

United in God's Work

We are not alone... Thanks be to God.
—A New Creed

Recommendations

We believe God is doing a new thing and is calling The United Church of Canada to be part of a new creation. The Comprehensive Review, which our task group has been leading since the fall of 2012, is about the church listening and responding to God's call.

After two-and-a-half years of conversations, consultations, research, analysis, and prayer, we offer the following recommendations, which we believe would best enable the church to participate energetically and faithfully in what God is doing. These recommendations would focus our resources on supporting, enlivening, and accompanying communities of faith to live out God's mission at this moment in our society. They would enable us to continue to come together to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus Christ. They would create a more flexible and responsive structure that could change and adapt as God continues to create.

These recommendations would also change the church dramatically. But we believe God is calling the church to change boldly and the church is ready to hear that call. In that spirit, we offer the following recommendations for the church's prayerful consideration.

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that:

1 Chasing the Spirit (p. 13)

- a) The United Church make a commitment to supporting new ministries and new forms of ministry through an initiative that tentatively would be called Chasing the Spirit. This commitment to the United Church's future would be demonstrated by investing 10 percent of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund in local and regional initiatives to transform existing ministries and launch new ones. Partial implementation of this initiative would begin in 2016, with full implementation by 2018.

2 Aboriginal Ministries (p. 17)

- a) A process be established to continue conversations with the Aboriginal ministries that form the Aboriginal Ministries Council to build a relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples based on mutuality, respect, and equity.
- b) To the extent possible, spending on Aboriginal ministries be maintained during the next triennium while discussions continue, and thereafter a set percentage of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund be dedicated to this ministry.
- c) The important work of Indigenous justice and right relations continue so the church can continue to live out its apologies to Aboriginal peoples.

3 A Three-Council Model (p. 20)

- a) The United Church be governed by three councils:
 - i) Communities of faith that would nurture people in their faith journeys and, through the Spirit, inspire and empower them to live out their faith in vibrant and
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- diverse ministries. These would include any community of people based in Jesus Christ that gathers to explore faith, to worship, and to serve. Communities of faith would have a much broader range of decision-making authority than they currently do, including initiating and ending calls and appointments of ministers and buying and selling property, subject to denominational and regional policies. They would function in covenantal relationship with the regional councils.
- ii) Regional councils that would provide advice, support, and services to, covenant with, and connect communities of faith. Regional councils would meet at least once a year in person, electronically, or via their executives to make decisions, and would be composed of one lay representative and one ministry representative (for communities of faith with ministry personnel) from each community of faith in the region.
 - iii) A denominational council that would nurture the identity of the United Church, discern and express a denominational voice, and connect the United Church with God's wider church by making decisions on denomination-shaping issues such as public witness, theology, and governance structure. The denominational council would meet every three years, as it currently does, but would be much larger than the current General Council because it would include representatives from every community of faith. The denominational council's executive would be much smaller than the current Executive of the General Council.
- b) Clusters of communities of faith in a geographic area be encouraged to gather regularly for collegiality, support, and learning, and networks link people with common interests across the church. Although the clusters and networks would not be formal governance bodies, they would be central to living out our faith.

4 A College of Ministers (p. 23)

- a) A College of Ministers be established to accredit, oversee, and discipline ministers. The college would ensure only qualified persons would be accredited as United Church ministers and the standards of ministry would be maintained.

5 An Association of Ministers (p. 28)

- a) A working group of ministers be struck to explore whether to set up an association of ministers. This process could include work on the membership of such an association, its role, and how it might be funded.

6 Funding a New Model (p. 30)

- a) The church spend only what it receives, which would require reducing spending by at least \$11 million by 2018 from 2015 spending levels. Deeper reductions would be required to fund proposed investments in Chasing the Spirit and a College of Ministers. The task group provided for \$13.8 million in cuts in its modelling.¹
- b) The number and function of staff depend on the revenues received.
- c) The Mission and Service Fund be used only for ministry and mission activities.
- d) Governance and support services (administration) at the regional and denominational levels be funded by assessing communities of faith.

¹ The task group's November 2014 update indicated a net cut of \$10 million would be required to live within our means, based on the 2014 budget (www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/141125-0). Based on updated spending projections for 2015, that figure is now at least \$11 million.

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- e) The sharing of all resources, wealth, and abundance be encouraged across the church.

Invitation

We believe in God: who has created and is creating...
—A New Creed

As Christians, we believe God created the universe and continues to create, tend, and enliven it. God calls all followers of Jesus to participate in God's mission to heal and restore creation and follow the example of Jesus by embodying God's love in the world. As God continues to create, God invites us to participate in new ways. This is our reformed tradition: "Once reformed, always reforming."

That is the origin of the Comprehensive Review Task Group, which the 41st General Council (2012) mandated "to examine the comprehensive vision and circumstances of The United Church of Canada and develop a report and recommendations for the 42nd General Council 2015 that will best enable the church to live faithfully in God's world at this time in the church's life." The impetus for the Comprehensive Review was both structural and financial, particularly the need to identify at least \$11 million in cost savings. But the main goal was to enable the church to participate more energetically and faithfully in God's new creation. In the conversation we led, we heard the church yearns to participate abundantly and joyfully in God's mission and celebrate the innovative, creative, and vital ministries that are emerging. Creating a more agile and sustainable structure is a key step toward the spiritual renewal the church is seeking.

After two-and-a-half years of conversations, consultations, research, analysis, and prayer, we offer the following report, vision, and recommendations. Over and over in our conversations, we heard fears we would not be bold enough, and we hope the following report will allay those fears. The following recommendations are substantial because we believe God is calling the church to change boldly. We also believe the church is ready to hear that call. It will not be easy. It has always been challenging and countercultural to proclaim Jesus as our purpose and passion.

These recommendations would change the church dramatically. We would have to let go of things we have always done and things we cherish. We would have to live within our means and accept that we will be smaller. We would have to have the courage to turn our gaze outward, look for new places where the Spirit is active, experiment, and take risks. We would need to expand our vision of partnership with others who share our commitments for healing our world, both ecumenically and in our larger society. And we would also have to be prepared to let ministries end. While these changes would be painful, we believe they offer the best path forward. Our Christian faith tells us that in death and loss there is hope of resurrection and new life.

We are well aware that our task group is the latest in a long line of committees stretching back decades that have been mandated to recommend structural change. In the past, the church has often responded by deferring decisions, striking more committees, and mandating more research. We can no longer wait. The imminent depletion of financial reserves, which we have tapped into for years to make up chronic budget deficits, and the need to find significant cost savings mean keeping things the way they are is not an option. Choosing to keep current structures and processes as financial and volunteer resources decline would still result in deep cuts but without the hope of renewal.

Throughout the church's history, we have listened faithfully to God's call and opened ourselves to the gospel speaking in new ways as our context has changed. The very

creation of the United Church in 1925—one of the first unions of churches in the world to cross denominational lines—was spurred by concerns around serving the vast Canadian northwest and the desire for more effective overseas mission. Over the years, the church has continued to respond prophetically to new contexts and issues, including ordaining women beginning in 1936, making declarations on interfaith relationships from 1986 onward, deciding in 1988 that sexual orientation is not a barrier to church membership or ordination, and offering apologies to Aboriginal peoples in 1986 and 1998 for its role in imposing European culture on them and its complicity in operating Indian residential schools.

We believe God is once again calling the church to live out God's mission and share the good news of Jesus Christ in new ways. Like many mainline Protestant denominations, the United Church has experienced decades of membership decline as Canada has become more diverse and secular. Church attendance, which was once a regular part of most Canadians' lives, has become the exception rather than the rule, and many young people have never been part of a faith community. As a result of these demographic and cultural trends, we no longer have the volunteers or money to support our current structures and processes. While there is energy and hope in parts of our church, these challenges are hindering our ability to participate effectively in God's mission.

In the face of these challenges, God helps us see opportunities. In a world where injustice, inequality, and violence mar God's creation, Jesus' message of love and hope remains deeply relevant. Many people who are seeking answers to life's big questions yearn to connect with something larger than themselves, but their past experiences or perceptions may lead them to believe they will not find what they are looking for in church. Yet the emergence of new forms of church and a renewed emphasis on discipleship and evangelism in some communities of faith show us some of the possibilities God is opening to us. We believe God is inviting us to change radically and renew ourselves so we can engage fully and authentically with diverse communities in a changing context.

This report is just another step on the church's journey toward renewal. We believe our recommendations, if adopted, would address the church's immediate challenges. We also believe they would create a new framework that would equip the church to adapt and respond faithfully in the future to new contexts and opportunities as God continues to create.

Those who came before us responded to God's call with courage, faith, and hope. They left behind treasured traditions and stepped faithfully into an unknown future just as the first disciples left their nets to follow Jesus. We invite you to explore and discuss the following recommendations; pray for wisdom and grace; and give thanks for ancestors and traditions. May we open ourselves with faith, hope, and anticipation as we seek new ways of participating faithfully and energetically in God's new creation.

Prayer

O Holy One, Source of All, Creator of all that is and will be, Christ, Saviour, and Redeemer, hope of the world to come, Spirit and Sustainer, Advocate, breath of life and love...

We give thanks for your creation.

In awe and wonder, we marvel at the new life and beauty you are continually creating. And we know, beyond all sense of knowing, that what you are doing is good.

We draw inspiration and strength from places where we already see hope lived out and the Spirit unleashed.

And we know that your Spirit—that sense of unwavering hope—is stirring and speaking life in the very depths of our being and inviting us to be part of your new creation.

We know our attention sometimes strays and we focus on things that do not serve your mission.

But your mission is our mission.

We pray for insight, that we may sense your call.

We pray for the strength to let go.

And we pray for the courage to travel more lightly.

May we draw closer to you and your vision, as inspired and invited by Jesus' own example. Propel us into your future, which is rooted in the richness of our past.

