

**JAMES ANGUS**

Jim was born to James and Amelia Angus on traditional Gitksan territory of Kuldo, now an ancient village site on the mighty Skeena River in the Northwest of British Columbia. Both parents are of Gitksan ancestry and Jim was raised according to cultural traditions. He is a fluent speaker of his first language. He acknowledges that “it takes a community to raise a child” as he had this type of upbringing. Grandmother Alice is one who recalled the first European to visit their community. Over the years, she became very concerned about Jim’s education and insisted that he stay in school despite the family’s need for financial assistance.

Jim carried out his first political act when he was to enter Grade Eight at a residential school along with several Kispiox peers. They were at the train station about to leave for Edmonton when they decided they did not want to go. Why should they? They stayed home and caused quite a stir with Indian Affairs representatives in the

area. The school in Hazelton became “Hazelton Amalgamated,” which meant that First Nations students could study there. Jim graduated from this school in 1962 with twelve peers.

Following high school graduation, Jim studied auto mechanics at the Vocational School in Prince George. This became a four year process, which earned him a full apprenticeship at an auto dealership. During this time, he met and married Doreen. Together, they have raised three children and now have 11 grandchildren. After returning to Kispiox in the late 1960s, Jim wore several hats and later became a leader in several organizations, one of them being the local United Church. The death of Jim’s grandmother, mother and maternal uncle resulted in his receiving the hereditary chief name he still holds, Wii Eelast.

Jim’s involvement with the local education board led to his position as school administrator, a post he held for 28 years. His leadership at this level led to other volunteer positions. He was elected to the School District as trustee, during which terms he served as vice-chairperson and chairperson of finance. His work in education carried on to board membership and also some leadership with the provincial First Nations education lobby group. He gained experience in negotiation with government agencies, and eventually a \$6 million project came about — a new school for Kispiox. Church leadership also evolved for Jim. He chaired the local church board and went on to chair Prince Rupert Presbytery and become involved with Native Ministry Council, Native Ministry Consortium and the Vancouver School of Theology. He was elected President of B.C. Conference of the United Church, a great honour, in 1989.

Recently, Jim has been involved with Aboriginal ministry at the national level in the United Church. He is thankful to friends at All Native Circle Conference for their support, particularly Laverne Jacobs and Cheryl Jourdain. Prestigious people such as the Very Rev. Bob Smith, Rev. Stan McKay, Marion Best (all former Moderators) and the Rev. Jim Elliott, the Rev. Henri Lock, the Rev. Leslie Black and the Rev. Gwen Boyd, along with numerous other members of the United Church family, are faithful friends and mentors. Their role modeling over the years has left its mark and will continue to guide the spirit of Jim Angus, as will the Creator's hand and Gitxsan ancestral teachings. Granny Alice, Uncle Steve, Jim's parents, Charlotte Sullivan and Gordon Pokorny are smiling from their stars. The current Native Ministry Council is to be honoured as well, in particular Alvin Dixon, Jim White and Clare Hill.

### **Statement of the Major Issues facing the Church**

I find myself deep in thought and praying that the Creator will guide me in my journey in the next few months and years.

I heard a few years ago about our dwindling membership in The United Church of Canada, from over a million members to just over 600,000 in 2006. The majority of our membership is over 55 years of age and very few are under the age of 35. For many years, I've said I was born into the United Church and I will die there, but my children do not feel the same way. We must have serious conversations with our youth and teens and, most of all, listen. At a recent event, the issue of music selection at worship was mentioned, that it may be difficult for members to agree on selections or to feel heard. Always, at home, our elders find comfort when they hear the old gospel hymns, but these are not as meaningful for young people. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Communication between elders and youth needs to be ongoing to promote understanding and to promote goodwill. The advancements in technology have made instant communication possible, yet do we really listen to each other?

The United Church continues to hold a leadership position in our country in terms of local and global justice issues, promoting multiculturalism and stewardship of God's creation. From my perspective as a First Nations leader, these issues are part and parcel of First Nations philosophy. We have always struggled with a poor economy, injustice, and racism. The Apology from the United Church to First Nations people is more than twenty years old. Now that the economy in the whole country is suffering, there may be more of an understanding of the situation of our people, and we can walk side by side to continue talking, listening and being proactive as a United Church.

Much work has been done to work through the process of restructuring at General Council of the United Church. Change being what it is, this can be a painful process. Our strong spirituality as a church is helping us walk together in a leaner structure. There are always lessons to be learned in every process, this is the positive.

Many, many thanks to the staff and volunteers who continue to make our church what it is. It is a great honour to be among those who are nominated for the position of Moderator. It is humbling to think of those great people who have served in this position in the past, some of whom I call my friends. If I am elected Moderator, I will spend three years doing my best to apply my cultural and spiritual values. I believe we are all here for a purpose. My many years of

experience working in education, in politics, and in different levels across our church has given me a broad vision of leadership. I am a willing listener and also speak my mind and heart about what I have been taught, what I have experienced, and what I have learned. May the Spirit guide us as we go forward in The United Church of Canada. May God bless.

**(THE REV. DR.) JAMES TAYLOR CHRISTIE**



I was born in the St. Lawrence River island seaport of *Salaberry-de-Valleyfield*, Quebec, southwest of Montreal.

The river sustained industry, and nourished the rich farm country of the Chateauguy Valley – the “*valley of the Jolly Green Giant*”.

My roots are Anglican and evangelical “Chapel.” My parents worshipped at St. Mark’s Anglican, where my grandfather had carved the rood screen. St. Mark’s burned in 1961. A young United Church minister, the Rev. Richard Delorme, with a vocation for engaging teens, brought me to the United Church of Canada.

Balancing studies with pastoral ministry, I served in *Ganasatake* – more widely known as Oka. There I learned some of the ways of the Mohawk people, and gained a lifelong respect for First

Nations and Métis.

From the suburban new church development ministry of internship in Kanata, west of Ottawa, I was settled in the Richelieu Valley Pastoral Charge. There I experienced the challenges of a company town in economic hard times, and tough lessons on being part of an ethnic minority.

I also learned much concerning the power of faith and love of neighbour. The churches of Beloeil and Otterburn Park partnered in an ecumenical adventure to declare sanctuary during the Guatemalan Refugee deportation crisis of 1984.

Seven years as minister of the Sutton West – Virginia Pastoral Charge reacquainted me with the rural context of my youth, and introduced me to the struggles of seasonal employment. My years at St. James-Bond in Toronto engaged me in the realities of urban ministry.

Southminster United in Ottawa was a proving ground for ecumenical and interfaith work in faith and the public square, an apprenticeship to become Dean of Theology at the University of Winnipeg, the heir to United College.

The church has entrusted me with leadership in all its courts- from the congregation, to the Chair of York Presbytery, to the Presidency of Toronto Conference, and to the ecumenical/interfaith portfolio of the General Council.

