

**REPORT FROM
NATIONAL UNITED CHURCH WOMEN
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Held by “ZOOM” September 28 – October 2, 2020

The past week was a very busy one for Winnie Kowalewich and me as we were the representatives from Pacific Mountain United Church Women and joined with 37 other women from across Canada at a “Zoom” version of the NUCW AGM.

For many of us “Zoom” was a relatively new experience sharing with so many other people who are used to reaching out and sharing their opinions and wanting to join in discussions. All in all, we feel it was fairly well conducted. Maybe voting was a little uncertain, but as there were no really contentious issues, it really wasn’t a problem.

An opportunity was given to participate in a couple of “Zoom” workshops during the week prior to our meeting and it would seem that most of the ladies did take this opportunity.

The gathering began at 9:30am (Pacific Time) each day with the opportunity to play catch-up with old friends and share ideas and opinions in an informal and non-official half hour which was akin to the meal time discussions that we always have when we are meeting face to face. Personally, I would have preferred a longer time.

In an effort to let you get the feel of the meeting I will write in a “Diary” form so that you will get a sense of each day.

President Beulah Haley from Newfoundland-Labrador called the meeting to order each morning with the lighting of the Christ Candle at 10:00am (our time) - Remember we were covering 5 time zones.

Beginning each session we were led in a brief meditation time by one of the Regions. Pacific Mountain was responsible for Wednesday.

On that first morning there were a number of routine actions taken: Acknowledgement of the First Nations Territories in which we were all located. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting, voting rights, accepting the agenda and other routine things.

There were 39 women present of whom 5 were non-voting. We then went through a fairly long though necessary process of self introductions sharing more than just our name and location. This was interesting and very necessary as some of the ladies didn’t speak up at all for the whole of the rest of the week!

Our guest for Monday was Rebecka Hornburg from the United Church Resource Distribution centre (UCRD) who made a very good presentation introducing us to some of the new merchandise and some new books they have. She assured us that the UCRD is up and running and they do have a very good website - check them out at UCRDstore.ca. Rebecka's presentation brought our agenda to an end and with a hymn and closing prayer we adjourned for the day.

Tuesday began with the usual opening and then we welcomed our guest Erik Mathiesen, Chief Financial Officer for the United Church of Canada. Erik shared a very good power point presentation. Erik reminded us that any cheques sent to the General Council Office for the UCW must be written to "The United Church of Canada" with a special designation on the memo line of the cheque: UCW Life membership, or Women for Change Zambia, or Donation to UCW, as all UCW money goes first through the accounting system of the General council and then to the UCW.

And then with a closing hymn and a prayer we adjourned day 2.

Wednesday and we were approaching the half-way mark. Each day we had been asked to wear a certain coloured blouse or T-shirt, and being September 30, we were all asked to wear orange in recognition of the injustices done to the Indigenous children in the Residential Schools.

Shortly after the routine of lighting the Christ Candle and opening meditation we took the group photo. A photo is always taken at these meetings so when I saw that it was on the agenda I wondered "How"? Well very easy really, there were 2 screens of us so that meant 2 photos and the job was done. In our orange shirts I imagine it will look very good!

Today was "Report Day" and although as Presidents we had all been asked to send in an annual report, there are often things which are added verbally so that is what happened. It seems that a few areas have held small "garden parties" and phones have been very busy. The usual big fund raisers have of course had to be cancelled though I heard of one group holding a "No bake bake-sale" for which they invited people in the congregation to donate what they would have spent to make things and/or what they would have spent buying goodies at a sale and deliver or mail the money/cheque to the UCW c/o the church!!

It seems that all the Regional UCW AGM's were cancelled this year, so we were not alone in our decision. Three of the regions in Ontario were combining for an on-line event very soon, so we hope it goes well for them.

A suggestion was raised that we could consider and that was the matter of "Names" Now that we don't have "Presbyteries" any more it is rather confusing as some are referring to "districts" or 'Zones" or "Clusters" and it was suggested that we could give some thought to coming up with a term for a group of UCW units in an area and that we give them the same title all across the country so we know what we are referring to. Just like the old "Presbyteries".

One of the issues that came up for lengthy discussion was the matter of the UCW's representation at the Regional Council level. There are a small number of UCW's that have been given a seat at the table of their Regional Council Executive, and a few others who have been given the right to vote on behalf of UCW at the Regional Council's Annual General Meeting, and others like us, who are ignored. This is a matter of great concern and so we have planned to hold another Zoom meeting in November to deal with this matter alone and have a letter prepared to be sent to the General council once again raising our concerns at the way we feel UCW is being pushed aside by our National Church and Regional Councils. Will keep you posted on this important matter.

Another issue which was raised in regard to our regions was the matter of UCW Life Membership Pins. The requests for them have been ignored since the COVID 19 Pandemic set in. As soon as an alternate arrangement that is in the planning has been put in place we will let you know, but we are not the only Region that has been upset by the fact that our requests have gone un-acknowledged and consequently not processed.

Plans for the 60th Anniversary in Nova Scotia in July 2022 are going ahead well, and all seems to be under control. Remember that \$400 will be given to help defray expenses for you to attend this event if you choose to apply. More details will be shared in a later newsletter.

