



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 Northern Spirit Regional Council Report for Summer 2025

True Document Date: June 22, 2025

Origin: Northern Spirit Regional Council

Geographic Location

Northern Spirit Regional Council includes all of Northern Alberta north of Hwy 13, the Peace Valley portion of Northern BC and the Northwest Territories. This vast geography makes Northern Spirit the largest geographical regional council; however, we also have the smallest number of Communities of Faith.

Northern Spirit Regional Council (NSRC) has been actively embodying The United Church of Canada's vision of "Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice". We became an Affirming Regional Council in 2024 and continue to live into our commitments in a public, intentional and explicit way.

Deep Spirituality

In 2023, the NSRC held an in person Regional Council Meeting in Camrose, Alberta, under the theme "Living Our Faith." We gather in person again in 2025 with the theme "United Church Fan Club: Deep, Bold, Daring." The meeting will include a Celebration of Ministries service and Anniversary commemoration.

Bold Discipleship

Northern Spirit is small in number yet the vast geography means most of our meetings are online. The regional council recently reflected on the variety of ways we gather and support

one another to continue to foster connection between the Regional Council and Communities of Faith. Opportunities to gather included a variety of training sessions for lay leaders, online and in person clergy gatherings, clusters and network gatherings. Dare to Share an Ecumenical Shared Ministry gathering brought together leaders in United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Moravian churches to discuss ways we can work and offer ministry together.

We have had a strong focus through our Ministry Personnel, Lay Leadership and Community of Faith support committees on training lay leaders and providing spaces of collegiality and connection for our ministry personnel.

The Pastoral Relations commission and Property Commission work closely with Communities of faith as they navigate the changing church. There is a strong commitment to encouraging Congregations to work together in order to provide full-time ministry opportunities. As congregations sell buildings and vision new ways of being church, our committees and commissions walk along side and try to offer as much care and support as possible.

Volunteers are vital to our work and we know Northern Spirit is not alone in struggling to find volunteers for the work of the Regional Council. A huge thank you goes out to all of the dedicated ministry personnel and lay leaders who have offered their time and talents to the Regional Council over the last triennium.

Daring Justice

In 2023 and 2024, both Northern Spirit and Living Skies Affirming Committees spent considerable time educating about proposed, and eventually passed, legislation in Saskatchewan and Alberta targeting gender-diverse people. They have also offered pastoral care space. This is a profound ongoing concern and advocacy needs to continue. Countering this, we continue to see growth in our Affirming movement, especially in rural areas and small towns.

In August and September 2023 Affirming ministries, allies, and regional Affirming committees rallied to counter the country-wide September 21 transphobic demonstrations against inclusive school curricula and lenses, dubbed the “Million Person Marches”. Counter demonstrations and messaging included extensive United Church participation in many communities. On the positive side, multiple secular groups and commenters online noted with appreciation the presence of United Church members and congregations at these and other counter- protests.

The Being Good Relations Network, which relates to both Northern Spirit and Chinook Winds Regional Council is comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The network has held many online and in-person education events, with a continued focus on: concerns about the Alberta proposed social studies curriculum; the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action; supporting local commitments to truth and reconciliation; supporting congregational engagement with significant days like June 21 and May 5; book studies and webinars on a range of topics; and most recently, hosting 60 people in person and online in Edmonton to learn about the report on unmarked burials.

The Western Intercultural Ministries Network, which relates to the five Western Regions has offered Northern Spirit, Prairie to Pine and Living Skies regional councils many online and in person opportunities to learn about practical engagement with intercultural ministry and anti-racism, through its in-person biannual conferences (and online with 100 people during COVID), and its online Coffee/Chai workshops. These 90 minutes national learning spaces have focused on everything from differing cultural understandings of the clergy collar, to the history of United Church music, to the experience of equity-seeking ministers in the United Church, to centering Black voices in the church.

Staff

A big thank you to the dedicated staff who resource Northern Spirit! The staff complement are: Adam Hall, Pastoral Relations Minister; Chloe Burns, Administrative Support; and Archivist, Leanne Templeton who also serves Chinook Winds. Northern Spirit also shares staff with Living Skies and Prairie to Pine: Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister; Julie Graham, Justice and Communications Minister; and, Chantal Winslow, Executive Assistant to the Executive Minister.

Since our last accountability report we celebrated the retirements of Kathy Jackson, Administrative Support and Earl Reaburn, Pastoral Relations Minister; Heather Dootoff, Finance Administrator retires at the end of June 2025. We offer thanks for their dedication to this ministry and wish them well in their retirement.

Respectfully submitted,
Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister

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