

Discerning Currents

ECORC Strategic Plan – 2024-2028

Fall 2023

If we plan, it is because we have confidence in a future. Having a plan that expresses our hope for the future and outlines some of our desired outcomes also helps us to be accountable to one another on the journey to those outcomes. It helps ground us in priorities so that we are not chasing goals in all directions. As a Regional Council, a plan needs to be rooted in the role and ministry at our level and how we will answer God's call for the good of our denomination. Ministry happens at the local level and our role is to strengthen that in ways that are life-giving and makes the future vision possible.

In the Spring of 2023 the Region formed a task group to draft a strategic plan framework for the next five years, with specific activity streams and measurables for the next two years. Building on the areas of focus offered by the General Council in its strategic planning document, "Strategic Plan 2023-2025," we adopted as our organizing principle the 'fish' diagram which consists of these categories: Growth (Renew, Create, Invite), Justice, Climate, Leadership, Indigenous Pathways, and (the Church's) Common Good. Inspired by 'the fish', the task group named itself 'Discerning Currents'. The Indigenous Pathways part reflects the important discernment work being done by the Indigenous Church in determining its relationship with the settler church. The settler church work is reflected in the work being done to adopt the remit, and the ongoing Regional work of the Indigenous Justice and Respectful Relationships forum.



At the May 2023 ECORC meeting the strategic planning project was launched, the fish diagram was introduced, and initial conversations were held. In June, a day of simultaneous in-person consultations was held throughout the Region, followed by an online consultation, and also the opportunity to respond in writing. The conversations were rich, and often passionate, as people expressed their joys, frustrations, encouragements, hopes, needs, and suggestions for ways forward. In August, the Discerning Currents team met and began our work of sifting through all the feedback and chart paper, and discerned themes and possible priorities. This plan is our best effort at capturing not just what you said, but also what seemed to be the building blocks for identifying priorities.

This plan is organized into the sections of 'the fish'. Each section is introduced by a summary of what we heard you say in the consultations. (Strategic plans and priority

setting by definition mean that not everything named will become a priority.) Then, a priority (or priorities) in each area is named, and a number of activity streams are offered. Each activity stream has a description, including who might take on the work, and a brief time line of outputs and measurables. This plan is meant to be descriptive, but not prescriptive. Not everything is fully fleshed out, by design.

Some of the activity streams are big, and some are modest. In several places we are simply naming ongoing work that we have discerned should continue to be prioritized. In a few places we've offered brand new things. Some of them are quite ambitious, and, we think exciting. While the activity streams generally tend to be more technical and organizational than overtly spiritual, we certainly hope that the sense of embracing and living into our United Church call and vision of deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice that we felt while doing this work is reflected in the draft.

The Discerning Currents Team is: Elizabeth Cunningham, Larry Doyle, Patti James, Arthur Smith, Ned Wells, Sharon Hull (staff), Éric Hébert-Daly (EM)

Here are the activities we have discerned that the Regional Council should prioritize in 2024-2025:

[CoF = Community of Faith]

- Activity Stream #1 – Community of Faith Self-Assessment Tool
- Activity Stream #2 – Collaborative/Shared/New Ministries Resources
- Activity Stream #3 – Amalgamating and Disbanding Resources
- Activity Stream #4 – Alternative (Alt.) Worship links on Regional Website
- Activity Stream #5 – Justice Monthly Feature
- Activity Stream #6 – Media Strategy
- Activity Stream #7 – Faithful Footprints and Greening Sacred Spaces
- Activity Stream #8 – Carbon Footprint Reduction
- Activity Stream #9 – Climate Forum
- Activity Stream #10 – Lay Mentoring Network
- Activity Stream #11 – Association of Ministers
- Activity Stream #12 – Governance Models Toolkit
- Activity Stream #13 – M&P Refresher
- Activity Stream #14 – Healthy Connections Forum
- Activity Stream #15 – Covenant Renewal
- Activity Stream #16 – Centres of Excellence



GROWTH

You identified strengths that have supported growth initiatives, including technical expertise and equipment for online and social media work. Hybrid church is a part of your repertoire for connecting with the community. You also recognized the Region Networks, Forums, and Clusters that are doing significant work in outreach and justice issues, making connections with the community.

