**Executive**

**Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council**

**of The United Church of Canada**

**MINUTES**

**October 18, 2023 via zoom**

**Roster:** Jennifer Irving (President), Brent Caslick (Treasurer), Andrea Allan, Jessica Cottrell, Ann Harbridge, Joyce Johnston, Beth Kerr, Cathy Larmond, Heather Leffler, Thom McDonough, Terry Smith

**Staff Support:** Mark Laird, Acting Executive Minister, Sue Duliban, Executive Assistant

**Present:** Jennifer Irving, Andrea Allan, Jessica Cottrell, Ann Harbridge, Beth Kerr, Cathy Larmond, Heather Leffler, Terry Smith

# Welcome and Constitution of Meeting (President Jennifer): I constitute this meeting in the name of Jesus Christ, the one true head of the Church and by the authority vested in me by Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council for whatever business may properly come before it. The bounds of this meeting will be the Zoom call.

**Acknowledging the Land** (President Jennifer)

**Welcome / Opening Worship / Check-in**

President Jennifer invited those gathered to name (if so moved) something that has brought joy to them, given the turmoil in the world. President Jennifer closed with prayer.

**Opening Agreements**

## 1. Consent Docket **approved by consensus:**

## Any of the following matters that require discussion can be lifted from the consent docket and voted upon separately:

1. Enabling Actions
2. That the Agenda be adopted as circulated.
3. That the minutes of the meeting of September 19, 2023 be approved as distributed.
4. That motions and proposals be written and given to the Secretary.

B. Correspondence Received

1. Proposal WOW Funding for Ontario-Quebec Native People’s Retreat at Five Oaks from Thérèse

Samuel, Minister, Right Relations and Social Justice.

1. Proposal from UCC Foundation.

**Business Arising**

1. Commission Reports
   1. Congregational Support: Ann Harbridge referred to her written report as follows.

We haven’t seen any feedback from the discussion on payment to PCS’s, so we are hoping to move forward by January. We are currently trying to set up a meeting with the commissions from HF & ARW so that we can all be consistent with the policy.

We are also trying to set up a conversation between HR and CSC to discuss the role of Liaisons and PCSs – trying to improve communication and sort out the overlap.

Several more church properties have been listed. Alma (amalgamated with Elora & Bethany last fall - sold), Hamstead, Rockwood Parking lot, Goldstone (long closed), the manse at Brussels (sold), Parkview Stratford, Angus, Bluevale (sold to Maranatha Conservative Mennonite). We have also finally wrapped up the transfer of the cemetery property at Honeywood to the township. Trustees have been appointed for Oliphant, and that property should also be listed soon. Amalgamation of Tottenham/Rich Hill and Angus/Grenfel has been finalized.

Tim Blair, Lauren Hodgens and Miriam Bowlby from Kindred Works joined the meeting.

New Business: 1. Kindred Works (Regional Trust)

Tim Blair outlined the United Property Resource Corporation, Kindred Works regional trust structure. He answered questions from the executive, particularly regarding structure, revenue flow, and process to move in this direction. This structure is intended to facilitate retention of church properties where a Regional Council deems this to be strategically important and financially feasible. This structure facilitates a systematic and professional portfolio approach to holding property while following the polity of property of the United Church.

(Kindred Works acts as the UPRC’s development and asset manager―developing and managing land on behalf of The United Church of Canada, communities of faith, and ecumenical partners).

Some points noted. The Regional Council determines priorities, Kindred Works manages and shares expertise. Any revenue , to be clear, is the regional council’s and it goes back to the regional council to do with as they see fit. Starts with a dialogue with the regional council; property team looks at the property, and the property gives advice directly back to the regional council; can the property be developed for example, or managed in cash flow or neutral way.

Question was asked, if there is a component around right relations. Kindred Works’ work is happening at a broader level, but the other piece is the regional council’s decision in honouring its property policies. The Moderator is looking at a wider approach toward reparation.

