

Renewal News!

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The Renewal Fellowship within The Presbyterian Church in Canada

is a means to contact and encourage those concerned about the evangelical renewal of the PCC.

Our mission:

To lead each other and The Presbyterian Church in Canada to authentic Biblical thinking, powerful Spirit-led prayer and effective Gospel witness.

Our twin priorities are

PRAYER &
PASTORAL CARE

Contact info
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The Renewal News is a quarterly publication of Renewal Fellowship.

We welcome your stories

Renewal renewal

RF proposes a new way forward

Faced with ongoing deficits and a declining bank balance, the Renewal Fellowship is proposing significant changes in the way it operates.

Starting March 1, the Executive Director's call will be cut in half as the Fellowship eliminates road trips and focuses mainly on online encouragement, support and advocacy for evangelicals. A significant shift will be a formal effort to broaden our base to include friends who have departed the PCC.

The changes were approved by the Board of Directors Nov. 4-5 while meeting in retreat/online at St. Paul's Simcoe, Ontario. The membership will be asked to homologate the board's actions at the April 20, 2024 annual meeting, which will be held online.

The board recognized that significant changes were necessary to remain alive.

Had no cuts been proposed, RF would have run out of money to operate by late 2024. The decisions were not made without significant prayer and discernment. Formal recognition that decisive action was necessary was made following the 2023 annual meeting. An immediate fundraising drive in the summer of 2023 yielded an increase in support from congregations but not enough to make up for the ongoing decline in support from our membership.

By no means should this action be seen as defeat. Rather, Renewal's leadership is retooling for a new era in which a significant proportion of our membership and support has departed from the PCC or is planning to do so in the years to come.

See Renewal Page 2

In Joyful Expectation

*A song was heard at Christmas
To wake the midnight sky
A Saviour's birth and peace on earth
And praise to God on high.
The Angels sang at Christmas
With all the hosts above
And still we sing the newborn King
His glory and His love.*

This poem by Timothy Dudley-Smith is a song of joy. As we celebrate the first coming of our Lord Jesus, "joy" follows

along the Sunday celebrations of Advent after the Sundays of "hope" and "peace."

The shepherds marvelled as the angels sang and quickly ran off to see this newborn King. They spread the news of Jesus' birth with joy. For Mary and Joseph, however, along with joy, the arrival of this Child brought danger, unexpected travel plans, perhaps even confusion. For Mary, she was to learn the grief and then the inexpressible joy of as she watched her son and Saviour follow His heavenly Father's will.

See Wonder and Joy Page 2

Renewal: the new RF at a glance

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Our mission, therefore, is both within and outside the PCC.

The landscape within our denomination has changed significantly since RF was founded in 1983. We are older and many of our churches are largely vacant on Sundays. Our growing edges are primarily our non-Anglo congregations. As evidenced by the 2023 Pastors' Retreat (see Page 3) we have vibrant younger evangelical pastors and leaders. Our challenge is to renew and re-form to meet them — and all authentic believers no matter what their age or location — wherever they are called.

The bottom line is that the need remains for a grassroots organization to encourage those who remain committed to Biblical truth and the urgent need to practice the Great Commission by going into the world, teaching and baptizing in authentic witness. We're here for a new season.

Coming soon

- An online publication that will cater to Reformed evangelicals in Canada, particularly those remaining within the PCC and those who have departed. The to-be-named 'Zine will operate with professional journalistic standards and will include essays, news, opinion and analysis, worship and ministry resources. Our hope is that it will be a gathering place for kindred souls to learn, share and find encouragement as we exercise and defend liberty of conscience and speak Biblical truth in love.

What's remaining

- Prayer calendar (online but printable)
- Website
- GA presence Prayer Rooms
- Knox College Living the Name bursary

- AGM (online only)
- Fall Pastors' Retreat, subject to donations from supporting congregations

Discontinued

- Quarterly mailings of Renewal News and printed Prayer Calendar
- Renewal Café, Listening Ear Here
- Standalone blogs
- Renewal Day with speaker
- Financial support for EFC.

