



A Strategic Plan for Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council

2023-2025

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3: 16-21)

Background:

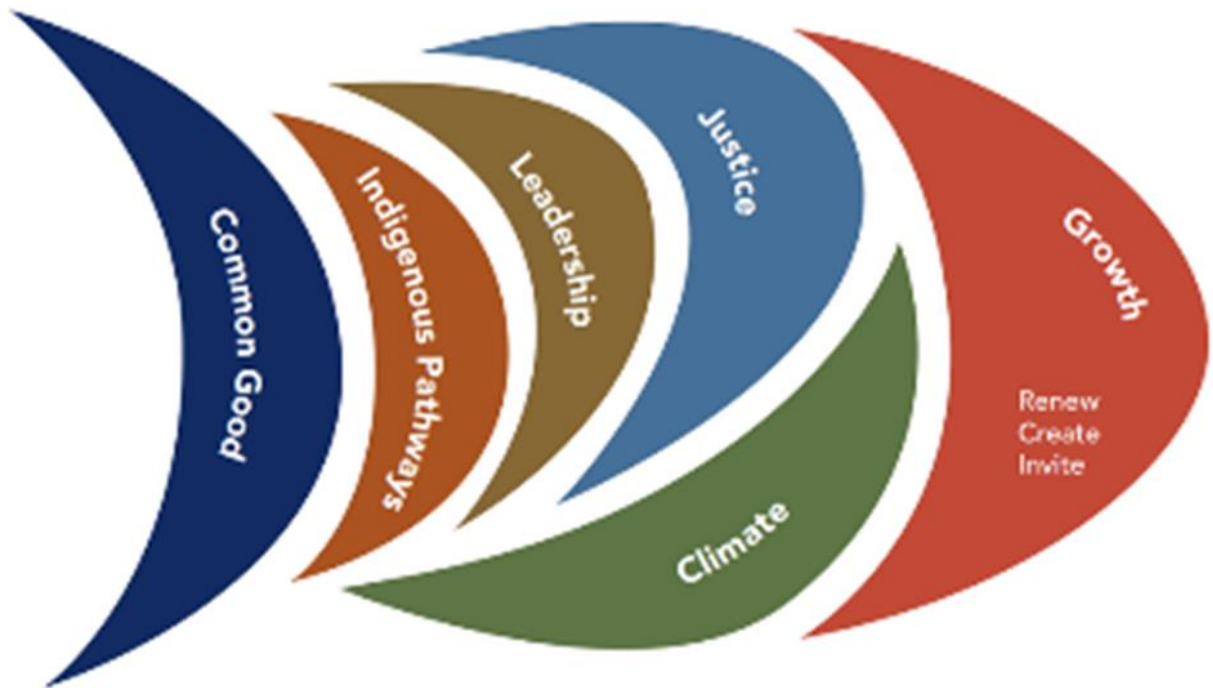
In the spring of 2023, the Executive of the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council (EOORC) established a Strategic Planning Working Group and appointed Cindy Casey, Liz Church, David Clemis, Paul Dillman, Mary Ruth Endicott, Kimberly Heath, Sharon MacDonald and Mary Royal-Duczek as its members. Peter Bartlett and Éric Hébert-Daly were designated as staff support. At the first meeting, Paul Dillman agreed to be the chair of the Working Group. Sharon MacDonald withdrew from the group for personal reasons.

Strategic Plan Development Process:

The strategic plan development process was launched at the EOORC annual meeting in Brockville on May 26-27, 2023. Table groups were asked to discuss the gifts and needs of the Regional Council. They were then asked to imagine what the United Church will be in 10 years time and what would be needed in the next 2-3 years.

In late August and September, a series of 6 consultations were held. Two were held online and in person events were held in Cornwall, Pembroke, Ottawa and Perth. Approximately 120 took part in these consultation events. An online survey which was open from August 1st to September 30th had 20 people respond.

This strategic planning process in EOORC was developed within the framework offered by “The Strategic Plan of The United Church of Canada 2023-2025”. In particular, the focus was determined by the six Strategic Objectives as outlined in this diagram:



Growth:

What we heard:

- Sense of inadequacy when it comes to thinking about growth and invitation.
- Need to support and strengthen healthy and vibrant congregations.
- Need for more understanding of varied models of communities of faith.
- There are possibilities for immigrant communities wanting connection to The United Church of Canada.

What is God saying to us?

- God is not done with us as a church.
- Need to expand our definition/understanding of “community of faith”.
- We have an identity and perspective of faith that needs to be shared.

