

# **Pastoral Relationships, Thriving with Equity Research Project Final Report**

For The United Church of Canada  
General Council Office (Anti-Racism and Equity) and Office of Vocation

Submitted by co-research leads  
Kimiko Karpoff and Marcie Gibson  
[equity@united-church.ca](mailto:equity@united-church.ca)

August 2023  
(Project dates January 2022 to April 2023)



**The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada**

Pastoral Relationships, Thriving with Equity Research Project Final Report



Copyright © 2024  
The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada



The content of this resource is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd) Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include the United Church copyright notice and the Creative Commons licence.

Care has been taken to trace ownership of copyright material contained in this text. The publisher will gratefully accept any information that will enable it to rectify any reference or credit in subsequent printings.

The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200  
Toronto, ON Canada  
M8X 2Y4  
1-800-268-3781  
[united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca)

# Table of Contents

Reading This Report.....	7
Some Definitions .....	7
Acronyms .....	8
Confidentiality .....	8
Quotes in the Report .....	8
Introduction .....	10
A Disconnect: Who We Say We Are .....	12
The Research Process.....	15
Origins of the Project.....	15
Project Goals and Research Objectives .....	16
Reference Group.....	16
Lead Co-researchers.....	17
Background Research and Literature Review.....	18
Research Methodology.....	18
Publicity.....	19
Engagement and Data-Gathering Tools .....	20
Who Participated and Their Pastoral Relationships.....	22
Participants .....	22
Additional Equity Factors .....	24
Ministry Contexts and Pastoral Relationships.....	27
Participation and Wisdom of the Indigenous Church .....	30
Walk with Us.....	30
Colonial Structure and Institutional Racism .....	31
Listen to Indigenous Voices.....	32
Awareness in Pastoral Relationships .....	38
Disclosure of Identities .....	38
Comfort Talking about Identities .....	39
Positive Consequences of Highlighting Differences.....	41
Negative Consequences of Highlighting Differences .....	41
Conditions or Changes Needed to Increase Comfort.....	42
Motivation of Communities of Faith to Engage.....	43
Rationale for Motivation.....	45

Who Bears the Burden? .....	45
Special Months, Sundays, or Current Events.....	46
General Experiences in Pastoral Relationships.....	49
Feelings, Thriving, and Appreciation.....	49
Vulnerability.....	53
Being Yourself.....	54
Thriving of Pastoral Relationship .....	55
Isolation.....	57
Experience with Allies in the Community of Faith .....	60
Ministry and Personnel Committees and Lay Leadership .....	61
Experience in Pastoral Relationships—Other Issues .....	66
Experiences of Discrimination in Pastoral Relationships .....	68
Assumptions.....	68
Accents .....	70
Discrimination.....	71
Forms of Discrimination .....	72
Sites and Contexts of Discrimination .....	72
Underlying These Actions.....	75
Experiences That Severely Impact Pastoral Relationships .....	76
Positive Impacts of Addressing Discrimination.....	77
Negative Impacts of Discrimination.....	77
Discrimination in Interactions with the Wider Church .....	78
Personal Experiences of Discrimination—Further Issues Raised.....	79
Experiences of Communication in Pastoral Relationships.....	81
Initiating Communication .....	81
Barriers to Discussing Concerns and Discrimination.....	83
Personal and Situational Barriers for Ministry Personnel Raising Issues .....	88
Church-Related Situational Barriers for Ministry Personnel .....	89
Impact of Raising Concerns.....	90
Other Issues Discussed in Communications.....	93
Experience of Supports to Pastoral Relationships.....	95
Reaching Out Patterns and Hopes .....	95
Sources of Support.....	96

Intervention Support .....	98
Timing of Reaching Out.....	98
Types of Support Sought.....	99
Allyship of Regional Staff.....	101
Supports That Helped.....	103
What Is Helpful for Colleagues .....	105
Unhelpful or Harmful Supports .....	107
Ministry Personnel Supports Sought but Unavailable .....	108
Community of Faith Supports Sought but Unavailable.....	111
Cynicism, Trust, and Distrust.....	113
Financial Equity and Support at the Beginning .....	115
Office of Vocation Support.....	116
Experiences with Policy .....	118
Workplace Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence Prevention and Response Policy:	
Familiarity and Experience .....	118
Discernment about Using the Policy .....	119
Accessibility of the Policy and Hopes .....	120
Other Policy Work Needed .....	122
General Wisdom about Policy .....	125
Health, Helps, and Hopes in Pastoral Relationships .....	127
Help for Starting Off Well in the Pastoral Relationship.....	127
What Could Have Helped the Pastoral Relationship Start Off Well.....	130
Helps and Health: It Gets Better .....	134
What Equity-Seeking Ministry Personnel Hope Gets Better.....	137
How to Make It Better.....	140
The Role of Mentors, Role Models, and Others.....	142
The Positive and Possible Roles of the Wider Church.....	145
Heath, Helps, Hopes: This Project.....	155
Specific Identity-Types of Discrimination.....	156
Disability.....	156
Ableism .....	157
Body.....	158
Racism .....	158

Sexism .....	167
Heterosexism and Cissexism, Homophobia and Transphobia .....	174
Mental Health and Neurodiversity .....	178
Issues for Further Research or Follow-up .....	181
Bullying.....	181
Fair Compensation and Negotiating .....	184
Rural Context .....	187
Theological Reflections .....	190
Kin-dom of God .....	190
Prayers.....	193

Appendix 1: Notes on Previous Equity-Related Research: Not included but available on request

# Reading This Report

## Some Definitions

Throughout this project and report we use the phrase “equity-seeking ministry personnel.” It is not a perfect phrase without opposition, nor one that each participant themselves might choose or embrace. “Equity-seeking” is intended to emphasize that, for this study, participants’ identities are contextual to the presence, degree, or absence of equity in a pastoral relationship and, by extension, in the wider church. For example, it is not solely someone’s identity as a queer woman that dictates their experience of sexism or heterosexism. Rather, it is the presence of sexism and/or heterosexism (both a lack of equity) within a system or context.

Equity realizes that in order to ensure fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, we need to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some people and groups, particularly from marginalized communities. Equity moves closer to justice, and it is part of the work of the whole church.

Equity-seeking ministry personnel identify historically and often currently with marginalized or oppressed groups. In this study, equity-seeking includes those who are Indigenous, racialized (Black, Asian, mixed-race, and people of colour), Deaf, those who speak English as an additional language, francophone, disabled, neurodiverse, 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual), transgender, non-binary, and female, based on self-identification. Many, if not most, of the participants in this project identify with at least two of the identities or categories listed and often experience or discuss the intersectionality that creates. We decided not to expand this list to identities that are role-based, such as parent or caregiver, but do mention these aspects and others in the body of the report.

The term “ministry personnel” includes diaconal (DM), ordained (OM), or designated lay ministers (DLM) and candidates who are accountable to the Office of Vocation and are members of a regional council. Candidates are in the recognized Candidacy Pathways formation process toward any of the three streams of ministry (DM, OM, DLM), usually as students or in a supervised ministry experience. The term ministry personnel includes those who are not currently in pastoral relationships, including retired ministry personnel and those on short- and long-term disability. It does not include licensed lay worship leaders, congregationally designated ministers, and those on the discontinued service lists, because they do not have the same kinds of accountability, requirements, or pastoral relationships.

Pastoral relationships are formal, recognized, covenantal relationships between a community of faith or ministry setting (such as an outreach centre, chaplaincy, or seminary), ministry personnel, and a regional council. This could be an appointment, a call, or an employment situation.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In The United Church of Canada, *appointments* are time-limited pastoral relationships, sometimes renewable; *calls* are permanent pastoral relationships, until they are ended, and an *employment situation*

## Acronyms

Where possible, we have tried to write out acronyms in full. Some that you may find, particularly in quotes, include

- UCCan or UCC - The United Church of Canada, when used in quotes
- M and P - Ministry and Personnel Committee
- OV - Office of Vocation
- 2SLGBTQIA+ - Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, and others, or some variation of this
- LTD - long-term disability
- ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Disability
- BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colour

## Confidentiality

The United Church of Canada is a very large organization of hundreds of thousands of people, but it can feel very small, especially when considering ministry personnel with particular identities or intersections of identities. Wherever possible, we have tried to protect the anonymity of survey participants and confidentiality of all participants, while not negating or misrepresenting their stories and quotes.

Those who filled out the survey began with a consent question, and those who participated in focus groups and interviews were asked to sign an online consent form, explaining the project's approach to confidentiality, with optional demographic questions. Wherever possible, responses or quotes used in the research report would remove identifying information unless it is critical to the message. All names and raw data of all contributions collected remain solely with the researchers.

## Quotes in the Report

While it might be tempting to try to figure out who said something, based on who you know or have heard speak in the past, we want to encourage readers to resist doing so. Partly, that is to honour the privacy and vulnerability of the participants. It is also to disrupt the problematic idea that we know everyone and their stories. Most of the comments could have been said by at least two participants or multiple other ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada. This approach also holds space for new voices to emerge and intersectional nuance and honours the diversity within equity-seeking communities themselves.

When reading the report, material that is in double quote marks and italicized means it is a direct quote from a participant. Most of these are written in the first person to further preserve confidentiality. We have signified either ~ Survey participant or ~ Interview participant to differentiate the kind of participant and response. The label of ~ Interview participant denotes all

---

is a ministry position in an organization that is recognized by but not accountable to a regional council (such as a university chaplaincy).



verbal contributions, both from those interviewed and those participating in focus groups. In certain cases, we have specified ~ Indigenous participant where appropriate and important to the context, particularly from the Indigenous circle conversations. We have chosen not to name other identity characteristics, in order to respect confidentiality (see above).

## Introduction

*“Gracious God, we ask of you that you continue to walk with us and guide us in our healing journey, but also in this new path of ministry, with a reminder that we are called by you, O God. And gracious God, we ask of you that this whole time together and all of these meetings be a form of prayer. And that as we hand these stories over to our researchers, that we're also handing these stories over to you, O God, knowing that we are not alone. And you are so present in all of this work and in our ministries and in our calls. And we pray that we continue to have eyes to see that and to feel that.” ~ Interview participant <sup>2</sup>*

In The United Church of Canada, we see ourselves as a church rooted in justice and equality with a vision of Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice. Our roots flow from the social gospel tradition of bringing Christian responsibility to public influence. In many ways, we have been a model of equality. We were the first denomination to grant ordination to women and commissioning and ordination to people who are openly 2SLGBTQIA+. United Church ministry personnel come from different walks of life and many cultural backgrounds. And while our history includes the running of Indian Residential Schools, we have apologized, made reparation, and continue to work toward reconciliation.

And yet.

As much as this is who we are, it is not all of who we are. The United Church of Canada also emerged from the colonial settler, patriarchal roots on which Canada was founded. We are a story within a story, and we cannot simply shake off this story. This is a model based on power, wealth accumulation, and exploitation of resources. Our structures, polity, and ways of being are crafted from and around it. It's so much the water in which we swim that it is invisible.

As a consequence, many people experience our ethos of justice and equality as aspiration rather than lived reality. Equity-seeking ministry personnel continue to feel the weight of a system that has not included them. And yet we continue to move, in God's grace, toward a better way.

Our desire is for ministry personnel and communities of faith to thrive in their pastoral relationships. Still we hear equity-seeking ministry personnel—Indigenous, racialized, those who speak English as an additional language, francophone, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+, and female—describe the impacts of “isms” and not being able to bring their whole and full self to ministry. We also hear from communities of faith who feel ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of diversity and pluralism and want to support and benefit from healthy pastoral relationships.

---

<sup>2</sup> This prayer is part of a larger set of prayers that were initiated through the interviews and focus groups. You can read the rest of the prayers in the Theological Reflections section near the end of this report.

We must recognize that racism, ableism, heterosexism, sexism, cissexism<sup>3</sup> and other forms of oppression continue to exist in The United Church of Canada. This was highlighted during a powerful moment during General Council 43 when equity-seeking people came to the microphones to speak out about their experiences.

**The people best able to articulate how this impacts their ministries and pastoral relationships are those who live the experiences, and so those are the people whose stories we sought.** Some experiences were of challenges and disconnects and some of hope-filled ways of co-engagement that can serve as models for others. We heard painful stories. And we heard many expressions of deep, faithful witness and love for God.

Our hope and desire is that the Pastoral Relationships, Thriving with Equity Research Project will help guide The United Church of Canada to respond to the realities of a world that feels increasingly complex. It is and will be deeply uncomfortable work. Yet it is also beautiful and powerful work. What we are asking for is a paradigm shift. There is no easy way to do this. It will be difficult.

We also need to look at the evident truth. The truth is that The United Church of Canada alone cannot fix what are at heart societal issues. The church is not removed from Canada's history. Racism, sexism, anti-gay and anti-trans rhetoric, heteronormativity, and ableism are in our fabric, emerging as they do from our colonial and patriarchal history. We must acknowledge this. We can create policies where necessary, but the solution lies in our collective desire to truly live into the kin-dom of God among us. We look for technical fixes when we are called to transformation. The era of Christendom is at its end, and in the midst of so much upheaval, everything sits heavy. No one person will bring back the glory days of congregational life in the ways our parents and grandparents remember. Nor would that serve God. Ministry personnel often bear the burden when communities of faith wish it were so.

That does not mean that there is nothing to be done (although we would do well to heed American author and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein's admonition—don't just do something, sit there). Careful pause is the order of the day, not getting busy responding.

Michelle Good, author of *Truth Telling: Seven Conversations about Indigenous Life in Canada* (HarperCollins 2023), speaks about words and intentions in conflict with policy. For example, as a nation we speak about self-determination but institute a policy that allows "the crown" to overrule land-use decisions at its discretion. The church as an institution has created policies that limit our capacity in many ways. So, we need to think carefully about how we can use the capacity we do have. An example is that, in our structure, congregations function with autonomy, making it difficult to uphold national policies. Yet regional councils still have the final authority on many aspects of pastoral relationships. So, if there has been inequity within a

---

<sup>3</sup> Cissexism is a system of oppression and privilege that discriminates against trans and gender-diverse identities and/or expressions. It includes the presumption that all people are cisgender and produces barriers for anyone who fails to align with dominant gender expectations.

pastoral relationship, the regional council must step in to hold communities of faith accountable and even to consider not authorizing any new pastoral relationships. It is not enough to provide educational materials and to state intent, the General Council must intervene and walk alongside equity-seeking ministry personnel.

*“I’m the fourth minister to leave unhappily. There’s a problem here that needs to be dealt with.” ~ Interview participant*

Consistently, what we heard from ministry personnel and regional staff who work closely with communities of faith was a desire to shift structure from colonial ways to something aligned with an Indigenous world view, focused on relationship and reciprocity. Walk with us is both an invitation and a cry we heard over and over. Sustainability comes through reciprocity, much like we hear in Acts 2:44, where all believers shared resources in common.

*“I don’t need a policy. I need conversation, relationship. Relationship is harder to maintain than policy.” ~ Indigenous participant*

While our past flows from a colonial settler world view, our future can be different. We can learn from other models. We are in a moment of parable where our world is turned on its head. This is the place that God has called us.

In order to shift, many of us will need to relinquish some of what we have taken for granted. We must learn to listen to those whose voices have been silenced and to walk together on a new path. But rather than see this as scarcity, we are called to recognize the abundance of God’s kingdom. It is the banquet to which we are all invited.

## **A Disconnect: Who We Say We Are**

*“My experience as an out person in the church is very divided.... If you know the church through The United Church of Canada website, it’s one church. And if you know the church through experience in congregations, it’s a different church.” ~ Interview participant*

*“As members of the United Church, we look at those websites, we think, Oh, look, we’ve done it. Right? That we are affirming, we are welcoming, we are (as opposed to we are becoming). And so in some cases, I’m not racist. No, we’re not racist. It says right there on our website, we’re not racist, without us even really thinking about, do we recognize racism? So it’s our vision.... It’s aspirational.” ~ Interview participant*

On the United Church website, [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca), under the section “What We Believe,” the opening statement frames who we say we are: “United Church faith communities welcome people from all backgrounds and orientations—wherever you are in your faith journey.” This is what we say, right up front. United Church faith communities welcome people from all backgrounds and orientations. And note that it is not even “The United Church of Canada” but

“United Church faith communities.” That is each of our congregations, each of our community ministries, each campus ministry, each new church iteration.

While The United Church of Canada is a national denominational entity, our lives and ministries are lived out in communities and neighbourhoods across the country. And as we scan across the country, as we listen to stories of people, stories of ministers, stories of communities of faith, it becomes clear that “what we believe” is not universally lived out, or even true, across the vastness of the denomination.

*“The hypocrisy of the wider church [is revealed] in terms of its website-stated mission and goals and the reality on the ground.” ~ Survey participant*

We understand, perhaps, that these words are aspirational. As people of faith, spiritual seekers, and those who long for the sacred, we know that it is always a “becoming.” And yet, our website, our public face, as it were, is not predominantly written for us, but for those looking to learn about us. Some of those people, including ministry personnel, walk into our churches, expecting to find a place of welcome, whoever they are. And they don’t find it.

In 1964, when Martin Luther King Jr wrote that we don’t need allies more devoted to order than justice, he could have been speaking to us today.

adrienne maree brown, an activist of emergent transformative justice, uses the image of fractals as an example of how patterns repeat in small and large scales. Fractals are created by repeating a simple process in an ongoing feedback loop. maree brown observes that how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale. What this means for churches is that our visions of the kingdom of God in the world must first be lived out at the local level. Patterns that we see in communities of faith echo both up to and down from the community at large, and through The United Church of Canada. If inequity exists in our congregations, it exists in the whole United Church. And vice versa. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 12:26, the body is a whole made up of many parts. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. Since communities of faith are parts of larger contexts, that suffering is repeated outward.

It is beyond our scope to fix the whole of Canada. And, like any meaningful change, it must start close by. How we engage in our own work of recognizing our individual place and roles in White supremacy, colonization, becoming anti-racist, and truth and reconciliation, how we learn to be in community, how we treat each other, will ultimately impact all our relations and our broader communities.

There is a lot to be done and many ways in which we have been walking for years toward our aspirations. We are doing so at a time of turmoil and shift in the world. Lucky us. But as Jesus’ life shows us, getting to the kingdom of God can be disruptive. It shakes up the status quo. Sometimes we are the ones made uncomfortable, because we find the beloved as we know it is lost. Sometimes the powers that need calling out are ourselves, our friends, or ones within our

communities. It's uncomfortable. But something new emerges, is emerging, as we live through the shift.

# The Research Process

## Origins of the Project

This Pastoral Relationships, Thriving with Equity Research Project is one of three different but interrelated research and statistical projects exploring equity for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada. There are two other projects. [Leadership Counts](#) is a voluntary identity survey to gather demographics of United Church ministry personnel, staff of General Council and regional council offices, and General Council committee members. Equity in Compensation, work being done by the [Total Compensation Review Task Group](#), will engage in statistically analyzing compensation policies and practices for ministry personnel in communities of faith and in the General Council and regional council offices. One of the aims is to examine the impact of these policies on ministers who are Indigenous, racialized, women, 2SLGBTQIA+, and persons with disabilities. While each of these research projects takes place separately and raw data is not being shared between them, the results and findings will be cross-referenced to enable more comprehensive analysis and strategic planning. This group will also work to develop any proposals needed to

- articulate fair, equitable, and sustainable compensation policies and practices in both the pastoral relations and the staff systems
- fill gaps in data so that a fuller equity assessment may be undertaken in the future
- address discrepancies that may be identified through the study

Spurred by ongoing and intensifying public and private conversations in the church about the experiences of equity-seeking ministry personnel in pastoral relationships, this study was first seriously considered in early 2021. At the time, the Pastoral Relations Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council (in the Greater Toronto Area and north of there) was engaged in a [related project](#), called the *Pastoral Relations Commission 2021 Equity Goal Research Project*. This project was studying the experiences of equity-seeking ministry personnel who were seeking, negotiating, and establishing pastoral relationships in that region and what could be done to increase equity at that stage of the pastoral relations system. This study was conducted by contract researcher Marcie Gibson. General Council was aware of this research and sought to consider similar questions on a national scale, though not focused exclusively on the early stages of pastoral relationships. Approached by the General Council Office's Equity and Anti-Racism Office and Office of Vocation to undertake this national research, the authors of this report—Marcie Gibson and Kimiko Karpoff—agreed to initial conversations. They worked with General Council Office staff Adele Halliday, Anti-Racism and Equity Lead, and Marlene Britton, Director of Policy and Programs for Ministry Personnel. Jenny Stephens, from the Office of Vocation, was also involved in early phases of this project before her retirement. The work included recruiting a reference group of six diverse people to accompany and inform the research process (more on the reference group below). The project and paid stipend contracts officially launched in January 2022 and ran until April 2023.

## Project Goals and Research Objectives

In addition to providing forums for equity-seeking ministry personnel to share their wisdom, experiences, and perspectives, three goals led this research:

- to identify current patterns of thriving and inequities in pastoral relationships with equity-seeking ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada
- to identify ways that inequities can be prevented or mitigated through denominational actions such as proactive education, early intervention, pastoral support, and systemic change
- to incite and foster positive change in The United Church of Canada and beyond

Initially, this project sought to consider the following primary questions:

- How can our structures enable and support ministry personnel to thrive in pastoral relationships with communities of faith who are predominantly different than they are?
- How can our structures enable and support communities of faith to thrive in pastoral relationships with ministry personnel who are significantly different in some way than most of their members?
- The United Church of Canada has developed equity policies and racial justice training. What are the barriers to these being lived out locally, especially in pastoral relationships?
- What are the effects of discrimination, targeted actions, microaggressions, bias, ignorance, and assumptions on pastoral relationships?
- What are the most effective ways for the regional council and General Council to be catalysts for changing problematic behaviours and attitudes in a community of faith?

In developing these goals and questions into a research methodology, the authors of this report consulted with numerous equity-seeking and identity-based networks in the church, with individuals, and most especially with General Council Office staff Adele Halliday and Marlene Britton. During initial conversations with leaders in the Indigenous Office of Vocation and Indigenous Ministries, they asked us to give them space to discern how best to participate, in the midst of other concurrent crises and needs. In part, this is what led to the fall Indigenous circle conversation method.

## Reference Group

Through the national nominations process we sought expressions of interest, which helped us gather together a reference group to advise and accompany the research process. Working with this diverse group was a vital aspect of shaping this project and getting feedback on the outreach, research tools, strategies, and initial data as they were developing. The reference group's mandate was to

- offer suggestions for the design of the research methodology, including shaping the research questions
- consult with other stakeholder parties as needed to design an equitable, culturally sensitive, and effective research process



- explore questions of access (such as language or remote communities) in the research design and implementation process
- assist with the interpretation and implications of the qualitative results
- offer insights about the trends around analysis, including how to gather recommendations from the emerging trends

The reference group met approximately every second week through the design stage of the project, then gradually monthly or bi-monthly. In January 2023, we held a two-day in-person consultation with the reference group and Marlene Britton to examine initial findings and emerging trends.

Five members of the reference group participated throughout the project:

- Laura MacGregor (lay member, researcher, Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council)
- The Rev. Franklyn James (ordained minister, Bermuda-Nova Scotia Regional Council and Pacific Mountain Regional Council)
- The Rev. Sung-Ran Kim (ordained minister, Shining Waters Regional Council); Kim was nominated by the United Church Korean Network through their own internal process when the network was asked to encourage participation
- The Rev. Karen Orlandi (diaconal minister, Horseshoe Falls Regional Council)
- The Rev. Liz Mackenzie (ordained minister, Shining Waters Regional Council)

The Rev. Étienne LeSage (ordained minister, Horseshoe Falls Regional Council) and the Rev. Darla Sloan (ordained minister, Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council) each served for part of a term.

Reference group members brought their abundance of wisdom and personal, professional, and church experience to the table. The group was intentionally diverse in race, language, dis/ability, sexuality, gender, professional background and training, and in their connections to networks and structures in The United Church of Canada. We are abundantly grateful for their insights, persistent questions, encouragement, commitment, hard work, and collective spirit throughout this project.

## Lead Co-researchers

The Rev. Kimiko Karpoff is a diaconal minister with a background in communications and community organizing. She is a writer and photographer with a particular interest in the intersection of healing, community, and story. Kimiko lives in British Columbia on the unceded ancestral lands of Coast Salish peoples. The Rev. Marcie Gibson is a diaconal minister with a background in community organizing and social sciences. She is passionate about the intersection of ministry, social justice, authentic questions, and community learning. She is currently on program staff at the Centre for Christian Studies, and a PhD student at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Marcie lives in Hamilton, Ontario, with her large, queer, interfaith, Jewish family. Both researchers brought an abundance of experience as equity-seeking ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada, in pastoral relationships, in

facilitation and wider church committees, and in networks and advocacy in and beyond the church.

## Background Research and Literature Review

As we were beginning this project, we reviewed each of the [equity-related commitments of The United Church of Canada](#), read through previous equity-related research reports in the United Church, and searched for research in other similar denominations.