Staffing Impact:

- Executive Director will reduce from 40-per-cent time to 20 per cent effective March 1, 2024.
- Administrative Assistant time will reduce slightly as of Jan. 1.

Wonder and joy

Continued from Page 1

As we follow Jesus, we experience many similar emotions and situations. Change comes as The Holy Spirit of Jesus works within and among us, along side the teaching of the written word, to lead us into new territory and in different directions.

For the Renewal Fellowship, we are mindful that things don't always "stay the same." As our churches have struggled and faced change post-pandemic, so too has the Renewal Fellowship. As the board of Renewal Fellowship, we find that we will have to do things differently. Our new direction will focus more on a publication that will highlight pastoral and theological issues. While change can be unsettling, change can also bring new energy and creativity. And, as always, we are assured of God's presence and guidance as we follow in obedience to His promptings. And then — the joy!

As we trust and obey, we experience His peace and joy. We continue to teach and make disciples, but through a different format. We are grateful at Renew-

al Fellowship for the willingness of its staff and board to risk to venture in a different way. Please pray with us, that as we discern where God is leading, we will continue to be an encouragement to His faithful people.

Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the magi all experienced the wonder and joy at the arrival of Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, come in human form as a vulnerable baby. I pray that we all, with them, will experience the wonder and joy of Jesus' presence as we follow what seems to be an uncertain path into an unknown future. We are always assured of Immanuel, God with us.

**May the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Romans 15: 13

In Joyful Expectation,

Sandy Copland-Dufour
Board Chairperson



Some of the pastors and presenters at the 2023 PCC Pastors' Retreat gather prior to closing worship on Nov. 8

Holy Imagination!

More than 40 pastors gathered for the 2023 PCC Pastors' Retreat on Nov. 6-8.

We were blessed to have Rev. Dr. Richard Topping, principal of Vancouver School of Theology, as our speaker on the topic "Holy Imagination: Believing is Seeing." (See message Page 4). Worship was led by Rev. James Yang and Rev. William Min and friends. Spiritual Direction was provided by Rev. Christopher Little and Don Crow.

Here are some comments from a few of the participants:

"I was so blessed by the praise team and the prayer time. The praise worship this year exceeded my expectations. It was a time of renewal of my spirit."

"Rev. Dr. Richard Topping provided great lectures to inspire us to slow down and help others see our Creator God."

"The teaching was very strong

and was a driver of the rest of the activities."

"It seems that everyone went home refreshed and aglow with the certainty that 'because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow.' "

Amen!

Among the pleasant surprises was the demographic diversity among attendees, as seen in the above photo. The evangelical wing of the PCC is no longer a Scottish-Canadian enclave. Even more encouraging was the ages of attendees; more than half were under 50.

An additional piece of good news is the fact that the event ended with a financial surplus, just like last year. This was amazing and unexpected. In fact, we were anticipating a small deficit. The main factor was the fact that the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre charged us much less than expected for food and accommoda-

tion. What a blessing to be in partnership with them.

We are already looking ahead to next year. The same venue has been tentatively booked for Nov. 4-6, 2024. The organizing team is in place and we are prayerfully discerning the theme and possible speakers.

After initiating and guiding the team for the first two retreats, executive director Andy Cornell is stepping aside to concentrate on RF's new mission. Rev. Al Brouwer, a member of RF's board of directors, will ease into the chair during 2024 with Andy remaining on the team for support.

Spirit-led worship, spiritual direction, small groups and a generous amount of unstructured time will continue.

See RETREAT Page 4

Introducing Andrew introducing

A message from Pastors' Retreat speaker Richard Topping

O God, grant us a tenacious winsome courage today. When we are tempted to give up, help us to keep going. When we are tempted to be blind, help us to see. When we are tempted to be angry, help us to love. Grant us a cheerful spirit when things don't go our way. And give us your Spirit so that our lives witness to your love and mercy for this world. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Andrew first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found Messiah." He brought Simon to Jesus.

A past moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Marg Carpenter, who spent most of her life promoting mission, said this: "I'll say it one more time: the church is alive and well in the world. I'm tired of hearing anything else. I love mission, I love the church, I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and I love you Presbyterians, well most of you.

