

Moderator's Accountability Report 2000-2003

General Council 38 (2003)

Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. (1 Peter 3:15 NRSV)

Introduction

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, the body to which we belong. And as Moderator of this wonderful, complex, diverse church it is my privilege to bring you greetings on behalf of the whole United Church of Canada. Some describe the above as my "signature" greeting. I wrote it with the role of the Moderator before me, "...to call the church to faithfulness and obedience to Christ...to lift up the wholeness with all its diversity, interpreting the parts to each other..." (Roles and Opportunities: The Moderator).

I write this accountability report with a profound depth of gratitude for the privilege and responsibility of ministry as Moderator during the chaos and challenge, the jubilation and joy in our church and world during the past triennium.

In my home province of Newfoundland/Labrador there was a custom of saying a blessing after the meal; we called that prayer, "returning thanks." I shared with the 37th General Council (2000) that I chose to let my name stand as Moderator because I wanted to "return thanks" to a church to which I owe so very much.

The opportunities to "return thanks" as Moderator have been legion. For example, when I visited Southminster United, Lethbridge, I learned that, when the cod moratorium was announced in Newfoundland/Labrador in 1991, Southminster United coordinated a boxcar of food items and clothing for the province. It was an honour to visit Southminster to "return thanks." I also was privileged to preach the sermon during the Celebration of Ministries at Newfoundland/Labrador Conference this year held at Fraser Road United Church, Gander, NL, my home congregation as a child, youth and young adult. Again, it was an honour to "return thanks" to the congregation of Fraser Road United for their Christian nurture. For thirty-five years I have worked in this great church of ours in many Conferences, at different levels and in a variety of roles. My experiences in ministry with children, youth and adults in rural and urban settings have given me cause to deeply love and respect our church, even as I offered my own share of criticism to it. This deep sense of gratitude for the church has sustained me throughout my ministry and especially during my term as Moderator. My gratitude and hope are intimately intermingled.

A Moderator's Advisory Committee is essential in order to exercise the ministry of Moderator. I thank God that I was blessed with a committee of persons gifted with knowledge, compassion, courage, theological depth, wisdom, wit and an examined-experience of church, faith and life. To you (Hal, Anne, Walter, Mary, JoAnne, Ginny and Jim) I "return thanks."

The Mandate

1. During the term of office the Moderator is expected to make an "official visit" to each of the thirteen Conferences for approximately 10 to 14 days, to listen to the Church and to bring perspective, vision and wisdom. The dates are set by the Moderator and the Conference Executive Secretary; the itinerary is planned by the

Conference. The Moderator's Advisory Committee and the Moderator provide guidelines concerning these visits.

Action:

I visited all Conferences, including Bermuda (as part of the Maritime Conference). These visits, together with my global visits, were the highlight of my term. They provided me with a deep sense of connectedness and inter-connectedness to the whole, an experience of the joys and struggles of being the church, the opportunity of putting "faces and places" on our Mission and Service Fund dollars, an awareness of people's desire to know that the wider church "cares," and of laughter in the midst of fatigue and stress. Thousands of people extended their hand in hospitable welcome and warmth. They were greeting the Moderator as a person, to be sure, and, equally important, they were greeting the Moderator as a representative of the Church. While others were viewing me as "Church" I had the heightened awareness that in meeting them I also was meeting the Church. I was meeting the "church" in congregations, Mission and Service Funded projects, UCW groups, Men's Clubs, presbyteries/districts, Conferences, theological schools, educational centres, church camps, seniors' homes, and in children, youth, and adults. They were, indeed, Church, expressing their love of God embodied in Jesus Christ, through writing letters to protest War and addressing other peace and justice issues, giving a "glass of cold water" here, serving a meal there, providing words of wisdom and counsel, worshipping, praying, studying, fund raising for local expenses and the Mission and Service Fund and socializing. They were being Church as community, and in the community, consciously and unconsciously, "where they lived and moved and had their being" and, at the same time, aware of the whole world as the arena of God's love and concern. There is an energy in many of our congregations; a "being and doing" of Church. I dare to call this energy, attuning ourselves to the "Spirit of God" in our midst.

It has been said that "It takes a village to grow a child." So, too, it takes countless numbers of people to plan and prepare for the "official" visit of the Moderator and I express my sincere gratitude to the Conference Executive Secretaries, their designates, and the numerous persons within each Conference who thoughtfully cared for my well being and itinerary within the Conferences.