The previous United Church of Canada equity-related research projects conducted between the 1980s and 2020s include

- 1984 - Women in Ministry Research Report by Jane Silman and Mary Graham, commissioned by the Women in Ministry Overview Group, Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (84 pages)
- 1999 - Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Persons in Ministry, consultation report by Ken DeLisle, commissioned by the Division of Mission in Canada and Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (54 pages)
- 2011 - Report on the Results of The United Church of Canada Identity Survey by Jane Armstrong Research Associates (38 slides)
- 2017 – The United Church of Canada Ministry Personnel Demographic Report ([65 slides](#))
- 2018 - Flourishing in Ministry Study: Ministry Personnel Wellbeing in The United Church of Canada by the Wellbeing at Work Research Group, University of Notre Dame and United Church of Canada partnership. There is a [summary](#) or a [full report](#) (109 pages).
- 2019 - Intercultural Ministries Survey, Jane Armstrong Research and Associates. ([20 slides](#))
- 2021 - Pastoral Relations Equity Goal Research Project for Shining Waters Regional Council by Marcie Gibson ([64 pages](#))
- 2022 - Sabbatical Report on Experiences of Ministry Personnel in the Admissions Process by Diane Blanchard (41 pages). Results available on request from the researcher.

Notes on their methodology and relevant information can be found in Appendix 1, available on request, and more detailed notes can be accessed on request from the researchers. This is the first national-scale United Church of Canada research project that took an intersectional approach to experiences of equity-seeking ministry personnel in pastoral relationships. Likewise, similar research from other denominations or academic research primarily looks at the experiences through the lens of one or two identities, such as Black women in leadership. While this research was important, opportunities for comparison were limited.

## Research Methodology

This qualitative research project used a feminist, participatory action research methodology. As researchers, we were clear that we would bring our own perspectives as equity-seeking ministry

personnel into the project, and that there was a shared goal to engage a diverse spectrum of equity-seeking ministry personnel and voices in order to affect sustainable and substantive change in The United Church of Canada. We did not assume that we would interact with all equity-seeking ministry personnel within The United Church of Canada, nor that those who chose to participate were quantitatively representative, although we did intentionally strive for diverse and fulsome participation. Within the parameters of financial and COVID-related restrictions, we sought to ensure that all equity-seeking ministry personnel who wished to participate had opportunities to do so at their own comfort level; whether by talking or writing, in a group or individually, at the same time or separately, anonymously or confidentially, in English or French (with potential for other languages). The Indigenous circle conversations were developed in collaboration with Indigenous leadership at a time that was accessible and appropriate to Indigenous participants (in addition to their access to the survey, interviews, and focus groups). The survey deadline was extended a few times to ensure opportunity for more participants, and new focus groups were created where requested.

This project was qualitative in so far as it focused on gathering the wisdom, experiences, and perspectives of participants who chose to engage. While a small number of survey questions did use rating scales or multiple choices, particularly in the demographic sections, this was meant to offer participants a break from typing out answers and to engage different kinds of thinking. Our data analysis did consider whether there were demographic trends with some of the answers. These should not be taken as quantitative data representing all equity-seeking ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada. They demonstrate trends and emphases among the participants of this study. The project used a snowball sampling in so far as we encouraged participants and community leaders in the church to invite others, above and beyond our own publicity. Anyone who met the criteria was welcome to participate.

Initially in our research design, we had planned to host a parallel process of online survey and focus groups with communities of faith who are in a pastoral relationship with equity-seeking ministry personnel. However, once the data-gathering process started, and we had had little interest from communities of faith, we realized that this component made the overall project too broad. Furthermore, that research would benefit from a different methodological approach, which might involve group gatherings with small groups of community of faith leaders and more involvement with regional staff. It was decided to postpone that part of the project indefinitely.

Initially, our research design also hoped to be able to offer equity-seeking ministry personnel the option to gather together in person, in order to hear stories face-to-face, encourage connections, workshop strategies, and use some more creative storytelling techniques. Unfortunately, the extent of the COVID pandemic and travel bans, in addition to costs, meant that this was not feasible within our data phase.

## Publicity

Information about the project, its goals, and opportunities to participate were hosted on an independent website so that it could be easily updated. Information and invitations were circulated through multiple different media—links on the United Church website, United Church

e-newsletters, an emailed letter from the Office of Vocation to all ministry personnel, Facebook posts in general United Church, ministry-specific, and identity-specific groups, and emails to identity-specific networks with a request that they then distribute to their members. The researchers spoke at seven regional council meetings (six electronically), provided PowerPoint slides to all, and met with the pastoral relations ministers and community capacity development coordinators to answer their questions and request their encouragement.

## Engagement and Data-Gathering Tools

The online survey of equity-seeking ministry personnel was available in English from April to October 2022, and in French from July to October 2022. The survey was anonymous in so far as it did not require participants to share any uniquely identifying pieces of information, such as their name or contact information. All questions, apart from the first consent-to-participate question, were optional. The first 37 questions were demographic questions about (a) participants' identities (age range, gender, Indigeneity, path into ministry with the United Church, etc.) and (b) the context of their pastoral relationship (size of community of faith, size of community, racial makeup, type of ministry, hours, length of pastoral relationship, etc.). Recognizing that many ministry personnel are in, or have been in, multiple pastoral relationships, we asked that they answer for their current pastoral relationship or a previous one about which they wanted to share extensively. The subsequent 90 questions covered areas of (c) general awareness and openness (d) general experience of the pastoral relationship (e) personal experiences of discrimination (f) communication dynamics in the pastoral relationship (g) experience of supports (h) awareness and interaction with United Church policy (i) pastoral relationship health, helps, and hopes and (j) final thoughts. Note: Blank survey questions are available on request.

**Ninety-five** equity-seeking ministry personnel chose to participate in either the English or French survey, and no one declined the consent question.

**Eighteen** individual interviews were facilitated and recorded via video (Zoom) between May and November 2022, with the majority happening from May to July 2022. Participants did have the option to meet via telephone. Because of COVID restrictions during the primary research phase, interviews were not offered in-person except at one in-person regional council event at which a researcher was already present.

**Seventeen** focus groups were facilitated and recorded in May, June, and September 2022 via video (Zoom). Of the groups, five were with institutional allies (one with intentional interim ministers and four with regional council staff) and 12 were identity-specific for ministry personnel who are

- Indigenous ministry personnel
- Francophone ministry personnel (discussions were held in French)
- Black ministry personnel
- Asian ministry personnel
- Disabled ministry personnel - primarily with mental health and neurodiversity
- Disabled ministry personnel - primarily with physical disabilities

- Cis-female gender ministry personnel (sexism in ministry)
- Non-Binary, Trans, and/or Two-Spirit ministry personnel
- Queer, Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay ministry personnel

The following two types were offered but did not run, for lack of participation:

- racialized ministry personnel who use English as an additional language
- all racialized ministry personnel

Each equity identity-specific focus group session was offered at least twice, with 24 sessions offered in total. Of the 17 focus groups held, five had only one person each, so they were facilitated as interviews. The Black, Asian, intentional interim, and regional council staff groups were all added at the request of those who wished to participate in such a conversation. There were a number of participants who said they preferred the more confidential interview format or that it was more convenient to schedule. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, following a common set of questions and topics that the researchers had formulated, with considerable variation depending on the interviewees' and participants' preferences and situations. Most interviews lasted between 90 to 120 minutes, with a few focus groups being closer to 60 to 75 minutes. (The focus group/interview question outline is available online.)

Participants in both the individual interviews and focus groups were asked to fill out an online consent form in either English or French. The form included agreement, contact information, and optional demographic questions that mirrored those asked in the online survey about (a) their personal identities and (b) the context of their pastoral relationship.

Three Indigenous circle conversations were held in the fall of 2022, concurrent with gatherings of Indigenous ministry personnel and some lay leaders, one in the west in British Columbia, one centrally at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (Manitoba), and one in the east at Five Oaks Retreat Centre (Ontario). At the request of leadership within the Indigenous church, Kimiko attended these three gatherings and facilitated an open voluntary, listening time as well as more informal one-on-one conversations. Participants could choose to attend the session or not, and knew that this was related specifically to the project. These conversations were not recorded electronically, but extensive notes were written afterwards.

## Who Participated and Their Pastoral Relationships

As the three Indigenous consultations were held through an oral Indigenous process, demographic information on identities and context was not asked of those who participated in these gatherings. Some Indigenous participants also chose to participate as individuals through interviews or focus groups, so their information is included in the following big picture.

It is always hard to know the reach of a research project, as it not only affects those who participate directly, but their networks of conversations, colleagues, and communities of faith. These contexts also inform the ways that people participate, the stories and wisdom they choose to share. There are lots of factors that may have shaped who chose to engage with one or more of the invitations; trust, comfort, identity, experience, accessibility, relevance, time, and timing. Being voluntary and primarily quantitative, we are clear that this research does not speak for all equity-seeking ministry personnel in the church. It does encompass a broad section and selection of their voices. It is vitally important that we hear those voices through this research and the myriad other ways that equity-seeking ministry personnel choose to speak out about thriving in pastoral relationships.

### Participants

This participant picture is based on the 149 answers to demographic questions we received on either the surveys or consent forms. (The full list of questions is available online.) Fifty-four are from interview or focus group participants. We actually had 58 interview/focus group participants over the course of 35 conversations, with four people participating in more than one conversation, hence 54 individuals. Ninety-five answers are from the survey participants (in both English and French). Since the survey was anonymous, there is likely some overlap wherein a person filled out a survey as well as a consent form for an interview/focus group. These are not major concerns.

Participants in addition to the Indigenous circle conversations:

- 149 participants who filled out consent and demographic information
  - 95 survey participants (in English or French)
  - 54 individuals taking part in interviews or focus groups

Each of the following criteria looks at an aspect of identity or context in isolation because it is organized by question groups, like a different viewpoint across a whole field of wildflowers. However, most of the participants identify with at least two if not multiple aspects of equity-seeking identities, and all have different contexts. This intersectionality is crucial to recognize because it is not only an accumulation of experiences or factors. The ways that equity factors interact are often most influential or detrimental to a person's experience. "It's not just one thing or another." These intersectional aspects are reflected more strongly in the quotes and text of the document. The choice to include certain demographic questions was also shaped by The United Church of Canada's work on the Leadership Counts project and other United Church research that may be used in comparison.

**Indigeneity, Racial and Ethnic Identities:** Seventeen percent identify as racialized or a person of colour, 3 percent did not answer or answered “other,” and 80 percent answered no. Fourteen different racial and ethnic identities are shared by the participants, with 13 percent identifying with more than one group. Six percent identify as Black, e.g., African, Afro-Caribbean, African Canadian descent, and 2 percent as South American/Caribbean, with a combined total of 8 percent identifying as Korean, Japanese, Filipino, or Chinese, and 7 percent identifying as Indigenous. Eighty-five percent identify as White, e.g., European descendant, or White as well, with 75 percent identifying White as their only racial or ethnic identity. Some 7.4 percent identify as an Indigenous person original to Canada, e.g., First Nations status and non-status, Inuk (Inuit), or Métis, with an approximately equal number identifying as Métis and First Nations. It should be noted that this does not include the identities of most participants from the Indigenous consultations.

**Language and Citizenship:** When asked their language of most comfort, 5 percent chose French, 2 percent Korean, 90 percent English, and 3 percent a total of other choices. Nine percent speak two or more languages, 31 percent are bilingual, and 60 percent of participants are unilingual. Two percent identify Indigenous or Métis status as their citizenship, 3 percent are temporary residents, 3 percent are permanent residents, 15 percent are Canadian citizens born outside of Canada, and 77 percent are Canadian citizens born in Canada.

**Age and Disability:** One percent are under age 30, and 9 percent are aged 71 or older, with 90 percent 30 to 70 years old. Thirty-three percent identify as a person with a disability and/or as disabled, and 67 percent do not. Of those who chose to then disclose or describe their disabilities, 11 named physical disabilities, including sensory impairment (such as sight). Seventeen named medical conditions and chronic diseases that affect pain, mobility, fatigue, and immunity, such as diabetes, EDS, and obesity. Twenty-three named mental health and neurodiversities, such as clinical depression, anxiety, ADHD, autism, and PTSD.

**Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexuality:** Four percent identify their gender as non-binary, gender-creative, or gender-queer, 22 percent identify it as male, and 74 percent identify it as female. Taking multiple identities into account, 3 percent identify as transgender, 7 percent identify as gender-fluid/gender-queer, Two-Spirit, and other genders, 86 percent identify as cisgender, and 7 percent didn’t answer about their gender identity. Likewise, taking multiple choices into account, 5 percent identify as asexual or nonsexual, 11 percent as queer, and a combined total of 6 percent as polyamorous, pansexual, or Two-Spirit. Twelve percent identify as bisexual, 16 percent as gay or lesbian, and 62 percent as heterosexual.

**Regional Council:** All 16 regions of the United Church are represented by multiple participants. Eastern Ontario Outaouais, Horseshoe Falls, Pacific Mountain, Prairie to Pine, and Shining Waters are the most frequent. When comparing the regional and Office of Vocation groupings, 10 percent relate to North and Central Ontario, 11 percent to Atlantic, 13 percent to Mountain, 19 percent to Prairie, 21 percent to Southwestern Ontario, and 25 percent to Québec and Eastern Ontario.

**Ministry Streams, Admissions, and Years of Service Category:** Two percent are designated lay ministers, 11 percent are diaconal ministers, 78 percent are ordained ministers, 4 percent are candidates for ministry (in any stream), and 5 percent did not answer or are lay regional staff. When asked if they were or are registered in the United Church admissions process—a program to receive and recognize those who are already ministry personnel in a different denomination and wish to transfer ministry status and membership into the United Church—2 percent currently are, 17 percent have been admitted through the process, 5 percent didn't answer, and 76 percent said no. Some participants may have had difficulty understanding the question about their denominational origin, as 13 percent didn't answer or said it was not applicable. Two percent are currently in the admissions process, 2 percent were admitted from a US denomination, 7 percent were admitted from a denomination outside of Canada or the US, 13 percent were admitted from another Canadian denomination, 4 percent serve under supply or special circumstances, and only 60 percent say they were commissioned, ordained, or recognized as a diaconal lay minister in the United Church. Lastly, in terms of their Years of Service ministry category, 15 percent were not sure or not applicable, 3 percent were step 1 or 2 (candidates), 11 percent were category A or B, 19 percent were category C, D, or E, and 52 percent were category F. Apart from F, categories B and C were most represented.

## Additional Equity Factors

Defining the parameters for “equity-seeking” was necessary to create boundaries around the research project. At the same time, the named identities are not all the identities that people have, and people may identify in a variety of ways. At the end of the demographic section of the survey (and optional questions of the consent form), we asked if there were additional identities. This question was intended to allow participants to specify anything they believed to be significant to being equity-seeking that had not been previously named.

Particularly noted:

- relationship status and family
- parenting
- age
- mental health/neurodiversity
- non-congregational ministries

Other issues include obesity, ministry status (e.g., intentional interim, voluntary associate minister), and gender.

## Implications of Additional Equity Factors Mentioned

The initial analysis of information gathered did not include the intersectionality that many equity-seeking ministry personnel identify. While being relatively youthful or single are not uncommon in society at large, that they were mentioned with frequency by equity-seeking ministry personnel is notable and raises questions that perhaps need to be considered.



## **Relationship Status and Family**

While being single was the most noted relationship status, married and non-cohabiting were also mentioned. Several people also noted being part of non-traditional families. Some of this also came out in interviews and other parts of the survey. Although we did not necessarily ask for elaboration, some were shared.

*“Unrecognized microaggressions unknowingly target my chosen family, partners, my dearest friends and my communities.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Parenting**

The age and particularities of parenting varied. Several parent young children, however teenagers and adult children were also mentioned as well as adopted and birth children. Some noted parenting children with intellectual, developmental, and mental health disabilities. Lone parenting was also mentioned, however, not all people identifying as parents noted whether they were or were not co-parenting.

Issues around being a parent emerged also out of interviews and other parts of the survey. The need to attend to family, work around school and other schedules, and expectations from congregation members for availability at any time were named. Some also mentioned how this hinders their capacity to participate in wider church work, since meetings and gatherings often do not include child care. The COVID pandemic created an added challenge for ministry personnel, such as creating new online worship and pastorally supporting people from a distance while also schooling and parenting children at home. There is further discussion of this in the Experiences of Discrimination in Pastoral Relationships section.

*“I think sometimes the challenge for me around parenting comes in serving the wider church...just being able to serve on the Executive or doing other national projects or work. It feels limited by access to awareness around school schedules and the reality of child care and that kind of thing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“They want me to have children, but they don’t want me to parent them.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Age**

While our demographic questions only asked for participants' ages in categories of under 30, 31–70, and 70+, a number of participants wrote "under 40" in the open-ended question of other significant identities. This would suggest that ministry personnel in their 30s, as well as ministry personnel in their 20s, are experiencing ageism or age-related issues in their pastoral relationships. Given the high average age of ministry personnel, this is not surprising. Others mentioned being perceived as young regardless of their actual age and experience. In interviews, issues noted included perceptions that they would have endless amounts of energy to do all of the things congregation members wanted or that they lack knowledge and experience.

*“I think ageism is as much a factor as the others. I am under 45 and my youth compared to older congregants seems to always be an issue.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I am considering leaving the church as I can’t handle the ageism any longer.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Mental Health/Neurodiversity**

How people name and understand mental health varies. Particularities noted include ADHD, bipolar, anxiety, and clinical depression. These are issues that are still not well understood and often stigmatized in society at large. Consequently, some ministry personnel do not disclose their mental health within the community of faith. This was named by many in the survey and interviews; however, some did include it here additionally.

## **Non-congregational Ministries**

While the study intentionally used the language of “pastoral relationships” as a way to be broadly inclusive of the variety of positions held by ministry personnel, the majority of pastoral relationships in the United Church are congregational. Other roles held by ministry personnel that were particularly mentioned include chaplaincy and secular or non–United Church settings. And while one’s workplace is not personal and some (although certainly not all) feel supported in their positions by their employer, they often named being overlooked or unacknowledged by The United Church of Canada.

*“I’m accountable. I need to be in good standing. I need to have police records check, all of that stuff. But really, I could have this job without being a member of a regional council. I could be a sort of a Lone Ranger minister. I had to show my ordination certificate when I got this job, to be recognized. But now if I left the United Church, I don’t think they would notice.... An example where I actually needed support, [the United Church] could have stood up with me and said, ‘No, you can’t treat our minister, one of our members this way....’ But I remember writing the Pastoral Relations Committee, ‘I need support,’ and they just said, ‘No, that’s not our mandate. You know, maybe that’s true, but I think there could have been a creative way. It’s like, ‘that’s not our mandate, but how can we make this happen?’” ~ Interview Participant*

## **Class**

One further issue that was not named in the surveys but emerged in interviews was class differences creating a disconnect with people in the community of faith. As an example, ministry personnel in predominantly middle-class congregations experienced unrealistic expectations from congregation members around capacity to purchase homes or vehicles as well as differences in styles of communication and having to learn to be less direct.

*“I would add class. I think class is a real issue in our church as well. Because so many of our congregations are middle class or upper middle class. And probably a lot of our ministry personnel have been as well. But I noticed that coming from a different class background, that there’re definitely a lot of barriers and ways of working in the world that you don’t know if you don’t grow up middle class. So a lot of financial pieces; how to navigate even within not only the*

*church, but the academic system. Looking for money, finding data, a lot of people know that there's support. And if you've never been in a position to know how to work the system, you may not know. That's something I've learned the hard way, kind of figuring it out as I go along.” ~ Interview participant*

## Ministry Contexts and Pastoral Relationships

The majority, 78 percent, of participants are in a current call, appointment, or recognized employment situation. Some 12 percent recently retired and therefore are answering about or discussing previous pastoral relationships, and 4 percent are currently in search and therefore doing the same. One percent are on short-term leave, and 2 percent are on long-term disability and therefore answering about previous pastoral relationships. Three percent are lay staff (from the regional council staff conversations) or did not answer. As we recognize that equity-seeking ministry personnel may be or may have been in multiple pastoral relationships, we asked that they focus on either their current pastoral relationship or one that they would like to discuss and describe in depth. These demographics about their pastoral relationship may not reflect their current situation, but they do describe most of the pastoral relationships the rest of the research data is referencing.

**Geography, Regions, and Communities:** The regional councils with which their pastoral relationships are affiliated are almost identical to those above, with the addition of 1 percent not applicable, and a few percentage point differences.<sup>4</sup> Some 3 percent are very isolated or on reserve, 3 percent are an alternative ministry format such as online or not applicable, 5 percent are regional staff, 5 percent are a combination of different-sized communities, 9 percent are suburban, 12 percent are rural, 24 percent are in a small town or village, 18 percent are in a medium-sized urban centre, and 21 percent are in a large urban centre (usually more than 300,000 people). In terms of the COL for the community of faith (Cost of Living group—based on housing costs on a scale of 1–6), the most frequent is COL3, followed by numbers of 2, 4, and 5.<sup>5</sup>

**Type and Size of Ministry Setting:** Some 2 percent are with new ministry initiatives, 2 percent are with non-congregational, camping, community or incorporated ministries, 4 percent are with recognized non–United Church ministries, 5 percent are regional staff, 25 percent are with a multi-point, mixed, or shared congregational community of faith, and 60 percent are with a single congregational community of faith. In terms of size, 7 percent are with an alternative ministry expression or incorporated ministry or not applicable, and 5 percent are regional staff. Of those with congregational communities of faith, only 9 percent have over 350 members, 22 percent have 5–60 members, 30 percent have 60–150 members, and 28 percent have 150–350 members.

---

<sup>4</sup> 10 percent relate to North and Central Ontario, 13 percent to Atlantic, 13 percent to Mountain, 20 percent to Prairie, 20 percent to Southwestern Ontario, and 23 percent to Québec and Eastern Ontario.

<sup>5</sup> 5 percent COL1, 11 percent COL2, 24 percent COL3, 11 percent COL4, 9 percent COL5, 5 percent COL6, 9 percent are not applicable or are serving a recognized non–United Church ministry, 26 percent did not answer

**Age, Racial, and Linguistic Diversity of the Communities of Faith:** Some 46 percent of represented ministries include the participation of all ages, including teenagers and young adults, 25 percent include only children and adults, 10 percent only adults, 12 percent only seniors (everyone is 60+), 2 percent specifically with youth and young adults, and 6 percent did not answer. Some 3 percent are specific racialized communities of faith,<sup>6</sup> 4 percent are a significant multi-racial or multi-ethnic mix (less than 30 percent White members), 7 percent are multi-racial or multi-ethnic mix (30–80 percent White), and 81 percent are communities of faith that are mostly racially White (80+ percent). Twelve different languages are used for primary ministry activities and/or worship. Taking multiple languages into account, 2 percent use Indigenous languages, 2 percent use ASL or other sign languages, 2 percent use Korean, 12 percent use French (4 percent exclusively), 5 percent use a variety of other languages, 5 percent didn't answer, and 90 percent use English (80 percent exclusively).

**Character and Affirming Status<sup>7</sup> of the Communities of Faith:** When asked if the community of faith has a particular cultural character, particularly as recognized by the United Church, such as Deaf Ministries, 4 percent are Ministries in French, 5 percent are ethnocultural ministries (with a specific ethnocultural community), 3 percent are chaplaincies, healthcare, or outreach ministries, and 74 percent do not have a particular cultural character. In addition to the choices provided, participants state that 5 percent are specifically White/Caucasian, 3 percent are rural, farming, or maritime, and 3 percent total are ministries primarily with disabled people, 2SLGBTQIA+, and those who are socially marginalized. In terms of Affirming status, 5 percent of ministry settings are not eligible, 6 percent of participants did not answer, 15 percent are currently in the Affirming process, 28 percent are officially recognized as Affirming, and 46 percent are not Affirming.

**Configuration, Terms, and Length of the Pastoral Relationship:** In terms of the designation of the pastoral relationship, 6 percent are an appointment as candidate supply or supervised ministry experience, 8 percent are employed in a regionally recognized ministry, 6 percent are retired supply appointments, 7 percent are intentional interim ministry appointments, 8 percent total are in various other appointments—supply or less than 12 months, designated lay minister, minister in the admissions process, or just “other.” Some 59 percent of relationships are a call, and 6 percent did not answer. Ministry personnel serve in a variety of configurations. Four percent are in a team, where they have fewer hours than their colleague(s), 9 percent have the same number of hours, and 11 percent have more hours than their colleague(s). Five percent serve in a team with a student, congregationally designated minister, or licensed lay worship leader(s). Eleven percent are in other configurations or didn't answer, and 60 percent are in solo ministry. Three percent of relationships are five to 13 hours/week, 4 percent are 14 to 19 hours/week, 8 percent are 26 to 39 hours/week, 14 percent are 20 to 25 hours/week, 65 percent are full time, and 6 percent did not answer. Lastly, 11 percent of these pastoral relationships are

---

<sup>6</sup> To protect the confidentiality of participants, we have not named the specific racialized communities when numbers are small in cases like this.

<sup>7</sup> This is a recognition by Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble that a United Church community of faith or ministry has done education and consultation work in preparation for declaring their public, intentional, and explicit welcome of 2SLGBTQIA+ people and engagement in advocacy.



# Participation and Wisdom of the Indigenous Church

*“[The settler church] needs to hear the story. Hearing is evidenced by how it changes you.” ~ Indigenous participant*

*“Yes, there will be shame and embarrassment. But you have to walk through that.” ~ Indigenous participant*

“We now stand at a crucial time in the life of the church, and the history of Canada, when we can see the journey through. For more than thirty years, the United Church and Indigenous peoples have been on a journey towards mutuality, respect and equity. Towards reconciliation. Towards justice.”<sup>8</sup> ~ United Church of Canada website

True reconciliation is preceded by truth. In this moment, as we speak about living into the [Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle Calls to the Church](#) and the [Calls to Action](#) given in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, we are also called to address the mistakes of the first settlers that continue even now. Rather than learn from the peoples who had inhabited the lands for thousands of years about how to live in a way that allowed all to thrive, settlers brought a different way. It is the outcomes of this that we lament now. Collectively, we are not thriving. The Earth is suffering; churches are closing. Settlers can learn now by listening to Indigenous voices in our church.

