

2021 GC 44 Commissioner Biographies

1) Marilyn Zehr Ordained Clergy

Biography

I would like to be a commissioner to GC44 because I have always believed that the work of the church belongs to the whole community of believers. All of us have gifts that contribute to bringing about God's dream for the world and I would like to contribute my gifts to the larger work of the church in this way.

One of the gifts that I bring is a new set of eyes, ears and heart to long-established ways of doing things because I am an "immigrant" from Mennonite Church Canada to the United Church of Canada. In the Mennonite Church, I was involved in the regional and national and international church bodies and bring a strong conviction that the work of the broader church and the local church need a strong link. We are stronger together.

I have also migrated from rural to urban and back to rural ministry. I grew up on a farm in South Western Ontario, I lived in and served in ministry in Toronto for many years. I now serve the Maynooth Madawaska Pastoral Charge - a near north 4-point charge. This experience helps me to appreciate the differing needs of differing contexts.

I am a married Lesbian and so also view the world from a queer lens. Queer theology helps bring a new angle of thought to old questions. The church is moving from mainstream Canadian society to the margins of Canadian society. Queer theology understands the margins and the gifts of the margins. I see the United Church as moving more and more to recognizing and reaching out for those gifts among us. I can contribute to that project.

I am committed to the anti-racism work of the church as it finds expression in our local communities and that has led me to serve on the anti-racism forum of the FNJT of ECORC,

In keeping with the national and regional church commitment to the work of antiracism and how that finds expression at the local level, I along with representatives of our church leadership, presented a delegation to our local municipal council asking for a Diversity and Inclusion Committee to address local racism and homophobia. As a follow up to that action I led a book study of 21 things you may not know about the Indian act – for interested community and church persons in order to begin to do our own work. The work of the church needs to address the very real struggles of the world around us. I would bring that conviction to my role as commissioner.

Last but definitely not least, I have co-founded, with my wife Svinda Heinrichs, a forest church called Cathedral of the Trees - for three key reasons. 1/ because this expression of church reaches people who may never enter the doors of traditional religious organisations. 2/ I believe that the present and future of the church needs to be adaptable and flexible as we face ongoing global challenges of climate crises and 3/ outdoor worship re-connects our minds, bodies, hearts to the more than human world of which we are part in a particular and transformative way with the goal of establishing right relationships (as called to by indigenous sisters/brothers/2-spirits) so we can move to right action. Cathedral of the Trees has found a natural home in the United Church of Canada because it cares about all these things.

I believe the above narrative demonstrates the following skills: Visionary, Spirit-led, Natural leader, Good facilitator, Good communicator (sermons and in writing), and I value collaboration and spiritual discernment for important decisions, consistent with my Spiritual Direction training. I would bring all of these things to my role as commissioner to GC44 if the body of ECORC discerns together that I should be called to do so.

2) ARUNA ALEXANDER Ordained Clergy

Although I have had experience with our Church on a variety of levels, this is the first General Council since the UCC's declaration in October 2020 on Becoming an Anti-racist Denomination. This vision and work interests me as an individual as well as a member of the UCC. My experience beyond the church is that of Founding President, United Nations Association, Quinte Branch. This has resulted in the organization of an annual event focused on the Leadership Summit on Inclusivity. This years (March 18, 2021) gathering saw 182 persons register. I work as well on Belleville City Hall's Inclusivity Committee. Unique attributes arise from the experience of local and global lived experience, and understandings of both world cultures, and world religions. In addition, I led the social integration team in the church/community collaboration of settling in a family of Syrian refugees.

3) Ted Meyers Lay Person

Since the East Central Ontario Regional Council came into being in 2019, I have served on the transition team, the Regional Council and currently chair the Mission Through Property team. This role has brought me closer to the pressing needs of many of our Communities of Faith (COF).