We are called to “*do justice and resist evil.*” This was food and drink in my home Presbytery, Montreal – *et memes en deux langues!*

I am a disciple of Christ, grounded in the Scriptures, yet The United Church has encouraged me to push the boundaries of ecumenical and interfaith conversation.

For fifteen years I have served in the Canadian Council of Churches, most recently as President.

Inspired by Rabbi Harry Joshua Stern among others, I have spent years in interfaith dialogue. A lifetime of engagement has led me to leadership in the G8 World Religious Leader's Summits. Each summit brings world faith leaders from the G8 nations together to address the Millennium Development Goals. In 2010, the Summit will be at the University of Winnipeg.

I marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination by Montreal & Ottawa on May 29<sup>th</sup>. All the years and all the places since have been marked by change. How could it be otherwise? Christ calls us to a "*new heaven and a new earth.*"

### **Statement of Major Issues facing the Church The United Church: God's Fulcrum**

*"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Who determined its measurements – or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone . . . ?  
- Job 38 (5<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century, BCE. Maybe.)*

*"Give me a place to rest my lever, and I will move the world."  
- Archimedes: Philosopher, Mathematician, Engineer (287-212 BCE)*

I believe, as I regularly advise my students, that story is to religion as mathematics is to science: foundational. The Christian lives not only in story, but in metaphor. How else? More often than not, we hear Jesus' teaching begin, "*the Kingdom of God is like . . .*" Not just the Kingdom, but God. God is – a potter, a law-giver, a jealous husband, a mother hen, a judge, creator, redeemer, sustainer – and Architect. Hence, Job. Hence Jesus: itinerant carpenter and rabbi.

Every builder knows that a lever is an indispensable tool, and every lever requires a fulcrum upon which to rest. An humble thing, a fulcrum; a servant of the greater work.

The United Church of Canada has served as God's fulcrum to move the world in many ways. God has rested the weight of the Holy Spirit upon us, and marvellous are the results.

We were the first of the "union" churches of the twentieth century, establishing the model for church communities in Asia, Europe and Australia.

From our humble beginnings in the local church union movement in the Northwest, the United Church has become a part of the very fabric of Canada. Like the CBC, the Group of Seven and, once upon a time, the NHL, we are quintessentially Canadian. This is both blessing and curse, of course.

In recent years, through leadership in the Canadian Council of Churches, we have helped redefine ecumenism. Pressing beyond our founding vision of John 17, “*that all may be one,*” we have identified a new ecumenical text, I Corinthians 12, and call for celebration of varied denominational expressions as aspects of the Body of Christ.

There is both unity and beauty in diversity.

*Mending the World*, adopted by the General Council in Camrose, 1997, continued the United Church tradition of interfaith and ecumenical cooperation first articulated in 1936, and added “*whole world ecumenism*” to the world’s religious lexicon.

*Bearing Faithful Witness* which we adopted in 2003 took a giant step forward in the eradication of the ancient scourge of anti-Semitism.

In a Spirit inspired and prophetic insight, the United Church has offered *That We Might Know One Another* to the world. Muslim colleagues tell me that we are the first and thus far only Christian community that has found a way to affirm Islam as an expression of God’s work.

The initiative of *Circle and Cross* is no doubt long overdue, but our recognition and appreciation of the First Peoples of this land is now irrevocable, and we live in a new hope.

Since last autumn, *Behold One Another* has been transformed from a phrase to a movement for a United Church that is rejoicing in its multicultural vocation.

All this we have done with “*a passion for radical inclusivity*”, as the Rev. Bill Blaikie says.

In all this, we have not set aside doctrine, but we have not been doctrinaire.

We have not so much *held* a theology, as dedicated ourselves to *doing* theology.

In the words of Marty Haugen’s hymn, we are building “*a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard, and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.*”

All this and more God has accomplished, resting the lever of the Spirit upon us.

But do you remember B.J. Klassen’s phrase? We live between memory and hope. To put it bluntly, we live between Job’s world of irrational and innocent suffering and the “*new heaven and new earth*” of Revelation 21.

How then shall we live?

Archbishop William Temple famously observed that the Christian church is the only organization in society that exists for the sake of its non-members. That must remain true for us.

Like a country dance in the round, we must certainly turn inward as part of the rhythm, but just as often face outward to a world too often in turmoil and torment.

We must reassert our legacy as more an ecumenical movement than a denomination, holding fast to an inclusive vision that brooks no discrimination on any basis – from origin to orientation.

Our United Church, like the Church in every age, is both rural and urban, and requires energy and resources in both contexts.

Let us explore the possibility of urban multi-point charges. Assess our property blessings and burdens by all means, and where we bid farewell to a much loved sanctuary, be open to gifting property to a new Canadian church community. The role of midwife is too often undervalued.

The Rev. Dr. Ross Bartlett of Halifax suggests that our rural communities might be strengthened by a revival of the Methodist circuit rider tradition. I like the idea; but then I started on a southeastern Ontario circuit.

I love the national strength and international reach which is the gift of the Mission and Service Fund. But mission begins at the front door of the local congregation. What might a new partnership among national, regional and local mission units look like, and how might it be funded?

Our ministry leadership is diminishing in numbers. Let's re-establish the connection between training centres and academies and well formed ordained and commissioned leaders. Let's invest in our schools.

*Emerging Spirit* has been daring and its impact is still uncertain. What is clear is that evangelism in every age is essentially an exercise in translating the Gospel for a new generation whose language is alien to its parents. Like Dylan wailed, "*we'd better start swimming or we'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a changin'.*"

And we must address everything in the genius of the conciliar system which is the gift of our forbearers. It can be unwieldy and inefficient, but like democracy itself, it beats the alternatives.

So, on to the future.

We lean on God, and God leans on us. The world moves a little, and we help to build God's world house, "*built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace; let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: All are welcome in this place!*"  
(M. Haugen, 2006)

James Christie  
May, 2009

**RICHARD HOLLINGSWORTH**

I live in the village of Braeside, Ontario with my wife Becky, where I have been pastoring a three-point rural pastoral charge for the past eighteen years. Becky and I have three daughters; one in North Carolina, one in Texas, and one in Italy.

The faith affirmations that have grounded my maturation are: the Renaissance and Anabaptist assertion of the rights and priesthood of the individual believer, and the Reformation doctrine that we are justified by faith, i.e. in Jesus Christ, God accepts us as we are. I first became conscious of God's calling me to my own mission and ministry in the early 1960's, as I walked the dirt streets of the Black and Hispanic ghettos of Lubbock and Fort Worth, Texas.

Endeavouring theologically and spiritually to understand the implications of my two faith affirmations, I embarked on a journey of life-long learning which began at Texas Tech University (B.A.), and took me to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), Oxford University (D.Phil. Candidate), McMaster University (Ph.D. Candidate), St. Stephen's College (Certificate in the Ministry of Supervision), Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (D.Min.), and Queen's Theological College. I have taught courses in World Religions, Theology, and Rural Cultural Anthropology.