Acting Executive Minister Mark Laird noted that the idea is that a presentation be made at the spring 2024 regional council meeting outlining the Kindred Works option, assuming Antler River Watershed and Western Ontario Waterways both set up business trust agreements.

Kindred Works staff left the meeting.

There was general consensus that WOWRC proceed with entering into a business trust.

Ann Harbridge suggested that perhaps a task group be struck so that when the agreement is entered into, next steps are clear. It was **agreed by consensus** that Ann Harbridge be given permission to set up a discernment circle and invite people to join that visioning discussion. Hearing from the circle will be included on the next executive meeting agenda.

* 1. Human Resources

Cathy Larmond noted the commission has been talking about some interesting things currently at the discussion stage, including:

Would be helpful to know who the pastoral charge supervisors are.

Need to get things in place re: DLMs eligible to become VAMs

Pulpit supply policy being looked at. Many congregations are unaware that those paid over $500 for pulpit supply need to be issued a T4. Congregations also need to be made aware that they need to fulfill their responsibility and pay LLWLs for pulpit supply. Commission is discussing sending a letter containing this information to congregations.

1. Discipleship & Justice: No report.

Andrea Allan left the meeting.

A 5-minute break was taken and it was agreed to extend the meeting to 12:30 pm.

1. Request for funding (G. Clark) Request for approximately $200, to fund refreshments for a former Waterloo Presbytery gathering. It was **agreed by consensus** that the Executive would not support the gathering financially, but would provide great encouragement to develop the cluster.

**New Business**

1. Proposal 1: Funding for Ontario-Quebec Native People’s Retreat at Five Oaks

**MOTION:** Ann Harbridge / Terry Smith

The Executive of Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council agrees to:

1. Provide $732.58 to Five Oaks toward the costs of the 2023 Native People’s Retreat
2. Set aside $2000 to support the Native People’s Retreat in 2024, and to give time for Nations Uniting to fully explore the current and emerging possible sources for funding
3. Be willing to consider engaging in future discussions with Nations Uniting and Ontario Quebec circle about Native People’s Retreat, and if no further funding is to be provided for this to give notice to Nations Uniting.

**CARRIED**

1. Proposal 2: Proposal from UCC Foundation

It was commented this is not really a new idea, it is just promoting the UCC Foundation a little more heavily.

The Executive of Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council **agreed by consensus** to the following proposal:

1. That the Regional Council, when appropriate, recommends congregations and communities of faith explore the options the Foundation provides.
2. That if a congregation or community of faith chooses to work with the Foundation, the Regional Council will allow a transfer of assets to the Foundation knowing that the agreement between the congregation and Foundation will specifically name that the Regional Council is to be consulted about the assets should a congregation or community of faith disband or cease to exist.

4. Proposal 3: Electing Volunteers Mid-Year

That the Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council **approve by consensus** the appointment of

Wonder Chimvinga (OM) to WOWRC Executive, 1st term to May 31, 2026

Sharon Norton (L) to Congregational Support, 1st term to May 31, 2026

Colin Snyder (OM) to Congregational Support, 1st term to May 31, 2026

as of January 1, 2024 with the proviso that before officially starting, those appointed can attend meetings as an observer.

The recruitment team will advise those appointed of the decision.

5. Spring 2024 Tri-Regional Council Meeting: person to serve on tri-regional planning team with President Jennifer will ask Wonder Chimvinga if he would like to serve on the tri-regional planning team. If he is unable to do so, will revisit item at the November executive meeting.

6. Proposal 4: Creation of Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council Business Trust

**MOTION**: Heather Leffler / Ann Harbridge

That the Executive of the Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council:

1. Endorse this approach to the management of real property within Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council;
2. Authorize the Acting Executive Minister and the Treasurer to proceed with negotiating the terms of the Business Trust;
3. Authorize any legal expenses associated with the same.

**CARRIED**

For information: It is anticipated that the documents will be ready shortly at which point the Executive will need to convene to approve the documents.

