

GENERAL COUNCIL 44 COMMISSIONERS

Thank you for trusting us to represent you at the 44th General Council. It was an honour to serve. Let us share a bit about our experience.

We knew joy! Two commissioners rejoiced in our “big tent” of the United Church of Canada. Whitney writes, “My joy in serving as a commissioner for General Council 44 rests in the conversations had. I met people from around the country in the learning sessions and roundtables. I experienced how broad we are theologically, politically, and academically. I met people with experiences I never dreamed of. People were vulnerable with one another, shared, and received.” Susan agrees, “It was wonderful to have the opportunity in small online discussion groups to share our experiences and sometimes different perspectives with people across Canada. It allowed us to learn from each other, and to recognize that we are not alone. Together we are stronger.” Fraser, too, enjoyed meeting everyone, “I was excited to participate as this was my first general council. I made new friends in my small online group.”

We celebrated our partnerships. Susan writes, “It was inspiring to hear from partners at home and abroad of the hope-giving work that they are able to do with the support of the UCC.” Joyce echoes Susan, “It was nice to hear from and talk with a few people I had not met before; I appreciated the inspiring words of some of our global partners, and it was good to have progress made towards the establishment of a self-directed indigenous church within the UCC.”

Peter writes his joy is from “all the conversations between the Elders and the delegates around creating an autonomous national Indigenous organization. Although as I am writing this, I have no idea what the outcome is for Remit #1. It still gives me hope that we as a church are walking in the right direction on the path of reconciliation.”

And yet, we were challenged too. Not from the reading or the time – but from much deeper issues. We were challenged by issues such as the needs of rural communities of faith. Peter writes, “I found that although we did work on what a DLM is and their importance especially in regards to Northern communities of faith. We still need to work on how we can support rural & remote Communities of Faith with no accountable ministry. When we use the word Community of Faith what does it mean...is it the same every where?”

And we were challenged by global issues. Whitney writes, “I was challenged over our response to the requests to address the State of Israel regarding its treatment of Palestinians. Now, a year later, tensions are even higher. Reactions are intensified. A need for Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice was, and is, dire.” Joyce feels similar, “I echo your concern, Whitney, about the very weak response to the petition from CSRC along with four other regional councils concerning the suffering of our Palestinian neighbours living under Israeli occupation. It is very disappointing to have our Church studying principles when urgent action is needed.” The same issue concerned Fraser, “One challenge or learning I had and was that there is so much division on the Israel Palestine issue. Since then, I have been reflecting on the side of the issue that I was not on during the debate. With what has happened since then, I am hoping for peace in this conflict and I am hoping for clarity on the United Church stance on the issue and conflict.”

Lastly, we were challenged by the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and how it affects relationships. Susan shares “The online format kept us safe (from Covid) and made it challenging to connect with other commissioners on a more personal level. The shared meals and discussions over the dinner table did not happen.” Joyce agrees, “I have found this rather difficult to write as I want to be truthful and yet respectful of the fact that others may have had a different experience of GC44 than my own... GC44 was in general quite disappointing for me, so I found little joy in it. Holding the GC with over 200 participants online was extremely limiting. Having taken part in three previous General Councils, I really missed the in-person way of meeting. Talking with people face-to-face is a far richer experience, and there is much more opportunity to really learn about and understand various issues, in smaller groups, workshops, and in the plenary gathering.”

But we have hope!

Fraser looks to the future, “Having not experienced an in person General Council I am hoping that we will return to in person meetings so I can interact with more people than my focus group.

Peter dreams, “My hope for the future is that every Community of Faith will be Affirming. We would no longer have to struggle as 2SLGBT+ to feel safe anywhere in the United Church of Canada. Being Affirming should be like breathing we don't think about we just do it because it is who are.”

Whitney writes, “My hope is that GC45 will continue to listen to narratives from the margins, from the disempowered, and from the historically oppressed. I think we are making headway in addressing the church's racism against Indigenous peoples and spiritualities. But we can't slow down now. There is much to do; and dismantling racism from within will continue to be GC45's work.”

Joyce shares, “I live in hope that the Holy Spirit will prod our Church to move beyond nice-sounding but empty words and take the risk of living out our Christian mission without fear of ‘rocking the boat’ or upsetting the status quo.”

Susan summarizes the commissioners’ hope: Our hope is that “The UCC, together with their partners, and armed with bold discipleship, daring justice, and deep spirituality, continues to seek justice for the oppressed.”

May God bless you all in this Easter season of new life, love, and hope; thank you again.

The Canadian Shield Regional Council Commissioners to General Council 44

Whitney L. P. Bruno

Joyce Fergus-Moore

Peter Haddow

Laura Hutchison

Susan Siczkar

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