

REV. DAVE JAGGER**Nominating Body**

Waterloo Presbytery (Hamilton Conference)

Biographical Sketch

I am thankful for my United Church roots. Being born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario, I attended Emmanuel United Church up on “the mountain” during the heydays of the late 1960s and 1970s. Taking the traditional route, I was confirmed in grade 8 and proceeded into the church youth group.

It was, though, at Silver Lake United Church Youth Camp that I realized that Christian faith is about more than just church involvement. At the same time as recommittting myself to following Jesus, I surrendered to the call to ministry I had been desperately trying to avoid. My commitment to church camping has remained strong to this day.

Of all the traditions, experiences, and learnings that have rooted me and nourished me, the most important is believing passionately that **in all things** God truly is at work for good and that **no-thing** can separate me from God’s love, as revealed in Jesus. The untimely death of a parent. My marriage to Deb 27 years ago. A couple of occurrences of cancer. The birth and subsequent parenting of our three sons: Josh, Benji, and Nathan. Deb going back to school and then to work outside our home. The normal routines of life. Bad, good, easy, hard, **in all things**, God truly is at work for good! (And sometimes we even get to see it!) Everything I do is rooted in that belief. In sharing it with others I have seen it bring hope, and I believe it will enable us to risk being the church that God is calling us to be.

Following my ordination in 1990 by Hamilton Conference, I have watched as new shoots have grown from those roots. My 25 years of congregational ministry have witnessed great change in Canadian culture and, therefore, in the United Church. Nothing is as it was or as I was trained to expect. As a result, in order to evolve, I have repeatedly had to learn and relearn how to do ministry by creatively synthesizing the old with the new.

- Typed sermons available to read became sermons online, first in text on Internet bulletin boards and recently in audio and video: www.trinityunitedelmira.ca.
- Flip charts becoming overheads, becoming data projectors and SMART Boards as worship becomes more EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image-Rich, and Connective).
- Helping congregations change from inward-looking Christendom churches into mission-centred faith communities engaging their wider context and experiencing transformation.
- Discovering that an online virtual community can be just as powerful as a face-to-face physical community as small groups and Bible studies move beyond local geography.

- Working with other Past Chairs of Waterloo Presbytery to create and implement a new presbytery structure, adapting to the new cultural realities while still focusing on presbytery's mission "to support and encourage the vitality and mission of local and regional ministries of The United Church of Canada within our area."
- Most importantly, always asking questions about what our VISION is for how we will live out our MISSION as followers of Jesus in the specific context in which we find ourselves.

Statement

As nominees for Moderator, we were each given 1,000 words to sum up the challenges facing the United Church and what we see the church's future to be. [*pause*] Is that giggling I hear?

Wouldn't it be great if someone could do that? Lay out a nice three-point plan to get us from where we are to where we want to be? But we can't. At least I can't. Not because the batteries in my crystal ball are low. There are just too many unknowns. Too many variables. The culture we find ourselves immersed in is still changing, and radically; we cannot pretend that we are separate from it.

It is no longer new news that the United Church that I grew up in during the 1960s and 1970s is passing away. However we may feel about that news, the fact remains...it is a reality.

The first 90 years of the United Church's life have been great. We have planted many deep roots of faith and practice.

However, no one can tell what's coming, what struggles and issues we will face. No one can tell what the United Church will look like in 15, 20, and certainly not 90 years from now. Will we have congregations, and if so, what will they look like? Neighbourhood house churches? Online faith communities? How will all these local entities relate to each other? The decisions we will make at General Council 42 around the Comprehensive Review recommendations are just the beginning.

I can feel the anxiety level rising just thinking about all this. Before we throw up our hands and descend into hopelessness, though, giving in to a fatalistic "Meh!" I would remind us that this is not a problem.

After all, being the church isn't about knowing all the answers and seeing the whole path laid out before us. For the last 90 years, and well before, being the church has always meant discerning the next step that Jesus wants us to take—Jesus, who says to us, "Follow me," and then forms us into a Spirit-filled community called "church" for the purpose of mission.

Being the church requires us to continually ask the hard questions to keep us rooted in mission. What are we about? Why does Canada need the United Church? Why does our neighbourhood need our local church? What do we have to offer them? What is our identity? That's a conversation that evokes passion and energy! That's a conversation I believe our church needs to have. After all, if all we do for the next triennium is focus on how we are going to structure

ourselves, then we have missed the opportunity to have a parallel, and I believe more important, conversation about what we are going to do with that new structure.

Thankfully, we have these words from scripture to give us hope and accompany us as step by step we move into our future: *“In all things, God works for good”* (Romans 8:28a). Words that our own experience as the United Church has proven to be true.

“In all things”...like combining three and more Christian denominations into one United Church.

“In all things”...like the various positions on social justice issues we have taken that are unpopular or controversial: poverty work, climate change, Israel-Palestine, economic justice, human rights, etc.

“In all things”...like apologizing to First Nations for our part in colonialism and residential schools.

“In all things”...like participating in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to continue to work toward right relations.

“In all things”...like welcoming and insisting on full participation in the life of the church for all people, regardless of race, status, sexual orientation, or theological position. *“In all things, God works for good.”*

Repeatedly, we have put those words to the test, and repeatedly they have proven themselves to be true; God has proven them to be true. I believe it is safe to say we are rooted in those words. I know I am.

“In all things, God works for good.”

- Even in the pain of budget cuts and declining human resources, *“God works for good.”*
- Even as we grieve the closure of congregations and the ending of long-held ministries, *“God works for good.”*
- Even as we let go of structures that have served us well for a long time, *“God works for good.”*
- Even as we struggle to think of ourselves in new ways, *“God works for good.”*

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- As we give permission to experiment in what it means to be church, *“God works for good.”*
- As a new generation rises, *“God works for good.”*
- As faith communities are transformed and renewed, engaging with their local communities, becoming hubs of faith development, *“God works for good.”*
- As different funding models and options emerge to sustain our mission, *“God works for good.”*

- As new ministry shoots begin, whether they are long-lasting or finite in life, “*God works for good.*”
- As partnerships are formed that we may never have imagined in order to work for justice and peace, “*God works for good.*”

As the Christian faith of individual people is deepened and as people are cared for, valued, and set free to do their own ministry, “*God works for good.*” As we discern and experiment and risk (and we must!) encouraging new shoots to develop from the roots of our past, taking us deeper into the mission we hear Jesus calling us to live (one step at a time), I know it is safe to say those words will do us well.

For a different way to picture these ideas, please see this presentation: “[Nurturing our roots to discover new shoots.](#)”