



45th General Council

Good morning.

Commissioners are Voting Members of General Council: They are the primary decision-makers during the triennial General Council meetings. Voting on matters of doctrine, worship, governance, and public witness.

204 commissioners are elected by the 16 regional councils while others are appointed by the National Indigenous Organization or the General Council Executive to ensure diverse representation.

Although elected by specific bodies, commissioners do not represent those bodies in a political sense. They are expected to discern and vote based on their own understanding and spiritual guidance.

Before and During General Council: Commissioners are active, helping to set policy and elect the Moderator.

After General Council: Some commissioners may continue to serve on the General Executive if elected or appointed, but most return to their regional roles. The General Executive then carries forward the work and decisions made by the commissioners between General Council sessions. In essence, commissioners shape the church's direction every three years, and the General Executive ensures its success between gatherings.



Late in 2023, On a whim I put my name forward as a possible commissioner for Antler River Watershed.

Now, while I'd love to say I was chosen in a competitive race, the truth is—Antler River needed 14 commissioners, and 14 of us volunteered.

Since I was accepted, I've learned so much. I've gained an appreciation for the process and the responsibility. It's been humbling and empowering and a lot more work than I anticipated.

The Antler River Commissioners currently are

- Jonathan Forbes
- Brie Wohlers
- Kerry Stover
- Keith Kaiser
- Pamela Wilcox
- Dave Whiting
- Tabitha Carey
- Erin Stirling
- Linda Britton
- Laurie O'Leary (attended online)
- Laura Swan
- Linda Badke
- Lilian Patey
- Louise Hall

Richard Auckland, President of Antler River is also a Commissioner by virtue of his position.

We did try for a group photo but not everyone's schedule fit the opportunity.

Also in Calgary from Antler River were Mark Laird, our Executive Minister, Kathy Douglas **Minister for Faith Formation** and seven youth delegates (Privacy keeps us from sharing names).

Our former Executive Minister Cheryl-Ann Stedelbauer-Samoa working during the event for the national office played a key governance role for all proceedings.

As commissioners we were faced with 86 proposals, most were multi paged and many including supporting documents and video presentations Also there were 39 multi page reports to be read and understood.

In preparation for the event the Antler River group held four online Zoom sessions to review the proposals. These were for clarification and understanding, not to debate the substance but to ensure any questions were addressed.

General Council itself began in June with two online sessions before the actual trip to Calgary.

These were ZOOM sessions with over 300 participants. At time we broke into facilitated discussion groups. We dealt with 24 of the 86 proposals again not on their merit but just to facilitate understanding and determine any needed clarification questions.

At these meetings we passed an omnibus consent docket process to set meeting guidelines and eliminate some of the tedium allowing more time at GC45 for the actual business of the triannual meeting.

In Calgary everyone was in one big room assigned to table groups of about 8–10. I was at table 6 Tabitha was at table 50 and there were over 60 tables. Each Table hosting a cross section of the delegates. At table 6 we had 7 regions representing 6 provinces and both an indigenous and two youth commissioners).



During our twice daily information sessions each motion/proposal was, presented without debate and we had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. There were designated responders for each proposal to address all questions.

After the proposals had been presented then the table groups convened in discussion groups. Each group consisted of 3 table groups 24 to 30 individuals along with a facilitator and a note taker. We met in private rooms and discussion was intense and to the proposals.

The notes from these sessions were provided to a “Way Forward” committee. Whose purpose was to

- Evaluated proposals and each groups discussion notes
- Ensured alignment with the church’s broader strategic plan.
- Grouped related proposals where appropriate.

Where discussion notes indicated they would consider

- Proposed further research.
- Recommended that findings be tabled to General Council 46 for deeper consideration.

- Empowered Regional Councils to experiment with new models of ministry and personnel oversight to address
- This Way Forward committee was then tasked to bring back to the floor the necessary motions and recommendations for the actual decision making.

I'm not going to try and inform or discuss the individual proposals and eventual motions I am only trying to illustrate the process. It would take several days to scratch the surface of the three years of business that needed to be dealt with. Some routine, some groundbreaking, some personal agendas - all intense and meaningful to their proponents.