2. The Moderator makes one or two overseas trips, preferably as early as possible.

Action:

During my term of office I visited the Philippines and Hong Kong (one visit of 14 days in March 2001). Through the Canadian Council of Churches I joined the Anglican Primate and the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada for a visit to the Middle East in May 2002. The trip to the Middle East included visits to some of the Church Leaders in Jerusalem, the Christian Peacemakers Team in Hebron, visits to Bethlehem and Beit Jala, with representatives of the Middle East Council of Churches in Gaza and the Palestinian Sabeel Liberation Centre. I attended an Arabic worship at the Anglican Cathedral, Jerusalem, visited the Rabbis for Human Rights, Bat Shalom, and the Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem.

The hospitality of our global partners was exemplary in its generosity. All of these visits were life-giving and world-view changing. All of these visits were disturbing, provocative and humbling. As the title of the *Observer* article (July/August 2001) illustrates, these global visits were like "going to the wall." Difficult questions linger: What does "hope" mean

when living in the midst of violence, or excessive poverty, or deep loneliness? What does "hope" look like when struggling with the effects of "colonialism"? What does it mean for The United Church of Canada as a middle class church to be immersed in God's mission in Canada and with our global partners? What does being in solidarity with our global partners call forth from us? The very situations that pose the questions also provide the responses. The Muslim and Christian women in a family life medical clinic shared with us: "Hope is peace and freedom...Hope is contact with my husband...Hope is having flour to make bread." Our global partners share with us their understanding that hope lies in having peace with justice and dignity, and passionately and with "revolutionary patience" persistently working with the conviction that God's power exceeds all other powers.

3. The Moderator will preside over the meetings of the Executive, of the Sub-Executive and of the next General Council's plenary life.

Action:

In relation to General Council, during the 37th General Council I presided over one of the Commissions as Moderator Elect and, following my Installation as Moderator, presided during the last day of Council. I am privileged to be among you to preside at this 38th General Council, with the exceptions of the Commissions. It was decided that other commissioners, rather than the Moderator, former Moderators and Acting General Secretary, would preside over the Commissions.

During the triennium there were six regular General Council Executive meetings scheduled. From 2000-2003 we held eight meetings, two off site, at Mount Saint Vincent, Halifax and at the Marriott Hotel, Toronto. When the Acting General Secretary and I decided to cancel the Church House site General Council Executive meeting in April, 2003 because of the SARS outbreak, the Executive convened Business Review and Recommendation groups (compare, sessional committees) through a Conference Call. The Sub-Executive met for three three-hour meetings to hear the reports of the BR&R groups and for decision making during the weekend. The summary assessment of these meetings was that it was a worthwhile way of gathering and, indeed, offered another possible mode of meeting in the future. The Sub-Executive held numerous meetings during the Triennium, with some of those meetings consuming holiday time for all of us.

My goal for these meetings was to facilitate informed, just, compassionate, Spirit-led decision-making. Providing voting members with as much information as possible is essential; giving "voice" to as many as possible who wish to speak is wise and just. Affirming the contributions of staff and elected members is strengthening. Attuning ourselves to God's Spirit through worship, prayer and theological reflection is imperative. Having a sense of humour is a pre-requisite! For the occasions in which we functioned in this mode I give God thanks. I lament the occasions in which we did not exercise our ministry in this manner.

This General Council needs to be aware of the depth of commitment, the skill and the perseverance of its Executive and Sub-Executive. On your behalf, I convey my deep appreciation to them for caring leadership in difficult times.

The Mandate (continued)

Correspondence, Conversations, Communications

Before I arrived in the Moderator's office, I posed the goal of responding to all of those who sought the Moderator's attention. I realized shortly thereafter that this was an unrealistic goal. Significant numbers of requests and much correspondence arrive at the Moderator's desk. Correspondence that did receive priority were those letters related to conveying greetings to churches or individuals and couples celebrating a "milestone" in ministry and life, and those expressing sympathy to pensioners and/or their families. I attempted to connect with pastoral charges through pastoral letters (written to ministry personnel but intended for the congregation), the website, the *United Church Observer*, and *Spirit Connection*.

