

**Rev. Dr. Martha ter Kuile Ordained
Minister
Nominated by Toronto South East Presbytery (Toronto)**

Biographical Statement

Born in Quebec City, I grew up in a large family, in Toronto and Montreal. Sunday school and youth choir and long midnight talks with friends laid the basis of a liberal faith. After studying music and African history at Victoria College, I began a career in international development. I worked for CIDA and the UN, living with my husband and children in Kenya, Ecuador, Nigeria, and later Guatemala, eventually returning to a farm in Ashton, near Ottawa. Through the traveling years, Cliff Elliott, a revered minister whom I knew from university days, would recommend books about faith, maintaining that thread of curiosity and reflection.

An M.Sc. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Guelph led me to focus my work on agricultural research for developing countries. I became interested in institutional development and governance through serving on the boards of two international agricultural research centres, and have continued as a governance consultant in a number of institutional and system evaluations.

While on the farm, I reconnected with the United Church at Ashton United, a warm and open-hearted congregation, with a thoughtful minister. This experience of welcome stirred up a spiritual reawakening which took me by surprise. (And also led to a Life Membership in the UCW!) In 1992, I began preparation for ordained ministry with an M. Div. at Queen's University, and served wonderful congregations at Zion United Church, Apple Hill Ontario and Bells Corners United Church, Ottawa before moving to Bloor Street United in Toronto in 2007. Through those years, I continued part-time theological studies at Saint Paul University, University of Ottawa, with an M.A. in Christian Ethics, on the history of Christian ideas about poverty. In 2012, I completed a PhD in Theology at Saint Paul University. My dissertation developed a Christian Realist Virtue Ethics, based on Reinhold Niebuhr and Martha Nussbaum.

Since my ordination, I've been active in in the wider church, serving on the General Council executive from 2000 to 2009, where I chaired the Permanent Committee on Governance, Planning and Budgeting Processes. As a member of Toronto Southeast Presbytery, I have served as chair of the Pastoral Oversight Team 2009-11, and Chair of Presbytery 2014-2016.

Reading is my main spiritual practice. Gardening restores my soul. In summer at the cottage, I like to swim and kayak and mess around in the woods with a machete. In town I walk a lot and go to concerts. I sing in an English and a Spanish choir.

I am blessed with three grown daughters, and four beloved grandchildren. My husband Coenraad, a soil scientist of Dutch nationality, died in 2006.

Statement about the Church

Like every generation of Christians, we are called to discover what it means to follow Jesus in this time and place. To do that in a season of transition and transformation, we have to become good listeners and learners. We need to pay attention to the world around us: a world which is secular, and diverse, and crying out for justice. That is the world God loves.

It is in listening and learning that we will encounter the power for good that the Gospel promises. We can listen to indigenous voices as we make the slow journey toward reconciliation with first peoples of this land. We can learn with others about social and environmental challenges to a flourishing planet, so that our work for justice is effective. We can learn, and keep on learning, lessons about the harm that racism, and ableism, and LGBTQ exclusion do to us and to our brothers and sisters. We can listen to the newcomer and youthful voices in our midst about different ways of being church. We can learn from people of other faiths about practicing faithfully when your neighbours think your religion is a bit weird. We can learn from our own rich traditions about a faith that is both ancient and always new.

This is a critical moment in the life of our church. We are facing a significant governance challenge with the restructuring – but not simply in the sense of belt tightening and new policies and committees and procedures. Even more important than the administrative details will be establishing the way we work together, as we live into the new structure with transparency, flexibility, and determination. We have to communicate well, and stay connected as we implement changes that will make us more nimble. And we may need to show some forbearance! The creation of the new Denominational Executive, the Regions, and the Office of Vocations will delight governance geeks, and I confess that I am one.

But governance isn't an end in itself. This restructuring is a kind of decluttering exercise. The point of it is to create more space and time and energy for what we are called to do and be. At a book study, someone said recently, *the church needs to be where the people are hurting*. And whether that is in our own pews, or in the neighbourhoods we live in, or in the public discourse, we want to be able to be there. As we worship God together, encourage one another, reach into our communities with compassion, advocate for justice, and share our faith, we need to be ready to act in ways that are both old and new. The new structure will help us do that.

I do think we are working our way toward a new way of being the church. The future hasn't been defined yet. There is plenty of scope for imagination and creativity, even when times are stressful. Looking around me at our beloved United Church, I believe that we have both more vitality and more freedom than we recognize. More compassion to offer, more hope to share. We need to dig down and find that vitality. We need to have the nerve to live out that freedom.

Writing this in the first days of spring, I think of what a plant needs, to flourish – first to be rooted deeply in the soil, drawing nutrients from the layers of earth beneath. And it also needs to be open to the air, and the sunshine, and the replenishing rain. As this season of transition and transformation unfolds, we in the church will need to be deeply rooted in the Holy Mystery of God's love, and also open to the breezes and sunshine (and occasional shower!) of the Spirit as we go forward.

Each one of us will have a part to play over the next triennium, and all will make their contribution. It is a privilege to let the church consider my name as it discerns the next Moderator.