*“It’s important for people to know what the history of the country actually was. Cree women helped the fur trade, how to live on the land.*

*If we’re behind the eight ball where we are, it’s not because it’s where we want to be. It’s because that’s where they put us.” ~ Indigenous participant*

## Walk with Us

Indigenous ways are a call to connection and reciprocity. Indigenous people are intimately and reciprocally connected to the land and value relationship. When an Indigenous person acknowledges “All my relations,” she does not just mean her human family, but all beings. Plants, animals, birds, bugs, mushrooms, and stones are all relations as well as communities of people beyond nuclear families.

*Walk with us* is a call to relationship. More than one relationship, this call extends beyond the wider church relationship to the Indigenous church. It’s an invitation to reconsider how we are, denominationally and in each community of faith, in relationship with each other and with the communities in which we are located.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/reconciliation-and-Indigenous-justice> accessed 2023-03-29

How does this speak to the real challenges faced by equity-seeking ministry personnel and the communities of faith they serve? It means recognizing the changes that come, like changes of season or aging, and to greet each moment with inquisitiveness, curiosity, and invitation. It is an invitation to be open to the new that comes with the moment that we are in.

The United Church of Canada emerged out of a foundation of colonization, patriarchy, and White supremacy. To many of us, this sounds harsh. However, it is the truth of our history, and it is important to acknowledge this. This is the history at the roots of Canada. Acknowledging this helps us to understand how it is that in 2023 we are still hearing stories of people hurt by racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. It's part of the water in which we collectively swim. It's so normalized, it's often difficult to notice.

*“When I talk to people about what it is to decolonize the church...if they're wondering, what does that mean? Any time you say the word polity, you can swap in ‘colonial process.’ That our church is built on and still relies on colonial process.*

*“And so what is shifting are some of the conversations we're having about being intercultural, some of the engagements that we're embarking on in learning from Indigenous leaders in our midst, what a parallel path means and how.... and learning a way of being that is relationally focused, where relationship is the highest value, as opposed to the almighty dollar, or doing things by the rules that are written in that colonial polity process. And I see that process of actively seeking to decolonize our processes and our relationships having a positive impact, opening up space for equity in general, not just in our relationships as Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Not just in our relationships as White and BIPOC. It opens us to a more relational way of being in differences that we might not have taken into account.” ~ Interview participant*

The United Church of Canada is not a monolith. We are a broad tent theologically and a broad tent culturally.

## **Colonial Structure and Institutional Racism**

Personal and individual experiences of racism were shared by ministry personnel in the Indigenous church, particularly from Indigenous people who serve in non-Indigenous contexts. However, stories shared tended to have more focus on

- structure
- policy
- big picture
- community impact

Much of the focus was toward institutional racism, the ways in which policy, procedure, structure, and broad decisions negatively impact Indigenous communities of faith and ministry personnel.

*“White privilege is in the systems.” ~ Indigenous participant*



When Europeans arrived in Turtle Island, the lands we commonly know as Canada, they were welcomed and invited to share. “We meant to invite settlers to our lands and that we would share it. It would feed us both. But we are cut off from the land.” ~ *Caretakers of Our Indigenous Church Calls to the Church, p. 3*

The response to the Indigenous church’s call for self-determination is the flip side of the settler response to the invitation to share resources. The invitation to share led to settlers taking more than their share and oppressing the people who were on the land first.

Listening now to the words of people at the Indigenous ministries’ circles, in the same way that settlers were invited to share, not take, the call to self-determination is about Indigenous peoples and communities having the power to make decisions and take action, not be cut off from the wider church. And yet in a colonial understanding, the rest of the United Church stepped away.

*“The White part of the church is so afraid to make a mistake. So they don’t walk with the Indigenous church and end up violating their own value of compassion.” ~ Indigenous participant*

*“Consult with and work with the Indigenous church. They say, ‘We’re doing this. The Indigenous church will tell us what they want.’ No. Work with us.” ~ Indigenous participant*

## **Listen to Indigenous Voices**

Experience and comments from Indigenous ministry personnel were collected during gatherings that happened in autumn of 2022 in Beausejour, Manitoba; Nanaimo, British Columbia; and Paris, Ontario. Indigenous ministry personnel also participated in interviews and in the online survey. Quotes and wisdom from Indigenous participants are also included in the other sections of this report, but this collection is more specific. The following are grouped into six themes: colonialism, systems and policies, personal story, relationship, Indigenous ways, and spiritual.

### **Colonialism**

Colonization continues to impact the structures of the church.

*“With liturgies at Conference, sometimes the language used is triggering of experiences of pain, violence, and hurt. I don’t think we pay attention to liturgies and language. Sometimes we think ‘Oh, don’t be so silly.’”*

*“When the church restructured, they never took into consideration treaty/nation areas.”*

*“The United Church is proud of their progressiveness, but it’s all talk. Those who have power from their dysfunction want to hold onto it.”*

*“At [the regional council meeting], we did ‘consensus.’ Everyone flashed their yellow cards. But there was no discussion. They don’t want to talk about it ‘because it takes too long.’”*



*“The church is colonial and Eurocentric.”*

*“In Bella Bella, the UCC hospital was sold to the province.”*

*“Sincerity is not truly there in the wider, settler church.”*

*“[In Indigenous community], accountability is to relationship. Colonial view is more punitive, to the rule of law.”*

*“There is an unwillingness of the higher church to change, to adopt new systems.”*

*“I no longer serve on any committee of the [wider] church. It just became too hard.”*

*“Right from 1925 when the UCC started, the Indigenous communities didn’t have a voice.”*

*[Talking about structures and power.] “We had to revise the JNAC five times. But in the end, it was almost the same.” [A JNAC, or Joint Needs Assessment Committee, was a congregational committee with a presbytery representative participant. Jointly they determined the needs of a congregation for the purpose of hiring, particularly ministry personnel.]*

*“We promote a White-centric point of view about compensation. We don’t listen to communities and don’t listen to leaders.”*

*“The problem in the church isn’t at the grassroots level, but people at the top making decisions for people at the bottom. We need to flip that.”*

*“We were told it was a good thing that we [my cousin and I] weren’t ministers at the same time because the church couldn’t handle two [Indigenous ministers].*

*“People use apology as a justification for bad behaviour. ‘I’m sorry. This is a bad question, but I’m going to ask it anyway.’ They use the apology as an excuse.”*

*“We had Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and there was not divide. Then we got the All Native Circle [Conference] and presbytery. And divided. The non-Indigenous stopped coming.”*

*“Why is it okay that Indigenous churches don’t have the same things as the White church? Would you say to a region, ‘Go do it?’”*

*“Of course the Indigenous church isn’t going to raise money because that isn’t the history of colonization.”*

*“Quit using the word immigrant. Because you all are. It creates a power level. You can use the word newcomer. You make a show of what you are doing e.g., helping refugees. You help overseas and ignore your backyard.”*

*"In the Indian Act, we weren't allowed to leave the reserve. We weren't seen as people. So only the [White, male] minister was allowed to sign for a body. And still the minister is responsible for signing for a body. The only person who can sign a body off by federal law is a health professional or minister." (Note: this is a common task of the minister in remote, fly-in communities.)*

## **Systems and Policies**

*"Systems and policies of the church go against Indigenous ways of being/doing."*

*"On restorative care, support is perfunctory. And the rules. For example, if you're on restorative care, the pastorate can't talk to you, so you are cut off. (Isolation)"*

*"When repairs need to be done, like a broken window in the church, we're told that we must get at least two estimates. This is not realistic in remote communities."*

*"The church has a terrible problem with tokenism. They want just enough [Indigenous participation] to tick the equity box but not enough to make change. All the best intentions in the world don't fix tone deafness and ignorance."*

*"I want to see more transparency. We are told that in supported ministries the minister will only get the minimum salary. But I hear that in some places, people are given more. It should be the same. There is no transparency in the church."*

*"It's interesting that the money to fly out was taken away just when we started doing our own leadership." (Note: Ministers used to get remote compensation to fly self and family out two times/year. Now many clergy can't afford to fly out.)*

*"Child care—a four-day meeting but no child care. We want young people to be here but hold things on a Friday. We say inclusive, welcoming all, loving, but policies and procedures exclude. If you're in a certain life experience, you can't participate."*

## **Stories**

From one-on-one interviews:

*"One of the members of my M and P committee made an appointment to come and see me to tell me that she was thinking about leaving the church, because she was very disturbed by the fact that we were saying a land and people's acknowledgement at the beginning of the service.... She said, 'They lost the war, get over it.'"*

*"They wouldn't even let me smudge on Indigenous Awareness Sunday."*

*"In the city church I was at before that, I did experience racism. And it was people saying to me things like, 'Why should we even talk about truth and reconciliation? I haven't done anything to any Indians.'"*

*“If something went wrong, or something they didn't like—such as me talking too much about Indigenous things—I would get a written letter of reprimand, or just complaint. I had one letter that was 20 pages long about everything this person hated about me.”*

*“My job was easier when I didn't talk about being Indigenous. Because I can pass, I didn't have to. Until it became unbearable because of the things people would say in front of me.”*

*“In one congregation, there was an expectation that I would teach them how to make a dream catcher. That's not why I'm there.”*

*“I used my Métis sash at my installation ceremony...and then I got complaints after. There were some very racist and hurtful comments made to me about being Indigenous. And I don't think they would have hired me if they had known.”*

*“The government shot them, killed them, killed them all. Because they were gonna stand with Louis Riel. Right? These are people that are no longer in my family tree because they're gone. And I think it's really super unfair that we can't have a conversation about it. It doesn't need to be blame; it doesn't need to be shame. It just needs to be acknowledged.... And to be told that it's none of my business, it's none of their business, and I should never talk about it again. I'm not sure how I feel about that.”*

## **Relationship**

Many Indigenous ministry personnel talked about relationship as foundational.

*“I don't need a policy. I need conversation, relationship. Relationship is harder to maintain than policy.”*

*“The White world view measures everything in ‘time.’ Spend time. No. Have to do something with them.”*

*“I want you to come to my community. I don't want to cook and clean for you. But to walk the land together, fish. And maybe you'll even clean the fish.”*

*“Listen, hear, bring voices forward. It's not about making policy decisions and never communicating with people.”*

*“The settler church needs to be sincere. Covenant with the Indigenous church e.g., Uniting Church in Australia.”*

*“Here's an example. The DLM letter did not go to Indigenous DLMS. The Indigenous testamur is not yet determined. Why are they having conversations without us?”*

*“The settler church likes to take on something as a ‘cause.’ ‘What can we do for you? How can we help?’ Butt out. I'm nobody's cause. I don't need your help. Support us. But don't help.”*

*“Ministers work so hard with no support. But they do it because they have a heart for the work. People have served the church faithfully without really being able to engage with the wider church.”*

*“What would be helpful? Have regional ministers check in, especially with queer, Indigenous, racialized ministers. ‘How is it going? How can we support you in ministry? How can we support the congregation?’”*

*“What turns the wheel is communities. The national church excludes communities. They need to be in relationship. [Indigenous church does not work on representatives, but whole communities. The voice is not always representative.]”*

*“Ministry personnel need a lot of support with deaths.... No one reached out. It’s unfathomable to think of the [colonially inspired] violence [in some communities to which ministers are exposed and need to respond daily].... To be in a settler community, there was not very in-depth or well-informed conversation. I wasn’t thinking all that well to be engaged in conversation. There was a time I felt numb. The expectation that I should still be engaged and have conversation. Expectation from me as well. As ministers, we have to learn to ask.”*

## **Indigenous Ways**

*“Truth, honesty, kindness, respect—these are core values, our way of being. When we allow fear to come in, even about doing the wrong thing, then we disconnect from core values.”*

*“Trust is an action word.”*

*“It’s not that the policy says there is a relationship. The policy supports the relationship.”*

*“We’re at a point in the church where the churches learn to be broken on the rock or we’ll be crushed by the rock.”*

*“Clash of two systems. The ‘laying on hands’ theology episcopal approach about power versus the Elders’ connection to the community, deep spirituality and connection.”*

## **Spiritual**

*“People are afraid. They think they have to give up one or the other. The UCC and the gospel or the drum and the eagle feather. I don’t want our people to be left with nothing because they think they have to make a choice.”*

*“Creator, unformed Spirit.”*

*“The original wisdom keeper, the man we know as Jesus.”*

*“We need to get out of the business of church, into the business of spirit. ‘Church’ is colonial.”*

*“Healing has to happen. Not about curing diseases, but about healing spirit within.”*

*“Indigenizing [worship] services. Language has to change. Narrative has to change.”*

*“The church doesn’t connect with us spiritually. They don’t give space for us. Where is the space where we can smudge, where ceremony can happen? There is disconnect from our spirituality.”*

*“I went into a community where I had been asked to do some baptisms. I think there were something like three or four. Then families kept coming. I think I did more than 15. In one family there were four generations!”*

## Awareness in Pastoral Relationships

This is the first of the sections of research data that follow the flow of the online survey, combining participants' contributions between the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. This section looks at the general levels of awareness and openness in the pastoral relationship and the ministry setting's enthusiasm and willingness to engage with diversity. It begins with a discussion of "being the first."

*"I was the first woman and the first queer person to be their minister. It was a constant struggle; I was young and it was my first call. I was often questioned and told I was overreacting or that I didn't understand how the world works." ~ Survey participant*

Although The United Church of Canada has ordained women since 1936, today, when 50 percent of ministry personnel in our denomination identify as female, there are still women who report being "the first." In 1988, The United Church of Canada declared that sexual orientation should not be a barrier to ordered ministry. In 2023, many from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community continue to report being the first. Racialized ministry personnel have served in the United Church since union in 1925, many in racially/culturally specific ministries. Today, many BIPOC ministry personnel report being the first in predominantly White contexts and many others have found it difficult to get hired.

**Ministry personnel who are "the first" often encounter assumptions both about who they are and who they should be, less support, more discriminatory behaviour and are, therefore, less likely to feel able to bring their full selves to their ministry.**

*"I go and I take a call. And if I'm the first, you know...what freedom do I have to really make a lot of mistakes and try new things and do all the things that ministers should be able to do and try and fail? I feel like if I fail, will they ever hire another Black minister? Would they ever hire somebody else like me? Or have I closed that door because I didn't live up to whatever the expectation might have been?" ~ Interview participant*

## Disclosure of Identities

Awareness of equity-seeking identities embodies many complexities. There are some identifiers that are visible, such as skin colour or use of a wheelchair. In these circumstances, disclosure is not a choice. Some identities are not visible. Cultural identity, for example, may not be obvious to all people, leading to assumptions. Neurodiversity or mental health conditions are not visible. Sexuality and gender identity are not often visible, and many people hold assumptions based on appearance. Some people choose to disclose their non-visible identities and others may not for a variety of reasons, ranging from sense of privacy to lack of safety.

**Implications:** People do or don't disclose identities for many reasons. White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied men are still considered the norm in many places, whether this is

spoken or not spoken. There are a lot of misunderstandings and assumptions held about people seen to be outside of this “norm.”

*“As a woman, that’s clear. The other two, like neurodivergence and depression, those aren’t things that most people will know unless you disclose, for the most part. But yeah, you just know, there’s not that room to fail.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Yes, they acknowledged this, and there seemed to be some issue because we had people leave right before I arrived (others spoke of this to me).” ~ Interview participant*

*“I never hid my trans identity, but have revealed this over time.” ~ Interview participant*

*“You ask questions like, Are you comfortable bringing your full self? In my case, because my disability is visible, I can never hide it. I sometimes wish that I had invisible disabilities, so that I would choose to whom I would reveal them.” ~ Interview participant*

When and if to share non-visible equity-seeking identities can be complex. The context of the community of faith, region, personal comfort with the identity, past experience, perceptions of safety, and privacy are all potential factors.

**Implications:** Many equity-seeking ministry personnel deal with the added complexity about how much to say, to whom, and when. Awareness can be helpful or not helpful.

*“I’ve been ordained now for 17 to 18 years. And what has struck me in particular is the difference between my current call and my last call. It has made me very aware that how I frame disclosure of my mental health concerns is received very differently by different people and used differently by different people. So that’s what has made me much more conscious.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have never shared my full identity with a community of faith.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In a previous charge, .... I was told by the chair of the board and the chair of M and P to never mention from the pulpit that I was in a same-sex relationship when we had invited the entire congregation to our home for a Christmas open house. I felt the relationship went downhill from there.... In the end, I left the pastoral charge.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Comfort Talking about Identities**

Half of respondents to this question noted being very comfortable talking about their identities to the community of faith. Half noted some level of discomfort. Again, there are many nuances within this. Some named feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. For some people, it depended on which identity and for others, to whom they were addressing. For those who expressed discomfort, “Don’t want to rock the boat,” “Don’t want to be seen as discriminatory,” and “Likely be pushback or negative consequences” were named by nearly one quarter of all respondents. The reason most cited was “It’s exhausting.”

*“I don't feel safe doing so, and it depends on which of my identities. I am out as queer but naught else. I am not out as trans. I fear for future employability skills if I disclose that I am neurodivergent.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There's only really been one time when I've had a really acute bout in ministry that I had to navigate. And I used language around a chronic health issue, as opposed to a chronic mental health issue. And so I refer to it in terms...kind of like in a way that you would refer to pancreatitis or something.... But I had been wondering about that afterwards. I thought, if it was osteoarthritis and I was having a flare up, would I just name that?” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have not found a welcome for polyamorous people in the church, outside of individuals in urban centres. So I am not out as poly about 95 percent of the time, unless I have built trust with an individual, and am never out as poly where I work.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I am comfortable as long as I am aware of the group I am working with. I have felt threatened as a woman once and dismissed a few times because of being female.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It runs in the family. It's just a thing. And so that feels very comfortable. It's always interesting to me, surprising maybe. I understand now, but the first few times people would be very hush hush about their own mental health stuff. I was like, oh, this is something that some people are really ashamed about.” ~ Interview participant*

**Implications:** Addressing or talking about issues/isms or identities has implications for equity-seeking ministry personnel. It's exhausting, they get pushback, are perceived as creating conflict. It is still true that equity-seeking ministry personnel are more often seen to represent all people who share their equity identity, which creates implications for anyone who might come after them or never come because “we had one of those and it didn't work out.” And communities of faith, much like Canadians, have a strong belief about who they are, generally open and welcoming. They do not like to have those beliefs challenged.

*“They did not want to see themselves as anything but welcome. I was too 'uptight' about sexist remarks or racist ones.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They have openly revealed racist, ageist, and homophobic points of view without any sense of shame about it or an understanding of why that might be inappropriate. Difference is not safe in this context.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It just was clear to me that, no, they're not ready to have that conversation. They're not ready to have an authentic conversation with me speaking from who I am. So that was, again, the sign to me that it was time to go.” ~ Interview participant*

In the United Church, there is a disconnect between what we say we believe, our national policies, and how those are manifested in local contexts. Acceptance of gifts and diversity varies. Some 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are now more broadly okay, but not everywhere.



“Diversity” is sometimes accepted, as long as it doesn’t disrupt the power structures and status quo. There are communities of faith who are both aware and working toward what it means to embrace diversity.

*“Differences and diversity are all right as long as nothing changes.” ~ Survey participant*

In some congregations, difference and diversity are held in tension with power and change. As long as things are essentially the same, we’re okay with diversity. There is often a superficiality to diversity. Diversity is not recognized as possibly requiring a shift in how things are done. Culture is only seen as colour.

*“They are appreciated by some in theory and by almost none in practice.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Positive Consequences of Highlighting Differences**

Although at times uncomfortable and challenging, highlighting differences between ministry personnel and the community of faith can have positive consequences. One positive consequence noted is that being open about their own lives creates safe space for others and gives others permission to be open about their own issues or within their families. Some ministry personnel find that awareness and understanding increases within the community of faith. In some cases, being open was the catalyst for change.

*“I know that youth talk to me about stuff because I’m open about being queer, non-binary. I feel like I’m bringing it.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Women have felt more empowered as leaders.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Growing awareness of male bias in the dominant culture.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Opening up a dialogue about being a Christian in the 21st century and what that actually means.” ~ Survey participant*

*“People come up or email me afterwards and share their own stories. Or it might come up in a conversation, and I just get the sense they don’t talk about this a lot. But they’ve chosen to. I think it opens conversation.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Negative Consequences of Highlighting Differences**

Some ministry personnel also noted negative consequences of speaking openly about equity-seeking identities. Discomfort or resistance within the community of faith created pushback impacting them or the community of faith.

*“A lack of welcome has been demonstrated in reaction to diverse experiences being shared. Arguing with experiences of marginalization and grandstanding about our own good work has been witnessed as a reaction to tender personal sharing.” ~ Survey participant*

*"Some left" and "Some people have pulled their support." ~ Survey participants*

*"Sometimes people would mutter, 'Oh, I'm getting sick of this.' Or 'When is this over?'" ~ Interview participant*

*"Burn out trying to be taken seriously and not as 'junior' to past male minister." ~ Survey participant*

*"Bullying and arguments, tantrums, threats about withdrawal of offerings, triangulation." ~ Survey participant*

*"Get attacked, told I am instigating issues with the board when I bring others' feedback." ~ Survey participant*

*"Exhaustion at times, being the one to be raising the issues, or having to 'educate' when my energy is all spent." ~ Survey participant*

*"There was a lot of pushback. I did not preach very often about race relations and LGBTQ stuff, like twice in a year. And I'd have people saying, 'You're talking about this too much.' I always felt like my ability to push that was limited, because it very easily would become about me pushing my issues." ~ Interview participant*

## **Conditions or Changes Needed to Increase Comfort**

How can the United Church support congregations to move toward equity and thriving? Some ways include education for boards and M and P committees (or a new structure other than M and P committees?). Education includes flipping the issue from, for example, talking about racism, which puts the focus on the racialized person, to talking about enforced Whiteness, which asks us to look at ourselves as a church and the culture in which we swim. There needs to be wider support for making all church spaces accessible, taking seriously and modelling accessibility at every level of events (regional meetings, General Council, speaking engagements).

The United Church could also ensure adequate communication about supports that already exist, for example, funding for ramps. It could provide upfront resourced interventions when congregations hire someone equity-seeking, for example, an in-person facilitated workshop about gender and sexuality.

## **Congregational Leadership Development**

*"In my case, an enlightened, better educated M and P and council." ~ Survey participant*

*"Board development. Attention paid to this in staff training." ~ Survey participant*

## **General Council/Regional Support**

*"Frankly, the UCC as a whole is ableist. There is very little resource and support in place for communities of faith to ensure that their spaces are barrier-free. We do not support using modes of worship delivery and gathering that are safe for those with disabilities (for example, the preference of gathering in person versus virtual or print meetings). As well, there is no support or training or even access to virtual communication for almost all rural and remote communities of faith, yet, for the duration of the pandemic, there has been no other communication available (i.e., picking up a phone!)." ~ Survey participant*

## **Allies**

*"Male ministers not protecting and promoting one another and finding ways around women in leadership." ~ Survey participant*

*"Recognition of mental health and addictions struggles also as part of maintaining better mental, emotional, and physical health to keep doing very difficult work." ~ Survey participant*

## **Shifting the Conversation/Focus**

*"This is not about disclosing an identity, it is about unmasking sexism." ~ Survey participant*

*"It's about learning about Whiteness, and not Whiteness as a skin colour. I think that's part of where we have to get over...it's not about your lack of melanin and your proclivity to skin cancer. That's not what we're talking about; we're talking about a system of Whiteness. And how that has changed over time, to include people that were formerly left out." ~ Interview participant*

## **Others Who Share the Same Equity-Seeking Identity(ies)**

Of those who responded, 22 percent noted awareness of other people in their community of faith who share the same equity-seeking identity; 20 percent said some, but only part of their identity; and 15 percent said a few, but not publicly. Considering women make up a large percentage of many congregational communities of faith, many women responding did not consider that a factor in their answer, although a few did note it.

*"Yes, since sharing my own struggles, people have felt able to share privately with me their own struggles or reach out to me to understand the struggles their family or friends may be having." ~ Survey participant*

## **Motivation of Communities of Faith to Engage**

Many congregations are somewhat motivated to engage in conversations or actions on equity and isms or, at the very least, will engage when it's brought up, if they are not motivated to start the conversation on their own. There are also congregations that are openly hostile or avoidant.

Very motivated/the community of faith is open to addressing anything	22 percent
They are somewhat motivated, or some members are motivated.	28 percent
They are only motivated on one or two specific equity issues.	13 percent
They are not motivated but will do it anyway.	8 percent
They are avoidant or will not respond to requests to acknowledge diversity or inequity.	14 percent
They are actively hostile and/or defensive.	2 percent

*“Leadership is open and has an 18-month plan in place to deal with equity issues. I can turn to the worship team when I am frustrated or concerned.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They believe they are motivated and also already fully welcoming and inclusive. I and other staff face a lot of pushback, which is not recognized as such. They are fatigued and seem unable to see beyond their own scope in a meaningful and sustained way. There is a lot of space given to those exhibiting phobias and isms. Their hateful rhetoric is tolerated and given space at a board level. Offending the privileged or sending away dangerous or hateful people is seen as the worst possible outcome of this work. Emotionally volatile communication is not addressed when it is brought up for discussion by staff, volunteers, or congregants.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They are open when I bring up/introduce topics of isms—some want to engage, others wonder why it is an issue.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I have one community of faith that wants to talk about it, as they say they have done this action before, but they have no proof that they ever had, and now don't make it a priority.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There're a whole bunch of people...more engaged with their own discomfort, rather than having heard the message, yeah, your discomfort is real. And let's work with that discomfort, instead of saying, let's ignore whatever it is; it's making me uncomfortable.” ~ Survey participant*

**Implications:** As with many things, motivation to engage can be nuanced, for example, only wanting to talk about certain issues, celebrating diversity but not engaging difficult conversations about discrimination—eating the cake but not washing the dishes. When equity conversations are also associated with conflict, this can make it doubly dangerous for equity-seeking ministry personnel to bring up issues that would be straightforward conversations in other contexts of their lives.