Island Journeys: From Newfoundland to the Philippines is a Bible study and reflection on my first global visit. It was originally written as a gift to congregations, as an expression of one of my goals as Moderator to affirm and strengthen congregations as they seek to be the people of God in the Spirit of Christ locally and globally. It links the wisdom of the Bible with the world God loves. People have written to say that they have used "Island Journeys" in a number of ways: meditation and discussion for Session meetings, personal meditation, minister-led Bible study, lay-led Bible study, UCW meetings, sermon material, etc. Thank you for responding. I am delighted to offer a copy as a gift to commissioners and others at General Council. This booklet was possible only with the strong support of the United Church Observer (Donna Sinclair, in particular), the Mission and Service Fund staff (Elsie Manley-Casimir and colleagues) and Nan Hudson (at the time, Area Secretary for East Asia). I thank them most sincerely. **Island Journeys** was among the numerous awards received by the United Church Observer from the North American Associated Church Press (ACP); **Island Journeys** received an Honourable Mention: Best Ancillary Product. We congratulate the United Church Observer for their strong record of excellence.

Care of the Whole

While the Moderator has no administrative or managerial responsibilities in the General Council offices, except as requested by the General Council, its Executive and Sub-Executive, care for the whole and having an office at Church House merit involvement for pastoral and social reasons. We have a large number of caring and loyal staff at church house, who take pride in their work and have a sense of service to the church. To do their work more effectively, they need our support. We can support them in the following way: expressing genuine affirmation; criticizing constructively and offering suggestions for improvement; holding the General Council offices in thought and prayer (privately and during Sunday worship).

Care of the Whole, resulting in an intensified workload at Church House, was focused early in 2002 when I became aware through conversations and consultations that some staff had genuine issues and concerns, directly and non-directly related to the new structure, "Redesigning how we work together." I grieved and prayed, worried and wondered. I consulted. I commend Virginia Coleman, General Secretary at the time, for requesting me as Moderator to call a meeting of the Sub-Executive with the recommendation that a Listening Team be established. I commend the Sub-Executive for their support and each one of us owes the Listening Team a huge vote of thanks for the care, concern, time and energy expended on behalf of the church as a whole church. Members of the Listening Team were: The Very Rev. Dr. Bill Phipps; Walter Sowa; Barbara Rafuse; The Rev. Martha Ter Kuile and The Rev. Dong-Chun Seo.

At the April 2002 meeting of the General Council Executive, a decision was made to establish a Commission on Leadership, to assess the effectiveness of the former General

Council Secretaries during the re-structuring. As per the action of the Executive, Bill Phipps, Marion Best and I worked to name the persons to serve on this Commission. We appointed Peter Bishop (Ottawa), Rev. Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat (Kitchener/Waterloo) and Judge Hugh Stansfield (Vancouver). Peter, Elizabeth and Hugh undertook their task seriously and prayerfully, committing much time and thought, and I thank them, together with our legal counsel, Cynthia Gunn, who ensured that the Commission had the staff they required. General Council Sub-Executive held a number of meetings around this report during the summer of 2002 and General Council Executive, in addition to addressing the recommendations in an on-going manner, held one special meeting for the sole purpose of addressing "A Call to the Table." More on this report is contained in the Report of the Acting General Secretary.

Context

Our world was ripe with despair. The major events are vivid:

- September 2000 (my first day in the office)—outbreak of violence among the Esgennoopetitj First Nations, non-native fisher folk and the RCMP and the arrest of Aboriginal Rights Coalition (Atlantic) human rights observer Tracy Sinclair, a member of The United Church of Canada;
- Launching of the Land Rights Petition in Ottawa, culminating in a meeting with Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come;
- Middle East unending violence between the State of Israel and the Palestinians;
- 9/11, the outpouring of hospitality towards stranded passengers in our Atlantic and West Coast airport communities, the empathetic expressions of sympathy towards our US neighbours, and the prayerful pleadings for a response of our nations' leaders based on wisdom and restraint, for reason, not revenge. When the incredible news broke I was leaving Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia and the National Consultation of United Church Women for Halifax Airport for a flight to Toronto. The next day, while stranded in Halifax (unlike many others, I was at a hotel), I joined our *Spirit Connection* staff at a breakfast for marginalized men at Brunswick Street United Church, one of our Mission and Service Fund projects. Somehow in this seemingly hopeless situation there was a glimmer of hope as these men gathered and ate to feed their physical hunger, and talked about the tragedy to share their despair.
- The threat of War with Iraq and the resultant Attack by the US and Britain, resulting in agonizing letters, messages and prayers.

