

WOWRC Discipleship and Justice Commission Report for the Fall 2024 Meeting

The Discipleship & Justice Commission is tasked with providing information, education and opportunities for communities of faith and their members to deepen faith and strengthen service and witness. Over the past year, our commission has worked to carry out this mandate on a variety of fronts.

At the end of 2023, we received applications for the 2024 Mission Support Grants, discerned our way through them, and awarded grants to the following applicants...

Camp Bimini	\$15,000
Camp Menesetung	\$15,000
Christian Resource Centre	\$11,000
Grand River Resource Centre	\$4,000
Five Oaks	\$10,000
The Hub	\$17,500
Westminster United (Waterloo)	\$2,500
Ecumenical Chaplaincy - U. of Guelph	\$29,000
Grey-Bruce Chaplaincy	\$31,000
Total	\$135,000

Since WOWRC was formed, our commission has been guided by a set of Mission Support priorities - Right Relations, Camps/Youth/Faith Formation, Chaplaincies. Our commission feels it is an appropriate time to revisit these priorities and will be seeking input from the court at our Spring 2025 in-person meeting.

The Discipleship & Justice Commission also administers two other funds for the Regional Council. The first is a modest investment set aside to support university chaplaincy within Kitchener-Waterloo. After a number of years of having no applications, in 2024 we were able to award the full yearly amount of \$4,000 to First United (Waterloo) for the development of new programming with UWaterloo students.

The second fund is a much larger investment that is set aside for Ministry with Children, Youth and Young Adults. We are able to award up to \$65,000 each year, but have only had occasional requests come in. This year, we were able to use \$6,850 from this fund to subsidize participants from HF/ARW/WOW to attend Audacious Hope - the national UCC/Presbyterian YAYA event held at Brock University. We also approved \$2,000 to help fund a Mental Health

Consultant for UCC Summer Camps across HF/ARW/WOW. \$8,000 was awarded to First United (Waterloo) for new programming, and \$4,000 was used to bring a top notch speaker (Jim Cain) to Audacious Hope. But apart from those projects, the Ministry with Children, Youth and Young Adults Fund went largely unused. We could have awarded 3x as many funds, if we had the applications! We want to encourage Communities of Faith to learn more about the Ministry with Children, Youth and Young Adults Fund, to dream big, and apply. The information is posted on the WOWRC website under Financial Support, as is the fillable form used to apply. Like other Regional Council Grants, applications are considered twice a year - April 1 and October 1.

With our commission's Events Budget, we were able to support programming that helped connect, inspire, and inform people from across our region. These events include (but are not limited to): the 360 Anti-Racism program with Alcris Limongi; a Music Ministry webinar with Rev. Jeffrey Dale; the Listening to Voices for Peace and Justice in Palestine event hosted by Harcourt United; a Duty of Care 101 training event with Terri Sparling; the Kairos Blanket Exercise for KW churches; a Basic Income Info Night in Guelph; the UNJPPI Conference in Toronto; Kids Across the Region; a Fishbowl Workshop bringing together youth and older adults; and the Grassy Narrows River Run direct action in Toronto. If you have a justice or faith formation event with a scope that extends beyond your Community of Faith, reach out to our commission - we may be able to help.

In July we conducted an accreditation visit to Camp Menesetung. They met or exceeded all the camping standards laid out by the United Church of Canada and we appreciated the tour of their site and the run through of all their policies and documents. Faith formation at Camp Menesetung is called "Love Out Loud" and utilizes the expertise of visiting clergy from local churches. Particularly encouraging is Camp Menesetung's emphasis on inclusion and diversity. 2024 was the final year for Executive Director Clayton Peters, who has been directing at Camp Menesetung since 2016. Thank you Clayton! Sean O'Leary is the camp's new Executive Director. He can be reached at sean@campmenesetung.ca. Please keep Camp Menesetung in your prayers, encourage registrations, and reach out if you can support their ministry financially. They are particularly in need of Communities of Faith to sponsor cabins.

In February, our commission met with Emily Cowley, the Director of Silver Lake Camp. Emily noted the challenges SLC is having with raising up new leadership, the steady growth in registrations since COVID, and their big fundraising campaign for a much needed new Dining Hall. Emily can be reached at slcdirectors@gmail.com.

In March, we met with Carol Young, the Director of Camp Bimini. Carol noted the addition of a day camp program this summer, measures to improve facilities, increased staff wages (and the difference it makes for attracting quality staff), many school programs using the site over May and June, and the support from local churches. Carol can be reached at coordinator@campbimini.ca

All camps mentioned the difficulties of responding to the mental health needs of campers and staff, the financial burden carried by camps (especially with rising food costs), the need to keep staff wages competitive, and the logistical challenges of updating aging infrastructure so as to be accessible and inclusive of diverse populations. One way our commission hopes to respond is by continuing to develop the Mental Health Consultant role that was piloted this summer. Are there ways your Community of Faith can support our camps?

Over the first few months of 2024, our commission worked hard to prepare, equip, and encourage WOWRC Communities of Faith to engage with Remit 1: Establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Organization. With coordination from Cathy Hird, Therese Samuel, and John Egger, a team of volunteers reached out to every WOWRC Community of Faith and helped answer questions, provided support, and gave nudges as the deadline approached. And did our region ever come through! We had an exceptionally high response rate, and heard just how important the conversations were for framing our commitment to Right Relations. The remit passed, and we took another step in our commitment to walk together in good ways with the Indigenous peoples in our midst.

As part of the evaluation of the regional structure, we realized that a lot of our commission's work over the first few years has been about resourcing Communities of Faith through the various funds we administer. We are now hoping to layer on a commitment to amplify and share stories and information about the different networks, ministries, and justice initiatives across our region. In many ways, information and stories are trickier to distribute than funds. But with God's grace and your support, we hope we can bring some energy and enthusiasm to this work. Please reach out if you have an idea or a question or a bit of news to share!

Lastly, I want to say a big thank you to our commission members and to the staff who work with us. You are all amazing! God is good.

Submitted with gratitude.

Rev. Andrew Hyde
WOWRC Discipleship & Justice Commission Chair