Looking internally, you are asking for a process to discern opportunities for your congregations in possible new ministry models that acknowledge your diminishing volunteer base and energy. For example, a tool to assess different ministry models – which one is right for you? Or a Community of Faith Health Assessment Tool to help you evaluate what is working and not working, accompanied by evaluation criteria that moves past traditional ‘success’ markers of dollars and numbers of people in the pews.

You have spoken of the isolation you experience and feeling out of touch with the Region and with each other. Many congregations are without a minister and may not have a connection to Region resources and connections that could bring encouragement.

You expressed a desire to hold worship services during the week to connect with your communities. A centrally managed worship service list could spark imagination and creativity in the planning of your services.

Growth Priority: Toolkits

A range of Region supported tools to help congregations realize and manage growth potential. Regional tools will help congregations to discern around possible renewal, creating new ministries, creating ‘third spaces’, amalgamations, closures, etc.

Activity Stream #1 – Community of Faith Self-Assessment Tool

- A way to look at a CoF’s vitality and viability, and discern ways forward
- Survey and research existing tools in other Regions – edit and adapt
- Develop a “how to” workshop (or video, instruction method, etc.)
- Meets our Manual (G.1.2.2) obligation to have CoFs do a regular “Self-Assessment”
- (see “Common Good” section for tie-in with new forum)
- Goal to have ALL CoFs complete the Self-Assessment by Spring 2025
- (Lead: Covenant Support Team – subgroup/new forum?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Available tools researched, adaptations/edits made
Spring 2024: Launch – “How to” workshop (Regional meeting)
Spring 2025: Use of Tool by 75% of CoFs

Additional budget for 2024: \$775 for in-person gatherings



Activity Stream #2 – Collaborative/Shared/New Ministries Resources

- A way to explore new ways and forms of ministry
- Continue the work of the 'Ministry in Changing Times' team already engaged in this (formerly Travelling Roadshow)
- Add/include "planting" new ministries aspect
- (Lead: Ministry in Changing Times group – subgroup?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Available resources researched, adaptations/edits made
Spring 2024: Launch – "How to participate" workshop (Regional meeting)
Spring 2025: Process for collaborating, sharing, or planting explored or entered into by 50% of CoFs

Additional budget for 2024: \$775 for in-person gatherings

Activity Stream #3 – Amalgamating and Disbanding Resources

- Resources to help in amalgamations, and in good endings
- Survey and research existing tools/resources in other Regions – edit and adapt
- Develop a "how to" workshop (or video, instruction method, handbook, etc.)
- Intentionally work on our language and communication around how we talk about and understand endings
- (Lead: Covenant Support / Mission Through Property Teams – subgroup?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Available tools researched, adaptations/edits made
Spring 2024: Launch – "How to" workshop (Regional meeting)
Spring 2025: Evaluation of process by those who used it

Additional budget for 2024: \$775 for in-person gatherings

Growth Priority: Alternative Worship

To curate/create a centralized repository of alternative, non-traditional worship and spirituality sources for use by Communities of Faith to develop and enhance their existing worship offerings, especially exploring mid-week options.

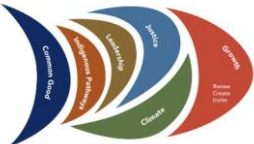
Activity Stream #4 – Alternative (Alt.) Worship links on Regional Website

- An expansion of the "Resources: Online Worship" menu on the ECORC website
- Primarily aimed at laity, to enhance their options beyond their local CoF
- Ministry leaders could use for exploration, inspiration
- Alternative worship styles, prayer resources, YouTube channels, spiritual deepening websites, etc.
- (Lead: Formation, Nurture, and Justice Team – subgroup?)