This is our prayer, and in the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

May it be so. Amen

Vision

The moment is now! God is calling the United Church into a new creation. In these challenging times the Spirit comes as wind and fire as it did long ago at Pentecost, enlivening our faith and turning us outward in love for the world, as Jesus upended the tables of the money-changers in God's temple.

*We are not alone,
we live in God's world.*

We are called to be vibrant communities of faith, where people encounter God with their heart, mind, body, and spirit—the Holy One:

*who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.*

We are called to be communities of faith of all shapes, sizes, and forms, yet interconnected as a united church:

*...called to be the Church,
to celebrate God's presence,*

where people experience the love of God in Jesus Christ; where they are welcomed, included, and affirmed, celebrated in all their diversity, and supported and challenged in their faith journeys.

We are called to be communities where people are transformed by the Spirit, forgiven and strengthened in renewed life, empowered to be courageous, and encouraged to take faithful risks; where we discover our gifts for ministry and, as disciples of Jesus, are sent forth to share the gospel story in word and action; and where we are compassionate toward neighbour and all our relations to work for a better and more just, peace-filled world.

*...to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.*

We are called to be communities of hope, love, prayer, and action, modelled in Jesus' ministry and united in God's work.

*In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.*

We say to the world: **You are not alone.**

Thanks be to God.

Process

The Comprehensive Review is the United Church's attempt to listen and respond faithfully to God's call to be part of a new creation. From the beginning, it was clear this process would be a huge task that would require the participation and engagement of the whole church. "Everything is on the table," General Secretary Nora Sanders said in August 2012 when the 41st General Council directed that a comprehensive review of the church be conducted.

Many faithful and talented people put their names forward to lead this work. From them, the Executive of the General Council appointed seven members to the task group on the recommendations of the General Council Nominations Committee and the Aboriginal Ministries Council. Moderator Gary Paterson worked closely with the task group as a key focus of his ministry as the church's spiritual leader. Together, we are a diverse and passionate group that collectively brings the wisdom of various generations, experience with organizational change, connections to local and global ministries, deep roots in rural and urban congregational leadership, experience with various streams of ministry, and a commitment to listen to and lead the church in this conversation.

From our first meeting, we recognized that reimagining the church for the future was not just our work but also the work of the whole church. So we invited you to share your hopes, dreams, insights, and ideas, and regularly reported back to the church what we were hearing. The result was a lively and unprecedented conversation that engaged the whole church: pastoral charges and other communities of faith, presbytery and Conference meetings, youth forums, Aboriginal circles, the United Church Women, global partners, chairs of national committees, the Executive of the General Council, senior staff of Conferences and the General Council Office, individuals, and others. These conversations took place in person, by video conference, on social media, in online discussion forums on www.unitedfuture.ca, and in correspondence. Some were formal consultations, while others were free-flowing conversations. But in all of them, the task group heard passion and energy for participating in God's new creation and recognition that the church needs to refocus its resources to do that effectively.

In addition to these conversations across the church, we conducted a thorough review of key reports from past committees and task groups, and researched and analyzed organizational models from other denominations and non-profit organizations. We also discerned and debated possible options in our nearly monthly meetings, while opening ourselves to the movement of the Spirit by grounding ourselves in scripture and prayer.

The collective wisdom of the church guided this process. We heard hope, energy, ideas, struggles, frustration, and everything in between. We heard about innovative, creative, and vital ministries that are emerging across the church, and other parts of our body that are challenged to live out Jesus' commission because of diminishing volunteer and financial resources. We heard innovative ideas, big-picture wonderings, and proposals for alternate models. We also heard the church knows it has to change, and most importantly, that the church is *ready* to change. What we heard was incredibly varied, reminding us that the body of Christ does not always speak with one voice and that many parts make up the whole. The church's unique cultures and regional differences truly reflect the abundance of the church and remind us that we certainly are not alone, not when we come together to do God's work.

We have been committed to transparency throughout this process. From the beginning, we believed the Comprehensive Review would result in positive and healthy change only if we

invited the whole church to participate actively and authentically in the conversation and shared our preliminary findings and thinking in progress. To that end, we shared

- [regular online updates](#)
- the results of [conversations with more than 600 communities of faith](#) that took place throughout 2013
- two discussion papers—[Fishing on the Other Side](#) and [Trust God; Trust the Body](#)—that set out some preliminary concepts
- feedback [presbyteries](#) and [Conferences](#) offered on these discussion papers
- an [update](#) in November 2014 on the broad directions we intended to recommend

To read the task group's updates, discussion papers, and consultation reports, please visit www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review.

While we have led the conversation, we believe our recommendations represent the wisdom of the church. The comments, critiques, questions, ideas, and prayers people across the church have offered have been crucial as we have thought about and discerned a faithful way forward. You have identified key issues, sharpened our thinking, nuanced the principles we developed, affirmed some of our directions, and prompted us to rethink others. Most of all, you have inspired us. Thank you for your faithful engagement and hope.

Now, it is up to the church to discern the way forward. The Comprehensive Review will be the main business of the 42nd General Council, which will gather in August 2015 in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Between now and then, we encourage you to read and discuss this report in your community of faith, presbytery, and Conference and pray for the commissioners who will be making decisions at General Council. If you have ideas to improve these recommendations or want to suggest other ways to do things, you may bring them through your Conference through the proposal processes of the church. If you have been named a commissioner to General Council, we encourage you to listen closely to these conversations and the questions and issues they raise, and come to General Council prepared to discuss them and discern the will of the Spirit.

This process did not start with the 41st General Council's decision to launch the Comprehensive Review and will not end with the rise of the 42nd General Council. Whatever the General Council decides, the church is changing and will continue to change. As A New Creed tells us, God has created and is creating. We pray for wisdom, faith, and focus to keep our eyes on what God is doing. In Christ and with Christ, thanks be to God.

[BACKGROUND #1: Mandate, Terms of Reference, and Membership](#)

[BACKGROUND #2: Past Reports Considered](#)

Context

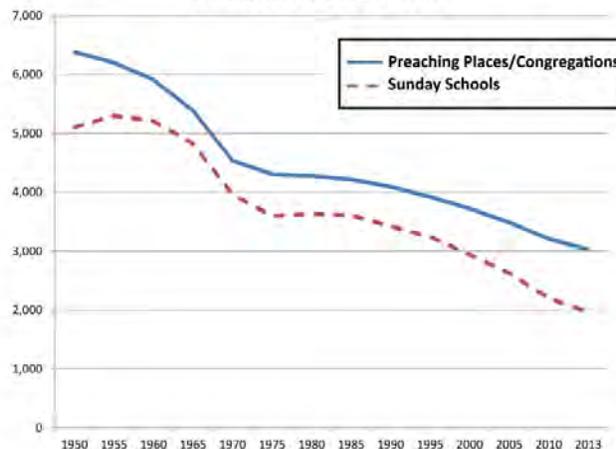
Like many denominations, The United Church of Canada is facing social, demographic, and financial pressures that are challenging us to live out God's mission in different ways than in the past.

You may be seeing some of these trends in your own community of faith: fewer people attending worship services; fewer young adults, youth, and children participating in the life of your community; overstretched and aging volunteers spending more time on bureaucracy than ministry; and financial pressures that may make it difficult for your community to pay a full-time minister or maintain your building.

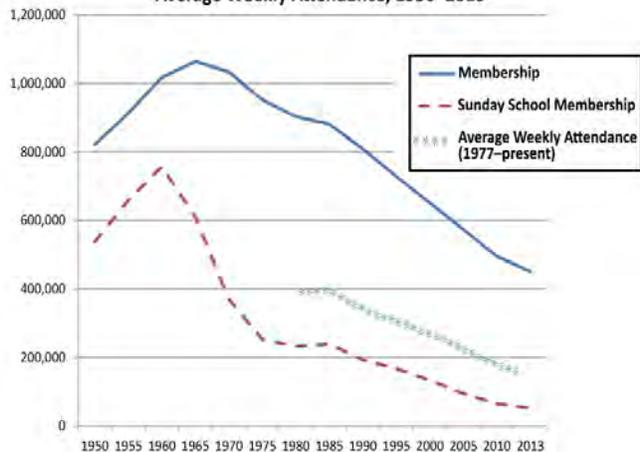
You are not alone. Many places across our church are feeling similar pressures as Canadian society becomes increasingly secular and diverse. From 2003 to 2013, the latest statistics available, United Church membership declined by 26 percent, average Sunday attendance dropped by 38 percent, and church school membership plunged by more than 50 percent. Over the same period, the number of United Church congregations declined by 567, or 16 percent. The number of baptisms—a key measure of the church's effectiveness in nurturing new believers—dropped by 46 percent between 2003 and 2013. Since 2008, more funerals have taken place in United Church congregations each year than baptisms and marriages combined.

The church's finances reflect this decline in membership and participation. While givings to the Mission and Service Fund, which supports our work as a denomination across the church and around the world, remained relatively constant for about 25 years, they have been declining every year since 2007. Combined with rising costs, the denomination's financial strength has declined by more than 50 percent since 1980.

Number of Preaching Places/Congregations and Sunday Schools 1950–2013

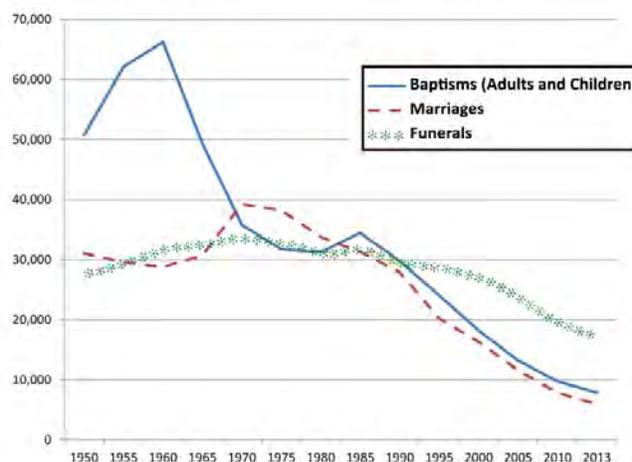


Membership, Sunday School Membership, and Average Weekly Attendance, 1950–2013*



*Statistics on average weekly attendance are available only for 1977 on.