## Rationale for Motivation

When asked to describe why they answered as they did about community of faith motivation, or lack of it, to engage in conversations or actions, issues named were grief, denial, lack of understanding, and fear of judgment from the wider community.

*“They believe all conflict in the congregation is the fault of the minister, and don’t acknowledge that there are different viewpoints within the congregation.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They don’t want to talk about it, because then, it will make it so!” ~ Survey participant*

*“Currently working on colonial Whiteness and equity in our welcome. Do we really mean all means all?” ~ Survey participant*

*“We live in a homogenous community for the most part, but our members are keen to engage with newcomers of different backgrounds. That curiosity doesn’t always translate into a willingness to address difficult questions around racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.” ~ Survey participant*

*“We’re welcoming of a spectrum of gender identities, and we do have some folks in the congregation who have children who are trans or bisexual. So it’s really good that we can have those conversations. But we can’t start on being Affirming because the congregation is scared of showing that to the wider community.” ~ Interview participant*

*“They are motivated about Affirming stuff, but only to have events and learn, not to team with LGBTQ folks or groups and do that hard work. Our reconciliation and intercultural work appears to have the same limits. This far and no further. They have engaged conversations about White supremacy, but with the same limits and high amounts of confusion and ‘not me, not us, surely.’ But there are a few who would go the distance. Those amazing folks in every group.” ~ Survey participant*

## Who Bears the Burden?

When asked who bears the burden or is most affected if there are negative consequences from highlighting differences, more than 50 percent said the ministry personnel or mostly the ministry personnel. Eleven percent said that all are equally affected. Only 8 percent felt that either M and P, the lay leadership, or the community of faith bore the burden.<sup>9</sup>

*“I’d say the burden lies with all of us, though I suspect I feel it more.” ~ Survey participant*

---

<sup>9</sup> United Church diaconal minister the Rev. Bri-anne Swan has written a master’s thesis (2022, St. Andrew’s College) on a related topic, looking at the 1988 General Council decision on sexuality and ministry and its effects on ministry personnel.

*“There are no sides. Here we either live or die. We are small and fragile. Each year we ask the question, Do we want to live another year? I do not allow folk to defend me. They are to accept any negative voices and bring those voices back to committee, where I will listen and not disagree. I just accept what is said and know that when it hurts, it hurts. I couldn't do this job without very good therapy. Because the community of faith needs a leader who can also serve as a good therapist. We are equally affected if the relationship fails. They will suffer and I will lose out on a fantastic job.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Special Months, Sundays, or Current Events**

Participants were asked about their comfort talking about special months, Sundays, or equity-related current events with the community of faith. Examples included a dinner for Asian History Month, preaching about Trans Day of Remembrance, providing educational materials for Indigenous Day of Prayer in the wake of media about burials, collecting donations for Haitian hurricane disaster relief. While there was a high level of comfort, there was also a level of resignation that the community of faith pushes against it or often doesn't engage.

*“Very comfortable. They are fine with ‘information.’ This is a United Church thing. We are convinced we will change the world by getting educated. Maybe, maybe not. But is it transforming us?” ~ Survey participant*

*“This is how I lead. I offer openings: ‘If you want me to...let's have a conversation. It needs to not just be my work.’ And that never happened. I think they were waiting for me to do it.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I do so with the knowledge that someone will always wonder why we have to talk about ‘X’ again. I feel called to do so, but not always comfortable. My comfort level has more to do with how grounded I am feeling than with the actual reactions of members.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I feel most comfortable with days I have some experience, or some lay leaders have experience, in talking about. Have done significant learning in sexuality and gender and its diversity is in the congregation. Anti-racial and Intercultural areas...much less.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Already the music director and I have had conversations about, ‘Okay, so how are we going to make this bigger next year? And who are we going to get into committee? And what are we going to tap into in the community?’ I know people, she knows people, but let's see. There's an excitement with that.” ~ Interview participant*

*“None are enacted. People don't want to even celebrate our Affirming anniversary. Some people went away for a month last year when we celebrated Indigenous Day of Prayer. It is exhausting and I don't have the energy to ‘push’ all the possible inclusion issues when there is no lay support.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Black History Month, forget that. No, there's not [support for that]. Geez, even when I touch on provincial politics or American politics I was already on a slippery slope.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have a relative level of comfort. I am aware there is a great spectrum in our congregation—some are activists and others quite traditional and not wanting change. When I preach social issues from the pulpit I try to preach with everyone in mind....we keep current events in our prayers, we offer to participate in fundraisers and I will announce those opportunities from the pulpit and other outlets.” ~ Survey participant*

The level of comfort engaging in special events or days for some did change when the special day related to them, although more said it did not.

*“Yes, I try to have others address events relevant to me, and I will gladly advocate for issues relevant to others, though I prefer this be directed and guided by the people affected or spoken to directly by those with experience, if that is comfortable and safe for the (paid) speaker. I bring in guest speakers for all issues as I am able and feels safe.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I started my ministry four days after the murder of George Floyd. Feeling called to speak prophetically and not having a pastoral relationship with the church that was entirely White. It was a terrifying experience.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have found myself reluctant to do mental health awareness stuff in May, though resources provided by the church are great. Seems so personal.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Without me even having to say, ‘Oh, can you do this?’ I let her know what the [themed] services are going to be. Our children’s minister went out and she got books. She read a fantastic book on gender identity and living trans written for kids. She read that on Sunday, and it's wonderful. It's wonderful that I don't have to be the one that has to stand there and be the only person asking for acknowledgement of these important days.” ~ Interview participant*

Similar to talking about their own identity(ies), ministry personnel who were not comfortable or did not generally recognize special events named fear of pushback, “rocking the boat,” and being seen as pushing a special interest as reasons. Others’ reasons included a lack of community of faith engagement, other priorities, and that there is already too much to do. Some noted that the United Church has too many special Sundays.

*“I did a whole series in February for Black History Month, and during that month, our viewership on YouTube quadrupled as people were sending it to their family and friends. That was amazing, and there was a lot of good feedback. But there was also me getting an anonymous phone call on my answering machine at work that said I don't have any right to talk about that in the sanctuary. ‘You're not even really Black.’ A lot of really terrible things. When I saved the message and said, ‘Listen, this is what happened’... they [M and P] just don't have the skill set [to address it].” ~ Interview participant*

*“There might be negative impacts to relatives in my home country.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It feels like climbing a mountain or entering a time machine...I have not encountered such a level of unconscious bias in decades.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I've been uncomfortable with focusing on International Women's Day, Dec. 6th, or Mother's Day in worship as it undermines my struggle to be seen as an ordinary minister rather than a 'lady minister.’” ~ Survey participant*

*“I think the United Church is too all-over-the-board. We practically create distress in our congregations by thinking we have to expose them to everything in worship. They are already distressed because for the most part, they read the news, they are concerned, if not worried, and they are donors to local causes (and M&S). We can only do so much as small congregations, and just giving information or giving too much is no good. I've learned, over 30 years in ministry, to limit the 'special events' and 'special Sundays.’” ~ Survey participant*

*“We organized the first Pride in [our small town] ever. And people flourished under it; the church did not. But the next year, they had their second Pride, and it was funded by drag queens.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Expectation to cut and trim trees, maintain lawns and gardens at manses while putting 80 hours of work or more in a week, church boards constantly complaining about electrical bills at the manse and how to reduce expenses when a person needs light at night and heat in the winter. Male clergy get away more and are treated different than female clergy, people commenting on women's clothing, people assuming you only work on Sunday and not paying clergy when they are supposed to get paid. Treated disrespectfully and not honouring the professionalism of the individual. Prejudice with regards to one's home province. ‘Oh, so you from X, well don't bring your big ideas out here.’” ~ Survey participant*



## General Experiences in Pastoral Relationships

This section looks at the experiences of equity-seeking ministry personnel in their pastoral relationships generally. It explores their perception of thriving, isolation, feelings of affirmation, vulnerability, and relationships with allies, leadership, and M and P committees, and asks how their equity-seeking status affects these experiences.

### Feelings, Thriving, and Appreciation

When asked, the *majority* of equity-seeking ministry personnel feel they can thrive in their ministry despite the many systemic inequities they experience and face in their ministries. Of survey participants 25 percent said 10/10, 63 percent said 8, 9, or 10/10; only 6 percent said 1, 2, or 3 /10. However, a simple “majority” is not really telling nor encouraging as a statistic. Generally, there were few demographic trends, though people without disabilities feel slightly more able to thrive than people with disabilities. When asked how their equity status affects this answer, some are very enthusiastic about their thriving with equity: “thriving like crazy,” “loving this place,” trusting, welcoming, complimentary team, etc. Many describe being tired, drained, tolerated, resigned, invisible/unseen, met with suspicion, or offered only the minimal level of necessary support. A few commented specifically on female gender being a key factor in making thriving difficult. Setting clear boundaries on the way communication happens was helpful in one case. In general, equity-seeking ministry personnel are doing the work of navigating pastoral relationships or encouraging themselves. When thriving is a hurdle, it can make one less likely to address other issues because of being already stretched.

*“There’s a price you pay for being afab (assigned female at birth) or queer in ministry. I feel I want to do more about race and reconciliation. I find it more difficult to deal with how to support other equity-seeking groups, because I’ve asked too much of them already to accept me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I love this congregation. I wish I could pick them up and take them with me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have thrived over a long career, but I am aware that I have earned less than males in my peer group. I thrive because I have had to swallow that truth, and I’ve lived with it not because I have been able to change it. It is my attitude which had to change. It makes me furious, but one cannot live perpetually furious.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Folk with mental health [disabilities and neurodiversity] have different needs for routine and stability. I have found great freedom in my current congregation twice.... What gives me energy is when my congregation finds out how I best work, and that’s my responsibility to teach them that.” ~ Interview participant*

*“When we talk about things that people don’t know how to address, it goes silent. When we start training people around human rights and what they can and can’t do in the church, we are living*

*in the phase of corporate development whereby people understand the rules and change their behaviour to support the rule, but don't change their beliefs or ethics, which means they subsume what they're mad about. They're mad that I'm queer, but that's illegal to say that. They've been told that they're not allowed to talk about my queerness, so they make up reasons I'm 'not okay' in order for it to be okay for me 'not to be okay.' This is called subsumed homophobia, subsumed racism, where we send it down. From my perspective, that's where the church lives right now.” ~ Interview participant*

Of the suggested ways that one can feel affirmed in a pastoral relationship, equity-seeking ministry personnel who answered the survey feel slightly more valued than other indicators.

### Forms of Affirmation Table

“Within the pastoral relationship, to what extent do you feel...”

	Valued	Recognized	Embraced	Appreciated for your unique experiences	Invited to share your particular gifts	Invited to share your experience and perspectives
Yes!	62.1 percent	49.5 percent	48.4 percent	52.6 percent	51.6 percent	47.4 percent
Somewhat/at times	26.3 percent	36.8 percent	31.6 percent	27.4 percent	37.9 percent	31.6 percent
Not really /not much	7.4 percent	7.4 percent	14.7 percent	15.8 percent	5.3 percent	14.7 percent
No	1.1 percent	3.2 percent	1.1 percent	1.1 percent	2.1 percent	2.1 percent
n/a (no answer)	3.2 percent	3.2 percent	4.2 percent	3.2 percent	3.2 percent	4.2 percent

Further analysis of this data does show some demographic differences among participants' answers (across all or most of the indicators), though none of these were stark differences, and the overall numbers are small.

There is a **higher** percentage of those who experience these positive affirmations (Yes! or Somewhat/at times) among equity-seeking ministry personnel who

- speak two or more languages
- are over 71 years old
- are male
- are racialized (slightly higher)

Positive affirmations are **lower** among those who are

- non-binary/gender-creative/gender-queer
- asexual or nonsexual
- bisexual
- designated lay ministers and diaconal ministers

In terms of their ministry context, positive affirmations are **higher** in the regions of

- Canadian Shield
- Horseshoe Falls
- East Central Ontario
- Pacific Mountain Region

Positive affirmations are also **higher**

- in COL 4, 2, or 1
- among those serving in team with a student or congregational designated minister (CDM)
- when they have fewer hours than their teammate
- in 350+ member settings
- among ministries that are a multi-racial or multi-ethnic mix (30-80 percent White)

However, positive affirmations are **lower** among significantly racialized (<20 percent White) or Indigenous ministries.

Positive affirmations are also **lower** in the regions of

- Prairie to Pine
- Regional Council 15 – Bermuda and Nova Scotia
- First Dawn Eastern Edge
- Shining Waters
- Chinook Winds

Positive affirmations are **lower** among those

- in team where they have more hours or hours are equal
- among those serving in alternative ministry expressions, incorporated ministries, recognized non–United Church ministry, non-congregational, or new ministry initiatives
- currently in the Affirming process (slightly lower)

Unsurprisingly, **those who feel most valued** also predominantly answered that they

- feel able to thrive (8, 9, or 10/10)
- can bring their whole self (8,9,10)
- feel discrimination is unintentional and less intense
- feel that both parties take responsibility for raising concerns
- are very comfortable raising concerns
- have read the harassment policy or know it well

These are not necessarily causal relationships but correlations.

*“I worked [darn] hard to get there. I've learned over the years...I'm a better advocate for myself than I was years ago. I know my way around the church [system].” ~ Interview participant*

*“We don't debate the legitimacy of trans lives here.’ or ‘We don't use that language here. We don't talk that way.’ She just says it. I also feel like people thrive when they have really clear parameters.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I celebrate for a living. That's my job. I just think the church makes it really, really hard for us to do that.” ~ Interview participant*

When asked how their equity-seeking status affects their feelings, many participants said that their equity-seeking status did not affect it, or it's not a factor if things are going well. For others, it affects it in all ways, including

- invisibility
- tokenism
- vulnerability
- identities seen as separate from their work
- shame
- resentment and exhaustion at having to educate the community of faith

*“They [feeling affirmed and equity status] are not connected.... I cannot be their pastoral leader and also challenge their unconscious misogyny.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There's not that room to fail.... As I entered, and even still, you just feel like you can't be as free to try things as much, because if it doesn't go well or fails, it's that much more of a kick or notch against you.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I believe that a good pastoral relationship comes from a minister's fulfillment of ministry responsibilities, trust building, good and transparent communication, adequate problem-solving effort together. When other things go well in general, a minister's particular identity or cultural background may not be seen as a problem. When things don't go well in ministry, congregants might link the minister's particular identity with concerns and complaints, which might also come from underlying prejudice, too.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They love me enough to engage with the things that bring them discomfort—because they trust me.” ~ Survey participant*

Some **feel valued** as a resource or for bringing a particular skill set. Some are called or chosen because of these talents and skills informed by their equity-status experience, not simply because of their identities.

But for many, there is nagging anxiety. They wonder if equity is a factor, especially with experiences of intersectionality and multiple identities. This leads to

- difficulty trusting their own instincts
- fear of failure
- vigilance about safety (especially for women)
- cumulative trauma

**Women and racialized participants particularly mentioned feeling underappreciated, unrecognized, or devalued in comparison to male teammates.** An incongruence between a minister's and community's expectations of "how well a community will get to know its minister" leads some to feel invisible and others to feel over exposed.

*"Sometimes I feel like I'm a gold star to them, like, 'Look at how progressive we are; we have an XYZ minister.' It's good and not good at the same time, like a bit tokenistic, but that's okay." ~ Survey participant*

*"The problem with being open and speaking from your own [social] location is people sometimes like to use it against you, whether they intend to or not. ... It's this funny thing. 'Yes, we want a minister to preach about mental health, or preach about Pride, but we don't want them to be queer or to have mental illness.'" ~ Interview participant*

*"Really, when you have an openly queer minister and you're having the Affirming process, it is about the pastoral relationship. It can't not be about the pastoral relationship. And I don't know if there is a way that the broader church could provide the support that would allow that conversation to happen." ~ Interview participant*

*"Early in my time with them, a community group asked me to come speak to them about why I became a minister. The following Sunday I had a few members voice their frustration with not knowing that I had spoken to the group. I shared a willingness to share my story in a similar format at the church if people were interested, but they didn't put in any effort to create such an opportunity. ... I often felt they were just happy to have a warm body in the pulpit." ~ Survey participant*

## Vulnerability

Participants frequently mentioned experiences of vulnerability. Though we did not ask specifically for or about this, it is worth highlighting here. Some themes and dynamics that arose include

- power dynamics with M and P committees
- that vulnerability inhibited their participation in this research
- feeling like they could reach out less in small towns

If a conflict or discrimination happens once, it sets a pattern of anxiety and anticipation. The outcome is

- fear of involving the wider church
- a lack of clarity at the regional level as to who to approach
- fear of involving the Office of Vocation disciplinary process

However, **there is also a need for the wider church (or others) to step in as bystander intervention** when bullying is taking place. Much of **the vulnerability is tied to financial constraints**, which compound systemic and historic oppression (e.g., part-time ministry is

promised to increase but never does). As is seen in later sections, complicating factors include candidacy, interdenominational settings, the visibility of one's equity issue, immigration status, and parenting.

*“So I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know, on a Sunday morning, if they're going to be there and yell at me; I have no idea. But after stuff like that happens, then it's a trigger. And...it's traumatic. And, do you want to relive it? Probably not.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Recognizing how systemic oppression is playing a role... can be hard to hold. Especially in my dynamic, where I'm often the minister and the queer person of colour in a White-dominant space. So I am the one person that gets paid to be there,...and I am the person who's supposed to have the most institutional power. And yet I'm navigating those dynamics.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I was being verbally abused by a member, but the M and P committee and the board chose not to speak to or discipline the offending member. I would, and on occasion still do, hide in my office if this individual is in the building.” ~ Survey participant*

One implication is that some will speak up less or take fewer risks out of fear of losing a position. The church needs to recognize the burden on equity-seeking ministry personnel to trust that they will be supported, in the face of doubt.

*“We cannot deny the economics of the church; how many full-time jobs are there?... So we're calling people into a vocation that takes a ton of training, a ton of education, a ton of all this for a very insecure future and not even full-time jobs. Am I going to go and now open my mouth on a subject that's already sensitive to the mainstream, and then risk putting myself in even a less employable state? So I think there're a whole bunch of things that just work against any person of colour speaking up.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It's the whole element of trust. Because you have to choose to trust, always, in places that are not safe. Even though we say we've created a safe place, because we'd like to say that, it's still not a safe place necessarily to be.... I think you just get used to taking endless microaggressions.... Is this my responsibility to educate the world about what they're doing? I don't know.” ~ Interview participant*

## Being Yourself

A similar number of survey participants feel like they can be themselves in their ministry to those who feel they can thrive (only 26 percent said 10/10 “I can be myself; it's all good,” though two-thirds gave this an 8,9, or 10/10 and only 8 percent gave this a 1, 2 or 3/10, meaning “I must significantly adjust /code-switch: my manner of speech, mannerisms, worship style, world view, theology, values, etc.”). In this case, there were more demographic differences. Slightly **higher than average** indicating they can be themselves were from

- heterosexuals
- Prairie to Pine Region

- COL1
- COL4

Slightly **lower/more middle** concentrated were from those who are

- racialized
- Indigenous
- permanent and temporary residents as opposed to Canadian citizens
- admitted from a different denomination globally or in Canada

Those feeling the least able to be themselves in their pastoral relationships are those who are

- bisexual
- queer
- asexual or nonsexual
- disabled
- in Regional Council 15 – Bermuda and Nova Scotia
- someone who speaks Korean as a primary language

**One of the consequences of not being themselves in the pastoral relationship can be less attachment and more transience.**

*“Oh, I did that for years. I don't care anymore; they just get me now.” ~ Survey participant*

*“About pastoral relationships and emotions: Gratitude is...the biggest emotion that emerges. Because they were really good about getting to know each other as individuals and appreciating people within the community. And I felt like they allowed me to actually be a full human being and also their minister.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I love them, but if they knew me, it would not be reciprocated.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I do feel like I have to modulate myself. I have to be more like the people that I serve. I have to code-switch and say things in a certain form of language, so that they can accept me, and I can feel like they understand me. And I'm not too exotic to them. Because I already know that they're looking at me, and I look exotic to them oftentimes. Cultures have compulsory Whiteness.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Thriving of Pastoral Relationship**

This aspect of showing up or bringing one's whole self to the pastoral relationship is not only a key factor in ministry personnel's experience of the pastoral relationship, it also affects the thriving of the relationship and the benefit to the community of faith itself.

*“[I asked] What do you want? And there's a long silence. And one of the elders said, We want you to love us. That's all we want. We want you to love us, and we'll love you. But we want you to love us.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Well, since they terminated me, they are missing out on everything I might have to offer.” ~ Survey participant*

When asked if there were things that they are not able to bring to the pastoral relationship, 18 participants said no, indicating that they bring their whole selves. While this is healthy for them, there were many more who explained what the community of faith misses out on when the equity-seeking ministry personnel is not able to be transparent and themselves. Examples of what the **community of faith misses out on** include

- more inclusive theology
- diversity
- parenting gay children
- millennial music styles
- women’s traditional crafting, such as knitting
- affirmation
- justice
- creativity
- accessibility
- discussions of abortion and relationship status, such as divorce

A number of people specifically mentioned them missing out on young people and younger cultural references.

*“It was really hard, and I was suffering...It just has taken up so much time and so much energy I could have put somewhere else. And I have edited myself so much because of it. And so I guess the church has lost things, because maybe I haven’t been willing to risk quite as much.” ~ Interview participant*

Some participants expressed a depth of “can’t bring my fullness of humanity in any way,” “knowing all of me,” or “everything,” while others leave before the community of faith fully understands them because it is not viable to stay.

*“Oh, it totally impacted it, in that I was never totally myself there. Because I didn’t feel it would be welcomed or accepted. And I would never do anything like wear a ribbon skirt to that church.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I didn’t have the heart to tell them, ‘Well, you realize that what you’re saying is you don’t have space in your heart for me and people like me.’ I mean, that’s what I was hearing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have been told not to use certain phrases and language because they are not comfortable with it...though I find their language is limiting to the scope and breadth of God...and God’s inclusivity of all. So to do what they ask makes me less authentic...limits and dismisses my understanding of the Holy...and conveys to all who worship with us (in person or online) the*



*exclusiveness of the community, rather than the expansiveness of the One who calls me to serve in Love's Way.” ~ Survey participant*

Some equity-seeking ministry personnel say they are hopeful it will get better with time, it is moving slowly, there is a process of unfolding, they feel the need to wait until things are a little more settled, or they can't say it all at once, while others have given up being quiet/closeted/withholding their perspectives. It should be recognized that the getting-to-know-you stage may take longer when there are more differences. Disclosure, conversations, and realizations should not be expected to happen all at once. Some participants rightly expressed that healthy boundaries mean they withhold trauma or personal details that would not be appropriate to share, and discernment is always encouraged to consider the pace and content of conversation.

*“I bring it all and if I'm called, I'm called. If I'm not, I'm not. Authenticity, vulnerability, and transparency lead my effort to model that God loves me just as I am, and I don't have to pretend to be someone I'm not. Not everyone is going to appreciate or like everyone else.” ~ Survey participant*

*“In the past, this has been quite true. In this congregation, I feel I can bring more of my ideas.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There is a lived reality of being an ‘other’ in the church. Whether that ‘othering’ is because you're female or whatever it is, there is an ‘othering’ that one can still experience. So, if you're in the ‘other’ category, you're just working harder to feel normal, whatever that might be, and to belong in that mainstream group. You just work hard, and for me, I've become far more silent. I'm doing far more smiling and nodding and shutting my mouth, unless I know I'm in a safe space and with safe people. I think that might be wisdom, in terms of ‘just being quiet.’” ~ Interview participant*

## Isolation

Another factor in equity-seeking ministry personnel's experience of a pastoral relationship is isolation, which can be exacerbated by many equity factors. Some 43 percent experience severe or moderate isolation and only 8 percent report that it is wonderful/not isolated at all. Of the survey participants 17 percent said it was awful isolation, 26 percent said yes, isolated, 15 percent said a version of “somewhat, sometimes, becoming, on some issues,” 38 percent said it was good/fine/not isolated, and 8 percent said it was wonderful/not isolated at all. Only 8.4 percent (8 participants) didn't answer the question. The **regions with most isolation** included

- Regional Council 15 – Bermuda and Nova Scotia
- Pacific Mountain
- Eastern Ontario Outaouais

Regions with the least isolation:

- Prairie to Pine
- Horseshoe Falls

Men and cisgender people expressed less isolation, but there were few other discernible demographic trends.

Descriptions and explanations for isolation include rural ministry settings, compounded when family and community is farther away (e.g., only Black person in town, only queer person, being the only woman in a ministerial). Nature of the position as being set apart, “just one step removed,” limited options to make friends, or moving frequently, while prevalence of vacancies affects collegial support options, especially in rural areas, and this is being felt more now than before. COVID was a factor and made gatherings precarious, but also increased use of technology.

