

REV. JORDAN CANTWELL**Nominating Body**

River Bend Presbytery (Saskatchewan Conference)

Biographical Sketch

I was born in New York, shortly after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, to a Methodist mom and a Roman Catholic dad. Ecumenical dialogue and practice have been part of my life from the very beginning, and continue to shape who I am and what I believe God is calling the church to be. We moved to the Canadian prairies when I was in grade 2, and I've been a prairie girl ever since. I grew up mostly in the Anglican Church, but left the church in my early 20s (like so many others) to explore alternative spiritual paths.

My first connection with the United Church came in the late 80s as I became involved in social justice movements. In 1989, I was hired as the first staff person for the Alberta Youth Animation Project on Southern Africa—an ecumenically sponsored program addressing racism and apartheid in both Canada and Southern Africa. In 1993, the United Church sent me to be an international observer with the Ecumenical Monitoring Program in South Africa, through the World Council of Churches. By the late 90s I had joined the United Church, grateful to have found a spiritual home where my passion for social justice and my belief in a radically inclusive God were both welcome.

I started working at The Centre for Christian Studies when it first moved to Winnipeg. That is where I learned about diaconal ministry and its unique and important place in our church. It's also where I met the amazing woman who would later become my life partner. I also worked as a staff associate at Augustine United, a core neighbourhood church in Winnipeg. Eventually I was given responsibility for Augustine's Oak Table outreach ministry, which offers hospitality, support, and advocacy for folks who are living in poverty. The people at the Oak Table helped to form me in significant ways—as a person and as a minister. They taught me about community, about sharing, giving, and receiving, they taught me about human dignity and what it means to be created in God's image. I am so grateful for my many mentors at the Oak Table Ministry.

In 2006, my family moved to Saskatoon so that I could study for my MDiv at St. Andrew's College. I graduated in 2010 and was settled into my internship charge, Delisle-Vanscoy United Church, where I have now served for seven years. It has been an incredible blessing to serve in a congregation that is open to new ideas, interested in the wider church, and generous with my time. This has allowed me to serve for the past six years on the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee; participate in the Moderator's visit to Israel and Palestine (2011); attend the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, South Korea, as a delegate for the United Church; travel to Mexico on an education/exposure tour with a group of youth and young adults from Saskatchewan; serve as a home group leader at Rendez-vous 2014 and the winter gathering of Youth Forum 2015; and chair the Education and Students Committee of River Bend

Presbytery for four years and the presbytery itself for the past year. Some of the other ways I have been involved in wider church work include serving as the United Church co-chair to the local Roman Catholic–United Church dialogue, attending GC41 as a commissioner, providing worship leadership for Ministry Matters and Prairie Horizons, and serving on the leadership team of the Saskatchewan All My Relations Network (formerly the Living into Right Relations Network).

I am married to Laura Fohse, a diaconal minister who serves McClure United Church in Saskatoon, and we have an amazing daughter, Hope, who graduates from high school this year. I am so grateful for their encouragement and support to let my name stand as a nominee for Moderator.

Statement

One of the great pieces of wisdom I have learned from friends who live with the daily reality of poverty is that the only faithful response to perceived scarcity is to become more generous and more community-focused. Like the hungry crowd that followed Jesus to a deserted place, we are being asked to reorganize ourselves so that our resources might be distributed in new ways that allow everyone to experience God's abundance (Mark 6:30–44).

Much of the attention of the Comprehensive Review has been on how we will organize the United Church in the future to ensure that we remain faithful and sustainable. Sustaining the institution should never become an end in itself, only a means toward an end. The church doesn't exist for its own sake, but to be a community that embodies God's justice, expresses God's compassion, and works relentlessly for God's vision of shalom. Getting the structure "right" means ensuring that how we organize the church reflects our mission and purpose. As we wrestle with what the United Church should do, be, and look like in the future, we know our structures must enable the voices of the marginalized to be heard and given priority; accountability to one another needs to exist at every level of governance; respect for creation should be evident in all aspects of our life together; and structural injustices must be transformed.

For many years we have been in a process of reflection and repentance for the colonial attitudes and practices that have shaped the United Church and marginalized Aboriginal people in this country. It is time to dismantle the structures that continue to privilege some at the expense of others. As we make significant structural changes, we will need courage, vision, and humility to ensure those changes, and the processes we use to implement them, reflect a new kind of relationship with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

We are still learning what it means to be an intercultural church. This will continue to be a priority for many years. By increasing support for and engagement with our ethnic, francophone, and Indigenous ministries we will all be strengthened and enriched. As our faith communities become more culturally diverse we will find wisdom and help from ecumenical partners, who have much experience in embracing the gifts and challenges of diversity.

I am excited about the leadership and deep faith I see among young people in our church. We need to strengthen our support for youth and young adult ministries and ensure that their voices, visions, and concerns are heard at every level of the church.

We need to muster all our courage because we are being called to fundamental change—not simply in our structures but also in how we relate to one another in the church, in this country, to the land, to all our relations. We need to embrace this change, not so that we survive institutionally but so that we truly embody the gospel by which we are called and named. Change is difficult. It is particularly stressful for those in leadership; we need good support in place for our leaders. Change also means there will be loss, and loss is always painful. We will need courage to walk through the pain to reach the abundant life that waits for us on the other side.

We will also need humility. Humility allows us to hear the wisdom that comes from outside of ourselves. My ministry with youth, Indigenous, LGBTQ, and core neighbourhood folks has given me a deep appreciation for the vision and insights of people who have been pushed to the margins—in both church and society—and shown me how essential it is that their voices be given priority. They are able to see and name critical truths that are invisible to those standing at the centre of power and privilege. As we move through this time of change, we must listen deeply to the voices at the edges and welcome perspectives that are different, even discomfoting.

We need to strengthen our global and ecumenical relationships as well. We need one another now more than ever before. Our ecumenical and overseas partners have wisdom and perspectives that will enhance our understanding of the gospel and help us to navigate faithfully through these waters of change. We also have insights and experiences from which they can benefit. As the Church throughout the world faces new challenges and opportunities, each of our churches will be stronger if we remain open to learning from and supporting one another.

How we make changes in our church is as important as the changes we make. As we begin to implement the decisions that the upcoming General Council will approve, we will need to make sure we keep asking ourselves key questions:

- Where do we see the Holy Spirit?
- How does this action reflect God's justice, God's economy, God's grace?
- Does this direction embody the truth of Jesus Christ as we understand it?
- How does this strengthen our relationships with one another in the church, in this country, to the land, to all our relations?
- Who is being left out/silenced? Who needs to be heard/included?

Amidst the turmoil and insecurity that inevitably accompany times of transition, we are reminded that some things do not change—at our core, we are still about embodying God's love and hope and good news in a world that needs them more than ever. This is something we know how to do. As we move into an uncharted future, we bring with us a rich tradition, deep wisdom, and profound stories that have the power to shape and reshape us. We will go forward carrying with us the best of what we have been and marrying it to the best of what we will be. These are rich, exciting, anxious, Spirit-filled times. With courage, humility, and hope we will follow the Spirit down old and new paths wherever it may lead.