"I'll tell you what," she said, "we could do great things together in this denomination if we could get back to basics."

Mission is what the church is and does as it is caught up in the movement of the triune God toward and for the world. Mission's always been our M.O. in the world. Mission is just the church

becoming and being what it is. Bonhoeffer said, "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others . . . not dominating; but helping and serving. It must tell people of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others."

Post-Christendom church in a secular society needs repair around mission. It has always been who we are and what we're here for as church. It is just we got lulled into thinking that staying open, teaching good manners and helping people assimilate to western values was often all we needed to do when we were at the cultural levers. Now that we have all become missionaries to a culture we thought we owned, we need to sand blast the grime of colonizing pretension and therapeutic niceness off the façade of the building.

Put another way, we might say the church needs reform around mission. Once more, we listen seriously to Jesus' words — like the ones at the end of John's gospel — "as the Father has sent me, so send I you . . ." and then Jesus animates mission with the breath of the Holy Spirit. And disciples (students) graduate to become apostles (sent ones) with a message of new life and reconciliation.

And so today at a church named after this missionary apostle, Andrew, it seems fitting to learn mis-

sion from Andrew. From the start of the gospel of John, Jesus incites Andrew to mission.

Zoom meetings and church services remind me of a commercial from years ago. You can still find it on You Tube. The commercial begins with a single woman lauding the excellence of Faberge Organic Shampoo with pure wheat germ oil and honey. She loves it so much she says, "and I told two friends."

Faces and voices multiply inside boxes as a growing chorus of diverse people checkerboard the screen repeating the chorus, "and so on and so on." And to think this early Zoom meeting started with one person. One person with some good news, about Faberge Organic Shampoo with pure wheat germ oil and honey spoke up, and the next thing you know through the miracle of exponential marketing, lots and lots of people now enjoy "super body, super shine and super smelling fresh hair."

This commercial came to mind this week, as I was reading our lesson. Andrew and Philip each met Jesus stay for a while with him and then get all evangelical — a brother and a friend get pulled into the Jesus movement by the patience and persistent witness of these first disciples.

See MISSION Page 5

Retreat

Continued from page 3

The team is striving to keep the cost to participants down to a token amount and offer a travel subsidy so that cost is not a barrier.

Donations toward this vital gathering are welcome.

Tax receipts will be issued.

- e-transfer to renewalfellowshipccc@gmail.com, specify Pastor Retreat.
- Mail a cheque to Renewal Fellowship, 3819 Bloor Street West, Etobicoke, Ontario M9B 1K7.
- Securely online with a credit card through [Canada Helps](#).

Mission is the Word

Continued from Page 4

Today, we learn mission, especially, even dare I say it, “evangelism,” from St. Andrew in particular. Let’s suppose that what he does, as a new but faithful disciple of Jesus, is what we are also called to do as faithful baptized Christians. St. Andrew, the saint after whom your church is named, traces out a pattern of life that invites our imitation.

Andrew, before he was a saint, back when he was just plain old Andy; he was a follower of John the Baptist. And John’s job was to point toward Jesus. So when Jesus arrived on the scene, John says to Andrew and an unnamed friend, “behold the lamb of God” — the two of them somehow know that this is code for: “follow him now, he’s the one you want to be with.” Andrew and his friend start following Jesus. It’s all so cryptic. Without any formal introduction; rumour and hearsay, trust of a friend and vague words, they start walking behind Jesus, stalking him. Andrew and his nameless shadow friend.

That’s when Jesus turns around and asks them a question: “what are you looking for?” That’s the first thing Jesus says in this Gospel: “what are you looking for?” And the two used to-be-disciples of John the Baptist answer Jesus’ question with a question: “where are you staying?” Jesus answers their questioning answer with: “Come and See.” It seems that what these two disciples looked for was a place to stay — they were looking to “stay” with Jesus. And our Gospel repeats this word three times: and they saw where he was “staying” and they

“stayed” with him. What is this Motel Super 8 or Hilton obsession.

There is more than meets the eye in this word: “stayed.” It means to remain, abide, to dwell. These two disciples really want to dwell with Jesus, where he goes and sets up shop is where they want to go. Stay has the sense of putting in time at a place, of a non-recreational interest. This is not weekend camping or seasonal resi-

impression on their own lives. They stay with him.