Attempting to live my first faith affirmation, I worked with a number of dedicated people in the creation and operation of several non-profit, charitable corporations and community associations in Ontario including:

- Hamilton: Wesley Urban Ministries, Victoria Park Community Homes, Kirkendahl Community Recreation and Rink Association;
- Bruce County: Queen's Bush Rural Ministries, Owen Sound Women's Crisis Centre;
- Renfrew County: Riverview Centre, Riverview Foodgrains Project

Striving to live out my second faith affirmation, I have helped create programs for spiritual growth. I have sat on board committees, written articles, facilitated discussions and led workshops for Exchange Magazine, Canadian Theological Society, St. Paul's United Church College at University of Waterloo, Theology and Faith Committee for UCC, Southern Ontario Orientation to Rural Ministry, Stewart House Retreat Centre, and Galilee Mission Centre of Arnprior. Since receiving my certification in supervision in 1983, I have supervised nine theological internships, eight university and seminary field placements and two designated lay ministers in training.

When I graduated from Seminary in 1970, I ``knew`` that the organized church was corrupt and beyond redemption because of its active participation in wars of aggression (particularly Vietnam) and support of racial, gender, sexual and ethnic discrimination and oppression. It was not until I became a member of The United Church in 1977 that I found a spiritual home where I could live out my faith affirmations holistically. It is in the pastoral charge, with its weekly celebratory worship and sacramental events, its one-on-one pastoral opportunities, its monthly social justice challenges, and regular community involvements that I discovered the locus and focus of God's calling. After serving seven years as a Staff Associate at Melrose and then First - Pilgrim United Churches, I was ordained by Hamilton Conference in May of 1983. I have served as the Member of the Ordered Ministry in three pastoral charges, one each in Bruce, Grey and Renfrew Presbyteries. Within the structures of the United Church, I have been given the opportunity of serving on many Presbytery, Conference, and National Committees. I was Chair of Renfrew Presbytery, President of Bay of Quinte Conference, and Clergy Representative to the Division of Mission in Canada for Hamilton, Toronto, and Bay of Quinte Conferences. I have served on the General Council committee's of Theology, Faith and Ecumenism and Mission Through Finance. This 40<sup>th</sup> General Council meeting is the sixth to which I have been elected.

I enjoy snow shoeing with my family through the bush on our farm in Castleford, reading P.D. James mystery novels (and other such Biblical and Theological treatises), singing John Denver ballads while driving, and writing Sunday sermons while listening to *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* on CBC.

### **Statement of Major Issues facing the Church**

When I accepted "The Call" of The Braeside Pastoral Charge, a friend asked me, "What in the world are you thinking?! The Charge is three-points. One congregation has already been investigated for closure. And, it is located in the Ottawa Valley, where they speak with a strange accent!" I said to my friend I had told the Joint Pastoral Relations Committee I wasn't interested in accompanying them as they walked "gentle into that good night." If they were interested in expanding and developing their worship practices, in broadening their pastoral care ministry, in revisioning their outreach activities and programmes, and enlarging their involvements in community development, then I would be happy to become their minister. I added, what I really wanted was to become their friend and colleague in ministry. For eighteen years, we have done just that! Along the way, we have had celebrations and disappointments. We have tried lots of "things." Some have worked and some have not. However, we have not walked gently into death.

If I have learned anything from these "Valley People," it is that we have to be willing to enjoy the pilgrimage God has called us into, because there is not a final destination. I know the Biblical metaphors of "The Garden of Eden," "The Promised Land," and "The Kingdom of God" exercise tremendous influence upon us. Remember, however, God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden; God gave "The Law" while the Israelites were in the wilderness; and Jesus told his followers they were to *proclaim* the gospel of the coming reign of God, not to *construct* it.

### **Challenges in Worship Practices:**

Worship is at the core of our being. I have been to multi-media church buildings, where I joined thousands in worship. I have been impressed! I have wished that I had a thousand people

clapping as I walked on stage and stood in the spotlights. Who among us does not wish to be “The Canadian Idol,” if only briefly.

We have to be willing to investigate how we can hold in tension those worship practices which have nourished us and aided us in our worship of God, while exploring and adopting newer, more multi-media worship patterns. My churches cannot do that investigation by themselves but they could join with others. I am not speaking of amalgamation, but cooperating with other churches in financing and resourcing collective worship services more accommodating to media savvy people. At the same time, we have to continue collective worship experiences that aid those of us who are traditional in our worship practices.

### **Challenges in Pastoral Care**

In the United Church we have an aging membership. The Baby Boomers are beginning to retire and make demands on our health care system and pastoral care services. And the rising cost of gasoline has made rural pastoral visiting economically unviable. One ordained person can not provide all the pastoral care that is needed in our Pastoral Charge. So we helped train a registered nurse and employed her as our Parish Nurse. It quickly became evident there were more pastoral needs than we had anticipated, and even she and the clergy together could not meet all the demands. Now we are training our members to provide pastoral care.

We, as a caring and care giving denomination, have to find practical and theological ways of training and educating our parishioners and linking adjacent pastoral charges so that more responsive pastoral care can be given. We also have to investigate new ways of offering pastoral care via the internet. The Emerging Spirit initiative can teach us much, but we have to offer it more locally.

### **Challenges in Social Justice Ministries**

The United Church and its founding denominations have been in the fore front of nearly every major social justice issue for at least 100 years. For many Canadians, our willingness to give leadership in rectifying those social injustices is what defines us. One of the joys of being part of our Charge is that we engage in social justice ministries with judicious care. We have actively participated in ecumenical and interfaith programmes, enjoyed employing women in leadership positions, been racially inclusive, and are not judgmental about sexual orientation or the gender of marriage partners. Over the past eight years, in one of our ecumenical outreach ministries, we have raised over \$200,000.00 for food relief. In our programming we are continually raising First Nations’ and Aboriginal Peoples’ concerns, while acknowledging our own complicity in their mistreatment. Social justice and outreach ministries are very much a part of our total ministry, but they do not define us.

We do have to address the real decline in M&S givings and the reductions thus necessitated. But even the M&S and all of the ministries which it enables do not define us. The challenge before us is to separate ourselves from those issues, however significant they may be, and speak to the core values which do define us.

### **Challenges in Community Development:**

In the rural communities, local fairs have provided a forum for people to show off their work in a multiplicity of endeavours. When we first arrived in The Valley, our local fairs were bursting with displays from our parishioners. That is no longer the case. In our second year we had Municipal elections. After the elections were completed, we decided to have three old fashioned Scottish “Kirking of the Councils.” I thought it would be great fun to remind our elected leaders it was by God’s grace they were elected and we were praying for them. The attendance at all three “Kirkings” was amazing! In addition, I was surprised by how many of the elected councillors were members of my three congregations. That, too, is no longer the case.