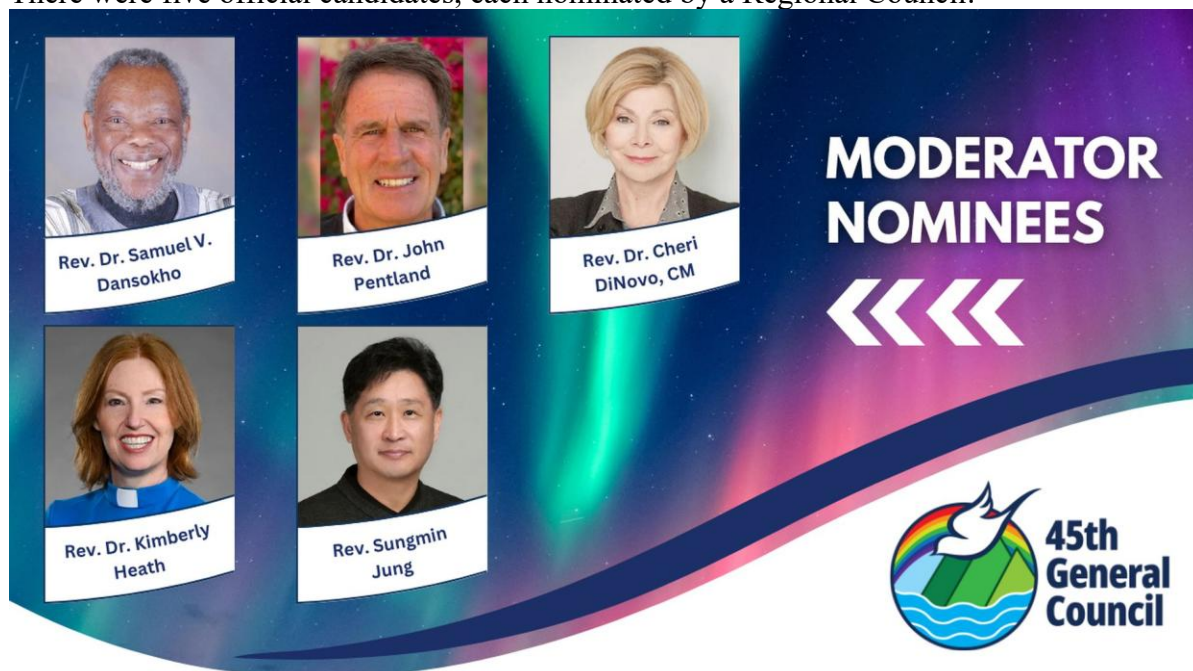
Aside from the business side of General Council 45 a major task was to elect our **45th Moderator** of The United Church of Canada



The Moderator serves as:

- Our **spiritual leader**, **Presiding officer** and the **Primary spokesperson** for our church

There were five official candidates, each nominated by a Regional Council:



Rev. Dr. Samuel V. Dansokho Nakonha:ka Regional Council Ordained Minister; known for intercultural ministry and theological scholarship.

Rev. Dr. John Pentland Chinook Winds Regional Council Ordained Minister; recognized for innovative congregational leadership

Rev. Dr. Cheri DiNovo, CM Shining Waters Regional Council Ordained Minister; former MPP; advocate for social justice and inclusion

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath Eastern Ontario Outaouais Region Ordained Minister; experienced in rural ministry and spiritual formation