Baptisms, Marriages, and Funerals 1950–2013



As a result, the church no longer has the volunteer or financial resources to maintain its structures and processes, which is hampering the church's ability to do ministry effectively and faithfully in some places.

The United Church is not unique. Mainline Protestant denominations across North America have experienced similar long-term declines in membership since the 1960s, when baby boomers and their parents filled churches. Like the United Church, they are grappling with the fact that many of their ministries are failing to connect with the communities they are meant to serve. Part of this trend is a church problem: many churches simply haven't adapted their ministries as their communities have become more diverse and the ways people engage with one another and with spiritual questions have changed.

But part of it may be the result of larger societal trends. As United Church minister David Ewart noted in a 2014 column in *The Observer*, declining church membership is part of a larger trend in our society away from joining organizations. "The simple fact is that Canadians are not going to church like they used to," Ewart wrote. "In fact, Canadians aren't going to synagogues, mosques, temples or Kiwanis either. Volunteer membership organizations of all types are declining. Attendance decline is not a problem that can be fixed. It is simply a reality to which we must respond."²

The goal of the Comprehensive Review is not to return to the mid-20th century when churches and Sunday schools were bursting at the seams as the general public proclaimed Jesus as Lord and our denomination wielded significant spiritual and moral influence in Canadian society.³ That is not realistic. It is also not where God is calling the church. Our future lies in the spirit of the Pentecost—in being smaller, more agile, and innovative; in listening to the Spirit as we go out into our communities to build relationships and work for equality and justice; and in offering a variety of faith experiences that may not look a lot like church as we know it.

May God work in and among us as we move faithfully and prayerfully toward renewal and transformation.

² David Ewart, "Reality Check: It's Not Your Fault," *The United Church Observer* (January 2014): 41. Reprinted with permission of the author.

³ Phyllis Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

Principles

We have rooted our recommendations in the following principles. These principles reflect the wisdom we heard from the church, our research, and our own discussions.

1. God is doing a new thing. Our structures and processes must enable us to take risks, be bold, and live our faith with passion, energy, and creativity as we participate in God's new creation.
2. Communities of faith in Jesus Christ are the core of the United Church and increasingly will include not just congregations as we know them but also new kinds of communities that gather to worship, learn, and serve. We must focus our resources and energy on supporting and enabling communities of faith in all their diversity.
3. In our diversity, we value the strength and challenge of being a united church.
4. God calls us to join our collective hearts, voices, and resources to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world. To do this, our church needs local, regional, and denominational expressions that gather for mutual support, ministry, and mission.
5. As an intercultural church, we embrace all forms of diversity in mutual ministry, including Aboriginal, ethnic, French language, racial, and other diversities.
6. We need to continue to develop capacity to enable Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to live into right relations as committed to in the church's 1986 and 1998 apologies.
7. Ministry and lay leaders must receive support and education to become more effective, dynamic, and innovative leaders.
8. Oversight and discipline must be separated from collegial support for both ministers and communities of faith.
9. Governance and support services must be simplified and sustainable to free people and financial resources for ministry and mission. Funding mechanisms must be transparent.

Recommendation #1: Chasing the Spirit

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that the United Church make a commitment to supporting new ministries and new forms of ministry through an initiative that tentatively would be called Chasing the Spirit. This commitment to the United Church's future would be demonstrated by investing 10 percent of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund in local and regional initiatives to transform existing ministries and launch new ones. Partial implementation of this initiative would begin in 2016, with full implementation by 2018.

Context

It isn't enough to rearrange our structures. God is doing new things in our world, and the United Church needs to engage with the ways in which the Spirit is stirring and moving among us. Even as we say goodbye to familiar ways, it is essential to incubate creative and transformational ways of experiencing God in our place and time. This will mean supporting those willing to take risks and to try things that may or may not work. The evidence is all around us in both new and emerging communities of faith and existing communities of faith that have reimagined and transformed themselves in response to Christ's call. These new and transformed communities of faith are taking many forms. Some are congregations as we know them, while others meet in cafés and pubs, explore faith through activities such as yoga, or gather primarily to serve others. Some of these communities of faith are permanent, and others are temporary. The common thread in this emerging movement is a willingness to experiment and take risks to participate in Jesus' hope for a new creation.

The Challenge

Throughout the history of the Christian church, followers of Jesus Christ have been challenged to live the gospel in ways that are relevant to their own times. God continues to challenge the United Church in this way today, and many places in the church are already responding faithfully to God's call. A movement of renewal and transformation is building in the church, but it can be difficult for the church to support and invest resources in hopeful but uncertain new directions when it is also facing the loss of familiar and treasured things. Yet the experience of denominations throughout North America is that the future of the church lies in nurturing new forms of ministry that require experimentation and risk.

Why This Recommendation?

The task group believes the challenge, risk, and hope for the church lie in joining what God is already bringing to life. Simplified structures are needed, but the purpose of changing them is to allow the church to focus on transformational ministries that support discipleship and evangelism in the emerging culture. As Jesus resisted complacency, the church needs to actively nurture, enable, and connect this movement of renewal and transformation that is breathing new life into existing faith communities and giving birth to new forms of faith communities.

This is "big picture" work that involves significant reimagining. It's about preparing leaders to take risks by providing spaces that nurture innovation—incubators for change in the church. This experimental spirit could free churches to become incubators for change in the world. Chasing the Spirit would require a significant shift in church culture to create space for rising leaders to experiment with new approaches to ministry, free from institutional pressures and fear of failure.

The United Church can learn from other denominations that are investing significant resources in new forms of ministry. In 2004, the Church of England and the Methodist

Church in Great Britain formed [Fresh Expressions](#), a movement that seeks to “transform communities and individuals through championing and resourcing new ways of being church.”⁴ The church can learn much from Fresh Expressions about the value of investing in transformation and the challenges and risks of trying something new.

The United Church has its own experience to build on, too. We have ministries in some places that are growing and thriving, where people are trying new things or doing old things in new ways. In many places, this work has been led by [EDGE: A Network for Ministry Development](#), which has been offering innovative leadership to support new developments in ministry across the country. In 2010, the Executive of the General Council allocated \$1 million for new ministries (the New Ministries Formation Fund); that money has now been spent, but it has nurtured new life in exciting ways.

The church will be called to trust passions and visions that are already at work and to embrace changes that are not yet fully imagined. Some of the characteristics of this type of innovation include

- taking risks, knowing that some efforts will fail
- recognizing that even if something is a success it may not last
- meeting people where they are
- endorsing entrepreneurial approaches to creating sustainability
- seeking greater diversity
- collaborating with other denominations

The church must dedicate resources to this work. The task group recommends that 10 percent of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund be allocated to Chasing the Spirit. Chasing the Spirit would also complement grants that are distributed by The United Church of Canada Foundation's New Ministries Fund. The task group's recommendation would expand the work of the New Ministries Fund by including additional money in the denominational budget.

The task group has identified three areas of growth and commitment for the church of the future:

Investing in Innovative Ministries

Chasing the Spirit would incubate innovative ministries by helping to plant and nurture new ideas, evaluate outcomes, and determine next steps to enable new ministries. This work would require entrepreneurial, big-thinking staff and leaders who would help sow new ways of being church and encourage and support risk-taking and idea-testing. It would be an intentional, active, and interactive process for nurturing and supporting innovative ministries in the church.

Chasing the Spirit would be more than a fund. It would focus on transformational ministries with support, accountability, and celebration, and support discipleship and evangelism in the emerging culture. Regional staff and volunteers across the country would be able to draw on its resources to encourage spiritual renewal. It would help link leaders and communities across the church to share challenges and successes and enable thriving projects to spread.

⁴ www.freshexpressions.org.uk, retrieved January 12, 2015

Chasing the Spirit would build on initiatives already begun through the New Ministries Formation Fund and various Conference initiatives such as Bay of Quinte Conference's [Transformational Ministry](#) initiative.

As a result, Chasing the Spirit could provide support to a variety of ministries, such as

- new ministries in communities of faith outside the traditional church
- existing communities of faith that want to be transformed
- testing evangelism and ministry projects, sharing successful projects across the church, and transplanting them to new environments
- entrepreneurial ministries via start-up loans
- other innovative ministries and ideas that may emerge in response to our changing society

Investing in Technology

Chasing the Spirit would invest resources in technologies and training to enable communities of faith and networks to connect with each other and engage with more people, especially over long distances. Technology support would focus resources on enabling individuals and communities across the church to network. Examples include [Alberta and Northwest Conference](#) and [Trinity United Church](#) in Thunder Bay, which have invested in technology and leadership to connect communities of faith in worship and share ministry resources through video streaming.

Developing and Supporting Leaders

The church's talented leaders, both ministry and lay, will need support and resources to continue the cultural change that has already begun in the church. Ministry will be different from the past, and we must nurture and develop ministry leaders who can be creative and adaptable as our context continues to change.

As local faith communities are empowered to take on greater decision-making, it will be important to support their leadership in governance, community engagement, and innovative worship and spiritual practices to meet the needs of generations for whom traditional approaches do not have appeal or meaning. The goal is for communities of faith to be the best they can be.

The task group recognizes that other committees and task groups are developing proposals that will be critical to developing and supporting leaders in the future. This work includes how the church identifies, accompanies, equips, assesses, authorizes, and celebrates candidates for ministry, and a proposal for one order of ministry that acknowledges several paths of educational preparation.

The church can also draw on examples of leadership investment, such as [EDGE's](#) mentorship and coaching programs and British Columbia Conference's extensive leadership training programs, [LeaderShift](#) and [Sowing Promise, Growing Leaders](#). BC Conference's programs offer compelling models because they are two of the few fully funded and staffed leadership programs in the United Church. They offer specific leadership training resources and tools and invest in new and emerging leaders.

