

President's Report to the Annual Meeting 2021

Toronto United Church Council Expands its Collaboration

As I began to write this report to the Toronto United Church Council (TUCC) for the Annual meeting of the Corporation, Newfoundland and Labrador's third medical relief team was heading to Ontario to assist us through the devastating third wave of COVID-19 patients. These compassionate workers have collaborated with Ontario's dedicated nurses to assist our ICU overload and see us through to reduce our pandemic losses. For TUCC, 2020-2021 has also been a year of expanded collaboration.

The Toronto United Church Council works with the church community to connect resources with ministry. Offering access to professional advice, financial support, and leadership development, TUCC helps our church address the social and spiritual challenges of the day. In 2019 we began to intentionally serve Horseshoe Falls, Western Ontario Waterways, Shining Waters, and East Central Ontario Regional Councils. As well as seeing grants, loans and services being sought from across the service area, this last year has seen expanded participation in the life of TUCC by a variety of people from all these Regions of the church. The incoming Board of Directors (2021-22) will have representation from three of the four Regions. One of the first matters of action for the Board of 2021-22 will be to explore a new name for the organization that better reflects its commitment to serve the ministries of the church across a much wider area.

TUCC Seeks Greater Diversity and Inclusion

In 2020, social developments in North America brought focus to the issue "Black Lives Matter". Our organization put this matter before its leadership and we responded in a number of ways. The Board had an intentional, lengthy and challenging conversation with Paul Rose of the Bloordale, Etobicoke congregation in December about the advantages of diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work. The Board and its Executive made a commitment toward full implementation to be spread over the next few years.

Early in 2021, our Executive Director and the Executive worked on the first policy statements regarding inclusion and diversity for TUCC. These policies articulate the commitment of TUCC to share the aspirations of the United Church of Canada to be open, inclusive and welcoming. At the April Board meeting, these policies were ratified while members also named ways in which progress in living into the aspirations will be evaluated each year.

The fall 'Heart and Vision' fundraiser was shaped by the matters of diversity and inclusion in its planning and delivery. On November 16, a virtual on-line event was presented to a wide geographical audience. We had participants from coast to coast this year. In 2020, the awards were presented to the Rev. Dr. Anthony Bailey and Dr. Hazel E. Hume Bigby, two outstanding church leaders who have made significant contributions to the church's and Canada's understanding of the systemic nature of

anti-Black racism within our nation. Musical entertainment was provided by Maestro Jason Jestadt and by Jackie Richardson. This was superbly done with individualized musical dedications for each of our recipients. In October, the Financial Development Committee created the Winston & Merle Roach Fund for the development of Black youth leadership. The December Board meeting saw directors vote to ensure that the new fund has enough income in its first three years (2021 to 2023) to sponsor new grants to the camps. From 2024, the annual investment income from the Fund will underwrite the hiring of Black youth as camp leaders at Shining Waters Region camps, but our hope is that the summer of 2021 will see the first use of the fund.

TUCC Values a New Partnership with United Property Resource Corporation

The United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC) was created by The United Church of Canada in 2019 to bring professional real estate expertise to communities of faith to provide them with all of the information needed to make faithful decisions about their real estate assets. The staff at TUCC began collaboration with UPRC over the last year and have had many joint consultations. At the February Board meeting, Tim Blair, CEO of the United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC), brought TUCC up to date on the work of this national arm of the United Church. We were quite impressed with the expertise they offer and the many projects which have begun under their tutelage. At that same meeting, a memorandum of understanding between TUCC and UPRC was advanced toward approval by both groups about how each will work with the other. This is a most exciting development as the United Church brings forward the priority of creating affordable housing projects across Canada and utilizing real estate assets to the advantage of the communities they serve. The working agreement between TUCC and UPRC recognizes the expertise of our staff and the possibilities we have for joint leadership and management of future projects in this geographic area of the Church.

Office Location

In 2017, the Board held a 'visioning retreat' where time was allocated to prioritize long term goals for TUCC over the following five years. One of the matters identified was the goal to have office space that was fully accessible in a location more central to the work of Council. The Board will be making a decision soon regarding a most accessible location in terms of public transportation and physical office space. Though there are still some details to be worked through at this time, it is also hoped that UPRC will have offices in the same building. This will facilitate even greater sharing of resources and regular valuable staff interactions.

Church Development and Leadership and Innovative Ministry Centre Assists Future Collaboration

There has been a significant transition in our staffing for Church Development and Leadership in the last couple of years and the first appointment to the Innovative Ministry Centre (IMC) in 2020 has completed the bringing together of a cohesive 'Church Leadership team'. In 2018, Katja Brittain began to facilitate work for TUCC in the field of 'property and mission'. Katja's prime focus has been helping congregations balance the need for revenue with the use of property as an asset that supports the congregation's mission. The reach of her monthly blog resourcing, and encouraging dialogue on

property matters between congregational leaders, has continued to grow and she now has readers across the entire province. Jill Strapp also began her work with TUCC in 2018. Her expertise has primarily been used to assist congregations and ministries looking for help with planning, ministry development and seeking fresh direction.

