

PROPERTY COMMISSION

Earlier this year, I had occasion to ask for a digest of actions/decisions taken by the Property Commission since our transition from being a Resource Team to becoming a Commission. I was surprised when the result was a list that covered 7 pages double sided.

The first thing that this told me was just how engaged the Communities of Faith in the CSRC are on the Property front. The work that we are called on to do on behalf of our Region is not just a text book curiosity, but very visceral stuff for many.

One of my favourite images in the Old Testament is found in Genesis 32, where Jacob wrestles with God at the ford in the Jabbok River. For me, I can relate to the wrestling and the struggle and the fact that Jacob is changed by the process. I sometimes get lost in it to the point of forgetting that the story does not end at the crossing of the ford but is a transition point in the story that is still to come. What happens when they cross the River?

I began my growing up in the east end of Toronto. Along with my family, I made my first trip to northern Ontario at the age of 6. My dad worked in a factory in Toronto along with a gentleman from Timmins. My father was an avid fisherman and his co-worker told him of exceptional fishing at Kettle Lakes Provincial Park just outside of Timmins. So, we headed off in our 1961 Ford (without any seat belts) and my northern Ontario journey was begun.

I think that every community I have ever encountered in northern Ontario traces itself to a moment when some folks set off on a journey of discovery; planted the beginnings of community and built up the framework of the towns that we have come to call home. There were all sorts of challenges along the way, but they hung in there and found ways to make it work.

In many ways we are both beneficiaries and stewards for the work they began. So, among our challenges is the time-honoured question of whether we intend to let the lights of our communities shine out for all the world to see, or are we going to find an old wicker basket and hide our light from everyone and everything. The challenges today are different, but the spirit of “there has to be a way” seems to be alive and well.

For me one of the greatest learnings from being involved in the Property related discussions in the Canadian Shield Regional Council since 2019 has been the challenge of moving from talking about /thinking about “communities of faith” rather than limiting ourselves to thinking about “congregations.” In my mind, congregations are defined by a very finite list of criteria. Communities of faith often look very different from each other. In terms of the work of the Property Commission, this often shows itself as no two requests being exactly the same and requiring a certain amount of flexibility in our responses.

My crystal ball is no better than anyone else's. The future for us as a church community may well be in some very unfamiliar territory. Rather than focusing on what we don't have, let's focus on what we know and who we are. Let's focus on being the people of God in our communities and in the world. Let's be the spies sent out to look around the next corner and see the next adventure that we have in store rather than being the canaries in the coal mine afraid of what might lie ahead.

This will be my last report to the CSRC as Chair of the Property Commission. This time has afforded me an extraordinary opportunity to see/experience the Communities of Faith in our Region at work.

Thank you for working so very hard to keep the worship/gathering places of our Region alive and well. I know of very few places in our Region where people have the luxury of wearing only one hat at their community table and a lot of good work is being done around our Region.

Thank you to the members, past and present on the Property Resource Team/Property Commission for all the work you have done for our Region over time. You are a gift to the Region and I am/ we are very grateful.

Thank you to Rob, Diane, Melody, Jody and Kathleen for walking with us through the sometimes-circuitous discussions of Property matters. Thank you to Peter and Janet for always finding ways to allow us to look inside and outside of the box for options. Thank you.

As I have said I have no crystal ball that will allow me to see the future. I do, however, know that a healthy “there has to be a way” attitude will help us to find a way forward. Blessings as you go and may the travelling mercies of God bless you always.

Rev. Gordon Roberts for the Property Commission