Activity Streams

- 1) Participate as one of two regional Councils in the Fertile Soil Test project of the General Council Growth Animation program. This is an exercise of using various sources of data to map our region for potential opportunities for growth of communities of faith.
- 2) Engage in conversation/education on becoming more invitational (evangelism)
 - Hold at least 3 learning events in 2024

- Have at least 50 people (ministry personnel and lay) engaged in this learning.
- 3) Continue to work with communities of faith in EOORC to offer facilitation in processes that lead to renewal of vision, purpose and identity.
 - Work with 15 communities of faith in 2024
 - Work with 15 communities of faith in 2025
 - Identify ministry strengths and centres of excellence (see Common Good Activity Stream #1)
 - Share stories of renewal of vision and hope
 - 4) Work with other Regional Councils (in particular East Central Ontario) to develop various models for being a Community of Faith
 - Have 10 communities of faith transition to a different understanding of being a community of faith instead of closure.
 - 5) By the end of 2025, create 10 new Communities of Faith within EOORC. This work will be supported by the Growth Animator that will be working in three regions, beginning Jan 1st, 2024.
 - Continue conversation with 3 possibilities already identified.
 - Use the data and analysis from the Fertile Soil project to identify by the end of 2024 potential opportunities for new communities of faith.

Justice:

What we heard:

- Established networks within EOORC are working on a variety of issues of justice.
- Our decision to be an Affirming Regional Council requires us to continue to focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues.
- Rural social justice issues such as family farms, access to internet, social isolation, access to services need attention.

What is God saying to us?

- We are called to seek justice and to resist evil.
- Discern our unique role and voice in address justice issues (faith, talents, energy, location).
- Work ecumenically, interfaith and with various agencies

Activity Streams:

1. Ask networks in EOORC to identify goals so that we may know their work and discover how communities of faith can use the networks as a resource.

- An annual work plan with identified goals for inclusion in the Annual Meeting Report Book
2. Work to establish a racial justice Leadership Team within EOORC to help racial justice education and action within the church and in the communities of the regional council.
 - Create a Racial Justice Leadership Team by the annual meeting in May 2024 that will undermine white supremacy in all its forms in our region.
 - Actively welcome 3 racialized admittands in our Regional Council by May 2025
 - Strengthen the awareness of pastoral relations liaisons and search committees as applications for ministry positions are reviewed.
 3. Develop more connection with the United Church Rural Ministry Network (UCRMN) to seek guidance and partnership on advocacy for rural issues.
 - Use Fertile Soil mapping data to identify needs.
 - Support and advocate for the need for the family farm
 - Provide assistance and advocacy for enabling rural communities to have essential digital services.
 - Host a first meeting by May 2024 with UCRMN to identify avenues for future support and collaboration.
 4. Work on increasing United Church visibility and identity in the social justice landscape of the region.
 - Acquire a United Church of Canada banner, flag and/or signs.
 - Work towards having a float in the Ottawa and other community Pride Parades in 2024
 - Share stories of communities of faith or individuals working in community organizations and projects

Climate:

What we heard:

- Climate change is an urgent reality to be addressed in our world.
- Stories of how communities of faith are responding with action.

What is God saying to us?

- Integrate our call to live with respect in creation with how we operate our buildings and conduct our business.

Activity Streams:

- 1) Have at least 10% of congregations engaged in Faithful Footprints assessments and programs by the end of 2025.

- 2) Within the time period - 2024-2026 - decrease our carbon footprint in our meetings and gatherings by 20%.

Leadership:

What we heard:

- There is a sense of isolation and weariness among the leadership of the church.
- Leadership – ministry personnel and lay – needs support and connection with one another.
- Leadership is changing in the changing realities of church and community.
- There is a shortage of leadership for the work of communities of faith.
- Models of leadership for communities of faith is shifting and more lay leadership will be needed.
- Important to continue to develop leadership skills and gifts in people of all ages.

What is God saying to us?

- Church needs leadership.
- Identity gifts and skills (tap people on the shoulder!)
- Support, inspiration and connections are needed for leadership to thrive.

Activity Steams:

1. Regional Council support and encouragement for various avenues of ministry support and connection.
 - Encourage and promote various initiatives for ministry personnel support and connection, such as peer ministry groups, lunch gatherings, one day retreats, etc.
 - Pilot an initial multi-day ministry leadership retreat in the fall of 2024 to determine if this is something we should do on an annual basis.
 - Initiate conversations about an Association of Ministers being formed in EOORC.
 - Initiate gatherings for groupings of ministry eg. Candidates, retired ministry personnel
 - Be intentional about welcoming and orientating new ministry personnel into the regional council.
2. EOORC offer support and connection for lay leaders within communities of faith.
 - Offer workshops for various lay leadership roles - eg. Governance chairs, treasurers, representatives to Regional Council
 - Develop or make available resources to help with specific situations and realities.
 - Continue to accredit and promote the resource of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders
 - Explore the needs for leadership development of lay leaders for communities of faith that do not have ministry personnel for long periods of time.
- 3) Support and build capacity for youth and young adult (YAYA) ministries for those aged 10 to 35 in communities of faith, clusters, networks and individuals within the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Region Council (EOORC) and Nationally of the United Church of Canada.

