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## MODERATOR'S ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

**Origin: Gary Paterson, Moderator**

Soon, my time as Moderator will come to an end, and shortly after, I will be returning to my home congregation, St. Andrew's-Wesley, to once again engage in ministry "on the ground." It seems an apt moment to share with you some of what I have done and learned in the journey of the last three years.

I am grateful...for this United Church, now celebrating its 90th anniversary; for the call to be your Moderator, the opportunity to offer what I could for the well-being of this church; for the hundreds, no, thousands of faithful people I have met across the country, and around the world, filled with Spirit, gifts expressed in so many different ways.

On good days, it's easy to be thankful. But it is perhaps even more important to be grateful on the tough days, when we are tired; when worry about the future seems to hold the upper hand, and anxiety leaves us feeling cranky or despairing. As the 17<sup>th</sup>-century poet George Herbert has said:

*Thou who hast given so much to me,  
Give one thing more, a grateful heart...  
Not thankful, when it pleaseth me,  
As if thy blessings had spare days:  
But such a heart, whose pulse may be  
Thy praise.*

Change is constant, which means the church is always in crisis in one way or another. What is happening to the United Church, and to most, if not all, other denominations in North America, is part of a sea change in our society, our world. There is no quick fix; trust me on this.

I have laughingly said that in past times God sent locusts to wake us up but that nowadays God sends statistics. We are being called (and forced) into a new future. Hence my participation in the work of the Comprehensive Review—the challenges of structural change; the necessity of cutting our budget by some \$10–11 million; and above all, the dreams of a different way of being church.

We must both cherish the past and let it go. And that's not easy. Note this pattern in Isaiah 43:16–18, where verses describing the mighty acts of God in the liberation from Egypt are followed immediately by "*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.*" So...we are called to remember how God has been with us in the past; to cherish our history; to lament and grieve what is passing away; and then...to let it go, whether that be liturgies, buildings, organs, or a paid, full-time congregational minister in every town.

Nevertheless, this is a time for hope. As the Bengali poet, Tagore, has said, "*Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.*" And so, I have travelled across the country, singing about the light, the dawn, even though the darkness sometimes feels overwhelming—[www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gce/2015/gce\\_1503\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gce/2015/gce_1503_workbook.pdf) (pages 31–34)—visited all 13 Conferences; attended innumerable events, gatherings,

conferences, celebrations, and anniversaries; met with a multitude of congregations and their ministry leaders—urban, rural, and remote; small and large; thriving, and near closure. And over and over I have tried to balance hard words—“Wake up! Everything is changing—NOW! Perhaps half of our buildings will shut their doors in the next 10 years”—with words of encouragement, inviting people to see new possibilities, trusting that crucifixion and resurrection are intertwined...and true.

We are a big-tent denomination. I have spent time with post-theists and Cruxifusion members. I have celebrated with congregations when they became “Affirming,” and I have watched us struggle to understand our place in the multiethnic reality that is Canada. I have preached in French and shared in worship where nine different languages were offered up by members of the congregation. But I also know that we haven’t figured out what it means for us to be intercultural. I have met with people who feel our United Church is “too political” and those who are convinced we’re not doing enough. Some are hungry to rediscover what evangelism is all about; others are worried about what that might look like. But, for all our differences, we are committed to being a “united” church, and we want to understand each other, and strengthen each other. Part of my call has been to be a travelling Moderator who listens, who cross-pollinates, who tells stories from one congregation to people in another part of the country, who believes that our differences makes us stronger and richer. And when I can’t get there in person, I’ve done my best to get the message out with letters, articles, video-greetings, YouTube videos, and above all with my blog—over 160 postings...who knew!!

But we’re going to be smaller; that’s a fact. And as we find ourselves on the margins of power and influence, it might feel a lot like early church days, which could be exciting, a time of experimentation and new possibilities, where we live as salt, yeast, and mustard seed. As Jesuit Daniel Berrigan said, *“We stand on the brink of the unknown. Which is to say, that things are normal, and good, and permissive of joy.”*

During the last three years the text I have preached on most frequently comes from Isaiah 43—*“Thus says the LORD...I am about to do a new thing—now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”* Nobody knows what “the new thing” is, exactly—it’s been called the “Missional Church,” “Fresh Expressions,” the “Emerging/Emergent Church.” It’s why I and 100 ministry leaders attended Greenbelt in August 2013, to be part of a festival where 20,000 people were sharing their experiences and hopes for a new church. It’s why I have been excited by the various “Greenbelt follow-ups” that have occurred, such as “Cracks” at Ottawa; “Festimagouche” at Tatamagouche, the week after General Council ([www.festimagouche.ca](http://www.festimagouche.ca)); or “Skylight,” happening in Paris, Ontario, the week before General Council [www.skylightfestival.ca](http://www.skylightfestival.ca). It’s why we must continue to invest in and support ministry leadership, in both traditional and new expressions. It’s why “Chasing the Spirit” (or whatever we might end up calling it) is the first recommendation of the Comprehensive Review.

I’m convinced that poetry helps. You ask me for a presentation, a reflection, a sermon...and you’re bound to end up hearing at least one poem. Here and there I’ve done workshops on poetry and faith. Metaphors—like salt, yeast, and mustard seeds—grab the imagination and take us to new places. So do images of...overburdened camels that can’t get you through the desert alive ([www.gratefulness.org/poetry/lightening\\_the\\_road.htm](http://www.gratefulness.org/poetry/lightening_the_road.htm)); piranhas who turn out to be God’s

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beloved children ([dianneastle.blogspot.ca/2014/05/piranha-prayer-by-evangeline-paterson.html](http://dianneastle.blogspot.ca/2014/05/piranha-prayer-by-evangeline-paterson.html)); weeds in a vacant lot that lead us into deep prayer ([www.goodreads.com/quotes/414333-praying-it-doesn-t-have-to-be-the-blue-iris-itLINK](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/414333-praying-it-doesn-t-have-to-be-the-blue-iris-itLINK)); the thread you hold onto that saves your life ([www.goodreads.com/quotes/319729-the-way-it-is-there-s-a-thread-you-follow-it](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/319729-the-way-it-is-there-s-a-thread-you-follow-it)).

I've even suggested that jazz is a metaphor for what we are about—God offers the melody of the gospel, and then asks us to improvise; God gives us our own instrument, and then asks us to play with others.

Spending time with the youth and young adults of our church also helps. I've had the opportunity to be part of several Conference Youth Events: British Columbia's Evolve, London Youth Forum, Toronto's Teen Camp, Worshiplude in Ottawa, Maritime Youth Forum; other youth gatherings in Manitou, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Bay of Quinte, Montreal and Ottawa, and at the Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering; and National Events such as Connections (Camping), Rendez-vous, and Youth Forum. Not just the church of the future, but the church right now, with vibrancy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness! I want to take that energy and sprinkle it across the church. Let's always remember how important it is to support youth ministry.

Because this has been a triennium where we have focused on what it means to be church, there have been frequent conversations about how we will engage in the mission to which God calls us, the ministry of loving neighbour and neighbourhood, the work of peace and justice. What does it mean to have less power, and to know that government pays little attention to what we think and that the media isn't particularly interested in what we have to say unless it's publicly controversial or scandalous? How do we live with the reality that there will be fewer resources for staff and research?

Well, we know that this work flourishes when it is local and contextual, and owned by members of congregations and communities of faith. Networks will become increasingly important. Likewise, partnerships with other denominations and ecumenical organizations; and with non-church groups who are equally committed to the work of changing the world. But we also know, from experience, that staff support is necessary for the long haul, particularly for national and global issues. So how do we find the balance?

I have visited many of our urban ministries across the country, from Victoria to St. John's; met with global partners in Colombia and Cuba; talked to people engaged in the pressing challenge of saving the earth...climate change, fossil fuels, environmental degradation, species extinction; have had conversation with those calling attention to the deep injustices in the land of Israel and Palestine; and have been present at gatherings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

How do we establish priorities? As Archbishop Romero once said:

*We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.*

I am grateful to have been able to participate in a number of events with Aboriginal people—from ceremonies in Bella Coola where residential school survivors were honoured; to the gathering of Keewatin Presbytery; to intimate listening circles during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events in Vancouver and Edmonton and elsewhere; to our church's Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering. My understanding of the broken relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has moved from head to heart. I am certain that how Canada travels the road to reconciliation will define who we are as a country, and I believe that our church has a particular call to take leadership in this journey—for justice for Aboriginal peoples; for our own healing; and for the well-being of this country.

And yes, let me say again, I am grateful. And since we embrace an incarnational faith, let me be specific and concrete. Grateful for Sue Fortner, my Administrative Assistant, who kept my life as organized as possible these past three years; for General Secretary Nora Sanders, a colleague of patient and faithful wisdom; for the staff at the General Council Office, dedicated and creative; for John Lawson (chair) and the members of my Advisory Committee, who helped shape my ministry as Moderator; for the members of the General Council Executive, who meeting by meeting held the well-being of the church in their prayers and decisions. And I offer endless thanks for The United Church of Canada—may we remain faithful to Jesus Christ, whose body we are.

The Right Rev. Gary Paterson  
41<sup>st</sup> Moderator of the United Church of Canada

## **MODERATOR’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE 42<sup>ND</sup> GENERAL COUNCIL CORNER BROOK**

It is the mandate of the Moderator’s Advisory Committee (MAC) to “provide advice, support and assistance to the Moderator in fulfilling the duties of the office most effectively” (*Manual* 3.17).

It has been the great privilege of the MAC Committee to accompany our Moderator, Gary Paterson, on this three-year marathon that is the Moderator’s journey from Ottawa to Corner Brook, Newfoundland, and the dozens and dozens of places in between. We have marvelled at Gary’s great stamina and boundless energy. His heart’s desire is to say “Yes!” to every invitation that came from every United Church across the land—and our gentle reminder that we felt part of our mandate was to ensure that he made it to the finish line healthy in body, mind, and spirit! Each time we met, we witnessed Gary’s deep passion and love for this United Church and the offering of his best leadership ability in this time of transition and comprehensive review. Most of all we witnessed up close his deep Christian faith and call to offer spiritual leadership to our United Church, “quickenning in the hearts of the people a sense of God as revealed in Christ, and heartening and strengthening the whole United Church.” (*Manual* 511)

Each Moderator tends to use the MAC Committee in different ways that works for them. We met eight times over the Moderator’s mandate. The rhythm that we worked out was to meet face-to-face for several days each year and supplemented these meetings with conference calls. In each of these meetings we were privileged to listen to the joys and challenges Gary experienced in his role as Moderator and then to pause and explore in a deeper way those areas that Gary needed to ponder and where he needed to hear different perspectives and points of view. Bible stories and poetry always flowed through these conversations. And we were always privileged to join in prayer—with so many others across the church—to pray for Gary in his leadership role, for his family, and for our church.

As Chair I met quite regularly with Gary and Sue Fortner, Administrative Assistant to the Moderator, to consider Gary’s agenda in some detail. In this detailed work, I wish to knowledge with deep gratitude Tim Stevenson, Gary’s spouse, who was most helpful in so many ways but especially helping Gary keep a healthy home/work balance. (By the way, this is an almost impossible task for the Moderator! It is important for us as a church to remember the cost on the family that this Office demands.)

One of the important tasks of the Moderator is to have an extended (six-day) visit to each of the 13 Conferences of our church. Very early in Gary’s mandate we met with the Executive Secretaries from all the Conferences, and they were very frank and forthcoming about what they needed. It was evident that there was “no one-size-fits-all” type of visit. On behalf of the Moderator and the MAC Committee, I would like to extend our thanks to all the Executive Secretaries who did so much to shape, arrange, welcome, and in many cases, act as chauffeur and guide for the Moderator in exploring this wonderful church of ours in their context.

This Committee is made up of a combination of staff and lay/ministry members. The staff has to be there—but they were with us with amazing grace, diligence, and full attention. Mary Frances

Denis always offered sage advice. Nora Sanders, in the midst of a myriad of duties and responsibilities, offered her full attention, solid direction, clarity, and wisdom that came out of an alive and vibrant faith. And finally deepest thanks to Sue Fortner, Administrative Assistant to the Moderator, who has faithfully worked with three Moderators and MAC Committees and has been “Den Mother” to us all. To all the other members of the MAC Committee who shared of their time and wisdom and faith—I wish to offer deepest thanks.

Finally I offer thanks to God for the inspired and faith-filled leadership of our Moderator, Gary Paterson, and this journey we were privileged to share with him.

And since none of our meeting were ever complete without poetry...a poem for Gary and for the readers of this report:

*Not knowing when the dawn will come*

*I open every door;*

*Or has it feathers like a bird,*

*Or billows like a shore?*

Emily Dickinson (1830–86)

John Lawson, Chair

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the MAC Committee

Gary Paterson (Moderator),

Marion Best (Former Moderator)

Mary-Frances Denis (Program Coordinator, Media and Public Relations),

Susan Fortner (Administrative Assistant to the Moderator),

Hannah Lee (Member),

Martha Pedoniquotte (Member),

Nora Sanders (General Secretary, General Council),

Michael Shewburg (General Council Rep)



## **GENERAL SECRETARY'S ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

*Behold, I make all things new.*

—Revelation 21:5

I hold this scripture passage in my heart as I reflect on the past three years and look ahead to implementing the decisions you will make in August at the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council. These words tell us God continues to create and call the church into new ways of being. They remind us that God is at the heart of this transformation and recall our Creed, which tells us, “We are not alone, we live in God’s world.”

These hopeful words speak to me especially at this time in the life of The United Church of Canada. This is a challenging time to be in church leadership. Like many denominations, the United Church is struggling to adjust to declining membership, volunteer resources, finances, and influence. But our shared faith that God continues to work in the world is a source of strength and hope that helps me—and I hope all of you who will serve as commissioners to the General Council—see new possibilities in these uncertain times. May we open ourselves to one another and the Holy Spirit as we discern together where God is calling us.

A time when the focus is on structure and process would not have been my choice of times to serve in church leadership. I would rather serve in a time when the focus was on renewal of our faith in ways that speak to current and coming generations. Maybe you feel the same way. And yet here we are, called to leadership in these times. I pray that together we can ensure that, even as decisions about structures and finances occupy us, we will remember that these things exist to support our calling to serve others and to share the good news of Jesus Christ in the world.

God’s promise to make all things new includes our church—his church—and the faith we live and share.

As I write this report in preparation for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council, I share news of my own work, as well as the work of all of the staff colleagues who serve with me. This report is an overview of some of the work the General Council Office has done on your behalf over the past three years. Further details are available in the accountability reports I shared with the Executive of the General Council during the triennium, which were published in the workbook for each Executive meeting. You can find them at [www.united-church.ca/general-council/gce](http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gce).

### **The Work of the General Council Office**

Those of you who have visited the General Council Office in Toronto have met the dedicated members of our staff and seen at least some of what we do. But in a church as diverse and geographically spread out as ours, it is sometimes helpful to let you know about the work our office does because so much of it, while crucial to the church, is not always visible.

This list of things that staff of the General Council Office do is not in any particular order, and is by no means complete:

- support the Moderator, including coordinating the Moderator’s visits across the church

- create, share, and facilitate worship resources, including Lenten resources and online Bible studies
- develop public statements on issues of key concern
- collect and analyze church statistics and publish the *Year Book*
- support the work of living into right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples
- process pre-authorized remittance givings to local congregations and the Mission & Service Fund
- facilitate events—like Rendez-vous, for celebration, learning, and mission
- set standards and policies for United Church camps and incorporated ministries
- provide technical advice and problem-solving support to congregations around finance, CRA compliance, insurance, and organizational change
- support congregational stewardship and raise money for the Mission & Service Fund, which supports the work we do as a denomination
- work with communities of faith to imagine and develop new ministries
- develop and nurture ecumenical and interfaith relationships and work with global partners
- communicate the work and priorities of the church through the denominational website, social media, and print publications
- administer payroll and benefits for ministry personnel and lay employees
- administer our pension fund and ensure it is invested wisely and responsibly
- support Conferences, pastoral charges, and ministers in questions about and supporting healthy local pastoral relations between ministers and congregations
- support the policies that help to ensure safe and healthy local ministries
- call and support members preparing for ministry and coming to the United Church from other denominations in Canada and around the world.
- research, design, and test new and effective ways to support local congregations and their ministers.
- work with Conferences to coordinate work across the church
- support and plan meetings of the General Council and its Executive, the Aboriginal Ministries Council, and denominational committees and task groups

Even after three rounds of staff cuts (sadly, since I have been here, in the first year after each General Council), it's amazing what gets accomplished. I am grateful for all my colleagues at the General Council Office and Conference offices, who contribute so much to the life of our church. The relationships within the Staff Leaders group—composed of the General Council Office management group and Conference executive secretaries and speaker—have been particularly important to me as we have prayed together, and struggled together with the difficult issues that our church faces. Our church is truly blessed by the dedication and loyalty of staff, especially in the face of continuing change and uncertainty.

### **These Times of Change**

Much of our work at the General Council Office over the past three years has been focused on resourcing visioning and planning processes around the future of the church.

The largest and most complex of these processes was the Comprehensive Review, which culminated in *United in God's Work*, a report you will consider and make decisions about in August. Supporting the Comprehensive Review Task Group was a big focus of my work this triennium as it engaged the church in an unprecedented conversation about the future and undertook the huge task of reviewing church structures and processes. I particularly want to thank the seven members of the task group who, along with the Moderator, brought their wisdom, commitment, and countless volunteer hours to the task of reimagining our church. They are true servants of the church who have given up so much to do this work on our behalf. I would also like to thank General Council and Conference staff who supported the task group by offering research, expertise, logistical assistance, and hospitality to the task group.

Having supported the task group as they did their work, my role shifted when their report was completed and released. As General Secretary, it is now my role to encourage engagement with the report across The United Church of Canada, and to ensure that Commissioners have full scope to work with it and consider changes as they come to the General Council to make decisions.

Even after over two years of consultation and discernment, the Comprehensive Review Task Group's recommendations offer broad themes for change. If these changes or variations of them are approved, there will still be many details to be filled in during the implementation phase. I am committed to undertaking this work, with staff colleagues, and with advice and direction from the Executive, and from all courts of the church.

While much of the task group's work focused on nurturing new ministries and developing more agile structures, it also recognized a fundamental imperative: the need to bring our spending in line with our revenue. Whatever decisions are made about our church structures, we are headed for change. With the Permanent Committee on Finance projecting a cumulative deficit of almost \$20 million over the next three years if no steps are taken, it has become clear that we will need to begin to address our financial challenges even before decisions around the Comprehensive Review report and any other related proposals can be finalized and implemented. That's why the Executive of the General Council in March approved in principle a proposal to move to a balanced budget by 2018 at the latest and has directed me to work with the Permanent Committee on Finance to bring to the November 2015 Executive meeting budget plans that will achieve that goal. Our best thinking at this time is that these plans would include reducing grant programs in 2016, initiating planning for staff reductions, reducing travel and governance budgets, and eliminating Conference operating grants by 2018, with the exception of All Native Circle Conference. For more information, please see the report of the Permanent Committee on Finance.

At a time when we know some changes will involve loss, God continues to help us to see opportunities. One of those opportunities lies in strengthening our relationships with other denominations as an expression and extension of our ecumenical and uniting traditions. You will have before you at this General Council meeting three historic proposals; these are a first for the United Church. You are being asked to approve three new relationships that will bring us closer to ecumenical partners: a full communion agreement with the United Church of Christ (USA) and mutual recognition of ministry agreements with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of

Korea and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. All of these, which are the culmination of several years of work, show our commitment to unity as the body of Christ, and offer opportunities for new or richer relationships at all levels of the church.

During this triennium, we have been living into the decision of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council to enter into another form of ecumenical relationships, a form that is new to our denomination. The Executive has approved Associate Relationships with the Ghana Methodist church, The Methodist Church of the Caribbean and Americas, and the Methodist Church of Zimbabwe. These relationships provide connection with migrant churches, while respecting their desire to maintain their own identity and connection to their denomination in the country of origin.

There are other possibilities for new ways of working with others. Recognizing that many congregations are already involved in Habitat for Humanity projects, we have begun discussions with Habitat about a national partnership to support these relationships. These discussions, which are in early stages, are built on the recognition of common goals of service to others, and the benefits to both organizations of offering church members the opportunity for “hands on” work in service of others, using organizational structures for volunteer involvement that Habitat already has in place.

Also looking to the future, we continue to implement and experiment with a range of technologies to communicate and meet more effectively and efficiently. Perhaps our most visible achievement in this area is the launch of the new denominational websites en français ([www.egliseunie.ca](http://www.egliseunie.ca)), and the coming new English site ([www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)), which will enhance our ability to serve both English- and French-speaking members and seekers by making content more engaging, easier to find, and accessible on tablets and cellphones.

We are also using technology more and more for education, discussion, and spiritual nurture. Some of you may have participated in webinars hosted by EDGE: A Network for Ministry Development, United in Learning, “Rock the Bible,” our second annual online Lenten Bible study; or the series of live online discussion forums the Comprehensive Review Task Group hosted to engage the church in discussions about the future. We are also using technology to meet over distances. In this triennium, the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council reconvened electronically to deal with a few items of routine business. At this General Council meeting, we have moved increasingly to electronic workbooks instead of paper, and are live-streaming the meeting for people across the church who want to follow the proceedings. And we are looking at the possibility of beginning the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Council with an electronic session a year early in 2017 to approve the results of any remits that you may authorize.

Even as some ministries struggle or close, new life and growth are present in many parts of our church. I’m excited about the initiative that has created “The Hope Collection” as a place to celebrate these, and learn from their experiences. [www.hopecollection.ca](http://www.hopecollection.ca)

As we move into the next three years, may we bring hopeful eyes to the possibilities ahead. Perhaps we can experience the inevitability of change as an opportunity to try new things.

### **Responsible Investment**

During this triennium, a Responsible Investment Reference Group created to consider issues and provide advice to all three investing bodies of the denomination nationally (United Church of Canada treasury fund, the United Church Pension Board, and United Church Foundation). Although each has some different considerations because of different legal and fiduciary obligations, the shared Reference Group strengthens the sense of shared principles.

It hasn't just been a matter of studying these issues: the church has been engaged in various forms of advocacy and shareholder engagement as well. We were the first denomination in Canada to become a signatory to UN PRI (UN Principles of Responsible Investment), have partnered with SHARE (Shareholder Association for Research and Education), have written letters to government leaders, and have had representatives speaking up at corporate annual meetings.

### **Major Reports**

This has been a busy triennium, and you will see elsewhere in this workbook the results of other work the General Council Office has supported over the past three years. This work includes reports and proposals on:

- one order of ministry
- a new understanding of membership
- a competency-based assessment system for candidates for ministry
- the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project
- Candidacy Pathway

Each of these reports is the culmination of several years of committee and staff work and in some cases would result in significant changes in our understanding and processes. But I believe each is also a faithful response to our current realities and deserves your consideration and prayer.

### **Living Faithfully in the World**

General Council Office staff continued over the triennium to support and animate the church's social justice priorities. Staff likely spent more time on measures related to peace and justice for Israel and Palestine, including the "Unsettling Goods" campaign, than on any other justice work coming out of the 41st General Council. This work is well begun, but far from complete: at its March meeting, the Executive directed that the work flowing from the Israel/Palestine report and motion at GC41, including deepening and strengthening relationships with the Jewish community guided by the United Church resource *Bearing Faithful Witness*, continue until 2018.

During the triennium, staff also coordinated a number of emergency appeals to raise money for situations of urgent need, including Syrian refugees, the Ebola crisis in west Africa, South Sudan, and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. I am writing this report just days after the earthquake in Nepal, and already United Church members have contributed generously to support the efforts of ACT Alliance, the ecumenical body we are part of to coordinate response to these major events.

I also want to lift up the fine work of the United Church Women (UCW) in addressing issues of social justice, both in Canada and around the world. The UCW marked its 50th anniversary by raising \$268,956 to fund maternal health training programs in Tanzania that are helping to lower death rates related to pregnancy and childbirth. I have in my office a beautiful rag doll, made by former UCW President Beverly Greene as part of the Alberta UCW Child Well-Being Initiative, a campaign that has been raising awareness about child poverty in Alberta since 2007. Both these initiatives demonstrate the leadership that the UCW provides our church as its members live out in very practical ways the four tenets: Christian witness, study, fellowship, and service.

### **Partner Council**

The United Church is privileged to have the accompaniment of the Partner Council, which is made up of representatives of global and Canadian partners. These partners help us understand that we are a part of a larger global context. Their wisdom and counsel have been a tremendous gift. After exposure to the church's work in right relations, the Partner Council has encouraged us to make choices that could even mean decreased funding to global partners, in order to continue our commitment to right relations. We look forward to the insights of Partner Council members who will be in Corner Brook with us in August.

### **Affirming Ministries**

The 41st General Council directed me to lead the Executive of General Council and the General Council staff in the "Affirming Ministry" study program, and to bring a report and recommendation to the 42nd General Council. We did not use the "Affirming Ministries Study Program" (which is the formal program of Affirm United), because it is designed for faith communities who will be deciding whether to become Affirming; a program was designed in consultation with Affirm United. We were grateful for the assistance of Bruce Hutchinson as a member of Affirm United and a former member of the General Council Executive. The executive had opportunities at each meeting for learning and reflection on what it means to be truly affirming. This and other intercultural lenses were lifted up during both educational times and decision making throughout the triennium.

I recommend that further opportunities be included in the work of the next and successive executives. In the final session, executive members were asked to make suggestions for further things that could be done to demonstrate the Executive's commitment to the affirming process, and these will be considered by the Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda as they plan for the work of the next Executive. I am not recommending other formal steps at this time. The Executive is not a faith community in the way that a congregation is, nor a collection of faith communities, as a presbytery or Conference is, but is a subset of a larger body, the General Council, and is therefore governed by the decisions of the General Council, which has spoken clearly on this topic.

The staff of the General Council Office also took part in an educational process, in their case an in-house workshop about gender identity and sexuality. This workshop included information about the differences and connections between gender and sexuality and best practices for making an environment that affirms individuals of all gender identities and sexualities, with a particular focus on transgender experiences and preferred personal pronouns. All of us who serve as staff of the General Council Office are bound by the decisions and policies of the General

Council, so this process was geared towards growing and learning together as a community, and included exercises to help us explore how to give and receive apologies. It is my intention that we will continue to give staff learning opportunities to equip them to understand and live out this and other priorities of the General Council. If General Council approves the proposal for a “Living Apology” process, staff of the General Council Office will be encouraged to engage with that. In this triennium, we also had a review of the General Council Office Human Resource policies in light of affirming principles. Our policies meet all legislated requirements of a work place and are broadly inclusive and accessible. I do not recommend other formal steps at this time.

### **Right Relations**

After six years of work, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to release its final report on June 2nd, and I, along with the Moderator and a considerable group of United Church people, will be attending the closing events in Ottawa. This will represent the end of the formal work of the Commissioners in acknowledging and documenting the experiences, impacts, and consequences of residential schools for former students, and raising awareness among all Canadians about the legacy of this shameful part of our history.

One of those Commissioners, Dr. Marie Wilson (who is also a member of the Yellowknife United Church), will be present at General Council to report on the work that has been done and on all that remains to be done for reconciliation to become a reality. As one of the parties to the Settlement Agreement, the United Church has committed to continuing to work together with the other parties (churches, government, and Aboriginal groups) to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations, as we strive to live out our apologies and live into right relations.

### **Youth Forum**

Following the successful Rendez-vous event in Winnipeg last summer, I am excited about this year’s new format for Youth Forum. The combination of the winter session (which I attended a little bit of) in February, involving a larger number of youth, the Pilgrimage across Canada this summer with one young person from each Conference, and the participation with youth commissioners from each Conference in the main body of General Council in Corner Brook, offers wonderful opportunities to youth participants and to the United Church as a whole. Given the significance of the decisions about the future of the United Church that this General Council will make, these youth voices will be especially important.

By the time we gather in Corner Brook, many of you will have encountered the youth Pilgrims on their way across Canada, and we will all benefit from the insights that they bring to General Council.

### **The Manual**

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Council approved a major overhaul to *The Manual*, and in this triennium the feedback on the new, simpler, clearer, less restrictive *Manual* has been very positive. The Manual Committee has recommended only a few small “tidying up” changes for consideration at this General Council.

Aussi, je suis heureuse que le Manuel soit maintenant disponible en français ([www.united-church.ca/fr/files/handbooks/manual\\_2013.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/fr/files/handbooks/manual_2013.pdf)). C'est la première fois qu'une telle ressource complète est disponible et ce sera un outil important pour les délégués francophones et bilingues au Conseil général 42, et les membres de l'église en général. La traduction a été possible grâce aux efforts de Judith Bricault (traductrice) et de Fred Braman (réviseur juridique). Merci à eux.

(Also, I am pleased that *The Manual* is now available in French ([www.united-church.ca/fr/files/handbooks/manual\\_2013.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/fr/files/handbooks/manual_2013.pdf)). It is the first time that such a complete resources has been available, and it will be an important tool for the francophone and bilingual commissioners of the 42nd General Council and members of the church generally. Judith Bricault did the translation and Fred Braman reviewed the legal terminology. Thank you to them.

### **Remits**

One of my responsibilities at General Council is to report formally on the results of the remits authorized by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012 and 2013. There were nine remits conducted during the past triennium. Eight of the remits have been approved by a majority of the presbyteries. The voting results are included in the proposal that I have brought to this 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council for enactment of these eight remits.

### **Rulings**

The General Secretary is also responsible for "ruling on questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church." The following rulings were given during the past triennium:

- |          |              |   |
|----------|--------------|---|
| 13-001-R | Jan 15, 2013 | Including Names of Respondents Under SAPRPP in Presbytery Minutes |
| 12-002-R | Nov 21, 2013 | Fee for Conference Annual Meeting                                 |
| 14-001-R | Oct 7, 2014  | Oversight re: Mandatory Racial Justice and Boundaries Training    |

### **United Church Foundation**

I serve on the board of the United Church Foundation, and am pleased to report to you that the United Church and its Foundation, while separate entities, are working together to serve the interests of our beloved denomination. During this triennium, \$29.2 million of trusts and endowments were transferred by the United Church to be held and managed by the Foundation, lifting up the principle that the Foundation would have responsibility for the "forever funds" that support future as well as current activities of the church.

### **Location of 43rd General Council**

I am delighted that the Executive has accepted an invitation from Bay of Quinte Conference and All Native Circle Conference to hold the 43rd General Council (2018) at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and Durham College in Oshawa, Ontario. Bay of Quinte has not hosted a General Council since 1968, and All Native Circle Conference has never hosted a General Council. Due to scheduling issues at the host site, the Council will be held in July rather than August 2018.



## **Final Word**

As this triennium comes to a close, I want to express my gratitude to all those who have supported the work we do together on behalf of the church. In particular, I would like to thank:

- Moderator Gary Paterson, who has inspired me and the church with his visionary and energetic leadership.
- the elected members of the Executive of the General Council and the committees and task groups of the General Council, who have offered their expertise and time to support the work of the church.
- all the members who have served on my supervision committee during this triennium, (Colin Phillips, Nobuko Iwai, Mary Laidlaw, Anna Stewart, Patricia Hassard, Sybil Wilson, and the late Alvin Dixon), who have offered invaluable guidance and encouragement to me over the past three years. I would particularly like to thank John Young, whose term on the committee is ending after six years, including the past three as chair. I am grateful for John's faithful leadership, wise counsel, dedication, and unwavering friendship.
- staff colleagues who serve with such competence and commitment through changing times.

I also want to thank all the faithful people across the church who have held me and staff of the General Council Office in prayer, encouraged us, and challenged us. It is a great privilege to serve you and the church we love during these times of change and opportunity.

Nora Sanders  
General Secretary

## **EXECUTIVE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

### **Origin: Moderator, General Secretary, and Chairs of Permanent Committees**

The Executive of the General Council has met seven times this triennium. The first meeting was a very brief one right after the end of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council to welcome the new Moderator and appoint a Sub-Executive for any necessary business arising before the first full meeting of the Executive in November 2012. One of the Executive meetings, in November 2013, also coincided with a brief General Council Meeting, marking the first time General Council had gathered partly in person and partly through electronic means. The minutes of the Executive meetings have been shared with the church through Web postings throughout the triennium and can be found at [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

The single largest commitment of time for this Executive has been to engage with the work of the Comprehensive Review Task group, which was appointed by the Executive in November 2012, as directed by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council. The Task Group reported and received feedback at each subsequent Executive meeting. Each of the permanent committees also offered advice or considered the work of the Comprehensive Review Task Group as it related to their own areas of responsibility, knowing that all areas of the church's life will be affected by major structural decisions.

During this triennium, all committees gained experience in doing some of their work electronically, instead of always meeting in person, as a way of exercising greater financial and environmental responsibility. The following notes offer other highlights of the Executive's work as offered by the permanent committees and the Aboriginal Ministries Council.

#### **Permanent Committee on Finance**

Members of the Finance Committee continually repeat the mantra that "financial resources are tools to accomplish our mission." This committee's role is to enable elected members to have a clear understanding of finances in order to enhance their decision-making. Thus, throughout this term, the committee used these principles to guide its work:

1. Ground ourselves theologically.
2. Provide clarity in a concise manner.
3. Focus on the future.
4. Recognize that we are being called to do things differently.

#### ***Budget Management and Clarity in Reporting***

The triennium began with the realization that it was necessary to effect major reductions in expenditures in order to live within our means. We continue to face the reality of declining revenues. This required difficult decisions by the Executive of the General Council. As the triennium closes, we are able to report that operating projections and expenses were maintained at target levels throughout the triennium with the help of above-historical-average investment returns. The committee also oversaw a staff process that made adjustments to the reporting systems so that there is great transparency. In particular, there is greater clarity in reflecting the use of reserves as well as report investment income. We also adjusted our practices on the use of bequests in order to invest a portion of these bequests for the long-term benefit of the church.

Significant cost reduction is still required over the coming triennium no matter what the outcome of restructuring proposals.

### ***Philanthropy***

The Finance Committee has made it a priority to focus on philanthropy. Research at the grassroots level offered important insights, both encouraging and challenging. While we have a strong “brand” as a church both locally and nationally, there is sometimes confusion about how our funds are used. This understanding is helpful in guiding strategies to support revenue generation at a local and national level. A new five-week stewardship program for congregations has been developed, providing all of the resources needed for congregational stewardship and Mission & Service giving—to inspire, to ask, and to thank. In addition, Mission & Service giving programs have been strengthened and significantly refined over the triennium to focus on increasing participation.

The transfer of \$29 million in trust and endowment assets from the General Council Treasury to the United Church Foundation—along with increased donations to the Foundation, strong investment returns, and sound management—has placed the Foundation in a strong position, with over \$56 million in assets under management as of March 31, 2015. This is an increase of \$51.5 million from March 31, 2012. This positions the Foundation to support all long-term giving and enabled it become financially self-sufficient.

### ***Responsible Investment***

The Finance Committee continues to support the values of socially responsible investment. Through our ongoing relationship with SHARE, as well as through establishing an advisory committee for both the General Council and the Foundation, it has been possible to engage in a number of issues, specifically excessive executive compensation; climate change, free and informed consent of Indigenous peoples, and human rights concerns. The church became the first denomination in Canada to become a signatory to the United Nation’s Principles of Responsible Investment and is actively pursuing carbon reduction advocacy—both politically and in our investment process.

### ***Other Finance Work***

The Finance Committee continued to receive updates on the General Council Office relocation, to receive results from internal and governmental audits, to consider efforts to improve information technology, to restore the nationally funded Directors’ and Officers’ Umbrella Liability Insurance, and to monitor loan guarantees.

The Finance Committee reminds commissioners to be particularly cognizant of financial affordability and staffing implications when considering the proposals before this General Council.

### ***Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda***

The role of Governance and Agenda is to assist in developing and refining structures, policies, and procedures to facilitate the work of the General Council and its Executive to enable the church to carry out our role in God’s mission.

## ***Governance***

The committee worked to improve governance processes by

- reviewing **decision-making processes**, including refining the proposal process; exploring consensus decision-making with Programs for Mission and Ministry; approving the use of technology to reconvene GC41 electronically to deal with authorizing remits; and approving the use of clickers for voting at General Council 42
- reviewing final revisions to the administrative sections of ***The Manual*** and the **handbooks** authorized by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council to complete the process of making *The Manual* more accessible and simple
- Providing guidance and advice on a number of **polity issues**, including committee restructuring and membership for Programs for Mission and Ministry; election of youth commissioners in light of the new Youth Forum program; and number and distribution of commissioners to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council, ensuring francophone presence and participation of intercultural observers
- Recommending approval of a new **conflict of interest policy** for Conferences, presbyteries, and pastoral charges prepared by the Manual Committee

## ***Work from the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council***

The committee provided **oversight of the work** sent from the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council to ensure that work was distributed appropriately and to monitor progress on individual projects. As mandated by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, this committee focused **governance education** on Becoming an Intercultural Church and Living as an Affirming Body in an effort to expand our perspectives and understandings and examine our behaviour and attitudes, both individually and as a body.

## ***Meeting Management***

Position descriptions were developed for individuals assuming leadership roles at executive meetings (e.g., Table Group facilitator, Friend in Court, Music Leadership, Theological Reflector, Chaplain, Reference in Council, Sessional Chair); lighter meals and snacks were introduced; and we tried out the process of using a webinar to provide governance education prior to face-to-face meeting.

## **Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services**

The interconnected projects under the oversight of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services are described below under headings that lift up the broad themes of the work prayerfully and faithfully engaged in this triennium.

## ***Discerning and Calling Forth***

The Executive received a number of reports that both respond to work from previous General Councils and fundamentally reshape the way in which ministry is understood in The United Church of Canada. The report from the Candidacy Pathways pilot projects culminates nine years of program development, testing in three Conferences (British Columbia, Bay of Quinte, and Manitou), and the work of St. Andrew's College in the equipping phase. (See the [Candidacy Pathways Report](#) in this workbook – REPORTS 137–144.) The Committee also developed a

series of recommendations on Diaconal Ministry that the Executive adopted. They respond to proposals from the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012, which address issues relating to the processes and policies in place to support this stream of ministry. These may be found in the Executive meeting minutes from November 2014.

### ***Educating and Equipping***

The committee recommended to the Executive that inquirers, during the discernment process, be encouraged to undertake a financial consultation on the affordability of ministry training and lifestyle. Candidates will also be required to contact the Employee and Family Assistance Program during internship for a consultation on debt, living expenses, salary potential, etc.

### ***Supporting and Supervising***

The Executive received regular reports on the progress of the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships testing that occurred throughout the triennium in nine Conferences. (See the [Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Report](#) in this workbook at REPORTS 127–136.) The authorization from the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012 to test different means of oversight and discipline, pastoral relations, and mission enhancement resulted in a number of different creative expressions of support and accountability for ministry personnel and communities of faith to respond to directions on polity and structure emerging from the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council 2015, the Executive proposes to the Council that the testing continue and the results inform the development of new policies coming out of decisions of this Council.

### ***Policy Updates***

The Executive updated and approved the following:

- Staff Associate transition policy
- Licensed Lay Worship Leaders and Congregational Designated Ministers policy
- Human Resource policies
- Admissions policy and procedures
- Interim Ministry policy and procedures
- Sabbatical Leave policy and procedures, including for Interim Ministers
- Gender Transitioning Healthcare Spending Account policy
- Compensation for Supervised Ministry Experience
- Discontinued Service List clarity for reporting and recording
- Disability policy and procedures
- Financial Assistance Committee accountability
- Police Records Checks policy and procedures
- Settlement costs and restrictions review
- Retirement policy clarity

### ***Other Ministry and Employment Work***

Recruitment and development of leaders is an important priority, and the Executive received regular updates on the work focused on Recruitment, and the God's World Needs Leaders campaign. As well, increased awareness of the challenges and benefits associated with military chaplaincy were reviewed. Annually, the benefits plans for ministry personnel and employees of the United Church are reviewed by the committee and recommendations for changes are

considered by the Executive. In addition to reducing premium rates in 2015, the Executive authorized several improvements to benefits.

### **Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry**

The Permanent Committee has been living into a season of transition this entire triennium. The former unit-wide committees on Partners in Mission, and Communities in Ministry, were phased out, and a larger all-encompassing permanent committee was created. Through it all, the committee has grounded its work in worship, study, and community-building as it seeks to live into its identity and ministry as “the people of God.”

### ***Partner Council***

The Partner Council, made up of global and ecumenical partners from Canada and other countries, has been a significant part of the United Church’s affirmation and commitment to living out its understanding of partnership. In view of anticipated structural changes, a reduction in the size of the Council from the current nine members to six members is planned. This will allow some cost savings, while still allowing us to have the important advice and insights that come from our partners.

### ***Ongoing Work Items***

The program work of the Permanent Committee is broad, interconnected, and complex. Some work items continue to be implemented with staff, working with a variety of networks. The following are ongoing pieces of work that the committee will continue to engage in over the next triennium:

- advocacy networks
- new financial architecture
- global mission personnel review
- French-language resources
- refugees
- program evaluation
- EDGE new Ministry pilot

### ***Youth and Young Adult Strategy***

The Executive has approved a new strategy for 2015–2018 to continue to support youth and young adults to grow in faith and offer leadership in the United Church.

### ***Migrant Church Working Group***

This working group, made up of staff and elected members, from the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry; the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policy and Services; and the Theology and Inter-church Inter-faith Committee reported to the Executive, naming key initiatives (Associate Relationship, Mutual Recognition of Ministry, and Full Communion Agreement) and indicating a way forward. This report will be before the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council in 2015 as background to the General Secretary’s report on Mutual Recognition of Ministry and the full communion agreement. (See the report [A Journey to Full Communion](#) in this workbook – REPORTS 23–31.) The working group recognizes that there is some need for clarification and changes to our policies and will work with the General Secretary to bring these

forward to the General Council and to the work on membership. For more information, please see the background report on the [Migrant Church](#) at REPORTS 32–40.

### ***Unsettling Goods Campaign***

The Unsettling Goods campaign was developed to carry out the work directed by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council based on the report of the Working Group on Israel and Palestine. This work is not complete, and the Executive has directed that it continue.

