

Board of Vocation – 2025 – Report.

Rev. Whitney Bruno- Oct. 26, 2025

Where was your pastor last week?

At the United Church of Canada's Board of Vocation once-every-three-years national meeting.

All Christians are called to minister, to be like Christ, in some way. You are a minister - and there are animals, people, or nature who need you to care about them and you serve them.

Sometimes, people feel they are called to serve the church in some way. They meet with the Office of Vocation to ponder- what IS the Holy Spirit up to in me today? Some discern, learn about themselves, that they know they are being Spiritually guided into providing music for a church, or baking, or council leadership. Others learn they are called to be worship leaders. Some are called to particular places: the armed forces, a hospital-- or cause: animal welfare, homelessness. I learned I was called to pastoral charge care.

Most of the people at the conference help with that thinking through. I'm one of those.

Some of these people are the ones who respond, and try to remedy, issues with Ordered Ministers (people who's calling places them in covenant with the United Church.) Others keep the paperwork in order, or work as prophets discerning the future needs of the church.

The conference examined what the church may be in 10 years from now; and what needs we may have. Churches, as we know them, appear to be the old way of God organizing God's Church. The new way appears to be small groups meeting in houses, coffee shops and smaller worship spaces; and church buildings as a place of culture and community - with music, art, non-profits, and room to care for one another. It appears to be led more by people who are not in Ordered Ministry, the "Revs", but lead by the people with passion and unique skills who traditionally sit in the pews. "Lay-lead." The theologically trained people, like me, then work like Paul did, writing letters and encouraging, traveling and teaching, and connecting communities to one another.

We also heard from the National Indigenous Church. With the funds given from the General Council, the National Indigenous Church was able to meet and select their Elders. Elders are the knowledge keepers and advisors. The full slate of national elders are now looking for members for the National Indigenous Council. Council members are the do-ers who act on the advice of the Elders.

The Elders are also working on advising the Grandmother's Circle. They are the people who help Indigenous Christians think through if they are called to lead a congregation that braids the traditions of Turtle Island, and the Holy Land, and all the other traditions we bring, without blending them, but putting them into harmony.

Lastly, the Elders have overseen looking at Indigenous Church property. Churches were constructed on reservations. After construction, these buildings were left to be maintained by the community. In some communities the congregation aged, died, and the building has sat abandoned for decades. In other communities, the congregation walked away from the church because the church was abusive. And in still others, people are still worshipping in these places and doing their best to maintain a century old building with little to no funds.

The Elders saw a manse, the home the church provides for a minister to live in, that had caught fire twice and still the family and kids lived in it.

They saw the sky through the collapsing roof over people gathered to worship.

They saw abandoned buildings collapsing in on themselves.

And they saw they need millions and millions of dollars to fix every property up. That isn't feasible. Nor do all the communities want this.

So their next work is approaching each community and asking: what is the history of that church? It's people? What do you want to happen with the property?

Some may choose to have the church properly torn down and a new beginning. Some may not want this to happen- because tearing it down would be like trying to hide the past.

Some may want the buildings repaired and returned to being a church, or a community centre. But each are being given the time, information, and space to make their own choice as a community.

And the Elders are looking at congregations that are off reserve but yet serving Indigenous people. We are one of the congregations the Indigenous church is speaking about. How do they make sure places like us are able to provide for Indigenous Christians in a way that isn't colonial? One way is by making sure I am aware of people to connect someone with if they are wondering how to walk two or more worlds at once. Another way is if there is an Indigenous person called to lead a church community, we would act as a training site where they could learn with community support.

Lastly, thank you for making all this work possible. It is because you donate time, and skills, and money to the church in various ways that all of these ministries are happening. You're the reason some minister's kid is going to have a molded wall replaced; you're the reason someone who has heard God calling in the night has a place to call and talk through 'what does this mean?' You're the reason I could go to this conference and bring the information to our community. Thank you.