

Tri-Region Staff Support Committee

It seems that the last year and a half have morphed into one big segment of time that straddles the end of 2019 to the present day. This accountability report is supposed to cover the calendar year 2020 but we realize now that in the Fall of 2020, when we were supposed to report on 2019 as that meeting was our postponed annual meeting, we included much of what had happened in 2020 as well. So, for those keen readers who might feel as if they have read some of this information before, you may very well have. The following is our report for the calendar year 2020.

We continue to live into our new reality as Regions and the shared work we are about as the three Atlantic Canadian (and Bermuda) Regions of The United Church of Canada. The Tri-Region Staff Support Committee continues to work through understanding its role and especially feel the growing pains as we continue to try and determine what our role is and what the expectation is for the work we are called to do. There were four committee meetings held in 2020.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed by all three of our Regions was updated and approved by all three Regions in the Winter of 2020. The Staff Committee will recommend updates and changes, as needed, to the Executive. The changes for 2020 were made to include the new staff person for Children, Youth and Young Adults and an update to the language for the cell phone use as a reimbursement of expenses for a percentage of the cost of cell phone up to \$65.00 per month, rather than cell phone allowance.

As stated in the Terms of Reference, this committee's responsibility is to:

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this model, including how the cost-sharing arrangements are working and help to identify improvements in this arrangement from time to time.
- Share experiences and insights about transitional work, including the possibility of any other shared projects.
- Provide support for all staff employed by the Regions and work with the Executive Minister in regards to working conditions and responsibilities.

Much of our time together as a committee has been spent in reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding and Terms of Reference and discerning our role. We struggle as a committee to clearly define our role. Some interpret it as being a resource, simply being a bridge between the staff and the Regions as we interpret the system for staff and report back to the Regions as to whether the staffing model we have is effective. Others of the committee see our Staff Committee role as more one of support to staff and even to advocate for them and in no way meant to act in a supervisory or bureaucratic role.

The direct supervision of staff is the responsibility of our Executive Minister, who herself is supervised by the UCC's General Secretary. We do act as a sounding board and place of consult for the Executive Minister as she keeps us apprised of her oversight of staff but staff issues remain the purview of the staff members' immediate supervisor. When we met with the staff, they helped us, as a committee, to see that they do not expect us to be a place of pastoral care for them but that our offering of support in a more general sense would be welcome. So, we have come to understand that our primary role is supporting the Executive Minister in her role.

We attempt to meet with all staff annually via technology. Just to be able to put a face and voice to a name and to be able to be present to one another helps us, as a committee, feel our way into what is

expected of our role. Each staff person is given the opportunity to speak about their role as well as the benefits and challenges they have encountered as they live into their new roles in this new system. As we continue to find our way into this new system as church, not having committee positions fully filled with volunteers means an extra burden for staff and we ask all church people in our Regions to prayerfully discern where they might offer their gifts in serving in roles that are not filled. The new technologies and work commitments also means that we try to be clear in offering support to our staff. Especially now through this time of pandemic where they were working from home for much of 2020 and then shifting back to in-office and facing especially trying times as they figure out roles and responsibilities, we are thankful for the ministries all of the staff carry out for and with us. We also had one staff member in the Sackville office on maternity leave, which ended in June of 2020.

We were pleased to welcome Rev. Catherine Stuart to the Children, Youth and Young Adult Minister position, who began work mid-Winter 2020. As a result of her entering the hiring process, Rev. Scott Stuart, her husband, who represented Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters on this committee, stepped aside and we are pleased to welcome Rev. Debbie Aitken as his replacement on this committee. We also thank Rev. Paul Vardy for his time spent as one of the members from First Dawn Eastern Edge Region as we now welcome Mr. James Evans to membership from FDEE.

Instead of naming a permanent secretary for this committee, we decided amongst ourselves that the three members who are responsible for reporting back to their Regions, and thereby sit on those Executives, would rotate quarterly the responsibility of note-taking, producing minutes of our committee meetings and writing the Executive reports for each of the Regions.

As we continue to live into our role on this committee, we consider the possibility of having committee members paired up with individual staff as a check-in and support. We sent cards of support to our staff in Spring 2020 in light of the difficulties of and new realities COVID-19 had placed on them, as well as the tragedies experienced in and by the people of Nova Scotia especially.

A meaningful virtual Christmas celebration with staff was held in December, with thanks to Reverend Faith. Boxes were mailed or delivered to each staff person. A Zoom party was organized where games were played, snacks enjoyed and boxes opened. Gift certificates to local restaurants were included in the gift boxes.

We are so very blessed with all of the staff who serve us so faithfully in our three Atlantic Regions. Especially through this pandemic time, they have continued to do their work virtually and in very different and creative ways. The Zoom platform is being used, creatively, by staff to connect to people in the Regions, but in some pastoral relations work where it was deemed necessary, staff have met face-to-face, following all public health guidelines. We especially thank Catherine who has lived into her new role completely virtually and has managed to acquaint herself with those she serves and has been a great resource virtually. We ask that you hold them all in your prayers as they serve Christ's church in their roles and support them in whatever capacity you are able, including offering yourselves to serve on committees so that the workload is shared and our staff do not have to carry the function of our system on their own.

Faith also reported about her work as part of the leadership team of the national church. The new General Secretary Michael Blair has now introduced the opportunity for the Executive Ministers to meet one-on-one with him, as opposed to as a group, and this seems to be a positive change as unique concerns to the Regions she serves can then be discussed directly with him.

It was discussed how the pandemic and its various restrictions has been hard on many congregations. There is a sense of anxiety/angst amongst some clergy about entering the second year of not meeting in-person, and what this may potentially mean in terms of attendance when congregations will once again be able to gather in person. Faith was applauded by committee members for her timely diligent support to the Regions on these matters.

The Tri-Region Staff Support Committee annual budget is \$1,500 with that shared between the three Regions at \$500 each.

We pray that God will continue to guide our work and help us to be of the best service we can possibly be.

Faithfully submitted by the Tri-Region Staff Support Committee

Rev. Lesley Hamilton, Region 15 Reporting Member

Rev. Derek Ellsworth, Region 15

Rev. Paula Gale, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region Reporting Member

Mr. James Evans, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region

Ms. Martha Vickers, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Reporting Member

Rev. Debbie Aitken, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region

Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, Tri-Region Executive Minister