### ***Living Apology to Members of LGBTTQ Communities***

Rather than creating wording for an apology and recommending it for adoption, the Executive has received the advice of a consultation with those affected, and is bringing to the General Council a recommendation for a Living Apology process. This would be an installation that would travel to different places in Canada to allow people to learn and engage with the stories.

### **Aboriginal Ministries Council**

Created in 2009, the Aboriginal Ministries Council is still relatively new and continues to grow in its role within the United Church. In conversations with the Comprehensive Review Task Group, it was recognized that Aboriginal communities of faith and their partners need time for further dialogue as they consider the structures that will best support their full participation in The United Church of Canada. The Aboriginal Ministries Council will be engaging Aboriginal communities on the following key questions:

1. What is a cohesive vision for Aboriginal ministries?
2. What principles will guide relationships with the wider church and with the constituencies that make up the council?
3. How will the vision be achieved?
  - a. What is the precious work that must go forward?
  - b. What is not essential and no longer effective?
  - c. What structure and resources (i.e., staff, networks, technology, funding) are needed to support the work of Aboriginal ministries?

In 2014 Aboriginal communities of faith have come together for Under One Tent conversations, which have provided a platform for this dialogue to begin. Communities share a common experience of growing and of adapting to change. Through these discussions, the Aboriginal constituencies that form the Aboriginal Ministries Council continue to explore ways to work together. For more information please see the [Aboriginal Ministries Council Accountability Report](#) – REPORTS 59–68.

### ***Real Property Plan***

The Aboriginal Ministries Council is establishing a property and capital plan for United Church buildings in Aboriginal communities. The purpose of the plan is to articulate, size, resource, and execute a project to improve Aboriginal buildings and residences in partnership with local, regional, and national partners. The project is a joint venture of the Aboriginal Ministries Council and Circle, as well as partners and stakeholders wherever real property buildings are located. The scope and duration of the project will be determined in the context of the overall Aboriginal ministry strategy and resources. Significant support and collaboration from partners and stakeholders is needed to ensure the objectives will be met.

In February 2015 the Aboriginal Ministries Council agreed to implement the initial phase of the Real Property Plan. This includes consultation with Conferences that have an interest in Aboriginal real property and with the All Native Circle Conference's Council on Sharing. Information on the plan will be shared with Aboriginal communities in early 2015.

There is a strong emotional attachment to buildings. Communities of faith will be asked to hold in balance the value of shared history and the challenges facing the church. They will also be invited to consider how they honour sacred and historic space while building capacity for spiritual nurture and ministry for future generations. Youth and young adults are not attached to buildings. Their spiritual nurture comes through connectional space (using technology, events, and gatherings).

### **National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering**

The National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering, with representation from Aboriginal ministries across the United Church, was held in July 2014 on the Oneida First Nation west of London, Ontario. Based on the evaluations from that event, the Aboriginal Ministries Council will support the planning of future gatherings, focusing on vision and objectives, representation, location, youth leadership in planning and facilitation, and roles of host community and council.

### **Theological Reflection**

In doing its work throughout the triennium, the Executive has been guided by worship, prayer, and theological reflection. The Moderator has played a significant role in lifting our hearts with scripture and poetry – always just the right poem! We are grateful for the theological reflections provided at the Executive meetings by Bill Steadman, Alan Boyd, Bruce Gregersen, Abigail Johnson, Basil Coward, and barb janes.



## **A JOURNEY TO FULL COMMUNION – RE PROPOSAL GCE 1**

**Origin:** The Report of the Joint Partnership Committee - The United Church of Christ and The United Church of Canada, April, 2015

The United Church of Canada and The United Church of Christ (USA) share a rich and similar history as “united and uniting” churches in North America. In 2013, both denominations authorized a Joint Partnership Committee to discern the call of God towards entering full communion. After a year of discernment, the committee is recommending through each denomination’s respective executive body that the 30th General Synod of The United Church of Christ, which will meet June 26-30, 2015, in Cleveland, Ohio, and the 42nd General Council of The United Church of Canada, which will meet August 8-15, 2015, in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, approve a full communion agreement. This document is the formal report of the committee, and is meant to accompany the proposal and serve as a resource for those who will carry the commitment to a full communion relationship into the future.

### **United and Uniting**

The United Church of Canada came into being in 1925 as the first union in the 20th century to cross historic denominational lines. While union discussions in Canada first began at the end of the 19th century, the Methodist Church in Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (about one-third of Presbyterian churches in Canada stayed out of union), and the Congregational Union of Canada, along with a large number of Local Union Churches which had formed in anticipation of union, formally celebrated the formation of the new church on June 10, 1925 in Toronto, Ontario. In 1968, at the time of the formation of the United Methodist Church in the United States, the Canadian Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church also joined the United Church.

The United Church of Christ was formed on June 27, 1957, in Cleveland, Ohio, with the merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches. Conversation toward union began in 1938, but the impetus to union had started long before that as both denominations were the result of earlier mergers. The Congregational Churches traced their roots to the English Reformation and to Puritan New England, while the [Christian Church](#) had its beginnings on the American frontier. The Evangelical Synod of North America, a 19th-century German-American church, was prominent in the Mississippi Valley, and the Reformed Church in the United States, which was of German and Swiss heritage, was initially made up of churches in Pennsylvania and surrounding colonies in the early 1700s.

There are remarkable similarities between the two churches in their commitment to social justice and commitment to inclusion of diversity in sexual and gender identities, in disabilities, and in theological openness and expression. For example, The United Church of Christ, through its predecessor bodies, ordained its first female minister in 1853, its first black minister in 1892, and its first openly gay minister in 1972. The United Church of Canada first ordained women in 1936, and in 1988 declared that sexual orientation was not a criterion for determining eligibility for ordination.

The churches share many global relationships as well as similar commitments to the ideals of partnership in mission. They have a history of shared appointments in overseas personnel, and

ministry personnel already move through admission processes between the churches. Both churches have also played significant roles in the social transformations of their societies.

The mottos of both churches are based on Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21, a passage that has often been cited as a foundation for church unions and ecumenism: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The United Church of Christ's motto is "That They May All be One", while The United Church of Canada's motto is *Ut Omnes Unum Sint* ("That All May be One" in Latin). The United Church of Canada's crest also includes the Mohawk words *Akwe Nia'Tetewà:neren*, meaning "All My Relations," as well as the name of the church in French. These mottoes are a reminder that both churches share a common heritage and ethos as united and uniting churches.

It is also important to see this passage from John as an affirmation that full communion within the body of Christ is a gift that is already present. A full communion agreement expresses more visibly and fully what already exists through the eyes of faith. John 17 speaks to what theologians call a "proleptic" or "as if" reality. The unity we hope for has already been accomplished in Christ. It is not something we strive for, but rather something deeply true about ourselves that we can now only glimpse. It is not something we construct, but something that Christ gives to us. In full communion, we commit ourselves to living out in visible ways the central truth of our separate identities: that we are a part of each other and are one body.

Historically, full communion was first used to indicate the relationship between geographically separate churches that would likely become one body if they were in the same place. This early meaning is significant for the relationship between The United Church of Canada and The United Church of Christ. If Canada and the United States were one country, it seems inconceivable that the churches would not have entered an organic union. However, the United States and Canada are two distinct countries and each church is intimately connected to its national context. This proposal, therefore, does not envisage an organic or structural union.

Yet the Committee believes much can be gained through a full communion agreement and that such an agreement can contribute to the united and uniting movement throughout the world.

More than 60 churches throughout the world see themselves as part of the united and uniting family of churches. While not all use the name "united" or "uniting," most understood their unions as an ongoing process that points to the future. They also understood that their first or most recent union would not be their last, and that they would continue to bear witness to Jesus' prayer that all may be one. Yet today, almost 100 years after the first union of this modern era, few churches have any appetite for structural unions.

In this context, full communion agreements have become one of the few remaining expressions of deeper ecumenical commitment. The committee affirms full communion as an important avenue of ecumenism, but wishes to offer an important consideration.

The committee explored in its first meeting the implications of two northern and comparatively wealthy churches proposing a full communion relationship between themselves, potentially privileging their relationship over ongoing global partnerships with southern and historic mission-receiving churches. The committee affirmed the processes of The United Church of Canada, which paralleled this full communion conversation, to establish mutual recognition of ministry agreements with two global partner churches, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and The United Church of Christ in the Philippines. From the beginning, the committee, therefore, wished to see the agreement as a contribution to the larger united and uniting church movement. It has explored the two “United” churches maintaining their own names but identifying themselves as jointly part of a “Uniting” family (for example, “The United Church of Christ - A Uniting Church” and “The United Church of Canada - A Uniting Church”). A proposal to rename the churches seemed premature, but the committee hopes both will explore the idea further.

This full communion agreement is at its heart an expression of the spirit of the united and uniting church movement. With it, both churches seek to lift up and reaffirm the “fire in the belly” for the ecumenical visions that brought them into existence. They also want the agreement truly to make a difference for them and for the world.

### **Context**

A full communion agreement is not a back door to union. It does not mean the two churches are merging. Rather, it recognizes that the local context of each church is not incidental, but rather central to its identity and that each church has been called to God’s mission and ministry in its distinctive location and context. However, the fact that the churches share many common issues and challenges suggests there is much to be gained from increased collaboration.

Both churches recognize that social structures can harm people and that the gospel calls the church beyond a concern solely for individual redemption to work for systemic change. Both churches, therefore, work extensively on issues such as racism, poverty, and homophobia and engage actively in political and social issues.

Many of these issues, while specific to each church’s context, also are interrelated. For example:

- The churches are connected by a common land. Geographically, Canada and the United States share air and climate, water systems, mountain ranges, natural resources, animal migration, ecosystems, and more. As two churches with common commitments to ecological justice and openness to theological exploration, and as churches that share a common land, they can commit to journey together in developing theological reflection, resources, and capacities to heal relationships with the land and the environment.
- The churches can also work together in developing a Christian perspective on borders. Christians must not be bound by identities framed solely by national aspirations. Other churches in North America exist as unified bodies across the Canada/U.S. border. Both churches can benefit from a relationship that puts their distinctly national identities into perspective. How might the churches respect their common border, but not be contained by it?

- Both churches face challenges in adapting to changing social contexts. Demographic and sociological changes mean both churches must become far more diverse, while at the same time maintaining their core values and identities.
- Increasing secularization means Sunday worship will likely no longer be sustainable as the main identifier of church life. Both churches need to understand where God is leading them and discover spiritual practices that connect with new social realities.
- Both churches in their own ways are committed to engaging the great challenges of our time: the threat to life in human-driven climate change, the immense suffering and inequality created by unrestrained capitalism, the clash of religious ideologies, and the creation of new enemy images. Deep issues of spirituality are embedded in these challenges, and both churches need to rediscover a language of faith that connects their evangelical heritages with progressive and inclusive identities. Both need to learn again for a different time how to speak and live the gospel in new and compelling ways.

The gifts of relationship flow not just from what the churches hold in common. The differences between the churches also offer opportunities for collaboration and learning.

Ecclesial differences can provide opportunities for reflective engagement. For example, the Congregational polity of The United Church of Christ offers congregations significantly more independence (including control of property) than the Presbyterian and Methodist polities of The United Church of Canada. As The United Church of Canada considers expanding the role of congregations in its polity, it can learn from the experience of The United Church of Christ.

There are also differences between the two churches related to national voice. In The United Church of Christ's understanding, the General Synod speaks "to the church," not for it. In The United Church of Canada's polity, the General Council speaks "for the church." In reality both denominations are struggling to find an appropriate role for their national councils and can benefit from mutual reflection.

There are also differences in understanding of the role of doctrine. Because of its congregational polity, the doctrinal statement of The United Church of Christ has a limited function in the life of the church. The United Church of Canada recently expanded its historic doctrine section of the Basis of Union to include three additional statements developed since union and by doing so established an expectation that further statements will be added in the future. Neither church, however, requires either members or ministers to subscribe to the doctrinal standards of the church. (The United Church of Canada requires ministers to be "in essential agreement" with the doctrines of the church.) As The United Church of Christ seeks new ways to articulate its beliefs, it might benefit from The United Church of Canada's experience of developing new statements of faith.

The United Church of Christ representatives on the committee have identified the ongoing work of The United Church of Canada in building right relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples as a key area of learning. They note the significance of the two apologies The

United Church of Canada has offered to Aboriginal people, the movement towards Aboriginal self-government in the church, the work at healing in response to the history of residential schools, the affirmation of traditional spiritual ways, and the changes to the United Church crest and historical section of the Basis of Union as some key examples of how The United Church of Canada is building this relationship. They note that The United Church of Christ is just beginning a similar journey and would benefit greatly from the experience and accompaniment of The United Church of Canada.

The United Church of Canada representatives have noted the significant work The United Church of Christ has done on identity. In particular, they noted the clarity of core values and goals at the national level of the church: the “Core Values” of continuing testament, extravagant welcome and changing lives; and the “Bold, Inspirational Goals” of bold, public voice, welcoming, reachable congregations, engaged discipleship, and excellent, diverse leaders. They also noted the importance of well-designed, unified national campaigns as an example of how the church maintains a cohesive identity in the context of a highly congregational polity. The United Church of Canada representatives believe their church could benefit particularly from the experience and wisdom of The United Church of Christ in maintaining a strong national identity.

Both churches need to understand that the challenges they face into the future are not unique to them and they cannot address them alone. It will take a refreshed web of interconnectedness, experimentation, and prototyping with partners who share common commitments and vision. The kind of work each church needs to do is distinctive to the North American context, a liberal and progressive theological identity, and to churches committed to social justice.

Together in ecumenical partnership, the churches can bring their distinctive and perhaps contrasting approaches, gifts, and skills to the task of building a new church of the future.

### **The Marks**

Full communion has been identified historically by five marks:

- common confession of Christ
- mutual recognition of members
- common celebration of the Lord’s Supper/Holy Communion
- mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries
- common commitment to mission

The World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission meeting in Bangalore, India, in 1978 offered the following vision of full communion agreements:

They will then recognize each other’s ministries; they will share the bread and the cup of their Lord; they will acknowledge each other as belonging to the body of Christ in all places and at all times; they will proclaim together the Gospel to the world; they will serve the needs of humankind in mutual trust and dedication; and

for these ends they will plan and take decisions together in assemblies constituted by authorized representatives wherever this is required.<sup>1</sup>

Full communion agreements, therefore, have a significant history within the ecumenical movement. A rich history of theological reflection supports their content and direction ([Full Communion - Appendix A](#) found in the online Reference Materials).

The committee explored the doctrinal statements as well as understandings of ecclesiology, sacraments, membership, and mission of each church. The committee believes the beliefs, practices, and polity of each church are consistent with a full communion agreement.

It noted the general assessment of many that both churches share remarkably similar identities and positions. Furthermore, it would be foreign to either church's understanding to question the legitimacy of any other church within the World Council of Churches family. Both churches also share the practice of an open table. The committee concluded that the core aspects of full communion related to common confession of Christ, mutual recognition of members, and common celebration of communion flow naturally out of the life of both churches.

The challenge and meaning of full communion lie more directly instead in mutual recognition of ministries, common commitment to mission, and the aspiration found in the Bangalore statement of planning and taking decisions together in joint assemblies whenever it is required.

Mutual recognition allows for an "orderly exchange" of ministers, or flexibility among ministry personnel to move back and forth across denominational lines with as little hindrance as possible. In essence, it means two denominations that agree to mutual recognition would:

- accept the credentials of each other's ministers
- authorize ministers to accept calls and be employed in the other denomination's churches under the same or similar processes used for processing a call in their home denomination
- if possible, allow for the continuation of pension, group insurance, and other benefits in the home denomination

The committee understood its work did not include the formal development of the agreement on mutual recognition of ministry. Instead, the details of this agreement would follow the approval of the full communion agreement. Each church would need to change its by-laws to enact such an agreement, develop mechanisms to establish ministerial standing in each church, and explore what arrangements, if any, can be made for pension continuation.

The United Church of Christ has established mutual recognition of ministry within a full communion agreement with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The United Church of Canada has used this agreement as a model for the proposed mutual recognition of ministry agreements with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and The United Church of Christ in the Philippines. The overall structure of an agreement, therefore, is already available,

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<sup>1</sup> Bangalore Report, cited in Michael Roo, "Full Communion Between Episcopalians and Anglicans in the United States: What Would it Look Like?" *Concordat Essays*, 179.

but both churches would need to identify aspects that are distinctive to the context of the two churches and any by-law changes that would be required.

The mutual recognition of ministry between the churches is historic but it will take many years before the effects of the orderly exchange of ministry personnel become fully visible.

Common commitment to mission, another mark of full communion, has the potential to be more immediate and transformative. Several possibilities for mutual engagement and learning have already been named, including developing jointly a church-wide mission focus and campaign. This would allow both churches to share resources, and could open the possibility of addressing a common issue across national boundaries. It could potentially invite congregations across the two churches to link together in common initiatives and learning and dramatically expand the impact of a campaign.

Another potential area is in global partnership and mission. The full communion agreement between The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has led to the formation of the Common Global Ministries Board of the two churches. The board works with 270 partner churches and organizations in 70 countries around the world.

The committee recognized that merging The United Church of Canada's global mission program into this common board is not likely in the near future. Such an exploration would require much more consultation, particularly with global partners that would be impacted by such a direction.

However, the committee did see potential for increased collaboration and sharing. For example, while there is already significant overlap in partners, the breadth of the board's relationships could offer The United Church of Canada opportunities to link with areas of the world and partners with which it currently does not have capacity to engage. This is particularly important as both churches seek to respond to the interests of congregations in nurturing their own global connections.

Shared work, including joint consultations on issues of common concern, is another area of possibility. Respectful and transformative relationships with people of other faiths and the impact of oil pipelines on the environment are two examples of pressing issues that could perhaps effectively be undertaken in partnership.

The churches could also explore together one of the most significant identity issues facing progressive Protestant churches: secularization. In the midst of increasing secularization in both societies, how might the churches be bold in still impacting their respective societies? How might they foster and encourage a compassionate humanity?

A commitment to doing mission together will require planning. The committee believes there are many possibilities for collaboration that can strengthen and widen the engagement of both churches in God's mission. But both churches also need to continue to pay attention to the potential for local engagement.

Michael Kinnamon has noted that recent full communion agreements seem to have made little difference in the ways most local members of congregations live with one another.<sup>2</sup> He argues that if full communion agreements remain primarily at the national level, they are not truly “communion.” The two churches need to establish formal bonds between congregations and between regional bodies. Examples already exist between conferences and between congregations in border regions of the two churches. The committee believes the true potential of the full communion agreement lies in these connections being established both as a witness to the visible unity to which Christ calls us, and as a means of strengthening each other in commitment to God’s mission.

It is why the creation of an implementation committee or committees is a central part of the full communion proposal. The rich potential of this full communion agreement will require careful nurture and planning at various levels of the churches. This is in part what the Bangalore declaration suggested above in noting that “they will plan and take decisions together in assemblies constituted by authorized representatives wherever this is required.”

The committee urges the churches to put in place structures that will allow the experience and commitment of full communion to grow deeper. These structures should enable opportunities to learn, worship, and engage together at both the national and local levels of the churches.

The structures of this full communion agreement, therefore, can keep before the churches the vision of the prayer of Jesus “that all may be one” and that through them the world might be blessed.

### **The Possibilities**

While these activities of full communion are important, it could be argued that they represent an established framework that should be happening anyway, rather than a true opening to something new.

It is possible, the committee believes, to see this full communion agreement as honouring this historic framework and pointing beyond it to new visions in ecumenism; to the emergence of new relationships that enhance current partnerships and opens new possibilities for united and uniting churches throughout the world. It therefore offers some final thoughts on what might flow from this agreement.

In opening themselves again to their calling as united and uniting, the churches can be drawn once again to the core of their identity as followers of Jesus. In their growth together in full communion they can discover the unity that is already present in Christ. They can learn once again the vision of a church that transcends the divisions of the world. They can seek to be more than just a body of faithful people struggling on their own to survive. They can rediscover what it means once again to be a movement of people who choose to follow Christ into the unknown.

The committee therefore encourages the churches not only to go deeper to live out this full communion agreement, but also to go wider.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kinnamon, 2014, *Can a Renewal Movement be Renewed? Question for the Future of Ecumenism.*



In this, the committee urges the churches to continue the vision of a wider united and uniting church movement. It hopes this agreement can be extended to other united and uniting churches that seek to reimagine and recover the ecumenical vocation that brought them into being. More specifically, the committee believes that this is a time for closer relationships between united and uniting churches that are working intentionally at radically inclusive identities grounded in progressive theological exploration.

The committee believes the two churches are being invited to a wider commitment to God's vision and purpose for united and uniting churches in the world, and that this journey of full communion is an opening to something truly transformative for them and for others. That through this initial step the churches can live more fully into the prayer of Jesus "that all may be one" and that the world might be blessed

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## **REPORT: MISSION AND MINISTRY WITH MIGRANT CHURCHES**

**Origin:** Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry

In August 2015, the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council will receive proposals dealing with, and celebrate the initiation of, Associate Relationships, Mutual Recognition of Ministries and a Full Communion agreement. This report offers background and context to these new initiatives that have the potential to transform the church.

This report emerges from the work of the Migrant Church Working Group, a shared initiative of staff and elected members participating from three areas of responsibility: The Permanent Committee: Ministry and Employment Policy and Services, the Permanent Committee: Programs for Mission and Ministry, and the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee.

Global migration is changing the church and the world. Significant numbers of migrant churches are emerging bringing gifts of energy, life and new forms of worship and identity. In 2006 The United Church of Canada committed to becoming an intercultural church, understanding that this would be a multi-generational endeavor. It was a necessary decision, not only because of the changing nature of Canada through immigration, but because we fundamentally believe that God's spirit is behind something new happening in our midst. God is calling the United Church and indeed Northern and Western churches to see the world through different eyes, to know that God is speaking from the marginalized places and peoples of the world. And God is inviting the church to be transformed by hospitality.

### **A Biblical Imperative**

The Bible is steeped in the imagery of the sojourner. From Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth and Naomi, to Mary and Joseph the Bible is full of stories of those who have left their homes to seek a better land. Psalm 137, for example, captures the heart cry of a people forced from their homes, in language that echoes throughout the scriptures: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

The biblical record speaks of Jesus born in the midst of a "worldwide" migration, of his family fleeing from a threat and becoming political refugees, of being questioned about his legitimacy because of the place of his birth. It is why the Bible speaks unmistakably about God's call to welcome the stranger: to the people of Israel because they were once strangers themselves in the land; and to the followers of Jesus because it is in the face of the stranger we meet our Lord.

*"When an alien resides with you in your land do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt." Leviticus 19:33–34*

*"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Matthew 25:34–36*

A central mark of the church might well be understood as being a migrant community itself, or a *diaspora*, a scattered and dispersed people. The letter to Hebrews declares that believers “have no lasting city but seek one that is to come.” All of us are strangers in the land, all of us find only a temporary residence while struggling and searching together for the promise of a new creation.

*“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one.”*  
Hebrews 11:13–16

*“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”* Hebrews 13:1–3

Throughout history the church has been challenged to overcome its desire for self-protection, its fear for losing its identity and traditions in the face of otherness, and to acknowledge that as a pilgrim community, it is called to welcome the stranger, to be hospitable, to become a place of mutual welcome.

The spirit of mutual welcome is at the heart of the new creation on which the church is founded. It is based in the realization that in Christ all of us are one people.

*“Here there is no Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all in all.”* Colossians 3:11

*“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Galatians 3:28

The United Church is challenged to be a faithful witness to the claims of the gospel that the church is a foretaste of the new creation where all people are valued and are loved.

It is not then that the current members of the church need to become better at welcoming others. Rather, the source of the welcome is the essence of the church itself and belongs to the whole community; both those who have been present and those who are newly come. It is a mutual welcoming to a transformed and new church.

### **The Age of Migration**

A migrant may be defined as a foreign born national who has decided of their own choice to move to a new country to stay temporarily in search of or for work and is subject to immigration controls. The UN uses the term migrant worker to refer to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

The term migrant does not refer to refugees or internally displaced persons. Refugees are persons who been forced to leave their home in order to escape war or persecution. An Immigrant on the other hand is a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

In 2012, the National Bureau of Statistics reported that the migrant worker population had reached 262 million with an average annual increase of about 3.9%.

The difference between a migrant and an immigrant can be defined by the length of stay in the foreign country. The similarities are that they may be seeking a better life and eventually develop social ties to the community they live in. Migrant churches are generally composed of both migrant workers and immigrants who are seeking to become or are Canadian citizens. We will use the terms somewhat interchangeably with this general distinction in mind.

Migration does provide for increased opportunities for many people. Migrant communities contribute in significant ways to their new countries, expanding economies and providing much needed labour. They also provide important funds to their home countries through remittances, which now far exceed the total of all foreign aid transfers.

However there are major human and social costs involved in migration. Poverty and the vast inequalities of wealth and power throughout the world are the major drivers of migration and many migrants, in particular women and children, end up in very vulnerable positions. Many leave husbands or wives and children to work abroad. Many journeys begin with selling property or taking on considerable debt in the hope of a better future. Migrants are vulnerable to exploitation in receiving countries and are often treated as commodities in such areas as domestic work. Structural racism often places barriers to employment and participation in their new countries. Migrants are all too often exploited for political purposes and used to create tension and even hatred between communities. At its worst human trafficking and other forms of extortion (including sexual trafficking and organ removal) result in the worst violations of human dignity imaginable. The impact on migrant's home countries can be equally severe with the loss of often the most highly educated and skilled workers.

Nevertheless, it is clear that we have entered a new time, an age of migration that is dramatically changing the world which we know.

### **The Challenge for the Church**

The Christian witness starts with the affirmation that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. This is a simple statement that has profound implications. It suggests that everyone has a right to live a life that is truly human, to seek security and safety for themselves and their family, to provide for their future. Throughout human history this has often meant migration. Drought, crop failures, changing climates, war, poverty, have all been factors that have forced large scale human movements. In the past century, world wars displaced millions. Today globalization, economic disparities, and climate change are proving to be drivers of even larger numbers of migrant populations. While the vast majority of migration is intra-regional and the wealthy northern countries experience comparatively small numbers of migrant peoples, nevertheless, many of these countries, including Canada, place significant limits on immigration.

It is in this context that the church is called to offer a different vision of the world; a world that welcomes migration because we are all immigrants; that affirms the rights of people to seek a better life for themselves and their children, because we are all part of one human family.

Members of the United Church are likely among those Canadians who desire to be open and welcoming to immigrants. On a political level it implies a willingness to address immigration policies and social and institutionalized practices that in society not only restrict immigration, but also limit the full participation of migrant peoples.

The church has also been involved or supported a wide range of programs and ministries with migrant peoples including; an extensive program of refugee sponsorship, advocacy on issues such as health coverage for refugees and visa quotas, the provision of sanctuary, ministry with migrant workers, new ministry initiatives, challenging racism and the many initiatives related to the commitment to become an intercultural church.

On a deeper human level, the task the church faces is a change of heart. Canada has benefited significantly from exploitation of global resources that has led to economic dislocation in many countries. It has done little to address climate change which is forcing more and more people from their homes. The change of heart is about believing that people do have a human right to seek safety and security, including financial well-being for themselves and their families, elsewhere, when it is not possible within their own country.

### **What Do Migrant Churches Look Like?**

New migrant churches are emerging and growing in almost all parts of Canada. The members of these churches are most often either first generation Canadians or migrant workers who desire to maintain contact and connection with their home communities. Many if not the majority of these new communities are Catholic or Pentecostal in origin. However a number are from historic Methodist or Reformed roots and come from home denominations which have deep connections to these two global confessional bodies.

As a member of both the World Methodist Conference, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the United Church's Methodist and Presbyterian roots provide connections that have invited contact and exploration from these churches.

It is not surprising that immigrant communities desire to maintain contact with their home communities while engaging the challenging task of integration into a new society. The church can be both a place of comfortable connection to the familiar and a place of integration into the new society.

Some immigrants do seek to be part of existing United Church congregations, if they feel welcomed and find some familiarity in language or style of worship. However many find significant language barriers and much different customs of worship. Church and worship are heart experiences, and both need to connect with our heart language. So also for most immigrants, worship in their home language is a critical aspect of feeling welcome.

So migrant communities gather together sometime in homes, sometimes in more formal churches and often reach out to their home denominations to assist them. Sometimes the home denomination has been instrumental in establishing the community, more often the community comes together on its own. Their connection to the home denomination often involves a pastor assigned to them from the denomination. Often formal visits are made by the presiding bishop or a superintendent. Migrant church communities often send funds back to their home denominations.

Two specific examples of this pattern are Ghanaian and Zimbabwean people who have come to Canada bringing with them their Methodist heritage and connections.

In both cases, church communities in various locations in Canada have been established. In the Ghanaian situation formal and structured churches with pastors sent from the Methodist Church of Ghana have been formed. In the Zimbabwean situation, less formal structures with lay leadership exist.

Both denominations are steeped in the Methodist tradition of connectionalism and believe strongly in honouring relationships with Methodist churches (or United Churches with Methodist roots) in the new locations.

The Methodist Church of Ghana for example, has a formal policy of requesting its diaspora churches to seek relationships with the Methodist denomination in the new country. The expectation is that their churches will stay in connection with the Ghanaian home church through the Presiding Bishop's office. Ghanaian clergy are assigned and sent by the denomination. But expectations are also that these churches and their clergy will function best under the oversight and discipline of the local Methodist church, or in Canada's case, the United Church.

### **Associate Relationships**

Conversations with the Presiding Bishop of The Methodist Church of Ghana (who worshipped with a United Church congregation in Ottawa for several years while doing doctoral studies) initiated the overall conversation on associate relationships in the United Church. Our model of Associate Relationship reflects loosely agreements that the Ghanaian church has established elsewhere in the world.

In Associate Relationships the intention is to honour the distinctiveness of migrant churches and their desire to be in relationship both to the United Church and to their home denominations. It seeks to avoid patterns of assimilation that have characterized the past; to value differences and therefore to be open to being transformed in the relationship.

Past approaches to congregations desiring to join the United Church could be characterized as "all or nothing." In other words, such congregations would be incorporated into the United Church including property, membership and authority for ministry. While this option is still available, it has clearly not worked in recent years by evidence of numbers alone. But it is also not worked in a more important way. By its very nature, incorporation (or assimilation) is designed to make the other like us; to effectively become like us and function under our

structures. It offers little room for maintaining separate identities or for developing dual identities and connections.

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Council approved the definition of Associate Relationship and defined its parameters. Migrant church communities that belong to denominations outside Canada, associated with the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, or are a partner denomination through the United Church's global partnership program are eligible to be Associate congregations. The Executive of General Council has the responsibility for approving Associate Relationship agreements. These agreements, while following a similar pattern, are distinctive to each relationship and are generally made with the home denomination.

Ministers of Associate congregations are assigned by their home denominations and have status in the United Church only while under appointment to these congregations. Currently a remit is before the church entitling ministers of Associate congregations to full membership in the Presbytery in which the congregation or ministry is located. The Associate Agreements are meant to define responsibilities such as pastoral and ministry oversight, denominational ethos and aspects of mutual accountability.

Associate Relationships have been formerly established with the Methodist Church of Ghana and are in process with both Methodist Churches in Zimbabwe, the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas and the Methodist Church of Haiti.

It could be accurately said that this approach is an experiment in building relationships with migrant communities. It is not distinctive to us alone. It is built on other models around the world. Yet it will need to be carefully monitored and evaluated.

Associate relationships are not without risk or challenge. Many differences do exist and do require dialogue and understanding. If Associate Relationships are effective however, they will provide opportunities for United Church and Associate congregations to learn and grow in faith with each other, to find God at work in new ways, to experience different forms of worship, to see the world through different eyes and experiences, and to represent the United Church as a community of welcome.

### **Mutual Recognition of Ministry Agreements**

Mutual Recognition of Ministry allows for what is also sometimes called an "orderly exchange" of ministers, or flexibility among ministry personnel to move back and forth across denominational lines with as little hindrance as possible. In essence it means that two denominations who agree to mutual recognition, would accept the credentials of each other's ministers, authorize them to accept calls and to be employed within each other's churches under the same or similar processes used for processing a call for one of their own ministers, and if possible allow for the continuation of pension, group insurance and other benefits to be maintained in the home denomination. While Associate Relationships deal with whole congregations and their ministers in relation to that congregation; mutual recognition deals specifically with ministry personnel themselves.

Mutual recognition of ministry conversations were proposed in part to seek the assistance of global partners in helping the United Church to address the changing demographic character of Canada. We know that the growth of population of Canada through the last two decades has been primarily due to immigration. We know that we need help in reaching out to immigrant communities in establishing new communities of faith, and in transitioning existing congregations faced with changing demographics in their neighbourhood.

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the United Church of Christ of the Philippines are long standing global partners of the United Church closely connected to us in theology, social justice engagement and understandings of ministry. The Korean and Filipino communities of Canada are large and growing. Korean United Churches also represent the largest number of ethnic specific congregations in the church. Seeking mutual recognition agreements with these two denominations is a way of honouring the long relationships, and also asking for their assistance in reaching out to these growing communities in Canada. It is an expression of reverse mission in which we need their assistance and help to fulfill God's mission for the United Church in Canada.

Mutual recognition is being explored for other reasons as well. Part of the rationale is to find mechanisms of deepening ecumenical life and relationships at a time when other patterns of ecumenism are withering. It is certainly to simplify processes of admission for historic church partners and is in response to direct requests specifically from the United Church of Christ of the Philippines.

Mutual Recognition of Ministry agreements have been approved by the Executive of General Council (and will be celebrated at GC42) with the United Church of Christ of the Philippines, and with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. These two agreements will provide models of mutual recognition that could be extended to other global partner churches in the future. Recently, the ongoing United Church Anglican Dialogue has agreed to focus on mutual recognition of ministries between our churches.

Each agreement has and will be developed to address the specific context of the relationship. Attention has been given to ensuring that the agreements are mutual and reciprocal. For example, the agreement with the United Church of Christ of the Philippines seeks to address concerns such as the loss of personnel (the brain drain). (The UCCP has expressed appreciation for the sensitivity of the agreement and see it as a model to be used with other partners around the world.)

Mutual Recognition of Ministry Agreements will not result in dramatic shifts in ministry personnel. In each one there will still be steps of approval and assessment. Care will be taken to ensure understanding of the distinctive ethos of each denomination, such as the commitment of the United Church to full inclusion of people irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. The key implication is that we will honour and accept the status of each other's ministers. The impact is likely to be felt over a long period. But it does open the path to new patterns of relationship that can transform us.



The development of mutual recognition agreements reflects a desire to explore new expressions of ecumenical co-operation. They are about strengthening the ministry of the church for God's mission. They reflect an acknowledgement that the United Church cannot face its challenges alone; that it does not have the capacity and the skills to do so. And they express a willingness to open channels of mutual accountability to sister churches in the world.

### **Full Communion Agreement with the United Church of Christ**

The Executive of the General Council in 2012 authorized the invitation to move towards mutual recognition of ministries with several Canadian, U.S., and global church partners. The Executive at the time recognized that mutual recognition of ministry agreements are usually found within larger "full communion" agreements between denominations.

The United Church of Christ, in responding to a request for mutual recognition of ministry from the United Church of Canada, indicated that such an agreement for them would normally take place within the larger agreement. The United Church of Canada welcomed the response and affirmed its willingness to move towards such an agreement.

Full Communion agreements have become identified historically by five marks: common confession of Christ; mutual recognition of members; common celebration of the Lord's Supper/Holy Communion; mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries; and common commitment to mission. Full communion agreements, therefore, have a significant history within the ecumenical movement. There is also a rich history of theological reflection that supports their content and direction.

While the existing patterns of full communion agreements are important, they do represent an established framework rather than an opening to something new. Our conversations with the United Church of Christ are exploring if it is possible to imagine a vision of full communion that honours this historic framework while pointing to new visions in ecumenism. In particular, it is imagining the emergence of a new relationship that breathes life into our churches and opens new possibilities for united and uniting churches elsewhere in the world.

Each of our churches faces challenges through changing social contexts. The United Church of Canada faces a dramatically shifting society, both demographically and sociologically as does the United Church of Christ. Increasing diversity in our societies mean the both churches must become far more diverse. Increasing secularization, again in both our societies, means that Sunday worship will likely be no longer sustainable as the main identifier of church life. In other words, both churches must now reinvent themselves for a different future.

We cannot and should not pretend that these challenges are unique to us or that we can address them alone. It will take a refreshed web of interconnectedness, experimentation and prototyping with partners who share our commitments and vision. In other words, the kind of work we need to do into the future is distinctive to our North American context, our liberal and progressive theological identity, and our commitment to social justice.

Together in ecumenical partnership our two churches can bring each one's distinctive and perhaps contrasting approaches, gifts, and skills to the task of building new churches of the future.

The Full Communion Agreement with the United Church of Christ will come for approval to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council.

### **The Tasks Ahead**

The commitment of the United Church to become an intercultural church is just beginning and will be a multi-generational task. It will require a transformation unlike anything that the church has experienced before. It is something that we cannot do alone and to accomplish it we need the help and assistance of partners in Canada and around the world.

This report is about only part of this intercultural journey. Associate Relationships, Mutual Recognitions of Ministry, and Full Communion Agreements can and likely will be extended beyond the current initiatives. Each requires ongoing commitments in their implementation, in their practice and in evaluation. Each in their own way helps the United Church to respond to the presence of migrant churches in Canada, and assists the church in becoming a place of hospitality and mutual welcome.

## **REPORT: MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF MINISTRIES WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF THE PHILIPPINES**

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

### **Memorandum of Understanding Mutual Recognition of Ministries The United Church of Canada and The United Church of Christ in the Philippines.**

The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines have been in a partner relationship for over 30 years. This relationship was formally structured in a Covenant of Partnership signed in 1994 at the respective governing bodies of both denominations.

Both churches have formed their identities through the physical and organic union of historic churches representing the Reformed and Methodist traditions. Both seek to be faithful to a common evangelical, reformed, prophetic and ecumenical heritage. They now desire to deepen their shared journey through the mutual recognition and exchange of ministry personnel, and in doing so to witness to a renewed calling to be truly united and uniting churches.

The United Church of Canada (UCC) and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) agree to enter into an ecumenical partnership that:

*recognizes* the ordained, consecrated (UCCP) and commissioned (UCC) ministries of both denominations; and

*establishes* the framework where ordained and consecrated or commissioned ministers of each denomination can have mutual authorization while under appointment for exercising all the prerogatives of their respective ministries in each other's congregations.

In so doing the UCC and the UCCP affirm each other's ministries as true ministries of the one, holy Church of Jesus Christ, blessed by God and called to provide leadership in the church through word and sacrament, pastoral care and education.

#### **Introduction**

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines and The United Church of Canada are partners in God's mission. This partnership in mission has emerged from the historic missionary movement to current expressions of the sharing of mission personnel and resources, mutual accountability and common witness. Both denominations are committed to deepening their commitments to new forms and expressions of partnership in the world so that God's people and God's world may be blessed.

Both recognize that the world has changed remarkably in the last two generations. The Filipino population in Canada is now the third largest in the world outside the Philippines and continuing to grow significantly. The UCC is deeply concerned about connecting with this growing population so that it might receive their gifts and be transformed into a church that would better serve God's purposes in the new Canadian reality.

The UCCP is concerned for its Filipino members now resident in Canada and desires to find ways of continuing to support them pastorally. The UCCP further recognizes that there are no

clear policies, nor ordered procedure for UCCP pastors immigrating to Canada and the United States and seeking church assignments. The potential loss of pastors is a deep concern for the church and therefore it welcomes this agreement as a way of mutually establishing a more orderly system of procedures.

The UCC acknowledges the presence of Filipino ministers, people and congregations already within the ministry of the United Church. This Mutual Recognition Agreement expands the possibilities for leadership in these and in new congregations as well as the possibilities for United Church ministers to gain valuable experience serving in the UCCP for a time. The UCCP also desires that the gifts of both Filipino and non-Filipino ministers of The United Church of Canada might offer gifts of ministry and service to the UCCP in the Philippines.

Both churches believe that this agreement will provide opportunity for their ministers and ministerial students to gain experience and skills in leadership in ministry that might otherwise not be available in their home contexts. Both churches believe that a mutual recognition of ministries is one step of greater cooperation towards the objective of sharing together in God's mission.

Both churches acknowledge that appointments under this mutual recognition of ministry agreement differ from personnel and resource sharing through established global partnership programs. Assignments such as those through the Overseas Personnel and Internship programs of the global partnership program of the United Church of Canada will continue through separate funding and policy agreements.

### **Global Context of Mutual Recognition of Ministry**

Both denominations face in their own context the pressures of increasing globalization and related immigration. Both seek to stand against ideologies that make globalization another form of imperial hegemony.

The UCC recognizes that Canadian policies and practices, particularly related to resource extraction, significantly affect the lives of vulnerable people in the Philippines. The UCCP, more so than any other denomination in the Philippines, has faced the implications of standing with vulnerable Filipino communities in opposition to corporate exploitation of resources. The murder of UCCP pastors and workers by private militias employed by these corporations has involved both churches in shared political interventions in each country.

Economic inequalities have also resulted in large numbers of Filipino workers, domestic and others, present in Canada often in circumstances where they are vulnerable and open to exploitation. The reality of Overseas Filipino Workers has resulted in disruption of families and communities as well as the loss of skilled workers and professionals across the Philippines, including the loss of church workers within the UCCP.

Mutual Recognition of Ministry must take into account these and other realities. It must reflect God's judgement against the mighty and proud nations and a light of hope to the poor and oppressed.

### **Understandings of Ministry**

The UCC and the UCCP acknowledge the similarities and differences that exist in their understandings and practices of ministry.

The churches believe that there is consistency in understanding of the roles and educational preparation for ordained ministry for those who have undertaken graduate study preparation (M.Div. or its equivalent) in both churches. Similarly, the UCCP and the UCC acknowledge a consistency of understanding in the nature of diaconal ministry and accept an equivalency between consecration in the UCCP and commissioning within the UCC.

The UCCP and the UCC commit to honouring the specific contexts and commitments of each other's ministry. Each denomination will encourage its ordained and diaconal ministers seeking to become a ministry partner in the other denomination to be sensitive to and honour these commitments.

These commitments include within both churches the full and equal participation of women and men in ministry, and within the United Church of Canada, the full inclusion of gay, lesbian and transgendered ministers.