Measurables/Outputs:

- Winter 2024: Survey launched – crowd-sourcing resources
- Spring 2024: Resources curated and sent to IT for uploading
- Summer 2024: Launch – website updated and resources available



JUSTICE

The United Church of Canada represents a progressive voice in many areas. You have witnessed to this work through a variety of ongoing and effective Networks and Forums that raise awareness and advocacy. These include the Affirming Forum, the Anti-Racism, Interfaith, Intercultural Forum, the Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) Network. You mentioned the work around anti-poverty and the learnings shared from the Equity Team. Our relationship with Kindred Works informs us of local housing initiatives through property redevelopment.

You urged us to help you find ways to invite the broader community to be more fully involved in your justice work, and to create safe spaces for these conversations, whether in our buildings or community spaces, working towards a community hub approach.

Justice Priority: Justice Awareness Strategy

To develop and implement a Justice Awareness Strategy, within the church and with Community partners.

Activity Stream #5 – Justice Feature

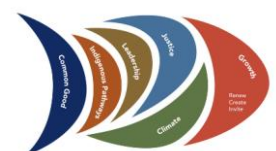
- We will feature awareness of a Justice initiative each quarter of the year that is part of our Region's work, e.g.
 - o Affirming,
 - o Anti-Racism, Interfaith, Intercultural,
 - o Indigenous Justice and Respectful Relationships,
 - o Equity,
 - o Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI),
 - o Anti-poverty, etc.
- Using a wide variety of communication methods – newsletter, workshops, panel discussions, action projects, video resources, CoF resources
- (Lead: Formation, Nurture, and Justice Team – Networks/subgroup?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Calendar/Schedule discerned

Winter 2024: First feature

June 2024: Evaluation of program, adjustments made if needed



Justice Priority: Media Strategy

To develop and implement a media strategy and training to help ECORC members respond to complex, time sensitive situations of injustice

Activity Stream #6 – Media Strategy

- Media training will be provided to Teams and Forums
- Ability to quickly prepare statements and pastoral letters that will achieve maximum reach
- Building on the work the Assembly of Elders has begun in this area
- (Lead: Assembly of Elders – task group?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Strategy developed

Spring 2024: Media training provided to all identified spokespersons

Summer 2024: Strategy implemented

Spring 2025: Five media stories published by journalists in non-church media

Summer 2025: Evaluation

Additional budget for 2024: \$1200 for media training



CLIMATE

You told us of the initiatives you see happening in the Region through available programs – Greening Sacred Spaces and Faithful Footprints. You are excited about the Eco-Justice Initiatives presented by the Cathedral of the Trees. You told us that climate care is important but you weren't sure how to help.

Climate Priority: Existing Programs Support

To lift up, celebrate, and encourage participation in Faithful Footprints and Greening Sacred Spaces, and to encourage more to participate by sharing the list of CoFs involved and to share their stories.

Activity Stream #7 – Faithful Footprints and Greening Sacred Spaces

- Curate a list of all CoFs in the Region that have participated in these programs
- Share stories, successes, process for engaging the programs
- Encourage greater participation through awareness, education, support
- Draw on experiences of Young Adult Climate Motivators
- (Lead: task group?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Participating CoF list curated

Spring 2024: Engagement strategy developed – launched

Spring 2025: 10% of CoFs participating/participated in either/both programs

Climate Priority: ECORC Carbon Footprint

Toward discerning the carbon footprint impact for Regional meetings, and creating a climate action plan – encouragement – pro-actively carpool organizing

Activity Stream #8 – Carbon Footprint Reduction

- Research and consult with bodies that have tools to discern an organization's carbon footprint
- Adopt a carbon reduction as a priority consideration for all Regional meetings
- Pro-actively organize carpooling, and other reduction strategies
- Encourage CoFs to offer online meeting options, where possible
- Draw on experiences of Young Adult Climate Motivators
- (Lead: task group?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Task group formed – initial strategy developed

Spring 2024: Carpool campaign implemented for Regional meeting

Fall 2024: 10% reduction in carbon footprint for Fall meeting



Climate Priority: Climate Forum

To explore whether there is interest to create a “Climate Forum” within our Regional structure, and to offer support in its establishment

