for ministry personnel individually may be useful for Regions and Pastoral Charges.

We were able to launch our first initiative, with two rotations of *Practicing Our Calling in a Time of Planetary Crisis*, offered by Janice Maclean of Prayer Bench, and *Rest and Resurrection: Silent Retreat* on the beautiful site of Tatamagouche Centre, offered by Rev. Dr. Catherine Smith. We continue to explore offerings and find funding resources to keep the cost minimal to our participants.

Educational Webinars/Events

The Affirm and Faith Formation and Education committees, as well as staff have made a commitment to provide learning events for our region. Some have been offered through zoom webinars and there have been some in person events. These learning opportunities have been open to both ministry personnel and lay leadership. We hope to continue with these initiatives and provide more into the future.

Reparation:

As part of our commitment to the Calls to the Church coming out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, our Region, through my office, the property committee and the Tatamagouche Board have been engaged in a conversation with the Women of First Light about the Tatamagouche Centre itself as a possible rematriation, (return of the land) to the indigenous people whose ancestors were the caretakers of the land on which Tatamagouche center is located. This place has been the place of Peace and Friendship and considered a place of healing for all people who gather there. We are in the process of creating an MOU that will determine the way we will move forward together. More information is forthcoming on this matter.

Evaluation of Regional Structure:

As you remember, we are in the process of evaluation of the regional structure. The key to the evaluation is the relationship between the regional council and the communities of faith, and whether the governance structure supports this relationship. The focus of the evaluation lines up with the priorities of the region. We wish to thank everyone, our committees, our ministry personnel and our community of faith governing bodies, for taking the time to complete the surveys. Thank you to the executive for their contribution to the process. The data-gathering phase of the project is nearing completion. Surveys were sent out from the regional council office mid January. The collating and writing of the report are now underway and we hope to have a report with any necessary recommendation to you prior to the regional annual meeting, so we can have discussion on the way forward. A special thank you to Jenny Stephens, our consultant, and Seyi Adeyemo, administrative support for this project.

Staff Updates

We were happy to have been able to increase the Communications and Office Administration position for the Sackville office to full-time. Oluwaseyi (Seyi) Adeyemo, started with us on October 7, 2024. Seyi is learning about the United Church and its organizational structures, while at the same time taking on many new projects, including supporting Rev. Jenny Stephens in the evaluation process. He has just completed his first six months and we welcome him to our staff team.

As all of you are now aware, the sudden loss of our colleague and friend, Rev. Kendall Harrison, has shaken our three regions and the church as a whole. Thank you to all who continue to keep his family, our staff and the Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council in your thoughts and prayers.

All of our staff have worked hard over this past year to support our communities of faith, our committees, our ministry personnel, and our laity. I take this opportunity to thank each one of them for their continuous support, faithfulness, and professionalism. There is never an ask that is too big or a task that is too small for our staff.

Thank you to our members:

The vibrancy of our communities of faith and our region is realized through the interconnected actions we take to support one another. None of this work is done by one person, it takes all of us. Your discipleship has helped to weave God's love through our region and connect us in the community, we call church. May we continue to live in this covenantal relationship