7. Regional Council Evaluation: Summary of notes from Fall meeting discussion (Appendix 1)

It was agreed that President Jennifer would write a letter (sent by email newsletter) to the regional council email newsletter list and fall meeting registrants, advising that those would like to see the summary of the break-out room conversations held at the Fall Gathering are welcome to email Beth Kerr and she will share the summary.

Next meeting: November 15, 2023, 9:30 am.

Adjournment.

**Appendix 1**

**Going Deeper Into the Evaluation: Notes from WOWRC Fall 2023 Meeting Discussion**

1. **Connecting communities of faith to the Regional Council**

The evaluation found that many communities of faith are feeling disconnected from the regional council.  Recommendation 1 suggested that we “*develop a strategy to be more pro-active in engaging with communities of faith and to keep them informed of activities and decisions of the regional council”.* Recommendation 2 proposed that we *“ensure that all communities of faith are represented on their regional council.”* This breakout group considered these questions:

1. How can we foster a greater sense of connection between local communities of faith and WOWRC?
2. How can we encourage communities of faith to appoint regional representatives?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **What is WOW?** – Small rural churches don’t always know what WOW is. People are feeling very congregational, more connected to home congregation and less knowledge about the wider church. Reporting to the congregation and the board by existing reps doesn’t seem to be enough to build the relationship. How do we let people know the personal benefits and the benefits to the congregation of being involved with WOW? How can we move from being seen as an oversight body to understanding ourselves as a relational body?
* **Not enough volunteers –** Small churches especially don’t have enough volunteers and existing volunteers are aging**.** We are missing ministry personnel who could take the lead. Is being online causing people not to volunteer? Do we just need more time to get used to meeting online?
* **Reduced relationship building time** – Shift from regular Presbytery meetings and one Conference meeting to two Regional meetings a year has reduced opportunities to connect and build relationship. More conversation time with longer breakout rooms was much more satisfactory in building connection than shorter breakout conversations. Can we send out relational information not just instructional? Could we open break out rooms at meal time during on-line meetings so that reps can connect with one another?
* **Limitations of staff time –** Especially when there are conflicts, pastoral charges may not feel listened to because of limited staff time. “Excellent staff but they can’t be with every congregation.”
* **Intentional reach out –** Volunteers reaching out from the Mission and Discipleship Commission around remit and congregations in the affirming process builds connection. What are the possibilities for cluster conversations? Could a corresponding member(s) go around and listen to what people are doing? Could we have listening groups to share ideas? Could we gather regional reps together to talk about their experiences?
* **Recruitment** – Intentionally invite people to be guests at meetings online to learn about it. Encourage congregations to have watch parties to talk about meeting topics. Develop a sales pitch to help people invite others to get involved.
* **Other Communication/Connection Ideas** - Volunteer eblasts … short notes not just newsletter … short videos talking about the region that could be shared in worship. Encourage Facebook sharing of coming events and news in cluster to build relationships … churches supporting other churches.
* **“Journey … takes time to build relationships and capacity”**

1. **Communicating with communities of faith**

Recommendation 1 suggested that we “*develop a strategy to be more pro-active in engaging with communities of faith and to keep them informed of activities and decisions of the regional council”.*

Recommendation 5 suggested that we *“reorganize the information and toolkits so that they are intuitive from a communities of faith standpoint. For example, in conducting a search, the community of faith should be able to ‘follow the steps’ in a linear fashion independent of the regional council structure”.* This group considered the following questions:

* 1. How do we communicate in a way that people can see and digest the information we are trying to share without it getting lost in a sea of information out there?
  2. Communicating via multiple channels takes lot of time and energy particularly for staff. How do we maximize the return on investment of staff time to communicate well with communities of faith?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **The need for simplicity** – Communication is often confusing and there is too much. We cannot expect folks to go to multiple places (website, Facebook, YouTube, Church Hub, Sharepoint, etc.) to find all the information they need. Many communications have long sentences and big words. “Keep it simple is our #1 request!” “We find that you have to be in this organization for a while (like years) to get to know how things work because things are so convoluted.”
* **Feeling patronized and dismissed** – Concern was expressed about decisions being made about what information is available without considering what information people might want to receive. For example, this group asked: “we wonder why you say it will not be possible to have a detailed report back - why not? It’s being compiled anyway, why can’t we access this as well?“ As the person who said that and the person compiling this report (Beth Kerr), my intention was to share that there would not be a verbal report back because of a decision to prioritize breakout room time. Still, people heard that they would not be allowed to have a copy of it even though that was never my communication intent (and what people hear is more important than what you mean to say).
* **Thinking about the website from the perspective of the end user** – Less church specific language and a more community of faith oriented structure is needed. “If you don’t know the proper terminology, finding what you’re looking for is impossible.” “Things seem to be presented from an assumption that we already know some of what’s going on, but really we don’t.”
* **Providing alternatives to using the website** – People are pointed to the website first when they ask for help and then when they cannot find what they are looking for or if that format doesn’t work for them, they don’t feel like they have alternatives to access the information they need. “We feel dismissed when we’re only told to go to the website. Sometimes we do find what we’re looking for there, but more often we can’t find what we were looking for, but then don’t feel like we can go back and ask again because we were dismissed before.”  It can also take a long time for someone not familiar with the layout to find what they are looking for on the website (ex. Chair of M and P looking for information about hiring lay staff spent several hours to find what was needed). Some people also don’t have access to online information: “In our communities, so many people are lucky to have a cell phone let alone a computer. We need to be able to provide things to these people in different formats for our congregation members, can you help us do that? Can you help us figure out how to share things in formats that aren’t dependent on computers?”
* **How can on-going feedback about communication be built in?** – Can we ask people if they found what they were looking for? “We need a mechanism to submit feedback quickly regarding communications. Somewhere we can let you know in real time what is helpful or unhelpful, and what has been effectively communicated and what has not been communicated effectively.”
* **Person to person information sharing** -- Can we have monthly Zoom meetings with reps from all communities of faith and someone from the Regional Council who will share relevant info, take questions and ask “How’s your church doing?” This is how information used to be shared in the former Toronto Conference. Reps heard about what was going on at monthly meetings.
* **Church Hub** (which is not a WOW responsibility but impacts our people) is very frustrating and it is difficult to get people to do the work of maintaining it.
* **Meeting Staff helps** – “Having the spring Regional Council meeting in person with staff present (including admin staff that we know the least) is really helpful so that we feel more comfortable asking people the questions when we need to later on. “
* **“We also want to say thank you for all the work and effort that has been put into communications thus far - we know it’s a lot!!”**

1. **Support to communities of faith searching for a new minister**

Frustration was expressed with the process of conducting a search for a new minister.  This is a time in the life of a community of faith when support from the Regional Council is frequently needed. Recommendation 4 identified that “*the process for conducting a search should be reviewed with a view to streamlining and clarify the commissions’ responsibilities and improving communication between pastoral charge supervisor and liaison*”. Recommendation 5 suggested that we *“reorganize the information and toolkits so that they are intuitive from a communities of faith standpoint. For example, in conducting a search, the community of faith should be able to ‘follow the steps’ in a linear fashion independent of the regional council structure”.* This group considered the following questions:

* 1. What are some of the challenges communities of faith experience interacting with the Regional Council when searching for a new minister?
  2. How can the Regional Council support communities of faith most effectively during such transitions?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Navigating ChurchHub is very challenging** (which is not a WOW responsibility but perhaps we can offer feedback) – The biggest challenge was using ChurchHub, especially in a community of faith where not many members on the search committee are computer literate. Even for those who are, ChurchHub was found to be difficult to navigate. It is not user friendly. Improvements to the filter system on ChurchHub that would better match ministry personnel with communities of faith were also suggested (i.e., rural vs. city would save reading through and emailing ministry personnel only to find out they aren’t interested in a rural setting.)
* **Challenges with paperwork** - Completing the required paperwork is difficult and when it is not completed correctly it gets returned to be corrected, slowing down the process.. Communities of faith would like more help from the Region or their liaisons in filling out these forms so that the process would be smoother and faster. The procedures required by the communities of faith to be taken are taking too long before they can move on to the next step in their search. It would help if documents identified more clearly which document goes to which person.
* **Challenges with Liaisons** – Some reported that there seemed to be a lack of communication between liaisons and the Region and others reported difficulty reaching their liaisons and receiving responses in a timely fashion. One COF reported that in the 4 years they have been without a minister, they have yet to be appointed a liaison. Having a liaison present at the beginning of the search instead of partway through would help speed the process up.
* **Length of Training Videos** – Many search committees found difficulties in keeping their members interested in the training videos as many did not want to sit through a 2-hour video.
* **More user friendly website** – it would help if the website was more user friendly where communities of faith could easily and readily find the information they require. Maybe having a help button?
* **Finding Supply** – It would help to have an updated retired minister’s list for those communities of faith who are looking for short term placement.
* **Recruiting lay people as liaisons and pastoral charge supervisors -** Educating communities of faith on the role of the liaison and pastoral charge supervisor and encouraging more lay members to consider these important positions within the Region would reduce the number of communities of faith one such person has to assist and enable them to be better present with the communities of faith they currently assist.
* **Education about alternatives** – Educating communities of faith in the search process as to alternatives to ordered ministry personnel, such as student ministers. Highlighting information on shared ministry arrangements for those communities of faith who are interested in joining one for financial reasons and where to look on the website for the checklist when starting the search process.
* **Group 3 thanks the WOW Regional Council Executive for all their hard work as they work at improving structures, education and communications with all the communities of faith in their region.**

1. **Networking communities of faith**

Some are grieving the loss of relationships developed through the presbytery/conference system.  Recommendation 3 suggests that we “*facilitate networking among area communities of faith. Explore more deeply what the communities of faith believe they are missing under the regional council system and endeavour to address.”* This group considered:

* 1. What is missing?
  2. How could the regional council support networking?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Disruption of historical relationships** – Both because of the change in structure and because of COVID, many patterns of cooperation that existed in the past have been disrupted
* **Clergy clusters** – Ministers in one area meet monthly for lunch. In another, they have a monthly breakfast. Most of these networks do not include lay representatives so they do not include churches without a minister.
* **People do not each other** – “We used to know the names of the Presbytery rep or Minister but now we don’t know.”
* **Shared activities** – In several areas, there are shared worship services at various times (example “Carols and Choirs” which has not resumed since COVID, joint summer services, shared Easter services). Are there ways to include smaller churches in areas surrounding urban centres? Are there possibilities for shared confirmation classes? Shared bible studies?
* **How do we communicate what’s happening locally** – How can we learn about upcoming events in other nearby churches?
* **Churches without technology** –“There are a lot of churches without technology in smaller places. Small empty churches don’t have lay representatives and don’t know how to get connected to the Region. They also need help getting on the church hub.”
* **Compile a database?** - A group of clergy has drawn together a number of pastoral charges to compile what strengths each has and is hoping to build a database with this information. How do we build collaboration without “ministers being fearful of losing members”?
* **Grassroots responsibility** – “We need to take responsibility for this and figure out ways in our own areas and share names. This should be at the grass roots level.”

1. **Enhancing "health, joy and excellence in ministry practice**"

30-40% of ministry personnel who responded to surveys do not feel positive about the regional council. Recommendation 7 is “*we recommend a consultation around strategies to network ministry personnel including retirees and to enhance ‘health, joy and excellence in ministry practice’ for all ministry personnel.”* Recommendation 8 is that *“the Business committee of each regional council consider more effective ways to honour the vocation of ministry”.* This breakout group considered:

* 1. How can we better support the work of ministry personnel and honour the vocation of ministry?
  2. What might help forge closer, more positive ties between ministers and WOW?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Importance of Clergy gatherings** – A consistent practice of clergy connection is crucial. Kevin Steeper’s ongoing clergy gatherings on Zoom are helpful and could be built upon. There is a group of clergy in Grey-Bruce who meet monthly with each other over a meal, face to face. In the past there was an Epiphany party held for clergy hosted by one of the Presbyteries/Conferences. More than one person mentioned the need for increased face to face opportunities to connect. How can we build health relationships that focus on connection over compliance? What does this look like in a time when we meet face to face less often?
* **Connecting to sources of support** – There is a need for more pastoral care for clergy, in addition to the groups that Kevin is offering. Some have experienced a lack of pastoral care when going through rough moments in ministry (medical, personal loss, not having a call, etc)… especially when not in active ministry, either in retirement or between calls or appointments. Some also feel like there is a disconnect in communication with regional staff. We need to make it clear to ministry personnel that they can reach out to Regional Council, especially staff, for support and enhance communication about resources available from the wider church. Further communication and clarification is needed about the recent correspondence from GCE about cost-of-living increases (not really about regional council but also greatly affects ministry personnel and their feeling of being supported). Create clergy groups who covenant with each other to be there for each other in support – perhaps Kevin could play a role in initiating these but then have others take the lead. There was an acknowledgement that staff are overwhelmed with large workloads and that the burden of connection should not fall completely to them.
* **What supports health, joy and excellence in ministry?** – While this was seen as more of a personal responsibility, how do we encourage such practices as spiritual direction, regular retreat time, regular disciples of things in life outside of our vocation (sports, art, etc.)? How do we help congregation to support their clergy in taking sabbaticals?
* **Other Ideas** – Hamilton conference used to have a listed of who was serving where, can this be revived? Having people greet attendees as we enter into the Conference site – being welcoming to others – some were lost in trying to figure out the Unifor site

1. **Connecting with retired ministry personnel**

The evaluation found that retired ministry personnel felt particularly disconnected.  Recommendation 7 is “*we recommend a consultation around strategies to network ministry personnel including retirees and to enhance ‘health, joy and excellence in ministry practice’ for all ministry personnel.”* Recommendation 8 is that *“the Business committee of each regional council consider more effective ways to honour the vocation of ministry”.* This group considered:

* 1. How can we improve the sense of connection between retired ministry personnel and the regional council?
  2. In what ways can we support/honour the continuing call to serve of retired ministry personnel?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Connecting with the church -** Recognize that retirees in a congregation still offer a ministry presence and can be helpful listeners. Develop a group of volunteers to work with Kevin Steeper to phone, visit, Zoom call retirees (and partners and families). Seek first to be pastoral. Inquire if and or whether they are still serving or willing to serve in full- or part-time capacity or other roles; or are they letting ministry go and having “me” time. Recognize retirees as a resource; build a list of pulpit supply volunteers, consultants, pastoral visitors, etc. There is a variety of other applications for their pastoral skills. Connect with retirees who may yet be traumatized by unhappy endings, Covid isolation, etc. Create cluster gatherings for retirees where they don’t currently exist.
* **Honouring/Valuing -** Value the roles retirees have played. Sort out the status of retired Designated Lay Ministers (we realize this is in process). Have conversations and offer assistance re: connecting with a new congregation in retirement or, how to gracefully reconnect with a congregation they have served. Honour the call. Though it is provincial statute, it bites that one has to become a V.A.M. in order to retain one’s license to marry; is it also required to continue to conduct funerals and memorial services? Can we do more at the time of retirement? The Presbyterian Church USA ensures that their clergy are “honourably retired”. The military holds a special ceremony and banquet for retiring chaplains so they may “Depart with Dignity”. The Spring Regional meeting offers an opportunity again to honour retirees in person. Is a rose, a certificate, a banquet, a brief testimonial enough? Clarify categorization of retirees by General Council.
* **Pragmatics -** Re-develop closed church properties as affordable housing complexes for retired UC ministers. Use Albright Gardens in Beamsville as a guide.