Activity Stream #9 – Climate Forum

- Survey the region to gauge whether there is interest in establishing a “Climate Forum” as part of the Regional structure
- Draw interested persons together to explore and discern together
- If appropriate, present a proposal to the Regional meeting
- (Lead: task group? – Formation, Nurture, and Justice Team?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Fall 2023: Survey of region to gauge interest

Winter 2024: Discernment gathering of interested people

Spring 2024: Proposal to establish Climate Forum at Regional meeting (if needed)



LEADERSHIP

You lifted up the ways in which leadership is supported and identified, from a strong Licensed Lay Worship Leader program to online regular clergy check ins, and the hope seen in the First Thirds Ministry Forum. You identified that there is a prevalence of clergy leadership and voice and are looking for a higher profile for lay voices and leadership. You are ready to let go of past ‘mantras’ like, “We’ve never done it like that before.” You’ve expressed that leadership can be a lonely place and that isolation is widespread, and that burnout amongst the clergy and laity within the church is a reality.

Recognizing the reality of diminishing Board/Council volunteers and energy, you’ve asked for stream-lined governance models that will work and training for leadership in these models. You would also like these stream-lined models to allow for spontaneity and the ability to act quickly, rather like a flash mob, able to come together quickly for a purpose, then disperse just as quickly before re-emerging somewhere else.

Leadership Priority: Mentoring Laity

Establishing a lay mentoring network with a goal of creating strong CoFs. It will incorporate stewarding innovative leadership, succession planning, and Lay Leadership opportunities. Learning and mentoring for church tasks, and for regional work – expanding beyond the human resources of individual congregations.

Activity Stream #10 – Lay Mentoring Network

- Survey the Region to gauge whether there is interest in establishing a lay mentoring network
- Draw interested persons together to explore and discern together
- Use a “train the trainer” model to equip lay mentors
- Ongoing support of the network once established
- (Lead: Formation, Nurture, and Justice Team – with staff support)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Survey of region to gauge interest
Spring 2024: Discernment gathering of interested people
Fall 2024: Launch Mentoring Network

Additional budget for 2024: \$775 for in-person gatherings

Leadership Priority: Clergy Support

Enhance and strengthen support of ministry personnel by continuing opportunities for connection e.g., Clergy Check-ins, First Third Ministry Monthly Check-ins, and other similar gathering events to build relationships, provide support, and bring connection, **AND** to encourage and support the formation of an Association of Ministers group in ECORC.



Activity Stream #11 – Association of Ministers

- Continue existing supportive connections
- An association of ministers would offer collegial support, advice, advocacy on ministry leadership issues, and continuing education
- Draw interested persons together to explore and discern together (work begun in late 2019 that got derailed by the pandemic)
- Connect with and learn from Bermuda and Nova Scotia Region who have a vibrant Association already in place
- Ongoing Regional support and resources in establishing the Association, which will become self-sufficient in time
- (Lead: new task group – with staff support)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Discernment gathering of interested people

Spring 2024: Gathering together and receiving progress report at Regional meeting

Fall 2024: Independent functioning of Association of Ministers in ECORC

Additional budget for 2024: \$800 for in-person gatherings and related expenses

Leadership Priority: Governance Resources

A refresher course for M&P Committees on the roles and responsibilities of members would be timely in reviewing role descriptions and expectations, alongside an introduction of possible new governance models and ministry structures.

Activity Stream #12 – Governance Models Toolkit

- Curating and creating resources to facilitate alternative models of CoF governance to adapt to current times
- Survey and research existing tools/resources in other Regions – edit and adapt
- Develop a “how to” workshop (or video, handbook, instruction method, etc.)
- (Lead: Covenant Support – subgroup?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Available tools researched, adaptations/edits made

Spring 2024: Launch – “How to” workshop (Regional meeting)

Spring 2025: 40 ‘downloads’ or uses of the resource

Activity Stream #13 – M&P Refresher

- Survey and research existing tools/resources in other Regions – edit and adapt



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- Develop a workshop (or video, handbook, instruction method, etc.) for resourcing M&P committees
- (Lead: Covenant Support – subgroup?)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Available tools researched, adaptations/edits made