I sometimes wonder in our own time — when at Amazon you can find an idiot’s guide to almost anything — whether we’ve got the patience to stay with Jesus. In our user friendly, mastery-oriented, drive through world, where we want everything quickly and immediately, staying with Jesus — abiding and listening and lingering with his words to us, takes time.

Could it be that sometimes I don’t get to telling anyone else about Jesus, because I haven’t lingered with him to experience death and new life. Without that slaying and rising with him, even if I did go and tell it could be non-sense, colonial impress, my translation of the Gospel —which is often code for exporting status quo privilege or what sells in with the secular — Jesus made in my image.

No, Andrew teaches us, we can’t graduate to the outreach department without first spending some time in the kind of deep Christian formation that could kill you in order to raise you.

In his beautiful little book, *The Love that is God*, Fritz Bauerschmidt puts it this way: “The kiss that the church exchanges with God in the daily routine of prayer and service can at any moment pass beyond ritual and turn, as Dorothy Day puts it, ‘to rapture, a burning fire of tenderness and love [for the world].’ ” 115. Go deep with God — in dying and rising with Christ — and you go wide with the world.

Andrew and his unnamed friend, said, “we want to go where you’re staying.” And they took the time to let the person of Jesus shape their lives.

See Mission Page 6



RICHARD TOPPING

dence staying; but finding a home and making it your own. This isn’t hedging your bets, let’s check this out for a while, non-committal, interest. This is put down roots, sign me up curiosity.

In the 15th chapter of John, Jesus invites his followers: “abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” ‘Stick and stay with me, and your life with blossom with a rich harvest of goodness and beauty.’ It’s the same word: *meno*. The variety of translations — remain, abide, stay, dwell, make a home — make us miss the repetition. Andrew and the unnamed disciple are all in — they push all the chips to the centre of the table, they get up close and personal with Jesus so that Jesus’ life will leave a deep

Mission

Continued from Page 5

They started following a Rabbi, and in the depths of staying with him, understanding blows open, confession goes large. He is “Messiah.” “We have found the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote.” You are “the Son of God,” “the King of Israel.” Stay with Jesus and grow theo/logical, doxo/logical. Lingering in the depths of communion with Jesus is where mission is born.

Jonathan Edwards, an American theologian who lived during the times of the great religious revivals that swept the United States in the mid 18th century, wrote a wonderful treatise. The short title is: *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. In the book, Edwards chastises people who say that God touched their lives, but then get all fervent and fluent about themselves. He notes how easy it is to get self-centred, talking about me and my religious experience, a sort of spiritual narcissism.

Edwards says that a sign of true conversation is that our affections get turned away from me, myself and I, and turned toward God in holiness and toward others with gentleness. How do you know someone has been touched by God, that someone has stayed with Jesus? Well, they get all eccentric – moved toward God and other people.

Look at what happens to Andrew in our lesson. He stays on with Jesus, learning and listening, maybe asking questions, and after he’s stayed a while, he thinks of his brother, Simon. Spend enough time with Jesus and suddenly wonder, “what about those I love?” Who Jesus is — he is for the people I know and love. And for those whose religious affections get shaped by encounters with Jesus,

they’ve got to go, got to get to people who might know and believe and have life in Jesus’ name. Think “burning fire of tenderness and love [for the world].”

D. Bonhoeffer, at the illegal seminary of the confessing church at Finkenwalde in the years after 1935, had a creative pedagogy for students. He would send them out to meditate on passages from scripture for part of a day. At the end of the day, they would share what spoke to them. One student reported that he was tempted (by the devil) with thoughts of others while he trying to meditate on scripture.

Bonhoeffer said, “that’s not the devil; that’s the Holy Spirit. Other people should come to mind when you read scripture, now go back and meditate and take those people with you.”

Andrew features in three episodes in John’s Gospel, and every time does the same thing. Andrew has one card and he plays it all the time. He never says much to the people he meets. He isn’t the impulsive sort. He doesn’t visit with anyone too long. His friends drag him into doubt. He lives in the shadow of his loquacious brother.

