



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC45 Pacific Mountain Regional Council Report for Summer 2025**

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**Origin: Pacific Mountain Regional Council**

## **Executive Summary**

The Pacific Mountain Regional Council (PMRC) is navigating a changing church landscape with resilience and strategic focus. Rooted in deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice, PMRC supports Affirming and First Third ministries, reconciliation, rural outreach, and emerging expressions of church. Key initiatives include leadership development, youth engagement, and innovative ministry models that prioritize sustainability and Spirit-filled vitality. While challenges such as volunteer capacity and structural strain persist, PMRC remains a hopeful, faithful presence, preparing for a vibrant future.

## **Introduction**

“Pacific Mountain Regional Council has demonstrated remarkable resilience, adaptability, and commitment to its values, particularly through its Affirming ministries, investments in reconciliation, and innovative approaches to small and rural communities of faith.” That was one of the concluding statements in a recent report reviewing the PMRC’s governance. As is the case across the country, communities of faith are changing, as are the structures that support them. In order to position itself to best navigate these changes, the PMRC has been strategic in its vision. Indeed, the PMRC has continued to focus on healthy communities of faith and ministries, effective leadership, and faithful public witness while fostering collaboration, leadership development, and being mindful of sustainability and longer-term vitality and viability.

As we seek to be a faithful Christian presence from James Bay United Church in Victoria, BC to Whitehorse United Church in Whitehorse, YK, we are grateful for the countless people who bring our expression of faith to life, living into the way of Jesus in their own way, in their communities and neighbourhoods. Critical to our flourishing has been the tireless, relational, and principled work of our Executive Minister, Treena Duncan, together with the dedicated and passionate staff who hold and animate the broader framework of the PMRC.

As we prepare for the Church of 2035 and beyond, we are strategic in how we foster and resource communities that empower Spirit-filled discipleship in order to interrupt the prevalent narrative of decline.

Below are key ways that we have, as a regional council, lived into the United Church of Canada's call to deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice since our last accountability report, June 17, 2022.

## Deep Spirituality

*A story of deep spirituality: The tragic and sudden passing of our colleague and Office of Vocation minister Rev. Brenda Fawkes reverberated deeply throughout our region and beyond. During her memorial, held on October 14, 2024, singer Dawn Pemberton invited those gathered in person and online across the country to sing with all of who we are. "Singing together is an expression of our faith and is a pathway to healing," she said. "Sing for your life." The room was filled with a fierce, embodied hope – a holy defiance in the face of death, a chorus of voices proclaiming that love and life still rise.*

- **Retreats, workshops, and gatherings:** In conjunction with LeaderShift and other partners, the PMRC continues to offer an engaging and nurturing slate of opportunities for rest, renewal, connection, vocational discernment, and faith formation for all ages. The various gatherings (such as *The Art/s of Worship*, the *Clergy Rest and Renewal Retreat*, *Navigating Landscapes of Faith*, the *Rural Ministry Conference*, etc) are designed to help ministry personnel, lay leaders, and young leaders find rejuvenation in a complex world. Many of these intentional spaces of spiritual reflection and theological conversation contribute to ministerial resilience.
- **Deepening relationship with camping societies:** In addition to offering support to the 7 camping societies located within the region, the PMRC launched "Beyond S'mores," a research project meant to provide opportunities for communities of faith to articulate

their hopes and dreams for camping ministry. The aggregated information will help strategically envision the future of camp ministry in the region towards the anticipated renewal of camping ministry as a locus for deep spirituality.

- **A discerning ear to the ground:** The Regional Executive implemented the practice of inviting different communities of faith and ministries to its meetings in order to listen to their stories and better have a sense of how the Spirit is moving across the region. Each ministry is asked to share what they are celebrating, what challenges they are facing, and how the Executive can be praying for them.

## Bold Discipleship

*A story of bold discipleship: A few summers ago, a teen from one of the PMRC Indigenous churches in northern BC was invited to participate in Camp Spirit, an initiative of the region that partners with local communities of faith to, in part, develop next generation leadership through summer camps. As a result of their experience, this teen attended Audacious Hope, the UCC's national youth gathering in St. Catharines, ON. At the recent Indigenous Ministry Annual General Meeting, they responded to the call to let their name stand to serve on the PMRC Indigenous Ministry Executive. What began as a small invitation resulted in a new rising voice, shaping not only their community but also the wider church.*

- **First Third Ministry:** Having identified ministry to the next generation as a regional priority, we continue to invest in initiatives to help young people encounter the life-giving way of Jesus. We have offered, often in partnership with Chinook Winds Regional Council, retreats for children (Imagine Children's Retreat), youth (YouthTrek), and young adults. As a testament to the emerging fruit of these efforts, the last young adult retreat counted 66 participants. We have also strengthened our presence on university campuses across the region, creating bridges of belonging for people as they age out of traditional programs.
- **Fourth Quarter Network:** In order to provide retirees with connection and support, the Fourth Quarter Network endeavours to offer gatherings and retreats throughout the year with a focus on ongoing discipleship and community.
- **Church plants:** As a faithful response to our ever-changing world, the PMRC is committed to fostering new experimental expressions of faith in pursuit of finding new ways of being the Church. This means reimagining ministry models, including experiments in collaborative pastoral teams and shared congregational space. We

currently are supporting 9 such initiatives, including Weird Church (a progressive, social justice minded community in Cumberland, BC), Becoming Church (a gathering focused on young adults in New Westminster, BC), and Wild Church (an outdoor-focused ministry with 3 locations in the BC Interior and one on Vancouver Island).

