

REV. DR. ANDREW RICHARDSON**Nominating Body**

Prince Edward Island Presbytery (Maritime Conference)

Biographical Sketch

I am anchored in congregational ministry; it is in communities of faith that my gifts have been forged, honed, and affirmed over the past 27 years. I have served diverse communities: a small, struggling rural charge; a new church development; a program-sized church; and currently a large multi-staff congregation. Though these settings are all very different they share in common a deep desire to form meaningful community; a resonant faith, and a desire to serve God and humanity in meaningful mission. I have seen the malaise, sadness, and fear that come with the disenfranchisement of the church. But I have also seen boldness and the great initiatives and new ways of being church that come bubbling up among the faithful. My doctoral work at Columbia Theological Seminary (on Friendship as a model for church) was a direct response to the loneliness and alienation that many in my churches experienced in their lives. I remain passionate and excited about ministry and the church.

From the beginning of my ministry, I have been privileged to be involved in the wider work of our denomination. I have attended several General Councils; chaired national, regional, and presbytery committees; and have been part of many of the major conversations that we have had as a church. As Chair of the Working Group on Faith Formation for Ministry I was most recently involved in some challenging work meant to help the church re-examine and reshape how we do theological education.

One of my great passions is teaching. I have taught diverse groups and topics, from change management to M.Div. students to introducing Brahms' Requiem to seniors. In every setting I have discovered men, women, and children who want a profoundly resonant theology, who are not seeking easy answers, who want to be intellectually challenged, and who are innately curious in their spiritual quests. I am energized and encouraged by such groups.

I have strong skills in governance, having chaired many community organizations and boards. As the chair of the largest school district in New Brunswick I managed a large staff, hired a superintendent and principals, oversaw a multimillion-dollar budget, and led the board through a visioning process that resulted in clear, measureable goals. I led the City of Summerside in a community safety audit to help neighbours combat crime through collaborative, creative, and evidence-based approaches. I have experience in motivating groups, encouraging collaboration, building consensus, and managing change.

My wife and I are owners of a coffee stall at the farmers' market in Summerside. We sell fresh, organic, free-trade products and have welcomed the opportunity to share with primary producers in our area the task of promoting sustainable goods and services. This has provided us with an enjoyable way to engage and be present to our community.

I love to sail, am a film buff, am a voracious reader, and love good music and good company.

Finally, I have been fortunate to be supported in my ministry by my family. My wife Janet and children Alexander, Olivia, and Noah have all in one way or another shared and supported my ministry, been shaped by the church, and at the same time cultivated their own unique path of discipleship.

Statement

For some time the United Church has been focused on how to adapt to shrinking resources and decline. At all levels much time and effort have been given to structures, methods, and solutions. We have streamlined, amalgamated, planned, studied, and speculated. Yet even in the midst of these activities, we are often despairing, exhausted, mistrustful, and angry. Responding to institutional needs simply doesn't energize us, doesn't convict us, and in the end doesn't really even provide much hope.

Whoever is the next Moderator will have to help the church come to terms with some immense structural changes. Institutional change is very much in the future for the church. However, it would be a mistake to equate institutional change with renewal.

I was reminded of this when our congregational board watched a TED talk by organizational guru Simon Sinek called "How Great Leaders Inspire Action." The talk pointed out that people are not inspired by *how*; they are inspired by *why*. This is a profoundly theological question and among the most important questions for us as a denomination because at the edges of the church people are asking, "Why Jesus? Why Christianity? Why church?"

As we continue to experience intense disruption, the church needs to shift our focus from how to why. Before we can even begin to engage the world with the gospel, we ourselves have to be convicted. Why do we continue to invoke the ancient story of Jesus of Nazareth? Why do we gather in community for worship Sunday after Sunday? Why do we have a church in the first place? Why are we compelled to act for justice, to reconcile with our neighbours, to care for all creation? Why Jesus? Why Christianity? Why church?

I would welcome a church-wide engagement with these questions and would hope to facilitate some deep theological conversation that would have the possibility to shape us, challenge us, engage us, and ultimately help us move into apologetics—the ability to clearly articulate the "why" to the curious, the bystanders, and the critics who are all around us. As Karl Barth said, "In the church of Jesus Christ there can and should be no non-theologians."

This conversation need not be centred on ancient confessions, rigid orthodoxies—liberal or conservative—or simple, stale theologies. In fact what we need is a conversation that is recombinant, brought together from various sources. As a church we need to cultivate ways for people to put the pieces of their own spiritual thinking and experience alongside the rich theological tradition of the church and in doing so create new sequences, potentially creating a new theology that can keep evolving as people's needs and the world that we inhabit change. Since commitment to Christ, and living the gospel, has many expressions based on diverse

geographical and cultural contexts, such conversations must be intentionally intercultural, involving those on the margins and those at the centre; those in the church and those outside it; those who are Christian and those of other or no faith; cradle Christians and emerging Christians; young and old; dominant and minority cultures. A conversation that is more like jazz than static classical forms, built upon a strong foundation and yet fluid and changing, improvised and polyrhythmic, spontaneous and surprising.

The possibilities of this kind of church-wide conversation give me hope for our collective future. It is important that we face forward into the theological and spiritual headwind of this burgeoning movement. If we do so, we may well repeat the feats of previous generations, who overcame other seemingly impossible crises in the church. The church has been considered on its deathbed many times in the past, and it has arisen renewed. We can, like our forbears, reframe the gospel in ways that again speak to the deepest human longings and needs.

In the new *Mad Max* movie the main character gives some well-meaning advice to his companion: “You know hope is a mistake, don’t you?” In the church it seems like we have taken this advice to heart. Often church life mirrors the world around us: cynical, despairing, and fearful. Where is the sense that even in the midst of rapid change and disruption we abide in Christ; that we belong to God; that in life, in death, in life beyond death we are not alone? The irony is that though we are stewards of a hopeful gospel, we despair. Though we are called to proclaim a life-giving, empowering Word, we are often afraid of the future before us. Though we are called to bold living, we often lack courage. This despite the promise of John 15:11: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

It is time for the church to lean into this joy—an abiding, loving, infectious joy. Yes, we need new structures and new ways of being the church. Yes, we have to live with our own disenfranchisement, with the end of Christendom, with the death of some cherished practices. But is lament the only response? Where in our church are the signs of joy, the surprise of resurrection? If joy is the echo of God’s great love for us, then I want to be surrounded by believers whose echo is resounding and overwhelmingly joyful. I want to be inspired by my church. Enough despair and hand-wringing. Enough with talk of exile and dislocation. Enough with not enough. Through God’s grace we have been given enough to be the church the world needs. Let’s preach justice like we are desperate for justice to roll down like an ever-flowing stream. Let’s follow Christ into the contested spaces of the world. Let’s heal the sick, strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, and hold fast to what is good. Let’s talk about love in a world consumed by hatred, forgive where retaliation is the norm, and announce Christ’s peace to a wartorn world. Let’s simply answer our calling to *be* the church, to practise resurrection, abiding in Christ, and filled with joy.