

PRESS RELEASE

United Church in Quebec acts against “inevitable decline”

June 3, 2023 (Sherbrooke, QC) - Popular opinion says that churches of all denominations are declining; the governing body representing United Church communities of faith across Quebec respectfully disagrees and will meet in Sherbrooke on June 3, 2023 to discuss strategic growth instead.

With a theme based on the biblical story of Jesus feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fishes, ministers and lay people of Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council will assemble at Plymouth-Trinity United Church---the sanctuary where the Rodriguez-Flores family recently sought refuge for more than a year in the face of deportation--- to discern how to move forward with a mindset of growth, rather than decline.

Churches are more than just buildings

The potential sale of the Plymouth-Trinity United Church building has been a topic of recent debate in local news. Shanna Bernier, member of Plymouth-Trinity United Church (and regional staff member responsible for programs for children, youth and young adults), reports that when hearing about the potential sale, people often ask her why the church is closing. “We are not closing; we just don’t need to have a building to be the church!” she says.

The COVID pandemic shifted assumptions about the essential nature of brick-and-mortar buildings, as many communities of faith in all denominations moved to online worship via Zoom, Facebook or other live streaming services.

A brand new online-only francophone ministry, Église Sainte-Claire, was established during the pandemic and has continued to thrive, proving two crucial points: that growth is possible, and that a building is not essential for existence as a church.

Honouring language and cultural needs essential to growth

Recent newcomers to Canada are key contributors to the current growth of some United Church communities of faith in Quebec, including Plymouth-Trinity United Church, Beaconsfield United Church, La communauté chrétienne francophone de Mount Royal United Church and the newly formed Ministère protestant francophone de Longueuil.

The multilingual nature of Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council is an integral part of its identity. In addition to English and French, the primary languages spoken in communities of faith across the regional council include Mohawk, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Armenian, Hungarian, Swahili, and Korean.

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BACKGROUND

Loaves and fishes (John 6:1-14): <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6%3A1-14&version=NRSVA>

Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council consists of ministry and lay representatives from United Church of Canada communities of faith across Quebec, supported by regional council staff members. <https://nakonhakaucc.ca/>

National Strategic Plan for Growth: As The United Church of Canada moves towards the celebration its 100th anniversary in 2025, the national organization has created a strategic plan that has growth as a leading priority, with other activities and resources dedicated to climate, indigenous pathways, justice, leadership and common good. Bold discipleship, daring justice and deep spirituality are the foundation on which these activities and resources are being developed. <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/our-call-and-our-vision>

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