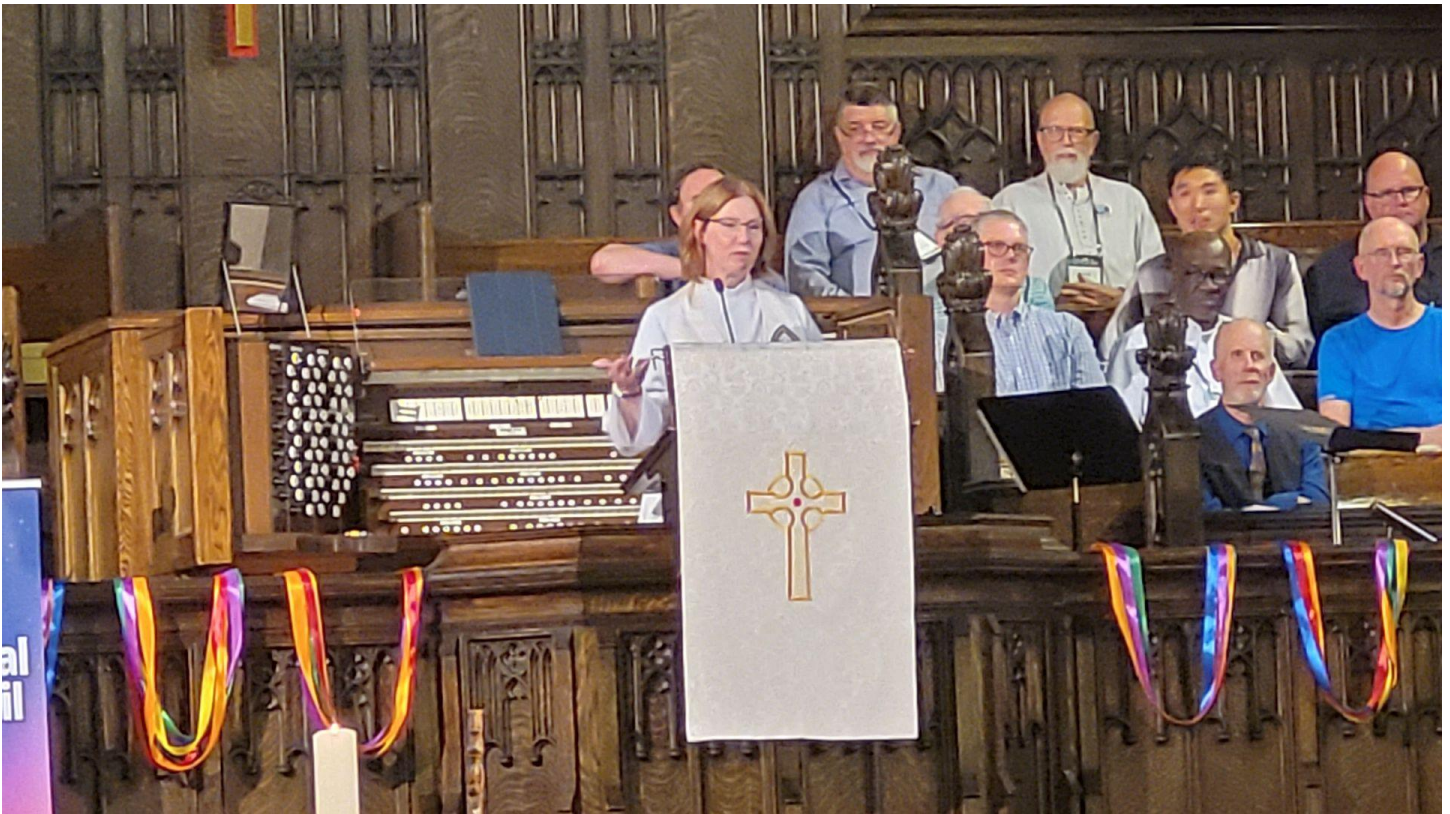
Rev. Sungmin Jung Western Ontario Waterways Region Ordained Minister; passionate about intercultural dialogue and youth engagement

I must say that personally, I felt very unprepared to fill such a Key position in our Church. Although provided months ahead with videos and synopsis for all the candidates and new videos from all Candidates were played for us in the convention center at the convention, I had no personal knowledge or guidance on whom to pick. The one session that was set up as a meet the candidate time was eliminated when the day ran long, and the convention center was closing.

Luckily, the Friday evening supper placed me at a table with the Rev. Dr. Kimberly and our Regional President Richard along with 7 or 8 others. During that relaxed social time, I was able to satisfy myself that if not the best candidate at least I was assured that she was a great candidate and one I could support.

Over 2 days through three ballots the five candidates were narrowed to two Rev. Dr. Samuel V. Dansokho and Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath and then after the third ballot on August 9 at 5:20 p.m. MT, **Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath** was elected as the **45th Moderator** of The United Church of Canada and officially installed during a worship service at **Knox United Church in Calgary** on **August 11, 2025**.





Her message at that service was

Faithfulness in smallness, courage in transformation

- acknowledging the church's shrinking size, but reframed it as a strength:
- She emphasized that the church's vitality lies in its **faithfulness**, not its scale:
- **Rev. Dr. Kimberly** called on the church to **lean into grace**, trust in God's vision, and embrace its prophetic role.
 - "Your hopes for me, your hopes for this church, they lie in you. The Spirit has given you these gifts to shine into the church."