Additional societal happenings included the ongoing concerns about safe, affordable housing, health care, residential schools, the Kyoto Accord, poverty and child poverty among others. Letters were written to the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers, and to congregations. On occasions these letters were signed in concert with other church leaders; on other occasions I wrote solely as Moderator. With the Attack on Iraq the letter writing and messages were extensive, including a letter to His Holiness, Pope Paul II.

I valued the annual meeting of church leaders, hosted by the Canadian Council of Churches; it provided the privilege of listening respectfully to the views of others, joining in community prayer, and responding collectively to peace and justice issues as we were able.

With the skilled assistance of the Honourable Rev. David MacDonald, I was pleased to host a Moderator's breakfast for Members of Parliament and Senators in Year One of my term. This breakfast, with all parties represented, gave me an opportunity, together with Jim Marshall

of the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, to highlight some of our societal concerns as a church and to entertain questions. It was my plan to host another such breakfast in Year Three; time, unfortunately, prevented that from happening. During visits made to federal staff following this breakfast, the seed of a visit to the Prime Minister Chrétien was planted. That meeting occurred in February, 2003. It was a fortuitous visit as the threat of the War with Iraq was on the horizon with disturbing imminence. I experienced a sacred moment and I was prompted to share our United Church Creed in French with the Prime Minister. Regardless of which political party we support, our nation's leaders and decision-makers need our prayerful support, as well as challenge, as they grapple with the complexities of the major issues in our country and world.

This was the despairing context in which we were called to Hope during these past three years.

Response of the Church

In relation to the amount of mail received, the items that caused most pain or rejoicing among church members were:

- the decision of General Council Executive to cease national funding for our Book Rooms (all responses raised serious concern about either the action or the method);
- the position of our church concerning the Middle East; most people knew about this through a statement I made, upon request, for the *National Post* (about half of the responses were most critical of this position and about half were in support of it);
- the call for non-violence and peaceful actions in relation to Iraq, rather than war (the vast majority of persons responding were extremely supportive of the church's action and the Moderator's involvement; a few were not—apparently the *National Post* gave me a zero rating on the Iraq War litmus test and Don Cherry received the perfect score, a ten!);
- the resolution from Saskatchewan Conference to General Council Executive for executive clemency for Mr. Robert Latimer, and the action of GCE to refer it to our Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations staff for further consultation and action (a number of very supportive letters and a number strongly opposed letters, especially from organizations related to persons with disabilities).

Critical Issues before Us as a Church

On at least two occasions I was asked to speak about this subject matter. The backdrop for sharing my responses is the bible passage of 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. The church in Corinth was in conflict, deep conflict. In this passage, however, Paul's exhortation to them is that their problem was not their differences; rather, people were not "honouring" the differences among them. I share my thoughts also with the underlying foundation that we are an open, inclusive church, a learned and a learning church, a united and a uniting church, with a strong, unqualified commitment to peace, justice and environmental issues in God's world.

1. One of our present and future challenges as a church will be "honouring the diversity among us." In specific areas that will mean different ingredients; for example, in Montreal/Ottawa Conference, it means the diversity between anglophone and francophone. Generally speaking, it means diversity of life-style, theological and liturgical diversity, cultural and racial diversity. When church union came into being

in 1925 our theme might have been "Unity in the Midst of Diversity." The understanding was that we would find our unity within three diverse denominations, each one giving up some treasured ideas and ways of operating in order "to be one". Today our theme needs to be "Diversity in the Midst of Unity," an honouring of our diversity in the midst of our unity. Canadian theologian Douglas Hall, commenting on Canada in relation to our United States neighbours, says that we are more like a "patchwork" quilt than a "melting pot." Our Church is more like a "patchwork" quilt; all of those patches make for one creative, artistic design with a purpose. It is our challenge and hope for the church.

