

Report of the President 2017

I make this report to you as we begin the 125th year of Council's engagement in mission and ministry. Through the decades, Council has adapted to the challenges and opportunities facing the church, increasingly providing a creative edge and a steady hand in changing times. The past year has been no exception.

Looking through the lens of the three major 'resources' of expertise, finance and property that Council connects with ministry, we can note with satisfaction that Council's congregational and ministry consulting role has continued to grow. Janet Marshall has been instrumental in this growth and we are thankful for the skill she brings to this work and the trust she has developed at presbytery and congregational level. Significant work has been undertaken with all four presbyteries in the Conference, twenty congregations and ministries and three Anglican dioceses. Much of this work is at the leading edges of church ministry as we learnt in the presentation earlier this evening.

Council's role, also, as a 'friendly-banker' continues to be one of its essential functions. When the roof is leaking, the furnace has collapsed, or premises have to be expanded or built, we have provided loans primarily through the Investing in Ministry Fund. Thanks to this fund, over \$13 million is available today for congregations in need of capital loans. That dollar number is impressive but the really important thing about this side of Council's work is that it is about Council 'helping the church help the church to be the church'. An investing congregation today can see the impact of its dollars at work in the new manse at Ghana Calvary United, the new church building at Wasaga Beach, the new multi-purpose configuration of the sanctuary at St Paul's Orillia and a host of other initiatives that all make ministry possible and more fruitful.

The Council's Sustainable Energy Loan Fund also continued to grow in impact in the past year. This partnership with Toronto Conference means just over \$561,000 is available for low interest loans for energy-saving measures. Almost 50% of the fund is now out in loans, with smaller congregations forming the majority of borrowers. Energy savings and associated cost reductions are vital to their futures as well as being the 'right thing to do'.

Council's financial work has two major dimensions, of course. The second dimension – a church community foundation role - is led by the excellent work of Jim Patterson, Ali Hayes and the Financial Development Committee. Please make sure you take time to read the latest edition of *Partners* included in the package for this meeting. It describes the variety of ways Council can help those looking to make gifts for particular ministries. Two highlights in this area deserve mention. One is the achieving of the Council

The Toronto United Church Council

'Advancement Trust' goals. Established through a generous gift of \$400,000 the trust has now been converted into a \$1 million capital fund, the income from which, will support camperships and provide capital grants for camp infrastructure projects. The second highlight is the first major gift (\$450,000) from the Muskoka Housing Fund, made to the Gateway Homes Muskoka Reserve Fund last fall to support home ownership for low-income people in the Muskoka region. We look forward to a report on the impact of this fund and a further transfer later this year. Please join me in thanking our financial development team for their patience and attention to detail in the management and care of the funds, and the nurture of the donors whose generosity makes those special funds possible. Thanks also to our financial management team of Joyce Kung and Wendy Sims.

Last year, the Board of Directors made a commitment to explore ways in which Council might respond to the challenge put to the churches and nation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As part of living into that commitment for a second year the annual Heart & Vision Concert focused on the theme of right relations. The honorees were Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, and the Very Reverend Stan McKay, the first Aboriginal United Church Moderator. We were also glad that the current Moderator, Jordan Cantwell, was part of the proceedings. The previous day Council partnered with the Toronto Conference Living Into Right Relations Circle and Kairos in an educational event, "Listening to The Earth and Her Children". Dialogue with the Circle has been very helpful and it has made some very good suggestions about ways in which Council can develop its response in the future.

Some of the biggest changes in the life of Council has come in the third resource area - property. The purchase of the Queensville house on behalf of Living Waters Presbytery is an example of a quite different approach to 'buildings for new ministry for a new time', while at the other end of the church life-cycle, an agreement had been made between Council and Toronto Conference for TUCC staff to manage and arrange for the disposition of properties deemed surplus by presbyteries. Tim Beard is overseeing this initiative, learning quickly about churches, cemeteries, housing initiatives and all things associated with them. Council is also strengthening its capacity to support congregations in their use of buildings assets. Katja Brittain has recently joined the group of consultants that Council draws on to support its work and will be helping the Centre for Church Development & Leadership test the market for these services during the coming year.

Many of you have been involved in discussions about the future structure of the United Church as your congregations and presbyteries have worked through the national church remits. Here at Council we have also been taking time to think and pray about

The Toronto United Church Council

Council's work so that we will be able to name clearly what Council can bring to a changed church. Through our conversations we have begun to identify again the complexity, the uniqueness and the importance of Council's work. It has been so encouraging as President to feel the energy and excitement of the Board and our committees as we have gained a better overview of the many facets of Council's activities, and begun to name the important contribution Council makes. 'Longer, deeper, local' are words that we have recently identified as hallmarks of Council's contribution – we are with our partners for the long-haul; we push hard so that work carried out has spiritual and practical depth; our local or regional focus makes us accessible to partners and enables a deep appreciation of the realities of the contexts in which they work. Put another way, we start where our partners are, and we journey with them to the place God wants them to be. I'd like to thank the people who have joined me in the steering committee and who are meeting on a regular basis to move this work forward: Wendy Jarvis, Norm Seli, Ken Clarke, Ted Meyers, and Anne Shirley Sutherland.

So yes, it has been quite a journey this year and every journey, however short or long, needs a navigator to see the potential and encourage others to join. Our Executive Director, Ron Ewart has been and continues to be that navigator. Ron, we have all thrived and continue to grow under your leadership. You have managed to nudge us forward to test new waters while at the same time remaining respectful of our rich history. You are a true leader and servant for and to our mission.

And as I step back and leave my position as President, I believe that Council remains an essential resource for the witness and work of the United Church of Canada in this region and for its fruitful participation in the mission of God. I have been proud to be a director for the past six years, and President for the past three. I look forward to continuing to contribute to Council's work along with all of you in the future.

In gratitude,

Susan Smith, President