In rural communities, the Christian Church is the last remaining institution for cultural formation. The challenge before us is that community development is now happening outside of our churches, primarily via the internet. Why is that a concern? The amoral “FaceBook” is now the largest and most comprehensive conveyor of social values. The major purpose of participating in community development is to transfer social norms and values. At one time the churches were heavily invested in that engagement and we must take back that responsibility.

### **Challenges in Defining Our Core Values:**

Even though we may be 84 years old as a denomination, we are still a work in progress. Praise God! We have not arrived at a destination point. I hope we never do. But we must articulate our core values with conviction:

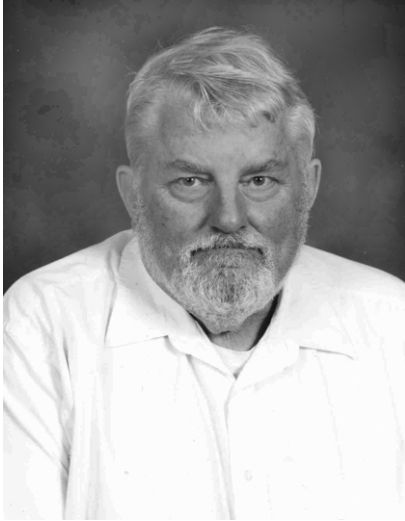
We have a deep and abiding trust in the Creating, Redeeming, Sustaining and Liberating God.

We hold the scriptures to be an authoritative expression of God’s love for all humanity. We are attentive to the movement of God’s Spirit and are always willing to respond as directed.

We know that the context in which we are living has to be addressed so that God’s grace, mercy, peace, love and justice can be realized.

We know that Jesus is the embodiment of a Holy Mystery by which and through which God actively engages us.

## **DR. STEPHEN MABEE**



Stephen is a graduate of the University of Toronto in history and holds three theological degrees a Master of Divinity, a Master of Theology and a Doctor of Ministry. He has taught a basic course on the United Church its history polity and ethos at Emmanuel College and Supervision at the Toronto School of Theology. He has also taught on time management in ministry at the United Church School for Lay Ministers. He has done special study in conflict resolution and mediation, and has taken the training for Interim Ministry. He is member of the Chancellor's Council of Victoria University. He pursues an active interest in the emerging Progressive Christian movement in North America and is a member of SnowStar, the Canadian offshoot of the Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute. With author Karen Armstrong and others, he believes we may be moving into a new age of transition which will affect all the great faiths

of the world profoundly.

His primary work has been as a Pastor. He began with five Mission Fields in Western Canada during student days. Since ordination he has ministered with the folks at Severn Bridge in Muskoka, West Plains Burlington, Timothy Eaton Toronto, and at Bloordale Etobicoke where he served for 21 years. He has also served as an Intentional Interim Minister at Grace Brampton and Saint Paul's Long Branch. Semi retired he has served in Kew Beach United Church (18 months) Rosedale United Church (4 months) St John's Agincourt (3 months) and currently serves at St John's Halton Hills (12 months). In each situation the concern has been to minister with as well as to people whether as a preacher, a counsellor, a teacher, a comforter, a challenger, a vision maker or a colleague.

He has held many voluntary offices and positions at local, regional, and national levels of the United Church including the presidencies of Toronto Conference, The Toronto West Presbytery Corporation, The Toronto United Church Council, Massey Centre, and currently Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources. He has Chaired Toronto West Presbytery twice and has been a member of the General Council Executive of the United Church. Stephen has taken an active role in presbytery and conference serving primarily in Education and Students and MPE work, and as a planner and facilitator of transition in congregations.

Stephen is married to Barbara Fullerton, Stewardship Development Officer for the United Church of Canada, is the father of Warren and Mark, and Grandpa to Eldon and Braedon. He is an enthusiastic amateur painter and piano player, a walker, a lover of sports and music. He looks forward to new associations and friendships as he continues in ministry enjoying each new adventure.

May 2009

**Statement of Major Issues facing the Church**

Capable people have named several major issues currently facing The United Church of Canada. These are found in the General Council 40 documents, *The State of the Church* and *Called to be Church*. I substantially agree with the issues identified and affirm our need to address them.

However, there are many vital issues beyond our church's institutional concerns that we cannot neglect, tremendous world troubles that are also our own: Poverty, war, racism, disease, religious intolerance and other tragedies. While these have plagued the world forever, the sad state of our planet's health has imposed an urgent deadline. If we do not place the environment as our priority all other problems may be rendered irrelevant, perhaps within a century. Ecology is the lens through which we should observe all of our issues, institutionally and globally. As a responsible and ethical people of faith, we have begun and must continue our efforts toward becoming an ecological church.

The closely related problems found wherever justice and peace are threatened also need to be addressed by the people of The United Church of Canada. Justice and peace are both essential to the future wellbeing of the world. They are foundational to the gospel imperative to "Love our neighbour" and to the prophetic summons to "Do justice and love mercy." The United Church of Canada must not reduce or relax its efforts in these areas. As followers in the way of Christ, we must raise public awareness and take public stands within our churches and beyond. As we consider how others should relate and act, we must hold ourselves accountable to the same standards. We must practice what we preach.

Of the many important issues specific to our denomination, there are two elephants in the room that can no longer be overlooked: The undeniable shrinkages in our denomination and the disconnects between the local pastoral charges and the national church. These realities support a conviction that both religion and spirituality are being transformed in this age of transition in which we live.

The original transformation occurred in the first Axial age, from 800 to 200 BC, at the time when the great faiths of the world began to appear as an antidote to violence and injustice. All over the world, independently and simultaneously, the golden rule appeared in some form. A new morality called people to treat others as they would like to be treated. One could say that God moved amongst the individual tribes and awakened them to a world movement toward truth and humanity.

Many think we are now entering a similar period, with the axis shifting into new understandings - even toward a new faith. A sign that this is so may be found in the decreasing numbers of people who still accept traditional forms of faith. More people are claiming the scientific view that maintains our world is one dimensional and the only reality is what we can see, measure, understand and manipulate. To these people, there is no God. There are also those who take the view that the God found in the understandings of traditional faith is too narrow and too exclusive to work in this global village. They seek a more inclusive view of God.

The United Church of Canada is open to the call of ministry in our ever changing world and is rightly discerning its own transformation in these interesting times. I applaud the vision of our

church to become an intercultural church. Our world is growing too small for anything else. I sometimes wonder if we will one day become multi-faith as we get to know and embrace this new thing that stirs among us.

In 1967, the year I was ordained, we were into the second or third year of decline from our highest recorded membership. I prayed that I would still be in ministry when the figures started going up again. Yet we are now into the third generation of ministering in a society that is increasingly non-church attending. We live between memory, which holds us to the things that matter, and hope, which points us to the new things that God is doing among us.