Practical/Financial Implications

Allocating 10 percent of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund to invest in transformational ministry initiatives would, in the absence of an overall increase in resources, require deeper cuts to work that traditionally has been funded. Endings are a

necessary component of new beginnings, and we need to create space for new life even as other ministries are ending.

[BACKGROUNDER #3: Renewal and New Ministry Examples](#)

To read more stories about new life in the United Church, visit www.edge-ucc.ca/stories and www.hopecollection.ca.

To learn more about EDGE, visit www.edge-ucc.ca.

For more information about Fresh Expressions, visit www.freshexpressions.org.uk.

To learn more about funds available through The United Church of Canada Foundation, visit www.unitedchurchfoundation.ca.

To learn more about Bay of Quinte Conference's Transformational Ministry initiative, visit http://bayofquinteconference.ca/?page_id=1635.

Recommendation #2: Aboriginal Ministries

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that:

- a) A process be established to continue conversations with the Aboriginal ministries that form the Aboriginal Ministries Council to build a relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples based on mutuality, respect, and equity.
- b) To the extent possible, spending on Aboriginal ministries be maintained during the next triennium while discussions continue, and thereafter a set percentage of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund be dedicated to this ministry.
- c) The important work of Indigenous justice and right relations continue so the church can continue to live out its apologies to Aboriginal peoples.

Context

God is calling the United Church to a right relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples—those who are part of the ministries of the United Church, those who are outside the church, and those who have been affected by historical practices and biases of the United Church and Canadian society, particularly [Indian residential schools](#).

The church has taken steps over the past 30 years to move toward reconciliation and right relations. It offered [apologies](#) to Aboriginal people in 1986 and 1998 for its role in imposing European culture and spirituality on them and for its complicity in operating Indian residential schools. The church was involved in negotiating the [Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement](#) and participated actively in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#). The church's structures include the All Native Circle Conference, Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, BC Native Ministries Council, Ontario and Quebec Native Ministries, and the Aboriginal Ministries Council. A significant step was taken in 2012 when the 41st General Council gave overwhelming approval to a proposal that made changes to the United Church [crest](#) to recognize Aboriginal spirituality, and entered into a new covenant in recognition that Aboriginal peoples were not invited to be signatories of the Basis of Union in 1925 when the United Church was formed.

This work has made progress even though patterns of colonized thinking remain in the church. Aboriginal communities of faith are not yet full partners in voice, resources, and decision-making, and the church has not fully lived out the apologies it offered in 1986 and 1998. Aboriginal communities also have work to do to build capacity for sustainable and vibrant ministry.

Lee Maracle, an Aboriginal poet and author, said in a 2008 address at Hart House at the University of Toronto, "It took eight generations of residential schools to get to this stuck place. We have been spiritually impaled. We don't know what it means to be freed (by the apologies of church and government). We need time and space in the institutions to look at our own problems ourselves and to recover from being told that it is our fault."⁵

The Challenge

The process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and developing a new church structure that recognizes the unique relationship will take time and cannot be

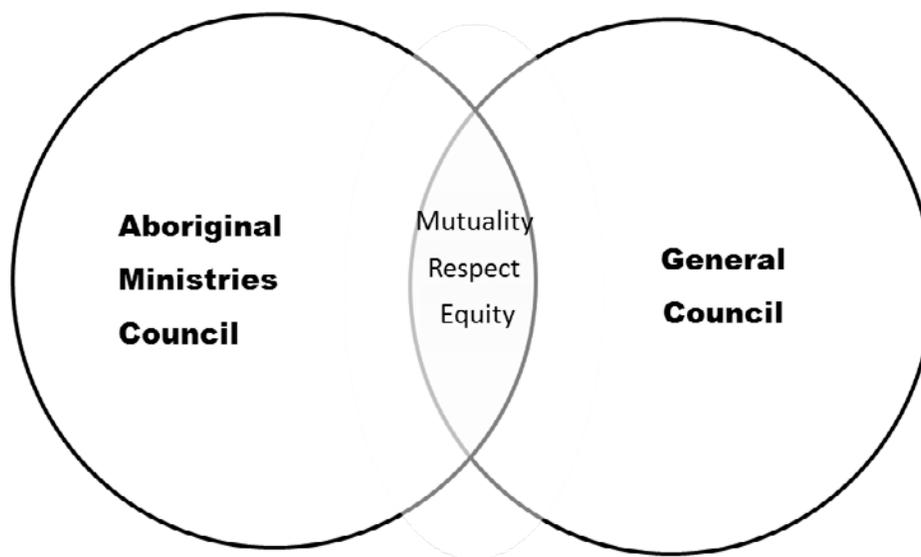
⁵ Covenanting to Live Faithfully in the Midst of Empire, Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry, Presentation to the Executive of the General Council, March 2009.

completed during the mandate of the task group. Reconciliation goes beyond structures and processes; it is first and foremost about relationship, and must also connect to other work such as racial justice and spiritual healing. It is not the work of the task group alone, but part of a larger conversation that needs to continue and deepen in the United Church. During this process, the church must continue to fund Aboriginal ministries.

Why This Recommendation?

The task group believes the foundation of any new United Church structure must recognize the unique relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada. Based on mutuality, respect, and equity, a new structure must build capacity to address the need for reparation through community and leadership development, and reflect the values of a diverse group of Aboriginal communities of faith in the church.

One image the Aboriginal Ministries Council has offered uses two overlapping circles to express the relationship Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples aspire to. Together, they represent our unity as one body, yet each circle has its own integrity, mandate, and responsibilities. In practice, the overlapping area might represent shared initiatives and ministry. The image is not a structural representation and is not meant to suggest segregation. Rather, it depicts a new foundational relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the United Church.



The task group also believes the church needs to continue to take an active role in restoring the dignity of all people. Given the history and impact of the residential school system and colonialism imposed on Aboriginal people, reconciliation will be a multi-generational priority for the church.

Members of the Comprehensive Review Task Group have engaged in a series of five discussions with the Aboriginal Ministries Council and the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools to explore ways of furthering the shift from past colonial relationships to ones that reflect a commitment to right relations as stated in the church's two apologies. In these conversations, we examined alternate structures, particularly ones in New Zealand and Australia. We explored together what right relations might look like as well as how to fund Aboriginal ministries and the Indigenous justice work the whole church must do.

The conversations have been fruitful, but they are not finished and will not be during the life of this task group. The task group is mindful that living out the apologies and building a healthy relationship is the work of the whole church, not the responsibility of Aboriginal peoples alone. The challenge for the church is to define, embrace, and live into this relationship together and find ways to express it in the church's structure. In this challenge, the church can draw from the lessons of the past 30 years, which have taught respect and inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and traditional wisdom.

The timing and processes of Aboriginal ministries must be respected as these conversations continue. It is not necessary, and in fact would be inappropriate, to push this work to conclude to fit with the scheduling of the Comprehensive Review Task Group or the 42nd General Council. That's why the task group is recommending that the Executive of the General Council establish a process to continue this conversation with Aboriginal ministries that form the Aboriginal Ministries Council.

While these discussions continue, funding to Aboriginal ministries should be maintained at current levels to the extent possible. Going forward, dedicating a set percentage of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund to this ministry would establish a relationship based on mutuality, respect, and equity.

In addition to its commitment to Aboriginal ministries, the church must commit to continue the work of the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools. This is the work the non-Aboriginal church must do to walk in right relations with Aboriginal peoples.

Practical/Financial Implications

This recommendation assumes a significant piece of work will need to continue beyond the life of the Comprehensive Review Task Group. This is the work of the United Church as a whole, in relationship with Aboriginal members and other Aboriginal Canadians. The commitment to this work recognizes the importance of right relations as a central calling of the United Church.

BACKGROUNDER #4: Aboriginal Ministries

Further information about funding Aboriginal ministries can be found in Recommendation #6: Funding a New Model (p. 30) and Backgrounder #10: Finances.

Read the church's apologies: www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/apologies.

Learn more about Indian residential schools and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement: www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/faq.

Find out more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: www.trc.ca. Learn more about the United Church crest: www.united-church.ca/history/crest.

Recommendation #3: A Three-Council Model

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that:

- a) The United Church be governed by three councils:
 - i) Communities of faith that would nurture people in their faith journeys and, through the Spirit, inspire and empower them to live out their faith in vibrant and diverse ministries. These would include any community of people based in Jesus Christ that gathers to explore faith, to worship, and to serve. Communities of faith would have a much broader range of decision-making authority than they currently do, including initiating and ending calls and appointments of ministers and buying and selling property, subject to denominational and regional policies. They would function in covenantal relationship with the regional councils.
 - ii) Regional councils that would provide advice, support, and services to, covenant with, and connect communities of faith. Regional councils would meet at least once a year in person, electronically, or via their executives to make decisions, and would be composed of one lay representative and one ministry representative (for communities of faith with ministry personnel) from each community of faith in the region.
 - iii) A denominational council that would nurture the identity of the United Church, discern and express a denominational voice, and connect the United Church with God's wider church by making decisions on denomination-shaping issues such as public witness, theology, and governance structure. The denominational council would meet every three years, as it currently does, but would be much larger than the current General Council because it would include representatives from every community of faith. The denominational council's executive would be much smaller than the current Executive of the General Council.
- b) Clusters of communities of faith in a geographic area be encouraged to gather regularly for collegiality, support, and learning, and networks link people with common interests across the church. Although the clusters and networks would not be formal governance bodies, they would be central to living out our faith.