Our morning ended with a wonderfully meaningful Bible study led by the Rev. Amy Crawford, the Church in Mission Team lead. Using passages from Nehemiah when the people were exiled from their land and their walls and temple destroyed, Amy asked us to consider what the people needed to rebuild their walls after the destruction and what do we need to rebuild our lives after this pandemic and what are our feelings as we go through the process. All very good but unfortunately not enough time in our small "break-out groups".

We were reminded that we should not look in the rear-view mirror at what we have left behind but rather to look forward at what lies ahead.

And now we are at the end of our 3rd day and more than half-way through our week of meetings.

Thursday, and we all were asked to wear Black to remember the women in our society who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence in their lives.

Today is "budget day". Here are a few figures for those who find these things interesting.

2019 UCW donations to the M&S Fund	\$1,020,000, 034
Women for Change: as of April 20, 2020	\$23,055.75 received
	\$19,475,85 sent to Zambia
	\$ 3, 579,90 remaining

In 2019 our income	\$80,064.00	(\$40,423 of this was transferred in from the reserve fund)
2019 expenses:	\$64,016.00	

Balance : \$18,048.00 (was returned to reserve funds)
Budget for 2020 had been set at \$78,525.00 with an expectation that because there was no face to face AGM in Toronto for UCW this year that the expenses will be much less than budgeted.
Budget for 2021: \$80,525.00.
The grant we receive from general council toward the cost of our Annual Gathering in Toronto will be reduced by \$4,000 in 2021.
The UCW has significant assets made up primarily of bequests and a reserve fund totalling \$893,624.00.

Grants from some of the bequest funds are offered to women of the church to help finance training events and overseas mission trips but of course this year little has been used. We were reminded that every region is given \$375 to be used for a workshop or education event within the region and I asked if it could be used to pay for a Zoom account and was assured that that would be a very acceptable use of the money. Your executive will be discussing this at our next meeting!

Although National UCW seems to have a lot of money much of it is restricted funds so we were reminded that the \$1 per member is still needed and should be sent to the UC of C clearly marked on the cheque as a donation to UCW.

Nora Sanders joined us, and as she is nearing retirement, she reminisced a little on her 14 years as Executive Secretary of the General Council and of all the changes that are taking place in the office. Sadly, this included news of the laying off of a number of the staff and the necessary budget cutbacks. She expressed appreciation for a prayer shawl she had been given by the UCW and had it draped around her as she spoke.

Well that was a very busy day and Thursday business came to an end with the usual song and a prayer. The songs for the week were all preplanned and the words posted while Diane Aikman accompanied herself on her guitar as she sang. Such a talented musician with a really beautiful voice.

So here we are on Friday with a few last minute things that always have to be dealt with at the end of a meeting.

Phyllis Buchner our representative on the Women's Inter Church Council, which is the organization best known for organizing the World Day of Prayer, gave her report and as she has completed her term on their executive, Win Czum, the President of Horseshoe Falls Region UCW was elected in her place.

We were informed that Sartu Mohamed who has been our main contact at the General Council office has been moved to another department, and our new primary contact person is Carol Owegi who can be reached at COWegi@united-church.ca.

Other news was that the Infopac Package which was sent to all congregations 3 times a year is being discontinued and in that package was the National UCW Newsletter "Keeping in Touch" which will also be discontinued in its present form. Because it was felt that this is an important means of communication it was decided that the publication and distribution of the "Keeping in Touch" newsletter would become the responsibility of the NUCW communications committee but as this news only came to us at our meeting no details about further publication or distribution are available yet.

We then started to prepare for our closing worship and communion which was to be led by the Rev Michael Blair. Michael is a #1 supporter of UCW and is well known and well loved, and for 12 years has been the head of the Church in Missions team at the GCO and in November becomes the Executive Secretary at the General Council Office as Nora Sanders retires. We are hoping that the UCW can maintain the close contact we have had with Michael over these past years.

Some of you were able to join us for this service thanks to the wonders of modern technology - you and nearly 100 others from all across the country. As one lady said as she checked in from Newfoundland "the sunshine is splitting the rocks here" It was explained that this was a Newfoundland expression for "It's a beautiful day".

In Michael's worship service he read passages from 2 Corinthians and reminded us that God is at work in our midst, that God is at work loving and caring for others and challenged us by asking what are we doing to care for others who are outside our communities of faith, social or community. We must walk by faith not by sight and see our neighbours as God sees them.

After the service our visitors left the zoom connection and our meeting began to draw to a close. It was agreed that because of the disruptions that the Covid 19 pandemic had created that our President Beulah would stay on for another year with the hope that our President Elect, Nancy Risto will be able to be installed in person. It seems that this has been a pattern adopted by a number of the regions.

The next Meeting of the NUCW executive is planned for September 20-24, 2021 at the Queen of the Apostles in Mississauga Ontario.

In closing, it was a good meeting - not as good as actually being together - and certainly had a few teething problems with some participants unfamiliar with Zoom but things got better as the week went on. Certainly some disappointments, - "Keeping in Touch" discontinued, some frustrations - lack of action in processing life membership pins, and some joys - that the Rev. Michael Blair is the new Exec Sec. and that we got to reconnect with old friends and make some new ones.

Obviously we can't fit everything into 4 pages so if there is ever anything you would like to know that we may have left out please make contact and if we don't know, we will try and find out for you.

We thank you for giving us this opportunity to represent you at a National level and in these challenging times take care, stay safe and remember to wash your hands.

Blessings to you all,
Clare Walker & Winnie Kowalewich