

Reflections on Kelowna 2026 by Lynda Gow

-from the perspective of a long-term DUCC who has been active throughout that period.

A week ago I arrived home from the DUCC gathering in Kelowna, one of many diaconal gatherings I've attended since 1984. They have held an important place in my life. While in active ministry, these DUCC meetings offered community, continued learning and support. As a diaconal minister, I came to rely on this time to gather with other Diaconal Ministers in our church. In those early years, as DUCC was formed, we worked on our identity using a consensus model. This model of decision making reflected our values of compassion, justice and love for each other and the wider church and world.

Now 42 years later in Kelowna, there were learning opportunities and the same value on community and concern for our church and world. We struggled with questions on climate change, food security and affordable housing, Palestinians in the Middle East, and heard more on "Toward 2035": a theme of our United Church. We heard from our special guest (via video), Mable Kifwabantu, of the United Church in Zambia, and from Michelle Collins, our ecumenical guest who joined us in person. Commitment and energy were strong and alive!

I always leave our gatherings with a new way of seeing. This year, I left with these thoughts from Mable Sichali: God is not calling us to survive; we are at a crisis of imagination and moral courage. Like Esther we are to walk into the 'halls of power'; like Esther we are here for 'just a time such as this'. As well, our ecumenical guest, Michelle Collins spoke of the uncomfortable space we are in and that our need has never been greater for us to work together in community.

At our meeting in Kelowna there were students, those employed with the church and community, plus retirees. This age range and variety of experiences was so valuable. As a retiree, I continue to attend our National Diaconal gatherings to find connection, not just to other diaconal ministers in our church, but also to the wider diaconal community in Canada and other countries. It expands my vision for a continued sense of calling to live out my faith and my diaconal ministry. I'm grateful.