Context

Our church currently consists of four courts:

- Pastoral charges may include one or more congregations under the spiritual leadership of a minister. In 2013, there were 2,172 pastoral charges, each of which had a governing body, and 3,016 congregations.
- Presbyteries, districts (in Newfoundland and Labrador Conference), the Consistoire Laurentien, and the Bermuda Synod are administrative groupings of pastoral charges in a local area. Lay and ministry delegates from the pastoral charges meet regularly to oversee the work of the pastoral charges. There are 86 presbyteries, districts, and equivalent bodies in the church.
- Conferences are administrative groupings of presbyteries. Lay and ministry delegates from the presbyteries meet at least once every three years. Staff in Conference offices work with presbyteries and pastoral charges. There are 13 Conferences in the church.
- The General Council is the church's highest decision-making body. Ministry and lay commissioners are elected by the Conferences and meet every three years to set church policy. The Executive of the General Council, composed of 50 members and

20 corresponding members, and the Sub-Executive of the General Council govern between meetings of the General Council. Policy is developed primarily through four permanent committees of the General Council and the Aboriginal Ministries Council, and implemented by staff. There are also about 25 other committees and task groups that are composed of voting members from across the church and corresponding members from General Council staff.

The United Church's structure is conciliar, which means it holds councils that are interconnected for the purpose of common agreement in faith and practice. Presbyteries are made up of representatives of pastoral charges, Conferences are made up of representatives of presbyteries, and the General Council is made up of representatives of Conferences.

The Challenge

The church's current structure is no longer serving God's mission effectively. The church does not have the volunteer and financial resources required to maintain it, and this is diverting energy and attention from God's ministry and mission. Many members find our complex court system confusing and unwieldy and feel disconnected from the church beyond their local context, particularly the denominational structures. The church needs a more agile and sustainable structure that better supports and enables communities of faith to respond to God's call, uses resources more effectively, connects and unites people across the church, and is more flexible and adaptable as God calls us to new things.

Why This Recommendation?

The primary purpose of the proposed three-council structure is to nurture and support vibrant and diverse communities of faith to live out God's mission. Three councils would keep local communities of faith connected to decision-making bodies, both regionally and nationally, and increase understanding that we are one church united in God's work. Direct participation by communities of faith in both regional and denominational councils would enhance their understanding of decisions related to ministry and mission priorities and support services and governance. The structure would be simplified, and decisions would be made only once. It would also be sustainable and scalable as the church's context continues to change.

Communities of faith would have much more freedom to nurture and live out their faith in a variety of ways, subject to denominational and regional policies and in accordance with the covenants communities of faith and regional councils would enter into every year. Areas in which communities of faith would have more responsibilities would include recognizing, receiving, and celebrating new members; structure and governance; mission; property; and covenanting with accredited ministers and other staff. They would engage directly in social justice and outreach activities both locally and with global and national partners. Communities of faith would receive support from the regional and denominational councils to meet the expectations set out in their covenants and competently perform governance, human resources, and property functions.

Regional councils would perform some, but not all, of the functions of current presbyteries and Conferences. They would covenant with and provide advice, support, and services to communities of faith in areas such as human resources and property. They would accompany students, provide mentors and appoint supervisors for internships, and celebrate ordinations, commissionings, admissions, recognitions, and retirements. They would support and provide communities of faith with connections to national and global partners for social justice and outreach activities. They would also ensure communities of

faith are living up to their covenants, attempt to resolve disputes, and step in if a community of faith is not functioning effectively or is failing to meet its responsibilities. The proposed model would require the church to rationalize regional structures and staffing by amalgamating Conferences or sharing staff and resources across separate regional councils.

The denominational council would vote on denomination-shaping issues and elect a Moderator. It would establish a three-year budget for the church and the assessment rate for communities of faith to fund the church.

While presbyteries and Conferences as we know them would cease to exist as decision-making bodies, local clusters would support collegiality and shared ministry, and connectional networks would provide space for ministry and mission passions across regions.

Practical/Financial Implications

If approved, this recommendation would lead to significant structural changes that would make the church more vibrant and sustainable:

- Communities of faith would have more responsibility and freedom to nurture and live out their faith in a variety of ways, subject to their covenants with regional councils and denominational standards.
- Presbyteries and Conferences would cease to exist and new regional councils would be created.
- Clusters and networks would offer opportunities for communities of faith and people with shared interests and passions to connect outside of decision-making bodies.
- Communities of faith would have greater opportunities to engage in the work of the church at regional and denominational councils by having direct representation on both of these bodies.
- A smaller denominational executive would facilitate more timely decision-making.
- Other committees and networks would be encouraged to meet at the same time as the denominational council.
- The denomination would no longer pay for commissioners to attend the denominational council meeting, but bursaries would be available.

[**BACKGROUNDER #5: A Three-Council Model**](#)

[**BACKGROUNDER #6: Distribution of Responsibilities for the Processes of the Church**](#)

[**BACKGROUNDER #7: Sample Covenant**](#)

[**BACKGROUNDER #8: Networks**](#)

[**BACKGROUNDER #9: Other Models Considered**](#)

Recommendation #4: A College of Ministers

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that a College of Ministers be established to accredit, oversee, and discipline ministers. The college would ensure only qualified people would be accredited as United Church ministers, and the standards of ministry would be maintained.

Context

Ministers are highly educated and trained persons God calls to ministry. As a denomination, the United Church must set admission criteria for candidates, establish standards for ministry, and exercise oversight and discipline over ministers when problems arise.

Currently, presbytery and Conference committees across the church make decisions on ordaining, commissioning, and recognizing ministers and are responsible for overseeing and disciplining ministers. These processes must be procedurally fair and sufficiently robust to survive judicial scrutiny. Presbyteries and Conferences are struggling to achieve these requirements consistently.

The Challenge

Ordaining, Commissioning, and Recognizing Ministers

Each year, presbyteries and Conferences across the church establish education and student committees and interview boards to consider, on average, 36 candidates for ordination, seven for commissioning, and 12 for recognition as designated lay ministers. Each year, on average, eight candidates are admitted from other denominations and one person is readmitted to ministry. In addition, education and student committees accompany approximately 240 candidates on their journeys to ordination, commissioning, and admission. Finally, Conferences establish commissions to inquire into objections received about candidates.

The task group heard the current system for qualifying persons to become ministers requires too many volunteers and is time-consuming, and the processes used and results achieved have been uneven, occasionally wrong, and subject to oversight by the secular courts.

Overseeing and Disciplining Ministers

The United Church is legally responsible for ordaining, commissioning, and recognizing ministers and placing them in positions of responsibility and trust. Each year, a small number of ministers get into serious problems such as abuse of trust, sexual misconduct, misappropriation of money, and other similar conduct. In addition, a small number of ministers are incompetent.

The church, which may be legally responsible for such conduct, must continue to oversee and discipline ministers. Oversight and discipline include ensuring candidates have the necessary competencies to become ministers, ministers continue on a journey of lifelong learning, and ministers are held accountable and removed from ministry for serious breaches.

The current system of overseeing and disciplining ministers involves all four courts of the church, takes hours of volunteer time and money, and does not produce transparent and consistent results.

Each year, on average,

- presbyteries and Conferences authorize 12 reviews of ministers
- General Council investigates six complaints of sexual misconduct by ministers
- presbyteries, Conferences, and the Judicial Committee establish two formal hearing committees and/or appeal committees to hear disputes from these reviews and investigations

The task group heard the current system of oversight and discipline is challenging in a number of ways:

- Conflicts arise when the same group of people is responsible for overseeing and disciplining ministers as well as providing ministers with support and collegiality.
- The current system for overseeing and disciplining ministers is carried out by people who have limited or no experience in conducting investigations, running formal hearings, or hearing appeals.
- The processes used and the decisions reached are not always perceived to be timely, fair, or consistent.
- Appeals to the Judicial Committee and the secular courts are time-consuming and expensive.

Why This Recommendation?

Many of the church's lay members who are teachers, nurses, accountants, doctors, social workers, and lawyers are regulated by colleges or boards that license professionals, set standards of practice and annual continuing education requirements, and supervise and discipline their members. These kinds of bodies are not limited to the secular world. Some denominations have colleges or boards that accredit ministers and oversee and discipline them.

The task group recommends that the denominational council establish a College of Ministers to accredit persons to become ministers, uphold the standards set for ministers by the denomination, and oversee and discipline ministers. This recommendation continues the Reformed understanding of our church that ministers carry out their ministry in relationship or covenant with communities of faith, and are supported in their ministry and held accountable for their ministry by lay persons as well as other ministers.

A college would separate the functions of oversight and discipline of ministers from support and collegiality and thus eliminate this conflict. It would build on the learnings from the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project, which recognized it is challenging for a presbytery to both support and oversee ministers. The potential for discipline negates the trust that is needed for support. Conversely, it is difficult to discipline a colleague who may be a friend.

Rather than distributing oversight and discipline across the regions, ministers and laypersons on the board of the college would be, or become, more experienced in dealing with investigations and conducting formal hearings and appeals than in the current system. This increased expertise would result in processes that are and are perceived to be more fair and transparent, and results that are timely, are consistent, and withstand scrutiny on appeal. Carefully chosen laypersons could also reduce the need for costly legal counsel.

The college would be made up of representatives from the regions but would be positioned to offer consistency of interpretation and application on a national basis. This mechanism is suited to the relatively small number of applications and cases overall, and maintains the

tradition of oversight of ministers coming from a body of lay and ministry representatives of our church

The task group has heard concerns that establishing a college would incorrectly cast ministry as a profession, rather than a calling or vocation. The task group believes this use of "profession" as applied to ministers has been misunderstood, and has found the following understanding from the College of Baptist Ministers in Britain to be helpful:

The actual word "profession" stems from the medieval Latin word "professio," which was used on the taking of vows upon entering a religious order. Gradually the word broadened in its usage and came to indicate "a vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in the practice of an art founded upon it" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In other words, professionals are people who apply their knowledge in the service of others. Surely this is what we as Christian ministers seek to do?... Professionalism, rightly understood, implies offering to God our very best—both of mind and of heart. There is nothing cold or unspiritual about professionalism. Professionalism involves whole-hearted commitment to Christ and his church.⁶

Membership

The college would include all ministers in the United Church. Candidates would be student members. Ordained persons from other denominations seeking admission to the United Church would be inquiring members of the college. All ministers serving in paid positions in communities of faith would be required to be members of the college. Retired ministers who provide ministry services for pay would be required to be members. Conversely, communities of faith could initiate calls and appointments only to persons who are members of the college. Membership would have to be renewed annually.