*“Very much [isolated] since the pandemic. M and P never once called me during the two years to see how I was doing. They just assumed since I produced a video service each week, I must be okay.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I am conscious about this. In the communities where I go to serve...I'm always the first Black person these people are having as a minister. My first pastoral charge, I was the only Black person in town.... So when word was out that the United Church had a Black person, everywhere I went, everyone would greet me, ‘Are you the new minister? Are you the new minister?’ I didn't have to introduce myself. The awkward guy is the United Church minister.... I was the only Black person in those small towns,... the other Black guy is the Catholic priest.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think for this conversation, the context of ministry is really important...how folks that are ‘others’ are treated can be highly geographical.... We may struggle more rurally to enact equitable ministry practices than we would in urban centres, where they get that ‘it's against the law.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“Extremely isolated. It's difficult enough breaking into a community as the minister let alone as a marginalized minister.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I am the only female minister, and as a woman, I am not welcome at the local ministerial, which says something (the nearest United Churches are in different communities).” ~ Survey participant*

*“[A]fter George Floyd died.... [I was] asking, ‘Have you checked in pastorally with any of the racialized clergy in our region? I imagine that it's been a really difficult time for them’.... It hadn't actually even occurred to them.” ~ Interview participant*

Other factors that make it more difficult to connect with others within the church include

- age
- gender identity
- being in recognized non-United Church ministries

It was noted that there are **major isolation issues** experienced by those on restorative care or LTD, or when a pastoral relationship ends abruptly.

*“Yes, I feel isolated in that there are few people to work with on equity issues.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Yes, I feel isolated. Chaplaincy is mostly unrecognized within the organization and is not at all supported by the United Church.” ~ Survey participant*

Isolation is most often countered by

- peer ministry groups
- colleagues
- prior experience of networking/making friends
- strategic use of technology
- regional support to make connections

Clusters are useful in theory, but because they are voluntary or by invitation, some people are excluded or not on the radar of their colleagues, especially if they are new to an area or there are other equity differences. **The prevailing assumption that successfully avoiding isolation is due to making the effort means that when that doesn't work out, it is extra disappointing and seen as a personal failure.** Some mentioned the demise of presbyteries as an isolating factor, that now they do not have tasks to do or opportunities for ministers to gather together, but others found presbytery more of a drain than a support or a space of problematic behaviour.

*“I thought coming to a bigger city, I would have more chances to meet people, and I worked so hard [at that] on my day off... Then I was so tired because I never had a day that was just relaxing, but none of that really bred friendships.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I would [feel isolated] without the outstanding colleagues I've been privileged to work with.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There are fewer colleagues around now than when I began ministry in this area.” ~ Survey participant*

*“[I feel isolated] a lot... I feel good that there are other queer families in the denomination. There are many ministers who are in similar situations, but meeting and making connections is really hard, especially when we are just weary from pandemic ministry.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Sometimes I feel isolated, but I am very fortunate to have [family] close by. My partner is also good to listen. Therapy is essential. As long as there is no controversy or break in the pastoral relationship, the people are also very much part of a ministry team. I also have recently formed a Zoom group with colleagues from my [seminary] days. This, too, is very helpful and healing. Clergy are generally overwhelmed and tend to be takers rather than givers to the conversation.*

*So I am very glad not to have pressure to be at a presbytery every month. I also seek out the wisdom of UCC colleagues who have wisely led in their own way.” ~ Survey participant*

*“When I went to presbytery, the clergy and lay members were decades older than myself, and older men would frequently try to greet me with hugs. Older clergywomen seemed so used to the sexism that they no longer addressed it or excused it as being the actions of men ‘from a different time.’” ~ Survey participant*

*“I don’t have much contact with my colleagues unless I call them, of course. Not that it doesn’t count, but it is not the same as going to a [yearly] retreat. That is different, and then we can share. We can say A, B, and C and have a good time not thinking about anything, or we can [talk] like this conversation we’re having. When I trust you and you trust me, I know that when I say these things to you it is not going anywhere. That space is non-existent right now, in my experience. Now with the newer structure, it is all up to what we called ‘clusters.’ Well, you have [to have] the guts to find something. If you don’t, then you’d have none. I don’t know whether I like that. I understand and appreciate the simplest structure, but at the same time, it’s really up to you to think of anything. What if I cannot think of anything, then you have nothing. I think the way to nurture the people who are already in ministry is to create space for them to come together in a safe space/retreat mindset. Relax, enjoy one another. Maybe some good food, too. (laughs).... I miss what my former church offered.” ~ Interview participant*

There is a **role here for regional staff and commissions:**

- being proactive in making sure clusters continue
- being proactive in helping new people connect in with networks
- reaching out when identity-specific tragedies happen (such as racially motivated killings, Indigenous residential institutions’ graves)

Isolation is a significant factor in mental health and staying in a pastoral relationship, even if it’s not about the pastoral relationship itself but more to do with the surrounding community and network.

*“It can be very lonely at times.... It affects your mental health. I thought, ‘It’s nothing.’ No, suddenly, it’s like a thief in the night that is on the back of your head.” ~ Interview participant*

*“During the 215 [graves being identified], I didn’t know what to do, what to think. I felt like I was betraying my own people because I was part of the church. I looked out and saw the orange tiger lilies growing and somehow that gave me hope.... I was lonely. I felt alone. I felt mad. But I didn’t know what to do with it, where to take it.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Experience with Allies in the Community of Faith**

While most equity-seeking ministry personnel say they have allies in their ministry setting, to some degree, who are important for moral support, allies are not always effective at intervening in the community of faith. Responding to the question “do you feel that you have allies?” only 8.4 percent of survey participants said no, 47.4 percent said yes, and 10.5 percent expressed

an enthusiastic yes. Some 34 percent chose not to answer. Some nuanced their answers by expressing that they are unsure, it's too early to tell, only regarding one or two of their identities, in colleagues but not congregants, or "yes but not those with authority." As the M and P committee is hit and miss as to whether they are allies, many equity-seeking ministry personnel wish they had ways to contact other equity-seeking ministry personnel in similar situations.

*"There were folks who deeply appreciated my ministry but would never have taken a risk by speaking up on my behalf. As their minister, I was a temporary part of the community, but they've spent their lives in that place and have to live with those neighbours until they die." ~ Survey participant*

*"I'm bringing in something different. I wasn't nervous about doing that, because I knew that this was a congregation that had Affirm training. I knew this was a congregation where there were different people of colour, who were from different ethnic and cultural communities. So I felt relaxed enough about being able to go in and to do what I do in ministry. Unlike my previous congregation, where it was impossible to work with the layers of White privilege that were at work in the system there." ~ Interview participant*

*"It's wonderful that I don't have to be the one that has to stand there and be the only person asking for acknowledgement of these important days." ~ Interview participant*

*"A handful of people were deeply supportive, however, even with them I sometimes felt misunderstood." ~ Survey participant*

*"I decided to tell my congregation. This news obviously moves around town. I wanted to start it here, because I wanted to be the one to say it. The really strong support here is making this easy." ~ Interview participant*

*"Yes...but they are often afraid to stand up...rock the boat...challenge the established norms...invite the deeper 'whys' to the toxic/abusive actions." ~ Survey participant*

*"An ally is somebody who's willing to risk themselves for what is right. There were people in that community who would come up to me and say, 'Oh, well, I really love what you said about thinking about becoming Affirming. I really love what you said. My grandchild is gay, and it's just so sad that there's so many people here who think that way, but for the sake of the community, I'm not gonna say anything. I don't want to ruffle any feathers.' Okay, great. So I get to ruffle all the feathers? Thanks. There wasn't a sense of safety. It's one of those things; if people say that they're an ally, that's great. It looks nice on a t-shirt, but when the time comes, show it. If you're not showing that you're an ally, if you're not demonstrating with behaviour, why should I believe you?" ~ Interview participant*

## **Ministry and Personnel Committees and Lay Leadership**

Participants were asked if they feel their M and P committee (or board/council) is supportive and effective and if so, how? This is one of the few survey questions answered by everyone, and it

was a major topic raised in interviews and focus groups. **Only 45 percent of equity-seeking ministry personnel survey participants found their M and P committee effective/supportive**, while 33 percent expressed that it was not effective/not supportive. Of the survey participants alone 5 percent said it was awful, 28 percent said not supportive/not effective, 22 percent said a version of “somewhat, sometimes, becoming, on some issues,” 32 percent said it was good/fine/yes, and 13 percent said it was wonderful/remarkable/enthusiastic. Interestingly, of these, there are no discernible differences based on demographics.

*“I’ve noticed in some cases, when there’s been a difficulty or a conflict, that support for the M and P committees is really important, and our relationship [as regional council staff] with the M and P committees is really important, so that there is an...early connection made with M and P, especially the chair.... I find that our equity-seeking ministers are sometimes a little bit hesitant to reach out to pastoral relations ministers,... but there’s a relationship needing to be built there and a trust needing to be out there.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

Those who find their M and P committees effective and/or supportive named ways this was lived out, such as

- committee members showing interest in mentoring other M and P committees
- meeting regularly
- checking in, especially after a tragic incident
- offering specific feedback and praise
- offering gratitude and appreciation often
- recognizing special occasions (birthdays, flowers)
- holding ministry personnel accountable to the congregation but do not micromanage
- listening both proactively and responsively.

Other appreciations noted include

- the hands-off nature of their M and P or how they trust the equity-seeking ministry personnel to manage themselves
- when M and P is willing to adjust a position description to reflect reality (e.g., post-COVID), discussing accommodations openly
- offering one person to meet monthly to organize and prioritize tasks or “body double” with those who are neurodiverse
- taking initiative when the ministry personnel expresses mental health concern about a congregant and needs boundaries on pastoral care
- having one person as M and P contact with the committee with whom you can share confidential information, such as diagnosis
- having one person on M and P with extra equity training or an equity “hat”

*“We had a spectacularly dramatic tragic event happen.... My congregants said, ‘What are you going to be doing to heal you, now that you’ve helped us in our healing?’ And that was the most profound question because I have never thought of that.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Yes. My liaison checks in regularly. If I bring forward a concern they meet very quickly.” and “Yes. They have our backs. Work hard, are both supportive and protective, and offer gratitude and appreciation often.” and “Yes, they listen, support, advocate, and regularly hold me accountable to the congregation and [expect me] to have patience with them as the growing pains are real.” ~ Survey participant*

Those who had a variety/somewhat response commented that their M and P

- was not functioning the first five years
- is only available for the basics
- is hesitant to rock the boat
- are good people enabling bad behaviour

Some participants explained how M and P

- are supportive but not effective
- perform basic functions but are not equipped to deal with racism (specifically mentioned a few times, though could apply to other equity issues)
- are slow to action, that it took several conversations
- are “not unsupportive”
- are sometimes only supportive when the congregation is desperate

*“Even when they were in the process of disciplining me for something I'd done, I'd have to turn around and go, ‘okay, but let's look at this.’... I've never had to have the region involved, but I have felt that...a part of my role has been to guide them and teach them what needs to be happening.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I saw him making eye contact with the chair of the board, who was kind of going like, ‘what?’ He kind of looked at me and sort of nodded. It was clear to me that he was negotiating some of that conversation on my behalf, so that I didn't have to say to the chair, ‘Yes, this really is an issue.’ But the onus of the education was on me. If I hadn't spent a lot of time having those conversations with him and being quite vulnerable in those conversations, he wouldn't have been able to support me in that way.” ~ Interview participant*

*“M and P there considered the church to be like a business, and I was treated like an employee. I was hoping that this would change.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I used to think so. Until something hard happened, and it made them so afraid, they fled until it died out. Not helpful.” ~ Survey participant*

Those who find their M and P committees ineffective and/or unsupportive say that the committee is:

- burnt-out
- disrespectful of ministry personnel's day-off boundary
- in a conflict of interest
- functioning with unconscious bias and a lack of confidentiality

- insensitive to the financial constraints of M and P

They expressed concern that M and P:

- becomes a place for bullies or those on a power trip because the committee exercises a lot of authority
- is too much like HR/employers (people don't know the difference)
- offer a barrage of ill-timed, negative feedback
- are clueless
- have unreasonable expectations
- become a place for other issues to play out, such as inclusive language

Sometimes M and P itself can be fractious (and members may then leave the church) and can accentuate the inequities of some congregations' finances. Some situations, like Quebec labour laws or pregnancy, are not well understood, and these concerns affect equity-seeking ministry personnel's pay.

*"No, neither. They are unequipped, feel unsupported by the region, and lack the confidence to address conflict directly. They would like direction from the region, but the region has offered options (and support, which is not understood as such)." ~ Survey participant*

*"We had a critical incident...with a person who'd been entrenched in power for [many] years...who set himself up as the chair of M and P. He had all of my personal information. Nobody ever saw him, and his behaviors were inappropriate and threatening." ~ Interview participant*

*"I haven't told my M and P chair about that experience, in part, because this person is a member of my M and P committee.... So I mostly feel really unsafe as a minister there." ~ [different] Interview participant*

*"I'd heard the gossip because my M and P committee was leakier than a sieve and was not at all helpful.... It would have been much better if they just showed up with a basket of muffins or offered some sort of practical help to us. They felt that giving their advice or their opinion was enough, and that would be all we needed.... [On top of] the strain of being in crisis and trying to deal with significant illness, the congregation responded unhelpfully." ~ Interview participant*

*"[They ask] 'how can we help?'... [but then don't listen].... I'm near tears, just trying to tell them.... You keep saying, 'What do you need?' And I'm trying to tell you, and it's f\*cking exhausting. I don't just make random stuff up off the top of my head, 'Oh, I'd like a pony' (laughter). No, it's so much work!" ~ Interview participant*

Knowing that this is the system we have, equity-seeking ministry personnel may create workarounds, such as doing their own research instead of asking M and P or consulting regional staff or colleagues. For many participants, **coaching M and P committees is seen as a part of their ministry**, and some are fine with this, while others are resentful. In some cases, equity-



seeking ministry personnel just leave the pastoral relationship, especially if they don't have the capacity themselves to compensate for the lack of an effective M and P committee. The effects of othering are exhausting. Equity-seeking ministry personnel end up "checking out" to preserve their energy and therefore aren't as available to participate either locally or in the wider church, which ends up missing their voices. There is a **clear role for regional support here, both with the M and P committees and with supporting equity-seeking ministry personnel.**

*"M and P is useless. They don't care about these issues. They only focus on 'how much we have to pay' the staff. For me, they say, 'You get the minimum increase required' and that's seen as generous. No staff feel supported in their normal jobs, so no one is sharing problems or equity concerns with M and P. The board says M and P is responsible and takes no active interest." ~ Survey participant*

*"The M and P support process is not effective...I found my own supports." ~ Survey participant*

*"M and P doesn't make sense. It's impossible to be oversight and discipline and support. Support gets dropped." ~ Interview participant*

In terms of other implications of these findings, it is fair to say that as equity-seeking ministry personnel put up with a lot of mediocre and dysfunctional personnel situations, they do not automatically count on their M and P committees to be supportive or effective. There need to be more opportunities to share best practices among those who are on M and P committees and a place to bring questions. In the new M and P national training, there is a need for equity to be included or a 2.0 that's specific to equity, not a simple addendum to the handbook. One option is to require/encourage one or all members to take the racial justice training or to make further links between United Fresh Start and M and P equity. These suggestions have to come from someone other than the M and P's racialized or equity-seeking ministry personnel.

We must recognize that there is a systemic problem of incapacity and resources such as handbooks and training not being used, and that this affects equity-seeking ministry personnel all the more. M and P committees are not specifically equipped to address equity concerns, so the church needs to either provide training or have it handled elsewhere. There is a strong need to differentiate between issues of congregational discipline (actually the authority of the governing body under the harassment policy) versus ministry personnel issues. Regional council may consider this an aspect of their oversight that is separate from pastoral relations in some ways, which may include ways to vet M and P committee members regarding a conflict of interest or those who don't participate in training. Regional pastoral relations ministers or their associates need to be available to be more involved with specific ministers and M and P committees, facilitating the relationship, especially in cases of language or disability differences. There were a number of participants who wondered whether M and P is really the best system for addressing personnel issues, or whether this "needs to be taken out of the hands of congregations." While this may be an option, does it also effectively take this out of the hands of ministry personnel, and is that wise?

## Experience in Pastoral Relationships—Other Issues

This study is on equity-seeking ministry personnel thriving in pastoral relationships, and it should be stated that many do feel that they are in very healthy pastoral relationships. Some participants feel particularly appreciated for coming to ministry, especially in rural contexts with vacancies, and some mention their gratitude for previous ministry personnel setting a good pattern or paving the way for equity conversations in their call/appointment.

*“I continue to be grateful for the thoughtful and wholehearted way they are prepared to do the hard work.” ~ Survey participant*

*“This is a brilliant congregation. I am not complaining about them. I love them deeply. I am reflecting on two decades of experience in a sexist society.” ~ Survey participant*

When there is a positive and **supportive relationship with other staff** in the community of faith, when equity-seeking ministry personnel are **given trust, room to make mistakes, and not micromanaged**, these pastoral relationships can thrive. There is a strong influence of congregational lay leadership dynamics to sour or support a good relationship, and conflict avoidance is at the root of many issues. The **prevalence of back-channel** governance/parking lot conversations/not accomplishing things through official channels is especially difficult on equity-seeking ministry personnel who are often marginalized from socially determined power.

*“I redid the racial justice [training]...and it was astonishing when I got that checklist of White racist modes of doing things.... I could check off every single one of the things on that list. So completely colonial, proud of being Canadian... big, massive building and steeple seen from miles around.... And so they don't accomplish things through official channels. That's just all a joke. They do stuff by having coffee together, and they depend on each other and their wives support that agenda and carry it forward in the context of the church. It's quite fascinating actually, in a very sad sort of a way. There was just no way that my predecessor could change that, and they became a victim of it in the end.” ~ Interview participant*

*“They remember being a thriving place and think that makes them experts on ‘church.’ They are not open to the necessary changes to live in the present, so they are in decline and blame others for it despite it being because of their own outlook of privilege.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Even if I hadn't been a woman, the relationship would have been difficult because the board was dysfunctional. Explicit bullying tactics were common at board meetings, one family controlled everything, and the terms of my call were violated from day one. However, I believe that I received worse treatment than a male minister would have received.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It's not sustainable and so it feels fragile. No one to take on roles when current people leave; people stressed about cycling back into roles they don't want and have already done. It makes it hard to lead in a detached and loving way, to not overwork and overextend. It's been a dying*

*organization since I arrived in ministry in the nineties; that is super hard to cope with long term.”*  
~ Survey participant

*“Being newly amalgamated there was lots of positive energy, more people to share with, and momentum, which I believe is not the case in many congregations.”* ~ Survey participant

The **lack of oversight from the wider church**, including financial oversight, such as consistency in pay scale across genders, and the impact of living with threats of closure/finances/palliative/decline on the horizon, even if in a long-term call or appointment, can be quite taxing. Sometimes this overshadows equity considerations or puts them at the bottom of the agenda, making it more difficult to raise concerns. The issue of **fair compensation has been a particular flag that bears more consideration**. What is the regional or national church’s role in directing stability? Complications of parenting as equity-seeking ministry personnel—especially when one’s child(ren) are ill or have complicated needs—needs to be considered as an additional area for support.

# Experiences of Discrimination in Pastoral Relationships

*“The one thing that the church needs to understand is that racism and sexism are on the rise.” ~ Interview participant*

White, male, cisgender, able-bodied, and straight is still considered and experienced as the standard. This is true in society in general as well as for ministry personnel in the church. Are things better than they once were? Yes. However, we also seem to be in a moment where overt incidences of racism, sexism, cissexism, and homophobia are on the rise. These overt incidences remain the case, despite our church's commitments to equity in each of these areas and the availability of policies, resources, education, and programs about each of these commitments.

Equity-seeking ministry personnel continue to bear the brunt of being othered. In The United Church of Canada, we have considered ourselves leaders in confronting these issues, yet our own systems, structures, and policies often simply uphold the status quo. Structures around hiring and negotiation assume a level playing field that does not exist either for ministry personnel or communities of faith. There is no accountability for communities of faith who perpetuate or allow inequities to exist.

The United Church of Canada has in some cases been at the forefront of pushing against these structures. However, it's difficult to fight a system from inside a system using the system. We often don't even see how our own structures are rooted in those very systems. For example, ministry personnel must each negotiate on their own behalf when they are called or appointed, with no recognition that, in a culture of inequality, this simply reinforces the inequity.

**Implication:** Equity-seeking ministry personnel are more at risk of discrimination. The United Church needs to consider how to use our resources to support equity-seeking ministry personnel and communities of faith in practical and concrete ways.

*“I have lived my life in White, male, right-handed organizations, and I'm none of those things. My life has always been, how do I fit into the race because the way has been most clearly defined as White and male, and English, as well?” ~ Interview participant*

## Assumptions

Assumptions are a sometimes-subtle form of discrimination. Equity-seeking ministry personnel experience both casual and overt “ism” based on assumptions people hold and often feel they can't simply be who they are. Assumptions about people come out as ageism, sexism, and ableism, for example. Assumptions can be about any aspect of someone or their lives.

**Implication:** This can heighten the sense of always having to be “on,” to be alert. Having your sympathetic nervous system always activated leads to mental and physical health issues.

*"That having a disability means I am unhealthy." ~ Survey participant*

### **Assumptions Based on Relationship and Family**

*"Discrimination for being a mother. [The assumption that] children are often an issue if they make you less available to work." ~ Survey participant*

*"That I have no responsibilities and can do anything I want whenever I want because I'm not married and have no children...that I can't have many expenses because it's just me, no dependents." ~ Survey participant*

*"And it was interesting going on maternity leave. Being a young woman where they probably hadn't had that in a long time.... Some even were expecting to see me at things like a gathering at the retirement home... just this misconception and understanding of what a maternity leave is like for a minister in particular, in solo ministry, in a rural town." ~ Interview participant*

### **Assumptions Based on Sexuality and Gender Identity**

(heterosexism and cissexism, homophobia and transphobia)

*"The community thinks that I am gay because I am married to a female trans person, and I am not." ~ Survey participant*

*"Encountered people who came to me to say I should not be in ministry because I was gay and we corrupt youth." ~ Survey participant*

*"As a bisexual person there are lots of assumptions that I am lesbian, so they can't 'hear' the both/and perspectives. Assumptions about my relationship status." ~ Survey participant*

*"I am not out, so speaking poorly of communities of which my family and I are a part is not known to be directed at us." ~ Survey participant*

### **Assumptions Based on Gender**

*"As a female who is single, I have encountered some sexualization and overt sexual harassment; M and P dismissed my concerns but supported my decisions not to visit with certain people." ~ Survey participant*

*"It's been assumed that I would do both the work of a traditional minister and a traditional minister's wife, be effortlessly good with children, and be flattered by sexual harassment from male church members." ~ Survey participant*

*"The undercutting of myself as a Christian leader in our congregation because I am a woman. This is usually from the older congregants who...will always go (sometimes literally) around me to speak to those male members, even the ones less educated and/or newer to the organization." ~ Interview participant*

*“That I was going to be exactly like their lead minister, who was White cis male, who was in ministry partnership, and they had served the congregation together for [many] years, but it was very, very clear that he was the lead.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Assumptions Based on Racism and White Supremacy**

*“There is an assumption that I am White. Discussion...is often couched in ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking without remembering a ‘them’ is present in the conversation. There is continued education needed and that can be exhausting. In general, I just don’t bring up my heritage because I have seen how with some people it lowers their respect/understanding or just makes them uncomfortable feeling like they don’t know what to say.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Indigenous, and black and LGBTQ ministers become teachers. I shouldn’t have to teach.” ~ Interview participant*

*“There’s been an effort to kind of corral me I felt into being sort of an anti-racist minister.... I don’t want to be pigeonholed, because I’m racialized, into having that be my ministry.” ~ Interview participant*

*“For those of us who are raised Canadian, we’re raised in this society that says, ‘There’s no difference.’ We’re raised in a society of entitlement. But when it comes down to it, we don’t really get the privilege.... I’ve been fed a lie my whole life and then I came to a point of realizing that’s not really how it is.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Accents**

We might say all accents are equal, but some accents are more equal than others. All of us speak with some sort of accent or local dialect. And while 95 percent of respondents to the questionnaire note English as their language of most comfort, it is not English proficiency but accent or vocal tenor that garners comment. People also sometimes “hear with their eyes” and presume that they won’t understand based on appearance. “White” accents are more generally accepted and forgiven than “coloured” accents, the exception perhaps being French accents.

**Implications:** As more ministry personnel come from other countries or across the country, differing accents will be more prevalent. The United Church has a role in preparing communities of faith. This could be through education, methods of mitigation, and also considering other issues that hinder understanding, e.g., proper sound systems.

