

## **President-Elect Message, Catherine Stuart**

“May the light of God illumine the heart of my soul. May the flame of Christ kindle me to love. May the fire of the Spirit free me to live this day, this night and forever.”

This simple Celtic prayer written by J. Phillip Newell, encourages me as I reflect on where the Light, the Flame and the Fire are calling me as I serve as President-Elect, but also to where they are calling us as the Maritime Conference. It is true that sometimes it feels as though darkness can overcome us, as we listen to news reports, read financial statements, and deal with every day challenges of being the church. This darkness can feel overwhelming and scary because we don't know what the future will bring—but yet, signs that the Light is not overcome are within us and around us. When we see churches taking courageous steps to amalgamate rather than close, when we witness countless churches and communities joining the effort to welcome refugees, when we engage in passionate discussions about the future of our church, and when individuals discern how they can offer themselves in ministry, we kindle sparks of God's Light, we feel the love of Christ's Flame and are able to dance around the fire of the Spirit's presence.

At a service celebrating the First Anniversary of one of our Pastoral Charges (how exciting is that?!), I had the privilege of hearing the stories and feeling the energy and excitement brought by doing a new, courageous thing. Sure, there were challenges, but there was great celebration because many of those challenges were faced and overcome. There was excitement in continuing to be a Christian Community, gathering around the Light, and being a beacon of hope for their wider community. It was here, as well as on my own pastoral charge in PEI, that I saw fervent, whole-hearted, enthusiastic energy around the questions, “How do we continue to be the Light of Christ together?” and “How do we continue to be a United Church presence in our communities?”

These questions illuminate for me the yearnings of our conference as well, which I think will be addressed as we engage our theme for this year's Annual Meeting: “Gathering Strength, Scattering Light.” This theme excites me, as I hope it will excite you, because it encapsulates much of what I find at our meetings: People gathered to share stories and experiences (while dealing with some business!) and then taking the strength of those shared experiences back to our pastoral charges and presbyteries to continue to be the Light of Christ. Even though there are many challenges that face us together, I am confident that the Spirit's Fire will guide us to where we need to be. As your incoming President, I look forward to gathering around God's Light to hear where you find the Flame of Love and the Fire of the Holy Spirit burning. There is much Light within our Maritime Conference, and I hope that, together, we will find ways to spread it!

Let us Dance around the Fire,  
Rev. Catherine Stuart