Governance

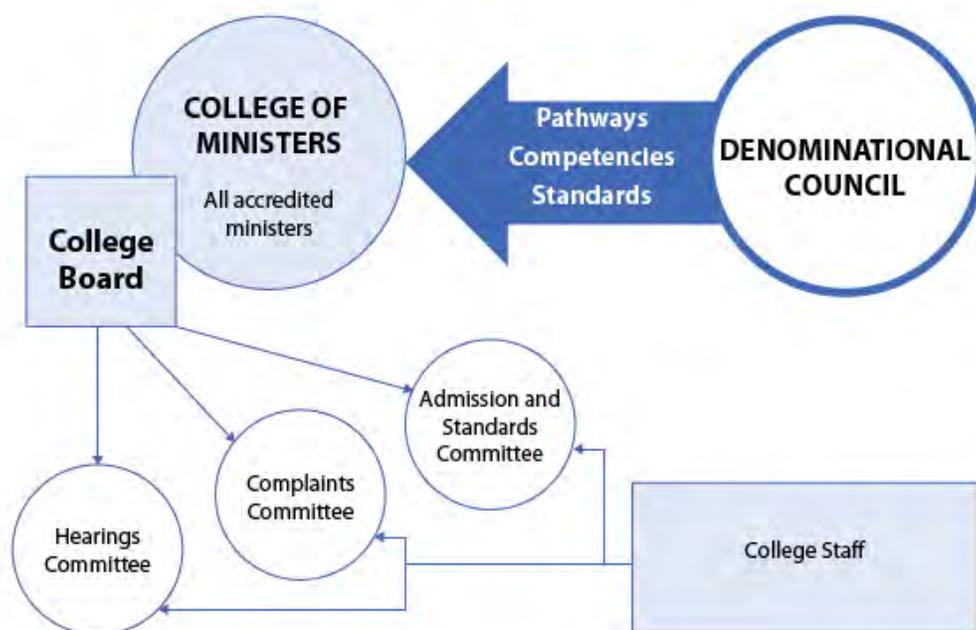
The college would be governed by a 20-person board with equal numbers of ministers and laypersons, consistent with the tradition of the United Church. Ministers would be elected by their peers on a regional basis. Ordained, diaconal, and designated lay ministers would be represented on the board. Laypersons would be elected by the regional councils. The representation of Aboriginal ministries on the board would also be essential. Members would be elected for two three-year terms, but it might be prudent to stagger the terms to enhance continuity.

People serving on the board of the college would sit on one of three committees, each with at least one minister and one layperson:

- The admission and standards committee would assess candidates to become members.
- The complaints committee would assess complaints about ministers.
- The hearings committee would sit in three-person formal hearing panels to hear evidence about complaints, make findings of fact and law, and determine the appropriate outcomes.

⁶ The College of Baptist Ministers, "Who are we?" Retrieved January 9, 2015, from www.collegeofbaptistministers.org/about. Reprinted with permission.

The United Church of Canada



Roles and Responsibilities

The denominational council would continue to set the pathways to ministry, the competencies for each pathway, the standards for ministry, and the requirements for annual continuing education. The college would implement the denominational policies using a more transparent, timely, and fair process and achieve more consistent results than the current system.

Regional councils would appoint persons to accompany students and would appoint supervisors for the internship period, and each of these would provide reports to the college as part of the accreditation process. Ministers would be ordained, commissioned, and recognized by the regional councils.

The college would maintain a register of all qualified ministers that would be available to communities of faith that are searching for ministers.

Ministers would be responsible for demonstrating to the college that they had met the annual continuing education requirements before they could be accredited for the following year.

Regional staff would continue to promote healthy relationships between ministers and communities of faith. If problems arise, regional staff would provide support and advice, including assistance in ending the relationship should there not be a good fit.

If a community of faith ended the call or appointment of a minister because of misconduct or incompetence, it would be required to report its actions to the college. If a regional council or its staff had reason to believe a minister had committed acts of misconduct or was incompetent, they would be required to report the minister to the college. Any person could file a complaint about a minister. Complaints of sexual abuse by a minister would also have to be reported to the college.

The college would advise the minister of the complaint and seek a response. The complaints committee would assess the complaint and the response, and where warranted, an independent person might be appointed to investigate the complaint. In serious cases, the complaints committee would order a formal hearing. The hearing would be held in the appropriate region depending on where the minister and the witnesses are located. Members of the complaints committee would be trained to review and assess complaints about ministers.

Persons would be chosen for the hearings committee who have prior experience in conducting formal hearings or similar proceedings. Additional training would be provided to ensure members of the hearings committee have the knowledge and skills to conduct formal hearings and write decisions. Formal hearings would be quasi-judicial proceedings that would be required to follow the rules of evidence and of natural justice. Decisions of the hearings committee could result in a minister's removal as a member of the college.

Practical/Financial Implications

Based on the church's history of ordaining, commissioning, recognizing, overseeing, and disciplining ministers and the experience of regulatory bodies of other professions of a similar size, these functions could be carried out by a college with a staff of not more than five people, including a registrar and resource staff for the board and the three committees, included in a staff of not more than five people.

The task group estimates that the costs to establish and run a college would be \$750,000 per year and would be funded out of the assessments paid by communities of faith.

A college would be compatible with the current practices or with the recommendations that the General Council will be considering regarding a competency-based system for assessing candidates for ministry, or one order of ministry.

Recommendation #5: An Association of Ministers

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that a working group of ministers be struck to explore whether to set up an association of ministers. This process could include work on the membership of such an association, its role, and how it might be funded.

Context

The church needs strong, effective, and innovative leaders to engage and inspire people in Christian discipleship and action. As our context continues to change, ministers will be crucial in helping existing ministries transform themselves, nurturing new ministry opportunities, and helping to wind down ministries that are at the end of their lives. To be effective in these roles and equip them for change, ministers need collegiality and support.

In our current structure, presbyteries and districts are meant to provide collegiality and support to ministers as well as oversee and discipline ministers. Diaconal ministers have the option of joining the [Diakonia of The United Church of Canada](#). Ministers may also find support in informal networks they build themselves.

Other denominations have associations of ministers. One example is the [Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association](#), whose mission is to “nurture excellence in ministry through collegiality, continuing education, and collaboration.”

The Challenge

Ministers often feel they cannot turn for collegiality and support to peers in presbytery who are also responsible for overseeing and disciplining them.

In addition, presbyteries include both ministry and lay representatives. But ministers may be more likely to find the support and encouragement they seek from other ministers who understand the challenges they face.

Why This Recommendation?

There is a strong consensus in the church that support and collegiality for ministers should be separated from oversight and discipline (see Recommendation #4: A College of Ministers, p. 23). The task group recommends that this be done by creating a College of Ministers that would perform oversight and discipline, among other functions.

The task group also heard in its conversations with the church that an association of ministers could complement the college by providing support to ministers. The task group believes an association—for ministers, by ministers—would be one way to offer support and collegiality, and we recommend that ministers be encouraged to explore this option.

In its conversations with the church, the task group heard

- considerable approval for the creation of an association
- diverging views on what an association might do
- general agreement that an association should provide advice and support for ministers
- some agreement that an association should also offer education and training
- differing views on whether an association should be the “voice” of ministers
- little support for an association to advocate on behalf of ministers
- differing views on whether membership should be voluntary or mandatory and on how to fund an association

- consensus that ministers alone should determine what an association would be and do

Given the lack of consensus, the task group recommends that the 42nd General Council mandate the establishment of a working group of ministers to explore

- what membership in the association of ministers might be
- what the association of ministers might do and not do
- how the association of ministers might be funded

Practical/Financial Implications

The General Council would need to allocate resources to support a working group's exploratory work.

Recommendation #6: Funding a New Model

The Comprehensive Review Task Group recommends that:

- a) The church spend only what it receives, which would require reducing spending by at least \$11 million by 2018 from 2015 spending levels. Deeper reductions would be required to fund proposed investments in Chasing the Spirit and a College of Ministers. The task group provided for \$13.8 million in cuts in its modelling.
- b) The number and function of staff depend on the revenues received.
- c) The Mission and Service Fund be used only for ministry and mission activities.
- d) Governance and support services (administration) at the regional and denominational levels be funded by assessing communities of faith.
- e) The sharing of all resources, wealth, and abundance be encouraged across the church.

Context

The life and work of the United Church are funded in a variety of ways, including voluntary givings, mandatory assessments, bequests, investments, other sources of income such as rental fees, and draws on reserves. More than 60 percent of the funding for the broader work of the church comes from congregations, either as contributions to the Mission and Service Fund or from assessments.

Different courts have different funding mechanisms available to them. Both presbyteries and Conferences can assess the court below them. The General Council Office does not assess and relies on voluntary givings to the Mission and Service Fund for most of its activities, including ministry and mission and the services that support these activities.