But Andrew can introduce.

“When in doubt, introduce;” that’s the maxim he lives by. It’s as if he knows himself well enough to know that what people need, he doesn’t have. He finds people, people find him, and he takes them to meet Jesus. Do you remember who brought the boy with the loaves and fishes to Jesus in John chapter 6? Andrew did. When in doubt, don’t complain about what you don’t have, just bring what you do have to Jesus. Again, in chapter 12 of John, some Greeks say to Jesus’ disciples, “we want to see Jesus.” And who should take them to Jesus. Well, you guessed it, Andrew again. Andrew is the patron saint of evangelical networking.

Andrew meets Jesus, the Lamb

of God, stays with him, and then he high-tails it home. Like lingering stokes commissioning. The encounter gives him news, good news, for his talkative brother, Peter. “I have found Messiah” and he escorts Peter into the presence of Jesus. Andrew’s gets it: Jesus is no one’s private possession. Jesus is God’s gift to the world: he is the light that enlightens everyone and all who believe in him become God’s children. Introducing Andrew introduces his brother to Jesus. That’s low key, small ‘e’ evangelism. That’s all it is: introducing those you know and love to the one who knows and loves them, Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, can I tie up one loose end? Way back at the beginning of our lesson, John the Baptist points two disciples in the direction of Jesus, one was Andrew, we didn’t get the other one’s name. We do know that this other disciple also “stayed” with Jesus. He lingered alongside Andrew in the company of Jesus. What we don’t know is what he did. I mean Andrew stayed, and then left to tell his brother the most wonderful news – I met Messiah! Andrew went home and brought another, Peter, into the company of Jesus. What did the “other guy” do? I mean he/she heard too. She stalked Jesus all the way to where he was staying. Did she tell two friends and so on and so on? Did he think of anyone else to talk to? Aren’t we staying with Jesus today in worship? And in a time like this when loneliness, fear, anxiety about our future and Zoom doom haunt our world, I am sure someone comes to mind. You just gotta’ hope that the unnamed disciple does the same thing as Peter, and brings somebody to Jesus. I hope to God that you do. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Richard Topping is principal of Vancouver School of Theology. This message was first presented to St. Andrews, Sask.

Get back to where we once belonged

What if we spent less time reading reports, more time getting to know one another?

Ministry can often feel like a lonely task. Pastors with large undefined workloads feel lonely and stressed. Congregations discouraged by small attendance feel isolated and adrift. Does anyone understand the challenges we face out here?

Strong relationships help with these kinds of issues. The Presbyterian way of being the church is designed to provide those relationships. The 1876 Basis of Union of The Presbyterian Church in Canada rested on three pillars. Most familiar are affirming the Old and New Testaments as “the only infallible rule of faith and manners,” and naming the Westminster Confession of Faith as the “principal subordinate standard” interpreting the scriptures. Less well-known is the commitment to “government and worship . . . in accordance with the recognized principles and practice of Presbyterian Churches as laid down generally in ‘The Form of Presbyterian Church Government’ and in ‘The Directory for the Public Worship of God.’”

“Presbyterial Church Government” starts with the exalted Saviour Jesus Christ giving “ministry, oracles, and ordinances” to “one general church visible . . . for the gathering and perfecting of it in this life until his second coming.”

This visible church consists of all those who profess faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, together with their children. That’s a lot of people, but Presbyterial Government is ready: “When believers multiply to such a number, that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is lawful and expedient that they should be divided into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of mutual duties.”

In these distinct gatherings, people know one another, which facilitates central church functions such as education, support, discipleship and discipline. They know where and with whom they live, allowing for contextualized mission and outreach. They are well placed to exercise compassionate and corrective church discipline. These individual congregations have great advantages, but also limitations. As Paul explained to the Corinthians, every part of the body needs the other parts of the body. Discipline means guidance, not only of individual Christians, but also of gatherings of Christians. The parts of the church need the whole church to be sure they don’t wander from the way of Jesus.

Scot McKnight wrote in *A Church Called Tov*, toxic leaders “tend to gravitate toward . . . nonaccountable church structures where they answer to no one . . . narcissistic pastors and leaders are found in denominational churches as well. But independent churches are especially conducive to leaders who want to be unsupervised and unchecked.”

