

## **Moderator's video greeting to Regional gatherings Spring 2021**

Grace and peace to all of you who, gathering in the Region, in Christ's name!

I'm glad that I have the chance to stop and be with you, even if it's just for a moment. It's been quite a year, hasn't it? The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us into places and practices that were new to many of us, just a year and a bit ago.

Snail mail. E-mail. Sunday School in a Box. Camp in a Crate! On and on and on, you have found ways to live out the ministry which Christ has given. You have found ways to make God's love tangible. You have found ways to follow the Holy Spirit, even in those times when we've been told we *must* stay close to home. to make sure that people have what they need. To survive. To live. And, hopefully, to thrive.

So. Thank you. You amazing, wonderful, awesome disciples of Jesus Christ! THANK YOU! You have done so very much. It is impossible for me to express how deeply honoured I am to be part of this United Church of Canada – to be part of *you*. Thank you!

As we move out of this time, into whatever comes next, I trust not only that God is with us, but that we are with each other.

This coming year will bring a lot. The General Council Executive's Strategic Planning process is well underway, with the view to bring a plan what will help the General Council, the General Secretary and General Council staff, as well as the wider United Church, a direction based on our shared mission, vision, and values. While a great deal of input has been and is being sought, so this plan will be collectively *ours*, one of the ways that you can help is to hold all of this work in intentional prayer – that our discernment might be clear, compassionate, and guided by God's love.

We're also coming up to General Council 44 – a meeting that is going to be different from any other, if only because we're going to be hosting this gathering in virtual space, there are possibilities and opportunities that we're just beginning to imagine. The meeting will open in February 2022 and close in August 2022 (dates to be announced). Between the opening and the closing, there will be opportunities for General Council commissioners to participate in Learning Sessions, in Discussion Sessions, in informal and formal small group conversations, and in decision-making sessions, including the election of a new Moderator. All of these experiences will be in front of the computer (or phone or tablet) – so it is helpful that many of us have built experience with these tools over the past year.

The GC44 Planning Committee is hoping, too, that meeting this way will allow us ways to bring the entire church – not just the General Council Commissioners – together – in learning, in worship, and in connection. Our theme, "Who do you say I am? / Et vous... qui dites-vous que je suis?/ Mâduwech echâmâgî " is an invitation for us to explore who Jesus Christ is for *us* – his disciples known as The United Church of Canada, in this part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I'm hoping that those people who choose to offer their gifts, their talents, and their time, as General Council Commissioners, will dive into the deep waters of this question, invite others in to the conversation, and see where it leads us. It's going to take time and energy and, no matter how hard we work to make all of the technology work together, it's probably going to have some times of frustration.

I know that, along with me and the Planning Committee, the General Council staff is committed to making this the best experience we can.

I hope that your Regional gathering is fruitful, and that you continue to support and celebrate one another in these changing times. Please know that you and your communities of faith are constantly in my prayers, and that I hold you in my love.

Christ's peace *is* with you!