

Rev. Dr. Richard Bott

Ordained Minister

Nominated by Vancouver South Presbytery (British Columbia Conference)

Biographical Statement

Hello! I'm Richard Bott—a member of the order of ministry (ordained stream) of The United Church of Canada. I was born and grew up on the north shore of Lake Superior, in the town of Marathon, Ont., on the traditional and unceded territory of the *Biigtigong Nishnaabeg*. It has only been in the past few years that I have come to realize that nearly everywhere I have lived has been on territory unceded by the First Nations of those places—the meaning and significance of which I continue to grapple with as I move forward in my understanding of both myself as a Settler/Descendent and our collective history as a church and as a country.

Since being ordained in 1994, I have served in the congregations of Trinity United Church in Iroquois Falls, Ont., St. Marys United Church in St. Marys, Ont., St. Andrews-Haney (which, with Hammond United, became Golden Ears United Church), in Maple Ridge, B.C., and Dunbar Heights (which, with Ryerson United, became Pacific Spirit United Church) in Vancouver.

The United Church of Canada is now, and has always been, the defining institution in my life. Although I couldn't always recognize it then, I had the great good fortune of growing up in a community of faith that nurtured my gifts and challenged me to do more. St. John's United Church was, and continues to be, a vital part of their community, sharing faith, and love in tangible acts of care, just like thousands of other United Church congregations across the land.

I understood my call while still in high school, but thought that my ministry was to be outside of the church. Others' willingness to struggle with me in discernment showed me a different path. I have lived my life as a beloved child of God, not just with my congregations, but with the church body as a whole.

I'm certain that some of you reading this are people I've met. Perhaps it's been on presbytery committees, or facilitating workshops and worship services in a number of Conferences. Maybe it's been while I have been taking part in worship, interchurch/interfaith, and stewardship committees, or other working groups of the General Council. I've been given the opportunity to facilitate the work of small groups, as well as chairing a presbytery (Huron Perth) and a Conference (London). Other folks may recognize my name from my liturgical writing—especially prayers, calls, and litanies that have been printed in *Gathering*, and then brought home by my colleagues to their congregations. We might even have met online, in one of the various iterations of our denomination's presence there, or on various social media. (If we haven't had the chance to meet, feel free to connect with me. I'd love

to hear about what's going on in your part of the people of God we call The United Church of Canada!)

Statement About the Church

I deeply love who we are as The United Church—a community of Christ-connected communities, doing our level best to try and figure out what it means to be Jesus' people in this day and age. We can look at our past and celebrate much of how our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived their understanding of this faith, while also recognizing the broken parts that have done damage to many people, in many ways. And, while we need to acknowledge our past and learn from it, we also need to realize that much of *how* we lived into our mission and ministry doesn't connect with where people are *now*. The world has gotten broader, and numerically and demographically, our church has gotten smaller.

And yet I believe that we are, in so many ways, well placed as a denomination in Canada of the 21st century. We have an expansive understanding of what it means to be Christians, one that can offer support to help people who are interested in exploring what it means for them to enter into and deepen their relationship with the Divine, through Jesus; and to live into the abundance of loving God, loving our neighbours, and loving ourselves, with *all* of who we are. Just as importantly, I believe we have a willingness to learn from our neighbours' experiences of life, of love, and of the Divine—and in our places of agreement *and* our places of difference, work together to mend the world.

The changes we are facing are frightening. The next few years will continue to be highly anxious for many of us. What will our structural changes mean? How will they affect me? How will they affect my congregation? What are we going to look like? Will we ever, effectively, respond to the changes in climate, to the injustices we see among economic strata, among genders, among races, among those of us who "have" and those of us who don't? Question upon question upon question...

I am hoping that we will find it in ourselves to challenge the world's anxiety, and reach deep within who we are, recognizing that that we are inSpirited, and we can grow inspiration wherever we go in the world. I believe that we will lean into our "God moments," and build excitement in each other for the possibilities that Christ is building in us!

I believe that worship is the heart of the church—that we express our connection with God, with each other, and with the wider world through the act of coming together in prayer, in celebration, in penance, and in joyful relation with God. It is central to our ability, as Christians, to go and be agents of positive change.

I believe that in times of change, it becomes even more important for us to listen—to one another, to the wider world, to Jesus' teaching, to the Holy Spirit's insistence, and to the Creator's love.

I believe that we need to work to communicate well—with ourselves, with other members of our communities of faith, with other communities of The United Church of Canada, and with people of a variety of worldviews in the wider world.

I believe our communication needs to be not only with our actions, but also with our words. It's okay for us to say, "Why am I joining in this work? Well... I'm part of The United Church of Canada, and we believe that it's important to live Christ's love, every day. That's a part of the reason I'm here." We can be proud, without being prideful. We can work out of our faith and worldview, without taking away from someone else's.

I believe that each of us needs to explore what this faith in God means to us; and what Jesus means to us. As we explore it as individuals, I hope that we can find ways of exploring it as congregations—as communities of faith and fellowship. We may never come to complete agreement, remembering that these kinds of discussions have been going on in the church for thousands of years, and wider faith discussions in the world for thousands more. But living into that exploration together, is a big part of what it means to be engaged as church.

I hope that when we get afraid—because each of us will get afraid at some point—we can reach out to one another and be heavenly messengers of God's love. I hope that in those moments we will whisper, or speak, or shout, or sing, or dance, or simply show with our heart, "Be not afraid! There is Good News, Great Joy!"

I believe that we are people of Good News.

I believe that we are people of Great Joy.

Whatever our institutional shape might become, I believe that we—O people of The United Church of Canada—have many more years to live lives of faith and of love.

So, let's go and do it—and let's help one another as we go along the way.