*Within The United Church of Canada* ordered ministers are called to a distinct role of leadership within the church. Their leadership is authorized and exercised through their membership in a presbytery (or district). Through this membership, they are called to exercise governance and leadership, shared with elected leaders, in the ministry of the church. Ordered ministers are office holders within The United Church of Canada. While there may be elements similar to employment, the essential nature of the relationship is a covenant with the presbytery, and the pastoral charge or presbytery recognized ministry, and God.

*Ordained and diaconal ministers* are ordered by the church and serve the mission and ministry of the United Church as a whole. Preparation for ordered ministry involves university level theological study and an extensive discernment and assessment process. Ordered Ministers maintain the historic connection of the United Church to the church catholic through the faithful witness to the apostolic tradition and the interpretation of a living faith. Ordered ministers carry responsibility as communicators of the tradition enacted in word and sacrament, education and service. They serve as resident theologians, called to bring the church's theological heritage into the context of God's mission in the world.

They are ordained and commissioned to the ministry of The United Church of Canada within the Holy Catholic Church. Consistent with the historic traditions of the church, in the United Church ordination and commissioning take place through the laying on of hands and once enacted, are not re-enacted.

*Within The United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, ordained ministers are those who have been called and set apart for the Ministry of the Word, Sacraments, Liturgy and Pastoral Care and Leadership in the Church of Jesus Christ. Their talents, gifts and capabilities are seen to mirror the grace of God in Jesus and their contributions to the ministry are recognized and affirmed by the faith communities, as they respond to God's call by offering themselves in

leadership as Ordained Ministers. The covenant of the Ordained Ministry is a full-time and lifetime commitment, and those who enter into that covenant dedicate their whole life to the disciplines and lifestyle the covenant requires.

Diaconal Ministers are those who are called and consecrated to serve in specific lines of ministry such as Christian Education, Church Music, Counseling, Chaplaincy, Early Childhood Education, Youth and Campus ministry and some practical theological areas in Ministerial formation such as Christian Educational Ministry, Church Music and research.

### **Eligibility for Appointment**

Mutual Recognition of Ministries means that the ministries of both denominations are considered to be eligible for appointment within both denominations.

Ministers of both denominations must be approved through the respective processes of each denomination. The appointment of a minister from either denomination is based on a letter of good standing from their respective denominations. The UCCP and the UCC commit to ensuring that such letters of good standing ensure that the denomination commends the minister to the other, that their credentials are in order, that there are no disciplinary processes in process, and that their ministry within their home denomination has demonstrated effective and faithful qualities and character. Ministers who are appointed under this Mutual Recognition Agreement will be called Ministry Partners in the United Church of Canada and Mission Co-Workers in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. For the purposes of this agreement, these terms are understood to be equivalent.

### ***Within The United Church of Canada,***

A congregation or ministry of the UCC which seeks an appointment of a UCCP minister is invited to contact the appropriate unit of the General Council Office. The application is expected to involve the participation of the Presbytery and include a needs assessment and an explanation of why a UCCP minister would best serve the ministry needs of the congregation and community.

The United Church agrees that all UCCP ministers seeking to serve a UCC congregation will be placed through an official church assignment from the UCCP. That is, such assignments will be made by the UCCP, specifically the Office of the General Secretary, in response to a formal request the UCC congregation made through the General Council Office.

UCCP ministers, who are assigned in this manner to a UCC ministry, will be asked to make application to become a ministry partner within The United Church of Canada. He or she will be expected to have gained an appropriate understanding and appreciation for the ethos and polity of the United Church. To assist in this preparation, the United Church provides a range of materials available on-line.

Once approved as a ministry partner the UCCP minister will have the same standing as all United Church ministers. It is important to note that this status of eligibility for appointment does not predetermine or eliminate the further steps that will be required to be undertaken by

the UCCP minister through Immigration Canada (Government of Canada) for a work permit in Canada.

***Within the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.***

UCCP Ministers seeking an overseas appointment within The United Church of Canada will do so following the directions of Article VI “The Ministry Without Borders” of the “Magna Carta for Church Workers of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.”

UCC Ministers desiring an opportunity to serve within the UCCP will secure letters of good standing and recommendation from their Conference. Their application will be reviewed and submitted through the General Council Office. The Office of the General Secretary of the UCCP will receive the application and will interview the applicant to determine their suitability for ministry within the UCCP. Following this, the applicant, as a Mission Co-Worker, will be placed within the established processes of the UCCP for ministry assignment.

**Responsibilities**

Recognizing the different cultures and practices that define each other’s identity and the difficulties that are present in adapting to ministry in an unfamiliar context, the UCCP and the UCC commit to ensuring that adequate programs exist within each denomination to support ministers assigned under this agreement. These support programs will include mentoring and accompaniment of Ministry Partners and Mission Co-workers for the first year or more of their appointment.

The UCCP and the UCC, through their Presbyteries or other appropriate means, will also undertake an evaluation meeting with the appointed minister at the end of their first year of service. The intention of this evaluation is to assist the minister in reviewing the first year of ministry in the partner denomination, and determining what additional work or support might be helpful in more effectively functioning in ministry.

**Discipline and Accountability**

Ministry Partners and Mission Co-workers, who are called or appointed to a ministry in the partner denomination, are seen for the purposes of discipline and accountability, to be equivalent to being admitted to the ministry of the denomination while under appointment.

While under appointment or call they are fully accountable to the respective judicatory bodies and subject to its discipline. Such oversight and discipline will be consistent with the polity and practices of the denomination they serve. Forms of disciplinary action will vary by context and the practice of denominations, but ultimately can lead to the removal of ministry status. In such a case, the relationship of the partner denomination with the Ministry Partner or Mission Co-worker is severed, the pastoral relationship and appointment ends, and discipline and accountability reverts to their home denomination. In all processes of discipline of a ministry partner or Mission Co-worker, the partner denomination commits to ensuring that the home denomination is informed of the outcome of such processes.

The status of a Ministry Partner or Mission Co-Worker is also dependent upon good standing with their home denomination. In the event that the letter of good standing is revoked by the home denomination, the status also ends, the relationship of the partner denomination with the minister is severed and the call or appointment is terminated.

### **Benefits and Compensation**

Ministry partners and Mission Co-workers, while under appointment in the partner denomination through this agreement will be compensated by and receive the appropriate benefits within that denomination. The partner denomination will ensure that ministry partners/mission co-workers are compensated according to the established policies of the denomination and that adequate benefits are in place for health and insurance coverage and for pension contributions as permitted.

### **Time Limit of Ministry Partner/Mission Co-Worker Status**

An appointment, made under this Mutual Recognition Agreement will be for a two year period renewable for two additional two year terms for a total of six years. Once the appointment is completed the minister is obligated to return to their home denomination.

In each two year term, four to six months before the end of the term, the appropriate denominational body, using processes appropriate to the denomination, will undertake a review of the appointment and determine its renewal for an additional two year assignment or its conclusion. A decision for conclusion of the assignment is not eligible for appeal.

### **Implementing Guidelines**

Implementing Guidelines will be developed and approved by the respective Executive bodies of the denominations. Such guidelines will be updated periodically and include:

- Compensation, benefits and pension
- Terms of appointments
- Eligibility for consideration for formal admission (in recognition of the reality of migration but with a clear intention that the agreement not be a vehicle for emigration)
- Options for those pastors who have relocated and desire to be recognized in their new church home
- Oversight and discipline
- Cultural sensitivities
- Denominational identity, ethos, and culture
- References to the UCCP Magna Carta, Sending Forth, UCC Manual and procedural policies
- Form for tri-lateral covenant between the denominations and the ministry partner
- Other required forms for application
- An ongoing structure to intentionally evaluate and evolve the concept and practice of mutual recognition

### **Approval of this Agreement**

This agreement is subject to approval by the appropriate governing bodies of each denomination and will take effect upon the signing of the documents by representatives of the governing bodies.



## **REPORT: MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF MINISTRY WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

### **Memorandum of Understanding Mutual Recognition of Ministries**

#### **The United Church of Canada and The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea.**

Through this agreement The United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea enter into an ecumenical partnership that:

*recognizes* the ordained or ordered ministries of both denominations (the ordained and commissioned (diaconal) ministries of the UCC, and the ordained ministry of the PROK); and

*establishes* the framework where ordained and commissioned ministers of each denomination can have mutual authorization for exercising all the prerogatives of ministry in each other's congregations.

In so doing the UCC and the PROK affirm each other's ministries as true ministries of the one, holy Church of Jesus Christ, blessed by God and called to provide leadership in the church through word and sacrament, pastoral care and education.

In entering this agreement, the churches affirm their desire to give visible expression to the prayer of Jesus "that they all may be one." (John 17:21) Because of this, we believe that we are "no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him", we believe "the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Ephesians 2:19-21)

#### **Introduction**

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and The United Church of Canada, from the foundation of the PROK in 1953, and in their respective bodies long before that time, have been partners in mission. The Presbyterian Church in Korea was established in 1907, but the division which created the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) was forced when the majority Presbyterian Church could not accept the more liberal theology being taught by some Korean professors, as well as William Scott of Canada, and espoused by churches whose clergy had studied under them. They were ordered to recant on a charge of heresy, but refused and, leaving, formed the PROK. The United Church was the sole partner denomination choosing to continue to stay in relationship with the PROK in that division. Canadian missionaries shared the grief caused by this separation, reminiscent of the pain in Canadian communities at the Presbyterian conflict over Church Union in 1925. At the same time all endured the great grief of being a mission in exile after the division of the country and the Korean War forced the Canadian mission from its centre in Hamheung in present North Korea to Seoul, along with the loss of so many Christians and friends through the conflict of the Korean War.

United Church overseas personnel and its predecessors since the first days have served the PROK in education, medical, social service, administrative, and other fields. Canadians were a significant presence in the liberation struggles of Korea, during the Japanese occupation of 1910-1945, and the dictatorship days of the 1970s and 80s. United Church theological reflections on mission and ecumenism have been greatly enriched by Korea's *minjung* theology. The churches continue to work closely together in justice and peace issues, including most recently shared work on empire and economic justice.

The partnership in God's mission of PROK and UCC has emerged from the historic missionary movement to current expressions of the sharing of mission personnel and resources, mutual accountability and common witness. Both denominations are committed to deepening their commitments to new forms and expressions of partnership in the world so that God's people and God's world may be blessed.

Both recognize that the world has changed remarkably in the last two generations. The Korean population in Canada is now the fourth largest in the world outside Korea and continuing to grow significantly. The UCC is deeply concerned about connecting with this growing Korean population so that it might receive their gifts and be transformed into a church that would better serve God's purposes in the new Canadian reality.

The PROK is concerned for its Korean members now resident in Canada and desires to find ways of continuing to support them pastorally. The PROK also recognizes the growing Canadian and English speaking population in Korea and desires that there be opportunities to share in ministry with the United Church of Canada to this community.

The UCC acknowledges the presence of many Korean ministers and congregations already within the ministry of the United Church. A Mutual Recognition Agreement would expand the possibilities for leadership in these and in new congregations as well as the possibilities for United Church ministers to gain valuable experience serving in the PROK for a time.

The PROK acknowledges that this agreement will provide opportunity for some of their ministers to gain experience and skills in leadership in ministry that might otherwise not be available in Korea. Ministers may gain expanded opportunities for congregational leadership and experience of inter-cultural and multi faith communities and families.

Both denominations believe that a mutual recognition of ministries is one step of greater cooperation towards the objective of sharing together in God's mission.

### **Understandings of Ministry**

The UCC and the PROK acknowledge the differences that exist in their understandings and practices of ministry.

The United Church in particular notes its understanding of one order of ministry with two expressions, ordained and diaconal. The United Church believes that there is consistency in understanding and in educational preparation between ordained ministers in both churches. It

commends to the PROK the distinctive role of diaconal ministers within the UCC and their historic connection to the world-wide movement of diakonia. It commends the diaconal ministry of the United Church to the PROK within this agreement as those ordered within the United Church to distinctive service of education, social justice and pastoral care and invites the PROK to receive their gifts.

*Within The United Church of Canada* ordered ministers are called to a distinct role of leadership within the church. Their leadership is authorized and exercised through their membership in a presbytery (or district). Through this membership, they are called to exercise governance and leadership, shared with elected leaders, in the ministry of the church. Ordered ministers are office holders within The United Church of Canada. While there may be elements similar to employment, the essential nature of the relationship is a covenant with the presbytery, and the pastoral charge or presbytery recognized ministry, and God.

*Ordained and diaconal ministers* are ordered by the church and serve the mission and ministry of the United Church as a whole. Preparation for ordered ministry involves university level theological study and an extensive discernment and assessment process. Ordered Ministers maintain the historic connection of the United Church to the church catholic through the faithful witness to the apostolic tradition and the interpretation of a living faith. Ordered ministers carry responsibility as communicators of the tradition enacted in word and sacrament, education and service. They serve as resident theologians, called to bring the church's theological heritage into the context of God's mission in the world.

They are ordained and commissioned to the ministry of The United Church of Canada within the Holy Catholic Church. Consistent with the historic traditions of the church, in the United Church ordination and commissioning take place through the laying on of hands and once enacted, are not re-enacted.

*Within the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea* ordained ministers are called to serve roles of pastor, teacher, evangelist or other roles according to their own talents and the church's need. There is no difference between a minister and a layperson as a new being in Jesus Christ. However the minister is distinguished from a layperson because of the responsibilities they hold. In a sense of serving the church wholly, the responsibility is a most dignifying, useful, and professional role.

Within the PROK ordained ministers are expected to be sincere in faith and be capable of teaching; healthy and committed to the mission of the gospel. They should manage their own families well, and receive respect from others (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Ministers are called to lead worship authorized by presbytery. They select hymn, psalms, Bible passages for worship and they are responsible for pastoral prayer, sermon, and benediction. They have authority to exercise ritual, that is, baptism and sacrament by the determination of the board meeting (which is composed of the minister and elders) or the permission of presbytery. They have responsibility to lead the baptized to enroll in a church. And when the pastor is asked to administer the sacrament and baptism by another denomination, church, church association, and other special cases, they can exercise or participate as long as it is not against their conscience.

Ministers are in charge of church administration and discipline for the holiness and peace of the church. Ordained ministry within the PROK is understood to express the commitments of the diakonia in service, education and social justice.

Ministers teach the Bible, doctrines, and church rules to their congregations. They do pastoral visits. They should pray and serve especially for the poor, the ill, the wounded, and the weeping. Ministers can serve educational organizations, administrative institutes, and other mission organizations and they should be devoted to their responsibilities.

### **Ministry Partner and Eligibility for Call**

Mutual Recognition of Ministries means that the ministries of both denominations are considered to be eligible for call, appointment or service within both denominations subject to individual approval as a ministry partner.

Ministers of both denominations must be approved through the respective processes of each denomination to be recorded as a ministry partner. The application of a minister from either denomination is based on a letter of good standing from their respective denominations. The PROK and the UCC commit to ensuring that such letters of good standing ensure that the denomination commends the minister to the other, that their credentials are in order, and that there are no disciplinary actions in process. In addition, letters of reference will be provided indicating that their ministry has demonstrated effective and faithful qualities and character.

#### ***Within The United Church of Canada,***

An ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea is invited to apply to the national officer of the United Church responsible for oversight of this agreement. The application format (available on-line) includes a personal statement on ministry and the interest in serving within the United Church. An interview will be arranged either in person or electronically, to review the minister's interest and to determine the preparation and suitability for doing so. As part of the process, the PROK minister applying to become a ministry partner is expected to have gained an appropriate understanding and appreciation for the ethos and polity of the United Church. To assist in this preparation, the United Church provides a range of materials available on-line. Once approved as a ministry partner the PROK minister will have the same standing as all United Church ministers in eligibility for call or appointment to a United Church congregation. This status will enable a PROK minister either from within Canada or from Korea (or elsewhere in the world) to make applications to United Church congregations advertising for a minister and indicate that they are eligible for call or appointment. It is important to note that this status of eligibility for call does not predetermine or eliminate the further steps that will be required through Immigration Canada (Government of Canada) for a work permit in Canada.

#### ***Within the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea,***

An ordained or diaconal minister of the United Church of Canada is invited to apply to the national officer of the PROK responsible for oversight of this agreement. The application format includes a personal statement on ministry and the interest in serving within the PROK. An interview will be arranged either in person or electronically, to

review the minister's interest and to determine the preparation and suitability for doing so. As part of the process, the UCC minister applying to become a ministry partner is expected to have gained an appropriate understanding and appreciation for the ethos and polity of the PROK. To assist in this preparation, the PROK provides a range of materials.

Once approved as a ministry partner the UCC minister will have the same standing as all PROK ministers in eligibility for call or appointment to a PROK congregation. This status will enable a UCC minister either from within Korea (or elsewhere in the world) to make applications to PROK congregations through the usual processes.

It is important to note that this status of eligibility for call does not predetermine or eliminate the further steps that will be required for a work permit in Korea.

### **Responsibilities**

Recognizing the different cultures and practices that define each other's identity and the difficulties that are present in adapting to ministry in an unfamiliar context, the PROK and the UCC commit to ensuring that adequate programs exist within each denomination to support ministry partners. These support programs will include mentoring and accompaniment of ministry partners for the first year or more of their appointment or call.

The PROK and the UCC, through their Presbyteries or other appropriate means, will also undertake a reflection meeting with the ministry partner at the end of their first year of service. The intention of this reflection is to assist the ministry partner in reviewing the first year of ministry in the partner denomination, and determining what additional work or support might be helpful in more effectively functioning in ministry.

### **Contexts of Ministry**

The PROK and the UCC commit to honouring the specific contexts and commitments of each other's ministry. Each denomination will encourage its ministers seeking to become a ministry partner in the other denomination to be sensitive to and to honour these commitments.

### **Discipline and Accountability**

Ministry Partners, who are called or appointed to a ministry in the partner denomination, are seen for the purposes of discipline and accountability, to be equivalent to being admitted to the ministry of the denomination while under appointment or call.

While under appointment or call they are fully accountable to the respective Presbyteries and subject to its discipline. Such oversight and discipline will be consistent with the polity and practices of the denomination they serve. Forms of disciplinary action will vary by context and the practice of denominations, but ultimately can lead to the removal of ministry partner status. In such a case, the relationship of the partner denomination with the ministry partner is severed, the pastoral relationship, call or appointment ends, and discipline and accountability reverts to their home denomination. In all processes of discipline of a ministry partner, the partner denomination commits to ensuring that the home denomination is informed of the outcome of such processes.

The status of ministry partner is also dependent upon the good standing of the ministry partner with their home denomination. In the event that the letter of good standing is revoked by the home denomination, the status of ministry partner also ends, the relationship of the partner denomination with the ministry partner is severed and the call or appointment is terminated.

### **Benefits and Compensation**

Ministry partners, while under appointment or call in the partner denomination will be compensated by and receive the appropriate benefits within that denomination. The home denomination of the ministry partner will have no responsibility for providing compensation or benefits. The partner denomination will ensure that ministry partners are compensated according to the established policies of the denomination and that adequate benefits are in place for health and insurance coverage and for pension contributions as permitted.

### **Time Limit of Ministry Partner Status**

A ministry partner, following application, interview and acceptance by the partner denomination, will maintain the status of ministry partner for a period of three years or for the duration of a call or appointment.

If the ministry partner is unable to secure a call or appointment within a three year period, ministry partner status must be renewed through a new application process. Each denomination will determine the extent of the re-application process and documentation required.

If the ministry partner has secured an appointment or call, the status continues throughout the call or appointment. At the end of the call or appointment, and at each change of pastoral relationship, a new application must be made for ministry partner status to be renewed. Each denomination will determine the extent of the re-application process and the documentation required.

### **Internship**

Supervised ministry education opportunities for ministry students will be explored. The PROK and the UCC will explore the ways in which such opportunities for cross cultural learning can be offered to candidates for ministry in the partner denomination. The exploration will include recognition of such internships as credit towards fulfillment of ordination requirements in the home denomination.

### **Implementation Guidelines**

Implementing Guidelines will be developed and approved by the respective Executive bodies of the denominations. Such guidelines will be updated periodically and include:

- Compensation, benefits and pension
- Terms of appointments
- Eligibility for consideration for formal admission (in recognition of the reality of migration but with a clear intention that the agreement not be a vehicle for emigration)
- Options for those pastors who have relocated and desire to be recognized in their new church home
- Oversight and discipline

- Cultural sensitivities
- Denominational identity, ethos, and culture
- Form for tri-lateral covenant between the denominations and the ministry partner
- Other required forms for application
- An ongoing structure to intentionally evaluate and evolve the concept and practice of mutual recognition

**Approval of this Agreement**

This agreement will be approved by the appropriate governing bodies of each denomination.

## NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

### Origin: The Executive of the General Council, Nominations Committee

The General Council and its Executive are supported in their mandates, in part, through the work of several committees and task groups as well as people serving as representatives of The United Church of Canada with various partner organizations. The Nominations Committee is charged with recommending the members who will serve on these committees and in these roles. Where other courts or groups are authorized to recommend or to appoint members to committees of the General Council, the Nominations Committee compiles these recommendations into a coordinated report.

In offering its recommendations, the Nominations Committee follows the related guidelines and polices set by the Executive of the General Council, makes use of spiritual discernment practices, and respects the United Church's commitments to diversity, becoming an intercultural church, and embracing the leadership of youth and young adult members.

During the 2012-2015 triennium, the Nominations Committee met on 22 occasions, either in conjunction with meetings of the Executive of the General Council or by video and conference call. Of particular note during this past term was the interest generated in serving with the Comprehensive Review Task Group authorized by the 41st General Council. This call for nominations resulted in 65 people expressing interest to serve on this 7-person task group.

Of no less importance is the work of the other committees, task groups and representative roles of the General Council and its Executive, and all those who faithfully serve with them. At the time of writing, the Nominations Committee has made 251 recommendations for appointment or reappointment to these roles, drawing on 476 expressions of interest.

In this report, the Nominations Committee offers the names of those it is recommending for appointment to the committees that report directly to the General Council. The Nominations Committee also proposes extending appreciation on behalf of the General Council to those who have served on its behalf in these roles during this past triennium.

### Members recommended for appointment or reappointment (with terms as stated)

Archives and History Committee (43rd General Council, July 2018)

- Wayne Harris – Layperson, Bay of Quinte, *Chairperson*

*For information: the following members have been elected through their Conferences Archives and History Committees*

- *To be determined* – Newfoundland and Labrador
- Julielyne Anderson – Layperson, Maritime
- Joan Benoit – Montreal and Ottawa
- Diana Duncan-Fletcher – Bay of Quinte
- Mary Gooley – Layperson, Toronto
- Rod Coates – Layperson, Hamilton
- *To be determined* – London



- Dawn Munroe – Layperson, Manitou
- Pamela McLeod – Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario
- John Haas – Ordained, Saskatchewan
- Helen Reed – Diaconal, Alberta and Northwest
- Gerald Hobbs – Ordained, British Columbia
- *To be determined* – All Native Circle

#### Audit Committee (43rd General Council, July 2018)

- Hugh Johnson – Layperson, Alberta & Northwest, *2nd term, Chairperson*
- Lindsay Mohn – Layperson, Saskatchewan, *2nd term*
- Garnet Webster – Layperson, Hamilton, *2nd term*
- Leah Weiss – Layperson, Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario, *2nd term*
- John Hurst – Layperson, Hamilton
- Robin Pilkey – Layperson, Toronto

#### Judicial Committee, *as recommended by Conferences*

- Fannie Hudson – Layperson, Newfoundland and Labrador (2021)
- Lynda Goy-Flint – Ordained, Newfoundland and Labrador (2021)
- Diana Ginn – Layperson, Maritime (2024)
- Greg Smith-Young – Ordained, Hamilton (2024)
- David Smith – Lay, Hamilton (2024)
- Steve Wilson – Ordained, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario (2024)
- Lorna Standingready – Layperson, All Native Circle (2018)

*For information. The following members who continue to serve on the Judicial Committee, were appointed by previous General Councils:*

- Florence Sanna – Ordained, Newfoundland and Labrador (2018)
- Steven Longmoore – Ordained, Maritime (2018)
- Susan MacAlpine-Gillis – Ordained, Maritime (2018)
- Kerri Seward – Layperson, Maritime (2018)
- Gail Christy – Ordained, Montreal and Ottawa (2018)
- Laurie E. Joe – Layperson Montreal and Ottawa, Layperson (2021)
- Paul Macklin – Layperson, Bay of Quinte (2018)
- Paul Reed – Ordained, Bay of Quinte (2018)
- Gary Magarrell – Ordained, Bay of Quinte (2018)
- Bob Little – Layperson, Bay of Quinte (2018)
- Penny Keel – Layperson, Toronto (2018)
- Ellen Mole – Layperson, Toronto (2018)
- Cindy Randall – Ordained, Toronto (2021)
- John H. Brown – Ordained, Toronto (2018)
- Brad Morrison – Ordained, London (2018)
- Bob Gibson – Ordained, London (2018)
- Ken Fraser – Layperson, London (2021)
- Margaret McKechney – Ordained, Saskatchewan (2018)
- Lorraine Harkness – Ordained, Saskatchewan (2021)
- Marilee Iverson – Layperson, Saskatchewan (2018)

- Charlene Orr – Layperson, Saskatchewan (2018)
- James H. Hillson – Ordained, Alberta and Northwest (2018)
- Nancy Steeves – Ordained, Alberta and Northwest (2018)
- Rhonda Clarke-Gauthier – Layperson, Alberta and Northwest (2018)
- Ben McKay – Layperson, Alberta and Northwest (2018)
- Jon Jessiman – Ordained, British Columbia (2018)
- Ruth Wright – Ordained, British Columbia (2018)
- Stan Lanyon – Layperson, British Columbia (2021)
- Kathleen McCallum – Ordained, Manitou (2018)
- Robert Wright – Ordained, All Native Circle (2018)
- Betty Lou Skogen – Ordained, All Native Circle (2018)
- Donald Little – Ordained, All Native Circle (2018)

Executive of the Judicial Committee, *as recommended by Conferences*

- Lynda Goy-Flint – Newfoundland and Labrador
- Steven Longmoore – Ordained, Maritime
- *To be determined* – Layperson, Montreal and Ottawa
- Paul Macklin – Layperson, Bay of Quinte
- Penny Keel – Layperson, Toronto
- David Smith – Layperson, Hamilton
- Brad Morrison – Ordained, London
- Steve Wilson – Ordained, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario
- Margaret McKechney – Ordained, Saskatchewan
- James H. Hillson – Ordained, Alberta and Northwest
- Jon Jessiman – Ordained, British Columbia
- Kathleen McCallum – Ordained, Manitou
- Lorna Standingready – Layperson, All Native Circle

Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (43rd General Council, July 2018)

- Daniel Hayward – Ordained, Montreal & Ottawa *2nd term, Chairperson*
- Alison Etter – Ordained, Maritime
- Carmen Lansdowne – Ordained, British Columbia
- Grace Lee – Ordained, London
- Jennifer Janzen-Ball – Ordained, Saskatchewan
- Ryan Slifka – Ordained, British Columbia
- Collin Smith – Layperson, Alberta & Northwest
- Brian Thorpe – Ordained, British Columbia
- Darlene Brewer – Layperson, Montreal & Ottawa, *2nd term*
- Teresa Burnett-Cole – Ordained, Montreal & Ottawa, *2nd term*
- Martha Martin – Diaconal, Maritime, *2nd term*
- Mathias Ross – Ordained, Saskatchewan, *2nd term*
- Earle Sharam – Layperson, Alberta & Northwest, *2nd term*
- Bill Steadman – Ordained, Manitou, *2nd term*

Transfer Committee, (43rd General Council, July 2018)

- Philip Newman – Ordained, British Columbia

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**Members who have completed or are completing their terms of appointment on the Executive or committees of the General Council:**

The Executive of the 41st General Council

*Moderator:* Gary Paterson

*Past Moderator:* Mardi Tindal

*Conference Representatives:* Florence Sanna, Claude Hender\*, Ivan Gregan, Charlotte Griffith, John H. Young, Lynella Reid-James, Thom Davies, Steve Lowden\*, Charles McMillan, Bill Rogers\*, Barb Janes, Bev Kostichuk, Robert Mutlow, Armand Houle\*, Jess Cobb\*, Alvin Dixon\* (deceased), Donna Kennedy,

*Members at Large:* Adam Hanley, Kellie McComb, Colin Phillips, Adam Brown

*Ethnic Ministries:* John Kim\*, John Lee

*Francophone Ministries:* Nicole Beaudry, Marie Claude Manga

*Aboriginal Ministries Circle:* Ray Jones, Jim White, John Thompson, Martha Pedoniquotte, Susan Gabriel, Grant Qeskekapow\*, Mel King

*Chairperson, Governance and Agenda:* Shirley Cleave

*Chairperson, Ministry and Employment Policies and Services:* Tracy Murton

*World Council of Churches, Central Committee:* Carmen Lansdowne\*

*Chairperson General Council Planning:* Roy West

*Chairperson Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith:* William (Bill) Steadman

*Global Partner:* Ramzi Zananiri (corresponding)

*United Church Women:* Beverley Green (corresponding)

*Observer Board:* Ambury Stewart\* (corresponding)

\* concluded or resigned from appointment prior to the end of the triennium.

Audit Committee - Janet Stockton (Chairperson)

Archives and History Committee – Robert Stevenson (Chairperson), Jean Barman (Academic), Linda White, Karen McLean, Michael Brooks, Edward Avery, Diane Trollope, Earl Gould, Sheila Johnston.

Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee – Aruna Alexander, Jordan Cantwell, Jill Curd, Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd, Adam Kilner.

Judicial Committee – Margaret Bain (Chairperson), Maggie Coffin-Prowse, Helen Barkley (Executive), Deborah Deavu, Scott Campbell, Cynthia Grandejambe, Charles Huband (Executive), Glenna Beauchamp, Jeff Cook, Kirk Windsor.

42nd General Council Planning Committee – Roy West (Chairperson), Gary Paterson (Moderator), Fred Monteith (Business Coordinator), Maya Landell (Worship Coordinator), Miriam Bowlby (Youth Forum Coordinator), Linda Stonehouse (Local Arrangements Co-Chairperson), Kathy Brett (Local Arrangements Co-Chairperson), William Steadman (Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith).

Comprehensive Review Task Group – Cathy Hamilton (Chairperson), Gary Paterson (Moderator), Russel Burns, Wilson Gonese, Lauren Hodgson, Kenji Marui, Beth Symes, Vic Wiebe.

Conference Records Review Task Group – Barbara Reynolds, Pamela Mykityshyn, Katherine Moore.

Faithfully submitted, by Florence Sanna, on behalf of the Nominations Committee:

Pauline Walker – Maritime  
Charlotte Griffith – Montreal and Ottawa  
Norma Thompson – Bay of Quinte  
Lynella Reid-James – Toronto  
Thom Davies – Hamilton  
Doug Wright – London  
Erin Todd – Manitou  
Anna Stewart – Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario  
Laura Fohse – Saskatchewan  
Bob Mutlow – Alberta and Northwest  
Graham Brownmiller – British Columbia  
Donna Kennedy – All Native Circle  
Nicole Beaudry – Ministère en Français  
Diane Bosman & Shirley Welch (staff)

## **REPORT OF THE ABORIGINAL MINISTRIES COUNCIL**

### **Origin: Aboriginal Ministries Council**

Introduction: “*Behold, I make all things new.*” Revelation 21:5

The Aboriginal Ministries Council (Council) will mark its sixth anniversary in the fall of 2015. The Council gathered for the first time in September 2009 to discern and implement recommendations made within the “*Vision of New Beginnings*”<sup>1</sup> report. The work of this triennium brought clarity to a vision of partnership rooted in respect, equity, and mutuality with The United Church of Canada. This new and emerging relationship provides rich soil for spiritual renewal within Aboriginal communities of faith and for the whole church.

The Council encourages the church to continue to build on the gifts and contributions made by Aboriginal communities over the past several decades. One cannot overemphasize the need for adequate time to be given for this significant and transformative work to evolve.

Over the last triennium Aboriginal communities of faith have expressed their needs on matters of spiritual well-being and leadership, support to congregations and improvement of church buildings. The Council has listened and has struggled with the question of how it is that we, the church, might hear, understand, and respond?

Yet, in the midst of struggle Aboriginal communities are committed to The United Church of Canada and want to continue to be a part of it.

Blessings come in the form of new connections with global partners, through new fresh engagements in youth leadership development and new commitments to stewardship. There is much to give thanks for and a growing cause for hope.

The Council meets twice a year. The spring meeting is held at the General Council Office. The fall meeting takes place within an Aboriginal community of faith thus enabling connections on matters of ministry, justice, and spirituality. As we look to building efficiencies in the new triennium we will review the community consultation and engagement processes.

The Council has engaged in fundraising events to support local ministry or the Mission & Service Fund.

The Council regularly reports to the Executive of the General Council.

The 2012–2015 Aboriginal Ministries Council membership is as follows:

Marie Dickens  
- Jim White\*  
- Lori Lewis

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal Ministries Steering Committee, *Vision of New Beginnings*, approved at the Executive of the General Council, November 15–17, 2008.

British Columbia Native Ministries Council

- Ray Jones, Chair \*

All Native Circle Conference

- Russel Burns - All Tribes Presbytery
- Bernice Saulteaux - Plains Presbytery\*
- John Thompson- Keewatin Presbytery\*
- Lorna Pawis - Great Lakes Waterways\*

Ontario and Quebec Native Ministries

- Susan Gabriel\*
- Martha Pedoniquotte\*
- George Montour, Co-chair
- Wanda Montour

Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre,

Grafton Antone\*

Inuit/Metis Community

-Rosalyn Cole\*

Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential School Committee

-Melvin King\*

Ministries in French

-Pierre Goldberger

Executive of the General Council

-Kellie McComb\*

Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry, Lark Kim\*

Executive Minister, Maggie McLeod

\*denotes 2–3 year terms are complete

Since the death of honoured Elder, Mr. Alvin Dixon (July 2014) there has been vacancy for a representative from the Native Ministries Consortium, Vancouver School of Theology.

**The Work of the Triennium**

National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering (Gathering): This Gathering occurs every three years. It is a forum for listening to Aboriginal communities of faith, guests, and partners on matters of spirituality and ministry.

The 2014 Gathering was held July 25–27 on the Oneida First Nation (Ontario). Aboriginal communities of faith (64 in total) were invited to appoint two delegates to the Gathering, 49% responded. The Moderator, General Secretary, members from the Comprehensive Review Task Group and the Global Partner Council attended as observers. Commissioner Marie Wilson brought greetings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and offered condolences to family and community on the loss of the late Mr Alvin Dixon. The communities of Oneida,

Chippewas of the Thames First Nations, and London Conference, played an active role throughout the planning stages and during the actual event.

The Gathering began with a sacred fire, followed by a memorial service for the late Mr. Alvin Dixon. Guest speaker, the Rev. Dr. Cecil Corbett offered reflections on *All My Relations*. Quilt patches representing Aboriginal communities of faith were stitched together to further honour the theme.

The three-day program included a visit to the Mount Elgin Indian Residential School Commemorative site located on the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Mount Elgin was one of the Indian residential schools operated by The United Church of Canada. Chief Joe Miskokomon welcomed the Gathering to the territory and shared insights of his community's journey toward reclamation and self-determination. For some participants this was the first time they shared their personal story about how the residential school system impacted their family and community.

Other workshops focused on congregational and leadership development, real property, and stewardship. Youth participants were actively engaged in community and culturally appropriate programming. They offered excellent leadership, particularly in the area of spiritual practices. A silent auction generated over \$1,000 for the Mission & Service Fund. Items for the auction were donated by participants and guests.

Sunday Communion Service was led by the Oneida United Church. The Right Rev. Gary Paterson offered the sermon and the local choir shared beautiful Oneida hymns of praise. Rev. Grafton Antone, and youth delegates presided at communion.

The Council will review the NASG Terms of Reference in early 2015. The review will focus on areas of vision and objectives, representation, location, youth leadership in planning and facilitation; and roles of host community and Council. The Council will consider future sites that will provide opportunity for participants to receive the gift of hospitality from Aboriginal communities of faith while attending to the important logistical aspects that impact participation, cost, and program.

National Elder: The Council continued to develop a proposal for National Elder based on the framework that emerged from the 2011 National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering. It was determined that a position of National Elder could not be defined within a job description. The Elder provides spiritual leadership and vision. A formal process for selecting or electing a national Elder does not exist within Aboriginal community. Regional Elders have been called upon throughout this triennium.

The Cairn: *The Cairn* (Laurentian University) was erected in honour of the 1986 apology to First Nation peoples. The Committee on Indigenous Justice, All Native Circle Conference, Manitou Conference and the Council have interest in maintaining the cairn. The Council will embark upon a proposal with the partners to post the new crest, install solar lighting, and an image of dancers and drummers to reflect revitalization of culture.

The Bundle: Aboriginal Ministries have gathered a bundle of spiritual items. The bundle is housed in the Aboriginal Ministries Circle area of the General Council Office. Historically, elements of the bundle have been present when the Council meets. The bundle consists of:

- A four directions cloth
- The four medicines (sage, tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar)
- The sacred fire Christ candle
- A broken chalice
- A rabbit pelt and an arrowhead shape stone
- The trowel used to repair the cairn in Sudbury, Ontario in 2005.
- An eagle feather and raven feather.
- Lord's Prayer in Mohawk
- Wampum strands
- Three crosses symbolic of the triune God
- A quill box made of birch bark and sweet grass
- A hand crafted wooden United Church Crest

Each gifted component of the bundle has a story and a teaching. As the Council grew to understand their intercultural nature there began a dialogue on the significance and meaning of the bundle for the Council. This presence of the bundle honours and celebrates Aboriginal presence within the United Church. Its intention is to be a spiritual space for unity.

In October 2013 the Council reviewed a paper that contained background and teaching on each of these sacred items in the bundle. There is consensus that traditional teachings are needed and an understanding of protocol is essential. The Council is committed to building understanding of how to honour these items. Elder Myrtle Moneybird, visiting Elder from the Treaty 4 (File Hills, Saskatchewan) cautioned that a bundle is a serious undertaking.

This dialogue carries significant importance and implications for Aboriginal communities of faith. Traditional wisdom teachings from the various regions are and will continue to be shared. There is much complexity in claiming an identity of Indigenous Christian. Respect is foundational. The Council affirms that we are all people of the earth, land, and lake; and, that unity comes in the most common elements of, earth, air, water, and fire.

In February 2015 the Council directed the Executive Minister to consult with a local Elder to determine future actions.

Leadership Development: The Dorothy Jenkins Estate trust account is held by The United Church of Canada. In a document dated August 31, 1995, the terms of the will state: *"To divide the rest and residue of my estate into three (3) equal shares and to pay...the third share to The United Church of Canada for charitable work among our native peoples."* In November, 2010 The Council began a new relationship with the Joint Grants Committee enabling them to develop a Terms of Reference to manage the application and disbursement process. This new partnership acknowledges the leadership capacity Council's has with respect to matters of "charitable work" in today's context of justice and right relations. Regular disbursements were made throughout



2014 and 2015. Aboriginal youth leadership development has been substantially supported through this fund.

The establishment of the Alvin Dixon Memorial Bursary Fund was announced at the March 2015 Executive of the General Council. This fund will support ongoing education for Aboriginal students. The fund honours life and work of the late Alvin Dixon, a respected leader, who died in 2014. The Council and the Joint Grants Committee will manage disbursements.

**Healing Fund:** The United Church of Canada's Healing Fund (Fund) came into existence in 1995 in response to the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. This commitment represented a step toward living out the 1986 Apology to First Nations Peoples and the Apology to Former Students of the United Church Indian Residential Schools and to their Families and Communities (1998). The Fund provides funding to community projects involved in culture and language projects—foundational to spiritual renewal of families and communities.

Promotion for the Fund occurs through The United Church of Canada website and various social media platforms.

Council has undertaken to review the Fund's process and trends. Recent trends show a shift in themes and a decline in requests for support for culture and language projects. There has been an increase in requests for administration health care (seniors care, etc.).

Resources for the Fund resources are drawn from Mission & Service Fund (\$300,000 per year). A total of \$660,000 has been granted this triennium (up to December 2014). It is anticipated there will be an additional \$150,000 granted during the 2015 spring granting process. In all, 84 projects with a focus on language, holistic healing, and cultural renewal will have received support from the Healing Fund in this triennium.

The Council will make recommendations for changes in the Healing Fund in the fall of 2015.

**Congregational Development:** The 2011 National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering has served as an avenue for Council to consult with communities in the development of a framework for the cluster group model. This program began in 2011 and has continued through this triennium with a focus on: congregational leadership, and resource development; real property, and spiritual healing. The objectives of the cluster groups include information sharing, setting goals and priorities, brainstorming and developing strategies for building partnerships.

Typically, cluster groups consist of three to five communities of faith, a local Elder and a Conference or presbytery staff. The number of participating communities increase in areas that are more isolated.

The clustering process is one approach toward achieving the objectives that have been named in this section. The Aboriginal Ministries Circle engages directly with communities of faith and is in partnership with Conferences, presbyteries, and other areas of the church.

In October 2013 a report was prepared by the Executive Minister and Community Capacity Development Coordinators that reflects the experiences of Aboriginal faith communities. The report identifies barriers and offers strategies to build capacity. The barriers are outlined in detail in the **United in God's Work** report.

The following quotation captures the essence of the work that lies ahead:

*“Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, body, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation....” And, “In accepting the premise of colonization and working towards decolonization, we are not relegating ourselves to a status as victims. On the contrary, we are actively working toward our own freedom to transform our lives and the world around us. The project that begins with our minds, therefore, has revolutionary potential.”<sup>2</sup>*

**Youth Leadership Development:** The Council has committed to actively engage in recruiting members from their constituency to fill future appointments and ensure there is inclusivity of youth and young adults.

The planning team for the National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering will include one youth or young adult. The Council is committed to designing safe and youth friendly spaces.

**Real Property:** The Council has a mandate to establish and implement a property and capital plan to address needed repairs, upgrades and restoration to United Church buildings in Aboriginal communities. The Council offers a wide lens from which to discern priorities and has capacity to develop resources that in areas of project planning and management training.