But there was much more to GC45 than the Election of a Moderator and the legal processes of dealing with motions etc. It is a once every three years opportunity to get together and celebrate the church.

Among many opportunities for learning and growth were presentations and introductions to new and existing directions.



Towards 2035 – A Whole-Church Vision for the Future

Launched as part of the church's Centennial celebrations, approved by the General Council Executive in late 2024

Towards 2035 is a strategy to guide us through the next decade. it acknowledges that:

The church faces significant challenges:

- A projected 65% decline in membership by 2035
- Shrinking resources and congregational presence across Canada
- A cultural shift toward secularism and disaffiliation

Rather than retreat, **Towards 2035** calls for bold imagination, adaptive leadership, and faithful experimentation.

It asks us to focus on strengthening our identity through collaboration and diversity

The initiative is rooted in:

- Deep Spirituality
- Bold Discipleship
- Daring Justice

We also learned about



First Third Ministry – Faith in the First Third of Life

The First Third Ministry is a vibrant initiative focused on nurturing faith among people in the first third of life—from birth to mid-30s. It's active primarily in the BC and Alberta Regional Councils, but its impact resonates across the church.

Serving

- Children
- Youth
- Young adults
- Families of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds

It's intentionally intercultural, inclusive, and justice-oriented, welcoming diverse gender identities, faith expressions, and family structures.

The Core Mission is to inspire Christlike lives of:

- Justice
- Hope
- Compassion

The ministry equips young people to live out their faith boldly in today's world.

The movement is deeply rooted in reconciliation, truth-telling, and territorial acknowledgment.

For those who are so moved there was the Alvin Dixon Memorial Walk/Run held on August 10 at 6:30 a.m. down by the Bow River (I did not attend)



- this event honored the legacy of Alvin Dixon, a respected Indigenous leader and advocate.
- Raised over \$25,000 for Indigenous Ministry and Justice initiatives

On August 8, the church offered a formal apology to Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people for past harms.



It was delivered at Knox United Church and marked a significant moment of healing and commitment to justice and inclusion. It was a very moving celebration and for those interested is available in full on the church's YouTube channel.

Youth delegates played a powerful role throughout GC45: There were over 100 in attendance taking part in all of the discussion and motions. As mentioned were two at my table and there were 6 in our discussion group.