- **Strategic development:** Just as we invest in new initiatives, we acknowledge the reality of church closures. We are in the process of finalizing a regional strategy that aligns financial resources, property development, and ministry priorities that will provide a robust framework by which to make decisions for the flourishing of the region. This is facilitated in part through the completion of an ambitious, three-year congregational self-assessment cycle that includes quantitative data on congregational health, vitality, and sustainability. The data, when measured against certain metrics, enables us to be strategic in being a faithful presence across the region.

## Daring Justice

*A story of daring justice: In 2022, at the PMRC's 4th Annual General meeting in Prince George, the PMRC voted in favour of becoming an Affirming regional council, believing that we are called to follow Jesus' wisdom in the way of a radically inclusive love. To celebrate this milestone, we extended an invitation to the wider community of Prince George to an outdoor BBQ and community party. Over 1000 people responded to the invitation – a great opportunity to proclaim and share the goodness at the heart of our collective expression of faith.*

- **First United redevelopment:** To better respond to the changing needs of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, BC, First United is undergoing an ambitious redevelopment. The new 11-storey building, built with climate resiliency in mind, will include four floors operated by First to provide safe and inclusive community amenities for those most vulnerable and marginalized by society. The seven floors above, built in partnership with Lu'ma Native Housing Society, will offer safe, secure homes for Indigenous peoples.
- **Living into reconciliation:** Seeking to make the good news good to all people, we seek to address the harms of colonial theologies. Last year's speaker at our 6th Annual General Meeting in Vancouver, BC, Patty Krawec, is an Anishinaabe/Ukrainian writer and speaker. She challenged us to lean into postures and practices of resistance. In partnership with LeaderShift, we also offered *Decolonization is a Community Act*, a fully subscribed, multi-day immersive cultural experience in partnership with Squamish

Knowledge Holders and Elders. The event sought to support and equip community of faith leaders, through dialogue and transformative experiential learning, to help their communities and acknowledge our role in upholding colonialism and racism.

- **Anti-racism work:** The speaker at the PMRC's 5th Annual General Meeting in Abbotsford, BC was the Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis. Through the imagery of fire, she challenged us to use our gifts, the practice of truth telling, and our particular expression of faith to help create a society that is anti-racist, just, fully welcoming, and gender-affirming. She joined us to continue the conversation later in the year at one of our monthly Townhall online gatherings. LeaderShift also offered several workshops, including the *Anti-Racism Work and Action* conference in partnership with First Third Ministry, the PMRC Justice Network, and the Vancouver School of Theology.
- **Attention to rural communities:** One of the ongoing laments regarding the denomination's structural changes is the felt loss of connection. In response, the PMRC has begun intentionally tending to those small, struggling, or rural churches to ensure access to resources, and encouragement offered to leaders. The recent Kootenay Faith Fest highlighted the importance of creating spaces of connection for those who might otherwise feel disconnected.

## Challenges

While there is much to celebrate in the PMRC, we are also aware of ongoing challenges faced both at the local level as well as within the broader structural level. As is the case more broadly in Canadian society, we too are facing challenges with volunteer engagement. This impacts communities of faith as they seek to sustain their existing governance and ministry structures, with few people who have the bandwidth to imagine new ways of being.

These volunteer issues also come to bear on the wider governance structures within the PMRC. This has a direct impact on all those already providing leadership in their various capacities throughout the region, including PMRC staff, who often find themselves overburdened by growing demands on their time and limited bandwidth.

Ultimately, despite the reality of decline, the story of what God is doing in the PMRC is a good news story, and we face the challenge of rescripting the pervasive narrative to one of future possibilities.

# Looking ahead

We continue to listen for the Spirit's leading, striving to embody the way of Jesus in ways that are vibrant and relevant to those communities we serve, relying on God's good and holy Spirit to animate the work of our heart. There is a lot of energy around conversations about interrupting the trend of decline, while also bolstering collaboration and connection. We believe that our expression of faith – what we stand for and how we live it out – matters, and is so, so needed in this world. We long for renewal, planting seeds, tending what is already growing, and trusting that something deeply rooted and beautifully unexpected is on the way.

*Submitted by the Rev. Dr. Simon LeSieur, President, PMRC.*

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