*“When they are having a minister come through the admissions process or somebody that might be coming with different traditions or with an accent.... Because accent tends to be the complaint that we hear most often: ‘Well, we can’t understand them’ or ‘We’re afraid we won’t be able to understand them.’ And we’re not sure if that’s code for something else, or if that’s a legitimate concern. Also, looking at the demographics of our congregations, a lot of them do have hearing challenges as well.” ~Interview participant*

*"I've heard the accent piece so many times. 'Oh, you speak English so well.' Well, I'm fourth-generation Canadian. I should speak English well; it's my only language. People hear us through their eyes. So they think they're not going to understand me because of the way I look. And that's a crazy, crazy piece around race, race identity. That is so common." ~ Interview participant*

*"Comments like 'We've got to get you rid of that nasty accent.' I get that in every church." ~ Interview participant*

*"There are lots of accents that we accept because they're European, White accents, a nice Scottish brogue, or English accent, or whatever." ~ Interview participant*

*"It seems to be more people complain more if the person is not White, regardless of the accent." ~ Interview participant*

*"I have changed (lowered my voice) after being told by my internship supervisor that he 'despaired of it' and a lay member saying it was 'whiny.'" ~ Survey participant*

*"I was refused a placement because of my accent and language use." ~ Interview participant*

*"They wanted our new immigrants to assimilate to their culture and their English, their ways.... And not through inviting us to their culture, correcting our culture and my accent to their culture." ~ Interview participant*

*"I would say that I have more calls around female racialized ministers for whom English is a second language than I do male racialized ministers for whom English is the second language. I have more calls about women, and I don't know if that's the way our ears are tuned or it's sexism. I'm not sure." ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*"I was followed in my settlement charge by someone who had arrived from Korea. And because he had quite a strong accent, he gave people in the congregation a hard copy of his sermon to follow along, so they could read it as he was preaching. I was talking to a member of that congregation following that time and she said, 'You know, it's amazing. We had to really listen hard in order to understand his accent. And we had the help of the written work, and his sermons were just so profound. I think part of it is because we had to actually really listen hard. And so we were entered into it.' And I thought, wow, that'd be great. That'd be great for all of us if people were just so engaged in this sermon that they were hanging on every word and trying to make sense of it instead of just letting it wash over them." ~ Interview participant*

## **Discrimination**

"The United Church of Canada believes that all people are created in God's image and all people deserve the same human rights and freedoms. The United Church of Canada is committed to providing safe environments for work, worship, and study that are free from

discrimination, harassment, and violence.”~ United Church of Canada [Workplace Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence Response Policy](#) Theological Statement

The United Church of Canada believes deeply in the sanctity of all people. This belief is laudable but can be hollow in the face of actions that speak otherwise. This next piece outlines the different aspects of discriminatory actions experienced and named by participants. For a more fulsome collection of quotes on discrimination broken down by identity type (e.g., sexism, racism, ableism) please see the section Specific Identity-Types of Discrimination.

## Forms of Discrimination

*“We can't think that because we have women who are ministers, trans people who are ministers, people in our congregations, that we've made it, and we're so much better than anyone else. We're not. Those issues are just being allowed to be exposed. That's where we are, not only as church, but as Canadian society. We are not anywhere close to what we were even 10 years ago. If nothing else, the amount of comments I've heard about women in ministry, about Asians, about Blacks and Blacks versus Asians, it is growing. People have the permission to express things that they wouldn't have done and more spaces where they're able to do that, particularly when it's online. People can say things online that they wouldn't necessarily have said personally to somebody's face. But it's growing. People are saying to people's faces now what they would have kept to themselves.” ~ Interview participant*

In our research, experiences of discrimination were divided into macroaggressions and microaggressions. Macroaggressions are more overt and potentially violent, while microaggressions are often quite subtle but more prevalent.

**Macroaggressions:** One third of equity-seeking ministry personnel reported having been belittled. One in five had experienced one or more of shunning, lies, sexualization, and verbal abuse. Macroaggressions reported also included threats to personal safety, family, or property and threats to withhold or withdraw support for the church.

**Microaggressions:** Assumptions and stereotyping are the most common types of microaggressions experienced along with bias, lip service, unequal criticism, and gaslighting. While microaggressions may seem less harmful, the cumulative impact is great.

*“It is many little things that leave you feeling exhausted.” ~ Survey participant*

**Implications:** Equity-seeking ministry personnel are often working within situations of heightened levels of tension or in ones that are abusive or unsafe.

## Sites and Contexts of Discrimination

It is not surprising that the **majority of incidences noted happened within communities of faith** since this is where ministry personnel are typically embedded. Within the community of faith the experiences can come from lay leaders, colleagues, congregation members, or others,



depending on the context. However, discrimination was also reported to have been experienced within the wider United Church and the surrounding geographic community. As was noted, we're in a moment culturally where people seem to feel freer to express things they would not have done overtly 10 years ago. Discrimination is experienced in many ways.

### **Within a Community of Faith**

*"My team was not aware of their own racism. And M and P was not aware of their own racism."*  
~ Interview participant

*"A particular funeral where I was not allowed to participate due to the bigotry of the deceased."*  
~ Survey participant

*"The board voted not to hire me. A year later they admitted that part of it was my orientation."*  
Survey participant

*"I often feel like older men devalue my gifts for ministry until they are proven with outcomes, which I believe my male colleagues would not have to prove/earn."* ~ Survey participant

*"Overt bullying and usurping power and authority, belittling, behind the scenes sabotaging, and coercing others to take the bully's side."* ~ Survey participant

*"Difficulty getting sabbatical or other benefits, withholding pay statements. I need to beg for my paperwork. To fix it I have to ask the one withholding the information to get me access through ADP! The church needs to just have ADP send us our documents."* ~ Survey participant

*"Because I am not (safe to be) out, I cannot report my experiences (of transphobia, for instance), because M and P is not a safe place to disclose marginalization and has demonstrated themselves to not keep confidentiality, even when requested. I have learned I have been outed and hesitate to put trust in those connected to my community of faith."* ~ Survey participant

*"I shared my experiences of racism, and it was dismissed. A woman on the panel was in an inter-racial marriage and she used that to speak from a place of authority to explain that 'nobody meant anything by it, I know these people, everyone is really nice.'" ~ Survey participant*

*"There are infrequent comments or mansplaining by a few men in the congregation. Comments on my clothing or appearance. In the wider community, connection to the local ministerial is hard when ministers from other denominations believe I should not even be clergy based on biblical literalism."* ~ Survey participant

*"Sexist jokes. Ageist jokes. Waiting for the 'one with power' to approve a particular action."* ~ Survey participant

*"Constant complaints, unfair remuneration, doing the work of two staff, lack of welcome for those I attract, withholding payment for queers, having to fight to get guest speakers paid, etc."*  
~ Survey participant

*"A tight-knit lay staff team that sidelined the minister, making use of their long-developed connections. Church administrators, music directors have a lot of power."* ~ Survey participant

*"Hearing things like 'why are the gays taking over the rainbow' and 'if we put the Affirm logo on the homepage, we will look like we are the gay church.'" ~ Survey participant*

*"Refusing to pay me the housing allowance because 'the man is already getting it.'" ~ Survey participant*

### **Within the Wider United Church of Canada from Colleagues**

*"Sexual harassment from other clergy." ~ Survey participant*

*"My colleague...decided that I was incapable of doing my job mostly because they needed to believe that they were so capable, that I needed to be incapable, which was mostly their stuff. But I began to completely doubt my abilities. And they began to use [my disability]: 'Oh, well, with your depression, you can't make these kinds of decisions on your own. So always check with me.'" ~ Interview participant*

*"Yes—same biases, same shunning, same meanness and unloving actions by colleagues (mostly retired...all ordained...) across the denomination due to DLM status, being a woman..." ~ Survey participant*

*"In February, I got into quite a deep conflict with a colleague because they phoned me two days or whatever before and said, 'Do you want to do a Black history thing? Can you come and show up and be the token Black person at this worship?' And I said, 'No.' I said, 'No,' clearly, and I explained why I was saying no, in as loving and direct way as I felt I was able. And that person had the reaction that so many of us have experienced...of defensiveness, of blaming, of shaming. 'I'm not even going to talk to you anymore. I should have never even asked you!' And it got very ugly. I said to them, 'You know, if you had just taken two minutes to think about what I said and not be defensive, you would see, actually, that I wasn't wrong for what I said.' It turned out that a month later, they brought a card and tea and apologized. To my office they came, and so that was a good way to mend fences." ~ Interview participant*

*"While my male colleagues like to talk about the love of God, they were not very loving to a female minister. They weren't even polite, some of them to me. " ~ Survey participant*

*"Yes. Sexism from male colleagues. being dismissed." ~ Survey participant*

*"Reading the statistical Yearbook and deducting what my male peers are earning." ~ Survey participant [Researcher note: typically more]*

*“The LGBT ‘community’ never lived up to its name. I’m sick and tired of the White, affluent, gay culture. I detest the rainbow flag; it doesn’t represent me. I get frustrated by gay [male] United Church ministers who sit in their [Affirming, urban] pulpits for 20 years, while all of the women and trans folks have to fly all over the place. Stop sending all the trans people out of the cities! It’s true, not all the gay men can get the big pulpits in the big cities. There is a disconnect [in the queer community] between the youngsters and the oldsters who fought hard battles. I get it, the eighties were hard.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Within the Surrounding Geographic Community**

Discrimination also sometimes comes from the community beyond the community of faith but is connected to the pastoral relationship because the equity-seeking ministry personnel is acting in their ministerial capacity at the time or lives in the community because of serving in their position. This can take place in the local market or medical clinic, ministerial gathering, or movie theatre. All of it contributes to the experiences of discrimination by equity-seeking ministry personnel.

*“I was the first United Church person in [our town] to do a same-sex marriage in the church. We had picketers and stuff, and I had a few death threats...terrible emails and stuff.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Underlying These Actions**

**Unacknowledged privilege and ignorance or lack of awareness** were considered to be what was **most likely** underlying the experiences of discrimination. **Fear** and **lack of experience with particular diversity** were the next most cited. One quarter also experienced **malice or meanness**.

**Implications:** Equity-seeking ministry personnel are often placed unsupported into the position of serving people with less experience of diversity and high levels of unacknowledged privilege. This puts them at a greater risk for discrimination.

*“It’s not that they don’t care, or they don’t love me, or they don’t want to be able to support people, but they don’t know. I feel that these congregations, that are a lot of times elders and from European descent, they just don’t have a clue about how to love other people. I think many of them in their own lives probably have never had friends of other races or been involved, go to other people’s house for supper. It’s not that they don’t want to be kind people or it’s not that they’re not individually kind. They are. It’s just that they often compound the damage and the hurt by their ignorance to what it is to be a racialized person and their own lack of going through the process of examining their privilege.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The sentiment in that particular community comes from an entrenched White privilege that was established in the 1950s and sixties.” ~ Interview participant*

## Experiences That Severely Impact Pastoral Relationships

*"The projections and stereotypes were unbearable at times. The microaggressions after a few years also became harmful." ~ Survey participant*

Support and trust from the community of faith and colleagues can help mitigate or counterbalance negative experiences, but discrimination still impacts pastoral relationships. Bullying came up often in this section; both directly named and implied through descriptions such as undermining, exclusion, and disrespect. (Researchers' note: Bullying was named so often that a separate section of the report has been created. See Issues for Further Research or Follow-up.) There is a lack of support from board/M and P/regional staff and a cumulative impact to financial discrimination. Negative impacts are most experienced through feelings of isolation, verbal abuse and threats, and financial consequences of discrimination.

### Particularly Impactful Experiences of Discrimination Reported

*"There were families that didn't come or didn't start coming back till after I left. And when I left, I was replaced with an older, straight, White male.... I recently had a conversation with [a lay employee], who said, 'Yeah, from talk that was happening, I sensed that that was what they wanted.'" ~ Interview participant*

*"The feeling of isolation." ~ Survey participant*

*"Staff behaviour and conflict churning." ~ Survey participant*

*"Verbal abuse in meetings." ~ Survey participant*

*"Gossip, professional jealousy, staking out turf." ~ Survey participant*

*"My marriage didn't survive that experience. My economic growth took a profound shatter." ~ Interview participant*

*"The active hostility of the current chair towards all ministry personnel." ~ Survey participant*

*"Physical threats, financial threats, actions taken that affect my family." ~ Survey participant*

*"Change in original terms of employment that made my pastoral care greatly impeded and my choice to resign." ~ Survey participant*

*"As they were talking at the lunch table, they started talking about how they didn't like [a certain ethnic group]. I just sat there. I thought, 'Do I say something? Like, hello?'... That was the moment that I thought, 'I'm not in for this fight.' And it was the next day I started looking for other openings [of pastoral relationships]." ~ Interview participant*

*"Resentment, lower standard of income, lower pension therefore long-term financial pressures, which the congregation will never see." ~ Survey participant*

*"Lack of formal support/acknowledgment of issues of sexual minority affecting well-being, no willingness to systematically address them." ~ Survey participant*

## **Positive Impacts of Addressing Discrimination**

Sometimes there are positive impacts on a pastoral relationship of addressing discrimination. It can be a rallying cry, a watershed moment when new allies find their voices or validating to be heard and respected, even if not by everyone. It can build honesty and trust and deepen working relationships with colleagues.

*"To a large degree, the community of faith is my ally when dealing with the larger neighbourhood." ~ Survey participant*

## **Negative Impacts of Discrimination**

Just short of half of equity-seeking ministry personnel participants noted that these conflicts are just part of ministry, and they are working through it fine. This suggests that this is not the case for the other half who notice a rift, acknowledge that there are conversations that they avoid, or feel that they bring less of themselves to ministry. One in five believes it will shorten the pastoral relationship, and some are looking for positions elsewhere. Others have already left.

*"The pastoral charges I served in had long-standing pastoral relations issues and yet you keep sending people to them only to have the door swing again and again and again with bad relations. So ask yourself, Who and where is the problem coming from? Can't always be the clergy." ~ Survey participant*

**Implications:** A question emerges: Who holds the communities of faith accountable for their behaviour? The answer seems to be no one. Also, why do we, as in The United Church of Canada, continue to approve pastoral relationships where there is a pattern of abuse and conflict? And if we do place people in those positions, who would be best suited to be there?

These experiences also negatively impact communities of faith by reinforcing abusive patterns, having implications for equity-seeking members, and spending resources on mediation or new pastoral relationship searches.

*"The discrimination that affects me has much more significant impact on members of the community of faith." ~ Survey participant*

*"[The] community of faith should have had intentional interim ministry 12 years ago when [the] long-time lead minister left. Since then it has been a revolving door of short-term lead ministers." ~ Survey participant*

*"I left for different reasons. The community was extremely conflict avoidant. I am sure that I could have stayed for a long time without problems, but my own personal integrity would have felt compromised." ~ Survey participant*

## **Discrimination in Interactions with the Wider Church**

*"We are so smug, we don't realize what's going on in our own denomination." ~ Interview participant*

While the lives of ministry personnel are lived most in the community of faith, our council-based structure means that we also interact with regions and General Council. Discrimination is also experienced within these levels of our governance, either through interpersonal connection or systems.

**Implications:** Systems and interactions need to be considered at every level. This includes adequate diversity training for regional and General Council staff, as well as accountability.

*"It has been inferred on more than a few occasions that I am where I am because of some form of affirmative action." ~ Survey participant*

*"My process was riddled with discrimination and prejudice, the assumption that I was aggressive and difficult; my skills and qualifications were not respected or valued in the same way my White classmates were." ~ Survey participant*

*"People in power, even people who are themselves equity-seeking, can act in ways that actively or passively discriminate against other groups. There is no trust within the systems, and the systems appear to move towards power seeking." ~ Survey participant*

### **Discrimination from General Council**

*"Yes, lack of acknowledgement of systemic issues of discrimination, no oversight, [General Council's] refusal to meet to discuss any of this." ~ Survey participant*

*"Yes. Being told Indigenous issues were 'the flavour of the month,' which is why they 'hog all the justice funding' by a member of the [General Council Office] (GCO) staff." ~ Survey participant*

*"Well, the pay will never be fair, will it? The people that can ask for more will get more; the congregations that pay more will pay more... My unionized friends can't believe we operate that way as a justice-seeking church." ~ Survey participant*

*"There is an unwillingness of the higher church to change, to adopt new systems." ~ Interview participant*

*"When we need to use English all the time. Discrimination in the wider church looks like lack of access to information in a timely manner, [for example,] the ChurchHub saga (where we had to use it but nothing was accessible [in French])." ~ Interview participant*

*"The General Council Office has generally been a positive experience, except when it came to concrete support. Finding work as a marginalized person is especially difficult without the support of the region and General Council Office, and I am privileged to have some regional support." ~ Survey participant*

### **Discrimination from Regional Councils**

It should be noted that similar experiences are also highlighted in the later section, Experience of Supports to Pastoral Relationships.

*"I phoned up regional minister, told him the highlights of this story, the opposition to my body being in their pulpit. He made a joke. And I never heard from him again." ~ Interview participant*

*"Lack of recognition and support for alternate ministry settings, lack of understanding of poverty issues (i.e., working full time for part-time pay), addictions background, and need for mental health supports." ~ Survey participant*

*"I have been reaching out for assistance at the region. They have been very paternalistic and condescending about the situation." ~ Survey participant*

*"There is very little regard for people with disabilities and no support offered on a systemic level. Regional activities often are held in places that aren't accessible. There rarely is food I can eat, even when my diet needs are outlined, and there is lip service paid to 'all being welcome to the table.' Even virtual meetings have inadequate breaks. And the only 'alternative' mode of communication is virtual—Zoom usually—when many, many communities of faith have no access to broadband and so can't use Zoom. Every time I bring up accessibility issues I am dismissed." ~ Survey participant*

*"I also just see a pattern and a problem with mental health, in particular, and neurodiversity, too. Especially if you're dealing with people at the regional level who are not neurodiverse and are neurotypical, just trying to get them to understand is very challenging." ~ Interview participant*

*"The following relates to the presbytery/region: Double standards. Men can intimidate with loud voices and chests thrust in your face, but women must always be kind and quiet or they risk being labelled angry or unhinged. Men protect each other as they bend or ignore the rules, put each other into positions that go unadvertised, sometimes stacking positions to have more hours than should be possible. Women who are afraid to rock the boat don't speak up, and those who do are punished." ~ Survey participant*

### **Personal Experiences of Discrimination—Further Issues Raised**

There is a disconnect between our ethos of justice and our capacity to live it. We are a product of the culture from which we emerged. Yet as Christ followers, we are called to be in the world, but not of it. And, to mix scripture, if one part of the body suffers, all suffer.

**Implications:** All levels and structures of the church must be discrimination-free or we cannot truly be who we say we are. People who already feel the impacts of discrimination in society will feel them even more acutely in the church. Equipping ourselves at every level to be and behave and model equity is the work of the church.

*"I constantly feel I am not the demographic the national church wants." ~ Survey participant*

*"The church has a story to tell at the national level, but it does not translate operationally. How we fill that gap is profoundly challenged right now, and a lot of that stress is falling on the backs of ministers who are 'other.'" ~ Interview participant*

*"Just that no one that I have turned to for support within the system and even within EAP [Employee Assistance Program] has been equipped and ready to deal with the realities of racial discrimination. There was no one within the system who could help me unpack and discern what was really happening (sort the facts from the fiction)." ~ Survey participant*

*"The lack of accountability for boards and congregations in our polity makes things unfairly one-sided and makes ministers overly vulnerable." ~ Survey participant*

*"My entire ministry and income have been impacted because I am a woman, from being settled to part time because I had little kids to...not having my appointment renewed for getting pregnant." ~ Survey participant*

*"We must do better to offer equitable employment opportunities. Racism is our baseline, and as a marginalized person who is White, I believe people of colour have the hardest time in our churches." ~ Survey participant*

*"Just this: there is a real ignorance among many about intentional meanness. They think bad behaviour is just a parishioner having a bad day, even if it goes on for months and really affects me. Christians still don't know how to recognize, or what to do with, bullies." ~ Survey participant*



## Experiences of Communication in Pastoral Relationships

This section describes the communication patterns between equity-seeking ministry personnel and their communities of faith, particularly when there are concerns or incidents of discrimination. How is communication about concerns or discrimination initiated, received, and negotiated, and what are the consequences and barriers?

### Initiating Communication

Open and effective communication between equity-seeking ministry personnel and communities of faith or ministry settings is vital to a healthy, thriving pastoral relationship. When there are concerns that need to be raised, equity-seeking ministry personnel are most often the ones who take responsibility to initiate this. Of survey participants, 54 percent said the ministry personnel or mostly the ministry personnel takes responsibility for raising concerns as opposed to the community of faith. Only 22 percent said they both do this/they share the responsibility. This is more so among queer and trans participants and slightly less so among racialized ministry personnel. Questions from these might be, are racialized ministry personnel being more heavily scrutinized? Do communities of faith not know how to raise concerns with queer ministry personnel or just not recognize or hear the concerns that might be happening? When asked if equity-seeking ministry personnel feel comfortable raising concerns and/or issues of discrimination, 60 percent said they feel comfortable or at least with some people,<sup>10</sup> which hardly encourages confidence. Demographically, **racialized ministry personnel were most often comfortable addressing only with some people. Queer, trans, and non-binary/gender-queer were most often those who don't feel safe or are rarely comfortable.**

*“No one raises them. They don't see them, and I don't raise them.” and “Raising my experiences of discrimination would have achieved nothing.” ~ Survey participants*

*“It is a discernment to know who I can trust with my ‘issues’ who won't judge me as weak and incapable.” ~ Survey participant*

Tying to probe some of the reasons, we asked those who rarely or did not feel safe if any of seven aspects were factors. **By far the strongest factor was “it's exhausting,”** followed by “there will likely be **pushback or negative consequences** for me of raising this issue” or the equity image/reputation of the community of faith; “The community of faith doesn't want to be seen as discriminatory/ist.” Overall, equity-seeking ministry personnel were less concerned with “not wanting to be seen as different” or, “it would endanger others in the community of faith who are also different (or who share my identity),” or that “the community of faith will or may feel embarrassed.” **Rationale** given for these perspectives includes personal feelings of sadness,

---

<sup>10</sup> Of survey participants: I am very comfortable (34.7 percent ), I am comfortable addressing them with some people (26.3 percent), I am uncomfortable, but will do it anyways (22.1 percent ), I am rarely comfortable addressing these (7.4 percent ), I don't feel safe doing so (6.3 percent ), didn't answer (3.2 percent)

apathy, anxiety, or anger. Some related these to their personal conflict-avoidant style or not knowing how to raise the issue, unsure of who to trust, internalized racism, or previous experience with raising concern in this or another community of faith that didn't go well and therefore their assessment that it would be ineffective, especially if there is a dysfunctional M and P committee.

*"Mostly, knowing how to bring up issues is a learning edge for me." ~ Survey participant*

*"Raising concerns is exhausting. While some folks nod/agree to their validity, others shake their heads in denial, and nothing is done to change behaviours, circumstances, policies, and practices, and so nothing changes...and the discrimination continues.... Then the cycle is repeated: speak up, speak out, nods of agreement/shakes of denial, followed by little action or deeper conversations." ~ Survey participant*

*"Nobody really ever even acknowledged that I was saying it or changed it. So it just became pointless to even continue to raise it as an issue. I guess it was hard to make people understand that if you don't see yourself, it's just hard to relate." ~ Interview participant*

*"So they're very supportive in this place. As far as some of the scars from other congregational settings that I've been in, I'm learning about where my triggers are. I'm getting to the point where I'm able to engage in relationships with folks and not go off in ways that are unhelpful or keep it all in and not talk about it at all. I'm able to find a balance and continue the relationship." ~ Interview participant*

Some were concerned that their congregation/organization is fragile or declining so they won't engage in conflict, that it already has a pattern of denial and not addressing bullying, or that it would blame the ministry personnel for ruining the church. Some expressed a fear of physical violence/displays of threat, or the cycle of speaking out being met with shock-nod-denial-no change and then repeat, or accusations of hysteria. Communities of faith also blame ministry personnel for creating cognitive dissonance between the accusation and the community of faith's perception of itself as welcoming/inclusive/progressive.

*"At the time when we needed their compassion and care, I just think about the installation [covenanting] ceremony where they said that it was a two-way relationship and that when we needed them, they would be there for us. They just weren't." ~ Interview participant*

*"He was angry. Pounding his fists on the table and...it was a huge blowout from this person. And I actually believe it was the impetus to having the other minister leave...a year later." ~ Interview participant*

*"There have been multiple opportunities to address bullying in our community, which have been met with denial and defensiveness. Lay leadership is fatigued and behaving poorly. There is a lack of responsibility or even consideration of pastoral duty of care from the board and leadership." ~ Survey participant*

*“M and P, they viewed us as having disappointed and betrayed them. That by going off on leave, I was destroying the congregation. There were many comments; about how the congregation wouldn’t survive this, that they hoped I was happy I had ruined the church. It just went on and on.” ~ Interview participant*

**Addressing concerns takes a significant emotional toll and time commitment**, especially when equity-seeking ministry personnel are already stretched thin and perceive that this is primarily their own responsibility. There is a significant concern around the equity-image of communities of faith that also needs to be considered. How can concerns be addressed with less stigma or blame? How can we foster an environment where these conversations are normalized so they don’t generate as much backlash? Support or intervention must ensure that ministry personnel are supported directly through the process and that intervenors are aware of the potential for fallout. All of these encourage the church to pay attention to these dynamics both within each pastoral relationship and in trends.

*“I’m getting tired of watching colleagues burn out, especially brown-skinned colleagues.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The cognitive dissonance is...whatever racism is, ... they don’t know what it is, they just know it’s a word that they want nothing to do with.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Barriers to Discussing Concerns and Discrimination**

If communities of faith are less apt to raise issues is it because they are not paying attention to the health of the pastoral relationship? Are they afraid or ill-equipped to do so? Are they deferring, unaware of the issues, or do they think everything is fine? Trying to probe these communication dynamics further, we asked equity-seeking ministry personnel about their assessment of the comfort and capacity of their communities of faith and barriers to discussing concerns and discrimination. While the statistics only come from the survey results, the commentary in these sections also encompasses the interviews and focus groups.