1. **Supporting justice work in communities of faith**

Given the many important social justice initiatives that are part of how we live out God’s call in the world, the evaluation noted that it is a challenge for the Discipleship and Justice Commission to know how to support the work of local communities of faith. Recommendation 11 suggested that we *“determine how the Discipleship and Justice Commission might support the discipleship and justice work in communities of faith and the commitments of the regional council.”* Recommendation 12 encouraged the “*Discipleship and Justice Commission build relationships with networks and consider the kind of relationship to establish to support God’s call in the world”.*

* 1. How can the regional council (and in particular, the Discipleship and Justice Commission) better connect with, support and encourage justice work at the local level?
  2. What role might you see for social justice focused networks to connect communities of faith to support God’s call in the world?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Justice Networks** – There are many existing networks such as the Affirming Ministry Network, United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel, Kairos. At the moment, Discipleship and Justice commission is often dependent on staff to know about networks. Can there be links to those networks with United Church connections on the webpage with something like: “interested in climate change?” as the link? Do we also want to provide connection to organizations that may not have a direct United Church link but are relevant? Can we spotlight each month a different justice network in the newsletter? Could there be representatives from some of the networks on the Discipleship and Justice commission?
* **Connecting local initiatives** – One church got involved in a neighbouring church’s refugee sponsorship project because two reps starting talking at the Spring regional meeting. How do we encourage that kind of connection? Not all churches have the volunteers or resources to do an outreach project on their own, how can we support folks combining their efforts with neighbours? Rather than initiating projects from scratch, can we amplify stories? How do we share the experiences of others so that more folks can get involved and/or be inspired? Can we provide specific contact people with these stories so that those who are interested in trying to do something similar in their context know who to get in touch with for wisdom about what worked and didn’t? “Passion is hot – connecting people with an experience and impetus to go deeper. In-person opportunities again – almost like a “job-fair”-esque gatherings where people can gather and connect with others interested in a topic.”
* **Are there group projects that could inspire, especially for youth?** – There used to be Presbytery-sponsored youth outreach activities that promoted social justice. Doing those for the whole region is challenging because of distance. Are there ways to do projects in a “middle ground” that is bigger than the community of faith and smaller than the region? Can we work with other justice organizations (not necessarily faith-based either – food security/food banks, fair trade, Ronald McDonald charities, etc.)?
* **Education –** There is an important role for learning in justice work as well. Can we offer suggestions of book club books and other educational resources for local congregations? Can we connect congregations so the people who are passionate about something in one congregation can study it with a neighbouring congregation? Are there resources like a social justice calendar for Advent or Lent?
* **What is the role of the Discipleship and Justice Commission?** – The role has been more focused on grants and educational opportunities, but perhaps more of a focus needs to be on communication (and encouraging communications between congregations).

1. **What is our purpose and how will we know we are living it out?**

Consider our WOWRC purpose statement - "connecting, supporting, transforming" and the denomination call/vision statements "deep spirituality, bold discipleship, daring justice".  Recommendation 18 suggests *that “There should be a review of the purpose statements to determine whether there is a need to have individual purpose statements or if it more effective to have one statement for the three regions or adopt the denominational call/vision statement. In addition, it is important to define what delivering on the purpose statement looks like and periodically assess if it is being achieved.”*

* 1. Which statement should we adopt as a regional council?
  2. What would delivering on that purpose statement look like (be as specific as possible)?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Which statement?** – Much appreciation was expressed for Deep Spirituality, Daring Justice, Bold Discipleship especially with respect to how we reach beyond the church. Some felt adopting this would help with a sense of unity. However, the function of the Region is different from the function of General Council and perhaps Connecting, Supporting, Transforming captures that specific purpose. Is there a difference between a Vision and Purpose statement?
* **How do we measure? –** The group had differing views on:Does supporting struggling congregations mean that we sustain them or that we thank them and let them know that their ministry in this specific form has come to and end? If the Region’s purpose is to connect communities of faith with wider church – access resources, help – could we measure if we are able to provide that help and if communities of faith feel supported? Connecting, Supporting, Transforming goes with the Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice of General Council. Could we identify how the work of the Region enables the discipleship, justice and spirituality in communities of faith? It might be helpful to spend some time as a Regional Council to assess how communities of faith have felt connected, supported, equipped. Finally, there is always the caution: **“**Some things you cannot measure! Sometimes we need to pray and hope that it evolves – accepting that there will always be difference and it may be what leads us in the right direction”