My years of life and church experience tell me that while change naturally occurs, there are things which last. Integrity matters. Justice matters, mercy, transparency, right action, relationships, love – they all matter. For me, the ineffable depth of mystery called God matters. These things that really count remain and grow. Core values enlarge. Transitory concepts even long lasting ones, diminish as a new and larger vision prevails. The problem arises when we make transitory understandings our core convictions, or when we think core understandings are transitory. How do we discern which is which?

In order to meet current and future challenges, I believe we need to build a strong, compelling purpose and direction at the national level that will engage our membership and enable us to remain an active national church. As *The State of the Church* indicates, our national and connectional operations are reduced and even threatened by diminishing support. Let us commit ourselves to putting our church's best interests at heart. Let us recognize where we must grow. And let us boldly and steadfastly participate in God's vision.

Let us seek the movement of the spirit together. Our challenge is to identify what is emerging today as the Spirit moves. Let us serve with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Let us discern what is becoming less important, or no longer true, and we must move on to become the people that God now calls us to be. Let us serve with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And when we have decided to do something let us enthusiastically do it.

When do we let go and when do we hang on? It is the freedom and the challenge of a non-creedal church to ask that question. Because the United Church of Canada is a healthy balance, stretching from the most theologically traditional to the most liberal, we have resources for excellent debate and wise decision making. We have a forum too in this General Council we will share. We can hear each other, respect our differing views, make responsible decisions and grow our church in wisdom, strength and unity. What grand things can happen! I look forward to being one with you at the 40th General Council.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stephen Mabee

## JOHN ROBERT THOMPSON



Born one of triplets, and growing up in southern Ontario, I gained an appreciation of both rural and urban life. While an undergraduate in Toronto, I participated in Operation Crossroads Africa and helped build a school in Ethiopia.

After completing Arts, I had a burning desire to see the world. Along with my brother, we set sail in June, 1966. Our focus was people and we had the privilege of meeting many, both rich and poor, from Anne Frank's father to Gandhi's son, in Europe, Africa, India and South East Asia. Teaching for a year in a Jesuit run school in Ethiopia was a real highlight.

Traveling around the world and seeing the needs of people and the importance of faith, I felt a strong call to ministry, and so became a candidate. During my arts and theological training, I served on 4 summer pastorates. In my final year of theology I was President of the Emmanuel College Student Society.

Ordained in 1971, I was settled on the Saddle Lake Pastoral Charge. While in Alberta, I helped establish a Native Ministries Committee which eventually led to the formation of All Tribes Presbytery. I worked closely with many elders and young people who were involved in a cultural renewal.

In 1974 I traveled across Canada – meeting with native traditional spiritual leaders and this culminated with my living with Vernon Grieves and family in Oxford House. It was here that I met my wife Elenor. We married in 1977, and during our first few years together, we were blessed with 3 healthy sons.

In 1976 I was called to serve at South Indian Lake on very unique terms without salary. I learned how to build with logs, snare rabbits, net fish and establish a community garden. Working hard on the land, I shared the fruit of my labour with the people, and they in turn shared with me. I served on the Community Council and took part on the Hydro Compensation Review Committee.

Teaching 'liberation theology' several summers in the 'Indian Ministry Training Program', I assisted the Northern Elders Council to take charge and form Keewatin Presbytery in 1982.

In 1985 I became the Conference/Presbytery Officer to Keewatin Presbytery. When the All Native Circle Conference was established in 1988 my portfolio expanded to cover 4 Presbyteries from Alberta to Quebec.

In 1994 I left to return to the pastorate, and spend more time with my growing family, and thus served in 3 Interim Ministries in the Winnipeg area.

Subsequent to my wife obtaining her B.Ed., we were called to serve at Oxford House, in education and ministry respectively, where we continue to this day.

During my time at Oxford House, I represented the Conference on the Isolation In Ministry Task Group. Currently I am on the Board of The Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre and Chair of Keewatin Presbytery, as well as the Keewatin representative to the newly established National Aboriginal Ministries Council.

### **Statement of Major Issues facing the Church**

#### **Social Justice**

As followers of Jesus, as a community of faith seeking hope and wholeness, we are called to address and indeed struggle with the forces that threaten, stifle and diminish Life. We must be a Church that continues to be ever more diligent in our 'critical consciousness' and constructive criticism of the forces at play in our present existence.

Let us work out of humility and Grace with intense honesty and courage knowing that we are not alone and that Truth will prevail. As scriptures dictate, we are called to side with the poor, the marginalized and the disempowered within our borders and around the world.

Even with a decreased membership and resources our impact can be as powerful and potent as ever.

#### **Spiritual Development and Nurture**

As a people of faith, spiritual development and nurture must always be our first and primary responsibility. This is the source of our strength and our vitality.

It is as we journey together on the road of life that the Spirit touches us, strengthens us and inspires us to move on, filling us with joy and hope. Faith is not static, but rather it is dynamic and ever evolving. "God created and *is creating*."

Our vision will be broadened, our faith strengthened, and our life renewed, as we become open to the teachings of the elders. The Apology offered 23 years ago implies that the Church has a mission to facilitate and enable the wonderful spirituality cradled in the aboriginal languages and culture to be expressed and articulated. The time is right for an aboriginal expression of the faith which will provide hope and newness of life, not only to us as individuals but to all people and to all of life.

#### **Ecology**

As physical beings connected to the natural world, our faith is intrinsically rooted and grounded in creation. With so many forces affecting the ecological balance we have come to a place where life itself is in jeopardy.

The pollution of our bodies and our world must be a prime area of focus and action in order to restore health and wholeness both physically and spiritually.

## **Information & Technology**

We live in an ‘Age of Information’ and yet rarely (if ever) has there been a time of greater alienation from the earth, each other and ourselves. We are constantly bombarded by a myriad of trivia, facts and information, much of which is of little or no importance. Our senses and our sensitivity are numbed by a flood of insignificant information and by a fixation and a propensity to violence, be it on the internet, media, movies or video games.

Uncertain of our place, our purpose, our mission – we drift, allowing our time and space to be given up to gaming and entertainment. We need to restore within our life and living – vision, imagination and creativity.

Technology has its place, and indeed has already played a huge role in helping us redefine who we are. Important information can be obtained in an instant, and people can be connected to others anywhere in the world in a flash. It has helped us to realize we are part of a global community.

While technology does provide many benefits it is a ‘cold medium’ and as such it cannot be relied on to convey the essence of the Gospel – a message of Love.

## **Church Structure**

It is important to be vigilant in seeing that our structures serve us well. Structures are developed to enable us to do our work more efficiently and effectively, however, sometimes we end up serving the structure instead of the structure serving us.

The Church has made a very significant move in establishing an Aboriginal Council or Unit at the highest level of Church governance. This places a challenge before us all; for the aboriginal people to rediscover and express traditional teachings that have been a source of hope and strength for generations; and for the wider church to be open and receptive to new perspectives and actively share in the dialogue. The Church has engendered great hope and expectation in providing this vehicle for the voice of First Nations people.