There are many challenges facing our COF's like aging congregations, declining members, membership burn out, failure to attract new folks especially in the 25 to 40 old population and escalating expenses like increased

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assessments, increasing operating costs like insurance rates, and old buildings requiring major upgrades, all resulting in reductions in Ministerial support from full time to half and even quarter time ministry and the sale of church properties to finance operations. In my extensive business background and senior management training there are only 2 ways to save our sinking ship. Reduce expenses or sell off assets to prolong the inevitable or increase sales to achieve prosperity and growth.

In order to do this, we must become a very inviting church showing that we are open and available to all. Our becoming an affirming church, and our truth and reconciliation actions, are a couple of ways we can accomplish this goal. Our challenge is to find other ways and take actions.

We must reach out to our younger generations to develop what's meaningful to them. As the chair of the board of Camp Big Canoe for 25 years I know that I can bring to the table and discussions the opinions and feelings of many campers and staff. These young adults are the future of our church. At Camp Big Canoe our motto was to Build tomorrows Leaders through Christian camping today.

A current challenge we are or will be facing soon in these COVID times is how do we do Church post Covid. I have served on the Board of Directors of the Toronto United Church Council (TUCC) for over 20 years and currently serve on the Property and Finance committee as well the Treasurer. As a member of this Board of Directors I have supported many programs to assist COF's with training in many of the challenges facing them. One such program is the recently released seminars called "The Church has Left the Building" which brings a focus on how will we combine online and in person church.

As you can see my wide business experience and the ongoing work/ministries I have been involved with the many bodies and/or courts of the United Church (Chair of York Presbytery; executive of Toronto Conference; Property Commission of Living Waters; Member of the Trinity United Pastoral Charge as Chair of Trustees, Chair of M&P and Treasurer) provide me with a strong background and a realistic future looking vision. I would offer these strengths as a commissioner for the General Council 44 meeting.

Thanking you advance for your nomination. I know I can and will serve our Region well.

Ted Meyers

4) Paul Reed Ordained Clergy

Ordained in 1987, settled in Red Lake District of Northern Ontario, I took a call to Alberta before settling back towards my childhood roots in the former Bay of Quinte Conference.

My life partner, Eleanor, a self-employed professional forester. Together, in 1997, we built an off-grid solar powered energy-efficient home surrounded by 400 acres of protected forest. Here we have raised our three children, welcoming family and friends, tending our sheep, and tapping the trees. During construction of our home, a CMHC technician described us as being on the leading edge of green technology application, but even before this, I found ways to combine my passions and studies with social action issues. My interest in the environment was fostered at an early age by canoeing and hiking. While studying Engineering and Community Development at university, I became involved in one of Ontario's early recycling programs, in retrofitting of homes for seniors, and in providing leadership to housing projects in rural and native communities across Canada. The challenges in these fields often required creative and multi-disciplinary problem solving.

Canoeing and hiking remain a passion. Paul has taught white water canoeing and guided canoe trips for young adult church groups and at-risk urban youth. Evenings sitting around the fire, beneath the stars, telling stories, whether ghostly yarns or tales intended to help unravel the mysteries of life, are a precious experience.

As a PKMK2 (Preacher's Kid and Missionary Kid 2nd generation), I was raised in a setting of faith-filled action. These two generations within the United Church of Canada grounded me, modelled leadership in ministry and encouraged me to become an ordained minister. Family vacations coincided with meetings of the General Council and there I and my siblings were witness to significant moments and audience to inspiring theme speakers. Since ordination have been consistently involved in one or more courts of the church accumulating a combined total of 48 years on the Executive three Presbyteries, three Conferences, Regional Council and General Council. Throughout this time, I have come to learn that "we are united, not because we have a common experience of Christ, but because we have the experience of Christ in common." In my varied roles, I have advocated that discernment be carried out, not with self-interest, but with an assertion of the values held in common and that decisions be made with an inclusive love and with regard for the well-being of all, past and future.

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5) Wanda Stride Ordained Clergy

The spiritual gift God has place on my heart is music. I love to play music, write music, sing in choir, solo, in any way. My journey through the church has also been a musical one - singing in the junior choir as a child at Rexdale United Church in NorthWest Toronto, playing piano for a children's touring church drama group, and singing in the senior choir as an adult. I have written countless songs, inspired by the work of the Spirit in my life, inspired by my ministry in the United Church of Canada, and simply reflecting on the mystery of the holy in our lives.

