



# Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

October 16, 2021

## Mission Centre President Report

As Mission Centre President, I want to share my voice and vision of the future of Community of Christ in Canada East.

### **D&C 162/3 selections**

“Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment in time, but is instead the call to every generation... to let the Spirit breathe.... Do not yearn for times that are past... build a foundation for what is yet to be. As a prophetic people you are called to discern the Divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges that will require new forms of ministry.... It is not the form but the divine presence which gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church.... From the earliest days you have been given a sacred principle that declares the inestimable worth of all persons... you hold precious lives in your hands... in their welfare resides your welfare.... It is for divine purpose that you have been given the struggles as well as the joys of diversity.... The richness of cultures, the poetry of language and the breadth of human experience permit the gospel to be seen with new eyes and grasped with freshness of spirit.... You are called to create pathways to be relationally and culturally incarnate.... Do not be defined by the things that separate you but by the things that unite you.... May we journey into the future trusting one another, confident that the One who called the church into being continues to guide it forward toward fulfillment of divine purposes.”

Community of Christ is NOT on its own the future of spirituality. We are a partner/companion with others to discern and participate in a preferred future.

Our 43 CEM congregations (3rd largest MC in NA) almost all face dwindling numbers, aging demographics and financial constraints. We have community relevance challenges in the locale of our actual buildings vs. the communities where we commute from. We are vulnerable in our traditional forms.

In the midst of our institutional church vulnerability as we currently exist—in form, in place and traditions—there is ongoing metamorphosis that promises hope for our future. Metamorphosis though, as we see from the dramatic caterpillar to butterfly transformation, is not just tweaking, fine-tuning, or adjusting what is, into that which we will become. The change is into a new, almost unrecognizable organism—from slithering body to winged angel.

The ingredients are all around us for transition. Perhaps our greatest challenge of all is discernment, but through unfamiliar lenses. We are pre-conditioned from our cultural roots and heritage traditions to loyalty towards our existing institutional religious worldview. Discernment is about us becoming vulnerable—akin to our camp song; “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.” By this open, willing stance, we can expect to be awakened and our eyes opened to that which we never expected, never envisioned before. The world around is rich in the lives of Others to nurture our transition once we become aware they are there like God given manna from heaven. We need to allow the Spirit to breathe.

We have been counselled by prophetic words to honour the worth of all others, to affirm diversity in all its forms, to discover our own welfare as a people/church in the welfare and well-being of the other. We are called to follow Jesus the Peaceful One; to live out the compassionate mission and message of unconditional love which he proclaimed. Yet, with revered tribal identity we subtly protect our distinctives as ultimate truths and diminish those of other faiths and spiritual expressions.

Peacemakers are bridge builders between the differences that distinguish us one from another. As we guard our faith, the message that is communicated and felt by others is that their personal and community worth, their cultural birthright, their faith and spiritual identity, are unequal and less valued. Jesus the Peaceful One came to foster unity across our diversity; to nurture unconditional love with an outcome of peaceful co-existence that embodies the blessings of sacred community for all.

In this light of discerning our spiritual and community interconnectedness with all Others and encouraging metamorphosis with all, our CEM 3/3rds Strategy ventures into the following spaces in our neighbourhoods to reach across the walls that separate us and cooperatively form sacred community.

**ONE** – Affirm our CofC congregations with pastoral caring, with spiritual formation, with awareness of our common faith and mission with others, and then to shape community along with our neighbours.

**TWO** – Creating Connection with our neighbours by inviting all to safe, familiar spaces for kindred relations and meaningful conversation. We each enter into the life story of the other and discover there is collective hope for our mutual transformed future. Creating Connection is an entry point into diversity where we journey with new companions, perhaps into existing congregational settings, or into missional endeavours for the common good of all, or into New Expressions that reflect diversity that is too new to fit within a traditional Community of Christ congregation.

**THREE** – New Expressions of diverse, relevant, spirituality and practices emerge from without our own faith community amidst Others who themselves spring from different traditions. We

all link by a common desire to join together to blend our unique and sacred identities, sacraments, and gifts in community. Thereby we create welcoming New Expression communities that carry within them traits of Community of Christ identity along with the equally valued offerings of other authentic diverse faith and spiritual realities.

So, here we are discerning; affirming our own journey along with that of others. Our welfare is found in communion with diverse others. Our vulnerability will be strengthened in mutual kinship—that will bless our local communities, provide financial stability, and attract the large numbers of seekers, church refugees and Interfaith peacemakers into our collective movement.

My voice and vision upholds the legacy of Community of Christ congregations—albeit we are now most likely representative of the caterpillar stage of our human spiritual journey. The fragile state of our congregations comes with a “best before” date for each congregation when their window of opportunity to have the capacity of people, finances, time, and energy to change the tide will have passed and choices for their future disappear. We have not retained our own past 2/3 generations who find our most relevant connection point is the experience of camps and reunions.

The new model of Creating Connection reaches new people whose hearts are singing, “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.”—those who are seekers, church refugees and inter-faith peacemakers looking for a diverse community to intermingle their own meaning and expressions of faith with a welcoming movement of joy, hope, love and peace. It is through their eyes and mutual fellowship that inviting relevance emerges in our midst and our “best before” dates become open-ended as new participants, new generosity and new age groups find belonging and voice in our transformed Community of Christ movement.

For me, our CEM future must include pastoral affirmations, camping programs, diversity bridges, intentional connections across our neighbourhoods, reframing of traditional forms, mutuality with other faith expressions and compassionate mission.

“May we journey into the future trusting one another, confident that the One who called the church into being continues to guide it forward toward fulfillment of divine purposes.”

With meaning,

*Kerry Richards*

*I acknowledge that I live on land which is the traditional & treaty territory of the **Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe**, including the Mississauga. The land is covered by the Ajetance Purchase (1818).*