### **Community of Faith Comfort vs Capacity**

A community of faith’s **willingness and comfort** discussing concerns may not necessarily match their **capacity or ability** to do so. Both are significant factors to consider when there is inequity in a pastoral relationship. Only 56 percent of participants perceive their communities of faith as at least somewhat comfortable responding to concerns, 15 percent feel they are uncomfortable but willing, while 22 percent feel their communities of faith would have a categorically negative response, 4 percent feel they are actively hostile or defensive, and 7 percent didn’t answer. Comparatively, while 61 percent perceived their communities of faith as at least somewhat capable to respond to concerns and 14 percent said they have limited capacity but will try it anyway, **no one chose the option “they do not have the ability to deal with this, but will seek regional or external support”** and **13 percent had the alarming response of “they do not have the ability to deal with this and will not seek support,”** which indicates serious dysfunction. Interpreting these responses, there is slightly more perceived capacity than comfort when it comes to addressing concerns, about an equal number

who have limited capacity or comfort but will try it anyway, and there are significantly more that are incapacitated (and perhaps stubborn about it) than those who are hostile.

*“I was once told that ministers are disposable; if a community of faith had to choose between a long-time member and a minister, they would always choose the long-time member, even if they were clearly in the wrong.” ~ Survey participant*

*“We keep seeing clergy as disposable. ‘Oh, well, there’ll always be another minister; we’ll just appoint someone else.’ I’m sorry, but you’re gonna run out of clergy. We grind through people at a pretty alarming rate after spending eight or nine years educating, supporting, prepping people through candidacy, seminary, internship.” ~ Interview participant*

Ministry personnel who consider their communities of faith to be “very comfortable responding to concerns” are more likely to be male, age 71+, and predominantly White. Are their communities of faith actually more comfortable responding to concerns, or do these identity factors help ministers assume they command that respect from their pastoral relationships? Of those communities of faith perceived as **hostile** to responding to concerns, all respondents were female. Racialized ministry personnel were more likely to consider their communities of faith somewhat comfortable or having some members who are, and communities of faith with 2SLGBTQIA+ ministry personnel were perceived to be slightly more uncomfortable, though they would do it anyway. There were no discernible regional differences, nor significant differences in terms of the capacity of communities of faith. In general, **avoidance and overcoming discomfort are still major concerns, alongside communities’ capacity** to engage in open conversations or engage others to help them when there is a need.

We can also learn from the signs of comfort and capacity, or lack thereof, that ministry personnel experience. The **positive signs that comfort level is high** include:

- the community is prepared to make time to talk
- conditions actively change when issues are raised
- leaders know what needs to be done and are willing to act
- regularly checking in
- trust is high
- there is mutual respect
- committees are diverse themselves
- transparency and humility are valued

Some committees take time to learn about and discuss racism or other issues in their committee meetings, they trust the minister’s request or suggestion for training, books, consultation, etc., and they are curious to know more.

*“In particular, one member of M and P steps up with fear and trembling, and she convinces the others that they can do it.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Some folks just clam up, but enough key leaders say, ‘Tell us more. How does this impact how we include folks?’” ~ Survey participant*

*“Anglophones (and allophones) in Quebec are in a unique majority/minority situation; it creates an extra complexity, but also creates a greater likelihood that they will be aware and able to address minority concerns or discriminatory practices.” ~ Survey participant*

Unfortunately, **communities of faith overestimate how welcoming they are** and to whom. A lack of comfort is said to come from

- social norms about avoiding conflict
- keeping the peace
- fear of upsetting the wider community
- unreasonable expectations of what a minister “should just put up with”

Some communities of faith are selective about the issues they will address and become defensive when asked to address others. Raising concerns is regarded as “unpleasantness” or inviting conflict, rather than the concern itself being problematic, and some report not only denial or discomfort but retaliation for raising concerns.

*“We would rather do anything except directly confront an issue.” and “We seem to have slipped into a comfortable silence, assuming no complaints means all is well. And I don’t feel like raising it anymore.” ~ Survey participants*

*“They want to be supportive of me personally; there is no interest in learning biblical or theological responses as learned in the Affirming process.” ~ Survey participant:*

*“They are avoidant and will dismiss any claims of discrimination, explaining how it is me and my perceptions or a culture gap. If I push further, they will become defensive.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I would pay for raising issues with rudeness or being ignored by those who disagreed.” ~ Survey participant*

Members who have professional experience with conflict (such as mediators, those with union experience, educators, nurses or health care workers, or those working in human resources) bring not only skills but also comfort and a willingness to engage. This was seen as an asset and a reason that these communities of faith have capacity. However, even where there is capacity, conflict or fear of conflict can incapacitate. Likewise, some communities of faith in more rural areas or areas where congregants are labourers or small business owners, see regulations and protocol as akin to government interference. Some ministers have received immediate and competent support when raising issues, while others refer to their communities of faith as “in progress,” or on a “learning edge,” or “avoidant.” Because M and P responsibilities are so extensive, it makes it hard to find volunteers to fill these roles.

*“Half of the M and P were so afraid. They had been bitten so badly already that they were never going to be able to address the elephant in the room. And they were all highly skilled in their personal and professional lives. Two of them had already decided that denial was their way, and one of them had just opted out.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In this community, almost no one had worked in a setting that had a human resources department or a procedures manual. Most worked in fishing, construction, or for a family business. Workplace regulations were perceived as the government trying to tell them what to do with their own business. The region/Conference and General Council were similarly regarded as making it harder for them to do things the way they always had and keep the church open.” ~ Survey participant*

In terms of implications, while the involvement of those from other professional fields can be an asset, this points to a potential lack of reliance on training within the United Church. Furthermore, some communities of faith rely on inaccurate information from this outside wisdom. There is a need for opportunities to discuss inequity issues at times when the stakes are less high, a need for skills on how to “lean in” to conflict, and a need to recognize that avoidance is damaging to the pastoral relationship and cumulative. With the closing of churches, especially in rural areas, there are fewer local support options when there is an identified lack of capacity. This means a higher reliance on regional staff who are able and willing to travel. Furthermore, some communities of faith may require intervention and support without them first approaching the regional council or General Council Office.

*“I find it problematic that the mechanism we have for dealing with challenges in the congregation is the M and P committee. Because either they don't have the right skill set, or they're unwilling to advocate for you within the congregation.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Their adamant refusal to believe that they were anything but welcoming.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It takes me risking everything to raise concerns they should already be aware of. I'm very sad that we're losing so many younger people because they feel the obvious hypocrisy at work even though they're deeply committed to ministry and spirituality.” ~ Survey participant*

Thankfully, some equity-seeking ministry personnel do report that their communities of faith show signs of both willingness and capacity to communicate on equity issues and concerns.

*“As above...exceptionally engaged and proactive people” ~ Survey participant*

*“The chair of the M and P committee...is trained in conflict management and is gifted in leading difficult conversations. Her ministry truly is a gift to myself and this pastoral charge.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Most of the members are 60+, but some are deeply devoted and willing to try.” ~ Survey participant*

*“This community of faith has learned from their past the importance of open conversations, and they have a genuine care for each other. The board chair is a retired school principal and does a fantastic job of facilitating discussion.” ~ Survey participant*

While **unwillingness/apathy/discomfort or inexperience addressing issues/lack of capacity** are still the most frequently perceived barriers to a community of faith communicating about inequity, there are others that were each mentioned multiple times. These other factors include

- concerns with the church’s reputation in the surrounding community
- that the surrounding community is inequitable in general
- denial or unawareness of the issue
- fear
- having other issues that are more pressing, such as finances

Another common factor mentioned was internal dynamics, such as protectionism and family dynamics in a community of faith. Often there are multiple barriers preventing issues being raised, let alone dealt with.

*“Hard issues are ‘too hard’ to take on, aging is used as an excuse for disengaging. Outdated ideas are clung to in the face of all evidence to a need for updated thinking and polity. We think we know and are not willing to learn otherwise.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The age of the congregation generally and the number of women who did not pursue careers outside the home here means it is hard for them to imagine my perspective.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The biggest problem I hear is not so much about money, it’s that we don’t have enough people to do the work. So we are often dealing with people who are tired and feeling like they have to do the job because nobody else will. So they aren’t going to always have the energy to say, ‘Let’s learn something new now.’ They are volunteers, so we can’t step in and fire them if they do a lacklustre job.” ~ Interview participant*

When discriminatory dynamics are so embedded in the wider community, it becomes particularly challenging to raise them in the church. **Mere conversation is an example of countercultural gospel ministry.**

*“There is a lack of diversity in the congregation and the wider community. When a place is as White as this is, it is easy for people not to realize their own privilege. They are also often unaware of the history of discrimination that created this ‘pocket of Whiteness.’” ~ Survey participant*

*“L’indignation trop fortement affirmée devant des personnes pour qui il faut être “gentil” à tout prix [There is a strong expectation of superficial niceness].” ~ Survey participant*

*“Admitting there are issues means folks are being challenged to reflect on their own behaviours and take responsibility for their complicity. Everyone is being asked to hold others accountable for their actions/behaviours, and everyone is called to act/love in the Way of Jesus...which is not how the other six days and 23 hours of their week is lived out. Many do not want to go inward...name their sinfulness...repent...seek reconciliation...facilitate healing.... It is far easier to continue as we always have, and if the clergy is the constant casualty of our actions, so be it!”*  
~ Survey participant

*“This is so much a part of our culture that no one sees it.”* ~ Survey participant

*“My own job security and how people will receive me to provide pastoral care if they feel like I threaten part of their identity (the part that challenges their White, liberal inclusiveness)”* ~ Survey participant

## **Personal and Situational Barriers for Ministry Personnel Raising Issues**

There are other personal or situational barriers that prevent some equity-seeking ministry personnel from even raising concerns in the first place. These are not universally experienced but important, nonetheless. **Personal finances is the most frequent barrier**, including the fear that raising issues will jeopardize their job security and therefore their financial position, which is precarious for many.

*“I need this job to make ends meet, so I stay and put up with it.”* ~ Survey participant

*“Yes. I am still in the process of applying for permanent residency, so I cannot be ‘unemployed’ at this time.”* ~ Survey participant

*“I never was able to take the medical leave, partly due to immigration process and partly due to the feeling of job insecurity by taking medical leave.”* ~ Survey participant

The next most common personal barriers are **housing and family responsibility** (including parenting and/or caring for an ill partner), current immigration status, and future employability, each mentioned multiple times. Some are protecting the community of faith or preserving the pastoral relationship either out of loyalty or stability. **These issues—especially finances and parenting—disproportionately affect women in ministry.** Some mentioned that being older or no longer being responsible for children meant they felt more able to raise issues and take the risk.

*“Now that my children are older and past secondary education costs I worry less about upsetting the apple cart and being dismissed if I speak out. I try to be my most authentic self and live the Way of Jesus that commands love and advocates for justice!”* ~ Survey participant

*“I am a single parent. My personal vulnerability is huge. As sole wage earner I cannot afford to alienate people in the congregation.”* ~ Survey participant



*“Future employability, and remembering how small the church is, and how rampantly rumours run amuck. Witnessing faith communities harming trans ministers.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Church-Related Situational Barriers for Ministry Personnel**

Church situational barriers also affect equity-seeking ministry personnel's choices about raising concerns, such as the candidacy process and colleagues' perceptions. Both of these relate to a **fear or perception of being judged by peers or peers-with-particular-power**. Interestingly, there is also a fear of regional staff's perceptions or M and P committees' perceptions, which could affect equity-seeking ministry personnel's chances of a next position. The lack of effective institutional support and lack of trust in the community of faith's leadership also dissuade equity-seeking ministry personnel from raising concerns.

*“There are no other DLMs in my area, and the other ministers do not consider me a part of their group, so no support there.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I sometimes think that I am perceived as a pushy (aggressive) Indian by colleagues.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Manse housing made me vulnerable to retaliation and left me unable to have a break from the discrimination while on vacation or leave.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It feels as though as a UCC minister I am only judged and disciplined by the wider church or colleagues. It would appear there is little to no support.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Candidacy had a huge effect on me, and instilled a fear of not being enough, and of never being good enough. I now put too much weight in other's harmful opinions because I am accustomed to trying to get through candidacy, even now that I'm ordered. Candidacy and this stress affected my health and mental health.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Not any more.... What a blessing.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Because when I say it, and nothing gets done, or nothing changes, it creates self doubt.” ~ Survey participant*

In terms of **implications of these barriers**, the church needs to be reminded that ministry personnel who are also balancing parenting and the immigration process are particularly vulnerable to having to stay in abusive or unhealthy situations. Similarly, for candidates transitioning into new ministry personnel, it is difficult to lay down the feeling that colleagues are evaluating you. Because they are less likely to come forward, more proactive support (semi-regular check-ins through a regional network) should be considered, as well as considering what can be done to support this shift, and how we balance mutual accountability with mutual support, while maintaining appropriate confidentiality. As more and more ministry personnel are in part-time positions and/or dealing with rising housing costs, their lack of financial buffer is a significant factor that is likely affecting the health of their pastoral relationships. Resources such

as paid administrative leave for those who file complaints with the Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Policy or mandated financial help with moving costs should be considered.

## Impact of Raising Concerns

As seen above, equity-seeking ministry personnel are concerned about the possible consequences of raising concerns or addressing discrimination. For those who have done so, thankfully the most frequent consequence is that “addressing it has made our pastoral relationship better or deeper.” Unfortunately, this is still not very frequent and is overshadowed by serious situations where the pastoral relationship ends or is broken irreparably, or it results in the equity-seeking ministry personnel considering leaving ministry or the United Church altogether.<sup>11</sup> Equity-seeking ministry personnel generally experience that they bear the burden or are most affected if there are negative consequences to raising concerns or addressing discrimination.<sup>12</sup> This encourages equity-seeking ministry personnel to be even more strategic about whether it is really worth raising an issue, even if ultimately there are positive consequences as well.

*“Mostly the ministry personnel and any marginalized lay person who enters our building and interacts with lay people.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It will affect me, young families in the congregation, seniors, anyone vulnerable and not ‘in charge’ within the power structure of the congregational culture. There is a lot of hidden bullying and pressure that is now coming to the surface.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I felt alone there. I did have people in the congregation who were supportive of what I was trying to do there and were actually angry at the people who were responsible for disseminating this information. But at the end of the day, they wanted to keep the community peaceful, and they didn’t want to ruffle feathers.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’m still there but picked up another half-time ministry position where my skills are at least valued.” ~ Survey participant*

---

<sup>11</sup> Of survey participants, who could choose more than one response: Addressing it has made our pastoral relationship better or deeper (chosen by 23 percent of participants, 16 percent of participants chose only this response, whereas 7 percent combined it with other answers), Little to no effect (17 percent), I bring less of myself to the ministry role/I am more compartmentalized (15 percent), The pastoral relationship has ended—I left (10.5 percent), I am considering leaving ministry or the United Church altogether (9 percent), It will likely shorten the pastoral relationship/there is lack of trust (8 percent), There are now conversations we avoid (7 percent), I am still here but looking elsewhere for another position (3 percent), Bringing it up has broken the pastoral relationship beyond repair (3 percent), The pastoral relationship has ended—by the community of faith’s decision (3 percent), The community of faith treads super carefully now/they are on eggshells (1 participant), I am considering leaving the community or Canada (0).

<sup>12</sup> Of survey participants: The ministry personnel (32 percent), Mostly the ministry personnel (18 percent), We are all equally affected (19 percent), Mostly the M and P committee, the lay leadership of the community of faith, or a few people (4 percent), Mostly the community of faith (3 percent), Did not answer (24 percent)

Framing any negative consequence as a need for “self-care” is a form of gaslighting, as it takes focus away from the reasons for those consequences. This is a disconnect from other spheres in society where, officially, it is the employer’s responsibility to ensure a safe workplace. More equity-seeking ministry personnel may turn to human rights codes and other external policies, as they are clearer about consequences and protection during the process. Addressing issues can take significant time in the pastoral relationship—both the process of addressing it and/or preventative education and preparation. When designing interventions that require ministry personnel to confront or raise concerns themselves, the potential implications and risks must be taken seriously.

*“Ministerial troubles being directed towards the idea of self-care lands all the problems back in the minister’s lap. That’s a crackerjack one. When someone told me to go to the gym, I said, ‘I swam 2000 meters this morning. I’m still pissed off! I’m doing the self-care.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“People who are ‘othered,’ the work of that is put on us. So if I experience homophobia, and I want to address it, then I have to chase down someone who’s willing to come and willing to do those tasks of saying, ‘You can’t do this,’ or whatever. It changes the dynamics of the job to be in roles like that, where you’re always chasing support. It takes time, it takes energy, it takes humility. It takes a profound amount of resilience. That’s another aspect of homophobia, racism, and all those things that I don’t think we give attention to; the energy and effort it takes people who are the ones discriminated against to elevate these issues and make action happen. The church still lives in that place that says it’s my job to sort this out, and the rest of the world does not, and the law does not. The law says it’s the church’s responsibility to sort this out, not the employees’ responsibility. Church isn’t there yet. And the weight is heavy. It’s heavy!” ~ Interview participant*

One of the consequences of attempting to raise concerns or communicate about discrimination can be the end of a pastoral relationship. Further research on ministry personnel retention could be very useful for the United Church, particularly into how this affects general morale and willingness to engage in dialogue and healing. We asked participants if they had **intentions of moving** from their present pastoral relationship within the next 18 months.<sup>13</sup> Over a third have little to no intention of doing so. For some, this is because the situation is very positive, and for others, because there are other factors compelling them to stay.

*“I never intend to move from this congregation. They will carry me out in a casket.” ~ Survey participant*

---

<sup>13</sup> Of all data, from surveys and those who discussed this: No/not at all likely (9 percent), Very unlikely (7 percent), Unlikely (19 percent), Don’t know/considering/maybe (7), Likely (2), Likely, but for unrelated reason (8 percent), Very likely/high (7 percent), Move is planned already, related reason (3 percent), Move is planned already, unrelated reason (6 percent), Have left already, related reason (16 percent), Have left already, unrelated reason (8 percent), Have left already, reason not given (2 percent)

*“I now have another short-term appointment. It appears the UCC values me as one who will hold space while we ‘find a real minister.’” ~ Survey participant*

*“I am not sure how long I will be able to stay in this isolated and discriminatory environment. Fear that this is the best I can expect is keeping me at my current community of faith.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The only reason I haven’t started looking for other jobs is that the Holy Spirit is moving in worship, and individuals are leaning into their faith in new and exciting ways. So long as there is fruit, I feel a responsibility to keep fighting the good fight, in the hopes that breakthrough occurs. I just don’t know how long I can do it and rely on the Spirit daily for guidance.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It is a factor. However, I do not wish to move just to end up in the same situation. Therefore, I am considering options very carefully.” ~ Survey participant*

Almost another third of survey participants and interview participants who talked about moving think it is likely, very likely, planned, or they have already left because of experiences of discrimination. **Numerically, discrimination is having a significant impact on the year-to-year number of ministry personnel who are leaving their pastoral relationships.** This contributes not only to pastoral relations disruptions but to a lack of trust by ministry personnel that their covenants are worth continuing.

*“Possibly, because of the dissonance in being [equity-seeking] while serving a [dominant culture] church. They are proud of having an [equity-seeking] leader, but it gets tiring.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It is likely that I will end any type of ministry in that period. I am tired of trying to be taken seriously...after 15 years,... related to my gender being seen by congregations and the male colleagues as a deficit.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I left almost a year ago after many years. I was burnt out and unsupported. They hired someone full time after I left.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Left with diagnosed PTSD. Am not sure I will ever return.” ~ Survey participant*

Of the unrelated reasons for moving on, the most common were retirement, the community of faith’s financial position, or because it was an appointment with a planned end date, including student/candidacy appointments. Retirement is a significant factor, either in someone choosing to retire early or choosing to stay in a problematic pastoral relationship because they are almost at retirement.

*“Not likely. If I move it will be about finances, not a fractured relationship that I can see.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Considered it; too close to retirement.” ~ Survey participant*

## Other Issues Discussed in Communications

*“I worked for the wider church. The person I reported to would ask for a report. But they didn’t want to hear my story and said, ‘Get to the point.’ As an Indigenous person, story is the point. The same thing happened on my [annual] review, although I really tried to understand what they wanted. When I said to them, ‘I don’t know what it is you want’ and we had a conversation, I was asked what I experience. I said, ‘I have a racist boss. You don’t want to hear me the way that I communicate.’ Later, they came back and said, ‘You’re right.’” ~ Interview participant*

In general, communication styles themselves are culturally defined. This needs to be recognized. Some level of discomfort is a normal part of all communication, especially across differences, and discomfort is not a reason to avoid communication. Once this is expected, communication is often easier than anticipated. **Healthy communication needs to be taught at the regional and local level**, including having outside facilitators come in and raise the bar around communication when needed. Other helpful participant suggestions include honesty, willingness to push through tough conversations, direct communication training, building trust, and programs such as Training in Compassionate Listening by Cathy Merchant.<sup>14</sup>

*“My board and M and P have built up trust from the beginning; my being honest and open has been the best way to deal with things.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I said, ‘Just go and ask him.’ She came running back [and said,] ‘Oh, that was so much easier than I thought.’... We need to start having these conversations and realizing that we’re a little bit uncomfortable in this conversation. Maybe tell them that you’re feeling awkward? That’s okay. The more we have these conversations openly and with each other in a timely manner, the more we can shift.” ~ Interview participant*

For M and P, in particular, the following additional wisdom was offered:

- resisting secrecy, such as not mentioning a concern to M and P (differentiating confidentiality from secrecy)
- setting aside time and preparing for intentional feedback
- sending yearly reviews to the Conference/region
- keeping M and P separate from other committees or leadership

Communication methods are often met with resistance from congregational leaders. These include using email to keep a record, e-newsletters, direct communication, and naming exclusionary dynamics.

---

<sup>14</sup> We are not endorsing this program as we have not experienced it, but it was suggested by a participant.

In communicating about equity issues in general, the following were suggested:

- Make use of empathy by making conversations personally relevant but not about the ministry personnel (give an example of someone you know/love) so that education actually works.
- Be clear about when the ministry personnel doesn't need to be present, for example, at some M and P meetings, when education is happening that is personal to them.
- Clarify the difference between a lack of skill and problematic attitudes, though both may be hurtful.

*“A leader within the congregation, who was very well respected and trusted, raised some very clear points and said, ‘I’m not afraid to talk about this, and we shouldn’t be afraid to talk about this because we care for this person [their minister], and they don’t need to be here while we address this. They don’t need to carry the burden of explaining their race or explaining their ethnicity or their culture. Right. This is on us.’ And so I wonder about having proactive conversations.” ~ Interview participant*

**Congregationalism and individualism by communities of faith** contribute to communities of faith believing they have a choice as to whether or not to engage with their regional council, or they have given up listening to the regional council. This can exacerbate a situation, and when there is a crisis, there is a need for more connection, not less. Continued ways to strengthen the relationship between regional councils and leaders in communities of faith would be helpful in this scenario. No matter how it plays out, ministry personnel often have to leave a pastoral relationship if a crisis level has been reached, even if resolved. Proactive and regular communication from the region to communities of faith, especially those with equity-seeking ministry personnel, to see how the pastoral relationship is going may help to catch issues earlier.

## Experience of Supports to Pastoral Relationships

Pastoral relationships are a covenant between ministry personnel, one or more communities of faith, and a regional council. What are the supports, particularly if and when equity concerns or discrimination arise, that are most effective from beyond the communities of faith? Are equity-seeking ministry personnel reaching out, to whom, and in hopes of what? This section considers how equity-seeking ministry personnel reach out for support and what the effects are, particularly when there are concerns or incidents of discrimination.

### Reaching Out Patterns and Hopes

Interestingly, half of all survey participants have reached out privately in the wider church. This is by far the most common response (50 percent), followed by 17 percent who said they didn't bother reaching out.<sup>15</sup> Far fewer have reached out beyond the United Church or publicly, so any public requests for support that are visible in the United Church or public are only a small percentage of the requests for support in general. This should be recognized, because the requests for support that are known about do not represent the extent of the problem. The reasons equity-seeking ministry personnel reached out or not and how come from both the surveys and interviews/focus groups, though some answers covered multiple categories. The three top reasons for their choices are

- a need for confidentiality or seeking pastoral care
- a realistic defeatism (that it was not worth it/being too tired/nothing was available/it wouldn't be effective)
- needing a specific kind of help/taking it to a new level<sup>16</sup>

*"I need a place to discern when something is 'my' issue and when it is a 'pastoral relationship' issue. I have good [identity-specific] support beyond the church, and use it." ~ Survey participant*

*"I appreciate the input of colleagues as a reality check for myself (am I over/under reacting?) and the personal support they offer." and "I was starting to wonder if it really was me." ~ Survey participants*

---

<sup>15</sup> Of survey participants: Yes, privately in the wider church (50 percent), No, I didn't bother (17 percent), n/a (didn't answer) (10 percent), Yes, privately beyond the United Church (10 percent), Yes, publicly in the wider church (5 percent), No, but I have considered it (4 percent), Yes but only in an anonymous way (2 percent), Other (2 percent). One oversight was not offering the option of the answer "Yes, publicly beyond the United Church," though this is represented in other questions.

<sup>16</sup> Of all participants who gave reasons: Need for confidentiality or seeking pastoral care (23 percent), It was not worth it/I was too tired/perception that nothing was available/not previously effective (23 percent), Needed a specific kind of help/taking it to a new level (22 percent), Needed material support (financial, forms, etc.) (12 percent), Had a good previous experience (8 percent), It was not too bad/not serious enough (7 percent), There was no problem (5 percent).

