

## **Reflections on DUCC and Toward 2035 (Marcie Gibson, Oct 2026)**

The United Church of Canada has developed a new Strategic Direction and set of Objectives called Toward 2035 [link: <https://united-church.ca/toward2035> ], envisioning a future of hope for the denomination and its various expressions of ministry. Some DUCCs have been involved in the creation and planning of Toward 2035, while others have engaged with their Communities of Faith, Regional Councils, or local clusters to facilitate learning, discussions, and discernment. What could this mean for us, and how could we live into this strategic direction? DUCC itself took the initiative to set up 2 online conversations in August and an in-person program session at the DUCC National Gathering in Kelowna, devoted to talking with General Council staff about Toward 2035, and opportunities for DUCCs to engage.

The session on August 18<sup>th</sup> was joined by Cameron Fraser and Tori Mullin, from the Growth and Stewardship Unit. Its focus was how diaconal ministers have been using the GCO-created resources, participating in awareness conversations, and what other opportunities there might be for collaboration.

The session on August 26<sup>th</sup> was joined by Andrew Richardson, Director of Emerging Ministry Leadership (including Candidacy boards and process). Its focus was on models of collaborative ministry, and how diaconal formation and emphasis might be particularly effective for collaboration, teaming, and expansive expressions of Communities of Faith. This conversation also highlighted some of the past roadblocks to diaconal candidates living out their diaconal vocations within the current pastoral relations systems.

The session at the National Gathering in Kelowna was facilitated by Beth Baskin, GCO Identity and Mission Network Coordinator and longtime DUCC member. In addition to giving a short overview of Toward 2035, we were invited to consider a series of questions in table groups. Some of the questions were; What objective area are we already engaged in and how might we connect to this bigger work? How does this plan enable us to embrace Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice? There was a cautious, optimistic sense from many in the room that ‘the church is finally catching on’ to different expressions of ministry and community, to the value of collaboration, to the integrated nature of on-the-ground justice, worship, community-building and care. Some others felt that the materials are aspirational, but there is still a disconnect with many local Communities of Faith, which are chronically under-resourced and over-stretched, and find it difficult to change paradigms despite diaconal leadership.

The Coordinating Committee and Advocacy Committee of DUCC will continue to consult with General Council Executive and staff about how DUCC members can best support and shape Toward 2035. One way is to actively participate in (or start!) conversations in your region or cluster. Continue to show up, listen, and speak up, with your creative diaconal spirit. As the Diakonia World Federation statement says, “The church is not the church without diakonia.”