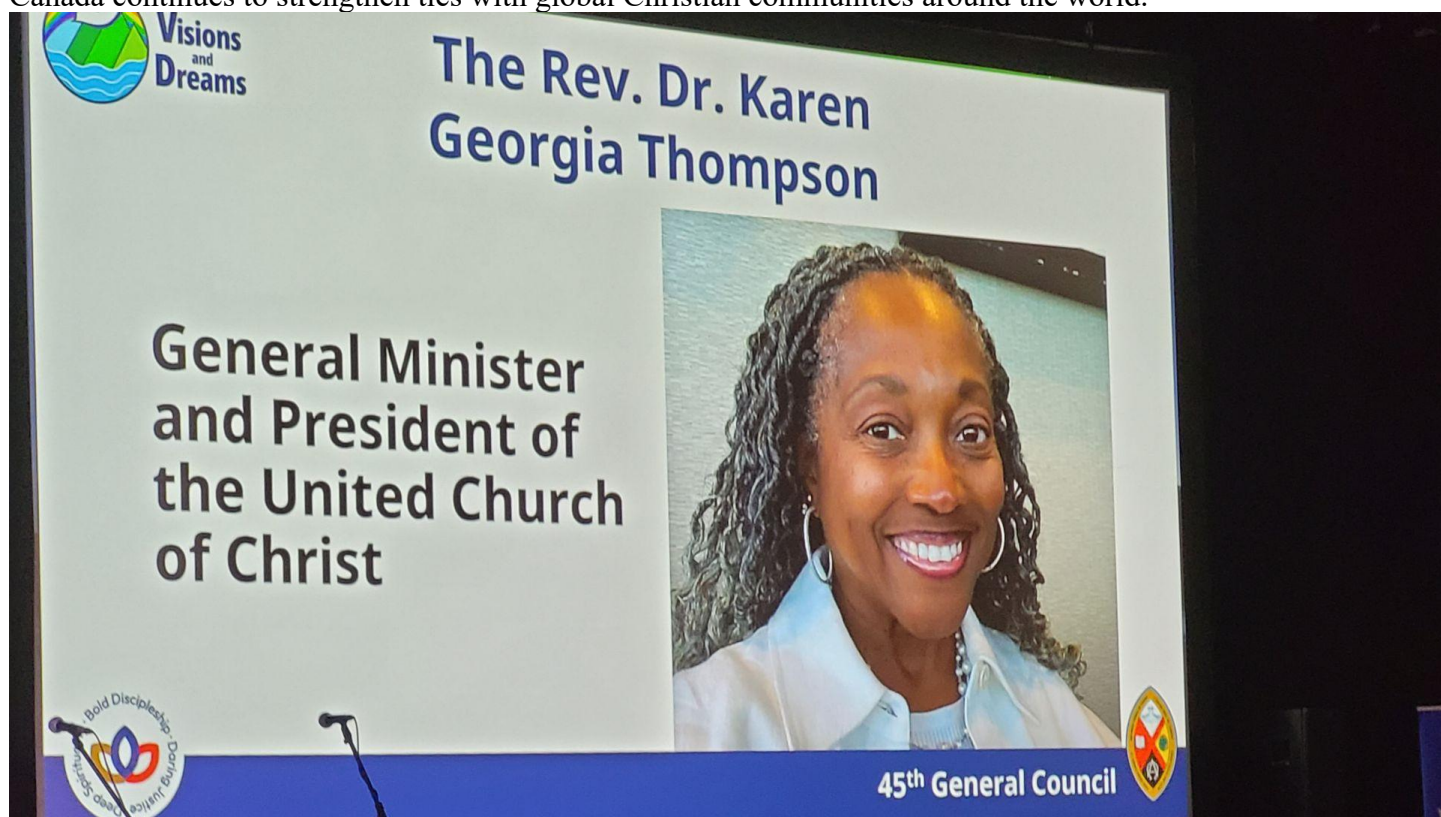


As a group they challenge the church to reimagine its relationship with younger generations. They led worship, shared stories, and engaged in discussion circles. Their voices were central to the theme of “Visions and Dreams”



We were blessed with Ecumenical & Global Partners with over 18 in attendance from every corner of the world

- faith and communion partners. As a group they presented to the floor confirming that the United Church of Canada continues to strengthen ties with global Christian communities around the world.



On top of all this we enjoyed a featured guest speaker **Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson**, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ (USA)

She holds a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Union Theological Seminary in New York and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Journalism. She is currently a

- General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the United States the
- First woman and first Black woman elected to this role in the UCC's history and is a
- Former Associate General Minister for Global Engagement, overseeing international partnerships and ecumenical relations and she is
- Known for her work in racial justice and interfaith dialogue
- Dr. Thompson is a powerful preacher and writer, and has
- represented the her organization in global forums including the World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. Thompson gave three major presentations providing a message of solidarity, encouragement, and shared vision between the United Church of Canada and its ecumenical partners. Her presence underscored the importance of global Christian witness and collaborative leadership in a time of transformation



As you can understand, at any gathering featuring over 600 attendees representing the church – a large amount of religion happened. From the services at Knox United to the Morning Greetings in the convention center, each day there were multiple worship services, including multilingual liturgies and Indigenous spiritual practices. We enjoyed Music Music and more Music including, at all events, choirs formed from the attendees who met to practice outside of our busy schedule.

All of the songs, I understand, were from the new church publication.



I should mention the food. I was never disappointed and never hungry. Calgary fed us well from one night out on the town in the restaurant of your choice to rapidly moving multiple food lines filled with amazing choices and unusual combinations.

I made a point of arriving early for breakfast each day and seating myself alone at a table to welcome and meet new people. I spent one breakfast with the Head of the Japanese's Church for Christ who was in attendance from Japan as part of the ecumenical and communion partners. Another morning, I broke bread with the 2009-2012 former moderator Mardi Tindal who just happened to later be in the same discussion group. And every morning I did try to spend a few minutes with Shannon and Tabitha as a special benefit.

The greatest reward for me was the inspiring fellowship and closeness that only intense days from breakfast at 6:30 a.m. to close of business at 9:30 p.m. can bring. 600 plus people in one room singing, praying, discussing, arguing and eating together.

It was impossible to not leave the experience fully convinced that the United Church of Canada is alive and well and will survive to continue with its mission.

This is the official photograph of the complete assembly at GC 45.



And I was There

