

General Board Report from the Christian Church in Canada

Since our last gathering of the General Board, the life and ministry of the Christian Church in Canada has continued and strengthened. We are small, spread out, and committed to one another. We rejoice that in an increasingly nonreligious country, some of our congregations are experiencing rich growth as they minister to new Canadians and new Christians alike. Two representative ministries are Broadway Disciples United Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which is a diverse while predominantly Filipino and ecumenical shared ministry, whose growth is rooted in historic churches cooperating; and Freedom Church in Windsor, Ontario, an originally Pentecostal church with a heart for recovery ministry.

We also have made considerable efforts to build bridges of deeper cooperation with independent Christian churches for a bigger tent future for us all. New Canadians, sometimes already from Disciples backgrounds, represent promising possibilities for our future, as we prayerfully discern possibilities of Congolese congregations in Hamilton, Ontario, and Montréal, Québec, and a Spanish-speaking congregation in Montréal, Québec.

In our relationship with the wider, general church, we are profoundly grateful that as the US government has harassed and threatened Canadians and Canada, the general church stood up for us at the last General Assembly. Our own ability to attend was greatly reduced by the political climate, as much of our membership in Canada is among new Canadians travelling on third country passports, finding entrance to the US frightening and in some cases simply impossible. But the Canadians able to attend were moved by the hospitality of American siblings, and grateful for the support of our country's right to exist and determine our own future.

We also have been working to deepen our ecumenical cooperation with partners north of the border, prayerfully discerning which ministries we are called to do with fellow Disciples across the border and which ministries God is calling us to do with partners here. We were especially grateful for the presence of Rev. Terri Hord Owens and Rev. Paul Tch   with our national pastor, Rev. Jean-Daniel O'Donnada, at the General Council of the United Church of Canada this past summer in Calgary, Alberta. Some of our ecumenism is cross-border, too, as we will host Ecumenical Partners in Outreach, a network of new church and evangelism staff from many American and Canadian denominations, for its first post-pandemic in-person gathering this coming autumn in Qu  bec, Qu  bec.

Our region joined the general church at a time decades ago when stable US/Canada relations seemed a reliable given, and when our Canadian Disciples were a more homogenous and English-speaking community. Today we face a neighbour to our South threatening our sovereignty, the struggle to fully participate in general church life when leaders of our congregations cannot get visas to US-based events, and an increasing diversity, especially linguistically, of our church in Canada that makes full inclusion in English-language events challenging as well. These changes are opportunities to discern the best approach to asserting the vision to which God calls us, while being in solidarity and cooperation with our American siblings in the faith. Our faith teaches paradoxes are indeed possible, but the status quo we inherited is not the path forward. In other words, the circumstances that seek to divide us are a clarion reminder that we are all the more called to be a movement for wholeness.

Submitted by Rev. Jean-Daniel O'Donnada