



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 From Covid to 2025 and Beyond | Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council Report for Summer 2025

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Executive Summary



The EOORC logo symbolizes the natural beauty in EOORC. The maple tree, and green landscape of forests and fields that run through the entire area of Eastern Ontario and Outaouais are symbolic of the ever-growing love of God for all people which EOORC holds dear. In the three main rivers (St. Lawrence, Ottawa and Rideau), and countless other lakes, rivers and streams we feel the Spirit flowing through us to a troubled world. The golden cross represents the sun, a guiding light for EOORC members as we go out, and, with the Light of Christ, we do not go alone.

In May 2023, EOORC became an Affirming Ministry of The United Church of Canada working for the full inclusion of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities in our Region and in society. We continue to encourage our Communities of Faith to join the Affirming Ministries movement and take part in the various Pride activities happening in our Region

through our Affirming Leadership Team.

Thanks to Covid we have recognized the benefits of online meetings as well as worship. Although monthly Executive meetings have primarily been Zoom, we are acknowledging the importance of meeting, every now and then, in person so, when the Presidency passed from Sue Hutton to Rev. Susan DeHaan (end of May 2024), the September 2024 Executive meeting was held in person.

Supporting and Enhancing the Ministry of Communities of Faith

The life and vitality of our Communities of Faith depend on the passion and dedication of folks from across our Region who step up to serve on the various Leadership Teams which play a crucial role in supporting the mission and ministry of The United Church of Canada. Our Nominations Team is always on the lookout for folks they can tap on the shoulder, or for those who others have tapped for Teams like Finance Leadership, Future Through Property Team (handling congregational property matters for current and future church communities), Church Extension (supporting renovations and church improvements), Communications Leadership, Vision and Transformation (helping to fund ministry projects in the region), Racial Justice Leadership, Right Relations Network (Indigenous Justice), Affirming Leadership, Pastoral Relations Commission, Ministry Personnel Support, and Youth, Young Adult Ministries Leadership, and new to our list of teams Keeping In Touch (purposefully staying connected with our congregations). The people who volunteer not only help strengthen our Leadership Teams, they deepen connections within our region and reinforce our shared commitment to God's work for which we are grateful.

What we have done, continue to do.

We do continue to hold three Regional Council gatherings each year.

1. The gathering of EOORC each year in March is our **Winter Education Event** which is a learning event held virtually and open to all who are interested.

At the **2023 Winter Education Event** the theme was "Building Stronger Communities Through Deeper Connection". Discussions focusing on "*The Stranger: the friend we don't know yet*", *The Power of Diversity: Being ready for transformation in the encounter with the other* and *Our Faith: Going deeper than talking about the weather*, were highlights

of the day.

Let's face it, every CoF sees itself as welcoming, the fact is that this is not always the case. Our **2024 Winter Education Event** "Being Courageous: A Time to Learn / Faire preuve de courage: prendre le temps d'apprendre (March 2024)" tackled the problem, circulated a "Community of Faith Self-Assessment Form" for implementing welcoming strategies, and sent out mystery worshippers with the intent of these people providing an analysis of how welcoming the CoF was.

In **2025** our **Winter Education Event** theme was "Creative Sparks" which highlighted 12 stories shared for inspiration, creative approaches to all aspects of ministries such as *Progaming and worship for LGBT refugees, Camp Omnia (progaming with children), Programming and outside grants, Pie Sales, Strategic Plan/Food Cupboard* to name a few. A learning experience for all (including members of our Tech Team) was folks being allowed to choose the breakout room of interest to them instead of being assigned to a breakout room.

2. Our **AGM** is a hybrid event with many choosing to meet in-person although the Zoom option is available.

In **2022** the **AGM** was a virtual event due to Covid. The theme for the two-day event was "Out of the Desert Into the Promised Land". Something we take for granted now (prior to Gathering Music/Land Acknowledgement/Welcome) but was necessary in 2022 was Technical and Procedural Instructions, as Zoom(ing) was a learning curve for many. Thus we journeyed out of the Desert together with the assurance of the Creator, Redeemer, and the Sustainer leading us to the Promised Land with words of encouragement in a message from the Moderator and greetings from the United Church of Christ (U.S.A.), from welcoming remarks of our President, Rev. Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro, to the report and motions of the various Teams/Committee's. All of which can be found at <https://eoorc.ca/2022-eoorc-annual-meeting/>

The 2023 AGM themed "Being Courageous" was held at the Brockville Memorial Centre. We heard words of inspiration from General Secretary Rev. Michael Blair which lead into the "Setting Our Sights" introduction and table group discussions of hopes and possibilities for the future on Day 1. The various speakers, conversations, motions and reports can be accessed at <https://eoorc.ca/2023-eoorc-agm/>

The 2024 AGM was held at Trinity United Church (Ottawa). *Being Courageous: A time to act / Faire preuve de courage: prendre le temps d'agir* (May-June 2024) was the theme as our United Church of Canada ministry was about to celebrate its 100th Anniversary. We took this opportunity to look back and look forward on the unique contributions and ministry that is The United Church of Canada. We celebrated our history and imagined our future by looking at our understanding of worship and evangelism. More can be found at <https://eoorc.ca/spring-annual-meeting-2024/>

For 2025 a grand event is planned. We will be gathering at the EY Centre in Ottawa for 2 days. Day 1 (Sat. June 14, 2025) is the AGM with *New Heaven, New Earth, Towards 2035*, as its theme. On Day 2 (Sun. June 15, 2025) the entire Region is invited to join together for our 100th Anniversary Service of Worship at the EY Centre as well. Busing is being arranged for some and carpooling is encouraged as we work towards a Strategic Plan objective of reducing our carbon footprint by 20% from 2024-2026.