## **Accountability, Communication, Connections**

In all that we do, we are accountable to one another, for everyone is in the Circle of Life. Being part of a vertical structure, we sometimes forget that accountability must be first and foremost to the people at the ‘grass roots’.

When we address issues, we need to look at them in all their complexity, their interconnectedness with life and all of creation. We do ourselves a disservice and limit understanding when we look at matters in isolation.

It is as we share our story that we come to a fuller understanding of ourselves, our church and our world. Good communication is paramount in enabling us to be excited about our mission and helping us to see that we are part of a body – the Body of Christ – working together for the common good. The world desperately needs communication that is personal, direct and caring – ‘effective presence’.

### **Ecumenism & Interfaith Connections**

The United Church of Canada broke new ground in 1925 when the Methodist, Congregationalist and many Presbyterian churches joined to form a union. This is a sign of our openness to other traditions and our respect of various views in faith.

Unfortunately, ‘religious belief’ has been the source of conflict, violence and death for many centuries due to pride, arrogance and a quest for power and domination.

We are part of one family, ‘the Human Family’; we are citizens of the world; our home is the planet earth. Aboriginal teachings tell us that we are connected to all life, past, present and future. As such the onus is on us to reach out with openness and respect to all people and celebrate the joy, the wonder, the mystery, the miracle and indeed the ‘fullness of life’.

**MARDI TINDAL**

May 2009

Mardi Tindal grew up in a small United Church at the heart of its rural community, was formed as a leader in United Church camps and youth programs, and has served in staff and volunteer leadership roles at all levels of the church.

Mardi is an adult educator and facilitator, organizational consultant, author and video producer who currently serves as executive director of the United Church's Five Oaks Centre, "a sacred place to seek God within the heart of all of life." In that role she enables the Centre's commitment to ministry with youth and young adults and its partnership with aboriginal colleagues. In 2008, the Francis Sandy Theological Centre honoured her as a Companion.

Another continuing focus is on promoting environmental sustainability, which has been a passion since her youth. (One of her first experiences in the national church was to serve on the General Council Task Force on the Environment, which reported to the 27<sup>th</sup> General Council in 1977.)

Mardi's United Church staff roles have included:

- Coordinator of Recreational Ministries and Youth Resources, General Council, 1976-1981;
- Consultant on Leadership and Program Development, General Council, 1986-1988;
- Communication and Stewardship Officer, Hamilton Conference. 1981-1986 (with Douglas Tindal);
- Director Camp Big Canoe York Presbytery, 1991-1994;
- Adult Program Coordinator, Five Oaks Centre, 1999-2003;
- Executive Director of Five Oaks since 2004.

She has also consulted with government, private sector, church and voluntary organizations in Canada, the United States and Great Britain to improve effectiveness, build productive teams, and navigate rapidly changing environments.

Mardi is an award-winning video producer and presenter whose work has been seen on TV Ontario, affiliated CTV stations, Anglican Video and, of course, United Church Television where she was story producer and co-host of the weekly *Spirit Connection* on Vision TV.

She has been involved in 8 of the last 13 meetings of the General Council in such roles as:

- offering theme presentations at the 38th General Council in Wolfville, 2003;

- broadcasting from General Council meetings;
- coordinating Youth Forum.

Her international church experience includes leading pilgrimages to Iona (Scotland); continuing education in Jamaica; and giving leadership within the global ecumenical network of retreat centres. In 2000 she represented the United Church at the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Association of Christian Lay Centres in Africa, in Ghana

Among many volunteer commitments, Mardi has served on the board of The United Church Observer and continues her active involvement in the life of the church as a member of Sydenham St. United Church, Brantford and of Erie Presbytery.

Mardi holds an MA in educational psychology from the University of Toronto and is committed to life-long learning. She is currently working with Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal to provide leadership as a *Courage to Lead* facilitator. She is the author of *Soul Maps: A Guide to the Mid-life Spirit*, and co-author of *The How-to Computer Workbook for Congregations* and *Who Me – A Theologian?*, in addition to various articles, chapters and blogs.

Mardi and Douglas Tindal are proud parents of two extraordinary young adult leaders.

### **Statement of the Major Issues facing the Church**

Like many of you, I have the soul of a farmer's daughter. My earliest memories include following my father's plow across the fields of our family farm, collecting the worms revealed in the fresh-turned earth; watching my grandfather hoe his large garden on early summer mornings; helping my mother and grandmother pick berries, shell peas and prepare food as we discussed matters of church and world.

In the years since, like most of us, I have become an urban adult. I recall those early years now, not with nostalgia, but with a fresh respect for the way in which my parents and grandparents lived with greater balance within the natural community. We can't go back, but we must learn anew to live, as our creed puts it, 'with respect in creation' and as our Song of Faith says, 'by grace rather than entitlement, for we are called to be a blessing to the earth'. Protecting the integrity of creation is the greatest challenge facing us at this time, and all other challenges take their place and become clearer within its context.

When I was in my twenties (the age of my young adult children and colleagues today) I had the privilege of serving as a member of the General Council Task Group on the Environment. Its report represents an important part of *my* faith story and of *our* faith story. I remain astounded by its theological power.

Over 30 years ago, in 1977, we as a church said that environmental problems are symptoms of a more fundamental crisis in the way our human economy defines growth. We said that we need to live within God's economy instead of trying to manipulate natural limits; that we need to live into biblical wisdom about the prophetic linkage between healthy natural order and justice among people. We proclaimed

In order to love each other,  
We have to love the garden;  
In order to love the garden,  
We have to love each other.

In the context of what Jesus described as the greatest commandment, we confess that we have *not* loved God, garden and one another as we must, and we have learned painfully that the ways in which we honour or exploit one another are linked directly to the ways in which we honour or exploit the garden.

All of us are aware of one of the most vivid and painful examples of this failure, the heart-breaking legacy of residential schools. Remember that just a couple generations ago, our church's role in residential schools was something we celebrated and promoted; now we face a long-term process of living into apology. Over a decade ago, as we were becoming fully aware of the residential schools tragedy, my spouse and I sat at our kitchen table and asked ourselves, "How could they not have seen? Why didn't they change?" And then we asked ourselves: "What is it that our children will look back on a generation hence and ask, how could *we* not have seen? How could *we* not have known? Why didn't *we* change?"

Our answer came instantly, rooted in regular recitation of God's call to live with respect in creation. How can we not see, even today, that our ways are not sustainable and represent a rejection of faith? The environmental crisis is the most critical test we have ever faced as people of faith. If we destroy God's creation, we can have no pretence to obeying God's greatest commandment.

This much seemed obvious to us a decade ago. What has taken more time to appreciate is the subtle way in which the issues are linked. Living with respect in creation implies respecting all of God's creation, including all cultures, all faiths, all species. At the very least, living with respect in creation could have opened our eyes to the arrogance of the residential schools enterprise.