A working group was established March 2014 to develop a Real Property plan and Terms of Reference. This Task Group consists of one representative from each of the constituencies that make up the Council.

The purpose of the plan is to articulate, size, resource, and execute a project to improve Aboriginal Real Property buildings and manses in partnership with local, regional, and national partners. The project is a joint venture of the Aboriginal Ministries Council and Circle, as well as partners and stakeholders wherever Real Property buildings are located. The scope and duration of the project will be determined in the context of the overall Aboriginal ministry strategy and resources. Priority will be given matters of safety. Significant support and collaboration from partners and stakeholders is needed to ensure the objectives will be met. Project objectives are:

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<sup>2</sup> Reprinted <<with permission>> from *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, ed. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (School for Advanced Research, 2005), pp. 2, 3.

1. To review the 2007 & 2008 North Pacific Building Assessment Reports and<sup>3</sup> updated reports to identify a priority order of work to be undertaken in consultation with stakeholders and partners.
2. Build capacity within Aboriginal communities of faith to develop a vision statement that expresses their ministry.
3. Develop and implement a communication plan for Aboriginal communities of faith, partners, and stakeholders of the Real Property and Capital Plan.
4. Build capacity for communities of faith to identify contractors and local tradesworkers.
5. Upgrade the physical state of real property in accordance to local cultural values with respect to safety, comfort, and aesthetics.
6. Consult with communities of faith, stakeholders, and partners to determine which buildings need to be safely demolished, as well as the capacity to be replaced.
7. Build capacity for communities of faith to assume responsibility for the management and operations of the property.
8. Create opportunity for the church and communities of faith to gain a deeper understanding of real property title within the various communities.

In February 2015 the Council agreed to implement the initial phase of the Real Property Plan. This includes consultation with Conferences that have an interest in Aboriginal Real Property and with the All Native Circle Conference's Council on Sharing. Information on the plan will be shared with Aboriginal communities in early 2015.

The Council appointed five members to serve on the Real Property Task Group. The Task Group will receive and review applications for real property renovation projects from the Aboriginal communities of faith, and will make decisions in a fair and equitable manner.

There is strong emotional attachment to buildings. Communities of faith will be asked to hold in balance the value of shared history and the challenges facing the church. Communities of faith will be invited to consider what the balance is in honouring sacred and historic space while building capacity for spiritual nurture and ministry for future generations.

Partnership with the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential School (IIRS): There was collaboration in the planning and resourcing of the Living into Right Relations Task Group's final meeting in November 2013, the goals of which were to:

- name accomplishments and challenges, experiences, and insights gained by the Task Group and home groups and forward to this feedback to those who will have ongoing engagement in this work.
- formulate recommendations with an action plan to carry the work forward within the United Church,
- bring closure to the Task Group through ceremony and acknowledge the five-year commitment and hand over the work to the bodies carrying it on.

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<sup>3</sup> This report was prepared by the North Pacific Management Services Ltd for The United Church of Canada (2008) contains an overview of the state of the church and manse buildings in Aboriginal communities of faith in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.

The IJRS and Council met twice during this triennium. The key areas of focus were: the comprehensive review—envisioning the future together; clarifying areas of collaboration; and, exploring the question of what follows the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

#### Comprehensive Review Task Group

In March 2013 Council made two recommendations: i) Aboriginal representation on the Task Group is needed; ii) The Task Group needs to establish a process of consultation with Aboriginal Ministries. The Council committed to a process that would clarify working relationships between the constituencies it represents.

Russel Burns, Council member, was appointed to the Comprehensive Review Team.

The consultation process began with the community of faith conversation. The Aboriginal Ministries Circle staff supported this work by engaging Aboriginal communities of faith in the questionnaire. Approximately 90% participated in this process.

Later, in the fall, members of the Comprehensive Review Task Group and the Council began to explore the presence and the work of Aboriginal ministries in The United Church of Canada. This dialogue enabled a deeper understanding of the Aboriginal context. Stories from communities of faith emerged expressing the barriers that exist in processes relating to ministry preparation, support, and reparation to church buildings.

From the many and varied conversations these questions emerged:

1. What are the characteristics of a sustainable and effective structure for Aboriginal communities of faith?
2. Council wants to be a part of nurturing the identity of the United Church. Honest conversations are needed as we build up the Body of Christ together. What do we value in a partnership?
3. Without the concept of reparation, is it possible to do justice as we accompany communities of faith? What is fair? What is equitable?

In October 2013 the Council envisioned a structure within the United Church of Canada that would facilitate an equal voice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within the church.

The Aboriginal Ministries Circle coordinated a research project to review the structures within the Anglican Church of New Zealand and the Uniting Church of Australia's, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The research was reviewed by the Council in March 2014. There was some comparison of structures, however, the main focus centred on the principles of the relationships. It was noted how themes of equality and value were reflected within structures.

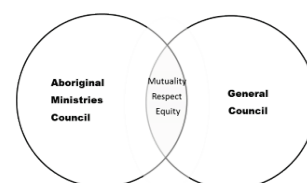
The following summarizes key points:

- Our present structure has been useful in many ways. The journey has not been easy, yet it has enabled progress. Much work has been done to achieve what exists now, i.e. Aboriginal Ministries Council and Circle, All Native Circle Conference, Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, British Columbia Native Ministries, Ontario Quebec Native Ministries, and Indigenous Justice/Residential School Committee.

- Indigenous theology needs to be nurtured and documented from within the context of Indigenous communities of faith. There is a need to capture stories for the upcoming generations.
- Equality requires that each party give to the relationship. How will the church address financial dependency? Has our structure created a dependency?
- Aboriginal communities need time and space to express how they want to relate to the wider church.

The dream:

- The foundation of any model needs to recognize the unique relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada.
- The shaded area defines the relationship.
  - Values: Respect, honesty, truth, wisdom, humility, love, hope, strength, courage, sharing, patience, collaboration, traditions, culture.



Aboriginal ministries are positioning themselves for change. The Comprehensive Review process acknowledged and responded to the need for time to further the dialogue.

In February 2015 the Council appointed three members to determine a process to engage Aboriginal ministries in responding to the following key questions:

1. What is a cohesive vision for Aboriginal ministries?
2. What principles will guide relationships with the wider church and with the constituencies that make up the Council?
3. How will the vision be achieved?
  - a. What is the precious work that must go forward?
  - b. What is no longer effective?
  - c. What structure and resources (staff, networks, technology, funding) are needed to support Aboriginal ministries?

The dialogue has affirmed how Aboriginal communities share a common experience of growing and adapting to change. It has become increasingly important that the Aboriginal ministries constitute the Aboriginal Ministries Council establish themselves as one body, working together.

The image of a “smaller house” has been used to describe our future together in the church. To support ongoing life within the church we will carefully consider what we take from the past and present that will continue to serve to revitalize faith and ministry. We will also identify those pieces we leave behind. It is clear that connectional space for spiritual renewal and Aboriginal youth and young adults’ leadership development remain priorities.

The development of Aboriginal ministries has enriched The United Church of Canada and has contributed toward Aboriginal self-determination. This vision has not changed; it continues to expand in ways that support connection for Aboriginal faith communities in this time. Aboriginal leadership renews the whole church.

Going forward Aboriginal ministries will be cautious of being drawn into empire. Space will be held to examine processes and structure that have the potential to become debilitating and oppressive. A circle of relationships will be nurtured rather than vertical or hierarchical structures. The Council recognizes a need for the whole church to shake the “ties that bind” and lean into the strength of Jesus’ prayer “*That all may be one*” (John 17:21) and the Indigenous truth and wisdom of *All My Relations*.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ray Jones, Co-chair  
George Montour, Co-chair  
Marie Dickens  
Jim White  
Lori Lewis  
Russel Burns  
Bernice Saulteaux  
John Thompson  
Lorna Pawis  
Susan Gabriel  
Martha Pedoniquotte  
Wanda Montour  
Grafton Antone  
Rosalyn Cole  
Melvin King  
Pierre Goldberger  
Kellie McComb  
Lark Kim  
Maggie McLeod, Executive Minister

## **NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR CONFERENCE**

### **The View from Here**

The view from here is connected, of course, with the view from right across the country. While we have a slightly different view, what we are looking at remains very much the same. In the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference we have been very busy talking about the Comprehensive Review and its recommendations. We have been busying ourselves with the worry of cut backs and how we might continue to operate in the future with fewer resources. And of course, we are very busy planning for all of you who will be with us at the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council.

### **Conference Initiatives and Action**

This fall saw the conclusion to our Models of Ministry Task Group work which began in 2006 with a task group called “Future Directions.” The Future Directions Task group recommended that a Models of Ministry Task group be set up to help pastoral charges with demographic changes within the Conference (out-migration, in-migration, decreasing membership, lack of clergy, decreasing financial support, and an aging infrastructure). Research and a presentation on different models for ministry were presented at a mid-point in the task groups work and then, in October 2014, approximately 75 people representing close to 40 pastoral charges gathered for a final workshop. The event had the Rev. Don Stiles and the Moderator, The Right Rev. Dr. Gary Paterson as theme presenters, as well as a variety of workshop leaders. The event spent time with Marvin Anderson’s seven lenses through which a congregation can look at itself, along with 14 suggested Models of Ministry that might be used, piloted throughout the Conference. Congregations and pastoral charges are asked to view themselves through those lenses while looking at their future direction in ministry and perhaps take some risks to try a new model for their circumstance.

The Conference Council of Finance and Administration, through the East and West Finance and Administration Committees, were asked to look at our insurance policy with respect to Replacement Cost and Actual Cash Value (RC and ACV). Some of our smaller congregations had indicated that they would not rebuild in a situation where their church was destroyed but instead would move their membership to a neighbouring point or with another pastoral charge. In negotiation with our blanket insurance carrier, we did put in place a policy where pastoral charges could choose between RV and ACV. The deadline for congregations to let us know is in June. To date we have discovered that all but one of our congregations will remain with Replacement Value Insurance. We are in a very fortunate place in the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference in which our churches/pastoral charges are all covered under a blanket insurance program, which of course give the Conference negotiation abilities with insurance companies.

Another initiative by the Conference Council of Finance and Administration, through the East and West Finance and Administration Committees, was a request heard from our pastoral charges around a new assessment formula. The formula used to assess pastoral charges for the work of the wider church was based on the number of households under pastoral care and a dollar amount for each household. Many of our congregation felt that this formula was unjust and pastoral charge began to cull their numbers and take people off their lists just to keep

assessments down, which was not a very pastoral response to people. Therefore, the three finance committees began research on a better more just formula. The formula approved by the District and the Conference Executive last spring is:

*Total Raised for all purposes by Congregational Givings (line 32A) less Mission and Service received from the Pastoral Charge, exclusive of UCW (line 36)*

**32A-36 x 5% = Assessment**

For some pastoral charges there were increases and for others there were decreases. We have received correspondence from about seven pastoral charges asking that we look into their assessments as they felt the increase was too high. The District Finance and Administration Committees have dealt with each Pastoral Charge on a one on one basis.

### **Staffing Changes**

We have been able to celebrate with Ms. Rochelle Forward and Mr. Greg Forward in the birth of their second child Cain, a little brother to Claire. Rochelle is currently on maternity leave, as she, Claire, and Cain have had a year together to continue to bond as a family. We welcomed Ms. Joan Hawkins to the staff team working out of the Grand Falls-Windsor Office filling the position during Rochelle's leave. We will welcome Rochelle back to the office the first week of June. I take this opportunity to thank all staff for offering themselves for the work of the Conference and for their faithful dedication to the work of the church in the Newfoundland and Labrador.

### **Future Directions**

The future directions of our Conference in some ways will depend on the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council and its dealing with the Comprehensive Review. We do not know what our Conference will look like in the future, but what we do know is that the church will still be here. An interesting fact is that the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference became part of the United Church before it became part of Canada. The spirit of God was here long before the United Church, as is witnessed through the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches and others in our midst. It was here long before all the church denominations through the spirituality of our aboriginal brothers and sisters; and it will be here long after us. The spirit of God and its ministry will always be here, thanks be to God.

Faith March-MacCuish  
Executive Secretary



## **MARITIME CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Origin: Maritime Conference**

### **The View from Here**

The full spectrum of Canadian society can be experienced within the geographic region of Maritime Conference and therefore we cannot claim any particular unique experience this is not also in evidence in other parts of the country. We have poverty and we have wealth. We have gorgeous pristine areas of natural beauty and we have areas of shocking environmental degradation. We have new immigrants and we have multi-generational European settlers. We have aboriginal communities both on and off reserve. We have thriving churches and we have struggling churches. We have corporate developments and we have citizen activists.

We also have lobster and lupins! Come visit!

As church we continue to seek the wisdom of the Spirit as we discern the Call of God and our expression of ministry within the communities we love and serve. Demographic shifts and changes occur sometimes faster than we can accommodate and we suffer loss and grief as cherished expressions of ministry come to the end of their viability. In other areas, these same demographic shifts provide fresh opportunities for new expressions of ministry. Sometimes we are able to respond and sometimes we grieve our inability to move fast enough to be effective in changing times. Even so, growth is occurring along with loss, and we faithfully seek to express God's love through our actions, large and small.

### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

The ground laid by the Conference initiative "Ministry in Changing Times" from a few years ago continues to bear fruit. With some shared language and understanding of the dynamics of change, pastoral charges and presbyteries have entered into a variety of experiments and initiatives for changes that will ensure viability and expression of ministry into the community. Conference staff are a resource for these conversations and considerations, while the local decision-making body provides formal leadership.

Conference, somewhat bravely and perhaps too boldly, undertook the construction of a new \$3 million Conference Centre in 2011-2012 that includes office space, meeting space and state-of-the-art Archival storage space. While fundraising efforts continue, regular mortgage payments have now been absorbed into the Conference operations budget, and the increase in allocations, while unwelcome, has been mostly accommodated. Voluntary donations have continued to the extent that an annual payment of \$150,000 directly towards principle was accomplished in 2014, and should be able to be done again in 2015. These early pay-downs have remarkable effect in relieving mortgage interest and shortening the term of the mortgage.

Under the freedom provided by the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relations experiments, Maritime Conference has offered a low-level, experimental increase in Conference staff interactions with several presbyteries. This has increased the confidence and ability of the presbyteries to engage with challenging circumstances; however, this has also increased anxiety as the presbyteries have engaged with challenging circumstances that might otherwise have been ignored for some time.

Following the example of British Columbia Conference, a formal arrangement with a specific real estate company is in the process of development. This effort will serve to offer expert assistance in property matters with congregations, Presbyteries and with Conference, depending on the circumstances and the potential of the particular situation.

Four of our summer residential camps have begun to hold regular conversations together to explore shared opportunities for faith formation ministry with children. This spring, a special Camp Promotions Team was hired for short-term, part-time contracts to promote the camping experience widely.

While there are no United Church aboriginal congregations in Maritime Conference, there continue to be developing relationships between United Church and aboriginal folk. We continue to engage to provide support around treaty issues and resource rights. The anti-fracking protest in New Brunswick served to be a gathering of diverse peoples for common cause, with a strong United Church presence.

### **Staffing Changes**

After 15 years of exemplary service, Janice MacLean left the position of Conference Minister, Christian Nurture and Enrichment, in February of 2015. Janice's contributions to the ministry of the Conference and to The United Church of Canada are many, most recently innovating with online offerings of ministry. Janice continues to offer a variety of online ministries through her website, "The Prayer Bench."

Conference continues to maintain the position of Conference Minister, Christian Nurture and Enrichment, but is holding the position vacant until after the meeting of General Council in August 2015. A review in the fall will seek to determine what should happen next.

### **Future Directions**

Conference remains committed to supporting the work of justice and faithfulness with communities of faith around the region and looks forward to the clarification of the organizational means by which these ministries will continue. The needs and requirements of the church and the world are not difficult to identify. However, the overwhelming and looming influence of the Comprehensive Review and the yet-to-be determined decisions of GC42 make future planning difficult.

Respectfully submitted,

David Hewitt  
Executive Secretary  
Maritime Conference

## **SYNODE MONTREAL & OTTAWA CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **Origin: Synode Montreal & Ottawa Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

Montreal and Ottawa Presbyteries have faced a few church closings and amalgamations, while Seaway Valley Presbytery continued its clustering experiment of finding new relationships with neighbouring pastoral charges, therefore able to maintain the structures but share the leadership. Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery has been much harder hit by aging populations and the exodus of younger family members to the urban centers, meaning that many of the rural church buildings are being re-purposed in the communities or sold to other denominations. We note that the fundamental and immigrant populations have far greater church attendance and need to space. We have also experienced, in the Quebec presbyteries that although Roman Catholics, the majority church, are still drifting in our direction for worship and weddings, yet many resist the idea of membership and commitment to a protestant denomination. The Consistoire Laurentien continues to be quite fragile and unable to offer full time ministry sites, hence finding appropriate leadership is a challenge but our Spanish congregation is a model of new ministries having launched 5 house churches with lay leadership.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

There have been many exciting ministry and learning opportunities because of the needs of others.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Montreal April 24–27, 2013 engaged many volunteers, greeting at the event, baking hundreds of cupcakes and making cards for the birthday party at the end, and arriving by bus from further parts of the Conference to learn.

A large focus of work for the staff, particularly the Conference Personnel Ministers has been working with Pastoral Relations and Pastoral Oversight committees, developing and testing new resources for the Effective Leadership project. The goal was to create consistent tools for gathering ministry site data and facilitating processes. The presbyteries have had trainings and are gradually transitioning to using the new Joint Needs Assessment Process and the new Pastoral Care & Oversight tool with hopes to have all visits planned for fall 2015. Living Ministry Profile reports are to be filed annually with traditional Annual Reports following congregational meetings.

The tragic train crash in Lac Megantic, QC on July 6, 2013 created a situation to raise the profile of the United Church. I am deeply grateful to the liturgical contributions of Denis Fortin and Darla Sloan, the political fortitude of some and the generous spirit of pastoral charges who raised over \$4000.

Following the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council which accepted the Beaconsfield initiative proposal opposed to Mining Actions in the Philippines, several of us joined The Working Group on United for Mining Justice. It is challenged with seeking ways to educate our church about the current issues. The petition from the Beaconsfield initiative was presented with 5000 names in Parliament on October 22, 2014, during the visit of Father Rex Reyes from the Philippines but there is a strong push for the campaign to continue.

Following my first “exposure” trip to the Philippines in November 2011, I have appreciated over 40 opportunities to present, initially on average three invitations per month with presbyteries, UCW groups and individual congregations and mission groups.

I left for a second trip to the Philippines in November 2013 to represent The United Church of Canada at the Jubilee celebrations of the National Council of Churches (NCCP). The timing was such that I became involved in the relief efforts for Super Typhoon Yolanda. Support for our partners in the Philippines has been very encouraging. As of December 31, 2014 for the Cordillera People’s Alliance we had sent \$2989.00. The project I had been encouraging support for since the typhoon, the Pump Boats project in Estancia, Iloilo, has received \$5,855.00. To date, four boats have been purchased, providing employment for 16 families in the village. I am deeply grateful for the depth of people’s generosity.

The Native Concerns Committee participated in a celebration in Kanesatake for the unveiling of a monument to Chief Joseph Swan and witnessed a wonderful presentation at the Kanesatake High School about the beaded Wampum belts, learning how the Archives of all the First Nations people are told through the images and the oral tradition of passing stories. Committee members are part of an ecumenical group in Ottawa and Rev. Jamie Scott has focused our discussion on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission closure which will take place May 31 to June 3 in Ottawa. The committee is also brainstorming plans to recognize the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oka Crisis which deeply affected relationships with Kanesatake/Oka and Hudson, Kahnawake and Chateaugay. The United Church played a variety of roles during the 78 days of stand-off and there is still healing that needs to happen for “right relationships.”

### **Staffing Changes**

The half-time Youth and Young Adult facilitator Shanna Bernier determined that enjoying her new daughter and youth work for her presbytery was a full load and with her resignation came the hiring of Rev. Jean-Daniel Williams working half time for the Conference and half-time as the Anglican-United chaplain for McGill University, effective January 2015.

Rev. Douglas Stewart, after 35 years of ministry, the last eight as Conference Personnel Minister (East) retired and we welcomed Me. Sabrina Di Stefano into the position on February 1 working with Doug for 3 months and officially taking responsibility effective May 2015.

### **Future Directions**

The Comprehensive Review has been the topic of much conversation and over 30 proposals to be discussed at the 2015 annual meeting. There is interest, agreement, and fear as ministry sites try to imagine their future, and many smaller congregations struggle with the new comprehensive salary which has greatly increased housing allowances, while Mission Support is being cut to the outreach ministries. The necessity for tightening the purse is mostly understood, as rural churches are being sold with increasingly regularity, and urban congregations choosing part time ministry option. Where these changes will lead us, and whether there will be any staff support for those who rely heavily on others to guide the processes, is yet to be seen.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Rosemary Lambie, Executive Secretary

## **THE BAY OF QUINTE CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **Origin: The Bay of Quinte Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

In 2013, we adopted the following Vision Statement

*“Enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the Bay of Quinte Conference in its ministries will nurture and enhance our network of relationships with the intention of deepening the lived faith of all within the Conference in light of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the traditions of The United Church of Canada, as we, an Affirming Ministry, recognize and celebrate diversities”*

Within this past triennium, we have sought to live into this Vision Statement and our Mission goals of enabling, supporting and encouraging presbyteries and congregations in their ministries. This has happened through the process of becoming an Affirming Conference, a restructuring of boundaries from 7 to 8 presbyteries, a physical move of the Conference Office to a more welcoming and accessible space, a re-commitment to Dancing the Circle of Right Relations, a flourishing Youth and Young Adult ministry, and a commitment of our staff to be involved in the life and witness of our presbyteries.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

- Became an Affirming Conference
- Restructured from 7 to 8 presbyteries
- Participated in the Candidacy Pathways Programs
- Participated in Effective Ministry initiative
- Offered workshops in all presbyteries relating to racial justice, boundaries, M&P Committees, congregation visioning and amalgamation
- Worked with EDGE in congregational redevelopment
- Physically moved our office from Frankfort to Belleville, ON
- Supported Mission Awareness Trips to El Salvador
- Formed an Equity Committee welcoming all
- With All Native Circle Conference, will be hosting the 2018 General Council at UOIT/Durham College in Oshawa

#### **Staffing Changes**

In 2012, we hired Mary Jane Hobden as our Conference Personnel Minister (MEPs).

In 2013, we hired David Timpson as our Conference Personal Minister (Pastoral Care).

This has brought us back to a full staff complement of six, which includes two Conference Personnel Ministers, one program staff, two admin staff (office co-ordinator and Finance and IT) and an Executive Secretary

#### **Future Directions**

Like the rest of the church, we await the decisions of the General Council and presbyteries and congregations (through remit) on the Comprehensive Review. While acknowledging that the church and its structure may change, we believe its ministry will be ongoing. We therefore

recommit ourselves as a Conference to our Vision Statement and Mission goals and strive to nurture and enhance the ministry of The United Church of Canada through its mission units

Respectfully submitted,

William D. Smith  
Executive Secretary  
Bay of Quinte Conference

## **TORONTO CONFERENCE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

### **Origin: Toronto Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

An excerpt from the “context” statement in all staff position descriptions: “Toronto Conference is characterized by significant diversity ranging from urban to rural, and influenced by multicultural and intercultural realities. Experience within the membership of the congregations in the Conference varies widely, and theological perspectives are sophisticated and diverse. Tension exists between areas of high growth and opportunity and areas inclined toward amalgamations and church closings. There is much opportunity for vital and creative ministry within the Conference.”

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

In this triennium Toronto Conference has been involved in the General Council’s Effective Leadership project. This required significant reorganization at both the Conference and presbytery levels. In the initial stages there was considerable upheaval, confusion about roles, and the need to hire additional staff. A major evaluation of this work is underway.

The Conference reviewed its policies related to property. Given the real estate market, especially in the Greater Toronto Area, the Conference and its presbyteries often must decide how to use millions of dollars realized from property sales. At present, the four presbyteries have access to \$12,000,000 in funds (\$3,000,000 each). Conference has a similar fund in the same amount, and a new Leadership Development and New Ministries Fund has been established with \$3,000,000. All these funds enable ministry in a variety of ways, but it has forced the question of “How much is enough?”

As a consequence, Conference will share resources with the General Council, The United Church of Canada Foundation and the Toronto United Church Council Sustainable Energy Loan Fund. In addition, we are beginning conversations with the All Native Circle Conference and the Aboriginal Ministries Council about sharing resources.

Other initiatives include:

- Funding an Explorer program in cooperation with other Conferences whereby young people from different parts of the country can spend part of a summer in another part of the country testing whether ministry might be a vocation for them;
- Providing \$100,000 annually to assist internships and other supervised pastoral education;
- Contributed \$200,000 to pay the line of credit of the Five Oaks Centre, one of the two remaining lay education centres within the United Church;
- Began offering sabbatical grants—up to \$3,500 per community of faith to cover expenses like pulpit supply or weekend supply, and up to \$1,500 per minister going on sabbatical;
- Providing scholarships to up to 10 persons to take training as interim ministers.

Right relations with Aboriginal people has been a high priority. Conference provided funds to enable a group to attend the final Truth and Reconciliation event in Edmonton. Approximately 125 people will attend the Reconciliation Walk and TRC closing events May 30–June 3.

The Conference has begun the process of determining whether to become an Affirming Conference.

### **Staffing Changes**

The Conference pays for a total of 14 full-time equivalent staff serving the Conference and the four presbyteries. In addition, three of the four presbyteries have hired additional staff, primarily to assist with Effective Leadership tasks, and the fourth hired a consultant to train volunteers. Two staff had sabbaticals during the triennium, and two others are eligible for sabbaticals beginning in 2015/2016.

### **Future Directions**

Like everyone else, Toronto Conference is waiting to hear what will emerge from the Comprehensive Review Task Group and whatever decisions GC42 makes. In the meantime, we plan to be as useful as possible to assist communities of faith to be better prepared during a major transitional time.

Respectfully submitted,

David W. Allen (Rev.)  
Conference Executive Secretary



## **HAMILTON CONFERENCE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

### **Origin: Hamilton Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

For the communities within Hamilton Conference the past triennium continues as a time of change.

Communities such as St. Catharines, Hamilton, Cambridge, Kitchener and Welland continue to experience higher than average rates of unemployment and the social challenges which often accompany such high rates. However, these communities are witnessing positive improvements. Hamilton in particular has significant growth in its downtown core.

Waterloo, Halton, Milton, and Mississauga, which rely more on “high tech” and service industries, continue to experience high levels of growth.

Our rural communities face constant transition. Changes in farming and the agriculture business have also impacted local congregations. Many rural local communities have seen a decrease in population, while communities along the water are experiencing significant growth. This residential development includes both an increasing population of retirees and “bedroom communities” for those working in urban centres.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

We have continued to work with congregations and presbyteries to support them as they seek new incarnations of church. Following is an outline of some of the initiatives undertaken in the past triennium.

- Resource development and workshop facilitation in the areas of accessibility and workplace safety.
- Organized, in partnership with General Council staff, a workshop on Intercultural and Diverse Communities.
- Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Test Conference: providing Bruce Presbytery with support around searches, collegial support, congregational essence statements and pastoral oversight.
- Suicide Prevention Workshop.
- Pastoral Care and Mental Health Workshop.
- Racial Justice Training.
- Organized, in partnership with General Council staff, two oversubscribed workshops on Websites and Social Media.
- Conducted a workshop on Advocacy for Social Justice.
- Ministry and Personnel workshops for Presbyteries and Congregations.
- Hosted Cross Conference Interim Ministry Retreats.
- Presbytery Learning Events.
- Congregational Visioning workshops.
- Focus on relationship building and partnerships.
- Action to work toward becoming an Affirming Conference.

- Right Relations Engagement, TRC engagement and support of Nations Uniting.
- Partnered financially with Halton Presbytery to hold the first annual Ministry in Motion conference.
- Partnered with Five Oaks in the creation and leading of Hand in Hand, a training program in Lay Pastoral Visitation and Care.

### **Staffing Changes**

- Staff Equivalent at the Conference Office changed from 7.75 full-time staff to 5.75 full-time staff.
- Full-time Administrative positions eliminated.
- Part-time Administrative position created.
- Full-time Administrative Position with an emphasis on Human Resources created.
- Minister for Congregational Support moved from a two-year contract to full-time.
- Full-time Minister for Faithful Public Witness position was eliminated.
- Part-time Minister for Social Justice position, two-year contract, was created.
- Summer student position was created.
- Executive Secretary, Fred Monteith retired March 1, 2013.
- Executive Secretary, Peter Hartmans started March 1, 2013.

### **Future Directions**

Looking forward Hamilton Conference will continue to provide support to United Church of Canada clergy, staff, presbyteries, and congregations, including partnerships related to Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships. We will support and promote Fresh Expressions in our Conference. The Conference will partner with General Council around any changes related to the Comprehensive Review and the funding transition for Conference related to General Council grants. In 2015, our Conference office will become fully accessible.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Hartmans  
Executive Secretary  
Hamilton Conference

## **LONDON CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **Origin: London Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

London Conference includes southwestern Ontario and the District of Algoma. Although there are urban centres in each of the eight Presbyteries, London Conference is primarily rural/small town. The stresses these congregations face are those experienced by the mainline church in general with the additional strains of depopulation, employment challenges, and limited resources in rural areas.

These circumstances lead some congregations to speak of their future as time-limited, such as “We have two more years.” Others have embraced these changes exploring how to continue to provide a United Church presence in their community, moving into innovative and life-giving partnerships. The latter congregations have experienced new life and have inspired others.

Entering into change with faith and hope continues to be the focus of the Conference as it seeks to resource its Presbyteries and congregations to discern their future.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

Prior to 2012, London Conference had named priorities and established its staff complement but the two pieces of work were done independently. At the 2013 Annual Meeting, a Priorities Working Group was established that continued until the 2015 Annual Meeting. Its goal was to confirm the priorities of the Conference, identify a staff complement to resource these priorities and to recommend a restructuring of the Executive to support them. The priorities named were:

- 1) Ministry with children, youth and young adults
- 2) Testing the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relations Process
- 3) Providing clear, effective and timely communication to the Conference and
- 4) Promoting best practices for healthy congregations.

The Effective Leadership test has been the focus of considerable staff and volunteer time.

London worked in partnership with Toronto Conference to design a process that would reflect the principles adopted by General Council 41. The pastoral charge and presbytery are accountable for the discernment of mission and ministry leadership needs and the support and nurture of pastoral relationships. The Conference is accountable for the pastoral relationship processes related to placement, oversight and discipline. Pastoral relations as well as oversight and discipline are resourced with trained paid accountable staff.

There are a few distinctions between Toronto’s and London’s models based on regional differences. The test has helped standardize and make fair and transparent the pastoral relations and the oversight and discipline processes. Although the work was not possible within existing capacity, the benefits of the test are evident. The Settlement Committee expressed its desire to continue the test and the Executive endorsed this provided staff capacity continued at the current level.

The Executive of London Conference also provided leadership in two additional key areas: 1) focusing on right relations especially concerning Fairfield and the tensions between The United Church and the Delaware Nation-Moravian of the Thames and 2) making a commitment to begin the

Affirming process. In addition, the Executive acted on the direction of the Annual Meeting to create a New Ministries Fund with The United Church of Canada Foundation to receive 10% of the net proceeds from the sale of buildings of closing congregations. A further 10% is directed to Mission & Service and 2% is held in a Conference Archive Capital Fund.

### **Staffing Changes**

The retirement of Judith Gililand from the Congregational Futures portfolio in 2012 and Matthew Stevens from Justice, Stewardship and Right Relations in 2013 changed the configuration of London's staff.

London experimented with its staff complement during the triennium. Elaine Graham started in 2012 in a contract position as Pastoral Support Minister. Her primary responsibilities are the pastoral care of clergy and their families and the development of collegial networks of support in presbyteries. In 2013, Michelle Owens joined the Conference staff as Personnel Minister with key responsibility for the Effective Leadership test. When it became apparent that the test could not be undertaken within existing capacity, a .5 position was created for other elements of the personnel portfolio and Tanya Cameron of the Conference staff took on the role of Minister, Vocations and Training. This change in Tanya's responsibilities created another contract position for financial administration and Krista Ford was recruited. These three contract positions, Pastoral Support Minister, Minister Vocations and Training, and Administrative Support Finance have made possible London's investment in Effective Leadership.

Pretima Kukadia continues to provide graphics for the Conference with responsibility for the website. Betsy Exley, Minister, Faith Formation, Youth and Young Adults offers resources for leaders and programs that help London Conference fulfill its commitment to ministry with children, youth and young adults. On a personal note, I count myself blessed by the opportunity to serve as Executive Secretary.

### **Future Directions**

This spring London held four events to review the report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group, "United in God's Work." Total attendance was between 350 and 400 indicating the interest people have in the changes being proposed. Some presbyteries are discussing how they might embrace elements of the report if it is adopted. Having already experienced the changes tested in Effective Leadership, it would seem that London is interested in being involved in a hands-on way in the next step in the United Church's history.

As of July 2015, the Conference office will move from an office building to premises within Riverside United Church. The new space will provide additional room and enable better remote participation in meetings. It is an excellent example of the way partnership can enrich the life of each involved—a sign of hope for the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa  
Executive Secretary  
London Conference

## **MANITOU CONFERENCE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

### **Origin: Manitou Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

Communities in our region have strong historic links to the mining, forestry, and tourism industries. The fortunes of these sectors deeply affect the fabric of our congregations. Mining and tourism are presently strong but hardship continues for many of our pastoral charges that rely on forestry.

The out-migration of our young adults for education and employment opportunities remains a troubling reality.

A significant percentage of congregations function with no ministry personnel. Many of these faith communities are clear that they see themselves continuing to engage in God's mission regardless of proposed changes to the denominational church structure.

This year is the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of Manitou Conference. Question of financial viability is the most significant issue for us. Proposed elimination of Conference Operating Grants will make it impossible to survive within the present staffing model. At the same time, we are profoundly grateful for the way in which other Conferences have absorbed much higher funding cuts in recent years, as the future of the church is being determined. It is humbling! We thank the broader church family for generosity which has enabled us to "stay at the table" while future funding directions are considered by this General Council.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

We believe that God's radical hospitality calls Manitou Conference to:

- Journey into new ways of being church and,
- Understand and engage with the struggle for dignity and economic justice for our neighbours and God's Creation.

Of ongoing importance is our right relations work with First Nations neighbours. This ministry continues to be capably led by our Right Relations Home Group.

We continue to recognize First Nation Traditional Territory wherever our courts meet.

Many congregations offered support and hospitality to the Ninanew Oskapawisak walkers during their journey through Spirit Dancing and North Bay Presbyteries. The group of elders and young indigenous people made the 53-day journey from Cochrane to Ottawa for the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report.

Manitou is committed to providing strong advocacy for the TRC's "Call to Action."

Conference Executive and each of the presbyteries have been engaged in education and discussion about affirming ministry. At our recent General Meeting we considered a proposal to become an Affirming Conference.

### **Staffing Changes**

In 2014, Conference Personnel Minister, Rev. Catherine Somerville, made the decision to return to congregational ministry. New CPM, Rev. Lillian Roberts, joined the staff team this past November. We've benefited from the gifts that her "new eyes" have brought.

The Conference staff's collective work is guided by three priorities:

- support to ministry personnel
- support to presbyteries
- ensuring a mission focus for Manitou

### **Future Directions**

Participation in the "Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships" pilot project has been a roller coaster of frustration and excitement. Sudbury Presbytery is fully engaged in testing all of the principles approved by the last General Council. The transfer and flow of pastoral relations work, from what had been presbytery responsibility to Conference, is being handled efficiently. For our Conference MPESI committee there is the challenge of managing two totally different pastoral relations processes at the same time. Conference staff time required to resource the pilot was more than we had anticipated. There are very hopeful and positive results as congregations shift to giving priority to their mission.

The theme for the 2015 Conference General Meeting was: "People Get Ready, There's a Train a-Coming!"

Manitou has been well-engaged in the Comprehensive Review process and, like the rest of the church, is eager to see which "track" we will be on following GC42!

I want to offer a word of appreciation for the way in which our GCE reps, Janice Brownlee and Erin Todd, have ably represented Manitou Conference over the last triennium.

These are stimulating times to be The United Church of Canada here in the north!

Respectfully submitted,

Will Kunder  
Executive Secretary  
Manitou Conference

## **ALL NATIVE CIRCLE CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Origin: All Native Circle Conference**

### **The View from Here**

All Native Circle Conference spans five provinces with 40 ministries including 10 remote fly-in communities. As the wider church changes and strains to accommodate the administration of this church of ours, the All Native Circle Conference strains that much harder—it is like trying to keep that (too small) fitted sheet on the bed; each of the corners keeps popping undone because the resources both human and financial can no longer be stretched to accommodate the work. We have been described as the “canary in the coal mine.” We have also been described as the ghettoized. We have not adopted either of these stances in our Conference; we are committed, and continue to do the work.

The TRC’s final report has just been offered. We hope to find and strengthen relationship with the help of these challenges that have been put forward to us all.

### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

In this past triennium we ordained and commissioned six Aboriginal people in our Conference. We currently have 22 Aboriginal ministry personnel working in our Conference.

We are experiencing some chronic vacancies and continue to work on how to serve these communities. We have developed two ministries that are much like circuit rider ministries; both of these serve isolated fly-in communities—this may be the answer for more ministries. Some partnerships are emerging in southern areas with non-Native churches. We continue to share ministry personnel across Conference bounds, and continue to find good process for transitioning non-native clergy into ANCC.

The Council of Healing and Respect attended the TRC in Edmonton, and from that began a right relations conversation with Toronto Conference. The two Conference executives had opportunity to be in a sharing circle in September 2014 to begin to get to know one another. Previous to this, three congregations (two in ANC Conference and one in Toronto Conference) began to work together on a church tear-down and rebuilding project in a fly-in northern Manitoba community, Red Sucker Lake. This church is 85% complete, and plans are to open this July. It is a project that took five years to coordinate and fund. We will celebrate!

ANCC church communities continue to be offered the “Our Journey” workshop based on the Medicine Wheel teachings. We have had limited engagement, but hope for renewed interest as we commit more staff hours to this initiative.

ANCC’s Executive met with the other five Ontario Conferences at a joint executive meeting at Five Oaks in September of 2014. This was a first time sharing of time and energy across these six Conferences; much relationship-building happened, so much so that All Native Circle Conference and Bay of Quinte Conference will now co-host the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Council in Oshawa. This will be an adventure in coordination. We are looking forward to this work and this conversation. AND we hope to keep Karen Smart sane during this process!

### **Staffing Changes**

\*Gloria Cook ended her contract as Acting Speaker when \*Cheryl Jourdain returned from an eight-month leave of absence 1 December 2012.

\*Rita Flett, Conference Personnel Minister after extended sick leave left the employment of the Conference in 2014.

\*Rick Hebert retired 30 June 2014.

\*Aileen Urquhart served as Acting Conference Personnel Minister from February 2013 to September 2014.

\*Fjola Hart Wasekeesikaw joined the staff team as Conference Personnel Minister in September 2014.

### **Future Directions**

Conflict resolution continues to challenge us (and the wider church). We will need to find a way to have conversation and be able to resolve conflict across cultures.

We continue to find ways to connect with the Aboriginal Ministries Council and Circle as it develops and plans work that intersects with our Conference.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Jourdain  
Speaker  
All Native Circle Conference



## **CONFERENCE OF MANITOBA AND NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO REPORT**

### **Origin: Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario**

#### **The View from Here**

The Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario is a large and geographically diverse conference, we have the flat expanses of prairie in the west and the hills and rocks of the Cambrian Shield in the east, with many lakes and rivers connecting us. We also have great diversity within our many congregations across the Conference, this can be a challenge; however it more often than not is a blessing as we gather and celebrate that which makes us church in this place. Our Conference is blessed with many volunteers who are dedicated to the ministry of the Conference, our six presbyteries, and our many congregations. We continue to have many small, remote congregations unable to afford full-time ministry so therefore have a large number of Licence Lay Worship Leaders and Sacraments Elders offering their gifts and talents across the Conference.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

Our Conference has invested in creating an easy to use website template that is designed for congregations and local ministries to have a website that meets their needs for communication with their congregations through social media as well as connecting them to seekers who want to find a United Church congregation that fits their needs. We have a variety of options for congregations depending on whether they have the technological skills in their midst or need more help from professionals.

As an Affirming Conference we continue to live into what that means in our context and what that calls us to in the wider world. We celebrate that of our six presbyteries two are already Affirming (Cambrian and Winnipeg) and three are in the midst of their education processes to become Affirming (Northland, Assiniboine, and Agassiz). We have also had quite a few congregations in our midst celebrate becoming Affirming Congregations over the past three years.

Right Relations has been a major focus for our Justice Committee. For the past three years this committee has worked together with All Native Circle Conference, Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, and the Centre for Christian Studies to hold an annual “Feast for Friends” right relations event. Other areas for education and advocacy include supporting KAIROS, The Jubilee Fund, Initiatives for Just Communities, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, and the Interchurch Council on Hydropower Inc. We are presently exploring issues around Mining and Fossil Fuel reliance as well as promoting The United Church of Canada Unsettling Goods Campaign regarding Palestine and Israel.

Ministry for Young Adults and Youth (YAAY) continues to be a strong part of the work of our Conference. Rendez-vous was held in Winnipeg in August of 2014 at the University of Manitoba. This was a celebration of Youth and Young Adult ministry across the church, but also an affirmation of the dedication and hard work of the many local volunteers who helped make it happen. The leadership skills learned through our YAAY networks and events continues to foster strong leaders with our youth and young adult community who are an important part of the leadership in presbyteries, at Conference, at United Church camps and in local congregations.

The Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference has meant a higher portion of staff time focused in this area and that a smaller group of dedicated Pastoral Relations volunteers has taken on much of the Joint Search Committee work formerly done by presbyteries. We thank this group for all the hard work they have done over the last two years. This work is ongoing and we continue to evaluate how it can best work in our context.

Much of our Conference's focus over the last three years has been engaging as fully as possible in the Comprehensive Review Process. Our hope is that as we move into decision-making at General Council 42, that all of our congregations and presbyteries will have had several opportunities to engage in discussion and decision-making around how we move into the future as a United Church.