The parts of the Body of Christ don’t have the resources of the whole Body of Christ. As the Form of Governance recognized, individual congregations “need all mutual help one from another, both in regard of their intrinsic weakness and mutual dependence, as also in regard of enemies from without.”

This is why “The scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church. A presbytery consisteth of ministers of the word and such other public officers as are agreeable to and warranted by the Word of God to be church-governors, to join with the ministers in the government of the church.

“The scripture doth hold forth, that many particular congregations may be under one presbyterial government.”

This is a way the Presbyterian system emphasises relationships. Presbyterian government happens in a community. There is no individual CEO, even with wise advisors and assistants, who can provide proper oversight and guidance to the church. This is why we need to remember, as our *Book of Forms* reminds us, “the organic unity of the church is maintained in a hierarchy of courts (in contra-distinction to a hierarchy of persons).” It takes a community of disciples to shepherd a community of disciples.

An essay

By Rev. Paul D. Johnston

When Presbytery meets, there is business to do. But the Presbytery is also a gathering of neighbours. If the Knox congregation wonders how

to respond to a challenge, the people from St. Andrew’s can share how they responded. If one minister wonders what to do in a certain situation, another minister can offer advice gained in a similar experience.

As the Presbytery community shares their mutual help, it strengthens ministry across the region. As we receive from the strengths of our neighbours and give them help and encouragement in their need, we make real an often-overlooked blessing of the unity of the Body. As Paul told the Corinthians, “. . . as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness” — 2 Corinthians 8:13-14. (ESV)

In the ongoing community of the Presbytery, continuing conversation facilitates follow up. How’s it working? How can it work better? What can we change to better meet the situation next time?

See Relationships Page 8

Relationships

Continued from Page 7

How long did it take for things to turn around in your congregation? We are encouraged to stay the course when we know others are on the same journey we are.

The Form of Presbyterian Church Government acknowledges another level of government in Synodical Assemblies, but these are different groups so their oversight is different. As our *Book of Forms* notes, “The General Assembly differs from the lower courts of the church in that it has, as a body, no permanent existence.” It meets, does its business, then dissolves.

What abides after General Assembly are the decisions and rules it passes. It does not live with those rules. The Assembly can’t change, adapt, modify, or revise those rules because the Assembly that passed them no longer exists.

The Presbytery lives with its decisions. The members of Presbytery can see how they’re working out, where they need to be changed, adapted, clarified. Presbyteries live with their decisions, and live with the decision makers. They can continue to discuss the meaning of the decision; they can pursue how to adapt it to better enable ministry in their congregations.

Presbyteries have a permanent existence. In the form of Presbyterian governance, what abides in Presbyteries is not simply rules and policies but relationships and ways of living together. When the partnership of Presbyteries becomes the focus of union in our church, we are focused on things that incarnate the love and care of Jesus Christ.

Which is not to say Presbyteries function today as they ought. As the managerial revolution in the larger society influenced the church, and denominations became more like regulatory agencies, presbyteries lost focus. They became more interested in making sure congregations followed national rules and policies. We neglected the partnership and relationship aspects of life together.

But we can get back to where we once belonged. We can get back to focus on the relationships and partnership of the people who profess faith in and obedience to Jesus as the tie uniting the Body of Christ. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if our presbytery meetings spent less time reading reports and more time getting to know one another? We can commit to spending less time rule keeping and more time to burden sharing and comfort giving.

The church doesn’t grow when people see how well we’re following policies. It grows when people see how we love one another, for in strong relationships the love of Jesus Christ is made real. As we are strengthened by what others can give, as we give to help others in their need, we will live the comfort and care Jesus gives through His body. We will live in the place where Jesus promised to grow His church.

Rev. Paul D. Johnston is Minister at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Arnprior, Ontario. He serves on the Assembly Council as a presbytery representative from the Presbytery of Lanark and Renfrew.



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Members normally serve for two terms of three years each (six years total). Board members are elected at the spring annual general meeting. The board meets at least three times a year.

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