So, today, in the hope of reconciliation for what has been, and in the hope for a restoration of right relationship in our lives ahead, it has become urgent that we return to questions such as:

- 1. How will we love God and garden in order to love each other?**
- 2. How will we love each other in order to love God and garden?**

These become questions not just for the integrity of creation, but also for our personal integrity as disciples, and for the integrity of our church as a place of faithful witness in this land. Our love of God, garden and one another depends on how we take such questions into our hearts. It is time for a renewed covenant with God, with one another, and with the garden.

Jesus taught that God is found in wholeness within as well as wholeness beyond our own skin. Integrity takes shape by listening deeply to our own true personal stories, to our own true communal stories and to God's call *today*. We are a church that honours a diversity of loving

responses to the world's challenging realities. So how is it that *you* are to respond to God's call to live with integrity today?

Some see this as a time of scarcity and restraint, but the truth is we are blessed with abundant leadership and abundant capacities as The United Church of Canada. We can work together to weave integrity in our lives and in this land.

We will not do this by focusing our energies inward. We will do it by turning our focus outward and serving our communities. This is the test of vision and leadership.

Neither can we weave integrity by the rancorous example of our political leaders. God's call to us is a 'still, small voice,' easily overlooked in the shouting of debate and accusation. Instead, we will offer respect to every soul and thereby enable each to hear God's call. We will extend our capacity to listen lovingly and to build trust. We will listen for and respond to God's call that lies in each of our hearts.

I hear God's call, no matter where I serve, to attend to right relations with the land and its peoples; to empower young leaders; and to exercise enabling leadership with discipline and courage.

To what are you called?

## MAYA LANDELL



Maya Landell was born in Orillia, Ontario, in 1975. As the child of two United Church ministers, she grew up living in two manses-- eight years at MacTier/Wata First Nations in Ontario and 12 at Talbotville United in Ontario. She is married to Adam Hanley and they make their home in Woodstock, Ontario.

As a staff associate for Elgin Presbytery she served as the director of Pearce Williams United Church Christian Centre for five years. It was through her United Church camping experience that her sense of self and faith grew. She also chaired the presbytery Division of Mission in Canada Committee and was the adult advisor to London Conference Youth Forum for three years where she worked to develop a new model for youth leadership. During this time she received her Certificate in Youth Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, and worked in her local community to open a Centre for Youth at Risk.

It was out of this work that she began to discern a call and pursued theological training at Emmanuel College as a candidate for ordered ministry. As co-chair of the Student Society at Emmanuel, Maya worked with faculty and students to foster a nurturing learning environment. She balanced her academic learning with work at Naramata Centre in British Columbia as Program Resource staff for several summers and for a sabbatical term on the management team as Program Director, before her settlement to serve Innerkip-Eastwood Pastoral Charge in Oxford County, Ontario.

Her commitment to life-long learning has been lived out in leading worship and professional development workshops across the church and ecumenically:

theme speaker at Connections 2000 (United Church Camping Consultation), Naramata Centre Children and Youth Ministry Institute, Five Oaks Centre Neos Program, Tatamagouche Centre, CanLead Forum, worship leader for Toronto and London Conferences, the Western Women's Conference, and Kairos.

Maya has lived out her commitment to spiritual nurture as a member of the General Council Division of Mission in Canada Committee, and continued that work through its transition to the Faith Formation and Education Unit and then as chair of the Working Group for Faith Formation with all ages. She was mentored by the Editorial Committee for the *Women's Concerns* publication, now serves on the board of *The Observer* magazine, and is a founding board member of Godly Play Canada.

Her joy in ministry has been sparked lately through connection with global partners in Cuba and by learning and growth through prayer and experiences with youth and adults. Her self-care in ministry starts with a commitment to a daily run.

### **Statement of the Major Issues Facing the Church**

As a member of the worship team for the 40th General Council I have been praying about our church for the last year, wondering how God will lead us and who will be called. After intentionally looking outward and listening to the voices of those who care, from deep within has come a sense that I have gifts to offer in this time. I believe we all do. Jesus came and called us to choose life. Our church has in the past, can, will, and must choose *life*, one simple act at a time. “So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which [God] has called you (Ephesians 1:18).”

Recently, I heard a fellow commissioner commenting on what she was reading in her General Council workbook: “I didn’t know that we cared so much about SOOOOOO many things”. This is the truth; our diversity calls us to pay attention to the ways that God is moving in the world. But I wonder if we have stretched ourselves too thin, and in so doing, are we missing possibilities for new life?

“Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version).” It is time to seek clarity about what our vision is as a church. We are called to follow Jesus in the time that is now; we cannot be all things to all people. The discernment work of the last two General Councils is calling us as a national church to *purpose*. The “The State of the Church” report provides a foundation for determining where the needs and potential for our church. We must acknowledge our reality, but not be frozen by it. We need to *move* forward.

“Write the vision; make it plain...so that a runner may read it (Habakkuk 2:2).” Effectively using the communication tools of our time for inviting people into this life of faith is important. We can no longer take for granted that the good news is being heard. So much is calling to people through family, work, things to do, things to buy, deadlines to meet. Our church marathoners are tired of doing all the work, and the excellent sprinters will pay attention if we can cut to the heart of what *matters*: living in awe and gratitude for the mystery of the Creator, following the way of Jesus, the radical peacemaker, and tuning into the Great Turning of the Spirit.

Our bureaucracy is bogging us down-so many forms to be filled out and so many different and complicated processes. Something has been lost between our intentions and our practices. This is an issue for our church as a whole because it takes our energy away from being open and willing.

The need for leadership throughout our church is vast. The remnants of Christendom sometimes give us false confidence that the way forward is the way it has always been. It is imperative for us to struggle with and recognize that we all must learn to lead. A tension exists between how to honour the wisdom and leadership of those who have been doing God’s work in the church for a long time, and how to make room for younger leadership that is present with us right now. At the 39th General Council, something important happened. Youth Forum led the court. Their ideas permeated the groups. They brought new life and energy in discerning the way forward. They worked with us to glimpse the possibilities that lie ahead. This is one example of the many places where wise, young leaders have been challenging our church to *choose life*.

They didn’t all go back to church communities and make petitions and resolutions for discussion and debate to move us forward at General Council 40, but they are leading us by being involved

in local and ecumenical justice movements, working at camps and education centres, and speaking out after experiences with global partners like the United for Peace initiative. We must listen up and act in ways that are life-giving and bold.

The first line of our “Call to Purpose” recognizes the place in us that hungers to connect to the mystery we know through Christ; the place that yearns for connection and community. On a congregational level, much of our energy and budgets are still going into Sunday morning worship, and yet the yearning to be fed spiritually is being sought in so many other places. We try hard with good intentions, yet often we overwhelm our communities of faith with too many words and too many ideas that do not connect or honour the seasons or the realities of people’s lives.