When I was a teenager I had a call to preaching. I wouldn't say I ignored it, but it took the birth of my two children, Catie and Sam, to truly appreciate the gift of life and love that God offers.

I left the church in my late teens and early 20s, as the god of my childhood became increasingly irrelevant and frankly, annoying. It took the birth of my children, and wise counsel of my minister in Stouffville, to realize that I was not recognizing the true work of God around me, and not acknowledging God's voice in my life - God was there, part of everyday conversation and yearning, but I was still looking for that white guy with a beard, living in the clouds.

Since that awakening I have earned a Masters in Divinity, was ordained to Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, and recently I have enrolled in the Jubilee Spiritual Direction program. In 2018 Kawartha Highlands Presbytery nominated me for moderator of the United Church, probably the most humbling moment of my life.

These days God is calling me into partnership with Emmanuel Baptist Church in El Salvador, where I have been part of several trips witnessing the powerful ministry there, and several fundraisers, trying to support their important work, even through a pandemic.

I believe that I am also called to do that difficult work of listening, learning, and finally accepting our church's complicity and our government's complicity (therefore my own complicity) in the oppression of the first people of this land. Through a book study, and a virtual walk across Canada, I have been able to facilitate, with other, conversations with First Nations folks across Canada as we learn from each other, and maybe, build relationships.

Since the East Central Ontario Regional Council came into being in 2019, I have served on the transition team, chaired the Nominations Team, and served on the Equity Team. I currently have the privilege of serving as minister with the good people of Trinity St Andrew's United Church in Brighton Ontario.

6) Joyce Payne Lay Person

I am willing to offer my skills in analysis and logistics to help the General Council move in new directions in this new world. My experience with regional work has offered me a chance to help realize new models of governance and opportunities for collaborative ministry at all levels of the church. My themes for these periods of service were "Bloom Where you are Planted", and "Be Present". I have a passion for social justice and have been very active with Community Meal programs. In all of my church endeavors, I have tried to follow the call of the God who in 2 Timothy 2 says: "Be the kind of container God can use to present any and every kind of gift to God's guests for their blessing." I believe the United Church has an opportunity to embrace being a less bureaucratic institution and more a national community of believers who work to bring justice and wholeness to our communities. I believe our stewardship and sharing of resources is critical to becoming who we are able to be

7) Kathleen Whyte Lay Person

I am studying with united in learning to serve as a llwl, and in doing so, find my faith deepening and my understanding growing. I will complete my courses in December. I also have moved recently to preach at a small 3 point charge to gain more experience of which io am truly blessed.

I love the United Church of Canada because we are forefront in addressing the issues at hand and we are making apology and addressing the wrongs of the past.

I believe in all the projects we are undertaking from inclusivity, to right relations, apology to unwed moms in the homes, liveable income for all, antiracism in society and in the church, and acceptance of all and becoming an affirming region and communities of faith.

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I have been a camp director for children's camps in five different provinces of Canada for thirty years, so god for me at that time was in the woods and the youth learned about god, sitting usually on logs in the midst of creation. We have to transition them inside the church during the year, that is the challenge i see the church facing in order for us to grow and sustain ourselves into the future.

I have been part of many different communities of faith from coast to coast and i can bring that experience to the general council as we are very different depending on geography.

I have recently moved out a retirement home and have seen many alarming things directed at the seniors there and am glad to see this is becoming an area of concern for both our church and the government as well.

We still have lots of work to do and with god's help, i wish to serve and help in that work.

8) C. Stephen Coles Lay Person

I see myself as a commissioner as the culmination of my commitment that started in Oct 2018. I accepted the challenge of being our Presbytery rep on the Commission that was being formed because I wanted to be part of the solution. It has been exciting and challenging times. I have been part of paradigm shifts in teaching and in the military and know it just does not happen. There are considerations that must be part of each decision. Review, review becomes the mantra. Unfortunately, like any organization the UCC has entrenched ethos that has to be shed in a positive manner. Your role in COVID and the issues that were just bubbling are now boiling. I feel I have a good understanding through my Liaison work of the issues confronting communities of faith. A huge question that needs to be answered is "how do we do Church post-COVID"

As a commissioner I want to bring my experience to issues being addressed and once again be part of the solution.