Currently, the four courts of the church receive income from the following sources:

Court	Sources of Income
Pastoral Charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary givings • Investment income • Bequests • Other income, such as rental fees
Presbyteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments of pastoral charges • Investment income • Other income
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments of presbyteries • Grants from the General Council Office • Investment income • Bequests • Other income, such as sales of property
General Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary givings to the Mission and Service Fund • Investment income • Bequests • Other income, such as retail sales

The Challenge

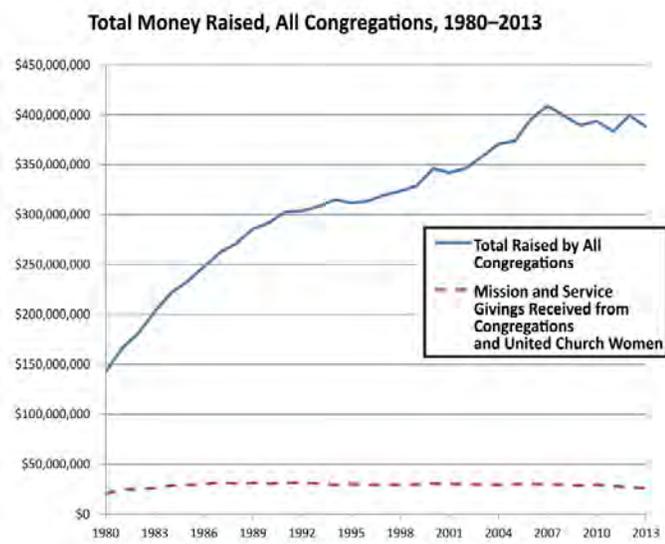
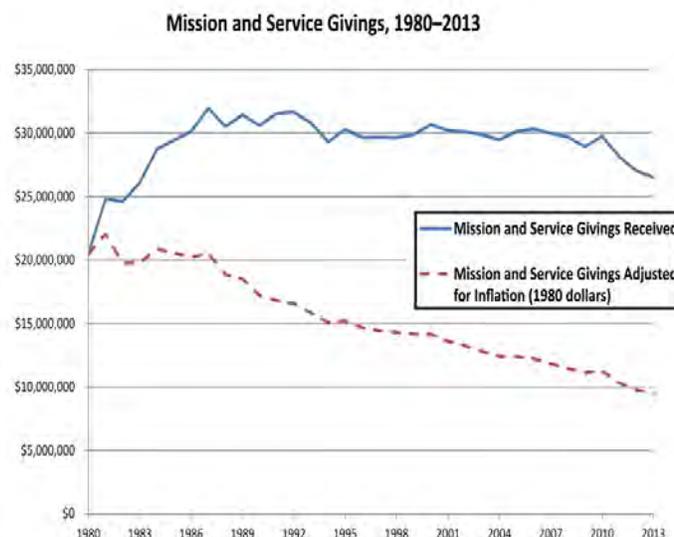
As a denomination, we have been living beyond our means. For many years, we have run deficits and used reserves and bequests to fund granting and denominational work in excess of annual revenue. The church can no longer fund deficits this way because it has drawn down unrestricted reserves to a point where they will soon be depleted. Given projected trends, at least \$11 million in costs need to be cut from the system by 2018. These reductions will impact all levels of the church because the Mission and Service Fund supports activity across the whole church.

How did we get here? From 1980 to 2007, givings to the Mission and Service Fund remained fairly stable at approximately \$30 million per year. Despite a steady decline in the number of givers, growth in average gifts helped keep the total relatively stable. But over these decades, inflation cut the denomination's purchasing power by more than half. In the meantime, congregational givings and presbytery assessments tended to keep pace with inflation.

However, all of these trends started to change in 2007 and 2008. Funding at the congregational level has begun to decline slowly, primarily due to church closures and local funding pressures. Similarly, givings to the Mission and Service Fund are now forecast to decline each year. Limited data are available on presbytery assessments, but the data that exist suggest this funding source has been more stable.

A number of factors are driving these trends. Church membership and attendance, and therefore the number of potential givers, are declining. Patterns of giving are changing as members increasingly see the church as just one of many organizations with which to share their financial gifts. In addition, the current system of funding the broader courts of the church is not well understood, and the fact that the Mission and Service Fund supports not only ministry and mission activities but also the administrative and governance services that support them is sometimes cited as a barrier to increased giving.

These trends have had a significant impact on funding throughout the church. Since 2006, the General Council has reduced costs by approximately \$11 million, almost all of it through reductions in grants and staff. These budget reductions have affected the whole church and



have included cuts to global grants and overseas missions, grants to Canadian mission support, theological education, General Council staffing, and as of 2014, Conference grants.

In light of continuing downward trends, the denomination needs to cut costs significantly by 2018 to live within its means, regardless of whether structural changes are made. Many of the most obvious operational cost savings at the General Council level have already been implemented, so now the church needs to consider more fundamental and strategic restructuring. Whether or not the 42nd General Council approves the task group's proposals or subsequent remits pass, major cost-reduction initiatives must begin in 2016.

Why This Recommendation?

Given current financial projections, there is no scenario in which the United Church can afford its existing structure. The church needs to reset its system substantially to remove at least \$11 million in costs in the near term and also leave room to grow and evolve in God's new creation. This will require fundamentally changing the church's structures and processes and how they are funded. The alternative is to simply keep cutting costs in our current structure and let each part of the church adapt or die, without hope of renewal.

The task group worked with General Council finance staff and consulted the Permanent Committee on Finance to create financial models to test the feasibility of its recommendations, including a three-council structure. This modelling showed a three-council structure is financially feasible, but only if the church is prepared to rationalize regional structures and make deep staff reductions at both the denominational and regional levels.

The task group's recommendations would fundamentally change how the work of the broader church is funded. Through increased assessments and decreased expenses, this model would remove at least \$11 million from the system. But the task group's financial model contemplates cutting more deeply than is absolutely necessary just to balance the budget for the wider church. Specifically, the task group recommends a financial model that includes cuts of \$13.8 million in 2018 in order to reinvest 10 percent of annual Mission and Service givings in Chasing the Spirit and \$750,000 in a College of Ministers. The Mission and Service Fund would become a transparent funder of ministry and mission, while an assessment of communities of faith would fund services and functions that support ministry and mission.

It is challenging to draw a clear line between ministry and mission and the services that support them. Ministry and mission, supported by the Mission and Service Fund, could include the work of the Moderator; evangelism and ministry transformation; leadership development; Aboriginal ministries; ecumenical and interfaith activities; justice and partnership work; theological education; French, youth, and ethnic ministries; and philanthropy. Support services for mission and ministry, funded from an assessment, could include the Office of the General Secretary and various support services to communities of faith, including human resources; a College of Ministers; shared services such as finance, information technology, and communications; and costs for meetings, governance, and committees.

The model assumes communities of faith would be assessed at a rate that, on average, would be 25 percent more than is being assessed today. But for an individual community of faith, the increase would be a relatively small percentage of the total annual budget. The financial model assumes that the rate of assessment would be 4.75 percent of column 40, the cost to run a community of faith in the National Statistics. The actual rate of assessment

would be set by the denominational council for the following three years and should include a three-year averaging to smooth out significant variations in annual expenditures.

If the assessment were shared equally between the regional councils and the denominational council, \$6.2 million would be available to regional councils and \$6.2 million to the denominational council to fund governance and support services. In addition, the task group projects that \$2.4 million would be available to regional councils and \$18.9 million for the denominational council for mission and ministry funded by the Mission and Service Fund. The task group's model assumes Conference operating grants would be eliminated. It also assumes resources and investments that are held by current Conferences and presbyteries would continue to be held and used regionally or locally, unless the regions choose to share them.

Practical/Financial Implications

These recommendations, if adopted, would

- provide a pathway to sustainability by linking the amount of support services provided by the denominational and regional councils to revenues.
- significantly improve transparency and accountability in how the church is funded by creating a more sustainable structure that is predicated on the well-being of communities of faith.
- increase the current level of assessment paid by communities of faith by an average of 25 percent, which on average would result in a 1 percent increase in the cost to run a community of faith (which is column 40 in the National Statistics).
- create a clearer mission mandate for the Mission and Service Fund and potentially make it more appealing to givers.
- require that services be rationalized into more efficient regions. Most of the current Conferences would not be financially sustainable if they were forced to rely on their own assessments and current ways of operating. The Conference operating grant from the General Council represents between 30 percent and 50 percent of revenue for many Conferences. If the church chooses to have a middle council, then it would need to rationalize the services it provides into more efficient regions. Decisions about the future of All Native Circle Conference would be part of ongoing discussions around Aboriginal ministries and would be considered part of the ministry and mission activities the Mission and Service Fund would support. The task group recommends that Conferences meet over the next two years to rationalize their structures and staffing, either by amalgamating two or more courts or by sharing staff across separate courts. This rationalization will need to happen whether the task group's recommendations are accepted or not and must be completed by 2017.
- entail significant staff reductions across the country. In its modelling, the task group anticipates needing to reduce staff at the denominational and regional councils by approximately 23 percent overall from 2015 levels. However, regional councils could choose to mitigate staff cuts by levying additional assessments on communities of faith or using the region's investment or other income.

BACKGROUND #10: Finances

Next Steps

Over the past two-and-a-half years, the Comprehensive Review Task Group has listened to voices from across the United Church in an unprecedented way, and has researched, debated, and prayed over the report and recommendations you now hold in your hand.

We are now offering our recommendations to commissioners, presbyteries, Conferences, and all members of the United Church to engage with it in preparation for the 42nd General Council. Read the report, talk about it, decide whether you can support its recommendations, think of alternatives to anything you cannot live with and propose them through your presbytery and Conference, and talk to the commissioners from your area who will be going to General Council. This report is now yours to work with. It's about the future of our church.

God is working in our world and within us, as always. Jesus calls us ever onward, beyond our comfort zones and safety nets. The Spirit will be with the commissioners of the 42nd General Council as they find the wisdom to make the decisions they need to make.

The next steps after the 42nd General Council depend on the specific decisions that are made. Whether or not the General Council approves the task group's proposals or subsequent remits pass, major cost-reduction initiatives must begin in 2016.

If the recommendations contained in this report are adopted, it would be up to the Executive and Sub-Executive of the General Council to develop and carry out an implementation plan. Some of the key components of the plan are set out below.

If the General Council decides to take a course of action different from these recommendations, it would still be up to the Executive and Sub-Executive of the General Council to implement the General Council's decisions.

The Executive of the General Council also has authority to take whatever action it considers necessary on behalf of the General Council if critical financial or other circumstances emerge between meetings of the General Council. This could include action beyond the decisions made by the 42nd General Council.