If people are committing to Sundays there is pressure for it to be all encompassing. Faith formation is now connected to worship in a way that it has not been before. We cannot assume that people know the stories of our faith. And without knowing the stories, we lose a sense of our foundation and calling to be the people of God. Our global partners have taught us to worship with joy, energy, and intention to sustain us through all of this change, moving us to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Let us really live into “A New Creed” and the “Song of Faith” with simple acts that show that what we say we believe is authentic. We need language that people can understand, embrace, and wrestle with. Let’s be who we say we are, celebrate and practice our faith in ways that are accessible and engaging. For example, if we are going to truly live with respect in creation, how do we get on-board with the greening of the world? By making it a priority and not just giving it lip service, we can embrace simple acts to change our world and make the communities of life and faith that we are called to. Walk to church, gather at table to break bread together, make challenging small and large choices every day to create the world we want. Our practices will mould us with integrity.

In our commitment to healing and reconciliation with First Nations peoples we have been engaging in a spiritual practice that is shaping us profoundly. As we embrace what it means to be intercultural, our ancient Christian practice of welcoming the stranger is transforming us. “Behold I am making all things new! (Revelation 21:5).”

Let us be bold and visionary in our faith. We are called to be God’s people.

## ROSS BARTLETT



“Always be ready to give an explanation to any who inquire about the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).” Those words have guided me for many years and continue to do so. We are, first of all, a people of hope: based in God’s grace supremely and in the resurrection of Jesus particularly. In our time we need to be ready, as congregations, individuals, and in the courts of the church, to speak of our reasons for that hope. There are many different sources in our world that are appealed to for hope. And there are so many places where the light of hope is dim or experienced as absent.

Gentleness and respect must be the watchwords of our interactions in this wondrous multicultural, multi-faith, multi-faceted world and society. We have no place to stand with a sense of arrogant

superiority. The only place to stand is the foundation stone of respect. But that must also be respect for ourselves, our story, and our history. True, we have much to lament and repair, but we also have much to celebrate regarding our work in concert with the Spirit.

I was born and raised in the United Church and am so very proud of what God has enabled us to do in Canada and around the world. I also lament the times we have forgotten who we are and whose we are and given into the seduction of empire. God’s active grace—and sense of humour—are revealed in the fact that we are still here and seeking to faithfully sing our part in God’s song.

There were a number of stops along the way in what I hope will be an ongoing journey of life-long learning: B.A. (Hons) (1979), M.A. (History) and M.Div. (1982) from Queen’s; Th.D. (Church History) from Toronto School of Theology (1992) and D.Min. from Princeton Theological Seminary (2003). My real education came from a six-point field in Nova Scotia, multi-point charges in Bay of Quinte (1982-86) and Toronto (1989-92) Conferences, a presbytery appointment in rural Hamilton Conference (1986-88), a suburban congregation (St. Andrew’s-By-The-Lake United, Kingston, Ontario, 1992-00), an exchange with the Uniting Church in Australia, visits to mission partners in Brazil, and an urban core congregation (St. Matthew’s United, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2000 to the present).

Certainly my greatest learning and joy have been in sharing the parenting of two daughters who are both at General Council 40: Erin as a commissioner and Laura as a Youth Forum participant. I have also been privileged to travel widely, to some 15 countries on five continents.

I’ve been involved in the life of the church at different levels. My first experience was in the Confessing Our Faith program (1982-88), which stirred my passion for theological reflection as a work of all of God’s people. From there I spent several wonderful years on the national

Theology and Faith Committee, participating in many projects but most notably the statement on “The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture.” Various courts have honoured me with different roles: Chair of Kingston and Halifax presbyteries; President of Maritime Conference; General Council Executive Member at Large (1997-03); Chair of Gospel, Ecumenism, and Theology for Maritime Conference (presently); co-chair of the national Working Group on Worship and Music (which introduced the Worship Matters events).

A large part of my personal vocation finds expression through writing in a variety of settings and teaching at United Church theological institutions in the areas of polity, history, leadership, and preaching.

### **Statement on Major Issues Facing the Church**

We can certainly speak about the details of many issues that face us today, but they can be linked together in the image of the United Church journeying into uncharted territory. Or better, territory that is uncharted for us, perhaps, but not unfamiliar to Jesus’ people of the Way. This journey will call on us to draw ever more deeply on the grace, wisdom, and humour with which the Spirit endows us.

Clearly the challenge before us can be manifested in numbers. But “counting stuff” is the way of the empire and we must be very cautious about the tyranny of numbers as they drive us towards actions that may appear “profitable” in the short term. For instance, we might look around and see that certain worship styles (whether of the evangelical right or of the Orthodox tradition) appear “successful” in terms of large numbers. The temptation is always to adopt the form without wrestling with the theological implications of such forms. The tendency to reject what is unfamiliar is just as great. Faithfulness requires more than our comfort.

The same can be said regarding the form and functions of our courts. The United Church is blessed with a wealth of dedicated and talented volunteers and staff who pour heart, soul, and incredible creativity into our church’s work. I believe that, increasingly, we will need to shepherd those resources ever more carefully, and decide what we must, may, and simply can no longer do. I am particularly concerned about the increasing burdens that fall on volunteers and staff in pastoral relations, pastoral oversight, and education and students work, especially when we consider the changing parameters of human rights and employment law and the rich variety of human situations that present themselves.

We must continue and strengthen our engagements with people of other faiths as “Mending the World” invites us to do for the healing of creation and the human family. Various documents such as “Bearing Faithful Witness,” “That We Many Know Each Other,” and “Circle and Cross” lead us into greater intellectual awareness that must find expression in personal interaction. “Behold One Another” promises to teach folk like me, very much of the dominant culture, what it means to be part of a multiculture, the wondrous rainbow of God’s many-hued people in our own land.

As an urban core pastor I see every day the results of the increasing power of empire to call us into self-focused spheres of fear that there will not be enough. As a result, we create societies and communities that no longer give priority to caring for the broken in body, mind, spirit, and relationships. That is one of the calls of Christ’s people: to remember that we too are always strangers, always on a journey, caring for the sojourner and the alien among us. We have been aliens in our time and the empire continues to invent new ways of alienating us from one

another. The church—along with other faith communities—remains one of the few places that cares for the whole person. That is our mandate; let us take it up with joy.

Together let us be open, from that position of hope, combined in gentleness and respect, to look at new ways of doing our work. Let us be willing to open the boxes—maybe even turn them into circles and triangles—to try new forms of mission, ministry, sharing, and blessing one another and our land and our world. I bring to this time and place a love for and deep experience of our United Church, a passion for order and justice in our corporate living; a conviction that God's mission in the world needs a church prepared to open doors and bring down walls; a belief that in each one of God's people there is a wisdom that we can listen into life; and a capacity and willingness to speak of the hope we have, gently, respectfully, but clearly.