3. The **Fall Meeting of EOORC** is hybrid as well with Zoom available to those not able to be there in person.

In 2022 "Re-Membering Beloved Community" was held at Bells Corners United Church in Nepean, Ontario where, with masking still highly recommended, we gathered in fellowship. In addition to an EOORC budget update and other business, there was a presentation by Rev. Dr. Peter Bartlett, providing an update on the feedback received at the Annual Meeting in May from the group discussions about "Living Into New Structures". There were also reports from Multi Faith Housing, Camp Awesome and the General Council Office all of which can be found at <https://eoorc.ca/2022-eoorc-fall-meeting/>

Our 2023 Fall Meeting, themed "*Being Courageous – A Time to Listen/Être Courageux – Un Temps pour Écouter*" was held at Woodroffe United Church in Ottawa. As listeners were heard from the Setting Our Sights Strategic Planning Group and were given opportunity for Table Group discussions. In addition to Listening to our Youth and Young Adults (Camp Awesome) and Listening to the needs of the World (Multifaith Housing Initiative) we celebrated with Affirm United in worship and fellowship. You can read more of this at <https://eoorc.ca/2023-eoorc-fall-meeting/>

The theme of the 2024 Fall Meeting was “*Courageous Community*” which was hosted by Trinity-St. Andrew’s United Church in Renfrew. Rev. Mary Royal-Duczek, our *new Community of Faith and Network Support Minister*, guided us as we began to explore the theme starting from the story of Jesus’ resurrection. In thinking of being courageous communities we were also introduced to *Neighbourhood Profiles* by Sharon BATTERY (from the General Council Office). We were encouraged to look into the profiles of our CoF to get a picture of where we are and how we might courageously better serve our community. More from this meeting can be found on our EOORC web page at <https://eoorc.ca/fall-meeting-2024/>

The 2025 Fall Meeting is planning smaller gatherings (similar to the 6 consultation gatherings organized for discussion of the Strategic Plan in 2023) to further inform CoF regarding the information being provided at our AGM *Toward 2035* and imaginings of ways forward.

LOOKING FORWARD

A highlight at the **2022 Fall Meeting** was remembering and honoring Rev. Rosemary Lambie’s tenure as Executive Minister and wishing her well in her retirement. At our **2023 AGM**, we welcomed, with gratitude, our new Executive Minister, Rev. Éric Hébert-Daly.

In **2023**, the Executive of EOORC established a Strategic Planning Working Group. The strategic plan development process was launched at the EOORC annual meeting in Brockville that year, as mentioned above. Table groups were asked to discuss the gifts and needs of the Regional Council. They were then asked to imagine what The United Church of Canada will look like in 10 years’ time, and what would be needed in the next 2-3 years. In late August and September of 2023, a series of 6 consultations were held under the “Setting Our Sights” initiative. Two were held online. In person events were held in Cornwall, Pembroke, Ottawa and Perth.

Approximately 120 people took part in these consultation events and an online survey was conducted from August 1st to September 30th with 20 people responding. 2024 was a difficult year to begin the highly ambitious strategic plan, however, good progress was made in the areas of education, communication and justice. In addition, some structures and effective staffing were incorporated to serve the plan well into 2025. A more detailed account can be found at <https://eoorc.ca/resources/strategic-plan/>

One important highlight of the Strategic Plan Working Group was to have EOORC included as a participant, one of two regional Councils across Canada, in the Fertile Soil Test project of the General Council Growth Animation program. This is an exercise using various sources of data to map our region for potential opportunities for growth of communities of faith.

New challenges were met by many Communities of Faith, especially after Covid. Finding a new path forward when facing fewer and aging volunteers, as well as buildings that are getting more expensive to maintain and require upgrading, is daunting to say the least. The task fell on the shoulders of Rev. Dr. Peter Bartlett to help Communities of Faith in strengthening their vision and renewal work to see possibilities as EOORC's Minister of Visioning. As 2023 came to an end, we bid Peter a fond farewell and blessings in his retirement years. In 2024 Rev. Mary Royal-Duczek accepted the challenge of Minister for Visioning, not only working with Communities of Faith but supporting Networks in the region as she took up the torch from Peter for which we are grateful.

In **April of 2024** we said goodbye to our **Communications Assistant**, Anita Jansman, who had been keeping us in touch with each other since 2019. Communications is now in the very capable hands of Natalie Matkovsky who keeps us connected, in part, by EOORC News, our bi-monthly newsletter.

As we look forward to the future, we are filled with hope and determination. The journey from COVID to 2025 has been challenging, but it has also shown us the strength and resilience of our communities. Together, we have embraced new ways of communicating, learning, and growing. As we continue to support and enhance the ministry of our Communities of Faith, we remain committed to fostering inclusivity, creativity, and courage. With the guidance of the Spirit, we will navigate the path ahead, confident in our shared mission and the ever-present love of God. Let us move forward with faith, embracing the possibilities that lie beyond 2025.

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