

## **COMMITTEE TO ADVISE WITH THE MODERATOR**

The Venerable, the 149th General Assembly:

When the Rev. Mary M. Fontaine, Director of Hummingbird Ministries, was installed as Moderator at General Assembly in Halifax, she became the first Indigenous Moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. On that happy and momentous occasion, Mary reports that she imagined her parents celebrating with Jesus in the heavens with gratitude for the daughter they were given and her mother cheering for the church whose ministers she challenged with deep theological questions.

As Mary's time as Moderator drew to a close, she reflected that the year has been a learning and growing journey for her. She realized that even though she grew up in the church, she felt disconnected from its colonial governance and structure. Her earliest impression of presbytery was that it seemed like a courtroom with people arguing. She attributed her discomfort in that setting to being Indigenous, given the experience of the law and Canada's justice system for Indigenous peoples. But she learned that as she shared her stories, the church was listening, a synonym for love. She regrets that her own commitments to an Indigenous "Listening Circle" system are not part of the church system. However, through the willingness of Presbyterians she met during her term, her hope for ongoing "sharing circles" (conversations) with Indigenous people has been revived.

Mary articulated her purpose, her hopes and passion for her year as Moderator, building on her vocation as the founding director of Hummingbird Ministries, a ministry of reconciliation and peacemaking through healing circles and the arts. Knowing and calling on the vision of her people for peace among the nations has been very helpful. Of course, this vision also fits with the healing and reconciliation vision of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its 1994 Confession before God and Indigenous people.

In her work as Moderator, Mary has been encouraged by hopeful signs that align with this vision of reconciliation and peacemaking. In many of her visits, there was a willingness by congregations to seek out Indigenous people for their events. Even though there may be no Indigenous people attending their worship regularly, they invited Indigenous people to participate in the healing and reconciliation events they arranged and hosted. At Mary's request, they found Indigenous hand drums and she was introduced to several Indigenous elders and cultural workers. But the most hopeful sign of all was the "listening" when she began to share stories rather than just read her sermons.

Important peacemaking moments during the year included the Moderator's healing work in apologizing to survivors of the Port Alberni and Round Lake residential schools in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, respectively. She taught a drum song in Cree to a group of enthusiastic children at St. Marys Church in St. Marys, Ontario. Mary helped answer questions at a Reconciliation event at Chalmers, London, Ontario (arranged by three local presbyteries) and hosted a circle with participants who were well informed in Indigenous history and injustices. The Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal took Mary on a tour to the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake and the Kahnawake Cultural Centre which displays the history of the Iroquois Confederacy. The congregation hosted a National Day of Truth and Reconciliation celebration and worship where Mary preached. She also participated with other ecumenical church leaders in September at the MMIWG2 Landfill protest camp in Winnipeg, appealing for the recovery of murdered Indigenous women whose remains are believed to be in the landfill, in support of the important issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Among her many visits with churches and groups, other visits included: on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, for the Residential School monument site event in June; the Saskatoon Native Circle in August, where Mary offered a blessing and prayer for the pastor and the ministry; and visits and interactions with faculty and students at the three colleges of the church. She also attended the Life and Mission Agency Committee meetings, Assembly Council meetings, a PWS&D meeting, the Women's' Missionary Society 110th anniversary celebrations and visited with Evangel Hall Mission in Toronto. The international trip planned for October to Israel and Palestine was cancelled due to the war on October 7. However, in February, Mary made trip to Cuba with a delegation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada, where she visited the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas and a number of churches.

Over time and during this year, Mary has learned that in spite of the church's "by the book ways", the Holy Spirit is doing something new in the hearts of the people in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It will take time for Indigenous people to heal from the harms of colonialism and to forgive the church but there is hope as long as the church is ready to listen and to take the steps necessary to reconcile broken relationships. She asks the churches to pray for Indigenous people in their regions for opportunities to connect and begin listening circles. She is grateful to The Presbyterian

Church in Canada for trusting her in the role as their Moderator and is honoured to have been the first Indigenous Moderator of the General Assembly, something she sees as an act of reconciliation.

The Committee to Advise wishes to thank Hummingbird Ministries for the support they gave to Mary as she fulfilled her role as Moderator. The council, Elders, friends and volunteers lifted Mary up in prayer as she strove to balance the commitments of her ministry with Hummingbird and her engagements as Moderator. The committee expresses its gratitude to Mary's family and close circle of friends as they encouraged her.

**Recommendation ADV-001**      adopted/defeated/amended

That the appreciation and gratitude of the church be extended to the Rev. Mary Fontaine as she shared a sense of hope and peace for all, encouraged truth telling and for her integrity, vulnerability and honesty as Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly.

**Recommendation ADV-002**      adopted/defeated/amended

That the thanks of the General Assembly be expressed to Hummingbird Ministries, its council, Elders, friends and volunteers for their support, prayers and encouragement for their minister, the Rev. Mary Fontaine.

**Recommendation ADV-003**      adopted/defeated/amended

That the appreciation and gratitude of the General Assembly be expressed to Mary Fontaine's family and friends.

**Recommendation ADV-004**      adopted/defeated/amended

That the thanks of the General Assembly be extended to congregations, individuals, presbyteries, synods and organizations, as well as the international and ecumenical friends who warmly welcomed and graciously offered hospitality to the Rev. Mary Fontaine.

**NOMINATION FOR MODERATOR OF THE 149TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Nomination of the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls**

The General Assembly's process for nominating the Moderator of the General Assembly was established in 1973. Nominations are submitted by presbyteries from which the ballot of nominees is prepared. A preferential system in which the counting proceeds until one nomination receives an overall majority, with the low nominee being dropped and their votes distributed according to the preference indicated on the ballot.

The voting for the Moderator was carried out electronically through Election Buddy during mid-February until March 25 with the tabulation of the votes on April 2, 2024.

In accordance with the procedure determined by the General Assembly, the Committee to Advise with the Moderator nominates the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls as Moderator of the 149th General Assembly.

Pat Dutcher-Walls  
Convener

Terrie-Lee Hamilton  
Secretary