

## MS. ANN HARBRIDGE



### **Nominating Body**

Pending nomination by Commissioners at General Council\*

### **Biographical Sketch**

I was born in Sarnia, Ontario, the eldest of six children. In 1973, I married my soulmate. We moved away from family because of Ross's work, living in Ottawa, London, and Gravenhurst, Ontario, before moving to Bradford, Ontario. Because we lived so far from family, both of us found family in other places, most importantly the church.

I have served at all levels of the church. My involvement at presbytery has included a term as chair, and membership on various committees and commissions, including a commission to establish the structure of our new presbytery when Toronto Conference went from nine presbyteries to four about five years ago. I currently serve on the Congregational Life Commission, working with congregations as they find themselves dealing with the challenges of decreasing membership and shrinking resources. I have served on the Toronto Conference Executive, most recently completing a two-year term as Conference President. I served on a General Council task group looking at Ministry and Personnel processes prior to the last General Council, and I attended the 40th and 41st General Councils as a commissioner.

I heard a lovely way of referring to those of us in my age category this weekend. I am on the higher end of middle age! Despite that I love to spend time with the youth and young adults in our church. Events like Rendez-vous, Worshiplude, and confirmation retreats all give me energy. The enthusiasm of our church's young people is contagious!

In 2014 I was privileged and challenged to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Edmonton, and in June of this year I was present in Ottawa as the commissioners presented their report. We still have a long way to go toward reconciliation.

Prior to responding to my call to ministry, I spent 25 years working for Sherwin Williams Co., finishing my career with them by managing their Canadian distribution centre in Vaughan, Ontario. My management skills were honed in that role. It was a challenging and rewarding career for many years, but several things happened that caused me to rethink my work.

Following the death of my husband in July 2001 from cancer, the events of 9/11, and much soul-searching, I responded to God's call to ministry and left Sherwin Williams. That call took me to Trinity Centennial, a rural congregation about an hour north of Toronto. I was recognized as a Lay Pastoral Minister (DLM) by Toronto Conference in 2007. I have now served Trinity Centennial for 12 years, and together we have grown from a small, sleepy congregation to a medium-sized one full of new life.

I am a 50-year member of Girl Guides of Canada, including three years as their President. In that role, I led the organization as it transitioned through changes in its structure at both the national and provincial levels.

Apart from my church and volunteer work, I am a grandmother to seven wonderfully delightful grandchildren ranging in age from four to 20 years. I spend my free time playing with the grandkids, camping, gardening, sewing, and doing what needs to be done around the house. I have a passion for pastoral ministry; however, my gifts in organizational management and working through change, and my ability to be a calm presence in the midst of change, are what I humbly offer to the church at this time in our history.

### **Statement**

My favourite line in the Song of Faith refers to God as Holy Mystery. So much about God is a mystery. Sometimes I think I know less about God after 12 years in ministry than I knew before my training as a Lay Pastoral Minister. And I know I am not alone. Most of us have questions. We hear the stories of our faith, and we wonder how those stories, written so long ago, are relevant today. Who is God, and where is God in a world that has changed and continues to change in ways that our parents and grandparents couldn't have even imagined? Holy Mystery, indeed! But I love a good mystery, and so I am excited to continue exploring who God is and where we find God in a world where so many struggle to find God.

I am passionate about the church and the place we have in the lives of the people of our communities, whether they are in church every week or call upon us in times of crisis. It is because of that passion for the church that I feel called to allow my name to be put forward as a nominee for Moderator. We face challenging times, and I believe I have the gifts needed at this time in our history to help the church navigate the changing landscape we face. I have proven myself to be someone who can see the big picture. One of my greatest gifts is in leadership during times of chaos. This came out during my time as President of Girl Guides of Canada, and again in Toronto Conference as we restructured, going from nine presbyteries to four. I bring a calm presence and a compassionate heart to those who are anxious about change.

As I think about our church, I sometimes wonder how we continue to serve those who long for the old ways and days and at the same time be a place where the Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat crowd can find their way to God? There is a hymn in *More Voices* titled "Listen, God Is Calling." We need to listen as much as we speak. In fact, perhaps more—after all, we've been given two ears to hear and only one mouth to speak! The Spiritual but Not Religious crowd is crying out for a place where they can find that Holy Mystery that is God. Our traditional religious structures, liturgies, and hymns of days gone by are of no interest to those who identify as spiritual but not religious, and yet, I believe it is still God whom they yearn to know. How does this United Church of ours offer that place where God is found and where the gospel message of Jesus Christ can continue to be our path to God, at the same time opening our hearts and minds to others who might seek that Holy Mystery?

It would be easy to look at the statistics and give up. Certainly if the church was healthy in terms of people and resources, we wouldn't be dealing with the Comprehensive Review at this General Council. But we are dealing with it, and whatever is decided at this meeting will shape the

church in ways that are very different from what we are used to. It will shape the church in ways that are likely to be uncomfortable for many of us. In the months and years ahead, we will need to find a way to live into the changes that are approved at this 42nd meeting of the General Council. Will we have the courage to make the radical changes that will see our church able to move beyond our next decade and the celebration of our 100th anniversary and into our next century? I have that courage, and I believe that I can instill it in others.

Anxiety is high as we let go of some of the structures and processes we have come to know and trust. It will be high not only among clergy and lay people active and involved in the courts of the church but also especially high among staff who currently serve our General Council, our Conferences, and in some cases our presbyteries, who depend on those jobs to take care of their families. We are going to need patience and a calm presence to see us through. Regardless of the changes we face, one thing remains constant: we live in God's world; we are not alone. When we put our trust in God, we will find our way. We only have to look at the stories of our faith to know it is indeed possible. After all, remember the disciples, hidden away in the closed room, fearful and anxious. But they didn't remain there—if they had, the movement that became the Christian church would never have come to be. We can't remain in a place of fear and anxiety. We have a story to tell and a chance to make all things new!

As I ponder my involvement in this General Council meeting, I am particularly excited by the theme "Behold, I make all things new." We have a wonderful opportunity this August, as we gather with God, to birth something new, something even more exciting than the current church we are in Corner Brook to represent. Do you think the disciples had a clear idea of what it was that Jesus intended for them? I don't. I believe they carried the stories; they made mistakes; they certainly would have been fearful and perhaps even ready to give up as they gathered and walked and talked with one another. Despite all of that, we're here today, a part of that Christian story.

I am confident we will be here in the future in ways that are still to be revealed. It is part of the Holy Mystery I talked about earlier. None of us has all the answers, but I remain hopeful, and excited about the possibilities that lie ahead of us as we continue to be the church, led by Holy Mystery.

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\* The General Secretary has received notice of intent that this nomination will be made at the 42nd General Council. To keep Commissioners well informed of the decisions that will be before them, information on this prospective nominee is included here and in the meeting materials.