

## Invitation to Comprehensive Review Conversations

Pour lire l'invitation du Modérateur en français, veuillez voir: <http://www.united-church.ca/fr/communications/news/moderator/130408>

To read the Moderator's invitation online, please see: <http://www.united-church.ca/communications/news/moderator/130408>

Dear Friends in Christ:

Imagine hundreds of young people packed into a church to worship: the band is hot, there's emotion and excitement in the air, and the energy is bouncing off the walls. This isn't the newest "megachurch." It's Worshiplude, a celebration that drew United Church young people from across Ontario and Quebec to downtown Ottawa in February to have fun and deepen their faith. And it's just one of the many exciting ways God is working through and among us, sometimes in ways we couldn't have imagined even a few years ago.

As Moderator, I am blessed to meet faithful United Church people across the country, like those young people in Ottawa, who are living out God's mission with joy, energy, and abundance. I've visited Hillhurst United Church in Calgary, which has started a short second service known as "The 9:05 Express" to accommodate folks for whom Sunday is already a full day. I've seen how vibrant community ministries such as the Christian Resource Centre in Toronto are transforming, and being transformed by, their communities. I've also heard about new leadership ventures in British Columbia such as "Salt and Light," a year-long program to help lay people deepen their faith and ministries.

But as I travel across the country, I also hear how difficult it can sometimes be to see these signs of new life. Like many churches, The United Church of Canada is facing significant demographic, cultural, and financial shifts. In many places in our church, fewer people—especially young people—are going to church. Faithful volunteers are spending more time on meetings and paperwork than on ministry. Many congregations are struggling to pay their ministers and maintain their buildings.

You are not alone. Different parts of our church are feeling these changes in different ways and to different degrees. But we experience them as one body in Christ. Our task is to discern together how to respond to these shifts, encourage the new life that is emerging, and continue to live faithfully in a changing world. That's why I'm writing to you today.

I am delighted to invite you into a church-wide conversation about our future that the Comprehensive Review Task Group (<http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review>) is leading. The task group believes God is at work in the world and is calling our church to the threshold of something new. Where do you see that happening? What new models, structures, and processes would nurture our vitality as communities of faith? As a member of this diverse and passionate task group, I urge you to be part of this important conversation, which will help shape the recommendations we will build together for the 42nd General Council in 2015.

Before the end of June, your pastoral charge, community ministry, congregation, or other faith community will have an opportunity to have a small group of representatives speak with a trained facilitator about the struggles and opportunities you are experiencing, where you see vital ministries emerging, and what structures and processes are needed in the church to support these vital

ministries. This conversation will last about 90 minutes and can take place by videoconference, by telephone, or in person where feasible. You and the facilitator can work out a convenient time to talk—after church, after work, or on a Saturday afternoon. Ministers will be invited to continue in conversation with the facilitator about issues that directly affect them.

We want to hear from as many faith communities in as many places in our church as possible. We ask you to share your dreams, your frustrations, your wisdom, and your prayers for our church. Most of all, we ask you to be part of this conversation.

To contact a facilitator, fill out the online form ([https://adobeformscentral.com/?f=0hY8YVen\\*nAa8XNFQ-aSMg#](https://adobeformscentral.com/?f=0hY8YVen*nAa8XNFQ-aSMg#)). We encourage you to get in touch soon so we can talk with as many of you as possible. Our facilitators will also be reaching out to encourage you to participate. Can you talk before Pentecost?

These conversations with local faith communities are just the first step in a broad consultation that will also include in the coming months Conference annual meetings, members of youth forums, Aboriginal circles, theological schools, chairs of national committees, and others. We are also exploring how we can continue the conversation online with those who have been part of the in-person consultations, and with those who have not attended the consultations or feel an affinity to the United Church but maybe not on Sunday mornings. If you have any questions about the consultations or the Comprehensive Review process, please feel free to e-mail us at [compreview@united-church.ca](mailto:compreview@united-church.ca).

This is an important moment in the life of the United Church, and your faithful participation will be a gift to your community and the whole church. Together, we will listen to the Spirit, discover anew what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ, and reshape our church for the future.

In faith,

The Right Rev. Gary Paterson  
Moderator