

**Rev. Wanda Stride**

**Ordained Minister**

**Nominated by Kawartha Highlands Presbytery (Bay of Quinte Conference)**

### **Biographical Statement**

Hello! It is an honourable place to be, spilling my life onto a page because I am letting my name stand for Moderator of The United Church of Canada.

As immediate past president of Bay of Quinte Conference, I expected to have a summer of leisure as my family and I regroup from a deeply rewarding year serving the church through conference.

I am deeply humbled by this nomination—almost beyond words. What does it mean that some people think Christ is calling me to lead the church in our time? I can only wonder.

My experience in our church is not typical for this nomination. I work hard at presbytery and Conference. Since my ordination in 2009 from Toronto Conference, I have served the wonderful people of Woodville and Peniel Pastoral Charge in Kawartha Highlands Presbytery; this year they enter a regional team ministry agreement with three United Church neighbours.

I have supported students as they navigate the new Pathways to Ministry pilot, helped organize a roving-VBS in our presbytery, led intergenerational trips of solidarity with El Salvadoran global partners at Emmanuel Baptist Church. Nationally, I have written articles for denominational magazines, *The Observer* and *Mandate*, and served as a consultant for the EDGE network in Central Ontario.

I have two main spiritual practices. I like to run and I'm helping to organize the Alvin Dixon Run this year, drawing from running two marathons and a handful of half-marathons.

My other passion is music. As a singer-songwriter, I had the privilege of playing piano in the GC42 band in Corner Brook, Nfld. I was also a commissioner from Bay of Quinte. It was a busy week! I provided music for the national event, More than Franchises 2012, in Toronto, and led or helped out with music and worship at Bay of Quinte Conference Annual Meeting over the past nine years. I have a solo CD of ministry-inspired music, and two CDs with a Celtic folk duo.

I believe that we can find Christ's joy through artistic expression and passion. When we have that joy, anything is possible.

I felt the call to ministry in high school. Instead of entering theological college, a diverse foundation has enabled me to become a flexible, useful minister in small, rural congregations. While studying English and History at the University of Toronto, I wrote for *The Varsity* student newspaper, and became the unofficial religion reporter in 1988 and 1989, an important time in The United Church of Canada. I did French and English public relations for a hospital satellite

network, community newspaper reporting, and finally an eight-month stint as a political assistant at Queen's Park; a crooked path that inevitably led me back to the church. I was music director at Trinity United in Cannington, Ont. and Stouffville United in Toronto Conference. It was at Stouffville where my life changed. My partner, John, and I married, had our two children (Catie, 19, and Sam, 17), and I finally explored the call to ministry. Sam was still in diapers when I started at Emmanuel College. Eventually, I was appointed to do student supply at Lemonville United for four years. I still live in Uxbridge, Ont. with John, Sam, and my mother Doris Stride. Catie is studying neuroscience at McGill University in Montreal.

### **Statement about the Church**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus talks a lot about love and joy. One phrase from Chapter 15:11 resonates with me in this time of change; Jesus wants us to abide in his love, so that we receive his joy. Joy. It's a third-Sunday-of-Advent word that doesn't get much airplay when we talk about governance and restructuring. But this is Christ's wish for us.

As I traveled Bay of Quinte Conference this past year, I invited presbyteries to name their loves, their frustrations, and their concerns about our church today. Not surprisingly, a few common themes emerged:

- lament, from missing the days of bursting Sunday School programs to fearing the loss of presbytery, their connection to the larger church, and lament over our history of broken relationships with indigenous neighbours, and the Indian Residential School System;
- fear, that we are getting the restructuring wrong, and that we won't survive the changes;
- confusion about people's personal roles going forward.

While these voices of concern are loud, the most prominent and memorable theme that emerged, one that gives me hope, is one of joy: joy found in faith through the church, joy found in each other's presence, and most importantly, joy found in our love for the Christ who calls us to serve the marginal, the lonely, the hungry, in his name.

The changes we are facing are not just in governance. I am hearing faithful church members wonder, why is the distance between them and their secular neighbours growing? Why aren't younger generations coming to church? What is the meaning of being church today? How are we supposed to serve our neighbours when we are tired and so few in numbers?

These are powerful questions that come from the core of meaning and purpose, on a personal level, but also on a national church level.

These are questions that I can't answer in a statement about the church, but they are questions we can ask together, we can pray about, and we can trust in the spirit that guides us from those discussions. All the while, I believe Jesus is calling us through this chaos to a place of joy.

Please don't think I'm using this word lightly or in any trite way. Joy can only be felt when we feel respected, grounded, heard, and loved.

However, we move forward as a church, and whatever happens with remits this summer; whatever happens over the next three years as we face this almost-overwhelming challenge of living into the processes and offices and structures of our new way... however we do this, it must be done in respect for each other, grounded in our faith, in a spirit of listening to the voices that are normally quiet or missing, and to love in a radical and challenging way that lifts neighbour to the level of self.

When we care for each other in this way, we will know the joy of Christ. My friends, what a strong and relevant church we will be on that day!