### **Staffing Changes**

We are preparing to say goodbye to Lee Rye, Administrative Assistant who is retiring at the end of July after 26 years of serving and caring for the people of our Conference; her knowledge and presence in the office and on the other end of the phone will be greatly missed. We wish her well in her retirement. We also said goodbye to long-time Archivist Diane Haglund; she retired in the fall of 2014 after 25 years of service and dedication to the work of our Conference through the MNWO Archives. In December of 2012 Bruce Faurshou stepped down as Executive Secretary and moved on to a new challenge as Director of United Church Halfway Homes; his ministry and leadership throughout his time in the Conference was greatly appreciated. Bill Gillis ably served as Acting Executive Secretary for six months until June of 2013 during the hiring process for a new Executive Secretary. We thank them all for their dedication and service to our Conference and wish them well in their next adventure.

As the new Executive Secretary I was welcomed in July of 2013. Richard Manley-Tannis, Winnipeg Presbytery Minister of Evangelism, Mission and Church Development; and Erin Acland, Keeper of the Archives, were also welcomed to our staff team and we look forward to their ministry with us in this time of change and transition.

### **Future Directions**

Communication, connection, and building relationships are the priorities as we move forward. We know regardless of what happens this summer at General Council the church we are so passionate about is changing. In times of change we look to build trust and rely on the strong foundations of our church to carry us forward. As the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario we look forward to the challenge and know that the strength, dedication, and faith of our people will ensure the mission and ministry of the United Church continues in our context.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon McCarthy  
Executive Secretary

## **SASKATCHEWAN CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **Origin: Saskatchewan Conference**

#### **The View from Here**

In spite of the slowdown in both the oil and potash industries, Saskatchewan continues to do well economically. However, the economic benefits vary widely from region to region and those benefits are not reflected in the financial situation of our pastoral charges. Rural depopulation continues. Many rural pastoral charges are challenged by declining numbers and energy levels of their members. This challenge has increasingly affected our rural presbyteries. Vacancies are increasing and the number of ministry personnel continues to decline which has been exacerbated by few or no settlements. However, we continue to be blessed by the many diaconal ministers and designated lay ministers who have chosen to call Saskatchewan Conference home and by the number of people who have assumed positions as licensed lay worship leaders and sacramental elders.

#### **Conference Initiatives and Action**

A new Conference structure came into effect with the rise of our 2012 annual meeting. One of the results is that the Conference Executive has become smaller. At the same time it has become more collegial and a place where everyone around the table seems to have a voice. It is now more of a fertile place where exciting ideas can sprout from the margins and flourish.

In particular it should be noted:

- After a three-year process, the decision was made at the annual meeting in 2013 that Saskatchewan Conference become an affirming ministry.
- In May of 2014, the decision was made to call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to enter into discussions on resource revenue sharing with First Nations. In the fall of 2014, the Conference Executive decided to challenge ourselves in the same way and so a proposal will be considered at our annual meeting this spring that half of the Moats Land Fund (which is revenue from oil producing property) and half of the net income which accrues to the Fund be shared with the All Native Circle Conference, or its successor.
- We meet more and more by electronic means and have endorsed the principle proposed by the General Council Executive that face-to-face meetings should be minimized by including meetings by electronic formats to reduce the resulting carbon footprint.
- Calling Lakes Centre made the decision to close after many years as an educational centre of the United Church and being central to the life of the United Church in both Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference and Saskatchewan Conference.
- While it feels like there has been a leveling in energy for mission work, much positive continues to be happening within Saskatchewan Conference as educational events, social justice ministry, outreach, chaplaincy in its various forms, intercultural ministry, and reconciliation and relationship building between First Nations peoples and settled peoples.

### **Staffing Changes**

Since 2009, the staffing of Saskatchewan Conference has reduced from 8.3 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff people to 4.8 FTE staff people plus a contract program staff person for youth and young adult ministry.

In other areas of the United Church staff reductions have been more newsworthy because they have happened in stages. The reduction in Saskatchewan Conference and in many of the other Conferences has been gradual but comparable. This has generally paralleled the gradual reduction in the grant from the General Council to the Conferences.

Since GC41 in the summer of 2012, there have been a few changes in the staffing of Saskatchewan Conference as follows:

- There was a turnover in the administrative staff position which relates to finance. Bev Fawcett retired in February of 2013 after 12 years of employment with the Conference and Heather Dootoff was hired shortly after that time to serve in the same position.
- Katie Curtis was hired as contract program staff person for youth and young adult ministry commencing in the fall of 2012. Youth and young adult ministry is thriving.
- In the summer of 2012, Madeleine McLuhan-Myers started with the Conference as a half-time archivist as the result of an arrangement with the Saskatchewan Archives Board by which we now share her services with the Board.
- Pam Thomas, who started as the Conference Personnel Minister in 2001, has given notice of her retirement effective September 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. Liz Mackenzie of Hamilton Conference is taking up the position effective September 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Hazel Arbon, who started in the employment of Saskatchewan Conference in 2007 as a half-time program staff person, has given notice of her retirement as full-time program staff for Mission and Education effective December 31, 2015. The budget that is being proposed to the annual meeting includes the renewal of this position on a half-time basis.

### **Future Directions**

Life on the prairies is changing. How we go about being church on the prairies is changing as well. Congregations are closing. Many communities include shared ministry among the denominations that are present. Lay ministry is increasing as is how much it is being valued.

The United Church in Saskatchewan Conference is prepared to embrace the change which is imminent. As we prepare to move to a new regional structure, it will be important to those of us who are the United Church in Saskatchewan Conference to do what we can to ensure that what makes the Conference distinctive lives on in some way or form.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bill Doyle  
Executive Secretary, Saskatchewan Conference

## **ALBERTA AND NORTHWEST CONFERENCE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

**Origin: Alberta and Northwest Conference**

### **The View from Here**

Alberta and Northwest Conference encompasses a large geography and four provincial/territorial jurisdictions: Alberta, north eastern British Columbia, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. We also have two inter-provincial pastoral changes with points in Saskatchewan. The issues and activities in the province of Alberta dominate the life of our Conference. To get an idea of the size of this Conference here is a small but significant fact. The distance between Edmonton, Alberta and Thunder Bay, Ontario is shorter than the distance between Edmonton and Whitehorse, and Whitehorse is located in Alberta and Northwest Conference.

We live in a highly mobile and affluent society and values in the United Church population reflect the values of the general population within Alberta and Northwest Conference. The average household income in this region in 2014 was \$121,000, compared to a Canadian average of \$86,000. The strongest social values found in both the United Church and general populations in our region, according to Environics data are: Need to escape, religiosity, and Canadian identity. In the general population those values are prioritized: 1) Need to Escape 2) Religiosity and 3) Canadian Identity. In the United Church population the same values are prioritized: 1) Religiosity 2) Need to Escape and 3) Canadian Identity. While regular attendance at worship is dropping in the United Church population, financial support of the church is increasing. The average givings per financially supporting household (FSH) in 2013 was \$1,459.

There are demographic distinctions between the United Church population and the general population in our Conference. The profile of the general population is that of a younger, mobile, employed, affluent population which tends to be married with families. There are more young children at home, but also fewer immigrants, compared to the general population in Canada. While Christianity overwhelmingly remains the primary religious affiliation, “no religion” represents the choice of nearly one-quarter of the general population. Among Christian denominations, the United Church comes third after Roman Catholic and “no religion.” The profile of the United Church population is that of a more mature demographic with a median age of 55 (compared to the national United Church population average age of 65) with a high concentration of retired people. The United Church population is concentrated in urban, exurban, and small town contexts. United Church affiliates tend to be people born in Canada (85.6% compared to the national average of 79%). Over 400,000 people in the general population of our Conference identify as United Church. The replacement value of United Church property in Alberta and Northwest Conference is just over \$425 million.

### **Future Direction**

Responding to advice from the Planning and Administration Committee and from the President’s Committee on the Future of the Conference, the Executive of Alberta and Northwest Conference, at its meeting in October 2010, determined to delay the 83<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Conference to 2012. The Executive directed the Executive Secretary “to initiate consultation that engages the Conference widely in a process to make the future work of the Conference faithful, vital and

sustainable; including, but not limited to, the examination of Presbytery boundaries, Conference committees, staff complement and frequency of Conference Meetings.”

At its 83<sup>rd</sup> Meeting held May 31–June 3, 2012, the Conference adopted a “Mission in Transition” model for its operations. This model allows an opportunity to discern the United Church mission and vision in the Conference while remaining flexible in responding to changing levels of funding, including General Council funding, and places Alberta and Northwest Conference in a positive position to transition into whatever new model is developed by the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council for the church’s operations into the future. We have developed a stewardship program which remains flexible in changing times as we recognize that no matter what future direction the General Council discerns, we must develop more cost-effective ways to support of the mission of the church both in terms of dollars and human resources.

The Mission in Transition model reduced the Conference Staff Complement by eliminating four executive-level program positions and maintains a core staff comprised of: Executive Secretary (1.0 FTE), Personnel Minister (1.0FTE), Office Coordinator (1.0 FTE), Administrative Assistant: Personnel (1.0FTE), Accountant (0.6FTE), and Archivist (0.6FTE). No further reductions have been made since 2012.

The Mission Transition model also established a Mission Transition Fund into which there will be an annual contribution of \$75,000—at least 30% of which will be designated for youth and young adult ministries. To date 12 new mission projects have received grants and \$133,700 has been dispersed from this new fund. Projects supported include a Spiritual Arts Collective, a Young Adult Neo-Monastic Community, Presbytery Mission Development, Connecting Congregations for Worship and Study through Technology, Youth Justice and Community Service and Aboriginal History and Culture in school education programs.

The Conference meets to conduct the business of the court every three years, with a major gathering of the Conference to take place mid-triennium for the purposes of education and inspiration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Lynn Maki, Executive Secretary

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA CONFERENCE REPORT**

### **The View from Here**

The United Church west of the Rocky Mountains has discovered the power of prayer. Across the country people were praying for “change”—well, change has come. Now the old adage rings true: “be careful what you pray for!”

Like much of the rest of the church, many congregations continue to shrink in size and in their ability to maintain an active ministry. Some congregations have disbanded and their properties sold. Amalgamation continues to be an option for others. Most struggle to meet budgets that were quite reachable in the past. Money is saved by allowing buildings to deteriorate. Part-time ministry is becoming commonplace.

At the same time a number of congregations are experiencing revived life and excitement for ministry. Only in rare cases, though, does this translate into financial stability. High property values in pockets of the Conference have allowed some to develop or sell their property to provide longer-term financial security.

Immense immigration into the Vancouver area has not brought with it many people interested in the United Church while the depopulation of rural areas threatens the long-standing core of United Church support.

### **Conference Initiatives and Actions**

BC Conference has benefited from significant cooperation between congregations, Presbyteries and the Conference in creating ProVision Funds. Created primarily from the sale of church properties, these funds now total close to \$7 million and are used to finance creative projects throughout the Conference. In an effort to share the benefits of high property values in some areas, these funds begin by benefiting presbyteries in which property sales happen but over time the capital from the funds starts to benefit the whole Conference equally.

As the 50% beneficiary of the largest charitable gift in BC history (from the Judith Jardine estate), BC Conference was able to significantly reduce its grant from the General Council and to establish a leadership development program entitled LeaderShift. Recognizing that an unknown future needs well-grounded and trained leaders, LeaderShift provides a variety of programs and supportive services to the leaders of the emerging church.

As one of the Conferences authorized to experiment with the Effective Leadership initiative which transferred responsibility for ministry personnel from the presbyteries to the Conference, BC Conference created a staff personnel team and a volunteer support system to develop and operate the new systems needed. While not without difficulties, the transition has proved to be relatively smooth and quite successful. Personnel work is now done more efficiently and presbyteries are finding significantly more time available to focus on the work of mission in their areas.

Recognizing that at least in the urban areas property matters have become both a blessing and a curse for congregations, the Conference began its Property Resource Team. A full-time staff person, in partnership with a property professional, has worked with congregations on “repurposing” their properties. Presently two large development projects are far into the planning stages, one including facilities for a new Conference office. Numerous other smaller projects have also been undertaken, including ones that include supported housing and senior care.

After hearing from their bank that it was about to foreclose on its large loan, the Centre at Naramata asked for assistance from the Conference. The Conference loaned the Centre enough money to pay off all indebtedness and helped the Centre work with professionals on a new business plan. Part of the plan called for “contracting out” some of the services done by unionized employees which sparked a lengthy labour dispute and closed all operations at the Centre. Despite a successful appeal for funds and intense research and work, the Centre’s Board decided that the huge capital deficit, its financial indebtedness, and its long-standing marginal sustainability meant that there was no alternative but to close the historic Centre.

BC Conference continues to use a Policy Governance system in its governance work, as it has since 2000. In the past year it finalized new Ends policies which articulate what the Conference is to accomplish. They begin with the recognition that the Conference is just one part of the body of our church and that it does not have to do everything the church as a whole wants to do. Instead, it can focus its work on particular activities and beneficiaries. This kind of priority setting is difficult in our church and it remains to be seen whether it can be maintained over time.

### **Staffing Changes**

Bucking the trend through much of our church, BC Conference has managed to increase its staffing complement. Presently there are 18 staff positions and a number of part-time contractors working regularly for the Conference. In the past few years we have added a mission specialist in our northern presbyteries, a personnel person for our Lower Mainland Presbyteries, hired a coordinator for the LeaderShift work, and have added contract work in communications.

### **Future Directions**

In the near future the Conference will develop policy that will help it determine how much of the assets from property sales should be saved for future generations and how much should be spent in the immediate future. Property sales and development will continue to have a major impact on a number of congregations, possibly freeing up significant assets for use locally and more broadly across the church.

The usual “business model” (low property costs, low wages, major volunteer time, high donations, fund-raising, and tax breaks) that has served congregational life so well in the past will continue to be strained and be found increasingly wanting. Congregations will either continue to fail or will adapt by developing new business models or new kinds of ministries. Leaders with new skills and mind-sets may start developing new ministries that will not depend on the usual models of congregational life and giving.

We anticipate that the Conference will become more important as an administrative centre for church life in the region while presbyteries take on more active mission discernment and support.

Of course, like the rest of the church, we are eager to see what emerges from General Council 42 before making too many firm plans for the future.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Karen Medland  
Past President



## **THEOLOGY AND INTER-CHURCH INTER-FAITH COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

**Origin: Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (Bill Steadman, Chair)**

### **Introduction**

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee is a committee of the General Council. We update our work on a regular basis to the Executive of the General Council, and are called to full accountability at the General Council Meetings held every three years under our current organization. This accountability report, therefore, will address matters that have been referred to us by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, matters that have arisen during this triennium, and also matters that have carried over from the work of the previous triennium.

Specific work assigned to this committee by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council was a request to examine Local Ordination as a way to deal with the unique calling of Designated Lay Ministers as Ministry Personnel within the United Church of Canada. We also were asked to look at the desirability of Diaconal Ministers automatically being licensed to preside over the sacraments from the time of their Commissioning as Diaconal Ministers. Further, as a result of discussion and action taken at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, we needed to revisit the statement on ministry to attempt to clarify the church's understanding of ministry today. All of these issues led to the formation of a Working Group on Ministry within the United Church, and its report, as authorized by the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee, and supported by Ministry Employment and Personnel Services Permanent Committee, entitled "One Order of Ministry," is found elsewhere in this packet.

As well, the committee has examined issues of membership that have arisen over the recent years as congregations struggle with how they may maintain our current form of governance which is dependent upon the involvement of full-members while at the same time congregations find more and more of their most active people, who are adherents, are reluctant to enter into full-membership, yet want to be involved in the life, mission and ministry of the congregation. A report that begins to address those concerns also is found within your package of material with separate recommendations and a request for further study by the church.

### **ONGOING WORK**

#### **A. Hindu-United Church Relations**

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee that served during the triennium continued work begun following the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council to study Hindu-United Church relations. This study followed earlier processes related to Jewish-United Church Relations and Muslim-United Church Relations.

*Honouring the Divine in Each Other: United Church–Hindu Relations Today*, the study resource prepared by this working group, was completed in this triennium, and is available on-line for study and response by congregations and mission units. We commend this study to the church, and hope that we receive feedback on the statement proposed in the study so that action may be taken to move this relationship forward at the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Council.

## **B. Land and Covenant**

Coming out of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, and earlier statements on Israel and Palestine, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee was looking at the whole issue of land from a covenantal perspective. We further realized that land needed to be understood not just in the biblical concept of land as it pertains to the Holy Land (and so the land that is claimed by both Jews and Palestinians), but also to look at land from a sense of Indigenous people, and in particular from the perspective of the land within Canada and our relationship to the land as both Indigenous people and people who have settled on the land, or immigrated into this land, in more recent years.

A symposium was held in May, 2014 in Saskatoon that looked at land from both the perspective of the Holy Land and from the perspective of the rights and stewardship of Aboriginal people within Canada. We determined that the goals of that symposium may have been more encompassing than what we could accomplish in three days. More particularly, we have realized that it is difficult, if not impossible, to address the land issues of Israel, Palestine, and indeed the whole Middle East without coming to grips with our own imperfect, indeed seriously flawed approach, to the land issue within Canada.

As a result, we see it prudent for the United Church to look at land as it pertains to Canada and our relationship with those who have carried the stewardship of the land from its beginning, our Aboriginal people, before we seek to offer further comment on the issue of land as it pertains to other regions and nations.

This may help expand the original concepts shared in the Circle and Cross document, and also, we expect, will be of critical importance in helping us to focus on Aboriginal spirituality in a deeper way. As we have sought dialogue and understanding with Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, we see it as of critical importance to look at Aboriginal spirituality in a concerted way in the next triennium. We would seek the support of the General Council in undergoing such work.

A full report with recommendations for further action on this issue is found elsewhere in this report book for action.

## **C. Physician Assisted Death** (as a follow up to the Moderator's blog in October, and the recent Supreme Court ruling on this issue).

Our Moderator had written a blog in October, 2014 in anticipation of the Supreme Court of Canada Hearing on the issue of Physician Assisted Death (the term "Physician Assisted Suicide" was commonly used at that time, but the Supreme Court in its ruling clarified the terminology with which they felt this issue could be handled appropriately). As a committee we were asked to share our perspective in this issue as background to the Moderator's blog, and then as a follow-up, developed a statement on the issue that was meant to help the church in dealing with this issue theologically, pastorally, individually, and corporately. We wish to continue that work in dialogue with the church as a whole.

Recommendations that were made by the General Council Executive in March, 2015:

- affirming the right and capability of individuals to engage with issues involved in end-of-life decisions

- directing the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee to examine the theological implications of physician-assisted dying and offer guidance to the Executive on the development of a church statement on this issue
- encourage congregations to deepen pastoral capacities to assist those who are facing end-of-life decisions, including a willingness to talk openly about death and dying

#### **D. Theologies of Disabilities**

This is work that recently has been placed before the committee. A working group to engage theologies of disabilities was formed, made up of two staff members, a theological resource person, two members from the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee, and four members chosen from a pool of 17 people who applied to be on this working group through the nomination process.

Early in its process, the working group determined it would be helpful to request personal statements related to the ways in which members have experienced the church dealing with people living with disabilities. The respondents could be self-identified as people living with disabilities, caregivers, or allies. The end result was a huge document of over 150 pages that shared very personal and painful stories of people's experiences within the church. The depth of the reflections in this document, and the overwhelming response when the call went out for members of the working group, both underline the timeliness of this work and the pain that is associated with people's personal experiences within our church as they seek to live their faith in the midst of personal disabilities. Often our church is behind other key sectors within society in addressing individuals' needs with regard to the whole range of disabilities, and meeting them. This clearly is important work for our church, and for all of our congregations and pastoral charges.

The report of this working group has been accepted by the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee and is being forwarded to the General Council for your consideration. The action sought from this report is that we engage communities of faith in exploration of theologies of disabilities. Such engagement will be important for people with disabilities and for the communities of faith in their ministry and in developing important pastoral sensitivity for and by their members as well as the community as a whole.

#### **E. Anglican–United Church Dialogue**

The focus for the Anglican-United Church Dialogue this year has been our understanding of ministry. This focus in part has arisen from the fact we as a denomination have been looking at the issue of ministry, and also we have begun talks with several denominations around mutual recognition of ministry (or, as in the case with the United Church of Christ in the United States, full communion). It seemed to the Dialogue an examination of our mutual understanding of ministry was an important process to enter. They found much that is helpful within an ecumenical context in the "One Order of Ministry" document, and offered some thoughts through our committee on this document and the report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group as it pertains to acknowledging the oversight role within the church. Such documents were made available through our reporting process to the General Council Executive.

### **F. The Roman Catholic–United Church Dialogue**

This group has been focussed on issues of ecology, environment and theologies of creation in the last year, and will continue to explore mutual concerns arising from those discussions. One initiative the Dialogue is undertaking is production of liturgical resources that may be used by our two denominations in relation to ecological justice. The dialogue also has offered advice on the Comprehensive Review process, reminding us as a denomination not to lose the importance of ecumenical gifts and commitments as we move into a possible new way of being the United Church. The Dialogue is also making plans for celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue this year.

### **G. Mutual Recognition of Ministry**

The work being done on mutual recognition of ministry with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, and with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, has had input from our committee and especially through one of our staff persons, Bruce Gregersen. We see these efforts as a helpful way to live the mandate of the committee in our ongoing “inter-church” work.

### **H. Full Communion with the United Church of Christ, U.S.A.**

These discussions have progressed very rapidly, and a timeline for formalizing an agreement on full-communion between our denominations has been approved. This process arose out of a request on our part to pursue mutual recognition of ministry with the United Church of Christ. Such a concept was foreign to them; they were, however, quite open to full communion (involving membership, doctrine, mission and ministry) as part of a more inclusive partnership. Dan Hayward of our committee has been part of this process moving toward a full communion agreement.

In the process, there has been a recognition of how much we have in common, and also what we can learn from one another. We were informed that the United Church of Christ has nothing that is the equivalent to our Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee, and those involved in these discussions from the United Church of Christ see it as a possible gap in their own process of doing theology within their church. They see value in our process.

### **I. Migrant Church Working Group**

Dan Hayward is our committee representative on this group as well, and updated the committee regularly on the work of this group as they seek ways to expand our linkages with those who come from denominations within other countries yet who share an affinity to the theology, values, and liturgical tradition of the United Church.

### **J. The Church Towards a Common Vision**

The committee is considering ways to respond to this convergence document from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. We understand that there are clusters of churches and at least one theological school holding discussions and studies around the document, and the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee will be seeking ways to respond to the document in the fall of 2015.

### **K. Together Towards Life**

A working group also is looking at ways to make this World Council of Churches document more accessible. We have also been granted permission to create a study guide more helpful within the Canadian context, with expanded worship and hymn selections. This is work that also is ongoing.

### **L. China Christian Council**

The Committee was informed of an opportunity later in 2015 where a delegation is being sought to meet with the China Christian Council. Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith is among the groups within the church with whom this invitation has been shared, as it relates directly to our inter-church mandate. We are pleased that our incoming chairperson, Dan Hayward, has been chosen to be part of that delegation.

### **M. Adoption**

This is another area that we have been asked to address as a committee in light of a recent report on the issue of adoption that came to the General Council Executive. We have set up a task group to develop the terms of reference for a future working group that ultimately will work on and develop a theology of adoption during the next triennium. Committee capacity, and the number of pressing issues that needed attention for this General Council, did not allow us the time to address this important issue in the past triennium.

### **Summary**

As can be seen in this report, we have been assigned a vast array of tasks from a variety of concerns within the church. The diversity of the work demands that the committee be populated by people with a wealth of experience, an agility in handling theological concepts, and a similar diversity of interests in order for the work of the next triennium to be accomplished. The committee as a whole has been impressed by the people who have offered themselves to serve on this committee in the next triennium, and we look forward to this work being shepherded effectively and efficiently in the years ahead.

On a personal note, I wish to thank a very hard-working, insightful, and compassionate committee for all of their efforts this past triennium. One of our members, Dan Hayward, has been nominated to fulfil the role of chairperson in the next triennium. This is a demanding position given the diversity of the concerns addressed, and the detail of reporting needed. I am sure Dan will fulfil this role admirably.

As mentioned above, some major pieces of business will come from this General Council in the form of specific reports. I shall be available to discuss any of this report at the General Council meeting itself.

### **Committee Members this triennium:**

Bill Steadman (chair)  
Aruna Alexander  
Darlene Brewer  
Teresa Burnett-Cole  
Jordan Cantwell

Jill Curd  
Daniel Hayward  
Adam Kilner  
Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd  
Martha Martin  
Mathias Ross  
Earle Sharam

**Staff Support:**

Bruce Gregersen  
Gail Allan  
Christian Nguyen  
Alan Hall (with Working Group on Ministry)

**Recommendations:**

See TICIF 1 [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Accountability and Future Work Proposal](#):  
CONSENT 27.

## **REPORT: THEOLOGIES OF DISABILITIES**

**Origin: Theology and Inter-Church Inter-faith Committee**

### **INTRODUCTION: WHY THEOLOGIES OF DISABILITIES?**

*Many times I have wondered: “Why would God let this happen? Where is God today?”*

*I have been bemused, saddened, and perplexed by the way our church has treated those like me, and has largely refused to hear that there is even a problem.*

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee was asked by the Executive of General Council in November 2013 to develop a theology of disability,<sup>1</sup> which could include concepts such as healing, cure, sin, and normalcy. From the beginning, we wrestled with the notion of developing a theology of disability because the category “disability” is not neatly defined or clear. With this principle in mind, we invited people living with disabilities, and allies, to tell their own stories. The *italicized* sections of this report represent a small selection of the 35 submissions received in writing, video performance, and artistic work which we received in answer to our invitation to tell the church a story over a cup of coffee about living with a disability, or being an ally with a person with a disability. We have been honoured to be entrusted with these stories, some painful and some joyful, that have enriched the development of this report.

As affirmed by the United Church in 2012 in the report “Open and Accessible: Ministries with Persons with Disabilities,”<sup>2</sup> people with disabilities may have physical, mental, or emotional conditions that affect movements, senses, or activities. A disability may be visible, or invisible; it may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or a combination of these. Disability is complex. A person with a disability is not reduced to their disability alone; rather, ability is just one identity among many—such as gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and age—that make up who a person is. In addition, understandings of disability change over time. Conditions such as Crohn’s disease or chronic fatigue syndrome, for example, were not considered disabilities several years ago. Disability can also be dynamic. It is an elastic category—an open minority—that anyone can join at any time, with the likelihood of joining increasing with age.

As we reflected on the complexity of disabilities, and the diversities of theologies related to this identity, we moved towards developing “theologies of disabilities,” as there is not only one disability and not only one theology related to this. We also want to present theologies that resist categorizing people solely as either normal or disabled. This type of categorization in the medical model is Western society’s prevailing way of understanding disability. It defines

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<sup>1</sup> The United Church of Canada, Executive of General Council, November 2013. “Gathering Together: Toward a Culture of Mutuality and Full Participation for Persons with Disabilities and Their Allies”, pp. 70-78, and “PMM6 Consultation on Disabilities,” pp. 98-99, [http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gce/2013/gce\\_1311\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gce/2013/gce_1311_workbook.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The United Church of Canada, Executive of General Council, March 2012. “PCPMM 19 Open and Accessible: Ministries with Persons with Disabilities,” pp. 172-180. [http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc40/gce\\_1203\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc40/gce_1203_workbook.pdf). A paraphrase of this paragraph also appears in this report.

disability in terms of what people with disabilities cannot do or what body parts or mental processes do not work. It emphasizes disability as a bodily defect, loss, or flaw. It also views people with disabilities as heroic when they participate in ordinary activities such as sports or careers. Focused on the individual, the medical model pervades our culture to such an extent that we hardly notice that it is only one way, and a particularly Western way, to understand disability.

The social model of disability, an alternative to the medical model, defines disability not as what a person can or cannot do, but how people with disabilities are treated by society. To have a disability is to experience prejudice and exclusion, called ableism. If disability is understood as socially constructed, then the barriers society sets up become an issue of justice. However, this social model has been criticized for focusing on bias and discrimination, while ignoring the physical and emotional realities of disability. Neither the social nor the medical model can fully define disability or what we understand about disability from a theological perspective, but both of these models can contribute to our understanding of disability.

*The church is behind, playing catch up and not leading. This saddens me, because of your history of fighting for social justice...This is a justice issue in our midst.*

Recognizing that people living with disabilities and their allies often encounter barriers in communities of faith and often find themselves on the margins of church life, the United Church needs to create much more accessible spaces, both in terms of physical space and attitude. According to Statistics Canada, in 2006 14.3 percent of Canadians were persons living with disabilities. In the national identity survey conducted by The United Church of Canada in 2011, only 5.3 percent of respondents identified as living with a disability. This gap illustrates that there are obstacles in the church that prevent individuals with disabilities from participating. And yet people with visible and invisible disabilities are present in all, or nearly all, of our communities of faith. Some may move in and out of church life, and some may move in and out of degrees of disability.

*The problem with the church and disability is cultural, and no amount of legislation, tsk-tsking, or calls to right thinking will change it quickly.*

The Gospel witness of the ministry of Jesus shows that he sought out the very people who faced disability and marginalization in the society of that time. If we are to be true to Jesus's example, and to the biblical witness, we must be clear that a theology of disability is inherent in Scripture. It affirms that all are created in the image of God, and that all of God's people are welcomed into the radical hospitality of Jesus, wherever they are on the spectrum of ability.

## **DIFFERENCE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY**

*My disability is not [the] totality of who I am. Usually, disability is not the first identity I name. As a person of faith, my first identity, my baptized identity, is as a beloved child of God. This is the primary identity that continues to shape my life, and one that I hope [to] be reminded of as I seek to remind others that they too are beloved children of God.*



Disability is usually viewed as a limitation, and in comparison to those who have the power to define normalcy. Disability, therefore, is a social construct, created by what a society takes for granted as normal. In fact, both the normalization of ability and the construct of disability can be challenged. There is no normal.

*Ideas of normalcy and imperfection remain and get reinforced in the church making some people feel inadequate because of their disability.*

### **Engaging Difference**

Disability is about difference: people with disabilities may move, see, hear, speak, and think differently. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities names as a general principle respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity.<sup>3</sup>

Commitment to relationship across diversities presents the challenge of creating communities that expect and honour differences. In the commitment to becoming an intercultural church the United Church has already developed some understandings of what it means to live with difference:

Becoming an intercultural church is the call to live together in intentional ways where there is the mutual recognition and understanding of difference through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable access to power; it is also our attempt to respond faithfully to such a call.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, as affirmed in the United Church's 2012 Ecclesiology Report,<sup>5</sup> we need communities that are prepared to struggle with the ways that the differences among us are reflected in structures of domination and subordination. This means that community is not achieved simply by including everyone in an unchanging church, but involves grappling with the relations of power among us in a dynamic faith community. An intercultural church honours difference, works to transform relations that exclude, and is committed to be changed by those who have been seen as "other." When difference is recognized as "necessary to truth and goodness"<sup>6</sup> differences become sources of energy, alternative visions of reality, and ways of moving beyond binary thinking into models of multiplicity, mutuality, and dialogue.

Alliance-building through action is key for the work of social transformation.<sup>7</sup> The ethicist Janet Jakobsen argues that without attention to forming alliances in a context of difference, movements for social change tend to reproduce the very dynamics they criticize in the dominant society. She

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> The United Church of Canada, General Council 41. "Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation", p. 312; 524 – 533. [http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/2012\\_rop.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/2012_rop.pdf) and Executive of General Council, "GCE 3 Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation (GC41 GCE12 – REF PC PMM 17 2012)", p. 137-138.

<sup>5</sup> The United Church of Canada, 41st General Council, 2012. "TICIF Ecclesiology Report". Record of Proceedings, p. 431 – 447. [http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/2012\\_rop.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/general-council/gc41/2012_rop.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Gloria Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Towards an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 159.

<sup>7</sup> Janet R. Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference: Diversity and Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).

contends that alliance-building must engage diversity and complexity within and among groups. Only then can movements for change avoid reproducing the barriers of we/they thinking and instead form working relationships for the creation of “spaces where differences need not imply hierarchy and domination.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the starting point for transformation is not simply valuing diversity by expanding categories of inclusion, but challenging existing relations of domination.

### **Building Community**

Faith communities tend to believe that diversity can be achieved by inclusion through outreach and invitation. Even when committed to diversity, the inclusive community too often reflects notions of pluralism which assimilate differences to the norms of the dominant social order. Honouring and engaging difference entails examining relations of domination and exclusion. Furthermore, building solidarity across boundaries of difference involves risk and struggle.

*I would value a church that spends time thinking about how to walk with people who live with chronic, demanding, unpredictable situations.*

An alternative vision of community is “radical inclusiveness” aimed at “the conversion of all present structures by the transformative power of ‘dangerous’ stories” in order to create communities “where all are able to know themselves to be loved by a God whose desire for them is fullness of life.”<sup>9</sup>

*More than anything, I need you not to be afraid of my story. I need people who are willing to walk with me when I am afraid, angry, exhausted, or sad.*

To be radically inclusive requires that dangerous stories re-shape how the community defines itself. Rather than seeking inclusion at the centre, this model of solidarity at the margins aims to transform the very structures that constitute the centre.

*It is essential to be aware of the power we hold related to our identities and our roles and who makes space for our leadership. How we see ourselves in leadership impacts how others see us and vice versa.*

Re-imagining community in these directions calls regional and national structures as well as local communities of faith to new ways of being church. God calls us through Christ to create spaces of possibility where all people without distinction (Galatians 3) can join to give life to this radically inclusive vision. To do so invites thorough examination of the ways that church life continues to exclude through hierarchical theologies, binary thinking, and relations of domination and subordination. To embrace ambiguity, faith communities need to be open to multiple and complex ways of expressing faith and permit the renewal of traditions through articulating, re-working, and negotiating diverse norms and values and the relationships among them. Diversity is the hard work of building relationships, bearing one another’s anger and pain,

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<sup>8</sup>Jakobsen, *Working Alliances*, 20, 15.

<sup>9</sup>Eileen Scully, “Solidarity: Love that Moves Hands and Feet,” *Groundswell*, Summer/Fall 1996, 3-4.

confronting complicity, and creating politically effective strategies for justice-making. Diversity work is a transformative process, reconstituting church, society, and individual.<sup>10</sup>

## REDEFINING ACCESSIBILITY, VULNERABILITY, AND SAFE SPACE

### Accessibility

*At church, the now startlingly regular references in Bible readings and music, to the healing of the blind, to sight miraculously being restored, jumped out at me at every turn with irony and challenge and sometimes a wry smile. I still notice and think a lot about what these words really mean. Has my sight been restored? - sadly no. Has there been healing? This is a more difficult question, and I am grateful to be a member of a denomination and local congregation that can talk about healing at many levels.*

To be radically inclusive, a faith community must be accessible—which means more than enabling people with disabilities to enter a building or see and hear in the sanctuary. The symbol of the white wheelchair on a blue background advertises accessibility, but how do the community’s structures and traditions reflect the diversity of Christ’s body? To welcome “all,” the church must think all the way through changing the physical and organizational structures to include not only potential congregants but also ministry personnel. “Under the guise of providing access, a society can systematically limit or censor access, purposefully determining areas of access and conversely determining areas that would remain inaccessible.”<sup>11</sup> Full accessibility goes beyond removing physical barriers to reconsider the language of worship. Liturgical language may link sinfulness with disability and use terms to describe disability that divide those with “abnormal” bodies from those considered to be “normal.”

Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,  
your loosened tongues employ.  
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come;  
and leap, ye lame, for joy.<sup>12</sup>

Making our faith communities accessible goes beyond accommodation. Our commitment to becoming an intercultural church prompts us to ask: What social and material arrangements enable all minds, bodies and souls to worship, grow spiritually, and contribute to the community? The radically accessible faith community includes Christians with disabilities as active, self-identified members in the body of Christ whose vulnerability make the church whole, for “difference is how God says beauty.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph appears in “A Church with Purpose: Towards an Ecclesiology for The United Church of Canada in the 21st Century.” Report of the Theology and Inter-church Inter-faith Committee, 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012. Reports 62.

<sup>11</sup> N. Kagendo Mutua, “The Semiotics of Accessibility and the Cultural Construction of Disability” in *Semiotics and Disability: Interrogating Categories of Difference*, ed. Linda J. Rogers and Beth Blue Swadener (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2001), 113.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley, “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” *Voices United* 326.

<sup>13</sup> Darren Dahl, “Why Does Ecumenism Matter?”, sermon delivered at St. Martin’s United Church, Saskatoon, SK, February 1, 2015.

## Vulnerability

The dual meanings of being vulnerable emerge as we craft relationships across difference and disability in communities of faith. One can be vulnerable in the sense of being, and feeling, threatened. More hopefully, vulnerability feels as if trust is inherent and the ability exists to open oneself up to love. How can this latter sense of vulnerability be fostered among diverse people? People cannot be forced to love, appreciate, or include others they deem unworthy because of their differences. But the scope of our imagination can be enriched if we learn to live with the hidden lessons of the dissonance that diversity occasions. The movement from feeling threatened to feeling trust needs to occur within communities of faith:

*Nurturing relationships, getting to know others and having open communication fosters bridge building. ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ and ‘Be still and know I am God’ are important verses that keep my faith “doing and being” in perspective.*

These words illuminate the sense of trust that comes with being vulnerable with others in relationship over time.

## Safe Space

*I need the church to know that I do not need to be fixed.*

*I have been bemused, saddened, and perplexed by the way our church has treated those like me. And has largely refused to hear that there is even a problem.*

Trust is fostered in safe space, a term that has come to mean a place where vulnerable people, such as victims of domestic violence or members of LGBTTQ communities, are safe from violence and free to express themselves in ways not permitted in the wider community. A safe space is an environment where all are accepted and are free to express themselves fully.

Sometimes the church has provided political sanctuary, but its safe, sacred space is for all aspects of human life and relationships. The United Church strives to welcome all people regardless of their gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, or cultural background. Despite good intentions, however, commonly-held theological and cultural beliefs make some communities of faith unsafe spaces for people with disabilities.

The obstacles to nurturing a safe space for people who live with disabilities go beyond inaccessible buildings to overtly and subtly inhospitable attitudes. For example, people with disabilities may be stereotyped as objects of pity, a source of divine inspiration, or recipients of charity rather than embraced by the community as active and contributing members. Further, biblical stories portraying disabilities and illness as connected to sin or acts of healing contribute to confusing messages regarding the church’s view of disability and community membership. Such concerns can lead to the perception that the church may not yet be the safe space it is called to be.

At times theological messages regarding disability such as “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle” serve to protect others’ faith while alienating individuals living with disabilities. In

response we may ask, “For whom are we making our church community safe—people with disabilities, or able-bodied members of the community?”

*I was told that God would not give me more than I can handle. I heard these opinions often, and for a young mother (of a child with disabilities) struggling with constant feelings of exhaustion, fear, and uncertainty these suggestions not only did not “cheer me up,” but they engendered feelings of inadequacy and shame.*

Communities of faith have the potential to affirm all as full participants but to do so we need to be open to hearing, and faithfully responding to, the stories of all members of our congregations, including stories of painful exclusion. Indeed, as beloved people of God we have the exciting opportunity to befriend all of God’s creation in its wonderful diversity. Communities of faith are called to create a space where the stories, contributions, and full participation of all are embraced and valued.

*Fast-forward five years, and you can’t tear J, now 16-years old, away from our church. He’s an active member of (the youth group), volunteers at community dinners, attends camp, sings at open-mic, and won’t miss a Sunday for anything. J has embraced the church and the church has embraced him in return....Our faith community at XYZ United Church has definitely enriched J’s life. He now has faith as well as a whole faith community to support him. And J has enriched the lives of the faith community in return. They know this fantastic young man who grasps life in both hands.*

## **DISABILITY AND THEOLOGY**

Practices of welcoming people with disabilities and their allies as full participants in churches have their roots in a theological imagination that understands disability neither as flaw nor defining characteristic, but instead as part of the variation that makes up our communities across the range of human experience.

*I am not special. I do not believe that God has uniquely chosen me for this journey. I am not a saint, nor am I some kind of superwoman. In fact, I am the same as you and I am simply doing the best I can because I don’t have any choice in the matter. This is our life...*

*Not all disabled people “suffer.” Disability can be just one more factor that shapes who a person is.*

Theologies of disabilities need to reflect the fact that many people with disabilities do not seek a cure or consider themselves broken or weaker, but rather work with the limits of their lives as something that makes up part of who they are, and may not perceive their disability as a limitation at all, but rather a difference.

*I was born with [cerebral palsy]... Had I the choice of miraculously becoming able-bodied, I would choose not.*

In practice, however, such bodily differences become socially excluded by attitudes based on common but problematic theological notions. Statements such as “there but for the grace of God

go I” or “God doesn’t ever give you something you cannot handle,” may be expressed with good intentions but have harmful consequences for people with disabilities, putting the burden on them to suffer the consequences of society’s exclusion. Disabilities are not all the same; there are invisible disabilities and mental illnesses that also affect people.

### **Image of God**

So there is need to rethink what it means to be human in relation to God. As part of God’s creation, human beings are created from the earth and with the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), neither perfect nor autonomous, but whole as vulnerable and interdependent creatures. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7).

*One of the messages within the Bible is that of perfection, and people with a disability are not perfect. In fact, all people are not perfect.*

The whole person is valued not because of a set list of abilities or capacities but in relation to God, with others and the rest of the good creation. The dignity of human life is connected to God’s creative activity; all humans bear the image of God (Gen. 1:27), loved into being as precious.

*I have never believed that my disability was a “gift from God” or God’s way of “testing” me. I find such ideas abhorrent and nauseating.... [A]ll of my physical and psychological imperfections, visible and invisible, which seem to be piling up the whiter my hair gets, in no way detracts from the light that shines within me. I know I am made in the image of God. I have God’s thumb-print on my soul. At my core I know I have been “fearsomely, wondrously made.”*

Disability is part of the natural limits and conditions of creation, neither a flaw nor a blessing but one of the diverse ways of being an embodied creature. For the image of God is not as a set of capabilities that can be listed and measured according to standards of exchange value, such that their absence makes someone less human; rather, it is a sign of intrinsic goodness and preciousness that is vulnerable and expressed differently in each person.

