



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 Horseshoe Falls Regional Council Report

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Origin: President Elect of Horseshoe Falls Regional Council

Body of report

Greetings and the peace of Christ be with you, from Horseshoe Falls Regional Council, AKA HFRC. We are located in the Southern Ontario, including the Niagara Peninsula, and the western shores of Lake Ontario. Our geographical location has allowed us to share resources, mainly in the way of paid regional council staff, with Antler River Watershed and Western Ontario Waterways Regional Councils. This arrangement has allowed all three Regional Councils to have staff specialized in social justice, faith formation, right relations, and ministry pastoral support. Our last report was made to GC 44 in 2022.

We are an affirming Regional Council whose goal has been to live into Deep, Bold, and Daring discipleship. We are exploring how to best fulfill the ongoing commitment to be an affirming Regional Council. We are finding that there wasn't a clear follow through plan, and now our work is to create a plan rather than just let it go.

Horseshoe Falls Regional Council has two United Church camps, and multiple chaplaincies in both hospitals and University campuses. We are also home to a number of incorporated ministries. We also have incorporated ministries which have moved to a legacy status but with whom we still have a good relationship such as former Wesley Urban Ministries, now simply know as Wesley, in Hamilton, ON, one of the longest-standing non-profits in the region. Wesley is a multi-service organization offering Children, Youth & Family Services, Housing & Homelessness Services and Newcomer, Employment & Community Services. Many of the region's communities of faith have a connection to Wesley and work to help support

their Children, Youth & Family Services. The region also has a number of active former Presbytery Extension Councils which are able to provide funding support to communities of faith, camps, and incorporated ministries.

We have a large newcomer, refugee and asylum-seeking population in Horseshoe Falls Regional Council. Many of our churches are working either on their own, or together in clusters to reach out and support our newcomer population, or by supporting the work of other non-profits. In 2024 Wesley together with regional churches and extension councils raised funds to build new kitchens including a halal kitchen in which they will be providing job training and resume experience, including food safety etc. to newcomers who need support to be successful in job searches.

As more of our churches are facing the reality of declining congregation size and difficulty raising operating revenue, we have a growing understanding of partnership. We are seeing an increasing number of churches who are thinking outside of the traditional box. Some are creating ministry sharing arrangements, many are considering working with Kindred Works to develop properties, and some are working on their own to come up with other solutions. Many are interested and working toward building affordable housing, many have created partnerships with daycares to provide win-win situations for church and for communities facing a shortage of safe, reliable childcare.

Like many other regions in the church, we are struggling to create more trust in Regional Council. Some communities of faith recall presbyteries with nostalgic fondness for a time when everyone knew and trusted one another. Now that leadership seems further away and perhaps less accessible, communities of faith report feeling isolated and frustrated. Many choose to turn away from engagement with the Regional Council, rather than reaching out to connect. At the Regional Council Executive level, we are working to find ways to re-engage, reconnect, and reunite the churches. We hope to go forward into the next years with a focus on relationship, God being our helper.

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