2. Related to honouring diversity is "modelling in our life together the way we want the world to behave." This is the "holy manners" phrase which I borrowed from Gilbert Rendle of the Alban Institute. We, as a Church, are passionate about peace and justice issues and we need to be even more passionate, especially in broadening the base of congregational, presbytery/district and Conference members around that commitment. Sometimes in our passion for peace and justice issues (and in our lack of passion for them) we speak and act in the most unjust and unpeaceful ways towards those with whom we disagree. If we could "model in our life together the way we want the world to behave," there is no doubt in my mind that the world would take greater notice of us.
3. What does it mean to be the church as the body of Christ, with all of the parts connected and inter-connected with such an awareness that "if one part of the body suffers, we all suffer; if one part is honoured, we all rejoice"? What does it mean to be the church as "community," to be the church "in community," recognizing community as "where we live and move and have our being," in our province, our national church, our country and our world. One response to this question is: we need to reclaim the educational ministry of the church. We need to ponder seriously those matters that we think breaks the heart of God. In order to discern what those things are, we need to know and critically engage our biblical faith stories and the faith stories of other faith communities. We need to be able to articulate our positions and give voice to the faith that undergirds our ethical stances. Again, Douglas Hall summarizes this concern when he challenges us: "in the church tell the story; in the world live the story." I have taken liberty with his informed work and revised his offering to: "In the church 'tell and live' the story; in the world 'live' the story and 'tell' it in respectful, genuine encounter and dialogue with others, persons of other faith expressions and persons with no identifiable faith expressions."
4. What does it mean to be a "middle class church"? For our church partners in the Philippines social justice is a "way" of life. That is, social justice issues personally affect their lives; for example, in one discussion of people in prison, all were church members; one was a church worker. For us, primarily, social justice is a "view" we have towards life. It does not cost us a lot. As middle class people we give from our "excess." Even when I increase my givings to the Mission and Service Fund, it costs me little. As middle class people we want to see, touch, and handle our outreach. This is particularly critical in relation to our Mission and Service Fund. Those of us who know the good work that it does, give and we give generously. Unfortunately, that is about half of our financial givers to the church. We have a mammoth challenge here and it takes the commitment of us all. We are better on "service" than we are on "justice." We need both. At the same time, we are good-hearted, generous people; in times of personal crisis, my experience is that there is no better place to be than in a congregation.

Words of Appreciation

I express heartfelt appreciation to:

- Friends who initiated this journey and those whose expressions of care, interest and encouragement kept my feet on the ground and the spirit high; without you I would miss the gentle, "earthy" touch;
- East District and West District of Newfoundland/Labrador Conference for your nomination, prayers and affirmation; without you I would not have been Moderator;
- the Rev. Dr. Hal Llewellyn, Chairperson of the Moderator's Advisory Committee and its members: Dr. Anne Squire, former Moderator; Mary Katsuno; Joanne Lam; Walter Sowa; Virginia Coleman, former General Secretary; and the Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair, Acting General Secretary. Without your support, love and counsel the way would have been confusing, isolating, and far less fun;
- members of General Council, General Council Executive, and Sub-Executive for your support and commitment and bold decision-making. Without you we would not have a national church;
- Conference Executive Secretaries and all others who planned, organized, and prepared for my "official" visits to the Conference. Without you, my love for the church would be stationary and my body more tired;
- the staff at church house, with special mention of the staff on 2nd floor, for your welcome and support, and for your service to the whole church; without you much of our work would be stifled;
- the Senior Leadership Team for your agonizing, prayerful care for the church; without you, I shudder to think where we would be!;
- the *United Church Observer* and *Spirit Connection* for highlighting the position of the Moderator and for your patience concerning editing and deadlines; without you we would be a "dis-connected" church;
- the Agenda and Planning Committee for General Council for your thought, skill, time, patience and energy; without you there would not be a 38th General Council;
- our global partners for teaching us theological wisdom and giving us exposure to the despairing realities of our world with incredible hope; without you our sense of church would be very narrow;
- Gower Street United Church for your love, care, friendship and celebration. No Moderator could have received a finer and more loving expression of support as I did when I arrived at St. John's Airport on Monday, August 21, 2000 and during the celebration luncheon the following day. Your generous outpouring of loving kindness has been my sustenance on many occasions.
- The United Church of Canada for sixty-one years of nurture and challenge, for its faithful expression of loving service, peace and justice and for this profound privilege of being the 37th Moderator of The United Church of Canada;
- God, Creator of us all; without God this journey would have no purpose or joy.

During a visit to Carbonear, NL and area I was given a book on the history of Methodism in the area. I read the itinerary of one Methodist circuit preacher; my schedule on the most hectic of days paled in its light. At the end of sharing this seemingly humanly impossible

itinerary he commented that he was "weary in body but happy in God." And that, my friends, is an apt summary of this wondrous journey. May God bless you all.

Marion Pardy (The Right Rev. Dr.)
37th Moderator of The United Church of Canada