Spring 2024: Launch – “How to” workshop (Regional meeting)

Spring 2025: Use of Tool by 65% of CoFs

INDIGENOUS PATHWAYS

No new activity streams are offered; however, these are the ongoing priorities of ECORC in regards to Indigenous ministries and people:

- Encouraging CoFs to engage with Remit 1 and vote in favour of establishing an autonomous National Indigenous Organization
- Supporting the work of the Indigenous Justice and Respectful Relationships forum and staff
- Committing to explore new and ongoing ways to be in a relationship with local first nations communities.



COMMON GOOD

You noticed where there has been something that connects us together, like the Rural Ministry Network.

Of interest might be the recognition of groups of like-minded Communities of Faith, and exploring something called ‘Centres of Excellence,’ different from Clusters and Networks, as they become a leadership point in the Region to access and provide ideas and encouragement to like-minded inquirers and searchers.

You have asked the Region to find ways to support safe third spaces in our communities, to foster relationships with the community through broader social and justice matters (see Growth Priority: Toolkits).

Common Good Priority: Healthy Connections Forum

Creation of a “Healthy Connections Forum” within our Regional structure to be tasked with contacting and maintaining contact with every CoF in the Region, to create deeper relationships and offer support and guidance in navigating church structures and resources.

Activity Stream #14 – Create Forum

- Draw interested persons together to explore and discern together
- Draw up terms of reference, including frequency of check-ins, types of information expected to be shared (e.g. how to access various Regional resources, navigate structure, etc.), process for sharing info with Regional Teams, (see “Growth” section for possible tie-in with “Self-Assessments”)
- ‘Connectors’ would function as kind of a ‘soft liaison’ for general things
- Match forum members with CoFs – perhaps teams
- Present a proposal to the Regional meeting to establish Forum
- (Lead: new task group)

Measurables/Outputs:

Fall 2023: Discernment gathering of interested people and creation of task group

Winter 2024: Terms of Reference for new Forum begun

Spring 2024: Proposal to establish Healthy Connections Forum at Regional meeting

Additional budget for 2024: \$1000 for expenses related to establishment, possibly for travel

Activity Stream #15 – Covenant Renewal

- Have ‘Connectors’ contact their assigned CoFs to work on Renewal of Covenants with each CoF
- The denominational restructuring automatically transferred all previous ‘Conference/CoF/Minister’ covenants to the Region. As an act of reconnection



and strengthening relationships the goal here would be to renew ALL existing covenants with a simple but symbolically meaningful ceremony.

- Survey and research existing tools/resources in other Regions – edit and adapt
- Goal to have ALL CoFs complete the reconnection and renewal by Spring 2026
- (Lead: new Healthy Connections Forum)

Measurables/Outputs:

Summer 2025: Begin to create schedule for contacts and covenant renewals

Fall 2025: Renewals of Covenants begin

Spring 2026: Covenants Renewed among Region and 65% of CoFs and ministers

Common Good Priority: Centres of Excellence

To strengthen CoFs through a mapping exercise that highlights strengths and creates a network of centres of excellence in ministry across the Region.

Knowing that not every CoF has the resources to do ‘everything’, but all CoFs excel (or desire to excel) in some things, this program would celebrate strengths, build and develop new ideas, and help to shift our understanding of church to be a more widely shared ministry rather than all-in-one silos.

Activity Stream #16 – Establishing Centres

- Surveying congregations through the region to determine areas of strength and desired areas of strength
- Identifying gaps and areas for strength development
- Build a program to strengthen identified areas of ministry and develop centres of excellence
- Public communications launched that describes the ministry offerings across the region
- (Lead: new task group)

Measurables/Outputs:

Winter 2024: Establish task group and begin surveying congregations

Spring 2024: Begin identifying gaps and areas for strength development

Fall 2024: Build a program to strengthen identified areas of ministry and develop centres of excellence.

Winter 2025: Launch program

Spring 2025: Public communications initiative to share program