1. **Equipping the church for "such a time as this"**
   1. What role could the Regional Council play in helping local communities of faith to be ready to respond to the times in which we are living?
   2. What supports/resources do ministry personnel and communities of faith need most in times like this?

Key Points Raised by Discussion Group

* **Encouraging risk-taking** – Does the Region have a role in encouraging communities of faith to try something, whether it lasts for 6 weeks or 6 years? How do we support folks to not be upset when it doesn’t work out? What can we do to promote “freedom to fail”? Culturally and socially, we are living in a time of great fear across all age groups. Fear about everything (not just change in our congregations). What resources are available to help ministry personnel and (some) in the congregation who have fears due to moving away from what was, lack of money. Workshops? Webinars?
* **Grief** – “We need to grieve. The changes that Euro-centred church is going through are enormous. Our place in the culture is changing in a way not seen in 1500 years. Bewildering. Grieving is part of the spirituality of change.” Is there a role for the Regional Council to help us be honest about how tough this is? Can we learn to be sad together in healing ways?
* **Reaching out to younger people** – With fewer and fewer young people in most communities of faith these days, “younger” means 50s and 40s. It’s important for 20s-40s to have a paid staff person dedicated to that role (doesn’t have to be only role) as younger people do not have time to volunteer and run a specific program. Can we promote and uplift creative ideas like Dublin St. UC which has a weekly bible study/lectio on Zoom that starts at 8 p.m. which eliminates the need for sitters or transportation? How can we help communities of faith understand that this demographic participates in church in a different way (e.g. podcasts)? Church community is not just people who show up on Sundays. Could programs online be offered across the Region, geared to this age group? We might also consider curating online resources that resonate with UCC theology (a wide spectrum) so that young families can find what they need. “We are all trying to tackle this problem individually in our churches. Why not as a whole? Not helpful if each church makes a TikTok. But what if we work together, if one church is really good at, say, internet ministry? Not about who has the most young people in a given congregation.” Is there a role for multiple congregations working together to hire staff? How would we help connect those congregations? Can we fund someone to make spiritual podcasts?
* **Ministry with older people** - At the same time, our biggest demographic is still older people and we should not feel badly about doing ministry with older people. “Youth & children is not the only answer. Many United Churches are good at being older people. The good thing about older people is that we keep making them. If we have gifts in connecting with recent retirees or the elderly elderly, then go with that. There's a lot of fruitful vitality in that. Our culture tends to be enamoured with young people (not always in a healthy way). Maybe God is calling us in a different direction.”
* **Responding to hate** - In Horseshoe Falls Regional Council, there have been two separate hate crimes involving affirming congregations. There is no official policy for what to do under these circumstances. It’s sad that we need one but is part of equipping the church for “such times as this” to prepare for when bad things happen. Potential for backlash is increasing. As we partner with other groups that might be vulnerable to hate crimes. (e.g., with a synagogue), we need to be prepared. One possibility might be to apply for an Ontario Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant. Could the region (if eligible?) or a community of faith within the region apply to fund a training program that could be shared by multiple communities of faith? Colleen Lowrie might be a resource as she is developing a policy for her summer camp.
* **Sharing Gifts –** How can local congregations work together according to the gifts of each community of faith or each minister? Churches can be very possessive of their minister. How do we encourage sharing?
* **Funding that goes beyond “new” things** – There is a need to mobilize funding, allow opportunity for things to emerge that are not necessarily brand “new”.
* **Other Outreach** – How are we reaching out to migrants? To those who have suffered during COVID? To others who may be new to our communities?