If all are created in God’s image, we might welcome one another with the intent of honouring the unique and different way that image is borne out in each of us, including disability and/or mental illness. Biblical characters who have a disability—such as Moses (with his stutter) or Jacob (with his limp)—are not somehow special or chosen because of disability; rather, they are examples of how God may work through people with different ranges of gifts and abilities.

### **The Healing Narratives**

Given this, there is need to rethink how we interpret the many Gospel stories in which Jesus heals people with disabilities. For some examples see Matthew 20:29–34 (healing two blind men), Mark 1:23–28 (healing the man with an unclean spirit), and Luke 13:10–13 (healing the bent over woman).

*Many disabled people have been severely damaged by Christians who have told the person that their faith is insufficient and that is why they have not been healed.*

*I didn't like the way people with disabilities were portrayed in the Bible. There were too many references to the lame walking and the blind seeing. If I couldn't walk or couldn't see, was I to blame for having too little faith?*

The healing stories may be understood differently. For example, Jesus does not treat disability as a sign of spiritual need or deprivation, as punishment for previous sin, or as a blemish marking some kind of danger. In fact, he challenges such cause-and-effect depictions, opening up alternative perspectives on healing. For instance, in John 9:1–41, with reference to a blind man, Jesus counters the disciples' assumption that disability is a consequence of sin, claiming that neither the man's parents nor he had sinned to cause the disability, but rather that the works of God may be displayed. In this story, as in many others, the focus is not merely on the elimination of impairments and illnesses, re-making people so that they function normally. Instead, the emphasis is on the personal and social transformation that takes place through Jesus' presence.

In this sense, healing entails the restoration of community, removing barriers to belonging, for Jesus had already recognized people with disabilities as part of God's community. Healing marks Jesus' radical hospitality, which fosters new possibilities for the wellbeing (*shalom*) that comes from living in transformed relationships with Christ, with oneself, and with others. Stories of healing in the Gospels serve to show Jesus' identity as Christ, revealing a taste of God's realm at hand: making whole, overcoming isolation, and building community.

Therefore, to focus on the physical cure of the individual with disabilities is to miss a richer, social sense of healing. It also makes people with disabilities the problem and overlooks how it is actually societies that demean and exclude on the basis of restrictive standards of value. Indeed, Jesus' ministry calls attention to this exclusion by constantly challenging the status quo and overturning assumptions about what normal is—refocusing community away from the centre toward the margins, welcoming the uninvited outcast as the honoured guest, pointing toward those shunned by society as, in fact, treasured vessels of the new community of God. Instead of indicating a non-functioning person, the presence of disability may instead be the sign of a non-functioning community, marking the limits of its capacity to welcome and foster belonging. In fact, the prophetic call here is toward communal transformation and right relations. Jesus identifies the work of God with the excluded, those wrongly counted as problems.

*I recall being stunned when a woman afflicted with late stage cancer said: "I must have done something very evil for God to have punished me in this way." Sadly it was not the only time I would hear such a statement. I did my best to say: "No, that is not how it works!" but it was an uphill battle.*

*The old dysfunctional folk theology of God dishing out disease as punishment survives like a wolf in sheep's clothing.*

### **The Disabled God**

In an even more radical sense, theologically Jesus' death on the cross is an expression of his identification with those suffering from marginalization and oppression. It is fitting, then, that the resurrected Christ retains the wounds suffered on the cross (e.g., John 19:20, 27), revealing a

God whose solidarity with humanity not only entails vulnerability and suffering, but more powerfully, whose suffering *with* humanity is now displayed as a disability that is raised and taken up into God's own life in the form of Christ's resurrected body.

Jesus now reveals, in the words of disability theologian Nancy Eiesland, a "disabled God" (Luke 24:36–39). Disability is central to the life of God's own presence in Christ, revealing a new wholeness. In Eiesland's words this revelation underscores that "the reality of full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it means "rethinking Christian symbols, metaphors, rituals and doctrines so as to...remove their able-bodied bias."<sup>15</sup> This powerful image of a disabled God, which deserves a more prominent place in our preaching and teaching, opens up solidarity with people with disabilities and a wider sense of access for all.

### **Being Church Together**

Accordingly, the church—the body of Christ—is that place where welcome, access, and accommodation are central features of life together, through which all members "have the same care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:25). The church is a household of God (Eph. 2:19) in which "dividing walls" based upon human ordinances are abolished (Eph. 2:14–15) and gifts are received from all members of the body (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12), some of whom may be assumed to be weaker but who are in fact indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22).

*We could focus on what is not working, what is broken, but if we focus from a place of positive, such as those who do accept and welcome, we can draw the circle wide and build communities of acceptance, that move equity forward.*

*I have a much clearer sense that I belong in church, especially because people have made me welcome and have made room for me.*

The church is a place where all might give and receive gifts. All belong. Since God's image includes disability, and this image dwells in all human beings, the church is summoned into a radical kind of belonging, as if welcoming each other is to welcome the divine in our midst.

### **Recommendations:**

See TICIF 1 [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Accountability and Future Work Proposal](#): CONSENT 27.

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), 100.

<sup>15</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 104.



## **REPORT: LAND AND COVENANT REPORT**

**Origin: Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee**

### **Prologue**

In response to concerns that Bearing Faithful Witness did not address issues pertaining to the land, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee decided to work on a theology of the land. We believe that we can only address issues of land and occupation in Israel and Palestine from our own Canadian context of colonization. We know that our context will add a confessional note of humility in our response to Israel and Palestine and that we need the guidance of our Aboriginal leaders. To this end, we called for a Symposium in May 2014 entitled “Doing Theology on Occupied Land: A Symposium on United Church of Canada Engagement with Israel/Palestine.” We invited Aboriginal, Jewish and Palestinian leaders as keynote speakers and welcomed workshop leaders from a variety of theological, political and activist perspectives. They were asked to address any of the following issues:

- our religious, ethnic and geographical identities related to the land
- the challenge of competing claims to the same land as essential for the cultural and spiritual identity of different peoples
- biblical perspectives on the call to be people “chosen” to live in a “promised land”
- how divine authority has been used to justify or challenge oppression
- how our response to these questions can lead to transformation of colonial relationships within our own context

Both this symposium and our United Church work in Israel and Palestine held up a mirror to our committee. We attempted to write a reflection on what we learned from the symposium, but realized that in order to articulate a theology of the land that might speak to the situation in Israel and Palestine, as well as other places in the world, we need to understand our own history and context much better.

We offer to General Council our reflections on our colonized, Canadian context arising from the symposium. We conclude with recommendations for the way forward.

### **Why Focus on the Land?**

Guided by A New Creed’s gospel imperative to seek justice and resist evil, The United Church of Canada has spoken out against injustice and apologized for its own role in perpetuating injustice. It has recognized and apologized for its inability to recognize and respect Traditional Teachings within the First Nations and for the harm caused in the Residential Schools. Overseas, it has spoken against the political violence in the Philippines and the destructive impact of Canadian mining in Central and South America and in SE Asia. It called for a boycott of South Africa because of its Apartheid system, of Nestlé because of the adverse impact of its infant formula, of California grapes and Arizona lettuce because of the treatment of foreign workers. More recently, it has supported the call from Palestinian Christians for a boycott of products coming from the illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory.

We are realizing that land plays a significant role in issues such as these. We also realize that we can only speak of land from our own Canadian context of colonization. We must acknowledge the underlying theological rationale that has been used to justify conquest within our own

history. Without addressing this, it will continue to shape actions and attitudes today that justify colonization throughout the world.

### **Colonization of the Americas**

The missionary impulse to convert the world to Christianity, rooted in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), inspired the early missionaries to accompany explorers and traders in their first forays into the new world. In some places, they provided a moral regulation for traders and settlers, urging them to treat the Indigenous people with respect.<sup>1</sup> In other places, they supported the common European sentiment that Indigenous peoples were savages, to be saved and civilized. This meant that they were to be converted to both Christianity and European culture. In a few places, missionaries called for the annihilation of Indigenous people, in accordance with biblical conquest narratives.<sup>2</sup>

In almost all cases, the missionaries helped to pave the way for settlers to establish themselves in what was considered “empty land”. There seemed to be little recognition that this land in the Americas was not empty. Colonization of Indigenous land was justified by the doctrine of chosenness. Settlers believed that they, as Christians, were chosen by God to settle in a new, promised land. According to the biblical conquest narratives, if there were others who were living in the promised land, God would lead the chosen ones victoriously in either forcibly taking the land or negotiating with the original inhabitants. To be a chosen people of God meant that God would favour them in their endeavours and bless them with a land flowing with milk and honey. This belief led to a sense of land entitlement, which in turn justified conquest and colonization.

When Europeans began to arrive on the shores of North America, relations with the First Nations varied. Companies dependent upon the trapping expertise of First Nations carefully negotiated business relationships. In Newfoundland, there is little record of negotiation. Rather, there was continuous hostility between the settlers and the Beothuk. Settlers forcibly claimed land, primarily as fishing ports, and were frequently raided by Beothuks, who feared the loss of their hunting and fishing areas. Settlers in turn sought to decimate the Beothuks, leading to a near extermination of the Beothuk people.<sup>3</sup>

The search for land and security has been a persistent theme with each wave of immigration to Canada. The early settlers knew the importance of land not only for their own livelihood, but also for their identity. For instance, Nova Scotia was called new Scotland because of the Scottish immigrants, many of whom were landless and lost in their old land. Some of the original Scottish immigrants were crofters who had been pushed off the land they were renting in the Scottish Highlands. Earlier, they had been forbidden to speak their language (Gaelic) or honour their

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1 Catholic Dominican friars Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas protested against the exploitation of Indigenous people in South America in the early 16<sup>th</sup> c. Bartolome de Las Casas: *Witness: Writing of Bartolome de Las Casas*. George Sanderlin, ed. and trans. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 66-67.

2 Rev. Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister, supported the “War of New England Against the Northern and Eastern Indians” in 1689 on basis of Joshua 11.

3Although historical accounts claim that the Beothuk people were completely exterminated, there are still some living who trace their origins to the Beothuk.

culture (wear tartans or play their fiddles and bagpipes). The Scots of the highlands were considered “rude barbarians” who needed to be tamed and civilized by the English-speaking lowlanders. When the Scottish settlers arrived in the new world, they were looking for a place where they could both farm and safely honour their Scottish identity.<sup>4</sup>

At first, there was a combination of animosity, curiosity and support between the settlers and the Indigenous peoples. Some of the first Scottish settlers who arrived in Nova Scotia on the Hector ship in 1773 would not have survived their first winter, were it not for the help of the Mi’kmaq, who brought them meat and taught them how to hunt and use snowshoes.

As the settlers gained land and wealth, they shifted from being the dispossessed in their lands of origin to being the colonizers in the North American colonies. The First Nations shifted from being powerful hosts and allies, essential to the outcome of European wars fought on this continent, to being the colonized, depleted in numbers and spirit, and forced into dependency upon the state. By the 1800s, their population was decimated by European-borne diseases, assimilationist policies, and massacres. Ironically, their language and sacred ceremonies were gradually outlawed by some of the same people whose own Scottish traditions had also once been outlawed. In both Scotland and the Americas, the theological rationale for destroying the local culture was to bring civilization and salvation to the “heathen barbarians”.<sup>5</sup> The United Church “Indian Missions” attempted to eradicate Traditional teachings and culture, “inculcating in the Indian child a moral standard which is the antithesis of all his home experience.”<sup>6</sup> One Superintendent of Missions claimed: “Among the Indians the old deep-rooted heathen practices are now dead because the leaders have experienced the New Birth and they are now enthusiastic members of the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Covenant within North America**

The Two Row Wampum Treaty, made between representatives of the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (called Iroquois by the settler nations) and the Dutch in 1613, is considered the basis of all subsequent treaties and covenants between First Nations and European/North American governments. This treaty was symbolized by a belt with two rows of purple beads. These rows signified the courses of a Haudenosaunee canoe and a European ship travelling down the same river of life together, parallel but never touching. The three white stripes, between and outside the purple, denoted peace and friendship. This was given to the Dutch, accompanied by the following words: “You say that you are our Father and I am your Son. We say we will not be like Father and Son, but like Brothers. This wampum belt confirms our words...neither of us will make compulsory laws or interfere in the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel...As long as the Sun shines upon this Earth, that is how long our Agreement will stand; as long as the Water still flows, as long as the

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4 This search for land and security became a persistent theme in subsequent waves of immigration to Canada.

5 Donald E. Meek, *The Scottish Highlands: The Churches and Gaelic Culture*, Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 11 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996): 2-9.

6 The Women’s Missionary Society report, *The United Church Year Book 1937*: 132.

7 Superintendent Report of Indian Missions from British Columbia, *The United Church Year Book 1933*: 137.

Grass grows green at a certain time of the year. Now we have symbolized this agreement and it shall be binding forever as long as Mother Earth is still in motion.”<sup>8</sup>

The Covenant Chain was a series of alliances and treaties in the 17<sup>th</sup> century between the Haudenosaunee and the British colonies of North America designed to promote peace and stability in order to preserve trade. It consisted of a three-link silver chain holding an English sailing ship to the Haudenosaunee Tree of Peace in the Onondaga Nation. The links represented peace, friendship and respect.

In 1763, the British Proclamation declared,  
 whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our interest and the security of our colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians, with whom we are connected and who live under our protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to, or purchased by us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds.

This Royal Proclamation became the basis for treaties between First Nations and the Canadian government and is referenced in the Canadian Constitution. Through this proclamation, the crown wanted to ensure access to resources and land for settlement while the Indigenous people wanted to ensure that the land was shared fairly.

Shawn Atleo and Ovide Mercredi, both former National Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations, believe that, as treaty people, every citizen of Canada has a responsibility to live into the intent of the treaties. This means mutual respect and peaceful co-existence “where each nation is allowed their way of life, their culture, their religion, their language, their territory.”<sup>9</sup> This respectful co-existence would be extended to First Nations, such as the Hieltsuk in British Columbia, which did not enter into treaty negotiations and still claim title to their land.

Rev. Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, recognizes that churches have “a unique and special responsibility because they created the framework that led to the treaties...[they] let First Nation peoples see the treaties as a ceremonial, theological, spiritual act.”<sup>10</sup>

Just as churches built a spiritual path for conquest and colonization, they must now build a spiritual path to covenant relations with all peoples of Canada. The concept of covenant is deeply spiritual. Biblical stories of covenant stress the crucial importance of three parties: God, the people and the land. All three elements must be considered in covenant.

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8 David Blanchard, *Seven Generations: a history of the Kaniienkehaka* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin & Kahnawake Survival School, 1980. Digitized 17 May 2010), 124.

9 Ovide Mercredi, *Broken Covenant*, Steve Heinrichs, producer Indigenous Relations, Mennonite Church Canada, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhTg4hUG548&app=desktop>

10 Mark MacDonald, *ibid.*

While there are biblical stories of land entitlement, leading to land occupation and annihilation of original inhabitants, there are other biblical stories of land as God's gift that are dependent upon right relations amongst all inhabitants and creatures of the land. Consider that the Jewish Purity and Dietary Laws, as described in the Torah and Code of Maimonides were enacted as a way of maintaining a distinctive Jewish identity in the midst of a multicultural environment. This need for a distinctive identity belies the assertions of the conquest narrative in which original inhabitants were annihilated. Instead, they suggest that the Hebrews co-existed in the same land with other ethnic groups. These alternate biblical stories are consistent with First Nations' understanding of land as a gift of the Creator, not to be owned, but respected and shared with all inhabitants.

Particular interpretations of chosenness and notions of land entitlement have fueled a long history of colonization, subjugation, cultural destruction, and environmental devastation in Canada. We have now reached a crisis point in the relationship between settlers and the First Peoples of this land, as well as with the land itself. Scientists, theologians and politicians alike are recognizing the errors of the past that have brought us to this crisis. The church urgently needs to embrace alternative theologies rooted in biblical narratives of land as gift, conditional on justice and right relations, if we are to correct the mistakes of the past and move forward into a more hopeful future.

The Indigenous concept of "all my relations" refers to the delicate balance of creation in which all of the creatures and plants, rocks and earth are related to each other's wellbeing and identity. The biblical stories of covenant also emphasize the importance of land to a people's identity. To remove a people from their land is to strip them of part of their identity. Indigenous land claims in Canada concern more than economic opportunity afforded by the land and its resources. They are concerned with a people's spiritual wellbeing and identity.

Covenant also requires humility and mutual respect, not paternalistic care. Interpretations of biblical concepts of land stewardship that justify dominion over other people and over nature undermine covenant. Following the wisdom of the Haudenosaunee elders 400 years ago, we should not be in relation as parent and child but as siblings, self-determining yet interdependent for the welfare of the earth and all its relations. In the prophetic words of Rev. Stan McKay, Cree elder and former United Church moderator, "We need to get rid of the helpers and bring in the relatives."

### **Lessons about the Land**

#### *1. Land is essential to one's identity and welfare as a people.*

Indigenous peoples, settlers and newcomers to Canada alike understand the crucial importance of land to their safety, identity and welfare. To deny the First Nations their land, either unceded or negotiated through treaties, is to contravene international law and to deny the right to self-governance, as affirmed in the Two Row Wampum and stated in the Royal Proclamation. It is to teach a forced dependency that undermines pride and identity and makes Indigenous peoples vulnerable to the laws benefiting the more powerful and wealthy colonialists. The original settlers have moved from being the dispossessed in their lands of origin to being the colonizers in North America.

2. *Land is a gift from the Creator, intended to be shared fairly for the welfare of all its creatures.* The first time the word “covenant” was used to describe the agreement between the Indigenous peoples of North America and the settlers was with the Covenant Chain. It was based on respect and referenced both the land and the relations between the different peoples. Land was understood as a gift from the Creator that depended upon respect for the land and all of its creatures.

Elder Jim Dumont, Chief of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge’s Eastern Doorway<sup>11</sup>, explains that covenant was first made with the animals, which agreed to teach humans how to look after one another and the earth. In return, they asked for respect. This is the key to peace. A legally-binding settlement, an agreement to disagree and a truce are all examples of forced relations that cannot sustain peace. They lack respect. A covenant, on the other hand, begins with respect for the other and a commitment to share the land in peace. It respects each nation’s autonomy while at the same time recognizes that no one stands alone. We are all related to this land and to one another. We have a responsibility to look after one another, not in a paternalistic relation but as equals affording each other friendship and mutual respect. Recognition of this teaching can lead to lasting peace.

This resonates with biblical mandates of respect. Every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore sacred, deserving of dignity and worth (Genesis 1:26-27). To undermine the autonomy or dignity of any human being is to desecrate the face of God. God also declares the whole earth and all of creation good (Genesis 1:31). To treat any creature or any part of the earth with disrespect is to violate God’s blessed creation. When we deny someone their basic human rights, we are denying Jesus, for as we treat the least of all, so we treat Jesus (Matthew 25:31-41). The greatest commandment of all bids us love for God and neighbour, and our neighbour is described as someone with a different ethnic and religious identity (Luke 10:25-37). We are called to seek justice and right relations with one another and the earth, that the Spirit may work through us to help usher in the peaceable realm of God that extends from the past, through the present and into the future (Micah 6:6-8; Mark 1:15). To this end, we have hope, not in things seen, but in the unseen promise of what can be (I Corinthians 13:9-13; Romans 8:19-25). Rev. Mitri Raheb, Palestinian pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem said, “I am not optimistic, but I do have hope. Hope is not something we see; hope is something we do.”<sup>12</sup>

These biblical mandates call us, as Christians, to have compassion for the “other,” to attend to the fears and needs of those who experience marginalization and oppression, to stand against the desecration of Earth and its creatures, to resist that which leads to the evils of hate, annihilation, dehumanization and vilification. We are called to live into our recitation of *A New Creed*: to seek justice and resist evil; to live with respect in Creation.

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<sup>11</sup> The Midewiwin Lodge is the contemporary movement of the sacred Midewiwin; sometimes referred to as the Grand Medicine Society, of the Anishnabe people. The ‘original spiritual way and keepers of the sacred knowledge, songs and ceremonies,’ it is at the epicentre of the cultural and spiritual renewal of the Anishnabe First Nations. The Eastern Doorway refers to the region compassing Eastern Ontario, Michigan-Lower Peninsula, and Eastern Canada and the United State. <http://www.three-fires.net/tfn/about.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with United Church delegation.

### **The Way Forward**

Those who have benefited from the colonization of this country must listen to those who have lost land, sovereignty, identity and pride. The church cannot dismiss the pain of Indigenous people by saying, “Let bygones be bygones.” Instead, the church has a responsibility to listen carefully, with great humility, and learn how to walk again. This walk is not on a lone path of individualism, hounded by guilt, but in a circle of interdependence and support. Moreover, the church needs to recognize that this communal walk is one trod by multiple stakeholders. Due to the history of colonization and its fragmenting affect in First Nations communities, the church needs to be in dialogue not only with our brothers and sisters in Aboriginal congregations but also with Traditional practitioners and others seeking right relationship and health within First Nations communities. Our prayer is that this walk will take us to self-determined nations committed to living together, because this land is big and strong enough to hold all of us in its embrace.

Just as A New Creed calls us to seek justice and resist evil, it also calls us to live with respect in creation. There is an urgent need for the church to rediscover and reclaim the biblical understandings of land and covenant that place care for the earth and all its inhabitants at the centre of our response to God's providence. We have much to learn in this regard from our Aboriginal sisters and brothers, as well as from contemporary theological reflection on ecology and incarnation.

To help facilitate this journey forward, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee proposes two new studies which we hope will engage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in discussion and action. The first will be a more detailed approach to Land and Covenant, focusing on theologies of land rooted in our Canadian context but opening avenues for exploration of both local and global issues related to land. It might include such issues as colonization, Indigenous self-governance, treaties and covenants, care of the earth and all its creatures (all my relations), clean drinking water, food security, and resource extraction. The second will be a Circle and Cross interfaith study of the relationship between the United Church and Traditional Aboriginal spiritualities.

To move from conquest to covenant requires a radical reimagining of what it means for different peoples to live together in a shared land. Our biblical stories and our own history within North America teach us that this is only possible on the basis of respect for diverse cultures and identities and respect for the land itself. Only if we are able to humbly listen to one another and truly seek the welfare of the other can we move from conquest to covenant. Land cannot be bracketed in this discussion. Rather, it must be understood as crucial to the welfare and identity of all peoples. If it is understood as a gift from the Creator, to be respected and shared equitably, it will bless us with fruitfulness and prosperity. Justice will then roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

### **Recommendations:**

See TICIF 1 [Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Accountability and Future Work Proposal](#): CONSENT 27.

## **COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS JUSTICE AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

**Origin: Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools**

### **MANDATE**

The Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools (formerly the Residential School Steering Committee) was established by the Executive of the General Council in 1998. Its mandate, renewed and expanded in 2010, is to:

- a) *co-ordinate all aspects of the issues related to Indian residential schools, including the legal, pastoral, communications, alternate resolution possibilities, healing and reconciliation initiatives, and financial planning;*
- b) *assist the church to live out its apologies through theological reflection and through education and advocacy for Indigenous justice issues including but not limited to land, rights, treaties, the impacts of colonialism, and racism;*
- c) *work in partnership with the Aboriginal Ministries Council and collaborate with Kairos, ecumenical partners and Indigenous organizations;*
- d) *make full reports, and recommendations as required, to the General Secretary and each meeting of the Executive of the General Council.*

In all its work, the Committee is guided by the church's Apologies of 1986 and 1998.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The current members are:

- All Native Circle Conference: Sue Evans, Frank Evans
- BC Native Ministries Council: Barbara Wilson, Ray Jones
- Ont/Que Native congregations: Mel King, George Montour
- GCE representative: barb janes
- Honorary Elder: Murray Whetung
- General Secretary, General Council: Nora Sanders
- Executive Minister of the Aboriginal Ministries Council: Maggie McLeod
- Moderator (ex-officio): Gary Paterson

Staff Support:

- General Council Officer: Residential Schools - James Scott
- Liaison Minister: Residential Schools - Cecile Fausak
- Special Advisor: Residential Schools Steering Committee - David MacDonald

The Committee reports to each meeting of the Executive of General Council, issues a newsletter, "Turning the Page Together" ([www.united-church.ca/residentialschools](http://www.united-church.ca/residentialschools)), and has a Facebook page (*Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools*). A separate website provides information on all of the residential schools that the United Church operated. [www.thechildrenremembered.ca](http://www.thechildrenremembered.ca)

The Committee meets twice a year, often in Toronto but periodically in other communities to connect with former students, and church and community members. In the past triennium, the Committee met in Toronto and in Winnipeg/Brandon, and had three joint meetings with the



Aboriginal Ministries Council. We gratefully acknowledge the significant contributions of former members the late Alvin Dixon, Marie Dickens, and staff person, John Bird.

### **INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT (IRSSA)**

In May 2006, The United Church of Canada became a defendant signatory to the largest settlement agreement in Canadian history as a result of its role in the Indian residential school system. The United Church (or antecedents) operated 14 residential schools. Its involvement ended in 1969. The Agreement was implemented in September 2007 and contained six main components: Common Experience Payment (CEP), Independent Assessment Process (IAP), a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), funds for Commemoration, funds for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), and legal fees. The Agreement also detailed the legal obligations to which the church committed itself.

#### **1. Financial Obligations:**

**a. Core Commitment:** Under the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, the United Church is obligated to a two-stage payment structure. Our base obligation was **\$6,455,020**. This amount was credited to the church from previously made contributions to abuse claim settlements. A second stage payment of **\$436,150** will become due only if fundraising by the Catholic Entities exceeds \$20,000,000. At this time, it does not appear likely.

**b. “In-Kind” Funds:** Under the “in-kind services” provisions of the Agreement, the United Church received back **\$1,010,600** of our base commitment for reallocation to new services or programs for former students and their families. A United Church Healing and Reconciliation Service Evaluation Committee, with representatives from the United Church, the Assembly of First Nations and the federal government, was created to approve projects according to criteria in the Agreement. As of June 2015, the church completed the disbursement of these funds, supporting such initiatives as survivor travel to Truth and Reconciliation Commission events, a five-year mobile counselor project for four west coast communities, language recovery and promotion of Mohawk and Cree, and a documentary film on the Regina Industrial School.

#### **2. Document Obligations:**

Under the Agreement, the United Church is committed to provide all “relevant” documents in its possession to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada for eventual inclusion in the National Research Centre (now the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation) in Winnipeg. Over the past six years, staff and contractors in the United Church Archives in Toronto as well as the Conference archives in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest, and British Columbia have worked diligently to complete this herculean task on time. The work included undertaking a file review of all our archival and active files, identifying those relevant to residential schools, and then scanning and meta-tagging each file for the Commission’s database. Over 30,000 historical documents and 1,537 photographs were provided to the TRC by the end of April 2015, extracted from 6,036 container sources of publications, periodicals, accessioned and active textual records, maps, blueprints, audio visual materials, near-print publications, pamphlets, and relevant emails up to July 31, 2013. This immense task was completed with dedication by many who saw it as an act of reparation and respect by the church for former students of residential schools and their families.

### **3. Bearing Witness in Abuse Claims:**

The process for settling claims for sexual, physical and emotional abuse is the Independent Assessment Process (IAP). As of March 31, 2015, a total of 37,962 IAP claims were filed from the approximately 80,000 former students still living. Equal numbers of claims have been submitted by men and women, with the average age of 55. Nearly 32,000 claims have been resolved and the Adjudication Secretariat anticipates that all claims will be resolved by 2017. As of March 31, 2015, the United Church had received 2,867 claims, and anticipates receiving up to 100 more. Since the United Church has fulfilled its financial obligations under the Agreement, the government pays 100% of all awards made by the independent adjudicators.

However, the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools has felt it important that the church respond with more than money. We have trained witness/volunteers across the country who represent the church at IAP hearings, when the claimant is agreeable to a church presence. The volunteers bear witness to the stories and experiences of former students and offer the church's apology for its role in the residential school system. The church is indebted to 30 volunteers who have carried out this confidential and caring ministry at 327 claim hearings over the past 10 years. Once a settlement has been paid, the Moderator sends a letter of apology to the claimant. The Committee also offers pastoral care to those who have been accused of abuse.

### **4. Participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ([www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)):**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was launched on July 1, 2009 with a five-year mandate to research and document the 130-year history of Indian residential schools in Canada. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild and Dr. Marie Wilson were appointed as Commissioners. The mandate was subsequently extended for a sixth year and the Commission finished its work on June 30, 2015. In the Settlement Agreement, the United Church committed itself to fully participate, at its most senior levels, in the Commission's work.

The Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools has coordinated participation from all levels of the church and in every part of the TRC's mandate. This has included the significant United Church attendance at TRC National Events (the Moderator presented a formal United Church statement to the Commission at the Edmonton National Event in April 2014 [www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/schools/trc-statement-2014.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/schools/trc-statement-2014.pdf)), the involvement of the General Secretary at meetings of the All Party Leaders' table, the contributions of senior staff to the National Events Working Group, the Document Collection Working Group, the All Party Coordinating Committee, the Public Education Working Group, and the Truth and Reconciliation Transition Team. In addition, local United Church representatives have participated in the seven community-based Regional Advisory Committees which planned the National Events in Winnipeg, Inuvik, Halifax, Montreal, Saskatoon, Vancouver and Edmonton, as well as in the planning for regional events in Victoria, Toronto, Peterborough and Whitehorse.

Conferences, Presbyteries and congregations across the country have been actively engaged in creating educational initiatives on the history and legacy of residential schools and in mobilizing United Church folks to attend and participate in seven national and scores of community TRC events. Volunteers organized and staffed the Churches Listening Circles at each National Event. Our church also contributed \$385,000 towards survivor travel and hospitality as an expression of reconciliation in addition to funds raised and in-kind services provided by local congregations in communities where National Events were held.

The Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission invited the churches who are Parties to the Settlement Agreement, to redress their history of devaluing and discrediting traditional Aboriginal spiritual practice by making statements of confession and affirmation. The United Church has acknowledged its complicity in the denigration of Aboriginal wisdom and spirituality, and offered a statement quoting documents from its recent history. In doing so, the Church recognized with pain that this is a complex and sensitive issue for some within Aboriginal communities of faith who, as a result of our Christianizing work and the legacy of colonialism, are on a journey to restore harmony and spiritual balance.

The Committee also responded to the invitation of the Commission to submit suggestions on what recommendations the Commission might make in its Final Report.

The Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools continues to work towards reconciliation ecumenically through staff participation in the Ecumenical Working Group on Residential Schools and on the KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle. The United Church participated with members of the Canadian Council of Churches to create an Expression of Reconciliation which was delivered at the April 2014 TRC National Event in Edmonton. The United Church has made a commitment to ongoing collaborative work with the other Parties to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement post-TRC to continue the work of reconciliation guided by the recommendations in the Commission's Final Report to be released at the Closing Event in Ottawa on June 2, 2015.

## **RIGHT RELATIONS**

### **1. Living into Right Relations:**

In 2008, the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools, the Aboriginal Ministries unit and unit on Justice, Global, and Ecumenical Relations (JGER) established a national Living into Right Relations Task Group to coordinate the 5-year "right relations" program begun at a national conference in Pinawa, Manitoba. The program brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people into a network of people in Conference home groups who covenanted to work together towards right relations. This initiative was seen, in part, as preparation for the church to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

From the onset of the Living into Right Relations program, there was an understanding, particularly from Aboriginal sensibility, that there needed to be intentionality in discerning what it means for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to "be" together. This need is rooted in Canada's colonial history whereby settler people imposed their culture, language, and systems onto the First Peoples of Turtle Island. This led to an incalculable disparaging impact that remains with Aboriginal people to this day. The United Church of Canada expressed regret for its complicity in this history in the 1986 Apology to First Nations Peoples: "*We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were.*"

The national LIRR Task Group provided guidance and support to the home groups and leadership to the church as it has sought to live out its Apologies. In the fall of 2013, the Task Group held its final meeting which issued in recommended directions for the church in

continuing reconciliation and right relations work. The Final Report of the Living into Right Relations program is at [www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/relationships/lirr-report.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/relationships/lirr-report.pdf).

Although the formal program has ended, staff members from the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools and from the Aboriginal Ministries Council continue to support the network by regularly distributing information and resources through the LIRR Digest. A series of three webinars have also been developed on the themes of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women (May 6), Free, Prior and Informed Consent (June), and Treaties (September).

## **2. Doctrine of Discovery**

In October 2012, the Executive of General Council adopted a motion to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery (a belief based on 14<sup>th</sup> century Papal Bulls that explorers could subjugate any peoples who were not Christian and possess their lands) and “commit the church to a process of discerning how its own values, actions, policies and structures continue to be informed by the Doctrine of Discovery.” As follow-up, an inter-unit planning team was created that has designed a land-based learning experience to be held at Nishnawbe Spiritual Center (Espanola) from August 27–31, 2015. Participants will journey in faith to unlearn and heal from colonialism and the impacts of the Doctrine.

Four facilitators will engage 30 people from across the church, including six young adults, to:

- 1) Become aware, emotionally and spiritually, of the brokenness of relations and the possibilities of healing.
- 2) Be empowered to name the ways the Doctrine of Discovery is operative in both church and society, and offer ways that might transform/reform the church.
- 3) Use this experience to inform the development of resources that would help the church engage in decolonization.

## **3. Justice and Reconciliation Fund**

The Justice and Reconciliation Fund supports initiatives that foster engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and that advance the church’s commitment to justice and right relations. The Fund is administered jointly with the Aboriginal Ministries Council and its Grants Committee of four volunteers is appointed by our two bodies. Over the past triennium, grants were made to 29 projects totalling \$191,400. Projects included educational events on residential schools and anti-racism, film productions, relationship-building women’s canoe trips and youth gatherings. Applications are at: [www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund](http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/relationships/fund).

## **HEALING AND COMMEMORATION**

### **1. Red Deer Industrial School Cemetery**

The Remembering the Children Society, formed in 2011 with First Nations, Metis and United Church membership (primarily from Sunnybrook United), completed the hosting of four feasts and ceremonies from 2009-2013 to remember the children who died and were buried in a cemetery associated with the Red Deer Industrial School (1893–1919). In 2013, the feast followed two days of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) community hearings, where 700 high school students participated in Education Day. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Commission, spoke eloquently at the conclusion of the feast.

The Society offered an Expression of Reconciliation at the Edmonton TRC National Event.

“The Remarkable Red Deer” permanent display, which includes a section on the Red Deer Industrial School, was opened in 2013. In June 2014, an outdoor exhibit at Fort Normandeau highlighting the school and the work of the Society was unveiled, and the Red Deer Mayor declared June 11<sup>th</sup> Remembering the Children Day, in perpetuity. In 2014, the Society was given the Red Deer Heritage Preservation Award. Work is ongoing to designate and mark the cemetery which continues to be in the hands of a private owner.

## **2. File Hills Indian Residential School Cemetery**

The fourth and final feast to remember the children who died at the File Hills Indian residential school and were buried at the associated cemetery will be held in August 2015 on the Okanese First Nation in Saskatchewan. In 2013, Okanese summer students removed bush to recover the cemetery, fence it, and restore the road to it. Research has been done by Susan Roy and her Waterloo university class to develop an initial list of students who attended the school. Saskatchewan Conference and the United Church folk from the Qu’Appelle Valley have been part of these remembrances.

## **3. Regina Industrial School Cemetery**

The Regina Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC) has been offering information, reports and a survey to the Regina City Council asking it to protect the Regina Industrial School (1891-1912) Cemetery from future development. In 2013, a Cemetery Working Group was formed of United and Presbyterian Church members, and representatives of the 44 First Nations from which the children had originally come. The Working Group contacted many of the area bands to provide information and an invitation to a meeting on June 8, 2014. Among the invitees were descendants of former students. The churches raised funds to provide transportation for all representatives, plus meals and billets. Approximately 70 people, including chiefs, elders, appointed band representatives, families, descendants of former students and others attended the gathering at St James United Church in Regina where there was a display of historic documents, pictures of former students and their families, and other materials related to the Regina school. The gathering, escorted by horseback riders, also held ceremony at the cemetery.

Subsequent meetings, under the leadership of Chief Barry Kennedy of Carry the Kettle First Nation and the File Hills Tribal Council, have taken place to discuss subdividing the property and obtaining Heritage Status for the cemetery, as well as further commemoration activities and a monument.

## **4. Brandon Indian Residential School Cemeteries**

Following a visit by the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools to the site of the Brandon Indian Residential School, a Working Group was struck by Assiniboine Presbytery in 2014 to commemorate the Brandon school cemeteries. The Working Group has undertaken significant exploratory work, and planning with Sioux Valley First Nation about establishing a healing lodge on the site. Katherine Nichols, an archaeology student who did much survey work of four cemeteries possibly connected to Brandon residential school, has been part of the Working Group as was now retired Conference of Manitoba Northwest Ontario archivist Diane Haglund who provided much assistance in sharing historic information and photos.

## **5. Witness Blanket: Pieces of History**

In 2013, carver Carey Newman began soliciting and collecting hundreds of artifacts from former residential schools, from the institutions that ran them, and from former students in order to create a large “witness blanket” that embodied the experience of the residential schools. This Commemoration project was funded under the terms of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Mr. Newman obtained an artifact from nearly every residential school, including the 14 schools associated with the United Church. The General Council office also contributed versions of the former and revised crests, along with copies of the 1986 and 1998 apologies. The amazing large-scale cedar art installation is on a national tour until 2021, when hopefully it will be permanently housed at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. This is a national monument “to recognize the atrocities of the Indian Residential School era, honour the children, and symbolize ongoing reconciliation.” <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!>

## **6. St. Michael’s Indian Residential School, Alert Bay, British Columbia**

The United Church was well represented on the occasion of the demolition of St. Michael’s Indian residential school (Anglican) in February 2015. Many former students who attended there were from communities served by the United Church.

## **INDIGENOUS JUSTICE**

### **1. Supporting Aboriginal opposition to the Northern Gateway Pipeline**

In light of the motion adopted at General Council 41 to “categorically reject the Northern Gateway Pipeline”, the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools created a “Take Action” notice last fall to support the Pull Together fund-raising campaign of BC First Nations for their court challenge. The Haida, Gitga’at, Gitxaala, Heiltsuk, Nak’azdli, Kitasoo/Xai’Xais and Nadleh Whut’en First Nations joined in this campaign to raise funds to seek a judicial review of the Joint Review panel’s recommendations, and the Federal government’s decision, to approve the project.

The campaign goal of \$250,000 was quickly exceeded as a total of \$350,760 was raised for research and to prepare the documents for the courts. Phase 2 of the campaign hopes to raise a further \$250,000 for court time. A matching donor will contribute up to \$500,000. Contributions by individual and congregations are welcomed. <http://pull-together.ca/>

### **2. First Nations Education, Bill C-33**

A coalition of Aboriginal, church and justice-seeking groups, including the United Church represented by staff from the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools, was formed under the leadership of the office of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue to develop principles and advocate for Aboriginal control and equitable funding for First Nations children who attend school on reserves. Federal funding per child for Aboriginal students is less than funding provided by the provinces for other children. Bill C-33, the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act, proposed by the federal government, is seen as unsatisfactory to many First Nations leaders. Negotiations have been suspended by the government.

On July 8, 2014, General Secretary Nora Sanders wrote to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Hon. Bernard Valcourt, urging the federal government to provide additional funding to Aboriginal communities for education even as negotiations on the Education Bill are delayed and

to create a consultation process with First Nations leaders of respect, openness, creativity and commitment. No response was received to the letter.

### **3. Residential School History in Public School Curriculum**

In its Interim Report of February of 2012, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offered 20 recommendations to the Parties and the Canadian public. One of the recommendations was that "...provincial and territorial departments of education work in concert with the Commission to develop age-appropriate educational materials about residential schools for use in public schools." The United Church joined with the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches to write the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada in 2013 and 2014 expressing our hope that the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, particularly the story of the Indian Residential School system, becomes a mandatory part of the curriculum in all Canadian schools. Several jurisdictions have implemented this recommendation and it is under active consideration in others.

### **4. Acknowledging Traditional Aboriginal Territory**

For several years, most Conferences and some Presbyteries have acknowledged, at the opening of their meetings, that they are gathered on traditional Aboriginal territory. The Executive of General Council also does so. There is growing interest in this practice from congregations as well as from other denominations. The Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools unit has collaborated with the Aboriginal Ministries Circle and Church in Mission to create a resource for Acknowledging Territory which was published in the Pentecost 2015 issue of *Gathering*. [www.united-church.ca/files/planning/seasons/firstnations/acknowledging-territory](http://www.united-church.ca/files/planning/seasons/firstnations/acknowledging-territory)

In response to a proposal from Montreal and Ottawa Conference, adopted at General Council 41 in 2012, the United Church has written to the Speaker of the House of Commons recommending that the House also consider acknowledging that Parliament sits on Aboriginal traditional territory at the beginning of each session of Parliament.

### **5. National Aboriginal Day**

In May 2015, General Secretary Nora Sanders wrote to Prime Minister Harper recommending that he "declare National Aboriginal Day (June 21<sup>st</sup>) a national statutory holiday". She indicated that for several years now, the United Church has given its employees a paid day off on June 21<sup>st</sup> and encouraged them to use that day to engage in Aboriginal educational and cultural activities. *"Our experience has been very positive, with employees taking part in a variety of learning opportunities, and gaining a deeper understanding of issues that are important in our work and in the life of our nation."*

### **6. Socially Responsible Investing**

In collaboration with the Aboriginal Ministries Council, staff of the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential School contributed to the Socially Responsible Investing report of 2013.

### **7. Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice**

The United Church has responded to the World Council of Churches' invitation to join in a seven-year Pilgrimage of Peace and Justice. Seven themes have been established, and the United Church has chosen to lift up "Reconciliation" beginning in June 2015 and "Land" in 2016. The Living into Right Relations network is being invited to become "champions" of reconciliation by

organizing visits to sites of former residential schools, and responding to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. General Council office staff will visit the Mount Elgin Indian residential school site and the Oneida United Church on June 23, 2015.