Tay Moss's appointment as coordinator of the IMC has brought his numerous skills to take up the responsibility of leading this initiative. Churches face unprecedented challenges in adapting to their local cultures to faithfully express the Gospel and serve their communities. Even before COVID, it was apparent that many United and Anglican churches in Southern Ontario would benefit from resources specifically developed to equip them for innovative forms of ministry. "Innovative" was meant here as an expansive and aspirational term for all the new things that we see God calling us to do. We draw on multiple sources for inspiration and wisdom and believe that no single methodology is sufficient for all churches.

Despite the challenges of COVID shutdowns, the planned training course for teams of congregational leaders (lay and ordained) got underway in January 2020 and has just completed its sixth and final module. Part of a five-year pilot project, with generous funding from the Presbyteries of Toronto Conference Corporation in addition to TUCC's financing of the staff position, the core program will provide training and resources to equip lay and ordained leaders to become missional in outlook and practice. The goal is to provide communities of faith with the capacity, motivation, and skills to seed and nurture new expressions of ministry designed to foster relationships with people with whom they are not currently connecting, for the sake of God's mission in the world. A number of other projects have been carried out under the IMC banner. These include a research project on methods of evaluation, and an 'integrated course design' course led by Natalie Wigg-Stevenson of Emmanuel College that provided a training resource that drew participants from regional staff, Edge, Fresh Expressions US, as well as IMC leaders.

There were two on-line events for individual leaders from congregations in the last year that involved the full 'Church Leadership team' bringing together their skills. The first one was an on-line conversation regarding the value of Church Properties to the Community. This conversation shared learnings from a research study conducted in the Huron county region of Ontario. The second is a three-part seminar entitled, "The Church Has Left the Building: How will we combine online and in person church?" The event is obviously most topical and pertinent as the registration has drawn 450 participants. The initiative and gifts of our team have been shown to 'shine' with this shift to an on-line presentation. Word has gotten out on the leadership development possibilities that TUCC can provide, so there have been approaches for possible involvement beyond United and Anglican Church circles.

Our Camps have Led Innovation through the Pandemic Crisis

We are well aware of the many adjustments our congregations have been making during this year of pandemic. The church camps which have been a historical mainstay of TUCC's ministry have had to pivot and be innovative to survive. Our camps have had no revenue from campers in 2020, while some of their expenses continued to draw upon reserves, government grants, insurance claims, and fundraising by camps and TUCC. Though there were no usual registrations, we are thankful that our camp

leaders were able to provide alternative ways to gain something of a 'camp experience' even in lockdown.

Each camp has autonomy with its own Board leadership, but all have been challenged to be prepared for a possible reopening in 2021. In many cases, overdue capital improvements and maintenance projects have been accomplished despite the pandemic. TUCC was able to offer \$297,259 in Camping Opportunities Funds in 2020 to be utilized collectively by the five camps (Ryde Lake, Big Canoe, Simpresca, Sparrow Lake, Scugog). Please note that through a significant 'challenge' donation and the generosity of others, this is the largest annual allotment to the camps ever! Through a staff facilitated conversation, the camp representatives came to consensus on how the TUCC allotment would be distributed based on the unique needs of each camp. We also congratulate Camp Scugog on the successful award of a Trillium grant of \$150,000. This grant will be used to install a geothermal heating system which will allow the Camp to run its innovative programs in the 'shoulder' months of spring and autumn.

As I Pass the Torch to a New President

At TUCC we have been gifted with an awesome staff selected for just such a time as this 2020-21 year. My bi-weekly connection has largely been with Executive Director, Ron Ewart who so ably 'steers the TUCC ship' through waters that at times appear chaotic. However, I have also witnessed most all of the staff 'in action' in a variety of settings. The commitment and resilience of the staff team during this time has been incredible. Despite the restrictions that the pandemic has imposed, TUCC's diverse services have continued to be provided at a high standard with flexibility and responsiveness to the particular situations each congregation or ministry brings 'to the table.'

It has been a great privilege for me to serve with so many gifted and dedicated Board and Committee members over a number of years with TUCC. Your energy and excitement about the work of Council has often been palpable at our meetings. I retire from the Board along with colleagues Bill Jermyn, Hannah Lee and Michael Kooiman. We each will continue our commitment to the work of TUCC in new ways. It has been very good to work alongside incoming president Doug Smith in the last year. I know of the skills and gifts the new Board members bring. Along with the will of God, the leadership of TUCC is in wise hands. I look forward to hearing what the future brings on to TUCC's agenda.

Blessings, Ross Leckie