9) Meggin King Ordained Clergy

I was a commissioner at GC 42 in Ottawa, and thoroughly enjoyed the process of discernment about our policies and procedures. In terms of financial conversations, I will confess to being somewhat overwhelmed, but was determined to keep plugging away at it. It felt good to be part of the decision process of the church, and the smaller group conversations were an excellent way of delving deeper into the issues.

Being connected to the local and world-wide concerns of our Church is something I want to be able to share in depth with my own community of faith, as we re-imagine being church here in our own small community. At times we can become somewhat insular, and I think it's important to remind the local church of its connection with the wider world. Being a Commissioner gives me a unique perspective of the deeper work of the church and an opportunity for a number of local educational sessions.

My passion for justice work is also a driving force behind my desire to be a commissioner. For as long as I can remember, growing up in the U.S in the 60s meant being aware of the great racial divide between white folks and people of colour. I was fortunate to be in a family that resisted the racism of so many, and taught us to try to see the world in a clearer light, and to work for justice. That desire for justice has expanded over the years: anti-racism is at the fore-front of my current work, but I also support initiatives concerning our First Nations' people, those who are materially impoverished, the LGBTQ2S+ community, the homeless, and the mentally ill. (While I was at the Atlantic School of Theology I did my Clinical Pastoral Education unit (seven months) at the East Coast Forensic Psychiatric Hospital, which furthered an interest in social justice and the needs of the forensically mentally ill offenders.)

The desire for social justice, and my determination to work however I can to "seek justice and resist evil" are tied to my understanding of Jesus the Christ as a radically political shit-disturber. I feel privileged and compelled to follow in his footsteps, extending a radical welcome to those who have been systemically shoved to the margins.

I am supported in my deep desires for the Church and its justice-seeking mission by my partner Don, by my daughters and their partners, and my grandchildren, as well as many friends, and my local church community and the wider Warkworth community as well.

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10) Don McLean Ordained Clergy

In 2010 I completed a unit of CPE, with my practicum at St. Vincent's Continuing Care Hospital in Ottawa. Visiting patients in very long term care on Level 3 for four months, I gained some insights which inform my whole approach to ministry, at least in theory. (I'm a bit fallible in practice.) Here's how I summarized the experience, in a report which was part of the CPE unit:

"As a spiritual care giver, I have been humbled and privileged through the course of the CPE unit, and the clinical placement at St. Vincent's Hospital, to meet a variety of patients and staff who have helped me to understand my vocation as a minister of the gospel in new ways, and particularly to learn a new role as a "student." It is how I learned to identify myself to patients (and hospital staff) – as "a student in spiritual care." Thus, I was meeting and visiting patients without the "mantle" of the professional status that I have, at least outwardly. Inwardly I did not stop being a minister, but in the clinical setting it was not why I was there. I was not representing the Christian tradition, or my denomination or a particular congregation. A couple of patients enquired what I did before beginning the placement, and at least two patients "sniffed out" the fact that I was a minister.

I relished the role of "student" with the patients as my "teachers" and with more than a few, asked them in as many words – "will you be my teacher." The patients on level 3 at St. Vincent's have experienced life situations of which I hadn't a clue, and it became my role as student to learn how they coped with or experienced the challenges of their medical situation. I hope that the patients I approached in this manner gained a new understanding of themselves as well, that they could become someone's "teacher" – possibly a revelation for individuals who normally rely on others to help them with every function of their daily life. As adults, so many patients on SVH III rely on other professional staff to change their diapers, or spend hours waiting for Personal Care Assistants or other staff to get around to helping them with every other aspect of their daily existence. For the months of my placement, many of the patients I visited found that someone was willing to come to them and ask to be their "student" and to spend time with them – perhaps that my have helped them in some small way realize that they are, and have always been, fully human.