### **COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW TASK GROUP**

Staff and elected members of the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools met with members of the Comprehensive Review Task Group in November 2013 to clarify the role and mandate of the Committee in providing leadership to the whole church in living out its apologies of 1986 and 1998. Committee members also participated in several joint meetings with the Aboriginal Ministries Council at which Comprehensive Review Task Group members were present to discuss the implications of the Review process for Aboriginal ministries and to explore what a renewed relationship might look like. The Comprehensive Review Task Group has recommended that the work of Indigenous justice and right relations remain a priority for the church going forward.

### **STAFF CHANGES**

There have been several staff changes in the Indigenous Justice and Residential School unit.

**John Bird**, who served as Program Coordinator for Indigenous Justice and Right Relations, saw the term position end on December 31, 2013.

**David MacDonald**, who has served the United Church as Special Advisor on Residential Schools since 1998, will end this role on June 30, 2015. David has provided invaluable wisdom and networking in guiding the church through a critical period of acknowledging and addressing the legacy of Indian residential schools.

**James Scott**, who has served in the role of General Council Officer for Residential Schools since September 2003, will retire as of August 31, 2015. Jamie has been lead staff for the church in its efforts to live out its apologies, including the settlement of abuse claims, negotiations for the Settlement Agreement, and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

**Cecile Fausak** will remain as staff for the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools with an updated job description and title: Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator. A second Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator position will be created out of Jamie's position effective September 1, 2015 so that the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools will continue to be served by two staff.

As of September 2015, the Committee and staff of Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools will be supervised by the Executive Minister for Aboriginal Ministries and Justice.

Respectfully submitted,

barb janes and Mel King  
Co-chairs  
Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools



## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND HEALTHY PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS REPORT

**Origin: Executive of the General Council**

### Background

These recommendations originate with work initiated by the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2003 which referred the Report of the Task Group on Options for Simplifying Policies and Procedures Related to Pastoral Relations to the Executive of the General Council. The 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> General Councils referred eight further proposals that called for evaluation of oversight, discipline, and pastoral relations processes to the General Secretary to inform ongoing work.<sup>1</sup>

In May 2010, the General Secretary's report "[Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action](#)" and the subsequent motion of the Executive of the General Council directed proposals to be developed to simplify pastoral relations processes and shift responsibilities for some or all pastoral relations from presbyteries to Conferences. The report envisioned presbyteries being freed from the administrative burden of complex human resource and regulatory work so that its leadership could focus on supporting local ministries in their mission and ministry and foster a sense of greater support and collegiality among ministry personnel. The report also imagined that simplified processes would encourage a greater range of ministry possibilities by being more open and adaptable.

The Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services undertook a number of initiatives to better understand the causes of the concerns being raised by these many petitions and proposals to General Councils and to research possible courses of action to address them. Current practices and requirements were evaluated, input on the experience of them was gathered, and best practices in other churches, professional and not-for-profit organizations were considered. These initiatives included:

1. the Isolation in Ministry project which engaged a major research survey of nearly 1,600 ministry personnel conducted in partnership with the research division of Warren Shepell (2005);
2. the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel which reviewed the current and projected demographics for ministry personnel, and the implications for recruitment, retention, and the pension and benefits plans (2008);
3. the Oversight and Discipline of Ministry Personnel projects which produced the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice policy (2006), an extensive legal review of our oversight and discipline policies (2010) and two major reports (2008 and 2011) with recommendations for extensive changes to policy;
4. the Working Group on Isolation in Ministry (2010) which developed specific recommendations to address the issues identified in the 2005 research project;
5. the Pastoral Relations Policy Review Steering Group, which reviewed all policies in *The Manual* related to pastoral relations with recommendations for extensive changes to policy and polity (2010);

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<sup>1</sup> The 39<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2006 referred proposals GS3, GS23, BC4, LON3, TOR4, MNWO1, and GC94. The 40<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2009 referred proposal ANW16.

6. the Collaborative Research Project (2011), undertaken with the professional research firms Myers Norris Penny and Prairie Research Associates, surveyed more than 1,700 lay and ordered members of pastoral relations, pastoral oversight, and disciplinary hearing committees across the church testing earlier research conclusions and proposed directions for policy changes;
7. in addition to the above research and data, the Permanent Committee drew on the General Secretary's church-wide invitation to comment on areas of policy needing simplification. A significant 135 responses were received from individuals, pastoral charges, presbyteries, and Conferences. The responses, though varied, spoke to a central theme: complex processes. A separate survey was posted to engage the youth voice and from youth and young adults.<sup>2</sup>

The research and studies revealed numerous recurring conclusions among members:

1. professional level support is required to assist pastoral charges with ministerial compensation and benefits, annual review and assessment of ministry personnel, and on-going discernment of mission and call;
2. volunteers, often with limited knowledge and experience are asked to manage the human resource aspects of pastoral relationships, often leading to unfavourable and inconsistent outcomes;
3. presbytery/district pastoral charge oversight processes are often not effective or helpful, leaving presbytery/district to intervene only when a crisis erupts;
4. the Ministry and Personnel Committee dilemma: members are required to be parishioners while at the same time fulfilling employer roles;
5. ministry personnel feel powerless to affect change and worry about the future of their vocation;
6. presbytery/district-managed pastoral relations often contributes to inconsistent application of policies and standards;
7. responsibilities of presbytery/district should focus less on oversight and discipline and more on collegial support for ministry personnel, mission and programs;
8. overlap of responsibilities between decision making bodies (pastoral charge, presbytery/district, Conference) creates redundancies and poor use of resources, i.e. people repeating the same work;
9. ethno and linguistic specific congregations agree that pastoral relations policies and processes do not meet their needs;
10. high turnover of volunteers increases the burden of training and results in a limited repository of skill and knowledge related to pastoral relations, oversight and discipline;
11. needs assessment, search and selection processes take too long; many pastoral charges report spending a year or more without permanent ministry leadership;
12. presbytery/district, as a circle of peers, is perceived to be often incapable of acting impartially in review panels and disciplinary proceedings;
13. disciplinary responsibilities of presbytery/district hinders collegiality and peer support among ministry personnel.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on any of these initiatives/ reports, please see [www.gc41.ca/background-material](http://www.gc41.ca/background-material).

Between the summer of 2011 and the winter of 2012, the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services discerned and tested three principles for responding to the collected concerns and recommended changes:

1. the pastoral charge and the presbytery/district be accountable for the discernment and articulation of mission and ministry leadership needs, and the support and nurture of pastoral relationships and ministry personnel;
2. the Conference be accountable for the pastoral relations processes related to credentials, placement, and oversight and discipline of ministry personnel;
3. the courts resource pastoral relations as well as oversight and discipline policies with trained paid accountable staff.

In March of 2012, the Executive of the General Council received a [revised report](#) (p.78-89), and proposed to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012 that it be authorized to undertake the development and testing of simplified pastoral relations policies that are flexible to contextual and regional differences, supported within overall financial capacity, and reflect, but are not limited to, the proposed principles for the distribution of jurisdiction as well as the provision of staff to manage the pastoral relations and the oversight and discipline work.

### **Process for this Proposal**

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012 passed the following motion, granting authorization to test new ways of doing pastoral relations and oversight and discipline:

1. The 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012 directed the Executive of the General Council to develop and test simplified pastoral relations as well as oversight and discipline policies that are:
  - a. flexible to contextual and regional differences
  - b. supported within overall financial capacity
  - c. reflective of, but not limited to, a model that:
    - i. the pastoral charge and the presbytery be accountable for the discernment and articulation of mission and ministry leadership needs, and the support and nurture of pastoral relationships and ministry personnel;
    - ii. the Conference be accountable for the pastoral relations processes related to placement, oversight and discipline of ministry personnel; and
    - iii. the courts resource pastoral relations as well as oversight and discipline policies with trained paid accountable staff; and
2. the Executive of the General Council be authorized to implement pastoral relations as well as oversight and discipline policy changes that do not require a Remit and that are consistent with and responsive to the ongoing work of the “Comprehensive Review of How The United Church of Canada Envisions and Lives Out Its Identity.”  
(2012 Record of Proceedings, p. 296)

The Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project was originally designed around ten program goals:

1. improving the “fit” of pastoral relationships as reported by ministers and pastoral charges
2. increasing the number of ministers and pastoral charges who report having a “healthy relationship”
3. increasing the number of ministers who state that they receive the support they need to perform their ministry well

4. decreasing the number of ministry personnel who report that they feel isolated
5. increasing the vitality of pastoral charges and other local ministries
6. proving viability within overall financial capacity
7. decreasing volunteer workload
8. increasing the competency for handling pastoral relations, oversight and discipline
9. increasing the consistency within each Conference in how pastoral relations, oversight and discipline are handled; and
10. increasing the efficiency of pastoral relations, oversight and discipline.

It was the vision of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services that increased health in pastoral relationships, increased policy efficiency, increased consistency and competency in the application of policy, and decreased feelings of isolation amongst ministry personnel could all be achieved, over time, by a new model of pastoral relations and oversight and discipline. This model would be simplified, the responsibility of one court, separated from collegiality and programmatic support for ministry personnel, and would be supported within existing overall financial resources.

This model also recognizes that paid accountable ministry is both a vocation and a profession, and that the Church holds a commitment to engage ministry personnel and local ministries with policies that are fair, just and consistently applied ([Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Polices and Services Guiding Theological Perspectives](#)). Effective paid accountable leadership and healthy pastoral relationships among ministry personnel, the local ministry and the governing bodies of the Church are critical components to the faithful and vital fulfillment of God's mission that we sing of in The United Church of Canada. It is crucial that the policies and procedures supporting the initiation of these relationships, the on-going support and accountability of them, and the conclusion of them be flexible and transparent. It is also important that they be responsive to particular contexts of region and culture. The 2,400 ministers serving in active calls and appointments throughout the church are among The United Church of Canada's greatest assets in responding to the call to be the Church:

*to celebrate God's presence, 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.*  
(A New Creed 1968, rv 1995)

### Summary of Conference Projects

In the late fall of 2012, the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project management team was appointed from the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services and resourced with staff from the Ministry and Employment Unit of the General Council Office. The project management team's initial step was to send an open invitation to all Conferences to participate in the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project test, beginning with a face-to-face meeting of exploration and planning. Twelve of the thirteen Conferences came to the initial meeting, and ten Conferences decided to participate in the project. It is the opinion of the project management group that when 70% of the Church participates in a change that is

**It is the opinion of the project management group that when 70% of the Church participates in a change that is optional, significant transformation is both possible and timely.**

optional, significant transformation is both possible and timely.<sup>3</sup> The Conferences participating in the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project include: British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, Manitou, London, Toronto, Bay of Quinte, Montreal and Ottawa, Hamilton, and Maritime.

The participating Conferences were given allowance by the [Sub-Executive of the General Council](#) (p. 75) to operate outside of some of the pastoral relations policies of *The Manual* for the sake and length of their Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships test. Each of the Conferences designed their own test model, which resulted in four types of tests:

1. movement of all pastoral relations and oversight and discipline policies to Conference, with a focus on collegial support and programming in the presbyteries (British Columbia, London, and Toronto);
2. movement of all pastoral relations and oversight and discipline policies to Conference, with a focus on collegial support and programming in the presbytery, but with the test limited to one presbytery within the Conference (Hamilton and Manitou);
3. test through the Conference, but limited to select policy/procedural policy changes (Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario); and
4. test within two or more presbyteries, and limited to select policy/procedural policy changes (Maritime, Bay of Quinte, and Montreal and Ottawa).

The participation of Saskatchewan Conference was focused on the collection of data regarding the financial and volunteer hours associated with current pastoral relations and oversight and discipline processes. For a number of reasons, including geographical challenges, the data collected did not allow for a comparison with the whole project. However, insights and wisdom from the process are included in the results below. For a summary of the projects in each Conference, please see [Appendix A](#) (found at the United Church website).

### **Summary of Evaluation**

Knowing the challenge of evaluating a project in which each of the test sites is distinct, the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project management team worked with consultant Leanne Douglas of the Winnipeg branch of Canadian business advisory, accounting and research firm, MNP, to create an evaluation framework that had the capacity to access data from Conferences and presbyteries who were participating, as well as all active ministry personnel and local ministry units within the United Church of Canada. The evaluation was built to measure the project against the original program goals (see p. 4) at the one, three, and five year marks. The first round of evaluation was completed in the spring of 2014 when the majority of Conferences were at or around the one-year anniversary of implementation.

The initial evaluation included four distinct pieces. Conferences and presbyteries who were participating in the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project were sent a spreadsheet with a series of quantitative questions about policy, financial capacity, volunteer effort and training, continuing education resources offered by the court, and change

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<sup>3</sup> Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Report for Information and Feedback, Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, September 19-20, 2014.

management. Ministry personnel and local ministry units/church members were sent an on-line survey that was largely perception-based that asked questions about pastoral relations and oversight and discipline policy, volunteer effort, time commitment, support structures, and staff support. The response rate for the ministry personnel and member surveys was much higher than the Conference and presbytery surveys.

Sufficient response was received from Conferences to make use of the data, but unfortunately not from presbyteries. Some of the feedback from both presbyteries and Conferences was that the information requested was time-consuming and difficult to collect, and that if the evaluation framework had been articulated at the beginning of the project, this information could have been collected throughout the testing. This is a significant learning for the project management team, and for the Permanent Committee: in large projects such as Effective Leadership, evaluation must be incorporated into the project from the beginning. Although the rationale for delaying the development of the evaluation framework included a desire to understand the breadth of the individual projects, the extra work required from the staff in the Conferences to gather the required information became an impediment to the efficiency of the evaluation.

**In large projects such as Effective Leadership, evaluation must be incorporated into the project from the beginning.**

It was also reported to the project management team that the financial cost to implement the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships projects was more than initially expected. Participating Conferences received a one-time grant from the General Council Office of between \$260 and \$8,000 in the 2013 calendar year to off-set implementation costs which ranged from \$7,500 to \$43,000. The expectation of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, 2012 that a project such as this could be implemented and “supported within the overall financial capacity” was unrealistic. As a result, British Columbia, London, and Hamilton Conferences hired program staff to support the development and initial implementation of the project, while Toronto Conference hired additional administrative staff to support the ongoing implementation. Further, feedback from non-participating Conferences suggested that had the availability of grant money been made known, they may have participated in the project. Finally, all participating Conferences reported an underestimation of the length of time required to develop, offer training for, communicate about, and implement the project<sup>4</sup>.

Through the fall and winter of 2014/2015, further consultative conversations occurred with the participating Conferences about project structures, best practices, and elements of Conference projects that could have been improved. An intentional conversation was also held with the Conference Personnel Ministers at their fall gathering in November 2014.

**All Conferences that moved their pastoral relations processes from presbytery reported a faster turnaround time for changes in pastoral relations.**

#### **Rationale**

***Approve the principle of locating oversight and discipline, and pastoral relations policy systems with Conference, or equivalent.***

<sup>4</sup> Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Report for Information and Feedback, Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, September 19-20, 2014.

The data from participating Conferences in the evaluation showed a decrease in volunteer workload and increase in process efficiency. Ministry Personnel also reported that search and selection processes are fairer and more consistent. In consultative conversations with Conferences, settlement committee, staff and ministry personnel reported significant decreases in the timelines necessary from a request for change in pastoral relationships to final selection of ministry personnel.

One of the ways that the flexibility of the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project met the contextual and regional differences is reflected in the development and implementation of some of the projects. British Columbia, London and Toronto Conferences have each implemented projects in which all pastoral relations and oversight and discipline policies have been moved to the court of Conference. Each Conference implemented a different project according to the culture in which they live and worship, and adjusted the implementation plans accordingly. London Conference set a date for implementation and then lived into their project. Toronto Conference established policy and procedures and then followed through with implementation of their project. British Columbia Conference hired a Project Manager and then implemented their project in two stages.

***Approve the principle that the denomination, or representative body, be responsible for education and communication about the denomination-wide oversight and discipline, and pastoral relations policies, and the best practices that consider regional and contextual circumstances.***

Many of the projects focused specifically on congregational mission development as required by contextual circumstances. Best practices of these projects included Hamilton Conference's Essence Statements and Montreal & Ottawa Conference's Living Ministry profiles, where staffing and resources were directed to congregational mission. In British Columbia Conference, the name and foci of the triannual oversight visits is being shifted to Ministry Vision & Support visits, which offer the Presbytery an opportunity to support and walk with local ministry units in mission and ministry work. Finally, in Maritime Conference, staff time is directed to assisting congregations with assessment reports regarding the vision, mission and vitality of the ministry to enable the Conference to "come alongside" a pastoral charge when stability is needed. When consulted, the Conference Personnel Ministers expressed concerns about regionalization being an unintended consequence of the project. The original intention was to open up the search and selection system to increase consistency and efficiency. Due to the fact that there is no longer one process for calls and appointments, ministry personnel are challenged when entering search processes outside of their own Conference. Similarly, Manitou Conference reported a challenge in the implementation of the project in only one presbytery and the lack of consistency created internally.

The online system in use in Toronto Conference that matches ministry personnel profiles with pastoral charge profiles is facilitating a more equitable short-listing process in the selection of ministry personnel, thus increasing the diversity of ministry personnel participating in the interview stage of search processes.

***Recognize the successful practices demonstrated by the testing Conferences, and ensure the incorporation of the following specific practices into pastoral relations procedures throughout the church:***

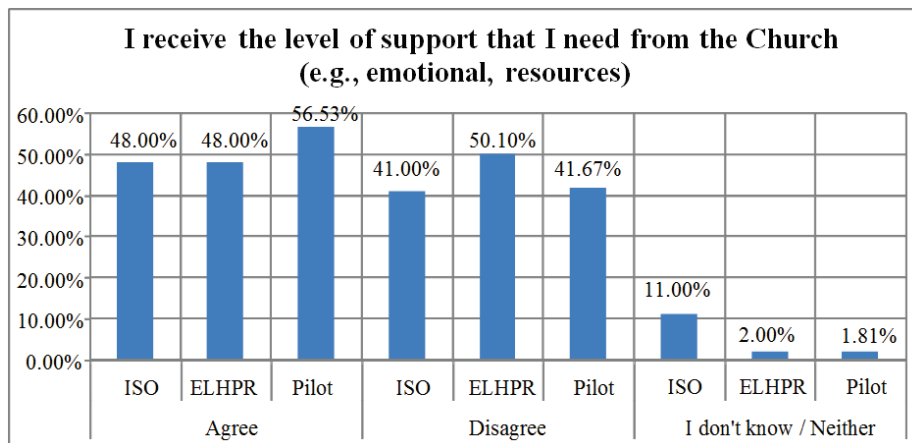
**1. Prioritize financial and staffing support for programs intended to foster collegiality among ministry personnel.**

When consulted, each of the participating Conferences indicated essential agreement for the benefit associated with collegial programming. However, the means to engage this goal differed in each project. Hamilton Conference’s Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project was limited to Bruce Presbytery and focused on congregational mission development and support of ministry personnel. Bruce Presbytery’s test included ministry personnel retreats, which were exceptionally well-attended. Saskatchewan Conference highlighted an important reminder that with the continued prevalence of part-time ministries in that Conference, the capacity of ministry personnel to participate in collegial programming is compromised.

That said, regardless of the number of opportunities that ministry personnel had to network with ministry colleagues, Conference, or community size, the majority of respondents reported that ministry personnel need to build stronger collegial relationships with each other.

**2. Provide support to local ministry unit governing bodies in their employer role and, in particular, training and consultation for Ministry and Personnel Committees, Pastoral Relations/Settlement Committees.**

The majority of ministry personnel report that the United Church of Canada is a better than average (or excellent) employer, that their current ministry is a comfortable and energizing place to work, and that they are appreciated and supported by the community they serve. In comparing responses from two previous surveys of ministry personnel (the Isolation in Ministry survey in 2005 and the Collaborative Research Project in 2010), an encouraging trend appears to be emerging.





One of the overall goals of the project is to improve the fit between ministry personnel and pastoral charges. When surveyed, 71% of local ministries described the fit between the programming leadership and the ministry needs in their church as excellent or good.

In London Conference's project the traditional joint needs assessment and joint search process has been replaced by a process where the congregation does both the needs assessment and the search supported by Conference resources, including handbooks and on-line training of the congregational interview teams by the Conference Personnel Minister. Most congregations have been able, under the new process, to move from a request for a change in pastoral relations to interviewing inside of 90 days. Montreal and Ottawa Conference developed a new joint needs assessment process that includes the Living Ministry profile referenced above, that is designed to be accomplished in a one-day workshop. This encourages a broader participation of the congregation, and an expedited process.

**68% of ministry personnel in participating Conferences noticed a decrease in volunteer workload.**

In terms of support to ministry and personnel committees, British Columbia Conference is providing resources for ministry personnel performance reviews, while Bay of Quinte Conference reports increased staff availability for ministry and personnel committees.

Conference pastoral relations and settlement committees have also shifted responsibilities in some Conferences with processes like centralizing the processing of applications for ministry positions. Toronto Conference has established a team of volunteer reviewers whose responsibility is to ensure the accurate completion of pastoral relations forms. Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference screens applications for eligibility, ensuring that mandatory training is complete, and credentials are cleared for admissions candidates. Best practices such as these contribute to a more efficient and consistent application of systems; 68% of ministry personnel in participating Conferences noticed a decrease in volunteer workload.

### **3. Maximize available communication and database management systems to support pastoral relations systems.**

Many Conferences reported a volunteer shortage to fulfill the responsibilities of supporting pastoral relations systems. However, Conferences reported that the use of technology is decreasing volunteer effort, especially in terms of travel, meeting time, and cost. Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference has developed PowerPoint presentations to be used in the training of joint search committees that both ensure a level of training and education, as well as reduce the level of staff involvement.

Toronto Conference's project is very focused on technology and is using an on-line matching tool to address bias and cultural assumptions in matching ministry personnel and local ministry units for calls and appointments.

As was highlighted in the Isolation in Ministry report in 2006, there continues to be pastoral charges with little to no access to high-speed internet. While this contributes to the sense of isolation ministry personnel in those areas experience, it also limits the capacity of using

technology for the work of pastoral relations, and should be an ongoing consideration for future development.

**4. Ensure access to conflict management and change management training for leaders who are initiating or implementing change.**

One thing that can be stated with certainty is that the future effectiveness of ministry in the local church will require significant changes to practices of congregational mission development, the ministry personnel search and selection process, and oversight and discipline procedures. In the responses to the evaluation, more than half of local ministries agreed with the statement "Typically, it is difficult for anyone to make significant changes in our local ministry without it resulting in conflict." Knowing that systemic change is essential, and that change raises levels of conflict, it makes good sense to increase the provision training for conflict and change management as we introduce systemic change throughout the church.

**General Observations**

There are many faithful and competent presbytery volunteers throughout The United Church of Canada who have dedicated many hours to the work of pastoral relations and oversight and discipline. Many of the Conferences reported concerns from presbyters that moving these systems to Conference would create a gap between the local context and the oversight body. At the same time, reports of renewed collegiality and capacity to support mission and ministry development within congregations are also emerging. There is also a sense of collaboration between different projects with resources and processes being shared as they are developed. As a result, the proposed changes will continue to build on these insights as the church continues to support and enable the ministry personnel and lay leaders within communities of faith across the country.

## **REPORT: THE STEERING GROUP ON THE CANDIDACY PATHWAY**

### **Origin: Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services**

#### **A) History of the Candidacy Pathway Initiative**

In May 2008, the Executive of the General Council directed the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry to review the current process by which members of the Church become members of the Order of Ministry (Diaconal and Ordained Ministers). The Permanent Committee established a Candidacy Review Working Group, which reported back to that Permanent Committee. In March 2009, the Executive of the General Council received the recommendations of the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry that the work of the Candidacy Review Working Group be approved. The Executive recommended that the General Council approve the policy directions and principles of the Candidacy Pathway and authorize the Executive of the General Council to take the necessary steps, including the issuance of required remits and revisions to *The Manual* at appropriate times, and to implement the policy directions.

At the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council 2009, the proposal to adopt new policy directions for the Candidacy Pathway process for the Church (GCE 6, attached as Appendix A) was presented and considered. A motion (GC 40 2009 – 021) to refer the proposal to the Executive of the General Council for more detail and development was passed (Record of Proceedings, p. 166).

In November 2009, the Executive of the General Council referred GCE 6 – The Candidacy Pathway to the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services for further study and development, including an option of trial implementation in up to three Conferences, with evaluation and proposals to be sent to the Executive of the General Council prior to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012. In April 2010, the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services referred this matter to a Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway, with a timeframe that anticipated the completion of this work by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012.

In 2011, three pilot projects began – one in each of British Columbia Conference, Manitou Conference, and Bay of Quinte Conference. These candidacy pathway pilot projects are ongoing at this time. In addition, St. Andrew's College is piloting the equipping phase of the candidacy pathway. As no candidate would be able to complete the seven steps of the Candidacy Pathway model by 2012 and as the work of the pilot projects and the Steering Group could not be completed prior to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council in 2012, an interim report on the Candidacy Pathway was provided for information to that meeting of the General Council.

#### **B) Mandate**

The initial mandate of the Steering Group on Candidacy Pathway was:

- to develop and implement a project plan to study and develop the policy directions of the Candidacy Pathway including oversight and evaluation of trial implementation in up to three Conferences;
- to evaluate the trials and report to the Executive of the General Council through the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services in anticipation of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012;

- to provide interim reports to the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services;
- in collaboration with the successor to the Unit on Ministries in French and the United Church Francophone community, (a) to review policies related to Supervised Ministry Education, Transfer and Settlement, and Candidacy to ensure maximum effectiveness in deploying Francophone and bilingual candidates for Ministry in French in appropriate settings; (b) to explore the feasibility of Francophone and bilingual candidates requesting to do their Supervised Ministry Education in French-language settings, including funding as necessary; and (c) to explore the feasibility of Francophone and bilingual candidates being prioritized for settlement in ministry-in-French contexts, including the candidates' own Conference.

In September 2010, the mandate was amended to add:

- to monitor and evaluate any explorations or experiments with various aspects of the seven stages named in the candidacy pathway, so as to include reflection on their results in the work leading to the Steering Group's report

In February 2012, the mandate was again amended – this time to provide the Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway with a revised time frame to complete its work by the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council 2015.

The Mandate of the Steering Group was specifically limited to the Candidacy Pathway and did not include those on the pathway to recognition as Designated Lay Ministers. Within the policies of The United Church of Canada, the term “candidate” refers specifically to those in the process of preparation for diaconal or ordained ministry. As the Candidacy Pathway developed through various pilot projects, it became apparent to the Steering Group that a pathway for those seeking recognition as Designated Lay Ministers should be developed and implemented, based on the same seven phases and the same resources used in the development of the Candidacy Pathway.

### **C) The Seven-Phase Candidacy Pathway Model – Further Detail and Development**

The Candidacy Pathway Model that is being proposed for implementation within The United Church of Canada is based on 18 “Core Values and Principles” (attached as Appendix B).

Building on that foundation, the seven phases were identified:

1. Call Forth: God calls persons to lead and serve
2. Identify: the Church tests the person's giftedness for ministry and identifies candidates for the Order of Ministry
3. Accompany: the Church accompanies candidates on the pathway
4. Equip: the Church provides opportunities for candidates to be educated for ordered ministry
5. Assess: the Church ensures candidates are gifted and prepared for ordered ministry
6. Authorize: the Church affirms the readiness of candidates for ordered ministry
7. Celebrate: the Church gives thanks to God for those offering to serve in ordered ministry

The goals, target groups, and activities involved in each phase have been developed to provide greater detail (attached as Appendix C).

In addition to these documents, a statement on the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership has been developed. Four goal areas have been identified:

1. Spiritual, Vocational, and Personal Formation
2. Teach and Facilitate Learning in and of the Christian Faith
3. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivities and Analysis
4. Leadership within the Faith Community and Wider Community

For each of these goal areas, general learning outcomes have been identified, as well as learning outcome elements and examples for the implementation of those elements (attached as Appendix D).

A listing of a series of Biblical passages to aid in reflection at various times along the Candidacy Pathway has also been prepared (attached as Appendix E).

#### **D) Pilot Projects**

For the three pilot projects operating at the Conference level, training for the Conference Assessment Boards for these Conferences took place in June (Manitou Conference and Bay of Quinte Conference) and September (British Columbia Conference) of 2011. The training was facilitated by Jennifer Clarke and Tim Elliott of Elliott Clarke & Associates (now Six Oaks Consulting), ministry development consultants.

One of the tools which the pilot projects' Conference Assessment Boards could use in its determination of suitability for candidacy is the Vocational Assessment Report. These reports are provided by the Ministry Development Council. The Ministry Development Council is an international network of accredited centres, providing resources for clergy and other church workers, denominational leaders, and local churches since 1969. The Council has offices in ten cities in the United States and one in Toronto. Jennifer Clarke and Tim Elliott are the partners of the Ministry Development Council's Toronto office and have conducted the assessments of inquirers in the Candidacy Pathway pilot projects.

In each of the pilot project Conferences, the Conference Personnel Minister has played a key role in the implementation of the Candidacy Pathway and continues to provide personnel and leadership support.

Throughout the life of the pilot projects, St. Andrew's College, Manitou Conference, British Columbia Conference, and Bay of Quinte Conference provided written annual reports to the Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway. In addition, representatives of each pilot project have participated via conference call in consultation with the Steering Group. The information from the pilot projects proved invaluable to the Steering Group in its work. Summary reports reflecting the progress of each of the pilot projects are attached to this report as Appendix F. The recommendations of the Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway are in large part a result of the development and implementation work carried out in the four pilot projects and the findings of those piloting the new Candidacy Pathway model.

The Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway heard a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm around the mechanisms piloted by the Conferences which warrant serious consideration. The

pilot project findings showed some significant advantages (such as greater accessibility and a reduction in the number of committees dealing with various steps on the path to vocational ministry). These advantages should be weighed against some issues which arose during the pilot projects, such as the increased costs of implementing the new model at the Conference level in terms of staff time and monetary expenses and the costs of vocational assessments, which were covered by the General Council Office.

### **E) Additional Consultation**

The Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway consulted with others to broaden its understanding of specific wishes of some communities regarding the pathway to vocational ministry.

The Steering Group considered a number of intercultural issues at its meeting in October of 2010, when it met with Rev. Michael Blair, Executive Minister of the then Communities in Ministry Unit. Some of the issues raised were language barriers, cultural reluctance to the practice of raising up ministry personnel from within the congregation they may serve, and the potential lack of placement opportunities (for Supervised Ministry Education experiences and for calls/settlement) for students from ethnic ministries.

The Steering Group is aware that there is a different pathway in place for those from our aboriginal congregations who are called to vocational ministry. The programs offered at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre have been developed with a particular awareness of the needs and faith tradition and expression of candidates and congregations within the All Native Circle Conference. Consultation on aboriginal issues and candidacy took place between the Steering Group and Aileen Urquhart, Acting Conference Personnel Minister, All Native Circle Conference. The current candidacy process, with its reliance on completion of forms and processes does not fit with the culture of our native ministries and the candidates and applicants who are called from within those ministries.

Following the “Gathering Together - Persons with Disabilities” conference in July of 2013, consultation with three current or former candidates who are differently-abled took place via telephone calls. Individual conversations took place with each one and the staff resource person to the Steering Group. Their recommendations and hopes for the future candidacy pathway were passed along to the Steering Group in plenary. All three agreed that it would be helpful to the process if more training and awareness around the issues of disability were provided to those on committees and boards dealing with inquirers and candidates, so that the focus “is not just on the disability.” All three expressed support for the Candidacy Pathway model and the pilot project work.

The Francophone Candidacy Sub-Committee developed a work plan for consultation with Francophone stakeholders and to develop data collection questions. Data collection from current and former Francophone candidates was conducted by means of a questionnaire. Consultation with other stakeholders took place immediately following a meeting of the Connexional Table in Lachine, QC on November 1, 2013. A member of the Steering Group and the staff resource person to the Steering Group met with representatives of United Theological College, Montreal & Ottawa Conference Office, Montreal Presbytery and its E&S Committee, Consistoire

Laurentien and its E&S Committee, the Conference Interview Board, the Conference E&S Committee, and Ministères en français. A number of issues specific to Francophone candidates and Francophone congregations were raised, including:

- the policies, forms, procedures, and handbooks governing all aspects of entering ministry are not available in French
- the Ministry of Supervision course is not available in French
- for small pastoral charges, without funding from the General Council Office it would be impossible to be a learning site; due to financial limitations, none of the Francophone pastoral charges can qualify as a learning site
- matching an appropriate site with an intern and a supervisor is not only a question of matching language but also of matching the “cultural context”
- formation must be focused on the future church, not preparing ministers for the classic model of a United Church pastoral charge; Supervised Ministry Education experiences should offer part of the placement in a missional setting or perhaps placement within the presbytery or a region
- the Church must work with theological schools to develop a model of training not based on a 50 year old model but on a model for the future
- the previous model of Supervised Ministry Education experience served over two four-month summer periods should be an available option; 24 months of Supervised Ministry Education could discourage some from pursuing the road to ordination
- if students can accept a call to the pastoral charge that served as their learning site, the Church needs to accompany and prepare these congregations and new members of the Order of Ministry to handle the transition when their roles change
- in light of ethnic differences, perhaps the Church should ask if it really is a good idea to have the same concept of what is a valid ministry for the entire United Church of Canada
- the Church must be intentional in placing bilingual ministry personnel in communities of declining Anglophone ministries where there are the possibilities of transition to a ministry in French or a bilingual ministry
- Conferences must identify places where there is the possibility of growing Francophone or bilingual ministries and share that information with the wider church
- the Church needs to anticipate the growing possibility of its new ministry personnel having to work in a bi-vocational manner

## **F) Evaluation**

The Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway was tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of the new Candidacy Pathway. A contract was entered into with MNP LLP to provide a project evaluation tool and processes for the Steering Group to use in its evaluation work. Leanne Douglas, Senior Manager, MNP Consulting, served as the Lead Consultant on the work. The Evaluation Sub-Committee met during the summer of 2013. It completed work on a Candidacy Pathway Evaluation Matrix and a time frame in which to complete its work. It also worked with Leanne to develop data collection questions.

Data collection from various target audiences was sought using a variety of data collection tools. Input was obtained from those involved in the pilot projects as well as from those involved in the

candidacy process in non-pilot project Conferences. Current and recent inquirers and candidates from within all Conferences were also surveyed, as were educational supervisors. A special survey was developed and translated into French before being sent to current and previous francophone or bilingual candidates. In addition, Presbytery E&S Committees received a specific survey on their capacity to work with Francophone inquirers and candidates in French.

The results of the responses were collected and the trends were then brought to the Steering Group at its plenary meeting in the spring of 2014.

The responses from various committee and board members involved in the Candidacy Pathway pilot projects served to reinforce the information that had been shared in the annual reports from the pilot project Conferences.

The results from new ministry personnel and current students/inquirers/candidates from the pilot project Conferences were surprisingly similar to those from the non-pilot project Conferences. These responses gave the Steering Group the opportunity to hear firsthand feedback from the students actually involved in the pilot project and from those who experienced the traditional path to ordination or commissioning.

From those current and former students in the non-pilot project Conferences:

- most found the resources useful, although not always easy to come by
- just over 20% felt their discernment process began too late
- just over 10% of respondents found the discernment process not at all helpful
- most saw their Discernment Committee as being valuable, a support, offering clarification, affirming, and non-judgemental
- most felt that field education while in theological school, theological education, the Ministry-Based Ordination Program (distance ministry) offered through Atlantic School of Theology, Supervised Ministry Education experiences, supply appointments, and Sunday worship leadership offer ample opportunities to integrate skills, knowledge, values, and faith; about 10% felt the opportunities offered were inadequate
- most have very positive responses to their Supervised Ministry Education experience; just over 11% had a poor experience with their educational supervisor; over 16% felt they did not have enough support
- most experiences with E&S Committees were positive (some terms used: “caring, interested, engaged, committed, providing guidance”) just over 12% said the experience was poor (some terms used: “bigoted, power tripping, negative, critical, little help, non-communicative”); Need identified: better communication and training
- most thought Conference does a good job of assessing readiness for ministry; 12% felt it was not at all good
- just over 30% had never used the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice document; just over 70% had never used the Learning Outcomes document

From those current and former students in the pilot project Conferences:

- most found the resources were useful; they were provided after the student asked for them



- just under 50% felt the Vocational Assessment tool accurately reflected their skills and interests; 30% felt it was somewhat accurate in this
- one quarter of respondents had a Circle of Accompaniment; one quarter had a Discernment Committee; over 20% had both; 21% of respondents felt that the Circle of Accompaniment/Discernment Committee were not helpful
- 25% felt the discernment process started too late; 5% felt it started too early
- the usefulness of the committees (Circle of Accompaniment/Discernment Committee) were perceived as changing as the individual moves through the process (some terms used: “assists with clarifying thoughts and reflections, non-judgemental, its availability varied”)
- two thirds of respondents felt that, through practical ministry experience, pulpit supply, field education, and student supply opportunities, they had ample opportunities to integrate skills, knowledge, values, and faith
- of those who had completed their Supervised Ministry Education experience, 9% of respondents said their experience with their SME supervisor was poor
- most respondents felt their experience with CAB was good (some terms used: “supportive, committed, honest, encouraging, challenging in a positive way”); 11% of respondents said the experience was poor and 17% felt it was a frustrating experience (a frustrating experience – the degree of power held by the CAB; needs better communication, more balanced CAB membership, with adequate training/screening)
- most thought Conference does a good job assessing readiness for ministry
- just over 18% had never used the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice document; just over 25% had not used the Learning Outcomes document

Another constituency that had not provided input to the Steering Group prior to the evaluation process was the Educational Supervisors. Their input reflected the following findings:

- with the growth in off-site supervision, their style of supervision has adapted from face-to-face to include using technology (phone, Skype, etc.) to keep in contact with the student
- they incorporate the learning goals, through open conversations and written summaries
- while most were familiar with the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice document, there was no clear consensus on its value to the Supervised Ministry Education experience
- 31% of respondents were not familiar with the Learning Outcomes document
- support was provided to them in their role of educational supervisor by the Conference Personnel Minister, other educational supervisors, and Conference Internship and Educational Supervision Committee members; however, some felt they received little or no support
- while the training provided through the Ministry of Supervision course was considered very adequate, many thought that additional courses with other educational supervisors would be welcome

The surveys concerning Francophones on the pathway to ministry very much reinforced the information that had been provided during the Lachine consultation. Other than the Consistoire Laurentien, only one presbytery E&S Committee had encountered a bilingual candidate and the

interactions with that individual were conducted entirely in the student's second language, English.

Francophone students or former students provided valuable responses, including the following:

- course work was predominantly done in English
- Supervised Ministry Education was most often done in English, with an English speaking supervisor and an English speaking Lay Supervision Team
- forms were not available in French
- often initial settlements were not in a Francophone or a bilingual community
- there are many bilingual and Francophone ministers but few Francophone pastoral charges; so Francophone and bilingual ministers must work in their second language
- when someone new (who is a Francophone) comes to church, there is a sense that among the congregation Francophones are not really welcome
- a pathway in French for Francophone candidates is very important for our denomination

The Steering Group reviewed all the trends identified in the responses provided to the various evaluation tools used. The evaluation tools provided input on the additional detail and description of the Candidacy Pathway model as it had been piloted. The evaluation tools also provided the Steering Group with a means of comparing experiences and perceptions about the new Candidacy Pathway model with the experiences and perceptions about the traditional path to vocational ministry within The United Church of Canada. The knowledge gained through the responses guided the Steering Group in further defining the seven phases of the Candidacy Pathway model and presenting those as recommendations for adoption along with the adoption of the Candidacy Pathway model as originally presented to the General Council in 2009.

### **G) Gratitude**

The Steering Group on the Candidacy Pathway extends its sincere appreciation to all those who worked on the development and implementation of Candidacy Pathway pilot projects, to Lorne Calvert and Lynn Bayne of St. Andrew's College, to members of new Conference Boards and Committees, to Conference Office staff members who supported this initiative, especially the following Conference Personnel Ministers (CPM): Mary-Jane Hobden (Bay of Quinte Conference), Victoria Andrews (formerly CPM of Bay of Quinte Conference), Catherine Somerville (formerly CPM of Manitou Conference), and Treena Duncan (British Columbia Conference). We are truly thankful for your work and your commitment to the Candidacy Pathway initiative. Our thanks also go to those students who have participated in the pilot projects and to the educational supervisors and learning sites that have participated in the equipping phase of these pilot projects.

## **JUDICIAL COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Judicial Committee (which meets as an Executive of ten of the fifty-two members, four named by each Conference) held five meetings by telephone conference in the period since August 2012. There were two appeals heard as reported below.

The Executive of the Judicial Committee deals primarily with appeals at the General Council level from Decisions of Formal or Appeal Hearing panels, Conferences, the Executive or Sub-Executive of the General Council and from Rulings made by the General Secretary of the General Council.

During this term, Margaret Bain chaired the meetings and Nora Sanders acted as secretary. Jon Jessiman and Lorna Standingready joined the Executive to represent British Columbia and All Native Circle Conference respectively.

In the term from 2012 to 2015, the following items were dealt with and are reported here:

### **Item 1**

Elizabeth Amirault appealed a Decision of Bay of Quinte to end Ms. Amirault's application as a Candidate for Ordered Ministry. Paul Macklin, member of the Executive from Bay of Quinte Conference, did not participate in the discussion or decision made whether or not to hear the appeal. The Executive considered the statement submitted by the appellant and the reply from the Conference and concluded that it would not hear the appeal as the grounds for an appeal were not met.

### **Item 2**

The Appeal of Derek Parry from a decision of London Conference was heard in London on July 2012 by a panel chaired by Helen Barkley with members Robert Little and Bill Bruce. Their decision to dismiss the appeal was issued September 7, 2012.

### **Item 3**

The Appeal of Betty Parrell was heard on November 14, 2012 by a panel chaired by Ellen Mole and members Paul Macklin and Steven Longmoore. Their decision to dismiss the appeal was issued on March 22, 2013.

### **Item 4**

Alan Rush appealed the decision of Toronto Conference to dissolve his pastoral relationship with Toronto Chinese United Church. Penny Keel, representative to the Executive from Toronto Conference did not participate in the deliberations with respect to whether or not to hear this appeal, or those in Items 5 or 6 which follow. Submissions made by the appellant and the respondent were considered by the Judicial Committee Executive which concluded that the grounds for appeal were not met. Their decision was not to hear the appeal.

