

Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne

Ordained Minister

Nominated by Pacific Mountain Regional Council

Brief Biography

Carmen Lansdowne is a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation, and a life-long member of The United Church of Canada (UCC). Baptized into the UCC in 1975, she waited until adulthood to make a profession of faith which came from a deep sense of personal spirituality and a calling to participate fully in the life and work of the church.

She attended the Vancouver School of Theology (VST) in the MDiv program from 2003-2007, and after successful completion of her internship Marengo Pastoral Charge (Alsask & Loverna, SK), she was ordained to further study in 2007. She completed coursework for a ThM degree at VST in 2008, then moved to Berkeley, CA where she commenced coursework for a PhD at the Graduate Theological Union. She completed the ThM in 2011 and the PhD in 2016.

In addition to her theological contributions as a writer and speaker, Carmen has served the church in a variety of roles. From 2006-2013 she served on the Executive and Central Committees of the World Council of Churches, as well as was an ex-officio corresponding member of the Executive, General Council. She continues to attend global theological and church gatherings by invitation. She has served on the Pension Board of The United Church of Canada, the Theology, Interchurch-Interfaith Committee, executive search committees for the General Council Office and the World Council of Churches, and various subcommittees of both the WCC and UCC. She served as one of six facilitators offering feedback from commissioners at General Council 43. She currently chairs the Indigenous Candidacy Board of the United Church and sits on the Keepers of the Vision of the Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. She also recently joined the Board of Directors of the Vancouver Foundation – Canada's largest community foundation.

Carmen joined First United Church Community Ministry Society as Executive Director in February 2017. Under her leadership, she has effected an organizational turnaround resulting in increased capacity and stability. She has also shepherded to construction-phase a \$65M redevelopment of First United's property in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The new purpose-built facility will triple First United's programming and ministry space and add 103 non-market rental units of Indigenous housing (to be operated by Lu'ma Native Housing Society). Under Carmen's leadership, First United has developed strong labour relations with its unionized staff, built a highly skilled and committed leadership team, increased revenues, and become a certified living wage employer. She worships at Lynn Valley United Church as she is able.

She continues to maintain academic interests through guest lectures and various writing projects and as a Christ Institute Fellow with the Westar Institute. Carmen guest preaches at different communities of faith several times a year, and remains committed to Indigenous way

of being, parenting and partnering. She lives in North Vancouver with her partner, two children, and their dog Cocoa.

A Statement of Vision

I am deeply humbled by the call to serve The United Church of Canada by letting my name stand for the role of Moderator. This call has come from a circle of friends, colleagues, mentors and elders whom I deeply trust, and whose words of encouragement, caution, excitement and concern I have sat with in prayer.

The role of Moderator is a permanent leadership position in our church in its current iteration, but one of the best things about our church is the fact that the leadership within the role is not permanent. As such over time the church has benefited through the diverse backgrounds and gifts of those who have gone before – shaping and tending this branch of the Christian tree that is so dear to us as Canadians.

The past two years have been particularly challenging: We have suffered the very harsh and real impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the economic, racial, political and social divisions it has worsened at all levels of society. The confirmation of thousands of unmarked graves across the country, sparked by 215 graves found at the former site of Kamloops Indian Residential School (and then over 6,000+ and counting across the country), has renewed calls for Canada to seriously address Indigenous justice concerns. We are on a continuing journey of examining the long and troubled relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians; the Indigenous church has not yet “accepted” the 1986 apology – in many ways we are still waiting for the rest of the church to make the necessary changes to live into that apology. I believe this is still an area of misunderstanding for many in the church, and bears further discussion as part of our denominational journey of repentance and healing. And I believe that there is much the non-Indigenous church can learn from Indigenous peoples as part of that journey.

So many of our traditional Indigenous cultures are deeply place-based, grounded in concepts that roughly translate to “the good living / the good life.” That good living is an active relationship of reciprocity and respect for the earth our mother – a respect that is based on striking balance and a differently oriented political and economic systems and stronger social connection. The Climate Emergency is not waiting for political systems to catch up. We have elders who remind us that there were other ways of living, and youth demanding we reorient ourselves to preserve any quality of life for their future. Those of us who make decisions about our elders and our youth have a moral obligation to take the climate emergency seriously and to call on our country to pivot in radical ways; ways that we know are possible due to the types of policy changes and leadership we saw during the Second World War and the Apollo Mission in the US – and in our global and collective responses (as imperfect as they were) to Covid-19.

Our church is currently working to be a place of deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice. All three of those are traditions deeply grounding our faith: prayer and awe at the Mystery, living in the way of Jesus, and trying to seek structures and systems in society that

would realize the world we believe a triune God calls us to co-create so that we might have life and have it in abundance. Traditional Indigenous ways of life are deeply spiritual, based on protocols that govern our interactions with each other towards right action, and a commitment to living in balance with the world and with each other. In many ways, we were traditionally focused on the present and the future in a way that could be life giving for our collective futures. So much of western civilization is focused on tradition, on the past, on facts. Those things are important, but rather than history and story being based on timelines and definitions of what is “true” or “fact” – history for Indigenous peoples is meant to teach us how to be together in this moment and into the future. The concept of looking into the future seven generations to make sure we realize the full consequences of our actions today would require us to make decisions differently in order to truly live with respect in creation and to create that good living for all.

As we continue to live into this newly restructured church and are still trying to find our bearings, many of us are still grieving what was. In particular, the process and outcomes of restructuring has left the Indigenous church adrift in many ways. The restructuring of the church (and the elimination of transfer & settlement before that) have also impacted the rural church in challenging ways.

Can we pivot in a 3-year period and shed our colonial baggage, solving all of our societal, political, economic, or environmental problems? No. But we can live into our 2006 commitment to each other to become an intercultural church. Being an intercultural church together means that we are radically committed to community, to granting each other dignity and listening to each other in ways that transforms who each of us is and who we are together. It is heeding the biblical call to “Fear not.” It is gathering when we fear there isn’t enough but realizing there are fishes and loaves among us. It is watching everyday events and realizing they are as miraculous as turning water into wine or seeing Jesus walk on water.

My vision for The United Church of Canada is that together we can work to continue to define who we are. To build new connections and rebuild old ones. To work towards social change that sees a world cared for, and human dignity honoured. To walk together every day in repentance and reconciliation. To march and fight and change unjust systems together. To pray together. To sing together. To discern together. Because truly we are not alone. We live in God’s world.