

Rural Ministries Through the Holy
June 15-17, 2023, Camp Abegweit, Prince Edward Island
Event Planning Team:

Catherine Smith, Marvin Anderson, Sara Jewel, Martin Dawson, Kerry Howart

I (Barb Miller) was fortunate to be able to attend this retreat in June along with three others from our congregation – Leslie Burrows, Karen and Anthony Waugh. Leslie and Karen had attended in 2022 and found it very enjoyable and well presented, so I was intrigued to experience it for myself.



Anthony, Karen, Barb, Leslie, Catherine, Marvin, Kerry

The purpose of the retreat is to gather folks from rural churches bringing our collective ideas around the future of the rural United Church and what that might look like a few years down the road.

The theme this year was **Restoring and Re-Storying Community**, with Marvin Anderson offering four sessions along with table discussions where we shared our thoughts, feelings and ideas around the following topics:

Restoring and Re-Storying our Ancestral Relations

Restoring and Re-Storying All Our Relations: How the Land is Us and More than Us

Restoring and Re-Storying Our Relation to the Stranger: Healing the Country and

Countryside

Going Deeper and Higher: The Joy of Deepening Community

During these sessions we had opportunities to hear other's ancestral stories and explore our own history; to learn of the strength, courage and determination of our families, as well as their struggles and mistakes along the way. Stories that have shaped us individually and as communities.

For most of us, our churches have been a central part of our lives, and contemplating what that might look like without a church building is uncomfortable to say the least and downright devastating at times. Along with the emotional attachments we have to our buildings and our 'things' is the fear of the unknown territory that we are being called to walk into with God's help.

The opening scripture for the event was the story of Abraham and Sarah, to whom God promised many sons and many tribes in a new land. My take on this is: Are we able to be as trusting and brave as they were in what we are invited to do, or where we may be invited to go, when our "meeting places" are no longer there? Is our focus on "no longer having" or "where can we go that is different, strange, new, maybe even exciting"?

Throughout the days we had "tasters" which were 30-minute presentations of what challenges some rural churches are facing, and what gifts have come out of those challenges. Topics covered subjects such as: Pop Up Church; Faithful Footprints; Stations of the Rural Church; and Being Affirming in Rural communities. All well prepared and informative with ideas to bring back to our own churches for future use.

Aside from the scheduled program, there was leisure time to check out some workshops such as Prayer Writing with Sara Jewel; a prayer center - opportunities to explore prayer through labyrinth, visual images for contemplation, mandala and string crafts; Healing Pathway ministry sessions were available; a free book table of gently used books, as well as new books by local authors for purchase.



Barb, Karen, Sara Jewel, Elaine Burrows

Worship times and spiritual prayers, led by Catherine, Sara, Martin, Linda, and Kerry, were truly inspiring. Familiar songs and prayers alongside new music, and new words to familiar music. Prayers and communion were Spirit infused and inclusive in thought and word. Marvin Anderson, with our own Karen Archibald-Waugh, presented a lovely guided meditation, called Harvesting the Gifts of the Ancestors, which took us back to our ancestors' footsteps as they left their known homes and traveled to a new and strange land.



Catherine

The property itself had access to the beach and a Chapel in the Woods to explore at our leisure, as well as a favorite spot of mine...a good sturdy swing set for children of all ages!



Barb

Home cooked meals and snacks were provided along with time to enjoy them at the picnic tables, chatting and getting to know one another.

All in all, it was a wonderful experience. I look forward to attending next year's event, which I understand will be held in Nova Scotia.