### **Item 5**

Karl Lam appealed the decision of Toronto Conference to dissolve his pastoral relationship with Toronto Chinese United Church. Full consideration was given to the submissions made by both

the appellant and the respondent. The decision of the Executive on the material provided was that the grounds for appeal were not met. As a result, the decision of the Executive was not to hear the appeal

**Item 6**

Toronto Chinese United Church appealed the decisions of Toronto Conference on March 1, 2013 with respect to its structure and function. Submissions were received by the appellant and the respondent on the basis of which the Executive concluded that the grounds for appeal were not met. The decision was made not to hear the appeal.

**Item 7**

David McKay appealed the Bay of Quinte Conference decision to discontinue his Candidacy. Paul Macklin, as member of the Executive appointed by Bay of Quinte Conference, did not participate in the discussion or decision. David McKay made submissions on his own behalf and the Conference made a statement. Both were fully considered and the Executive of the Judicial Committee decided that the appeal did not meet the grounds for appeal.

**Item 8**

Wilson Chan appealed the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario decision to place him on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary). Charles Huband, the representative of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, did not participate in the discussion or decision made with respect to whether or not to hear the appeal. The Executive of the Judicial Committee considered the submissions of the appellant and the respondent and concluded that the grounds for appeal were not met. The decision was made not to hear the appeal.

Margaret Bain, Chair, Judicial Committee Executive

## CONFERENCE RECORDS REPORT

### Background

41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012 approved a new process to meet the General Council's responsibility for review of Conference records from the triennium 2009-2012.

An excerpt from the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012 Record of Proceedings follows:

- ***Review of Format: The General Secretary will arrange for review of the records by General Council staff to ensure the proper format has been followed for the records in compliance with section 092 of The Manual. The General Secretary will address any concerns resulting from this review directly with the appropriate Executive Secretary or Speaker and report to the Executive of the General Council on completion.***
- ***Review of Content: The Executive of the General Council will appoint a task group to review the records to ensure all Conference proceedings have been recorded in accordance with The Manual. Upon completion of the review, the task group will relay any resulting concerns to the appropriate Conference and report to the Executive of the General Council with recommendations for any necessary follow-up action.***
- ***Report of Review: The Executive of the General Council will report to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council 2015 on completion of both parts of the review.***

*The Record of Proceedings goes on to set out (at page 236) that:*

*Past practice has been for the General Council to appoint a committee of commissioners to review the records of each Conference (including Executive and Sub-Executive) for the previous triennium. The review takes place over the course of the meeting of the General Council, with the committee reporting its findings by the end of the meeting.*

*For the committee, reviewing these records is a huge time commitment that may affect their availability to participate fully in the various sessions of the General Council.*

*There is no requirement in The Manual that this review take place at the meeting of the General Council. In the spirit of simplification of church processes, the General Secretary is proposing an alternative process so that the actual review would take place after the General Council meeting.*

### Process

The Conference Records Review Task Group was appointed by the Nominations Committee in May 2013 and is composed of Barbara Reynolds (Montreal & Ottawa Conference), Pam Mykityshyn (Alberta and Northwest Conference) and Katharine Moore (Alberta and Northwest Conference). Kathy McDonald is the staff resource person. Barbara Reynolds and Pam Mykityshyn have extensive experience in the work of reviewing the format of Conference records as it was carried out previously.

In preparation for the review, Conference Records were to have been submitted electronically in advance of 41<sup>st</sup> General Council 2012. All Conference records were received, though two were submitted in hard copy only.

Confirmation and direction from the Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda about the scope of the task was requested midway through the work of the Records Review Task Group. The Permanent Committee directed the Records Review Task Group to keep its work as simple as possible and “to ensure that Conference proceedings have been recorded in accordance with *The Manual*, and to determine whether Conference has authority to take certain decisions.” A copy of the Request for Direction and the response of the Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda dated October 29, 2013 are attached for ease of reference.

With that information in hand, the Task Group proceeded to complete the review of the Conference Records. The minutes of each Conference were reviewed and a summary of motions prepared for each meeting. All the work of the Task Group was done electronically, with members sharing their summaries via email.

### **Findings**

The minutes of the Conferences for the triennium concluding August 2012 were reviewed by the Records Review Task Group. The Task Group found that the minutes of the Conferences are in order. The format of the minutes is appropriate and minutes of the Conferences reflect the work that is being done and is within the scope of the authority of the Conferences.

## MANUAL COMMITTEE REPORT

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

The Manual Committee is composed of the following six elected members:

Peter Bishop  
John Burton  
Cindy Randall

Alan Boyd  
Mary-Beth Moriarty  
George Thurlow

Cynthia Gunn, one of the church's Legal/Judicial Counsel, serves as a corresponding member.

The role of the Manual Committee is to assist the General Secretary with preparing *The Manual* and conducting remits.

The Committee acts as a resource to the General Secretary in proposing wording for the amendment of existing by-laws or the creation of new ones to reflect policy changes made by the General Council. The Committee's work includes addressing any gaps or inconsistencies in *The Manual*, and recommending improvements to the language and style of *The Manual* generally. The Committee also drafts remits, which are circulated by the General Secretary to presbyteries (and pastoral charges as required) after the remit form and content has been approved by the Executive of the General Council.

During the past triennium, Pat West completed her term as an elected member and was replaced by Peter Bishop. The Committee is grateful for Pat's service and welcomes Peter to its work.

Judith Bricault, formerly with Unité des ministères en français, has been lead staff in the work of translating *The Manual* into French in its entirety, as mandated by the 39th General Council 2006. Judith has been a corresponding member at several Committee meetings to allow for consultation with the Committee on the translation work. She completed the translation of the 2013 edition before her retirement last year and it was reviewed for legal accuracy to the English edition by Fred Braman, a bilingual lawyer.

The 2013 edition of *The Manual* includes a complete re-writing of the by-laws from previous editions, as approved by the 41st General Council 2012. This edition was made available both in hard copy format and as a PDF document on the General Council website. The Committee has continued to hear positive comment about the availability of *The Manual* in PDF format, with appreciation expressed especially for the search features and the hyperlinks that were introduced in the 2013 edition.

The Committee held four in-person meetings during the triennium: in the autumn of 2012, 2013, and 2014, and in the winter of 2015. It also met twice by conference call: during the late autumn of 2012 and again during the winter of 2013.

For meetings early in the triennium, the Committee's primary agenda was the drafting of changes to *The Manual* to reflect the policy decisions made by the 41st General Council 2012.

The Committee also drafted the remits that had been authorized by the 41st General Council in 2012 and 2013.

At subsequent meetings, the Committee reviewed feedback received on the 2013 edition of *The Manual*. This feedback was largely positive, and included much enthusiasm for the new format and content.

The Committee has heard concerns that, in a few instances, the 2013 edition did not reflect the policy contained in the previous edition as clearly or accurately as might be possible. In response to these concerns, it is expected that there will be a proposal to the Executive of the General Council at its fall 2015 meeting for changes to the wording of a few sections of *The Manual*. The Executive of the General Council is responsible for approving all wording changes in *The Manual* for greater clarity and accuracy of policy previously adopted by the General Council.

The Committee has also worked on improving the wording of certain sections in *The Manual* where the improvement would involve changing an existing policy by:

- setting an advance notice period specifically for congregational meetings dealing with amalgamation or disbanding
- extending the policy for ordered ministers elected as members of Parliament to ordered ministers elected to any public office (including provincial and municipal)
- ensuring access to church court minutes by members of the court and congregation
- adjusting the calculation of the time period for appealing a decision by a church court

Since these improvements would require a change to existing policy, they are subject to the approval of the General Council and there is a proposal before the 42nd General Council 2015 for each item listed above.

John W. Burton  
Chairperson



## ARCHIVES AND HISTORY REPORT

### Committee Structure and Responsibilities

The Archives and History Committee is a mandatory standing committee of General Council, which is, according to *The Manual* (Section E 4.8.3a), responsible for coordinating and promoting archival and historical activity of The United Church of Canada.

The Committee consists of: a chair appointed by General Council; two representatives from the Academic Community, also appointed by General Council; one representative from each of the 13 Conferences; the General Secretary, or designate; and the General Council Archivist, as resource. The Executive of the Committee includes the chair, the General Council Archivist, and the General Secretary or designate, plus two other members of the Committee. During my time as Chair, I have relied considerably on the Executive

The Archives and History Committee meets once a year to transact its business. The Executive meets at least once a year or more often if needed, by conference call.

### Sub Committees

There are currently two sub-committees, set up by the Archive and History Committee

- a. Sub Committee on Historic Sites – Linda White (Chair), Jean Barman, Wayne Harris, Don Smith. Their mission is to research what should be defined as historic sites and to come up with a policy to deal with them. They have created the Heritage Commemorations program of which more will be said later.
- b. Ad Hoc Committee on Artifacts – Julielynn Anderson. The purpose of the ad hoc Committee is to investigate how to manage artifacts from the various levels of the church. (Archive and History Committee minutes 2013, XV,b)

### Work of Archives and History Committee Initiated or Continued in the 2012-2015 Triennium

- Historic Commemorations Program  
The Subcommittee on Historic Sites was set up by the Archives and History Committee to consider how to best commemorate historic sites related to the United Church. The subcommittee has approached this topic with great creativity. Their work began in the last triennium and was completed by September 2014. They have set up, with the approval of the Archives and History Committee, the Historic Commemorations Program. This program is designed to highlight distinctive aspects of the Church's history, culture and heritage and will publicly recognize
  - a) Persons of Historic Significance
  - b) Places or Sites of Historic Significance
  - c) Events of Historic Significance
  - d) Distinctive Cultural Traditions/Intangible Culture of Historical Significance
 For more information, go to [www.uchheritage.ca](http://www.uchheritage.ca).
- Artifacts Subcommittee:  
In 2012, the Archives and History Committee approved the idea of setting up a subcommittee on Artifacts. At the Archives and History Committee meeting of 2013, the Committee agreed

by resolution to extend the Ad Hoc Committee on Artifacts for an additional year to propose strategy of managing artifacts into 2014. After this slow start, Julielynne Anderson from Maritimes Conference has accepted the job of Chair of the Artifacts subcommittee. With the support of the Conference Executive, the Conference Archivist and the Presbytery Archives Committee, Julielynne has decided to start a template survey with one particular Presbytery in New Brunswick, specifically the one which includes Fredericton. It has become clear (1) that the term of the subcommittee needs to be longer than one year and (2) there will need to be a coordinator in each Conference that is familiar with the concept of public history and artifacts

- **Part-time Professional Archivist in Saskatchewan Conference:**  
Saskatchewan Conference hired a part time Archivist in 2012 and Newfoundland and Labrador continues to work toward hiring a part time Archivist
- **Move of General Council Archives and Central Conferences Archives to new location:**  
The Archives and History Committee supported the continued relationship between the General Council Archives and the Central Ontario Conferences Archives during negotiations to move The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) from 3250 Bloor Street West, Toronto. This relationship was maintained when The United Church of Canada moved to the Christian Resource Centre building in Toronto in the summer of 2013.
- **Contribution from Sale of Church Property to Support the Archives:**  
Since many of the properties being sold are churches no longer functioning, the Archives ad History Committee feels that a portion of the sale receipts from churches should go to support the Archives. Hamilton Conference began this policy in the 1990s and other conferences have followed suit. A survey of all Conferences was carried out in the fall of 2011. At the Archives ad History Committee meeting in September 2012, it was resolved that each Conference of the United Church implement a policy stating that a minimum of 2% of the proceeds from the sale of churches and/or church property in their Conference go to the appropriate Conference Archives to ensure processing, care, maintenance and storage of records.
- **Comprehensive Review of The United Church of Canada:**  
The Archives ad History Committee has put a considerable amount of work into the Comprehensive Review. At the Archives ad History Committee meeting in October 2013, the Archives ad History Committee did a workshop discussing among other things: What work does the Archives ad History Committee do and how might it be accomplished in different ways? In days of leaner structures and resources, how can the operation of the Archives across the country be sustained long term? There was considerable discussion at the Archives ad History Committee meeting again in 2014. The Archives and History Committee sent a report the Comprehensive Review Task Group, which was a distillation of the collective opinions of the Committee. The Archives and History Committee received a message from the Comprehensive Review Task Group stating that our report had been received and read. We were pleased to see that Archives appears in the Comprehensive Review Task Group Final report.

## REPORTS - 152

As part of my report, I believe that it is important to convey the views of the Alberta and Northwest Conference on the Comprehensive Review Report. The following are excerpts from information compiled by the Alberta and Northwest Conference Heritage Resources Committee:

### **Ownership of the Records and Archives as the “Corporate Memory” of The United Church of Canada**

The Alberta Northwest Conference Heritage Resources Committee] believes that it is imperative that the new structure clearly state that The United Church of Canada is the legal owner of the records and archives created by the communities of faith, the regional councils and the denominational council. Clarifying the ownership of the records and archives is essential if The United Church of Canada hopes to maintain custody, control, care and preservation of its corporate memory.

### **Denominational Ownership Is Essential in Ensuring Common Best Practices and Policies Being Applied to The United Church of Canada Records and in Supporting The United Church of Canada Archives Network**

If The United Church of Canada retains ownership of its records and archives in future communities of faith, regional and denominational councils, then it will continue to facilitate the application of common best practices (e.g. The Sample Records Schedule for Congregations and Access to Church Registers) and policies (e.g. The Privacy Policy). The United Church of Canada Archives Network has developed several tools and resources to assist our current congregations, presbyteries and conferences that could be re-worked for good stewardship of church records and archives within the proposed new structure.

### **Funding for The United Church of Canada Archives**

If ownership of the records and archives is retained by The United Church of Canada, as its collective corporate memory, then responsibility for funding the care and maintenance of the records and archives should rest with the denominational council. With the disbanding of the Conferences, the fate of the various Conference Archives across Canada is uncertain within the regional structure. There could be multiple archives in multiple locations within the boundaries of one regional council jurisdiction. Some of the Conference Archives currently operate within Conference Offices which might cease to exist. Other Conference Archives function through partnership agreements their Conferences have arranged with secular provincial archives across the country. Active attention must be given to preserve the best elements of The United Church of Canada Archives Network during this time of change and transition, and not simply leave The United Church of Canada Archives as an afterthought in the new structure.

### **Archives Should Remain in Regions Where They Are Created**

Alberta Northwest Conference Heritage Resources Committee firmly believes that the archives of this Conference should remain in the current location, close to where the records have been created over time. The Committee does not think that centralizing The United Church of Canada archives into other locations would be practical or useful to church members or the researching public.

- **Making Room for Women**

The Making Room for Women Committee, an independent committee from the Archives and History Committee, was created over ten years ago to identify and preserve personal papers of women in The United Church of Canada and the records of organizations in which they have participated. In 2014, the Archives and History Committee was asked by this Committee to take a leadership role in furthering this work. The Archives and History Committee set up an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss this issue and make recommendations.

**Presenting Issues for the Next Triennium Include:**

- Dealing with any changes to the Archives, which may result from the CRTG report presented to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council meeting in Corner Brook, Newfoundland/Labrador
- The Annual Meeting of the Archives and History Committee I think that all of us on the Archives and History Committee recognize the need of the Church to use money wisely and the value of new technology such as Skype and Conference Calls to allow the Committee to communicate well at a more reasonable cost. However, I do believe that a face to face meeting is by far the best way to communicate. Beside verbal communication, group interaction and body language can convey a great deal. In addition, the format of a two-day conference would have to change to accommodate the different means of communication.
- The Archives and History Committee needs to continue to have good communication with the Archives Network and provide support and ideas for them
- The work of the Historic Sites subcommittee on the Heritage Commemorations program needs to continue and grow.
- As was clearly stated by Rev Helen Reed of the Alberta and Northwest Conference, it is important that the Archives and History Committee urge The United Church of Canada to re-confirm that The United Church of Canada is the legal owner of all archival records.
- Continue to develop new projects that fit the mandate of the Archives and History Committee Making Room for Women; United Church Cemetery work; work of the Archives subcommittee
- To carry on the growing work of Archives across the church, there needs to continue to be a funding formula, which is both adequate and reliable.

**Conclusion:**

As a people of the book and disciples of the Word, we are formed in the understanding of the central role that recording, retaining and revisiting our story keeps us faithful; archival records are a significant way in which this faithful activity is sustained. To paraphrase the former General Secretary of The United Church of Canada, Jim Sinclair: “Those who do the work of archives are performing a valuable ministry of the Church, The Ministry of Memory.”

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Stevenson - Chair, Archives and History Committee, The United Church of Canada  
Author of Report

**Committee Members (and alternates)**

Gerald Hobbs – Representative, BC Conference

Helen Reed – Representative, Alberta and Northwest Conference  
John Haas – Representative, Saskatchewan Conference  
Erin Acland – Representative Manitoba and Northwest Ontario Conference  
Edward Avey – Representative, London Conference  
Michael Brooks – Representative, Hamilton Conference  
Rod Coates – Alternate Representative, Hamilton Conference  
Diane Trollope – Representative, Manitou Conference  
Dawn Monroe – Alternate Representative, Manitou Conference  
Wayne Harris – Bay of Quinte Conference  
Joan Benoit – Ottawa and Montreal Conference  
Julielynn Anderson – Maritimes Conference  
Linda White – Newfoundland and Labrador Conference  
Donald Smith – Academic Representative  
Jean Barman – Academic Representative  
Nichole Vonk – Staff Support (until July 31, 2014)  
Erin Greeno – Staff Support (August 1, 2014 to April 24, 2015)  
Dan Benson – Representative of Nora Sanders, General Secretary, The United Church of Canada  
Bob Stevenson, Chair

# THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA FOUNDATION REPORT

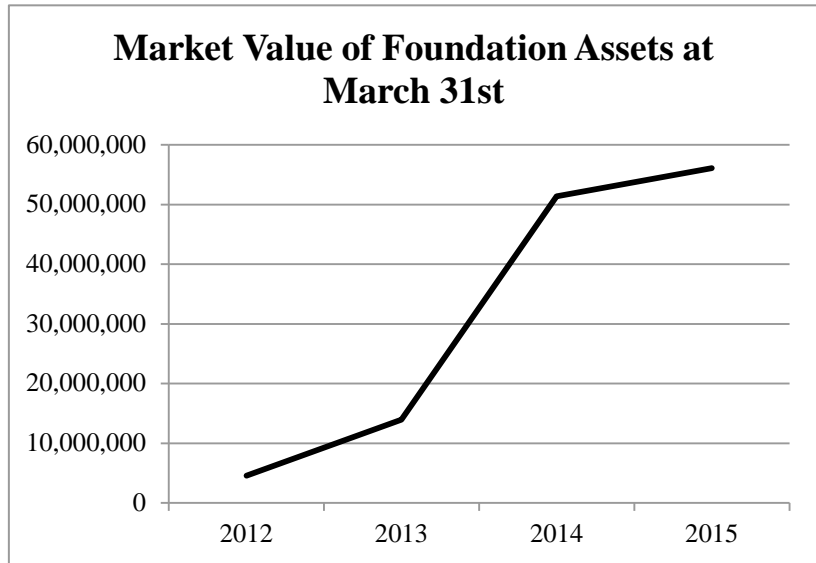
## Origin: the General Secretary

### Growth of Assets under Management

Since its creation by the Executive of the General Council in 2002 the Foundation began by growing quietly, slowly and steadily. This all changed at the beginning of this triennium when momentum increased significantly.



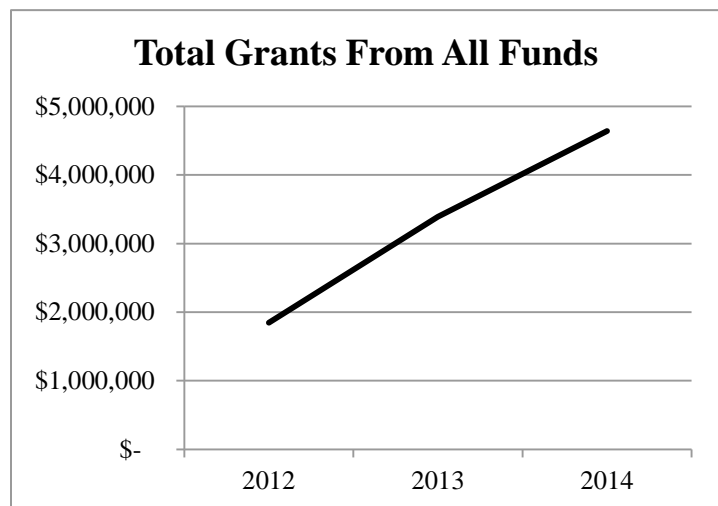
In this triennium the combination of strong groundwork, strong investment returns, increasing donations and the transfer \$29 million in assets from the General Council Treasury has resulted in over \$56M in assets under management, an increase of \$51.5M since March 2012.



The Foundation’s board of directors is very appreciative of the enormous support and the provision of operating funds by the Church in its initial start-up years. Beginning in January 2015, the Foundation is financially self-sufficient, covering all of its direct and indirect operating costs within the General Council Office. The units that support the work of the foundation will now be reimbursed for the services that they provide such as finance and IT.

### Growth of Total Grants from All Funds

The Foundation’s mission is to support the work of the church. This means supporting the important work of congregations, presbyteries, Conferences, UCC organizations and ecumenical partners through grants and long term fund management. Grants to these diverse areas of work have grown significantly over the triennium.

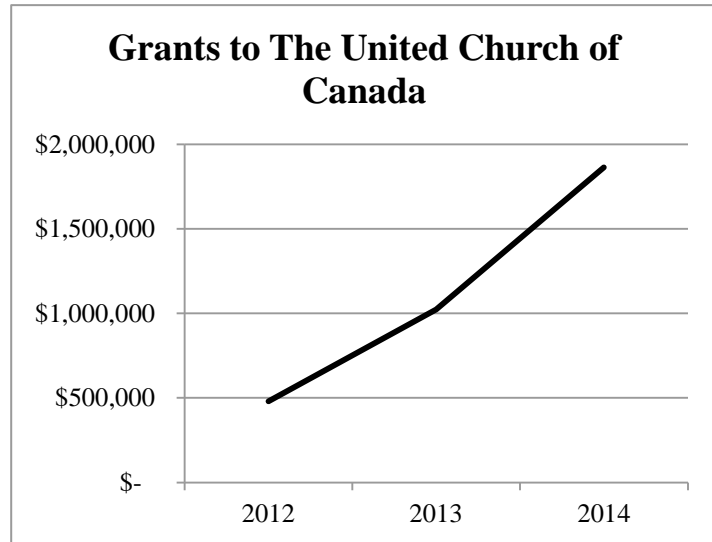


Grants are made through an application process and from short- and long-term funds where donors designate the beneficiaries.

**Growth of Grants to The United Church of Canada**

The Foundation makes grants that support a broad range of the work of the General Council. These grants to The United Church of Canada have also grown significantly. Total grants to the General Council of the church of \$1.7 million in 2014 included:

- Support of Mission & Service of \$300,000 up from \$68,000 in 2013
- grants of just over \$1 million for the program work of the General Council
- the return of the Foundation’s prior year’s operating surplus of \$352,000

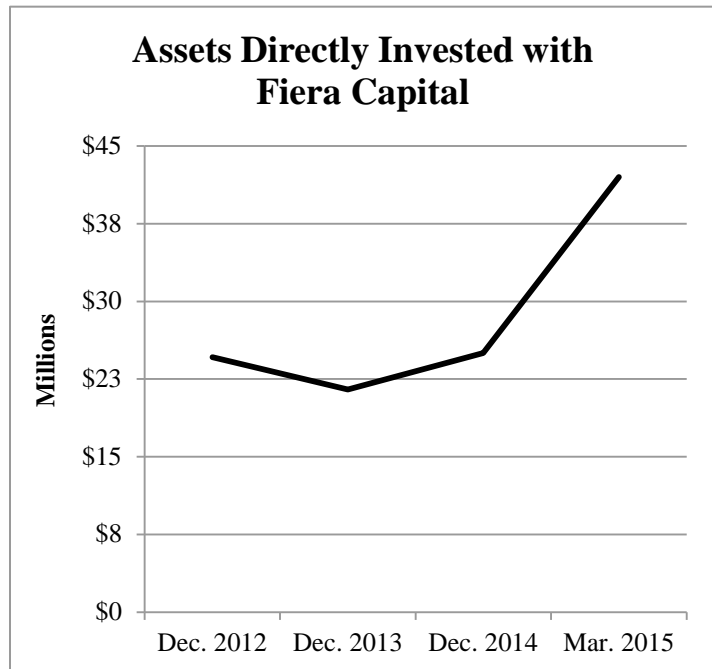


**The Direct Investment Affinity Program**

The Foundation also provides access to its fund manager, Fiera Capital Corp. to interested church organizations.

Congregations, presbyteries, Conferences and affiliated organizations now have \$42M invested directly with Fiera in a variety of investment vehicles with accounts ranging from \$10,000 to over \$4M.

These organizations get solid customer service and investment management track record as well as fees that are lower than industry standard. The most popular retail fund that UCC organizations are invested in returned over 11% in 2014 and has an MER (after rebate) of 1.5%.



## **THE PENSION PLAN OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA REPORT**

**Origin: Marcus Robertson, Chair**

The Pension Plan of The United Church of Canada is a multi-employer plan maintained for the benefit of approximately 9,000 active and retired plan members, with assets exceeding \$1.3 billion. Pension payments and fund expenses total \$70 million annually. With only \$23 million in annual contributions from active members, \$47 million must be generated annually by investments.

The Executive of the General Council is the Plan Administrator. This is not a role delegated to it by the General Council. As Administrator, the Executive is bound to act in the best financial interests of the Plan members and is governed in accordance with the Pension Benefits Act (Ontario). The Executive established the Pension Board to support it in governing, managing, and operating the plan and its assets (the fund). The Executive of the General Council retains responsibility for:

- the Statement of Beliefs and Guiding Principles;
- appointments to the Pension Board and its committees;
- terms of reference for the Pension Board;
- the fund trust agreement;
- annual accountability reports received from the Pension Board.

All other plan functions are delegated to the Pension Board, the details of which are set out in its terms of reference, available upon request from the General Council Office. A brief description can also be found in the governance structure section of the plan's Annual Report to members, available at [www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pension/information](http://www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pension/information), and the detailed annual accountability report is available in the minutes of the Executive of the General Council.

Two issues of concern regarding the Pension Plan are before the General Council: divestment from Canadian gold mining company Goldcorp and investment in fossil fuels.

In regards to Goldcorp, one of the Fund's external managers holds shares in the company. The holdings represent approximately 0.09% of the Fund. Issues of concern have been raised by church members about company activities at one mine in particular, Marlin in Guatemala. Sustainalytics, a service used by the Board to screen companies on a range of environmental, social and governance criteria, delisted the company in 2008.

The Pension Board concluded that divesting, as recommended, would have no effect on the company or its policies. It would not be a significant news story drawing attention to the company. Nothing would change at the Marlin mine or elsewhere where the company operates. Instead, the Board chose to engage with Goldcorp management to bring to their attention the issues and concerns that have been raised by the church's partners in Guatemala. This engagement has been undertaken with other institutional investors through the Shareholders Association for Research and Education (SHARE) and has resulted in substantial change to corporate policies and practices. So much so, that the larger funds—Ethical Council of the Swedish national pension fund and NEI Investments—have concluded their engagements, satisfied with the progress. In 2015, Sustainalytics removed Goldcorp from its restricted list,



stating that “the company has made significant management improvements in material areas such as human rights, security and human rights, and community relations. These improvements significantly reduce the possibility of recurrence of controversies at the Marlin mine.” In 2015 Goldcorp was for the second time named to the NASDAQ Global Sustainability Index, being noted “for taking a leadership role in disclosing its carbon footprint, energy usage, water consumption, hazardous and non-hazardous waste, employee safety, workforce diversity, management composition and community investing.”

While the larger funds are satisfied with Goldcorp's progress and are no longer actively engaging the company, because of the information from Mining the Connections, the Pension Board continues to engage management on three issues in particular, issues identified by Mining the Connections as being of primary importance on the ground: potable water availability and greater transparency and community involvement in water testing; free prior and informed consent for any further development; and a review of the progress made on recommendations of the 2010 independent human rights assessment.

Engagement with Goldcorp management has been a responsible, effective, and faithful action that over time has contributed to lasting and meaningful changes that divestment would not have encouraged or accomplished.

The Pension Board is also being proactive in the area of fossil fuels. Because fossil fuel is so pervasively entrenched in all of the global, and in particular in the Canadian, economy, a total divestment may not be possible while continuing to meet the fiduciary duty to plan members and requirement to maintain a diversified portfolio. In the interests of protecting Fund assets for the long-term while also protecting short-term income to maintain solvency and limit the risk of having to reduce benefits, the Pension Board Responsible Investment Working Group is recommending a comprehensive review of the fund from a carbon risk perspective and the development of a plan of action that may include recommendations for corporate engagement, stock screening, proxy voting, engagement with our external investment managers, working with other investors through networks and coalitions, and selective divestment. Meanwhile, the Board is actively engaging companies through SHARE's core engagement programme on climate change, is a member of the Canadian Coalition on Good Governance, and is looking to become a signatory to the United Nations Principles on Responsible Investment. The Board is evaluating the reporting requirements to maintain signatory status against available staff resources.

Investing responsibly and faithfully is a priority for the Pension Board as it seeks to fulfill its obligations to Plan members. It is continuously reviewing its policies and practices for responsible investment and participating with the other major funds of the church and with other institutional investors in identifying and adopting best practices.

## 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

- 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

- 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

- 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.

#### **4. A College of Ministers**

- 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**

- 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**

- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.

## 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](http://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

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To read the task group's updates, discussion papers, and consultation reports, please visit [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

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 42<sup>nd</sup> 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 41<sup>st</sup> General Council's decision to launch the Comprehensive Review and will not end with the rise of the 42<sup>nd</sup> 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**

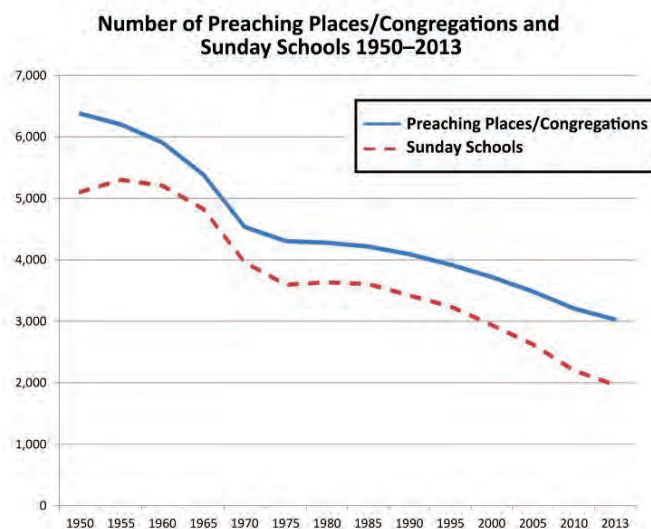
([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

**BACKGROUND #2: Past Reports Considered** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

#### **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



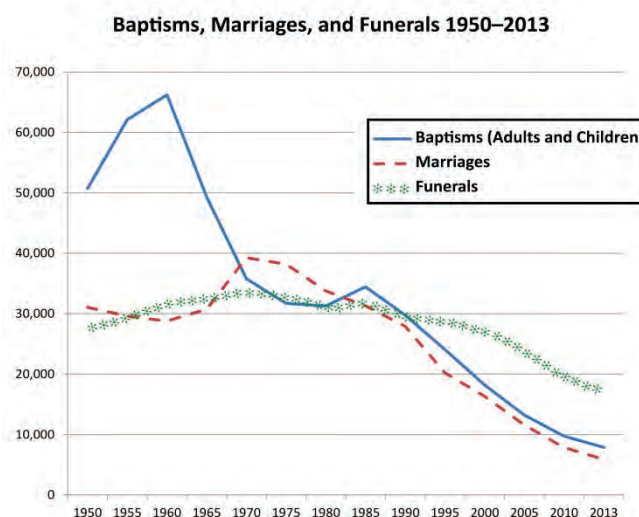
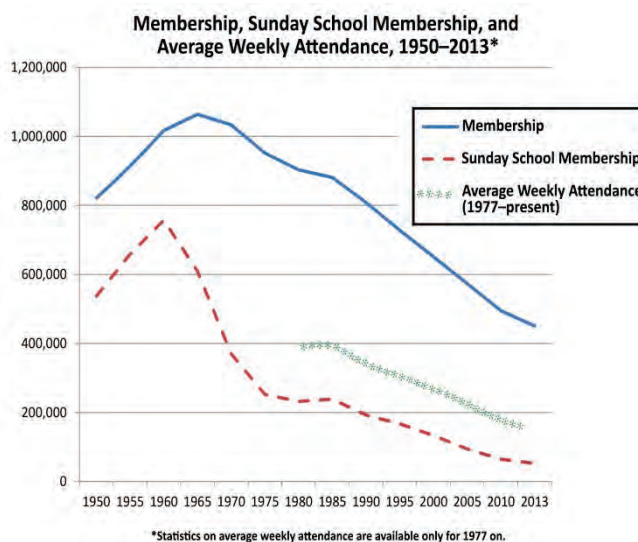
community; overstretched and aging volunteers spending more time on bureaucracy than ministry; and financial pressures that may make it difficult for your community to pay a full-time minister or maintain your building.

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.

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.”<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

## 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.

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.

### **BACKGROUND #3: Renewal and New Ministry Examples**

([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

To read more stories about new life in the United Church, visit [www.edge-ucc.ca/stories](http://www.edge-ucc.ca/stories) and [www.hopecollection.ca](http://www.hopecollection.ca).

To learn more about EDGE, visit [www.edge-ucc.ca](http://www.edge-ucc.ca).

For more information about Fresh Expressions, visit [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk).

To learn more about funds available through The United Church of Canada Foundation, visit [www.unitedchurchfoundation.ca](http://www.unitedchurchfoundation.ca).

To learn more about Bay of Quinte Conference's Transformational Ministry initiative, visit [http://bayofquinteconference.ca/?page\\_id=1635](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."<sup>5</sup>

### ***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 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.

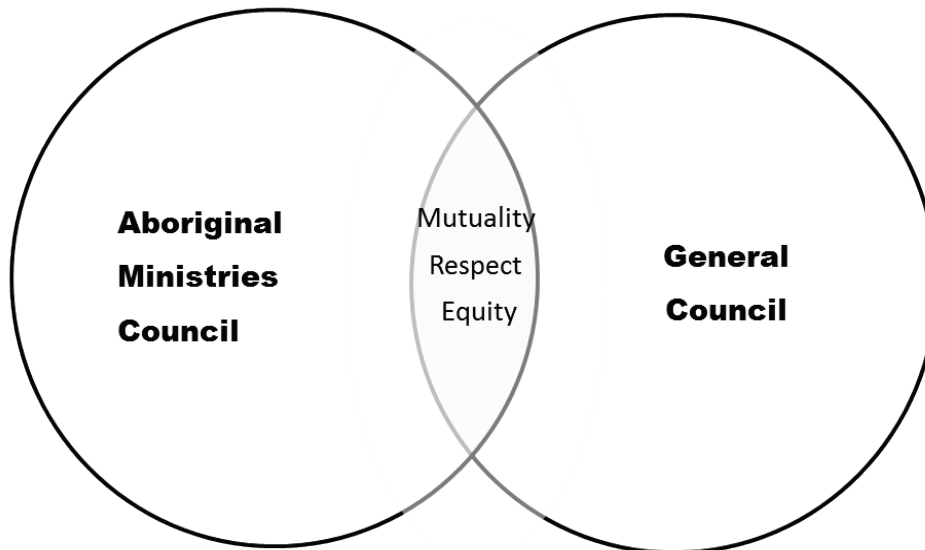
### ***Why This Recommendation?***

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.

### **BACKGROUND #4: Aboriginal Ministries ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))**

Further information about funding Aboriginal ministries can be found in Recommendation #6: Funding a New Model and Background #10: Finances ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report)).

Read the church's apologies on [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

Learn more about Indian residential schools and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement on [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

Find out more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca). Learn more about the United Church crest on [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

### **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** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

**BACKGROUNDER #6: Distribution of Responsibilities for the Processes of the Church** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

**BACKGROUNDER #7: Sample Covenant** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

**BACKGROUNDER #8: Networks** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

**BACKGROUNDER #9: Other Models Considered** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

### **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.<sup>6</sup>

### *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*

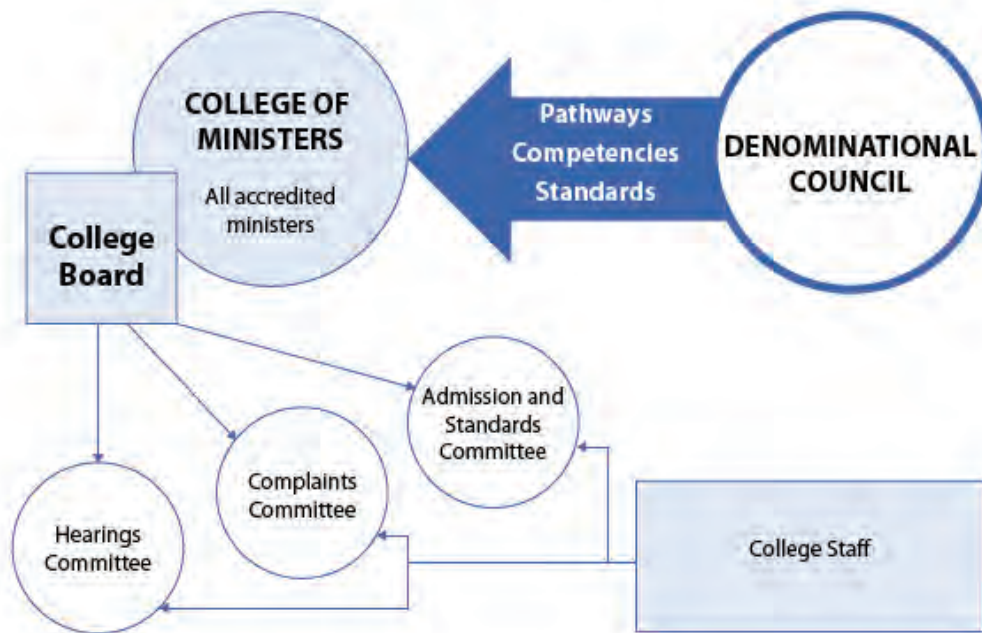
The college would be governed by a 20-person board with equal numbers of ministers and laypersons, consistent with the tradition of the United Church. Ministers would be elected by their peers on a regional basis. Ordained, diaconal, and designated lay ministers would be represented on the board. Laypersons 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.



## 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). 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"> <li>• Voluntary givings</li> <li>• Investment income</li> <li>• Bequests</li> <li>• Other income, such as rental fees</li> </ul>
Presbyteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments of pastoral charges</li> <li>• Investment income</li> <li>• Other income</li> </ul>
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments of presbyteries</li> <li>• Grants from the General Council Office</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment income</li> <li>• Bequests</li> <li>• Other income, such as sales of property</li> </ul>
General Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary givings to the Mission and Service Fund</li> <li>• Investment income</li> <li>• Bequests</li> <li>• Other income, such as retail sales</li> </ul>

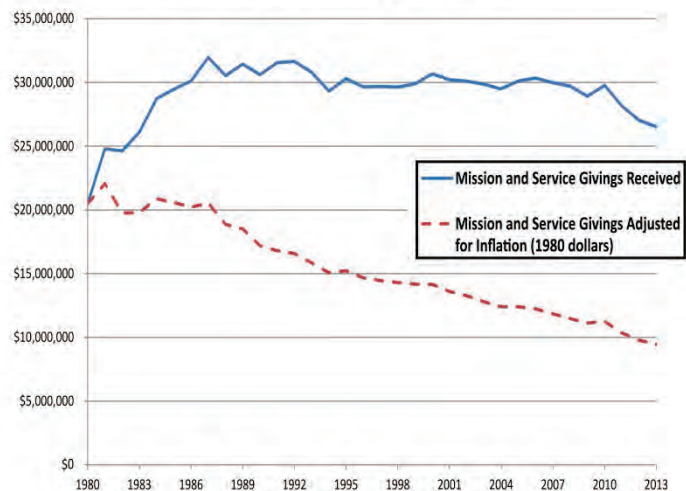
**The Challenge**

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.

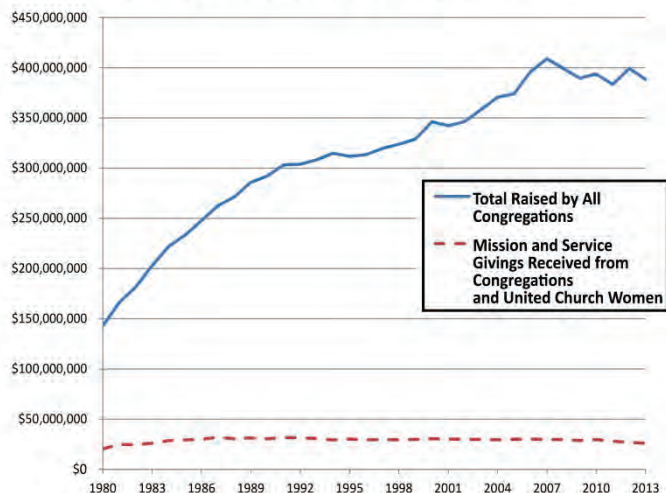
How did we get here? From 1980 to 2007, givings to the Mission and Service Fund remained fairly stable at approximately \$30 million per year. Despite a steady decline in the number of givers, growth in average gifts helped keep the total relatively stable. But over these decades, inflation cut the denomination’s 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

Mission and Service Givings, 1980–2013



Total Money Raised, All Congregations, 1980–2013



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 42<sup>nd</sup> 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.

## **BACKGROUNDER #10: Finances** ([www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report))

### **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.

## **Glossary<sup>7</sup>**

### *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.

#### *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.

### Notes

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](http://www.united-church.ca)). Based on updated spending projections for 2015, that figure is now at least \$11 million.

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).

4. [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk), retrieved January 12, 2015

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.

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

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.