I learned that my ability to minister does not hinge on my ordination, but on the quality of relationship that developed between patients and me. With some patients this relationship took on the character of "friendship" – an expression in my view, of the "friendliness of God in Christ" referred to by Karl Barth. I have mentioned previously the need to be able to exist with paradox and the paradox in this is that although I am the spiritual care "professional," the living out of this profession is - to be a student of my patient teachers and to be a friend to my patient friends. I would also say that this kind of relationship, in both senses, may be different than the kind of relationship the patients have with the regular spiritual care staff, in that I deliberately identified myself as "student." I did not identify my own religious tradition unless the matter was raised by another. I was visiting as a student in "spiritual" care, not so much "religious" care, however, I visited effectively, I believe, with patients of different religious traditions than mine, and patients with traditions the same or similar to mine. I believe this approach (spiritual care) freed me in many ways to be creative – to be free, for example, to bring a pair of maracas (from St. Lucia) to share something from "home" with a woman from St. Lucia, and to bring my 'cello to visit with other patients, or, in other words, to communicate in a non-verbal language with, in one case, a man who can no longer speak or exercise his identity as a musician, and in another, to share my artistic gift with a patient who had shared his writing with me."

11) Penelope Culverson Lay Person

I enjoyed my service as Commissioner for GC43 and feel a calling to continue. I have respect for the commitment and devotion of the wonderful people I have served with and look forward to being considered for this position on GC44. My service as President of the Bay of Quinte United Church Women and on Church Boards and Councils, committees like the Equity Team since 2018- present, give me a unique perspective to serve as Commissioner. In addition I was on the organizing committee to bring Anne Graham Lotz to the Air Canada Center for a Revival called "Just Give Me Jesus" which was attended by over 20,000 people. I'm a retired business owner/manager. I am a life member of Beta Sigma Phi International, a social sorority and have held most executive positions. I have been woman of the year several times. I am a Member of Soroptimist International. Supporting women and girls with education and empowerment. I am a mother of two girls, now in their 40's. With their Husbands and two children each, they are living in Peterborough and Lakefield.

I have a passion for the word of Jesus and the relevance of our communities of faith today and a desire to help in ensuring the health and future of the United Church of Canada.

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12) Ryan McNally Ordained clergy.

Greetings! I offer myself as a nominee for the role of commissioner to General Council 44. When I participate in GC deliberations, I examine proposals using lenses informed by different experiences outlined below.

I come to situations with some understanding of the privilege I possess, and an understanding of the need to be on the lookout for unseen privilege that may cloud my participation. I believe it is important that I use that inter-personal power to make space for less-privileged voices through leadership, example and silence.

I bring experience of some of the diversity of congregational life in the UCC having been a lay-member in rural and(sub)urban contexts. My congregational experience has taken brought me into different subcultures of the UCC, shaped differently by historic denominations or church planting efforts. Some congregations have been Affirming, while others were afraid to take that stance or undertake the work. By living in different parts of Canada, I experienced different roles for Conferences and Presbyteries, and the different ways communities of faith worked together.

Currently, I serve a congregation with an identity rooted in a rural community that has been replaced by suburban development. An Affirming congregation, St. Mark's is also part of the *Rural Connect* experiment of inter-active, internet-enabled, multi-congregational worship. In this way, we might partner with and support other communities of faith. I am also painfully aware of numerous challenges facing communities of faith in this time of flux.

My experience of different councils of the church allows me a broader field of vision. Having been a part of numerous changes in the church, I recognize that much is impermanent and being overly attached to particular ways of being does not serve us well. Yet, with several more decades of work ahead of me, I know the need to continue working towards that uncertain future. As a parent of teenagers with unique needs, I also see the need to prepare the church for them.

Finally, despite all the tumult, I continue to trust that the church is Christ's vessel to carry the "kin-dom" of God into being. We may rise and fall, and at times be fallible and feeble, but the church will continue until all are one in a cacophony of splendid diversity.