Remits

All changes that affect the structure of the United Church in a fundamental way must be approved through the remit process. Three of the changes recommended in this report would be considered Category 3 remits, which means they would be subject to the approval of a majority of all presbyteries and of all pastoral charges:

- Recommendation #3: A Three-Council Model
- Recommendation #4: A College of Ministers
- Recommendation #6: Funding a New Model

As well as the task group's recommendations, the General Council will be considering a proposal from the General Secretary that would require a Category 3 remit. See the heading "Legislative Change: Federal," below.

The remits would be sent to presbyteries and pastoral charges by the end of 2015. The return date would be set to give these courts at least a year to make their decisions before the 43rd General Council meets.

When a remit is approved by a majority of presbyteries and pastoral charges, there is a final step in the process: the change comes into effect only if it is enacted by the next General Council. The 43rd General Council would be responsible for deciding whether to enact any of the remits that have been approved.

If one or more of these remits is not approved, or not enacted, it would be up to the 43rd General Council to decide on an alternative course of action for the United Church. Again, the Executive of the General Council has authority to act on behalf of the General Council between meetings of the General Council if emergency financial or other circumstances require it.

Legislative Change: Federal

The changes contemplated in Recommendation #3: A Three-Council Model are so fundamental that they would require an amendment to *The United Church of Canada Act*, the federal legislation that created The United Church of Canada in 1925. Under our current structure, this amendment would require the approval of Parliament, initiated by either the federal government or a private member's bill. The process could be a lengthy one and may not necessarily result in the amendment being approved.

The United Church could move to governance under the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act* rather than *The United Church of Canada Act*. This would give the church the option to make major structural changes without the need for parliamentary approval. Moving to the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act* would also require a Category 3 remit, which would be sent to all presbyteries and all pastoral charges at the same time as the other remits.

If the remit passed and was enacted by the 43rd General Council, the Executive of the General Council could then complete the move to governance under the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act*. All of the changes approved by the other remits could then be legally implemented through that Act following the 43rd General Council.

If the remit failed, the only option would be for the United Church to seek parliamentary approval for the three-council model, or to restructure in another way that did not eliminate Conferences and presbyteries. Those decisions would be up to the 43rd General Council.

Legislative Change: Provincial

In addition to the federal legislation, there is parallel legislation entitled *The United Church of Canada Act* in nine Canadian provinces (not Newfoundland). The impact of the proposed changes—a three-council model and a move to governance under the *Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act*—on the provincial legislation would need to be explored and addressed as part of the implementation plan. This could begin immediately after the 42nd General Council, with any decisions being deferred until the outcome of the remits is known.

Pilot Projects

Some Conferences and presbyteries may be keen to begin moving into new models following the 42nd General Council. If the General Council approves the restructuring, it should also consider approving the initiation of pilot projects on the College and the three-council structure on a voluntary basis. These projects would generate learnings that would help inform the implementation of restructuring on a church-wide basis, if approved by remit.

Other Work

Concurrent with the work of the Comprehensive Review, several other significant reviews and projects have been underway, relating in one way or another to ministry in the United Church:

- "One Order of Ministry" proposes a revised model for the status and roles of professional church leaders.
- "The Candidacy Pathway" proposes a revised model for discerning, identifying, and training professional church leaders.
- "Leadership Formation for Ministry" proposes a new competency-based model for assessing formal and experiential learning and would redefine the church's relationship with theological schools.
- The "Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships" project focused on ensuring support, oversight, and accountability of ministry personnel, and matching the qualifications of ministry personnel with leadership needs.

The task group has met with those engaged with these pieces of work. The task group's recommendations are designed to work with and build on the results of these other pieces if they are approved, but do not depend on them going forward.

Although much is uncertain about the future, one thing is clear: if we want to offer a place where the next generation can find their spiritual home, we must be willing to risk new and unfamiliar ways. This isn't new; this is the essence of following Jesus.

Commissioning

It is with profound gratitude and hope that the Comprehensive Review Task Group offers this work to the church. Early in the process, we recognized that if any change were to happen, the whole church had to be engaged in the process, listening to one another, praying together, and learning to trust one another. We did our best to listen to your wisdom, hear your advice, and engage your imagination. The task group believes there has been real conversation, and sense an acceleration of changes in our culture and church processes right across the country. The evolution of Jesus' ministry is ongoing and at hand. The Spirit is active among us.

Frequently, we have been bowled over by the movement of the Spirit. We do not claim this model is God's plan for the United Church. Rather, we have been caught up in a Spirit-storm of change that is already taking place and trying to create support structures that would enable the church to be our best selves, sustainable but not static, long into the future.

We have been moved by your prayers as individuals, as committees, as networks, and on social media. We encourage those prayers and hope they will continue and intensify as the church approaches the 42nd General Council in August 2015.

While the catalyst for this work was declining financial and human resources, the goal of the review was to create a structure that would enable a more vibrant and energetic church. Staying the same is not an option.

You asked us to be bold, and now we are asking the same of you. We are counting on your continued involvement to clarify, improve, and celebrate this new future. We believe these extensive structural and procedural changes are the church's best hope for vibrant sustainability, but also trust the Spirit will lead us together. Consequently, while we will be available for clarification and continued deep conversation, the report now belongs to the whole church to use in preparation for our gathering at General Council.

The need for change in how the church is and will be united in God's work is pressing. This process of listening to and responding to God's call continues to be the work of the whole church. We encourage people across the church to listen to one another with careful attention, and to listen for the movement of the Spirit. This is not just about money or structural change, but about transformation in the church.

God, through Jesus Christ, will be active in the world no matter what we choose to do.

So, embrace the Spirit as she sparks new life and opens new paths to the realm of God.

Glossary⁷

Aboriginal Ministries Council

A decision-making body composed of representatives from Aboriginal constituencies across The United Church of Canada, including All Native Circle Conference, British Columbia Native Ministries Council, Ontario and Quebec Native Ministries, and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. Representatives are sought from French and intercultural ministries as well as from the Aboriginal communities of Inuit/Métis, the Maritimes, and Indigenous traditional wisdom.

Accreditation

The process of ensuring ministers in the United Church are in good standing and in compliance with the standards set by the denominational council. The proposed College of Ministers would keep a roster of accredited ministers. Communities of faith could select and covenant only with accredited ministers.

Assessment

The amount of money each community of faith must contribute to fund the life and work of the wider church. In the proposed model, the denominational council would assess communities of faith. This assessment would fund the governance and support services of the church at the denominational and regional levels.

Chasing the Spirit

The tentative name of a proposed initiative to support and develop new ministries and forms of ministry. It would provide space for risk, innovation, and transformation and would be funded by 10 percent of annual givings to the Mission and Service Fund.

Clusters

Geographic groupings of communities of faith that would gather for collegiality, support, sharing best practices, and determining priorities for common mission and ministry in the area.

College of Ministers

A body established by the denominational council that would be responsible for accrediting, admitting, overseeing, and disciplining ministers according to denominational policy.

Communities of Faith

Communities of faith would include any community of people based in Jesus Christ that gathers to explore faith, to worship, and to serve, and could include congregations as we currently understand them, outreach ministries, faith-based communal living, house churches, shared ministries with other denominations, online communities, and others. They would connect with other communities of faith through clusters and networks, and send representatives to regional and denominational councils.

⁷ In this glossary, terms related to the church's current structures and processes are referred to in the present tense. Terms related to proposed structures and processes are in the conditional tense.

Denominational Council

A body with representatives from each community of faith that would meet every three years to nurture the identity of the United Church, discern and express a denominational voice, and connect the United Church with God's wider church. It would deal with denomination-shaping issues related to public witness, theology, and governance structure. The council would establish a three-year budget envelope for the church, set the assessment rate for communities of faith to fund the church, and elect a Moderator.

Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Project

A new model for the human resources work of beginning, supporting, and ending pastoral relationships between ministers and pastoral charges. Pilot projects have been conducted in many Conferences across the church since 2011 based on principles of separating oversight and discipline responsibilities for ministers, emphasizing collegiality among ministers, increasing focus on mission and ministry in pastoral charges and presbyteries, and engaging trained staff support for this work.

Fishing on the Other Side

A discussion paper prepared by the Comprehensive Review Task Group that explored a structure with two councils, a connectional space, a college of ministers, and an association of ministers. This discussion paper was the basis of the consultation with all presbyteries, districts, the Consistoire Laurentien, and the Bermuda Synod in spring 2014.

Incompetence

Failure to meet the standards of ministry as defined by the denominational council.

Ministers

The United Church of Canada since its beginning has upheld a central tenet of the Reformation: that the ministry of the church includes the ministry of all the baptized (1 Peter 2:9). However, in this paper "minister" is the general term used for a variety of persons recognized as working in paid ministry and includes those who are ordained, commissioned, and recognized to provide leadership in communities of faith.

Mission and Service Fund

The unified fund that supports service and ministry of the United Church by donations. Individual members, communities of faith, and organizations such as the United Church Women contribute generously to this fund every year. Gifts are combined to support global and local mission, Aboriginal ministry, theological education, faith formation, the work of Conferences, and the General Council. In the proposed model, Mission and Service donations would be used exclusively to fund the mission and ministry of the United Church, while governance and support services would be funded by an assessment of communities of faith.

Networks

A group of people or communities of faith who organize around a particular issue or passion. Networks would not be bound by geography, although there could be local groups within a national network. Examples already exist, including Affirm United, United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel, Table de concertation régionale des ministères en français, and many others. The proposed model would encourage further development of networks.

Regional Councils

Geographically based councils that would connect, covenant with, and provide advice, support, and services to communities of faith. Regional councils would be composed of one lay representative and one ministry representative (as applicable) from each community of faith within the region, and would meet at least once a year in person, electronically, or via their executives.

Remit (from F.2 of *The Manual, 2013*, p. 125)

A vote by presbyteries, or by presbyteries and pastoral charges, to change the Basis of Union.

Trust God; Trust the Body

A discussion paper prepared by the Comprehensive Review Task Group that asked questions about funding, the relationship and accountability of communities of faith to the denomination, social justice, discerning a national voice, and identifying regional needs and opportunities. This was the basis of the consultation with all Conferences in the United Church in 2014.