- Develop a leadership team to plan and implement an annual Youth and Young Adult retreat and Youth and Young Adult Leaders Retreat in the region.
 - Grow Camp Awesome to operate two camp locations outside the City of Ottawa boundaries.
 - Participate in training to develop campus ministry within the region.
 - Participate in the UCC camp accreditation process and develop policy and guidelines around the practise of equity at camp with the three Camping Ministry boards.
 - Create and submit a proposal for Rendez Vous 2027 to be hosted in the Region.
 - Develop a leadership team to plan and implement Regional meeting programs and Worshiplude, growing participation by 20% annually.
- 4) Work to develop children’s ministry within EOORC.
- Hold a consultation in 2024 to determine the needs for support and development of children’s ministry.
 - Consult with other regional councils, in particular our neighbouring regional councils, to explore possibilities for collaboration.

Indigenous Pathways

In the General Council strategic plan, 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. Within EOORC, the Righting Relations network is at work in communicating with pastoral charges about the importance of voting on the current remit. Indigenous justice issues are being captured in the work we are setting out to do in the Justice portion of this plan.

Common Good

What we heard:

- Our identity as United Church is broader than communities of faith, although there is resistance to working together because of a congregationalist culture of competition rather than collaboration.
- Connection with one another has been missed since change of governance model and because of Covid restrictions. The concept and possibilities of clusters needs further exploration.
- Communities of faith are seeking different ways of operating and assistance in exploring renewal of vision and purpose.
- As we look to future, new ways of functioning as communities of faith will be needed.
- How can the oversight function of the regional council be done effectively?

What is God saying to us?

- We are called to be the church and each part of the body does not have to do it all.
- In the sharing of resources, our efforts can multiply.

Activity Streams:

- 1) Develop a model of Congregational Support that will be a resource to congregations with self-assessment, discernment and visioning, including operation through times of ministerial vacancy. This model will also need to include ways that the Regional Council can forecast trends and possibilities for collaboration among communities of faith.
 - Appoint a working group to propose a model to the 2024 Annual Meeting of EOORC
 - Implement the model by the end of 2024
- 2) Develop inventory of congregational “expertise” or specialities.
 - Build into the model of Congregational Support, a means for identifying the areas for which ministries have existing strengths and/or gaps they can fill while trying not to do everything.
 - Establish a communications plan that offers the public a clearer sense of what ministry offerings they might find when attending a particular community of faith.
- 3) Find ways to gather for inspiration and deepening spirituality.
 - Hold a large inspirational worship event for the 100th anniversary of the UCC in 2025
 - Encourage communities of faith in clusters to gather together and be inspired through worship and prayer.
- 4) Find ways to gather for learning and encouragement.
 - Have sub-regional gatherings as educational events in place of one of the yearly meetings of the regional council.
 - Encourage clusters to form to work and learn together.
 - EOORC share stories and possibilities of how clusters are working and the activities that are happening.
- 5) Find ways to expand our communication of the work and resources of EOORC.
 - Ongoing evaluation of the website and newsletter
 - Offer a summary of EOORC meetings to be shared with members and congregations.
 - Create a report of the work of EOORC as a template for inclusion in congregational annual reports.
 - Provide an orientation for new lay representatives to EOORC.
- 6) Explore ways that administrative work of congregations can be supported and shared.
 - Develop a system for Financial Reviews for congregations to be coordinated.
 - Continue the pooling of investment option for congregations.
 - Find ways to help congregations explore sharing of administrative or bookkeeping work.

Conclusion:

The Setting our Sights Working Group offers this report as a way for EOORC to focus its work and to deepen its sense of how the Regional Council can fulfill its responsibilities and possibilities as a governance court of The United Church of Canada. This report does not cover all the work and responsibilities of the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council. There is a lot of work that we trust will continue.

Throughout this work, the Setting Our Sights Working Group has been guided and inspired by the words in Ephesians 3: 16-21. While there is weariness and despair that affects our life as a church, we are reminded that the Spirit of God is at work in our midst inviting us to discern and to recognize *"... the power at work within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine."*

We are called to be followers of Jesus and to live with resurrection hope.

Motions:

- 1) Moved by Paul Dillman, seconded by Mary Royal-Duczek that the Eastern Ontario Regional Council adopt the "Setting Our Sights" report as the strategic plan for work of the regional council for the years 2024 and 2025.
- 2) Moved by Paul Dillman, seconded by David Clemis that the Setting Our Sights Working Group be disbanded.