

REV. DEBRA BOWMAN**Nominating Body**

Vancouver South, Cariboo, Vancouver-Burrard, and Fraser presbyteries (British Columbia) and BC Conference

Biographical Sketch***Chair of Agenda and Planning Committee for 39th General Council***

I was responsible for planning, with the Moderator and the General Secretary, a meeting of 700 people in which we needed to discern the future direction of The United Church of Canada. This undertaking involved familiarity with discernment methodologies and large group facilitation, as well as strong leadership skills.

- 2000–2009 Member of General Council Executive,
Chair of Business Committee of GCE for some of that time
- 2001–2002 Member of GCE Governance Project Team
- 2002–2006 Member of GCE Governance, Planning, and Budget Processes Committee
Attended the 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th meetings of the General Council

Leadership with Congregations

- Ryerson United Church: Coordinating Minister, 2006–present
During the nine years I have been the Coordinating Minister of Ryerson United Church in Vancouver I have learned an enormous amount about the potential of the church as a partner in new work. Forging and leading partnerships involves work with the congregation, Vancouver City, nonprofits, developers, and architects to determine how our property resources and our sanctuary can undergird the ministry of Ryerson United in the 21st century. I am very committed to considering how our buildings both shape and reflect our mission and theology; this includes considering how we hold space for the sacred and the secular to encounter each other; how our buildings can serve as “commons space” or “piazza space.” I believe that the holy can be made known and experienced in beauty and am wondering how the church can be a space that allows, even encourages, this to happen.
- I have also served Wilson Heights and Capilano United Churches.

Leadership with the Larger Church

- President BC Conference 2011–2012
- Executive Secretary, BC Conference, February 2000–June 2003
While Executive Secretary we implemented the changes brought about by the Conference’s decision to restructure. While the implications of such changes are often far-reaching such decisions can be implemented well.

- Facilitated workshops on leadership practices for several presbyteries; for the Emerging Spirit program; for the BC Sowing Promise, Growing Leaders Events; and for the Interim Ministry program. This work has three foci: (i) where we are in our development as an organization, (ii) what leadership is required, and (iii) what kinds of relationships and personal behaviours are required.
- Served on the LeaderShift Advisory Resource group.
- Worked with groups in the Effective Leadership Pilot project. This initiative presents many of the same challenges that a move from presbyteries to regional councils might offer.

Education

- Following a Master's of Divinity degree (1995, Vancouver School of Theology) I have pursued a wide range of courses dealing with leadership during times of organizational change.
- Powers of Leadership: Meeting the Challenges of the New Commons
The focus is on a framework of leadership for a time of adaptive challenge, extremely relevant to leadership in the church at this juncture in our history.

Statement

Once in a long time there is a point when “hope and history rhyme” (*The Cure at Troy* by Seamus Heaney, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/29574.Seamus_Heaney). A time when the caustic flow of cynicism is staunch and a collective call for justice is heard. We are at such a time in our history.

I grew up in Chilliwack, BC, in the late 1950s, when we had practices at elementary school about what to do when the atomic bomb fell. (Leave your rubber boots and lunch kit behind, and run home as fast as you could!)

I came to early maturity when the people I placed hope in were all assassinated—John F. Kennedy; Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Robert Kennedy among them.

I was living in Argentina during the time when that country's “dirty war” was an early rumour. I was confident that nothing like that could happen at home, until students were shot dead at Kent State University.

These life experiences, and my undergrad formation in political sociology, shaped in me despair for our future. The church seemed irrelevant to the crisis of the time, and I left.

And then, years later at the baptism prep for our son, when all we really wanted was to have him “done,” I fell in love. To quote Seamus Heaney, hope and history rhymed.

As I listened to the scripture and the hymns and the orientation to what the United Church was about, I recognized a vague memory about hope and possibilities and justice. I was converted from cynicism and despair.

That is the call to our church now—to find the capacity to offer hope to those who despair at this point in the world’s history.

I think we are at a global tipping point. Capitalism run amok and the destruction of our environment are dividing our world along sharp lines.

The national church and all congregations need to align with those seeking righteousness. To become much more maladjusted and maladapted to the way things are going. To be a stick in the wheel to what feels like an inexorable rolling away from God’s yearning for creation. To be one of the places where the sacred and the secular align for righteousness.

Some of my sabbatical was spent in Italy during Lent and Easter. I wanted to see what it looked like when religious celebrations are lived out on the streets. Instead I saw what community living looked like on the steps of the churches. The piazzas of every city and village offered common ground for people to gather. People of all ages, stages, economic classes, and abilities came together and talked, argued, laughed.

What if churches served as piazzas? What if we offered ourselves as open spaces, gracious, hospitable, and engaged in the world, where anyone can enter and rest a little, be received and welcomed and restored? Where we form partnerships and alliances with those we encounter and together continue our efforts to change the world? Our buildings and our spaces would be physical manifestations of our mission.

If we take this posture seriously, we stand at the most intimate level of developing community.

This kind of hospitality involves a lot more than a cup of coffee in the narthex. Many of us already offer meals for the isolated and beds for those in crisis. Much more life can be happening in our spaces. We have the room to partner with non-profits with similar commitments to quality of life so that our mutual care for others is housed affordably in our buildings. We can be a home for the resistance.

The United Church of Canada has no time to go to ground in preoccupation with structures. We need to determine one thing each community of faith can take on and then find partners who will strengthen our efforts. Some examples from my congregation, Ryerson United in Vancouver (ryersonunited.ca):

- co-sponsoring with EcoJustice to show *On the Line*, a movie about the proposed Enbridge pipeline
- the Can You Dig It learning disabilities organization building a community garden on Ryerson’s land for members and neighbours
- partnering with the choral community to create space for beauty and for all the arts to be rehearsed, housed, and showcased in affordable space

Because I was gone from the church for so long, and because our sons are very involved in athletics, much of my time is spent in tension between the secular and the sacred worlds. In that place, it is easy to see a yearning for meaning in the secular world, and the same vague memories

of possibilities for hope that I had.

There is an awakening afoot—and we can be part of it.

I chose to come back to church, touched by the commitments of the congregation, and because in faith I could see hope for our history. With that conviction I accepted the call to ordination so that I could offer witness to the source of my hope. And it is that same impetus and imperative, and love for this church, that moves me to be a candidate for Moderator. I believe I have the gifts, the heart, and the conviction to deliver the leadership we need.

It seems, at this moment, we in the United Church are standing with our noses pressed up against a window looking onto the rest of the world. We have so much to receive and so much to offer through our engagement with the community immediately outside our doors. I trust that with simplified structures, less desperation about finances, and a renewed connection to God's purpose, the glass will shatter and we will spill out into the streets, and people will come to live and Love in our piazzas, in our sacred spaces.

But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
[God's] mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in [God].”
(Lamentations 3:21–24)