

June 9, 2024

Third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 5

**Meditation:** “It happened in Port Elgin”

**I’m sure you will all recognize our next guest immediately, Rev Mark.  
How are you today?**

I’m well thanks. And you?

**Good. Let me ask you, you weren’t in church a couple of weeks ago;  
where were you?**

I was at the annual spring meeting of ARWRC.

**When and where did that happen?**

It took place from Friday afternoon until Sunday at noon, May 24-26, in Port Elgin Ontario, at the Unifor Family Education Centre.

**Were there many people there?**

Oh, yes. It was a tri-regional meeting with HFRC and WOWRC also there, so there were about 350 people there, plus another 130 people joining online.

**Did you always meet as all three regions together,  
or did you meet individually as well?**

Sometimes we met as all three regions together – for worship, for our keynote speaker, for presentations, and so on. Other times we met just as ARWRC.

**Did the meeting have a theme?**

The theme for the meeting was “Life Together” Life together can mean with one another, it can also mean about life together as Indigenous and those of European descent.

**What did you do all weekend?**

We had worship, and we sang a lot, and we ate too much, and we visited with people we hadn’t seen in a long time, and we made new friends, and we....

***Interrupt Rev. Mark***

## **You mentioned presentations. What kind of presentations were there?**

Oh, yes. There were lots of presentations. But first I have to mention the opening worship on Friday afternoon. There was a covenanting with the new Executive Minister, Mark Laird. He is the EM for ARWRC, HFRC, and WOWRC.

Tanya Cameron – office of vocation

– I'll talk more about Tanya's presentation later

Brenna Baker – stewardship – video

- Cultivate gratitude and generosity
- Connect generosity with discipleship
- Tell inspiring stories
- Invite people into your future
- Set goals

Greg Smith-Young – growth animator

Greg works working alongside existing congregations that are seeking to renew, supports people who are seeding new communities of faith, and shares in efforts to strengthen how all of us invite people into the life and way of Jesus.

Kindred Works (part of UPRC – United Property Resource Corp.)

- Regional trusts to hold surplus properties
- White Oaks

## **You also mentioned a keynote speaker. Who was it?**

Our theme speaker for the weekend was our Moderator, The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne.

## **What did she talk about?**

She talked about “Life Together”. She drew from the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his book, titled, ironically enough, “Life Together”.

She started off by talking about the new Call and Vision statement of the United Church of Canada – Deep Spirituality. Bold Discipleship. Daring Justice. She said that as she looks around at all of the struggling congregations who are so dedicated and determined to hang on, she sees a deep spirituality. She said that the denomination is known as one of daring justice. Where we fall down, she said, is in the area of bold discipleship.

She said we are good at gathering **with** one another, but where we often fail is in being **for** one another. We need to learn to love and care for one another. She believes we are weak in this area because we haven't done the difficult, and sometimes painful, inner work of acknowledging and resolving our own brokenness and sinfulness. When we do that difficult work we become more empathetic towards others.

She said that visible community is an expression of grace and is therefore sacramental. Actually, that's what sacramental means – an outward visible sign of the grace of God. She reminded us that Christian Community is a divine reality – it is a community that is spiritually based, not emotionally based.

She also shared that a faith leader from another denomination called her the Queen of the Church of Satan. She said she had never been so excited before in her life. It was an affirmation of the bold work, daring decisions and deep convictions of the UCC.

**Wow. That's a lot. With all of that, did you actually do any business? If so, what got accomplished?**

Yes, we actually did some work. We voted to elect commissioners to attend the next General Council meeting, GC 45, next year in Alberta. Names that you will be familiar with are Tabitha Carey and G. Keith Kaiser, plus 11 others.

We heard from the four candidates who were being ordained and commissioned: John Adeyemi, Jeffrey Learmouth, Carolyn MacMillan, and Dan Leaver from ARWR. Dan will be leaving WKUC in Wortley Village, and will be serving Port Elgin UC.

We talked about the kickoff for our 100<sup>th</sup> year, and shared ideas of how some are celebrating.

And, we elected a president-elect to serve for the next year alongside President Cheryl Bolton. Next year, Richard Aukland, a lay person from First UC in St. Thomas will become president and Rev. Cheryl Bolton, will become past-president for a year. Now that I think about it, Rev. Cheryl serves St. Andrew's UC in St. Thomas. Is there something in the water in St. Thomas?

## **What are the duties of the Region?**

Regional Council is a decision-making body responsible to serve and support Communities of Faith within its bounds as well as to provide necessary oversight. Probably the most joyful duty of the regional councils is to ordain and commission new ministers to serve the church.

## **So, were there any ordinations or commissionings?**

This was another part of the meeting when we gathered as all three regions. There were over 500 people on-site for the Celebration of Ministries service, because, there were lots of people ordained and commissioned this year – 24 in all. 20 were long serving DLMS – 6 of whom were from ARWR: Marilyn Arthur, Pat Morrison, Michael Shewburg, Erik Skillings, Pam Wilcox, and Karen Willis. The other four were the candidates I mentioned previously.

The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Landowne preached at the service and she mentioned that we, the denomination, have suspended receiving applicants who want to transfer in to the UCC from other denominations around the world because, despite having many congregations who are not served at all by a minister, there is a backlog of 70 black and brown people who want to serve but congregations won't let them because they don't look like our vision of the Christian church. The moderator can be passionate, even a little spicy at times, and she has no qualms about holding our feet to the fire.

## **What about recognition. Was anyone or anything recognized?**

On Sunday there was a time of recognition.

Across the three regions, 7 congregations have closed and disbanded, 10 have amalgamated, and 2 are nesting over the past year. For our region, those numbers are 1 disbanded, 5 amalgamations, and 2 nesting.

Across the three regions, there was a total of 14 ministers who died. 4 from ARWRC, including Lewis Snow, 4 from HFRC, including Bruce Scott, and 6 from WOWRC.

23 Jubiliands were recognized. Derek Parry and William Vanderveeken from ARWRC both marked 50 years since ordination. HFRC recognized 11 Jubiliands who marked between 50 and 70 years. WOWRC recognized 10 Jubiliands who marked between 50 and 70 years.

16 ministers retired in the past year. 4 from ARWRC – Mary Dillon, Jack Lovering, Sheila MacGregor, and Brenda McMain. 7 from HFRC and 5 from WOWRC.

### **Any stats?**

Stats: As of Dec '23 193 candidates for ordered ministry.

	National	ARWRC
Active	1806	88
Retirees	2128	113
Admissions	81	1
Restorative Care	36	1
LT Disability	62	7
Ministry Partner	14	3
Non-UCC	10	2

### **Any final thoughts?**

The moderator said, for the malaise in the church – gratitude is the antidote. We need to look at each other as a sacrament – an outward visible sign of the grace of God.