Overwhelmingly, equity-seeking ministry personnel's decision is **motivated by the need to be able to trust the source of support**. Trust means confidentiality, no possible retaliation or mark on one's record, assurance of effective intervention, or referral when requested. **Just being heard (pastoral care/confidentiality) was a significant motivator**, though did not necessarily address the issue. The church works differently than other places of employment, so there is a need for specific kinds of advice that include theology and church cultural awareness. **Equity-seeking ministry personnel also strive to protect the church (or a community of faith) from further criticism**, even if they wish to address a particular concern or dynamic. Equity-seeking ministry personnel perceive the lack of an ethic of pastoral care from the wider church, and negative experiences with one staff person or sector of the church have significant implications as to whether someone will reach out elsewhere (perhaps apart from individual colleagues). This needs to be confidential, trustworthy, and someone not involved in pastoral relations decision-making. Respondents either appreciate having a regional pastoral support minister or comment on the absence of one in their regions. **There is a significant need for more mechanisms for pastoral care for ministry personnel—in consultation, in being heard, in recognizing equity issues.**

*"I needed advice but didn't want to tarnish the congregation's reputation." ~ Survey participant*

*"As I understand, it is proper to start with the pastoral relations and the congregational support minister. Their lack of effectiveness was uninspiring." ~ Survey participant*

*"I think BAM [Below Average Ministers Facebook group] is super toxic in so many ways, but Facebook is where a lot of people feel heard because the church doesn't understand how to offer that. It's really hard to sit with people who are in pain, and to just sit with them, but that's supposed to be what pastoral care is. I think that's something that people in the administration have forgotten." ~ Interview participant*

*"We moved a few years ago, and I thought I would be on somebody's pastoral care list.... There hasn't even been a card. There's been zero contact for me or for our family from the region. When I have reached out to the pastoral relations minister, they replied, 'Oh, I'm sorry; if you don't hear from me, it's just because I'm swamped.' That may well be true, but it just seems like there is no mechanism for pastoral care for ministers who have been hurt or who are ill." ~ Interview participant*

*"I went to a GCO staff member, thinking that they were positioned to make change for everyone, not just for me." ~ Survey participant*

## Sources of Support

Numerous participants underscore the importance of supportive colleagues, either from their own identity group or more generally/locally, and needing someone to consult with to discern whether this was a personal reaction or an external issue. When equity-seeking ministry personnel reach out for spiritual support (such as pastoral care, discernment, spiritual direction, wisdom, prayer) they are most likely to do so from more than one source.



<b>Types of Spiritual Supports Reached Out To</b>	The number of participants who chose this type	The number of participants who <b>only</b> chose this
Colleague(s) or a church support group	50	4
Personal friend(s) or family	48	3
A spiritual director, therapist, or medical doctor	36	5
My regional pastoral relations minister	34	3
A regional pastoral support minister or chaplain	10	0
My Office of Vocation minister	8	0
Someone from the United Church legal team or other General Council Office staff	7	2
External support, such as a lawyer or Human Rights Commission officer	2	0
n/a (didn't answer)	23	23

*“I had a local colleague, who would also be considered an equity-seeking-minister, and we became close friends. Our luncheons were a lifeline for me; I wouldn't have lasted with the [community of faith] as long as I did without this important support and friendship. This colleague saw me and was intentional in being a support for me.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I've just been grateful for that group, just for me to be like, ‘I'm not the only one!’ is amazing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Spiritual direction and therapy, medical doctors prescribing meds and supplements for calming my neuro system and writing letters of recommendation for [potential] medical leave.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Being on the regional council commission was really fruitful, and I learned a lot. I developed allies outside of this particular community, whom I could call and say, ‘Hey, someone said this thing. Is that weird?’ And they're like, ‘Whoa.’ (laughter) Okay, not just me.” ~ Interview participant]*

Other sources consulted or sought out include teachers/seminary teachers, partners, Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble, other younger colleagues, Unifaith (a community chapter of the Unifor union), Facebook groups specifically for certain identities of ministry personnel (mental health, Indigenous, etc.), diaconal networks, and just getting involved regionally or nationally. **Support for healthy colleague networks, clusters, and groups should not be considered optional in our church structure. For equity-seeking ministry personnel they play a very significant role in their thriving.** Likewise, for all its issues, is Unifaith playing a role for equity-seeking ministry personnel that is not adequately addressed by the wider church? It was mentioned, though not often, and it may be a dynamic that is worth considering.

## Intervention Support

Beyond consultation and spiritual support, far fewer equity-seeking ministry personnel are requesting that someone intervene in their pastoral relationships.<sup>17</sup> In particular, **racialized and Indigenous, those admitted, and sexual- and gender-marginalized equity-seeking ministry personnel were much less likely to request intervention**, although overall, those in their first three years of a pastoral relationship were more likely. Particularly, since many racialized and queer ministry personnel are overrepresented in short-term pastoral relationships, this points to a significant disconnect either in accessing intervention or trusting it to be offered. Of all those who said yes to requesting intervention, almost all are requesting this from their regional pastoral relations minister or regional executive minister. No participants chose “Yes, My Office of Vocation minister” or “Yes, a UCCan sexual misconduct consultant,” which suggests that ministry personnel are still most likely to request intervention from their regional council staff. While this may be appropriate in our polity, if an equity-seeking ministry personnel perceives their regional council staff as unsupportive or in a conflict of interest, the Office of Vocation may need to consider other mechanisms that can be accessed.

*“[I hoped for the] kind of help that makes us feel seen and heard and valued. Not just because we’re Indian, but because we’re people.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I would have liked to hear them say, ‘I’ll keep you in my prayers’ or ‘How can I help?’ That’s what I would like to hear.” ~ Interview participant*

## Timing of Reaching Out

When equity-seeking ministry personnel reach out to their regional council staff, almost half do so after trying to address the situation internally went nowhere, and another quarter do so as soon as they see the first signs of a concern.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that **if equity-seeking ministry personnel are going to reach out, they generally do so relatively early on in the situation**. Given what we hear about regional staff’s lack of availability, this does not presume that they received intervention or support and doesn’t account for those who don’t reach out at all, but it does point to a willingness and effort to engage regional support. Again, of those who reach out, there are some differences among equity-seeking ministry personnel. Those who did not reach out or waited until much later to do so were

- bisexual, asexual, or queer
- racialized, Indigenous

---

<sup>17</sup> Of survey participants: No (63 percent), Yes, my regional pastoral relations minister or regional executive minister (18 percent), n/a (didn’t answer) (15 percent), and one each of a United Church conflict mediator, mediator, police or a lawyer, a landlord and tenant [board].

<sup>18</sup> Of survey participants who had reached out, they indicated their timing as, As soon as I saw the first signs of a concern (45 percent), After trying to address it internally went nowhere (26 percent), When it became unbearable (11 percent), When I was ready to end the pastoral relationship (7 percent), After the pastoral relationship ended, and I was ready to talk (2 percent). Other answers: “as a part of my support network and to support what we were doing,” “as part of routine regular communication with my regional minister,” and “when I needed to be strategic—when I knew that they would share their story first.”

- those in non-congregational ministry
- in pastoral relationships with racialized or significantly multi-racial or multi-ethnic communities of faith

Those who are White, in a call with rural, five- to 60-member communities of faith of adults only are the most likely to reach out to regional staff early on.

*“Especially when I was at one church, I called the pastoral relations minister a lot. Just having someone in that role that’s willing to listen to me, help me talk through things, and do some discernment to gain clarity on what the situation is and what is my role and responsibility.” ~ Interview participant*

*“[after a tragedy] There was a time I felt numb. [There was an] expectation that I should still be engaged and have conversations. [An] expectation from me as well. As ministers, we have to learn to ask.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I didn’t know what direction to go in. I didn’t want my M and P committee to get into trouble, and they were as good as they knew what to do, so I contacted the pastoral relations minister for the region.” ~ Survey participant*

## Types of Support Sought

There are generally four kinds of support that equity-seeking ministry personnel are seeking when they reach out: pastoral, strategic advocacy, proactive action and resources, and intervention. Since this information comes from the surveys and interviews and focus groups, it is expressed with the numbers of times mentioned rather than a percentage of participants. As a reminder, 149+ individuals participated (three Indigenous consultation groups, 95 surveys, and 54 individual participants in interviews or focus groups, with a few overlaps between all of these). For example, 12 participants naming pastoral care is approximately 8 percent of the total, but does not mean that 92 percent did not seek or did not want pastoral care, just that they did not mention it when asked about types of support.

### **Pastoral** includes

- pastoral care (12 participants mentioned this)
- being heard/compassionately acknowledged/seen as human/understood/trusted (14)
- peer support/healing circle/sharing ideas of how to cope (8)
- real relationship (7)
- a regional staff person proactively checking in, especially when significant issues are occurring for an individual or in the news (8)
- someone to reflect with, a minister for the minister/pastor for the pastors
- mental health supports

*“Support services for ministers and chaplains where cultural safety was understood and provided.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The thing that I really missed in that moment, in those moments, was anybody offering to pray for us. Was anybody saying, ‘Hey, I have a colleague in your new town that could come and be bedside?’ ‘What do you need spiritually?’ Because that is something our church is supposed to be able to provide.” ~ Interview participant*

*“For the next 45 minutes while it was all going crazy, she just kept texting me, saying, ‘Breathe. I’ve got your back. You’re all right. You will be okay. Breathe.’ She didn’t talk about what was happening. She didn’t weigh in. She just kept reminding me to breathe. And that was huge. That’s all I needed to survive that.” ~ Interview participant*

The other most common kind of support is **strategic advocacy**:

- advice/objective perspective/constructive guidance (17)
- an advocate/ombudsperson (16)
- solidarity (9)
- how to be involved in the church while on LTD
- support for situations beyond my capacity

*“A clear eye from certain colleagues, love from friends and family, intervention in small ways from my regional minister” ~ Survey participant*

*“There were a few times where we were in the church hall, and he was there. Someone would come over and just stand with me so I wasn’t standing alone, so he didn’t feel like he could approach me. Sometimes intervention is literally being a witness.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I did have one experience that was escalated to the pastoral relations minister in our region. It resulted in that member asking to have their membership revoked because they were asked to apologize, and they refused to apologize. I took a lot of abuse from that person—racist, sexist abuse—because of their feeling we should reopen the church [during COVID], sending me a lot of far-right propaganda about vaccines. I tried to handle it in a pastoral way, hear them out, engage with them, and have a conversation. When it didn’t go the way they wanted it to, they really just became abusive, is really the only way to say it.” ~ Interview participant*

The third category of support is **proactive action and resources**:

- help training the board and M and P around equity and pastoral relations (8)
- education for their specific community of faith (7)
- systemic change (4)
- active support for networks/organizing ministry personnel gatherings
- equity-group-specific supports

*“I have found my lifelines in others who are clergy with ADHD. It’s very life-giving in a lot of ways because we can celebrate how ADHD is the birthplace of our creativity, and the gifts of neurodiversity, and how it can be a true superpower. And then talk about being overly sensitive and the challenges with depression, which sometimes go hand in hand with ADHD. Finding my colleagues was my lifeline.” ~ Interview participant*

The fourth category of support is **intervention**:

- mediation (4)
- discipline of an abuser or institution or community/hold them accountable (5)
- providing support to M and P (4)
- holding a meeting
- initiating a review
- financial support
- denominational support for equitable salaries

*“I was hoping the M and P would write up a complaint based on an unacceptable experience. I may be fine, but it’s still unacceptable behaviour.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I would have liked to sit down with the person who had the issue and M and P and discuss the matter together. And if that hadn’t worked, then I would have liked to see someone from the regional office get involved. But we never had the chance to actually just talk the two of us with M and P facilitating the conversation. [interviewer] ‘Did you feel like someone or that the M and P would have had the skill level capacity to do that?’ That’s another question. Maybe not. But I think they could have sought guidance regionally.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Someone to mediate...to help people truly hear each other.... I went to a professional counsellor to address my part in the relationship, while the [community of faith] did little to assess or take responsibility for their part. I hoped someone would come in and help facilitate deeper conversations of self-discovery to understand the underlying motivation for repeat destructive and harmful behaviours. None of this support was forthcoming...so the behaviours continue.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Allyship of Regional Staff**

When equity-seeking ministry personnel reach out to regional staff there is a very mixed experience of whether they are perceived as allies or not. **In general, roughly one third very much do, and another third very much do not.**<sup>19</sup> We see some familiar demographic trends; male ministry personnel experience regional staff as allies more often than female and non-binary or gender-queer ministry personnel. More frequent allyship is found in

- Prairie to Pine and Northern Spirit regions
- diaconal ministers
- those serving in Affirming communities of faith, particularly in COL3 and COL6

**While gay and lesbian ministry personnel find allies more frequently, queer, bisexual, and other sexual minorities do so less often.** Other groups that report experiencing less frequent allyship include

- those who are disabled
- racialized and Indigenous ministry personnel

---

<sup>19</sup> Of survey participants and those who chose to answer: 10 or 9/10 (31 percent), 1 or 2/10 (29 percent).

- those in non-congregational or alternative expressions of ministry or recognized non-United Church employment
- those with less than 20 hours/week
- those in the suburbs
- those in Living Skies region
- Western Ontario Waterways region

Although each of these factors may not be at play all of the time and for each equity-seeking ministry personnel, we do see trends whereby certain groups of equity-seeking ministry personnel are repeatedly disappointed by their interactions and this has **ripple effects among their networks** or those they are supporting informally.

*“They were really affirming of how awful the situation was for me. And you know, that one time, went to bat for me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have to say, when I was diagnosed, I think my boss [in a regionally recognized ministry] was more pastoral than some of the church people. I wasn’t accountable to the region, but it wouldn’t have hurt if some of them had sent a little email.” ~ Interview participant*

A number of participants mentioned the **importance of relationship and trust over the need for policy**. The church relies on policy when they can’t trust communities of faith, but this hampers some smaller or unique ministries. Automation and systems can make things more transparent or more unbiased, but also impersonal and aid the system rather than participants/ministry personnel. Ministry personnel want to be known, acknowledged, and noticed by their regional ministers (of all kinds). There is a clear call for trauma-informed support/a trauma-informed church. Recognizing that when there’s injustice, there’s trauma, and whether that is trauma from the church or previous experiences, it must inform our structures. **Well-trained and equipped pastoral supports (“ministers for the ministers”), who can also occasionally act as advocates or strategic mentors, would be of significant value.** A specific strategy for supporting and engaging with those on long-term disability needs to be developed, in addition to support for those who are retired. Intervention and policy is less frequently hoped for but is necessary in certain circumstances.

*“How to be better at being a trauma-informed church as a whole. Because when there’s injustice, there’s trauma.... We pretend ‘if you’re a woman in a leadership position, somehow you’ve escaped [violence or abuse].’ Most people would not expect the story that I told to come out of my mouth, but I think we should expect it. We should expect that those stories are everywhere. We don’t really know how to acknowledge or make room for the fact that it’s everywhere. One of the reasons I wanted to come to this focus group was to say, ‘I know I’m not the only one.’ I actually haven’t been in circumstances where I’ve heard other people in ministry telling these kinds of stories to one another. But I know, I just know, that they’re out there.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’m not content to just be on this tiny disability stipend and ride off into the sunset. I still want to contribute to the church, but I have had zero help or guidance.... Since I went on long-term disability, I’ve asked each person, ‘How can you use me? What can I do? What can I not do?’ Beyond me joining the National Accessibility Disability Committee to try to add my voice to the conversation, I don’t see anywhere that the church is being hospitable or enabling participation from clergy with disabilities.” ~ Interview participant*

## Supports That Helped

Equity-seeking ministry personnel who did reach out for support were able to share what was most helpful personally and most helpful for the pastoral relationship. Personally, certain **people** were named as most helpful, including regional ministers-unspecified positions, colleagues, and friends.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, supportive **actions** that were most helpful included

- listening/being heard
- advocacy/someone went to bat for them
- moral support/solidarity<sup>21</sup>

*“People beyond the situation who were outraged on our behalf and tried to consider ways to address it.” ~ Survey participant*

*“What happened in the wider church is that I spoke to someone who helped me realize it was an abusive relationship.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Access to skilled moderators, so the onus is not all on me.” ~ Survey participant*

Some mentioned **other resources or their own actions**, including

- starting identity-specific collegial groups
- organizing small gatherings of colleagues (networks, clusters, retreats)
- seeking medical care
- financial compensation/time off/financial support
- participating in regional council

---

<sup>20</sup> **People/roles** who were named as most helpful personally: regional ministers-unspecified positions (named 16 times), colleagues (named 12 times), friends (9), M and P reps (6), therapists (5), mentors/older or retired ministry personnel/those with experience (5), spiritual directors/companions (4), networks or colleagues who shared their identity or experience (queer, neurodiverse, Indigenous, Black, etc.) (5). Other people mentioned included family, board chair, lawyer, presbytery or regional volunteers, GCO staff, sexual misconduct consultant, and specifically those beyond the United Church (for reasons of confidentiality).

<sup>21</sup> Supportive **actions** named as most helpful, personally: listening/being heard (named 12 times), advocacy/someone went to bat for them (named 10 times), moral support/solidarity (9 times), strategizing/understanding options or process/proposing alternatives (9 times), being believed/understood/affirmed in how bad the situation was (7 times). Each of the following were named at least once: regional staff meeting with the offender, regional staff facilitating finding similar colleagues, regional staff helping close a pastoral relationship, regional staff providing follow-up check-ins, especially when there has been trauma, regional staff initiating intervention, especially when it means there is a no-communication mandate, mediation, and just showing up.

- mutual conversations
- learning what other denominations do
- education or courses for oneself

*“A healthy minister makes for the chances of a healthy pastoral relationship way greater.” ~ Survey participant*

*“My leaving and telling the story to the full board as I was preparing to leave; demanding interim work to be done and removal of power people.” ~ Survey participant*

Some focused on **open communication**:

- a space to speak
- openness, listening
- pre-emptive conversations with M and P about a strategy for leave if needed (disability context)
- consulting with a mentor or coach
- an opportunity to talk without fear of judgment
- family systems theory
- scripture discussion
- negotiating reasonable half-time position descriptions if coming back from restorative leave

*“The ability to speak what was on my heart.” ~ Survey participant*

*“When I came back, I was half-time for a month. I talked to the board about what half of my time would you like me to do, and what half can I give up? I made sure that the job description went around the room and everyone watched us all cross things out.” ~ Interview participant*

Some focused on **regional involvement and advocacy** by the region or others, including

- training provided to the community of faith on awareness sensitivity and communication
- training with minister and community of faith together
- having a town hall with the regional executive minister present
- involving the regional pastoral relations minister or local retired ministers
- having an external person moderate or facilitate conversation
- removing the aggressor/bully

*“I watched the M and P transform as they sought help and asked for guidance. I hope their approach might spread to the council.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Our regional minister came and did a fantastic job. They did their part. We got back on track, and I had come to a pastoral charge that didn't want me.” ~ Interview participant:*



Unfortunately, **many participants said that nothing was helpful to the pastoral relationship**, or that it wasn't able to be helped or saved. One said the relationship would be helped "by the minister leaving" and others alluded to that or suggested things like a space apart/time away/a time to focus on healing or the ministry personnel becoming involved in the wider church. Intentional time away should not be underestimated for building health, but it does not address or change problematic issues.

*"Little support was offered or received. We were on our own." ~ Survey participant*

*"I am hopeful that an outside consultant will provide a fresh perspective and directly address conflict. So far, employees choosing to leave has been the only way things have been resolved." ~ Survey participant*

*"There is a lack of willingness to be introspective about the effects of our choices. Our tolerance of hate has harmed multiple staff, some of whom have left their roles." ~ Survey participant*

Lastly, some mentioned financial support for the minister or administrative and financial support from the regional council for new ministry initiatives while they are establishing, such as acting as treasurer and M and P committees.

## **What Is Helpful for Colleagues**

In addition to describing what was helpful to them and their pastoral relationship, some equity-seeking ministry personnel talked about what they saw as being helpful to their colleagues.

Adding to the wisdom above, the following were observed:

- having a personal or ministry advocate/consultant present during difficult conversations
- facilitators from outside the United Church/independent consultants
- conflict mediators
- talking with OV (Office of Vocation) ministers
- unions/legally binding contracts
- intentional interim ministers
- Affirm United/ S'affirmer Ensemble
- ecumenical and United Church of Christ resources

*"An amazing mentoring group—outside leaders who know people in the church; the M and P committee members who are not power hungry" ~ Survey participant*

*"Willingness of the congregation to bring in outside facilitators to help build capacity for leading in liminal times. Addressing conflict and violence, and dealing with privilege and defensiveness." ~ Survey participant*

*"Friendships, advocacy, support groups." ~ Survey participant*

Other ideas mentioned include

- the pastoral relations minister intervening with M and P so they are aware of their support role
- a heads-up as to whether the community of faith or the community in which it resides is “safe” to receive an equity-seeking ministry personnel
- strong or caring M and P committees who choose to assist
- attending leadership and well-being courses or paid clergy conferences/retreats for nurturing the pastoral spirits of ministry personnel
- the previous Saskatchewan/St. Andrew’s College program for preparing communities of faith for receiving admissions ministry personnel—addressing issues such as providing support against racism and preparing the whole community. Unfortunately, the program was not intensive or ongoing. (It should be noted that new Admissions Orientation programs are now running through The United Theological College/ Le Séminaire Uni and the Centre for Christian Studies.)
- intentional support around sabbaticals—planning for being away, setting good boundaries, and having a thoughtful plan for return and reintroduction
- good formation around ecclesiology and theology—what it means to live in covenant with each other and its bearing on how we treat one another

*“What they have found helpful is better formation around issues of ecclesiology and our theology of ministry. What does that mean to live in covenant with one another and to be in a covenant relationship between the community of faith, the minister, and a region? How does that get played out theologically? I find that sometimes the attitude or the understanding of one’s ecclesiology, or lack thereof, has bearing on how we treat each other. So if you think the church is simply a business, the bottom line is the bottom line, and you run your council meetings accordingly, that’s going to have an impact, in some cases, on how you treat your minister. To me, that speaks to an education in ecclesiology and theology of ministry within our denomination.” ~ Interview participant*

Sometimes, what is helpful for other colleagues is not available or accessible to equity-seeking ministry personnel because of equity issues themselves or regional financial disparity.

*“[Just asking for better compensation has been more effective for male colleagues.] The unspoken assumption that because he is a man he is worth more, should earn more, needs more for his family as breadwinner, or deserves more because of his exceptional qualities.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I realized there’s a huge disparity across the regions as to who has money and who does not. [Our regional council] could not even hire a part-time chaplain with the finances that we have. And so I’m grateful when other regions have that. I do go across and look at all the regions’ websites just to see if there’s anything that’s available. With them being online, that’s really helpful. I do know that the disparity in financial resources is massive across the regions, across the church, and that that makes a difference as to what’s offered.” ~ Interview participant*

## Unhelpful or Harmful Supports

Certain kinds of supports offered are unhelpful or actively harmful. The **most frequent problematic kinds** are:

- offering misguided advice
- blaming the equity-seeking ministry personnel
- ineffective words with no action or justice<sup>22</sup>

*“People, largely clergy, who personalized the political and assumed it was about feelings, not justice.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Several times I had to explain to someone why an egregious and sometimes illegal action was a problem.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Unsolicited advice, including ‘Everyone has issues—you need to get over it,’ ‘Maybe you just need to do less,’ ‘Maybe you just need to not let stuff bother you’—none of these were helpful or true to my situation.” ~ Survey participant*

*“This idea has taken hold in the church that all will be right if we just figure out self-care. It’s ludicrous! These little churches abuse ministers horribly, and the answer from the region is, ‘Go get a massage.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“When things fell apart, I phoned the regional minister. For me as an older professional woman, what I heard was, ‘There is no emotional, spiritual, or governance support for what’s happening in your pastoral charge right now. But you’re probably crazy and can’t look up a therapist on your own, so here’s a referral.’ I never heard from them again.” ~ Interview participant*

While not all participants had interacted with a regional council on equity issues, and some of those who had found it a positive experience, others mentioned specific actions of regional council staff or commissions that were problematic, including

- the region saying it has no power/regional ministers ghosting or not returning calls (8 participants mentioned this)

---

<sup>22</sup> Survey and interview participants who named unhelpful or problematic kinds of “supports” they had been offered listed the following types: Telling me what to do/misguided advice/glib suggestions/fix-it solutions without hearing the concern/projected reason for the problem (15 participants mentioned this), Criticism/blaming the ministry personnel (14 participants mentioned), Ineffective words—Nice but meaningless words/listening with no action/apology and prayer with no action/platitudes/endless talk/care but no justice (8), Downplaying or justifying the behaviour/you know what s/he is like/that’s just so-and-so/they are from a different generation/they were having a bad day (7), Gaslighting/denying/assuming that a lack of self-care is the issue or solution (7), M and P workshops not addressing equity/M and P committees without capacity/M and P needing guidance from the minister while in crisis (5). Other types mentioned at least once included: Lack of a contact person/support person for those on LTD, Clusters that are too geographically large/inaccessible, Breaking confidentiality, A misuse of a theology of forgiveness.

- regional staff offering resentful intervention or minimal intervention (7 participants mentioned this)
- regional staff taking sides with the community of faith/ministry personnel feeling “thrown under the bus” (6)
- regional staff stepping in when not requested/making it worse (5)

*“I reached out for regional support, and the region and our board chair made it about listening to the chair instead of addressing the ongoing concerns. They validated one of the worst offenders instead of actually solving anything, which triangulated the problem and made it worse.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There was no attempt to deal with this issue in any way that did not humiliate my colleagues and me. The region and other church bodies abetted this behaviour.” ~ Survey participant*

*“A staff person came and sat at my kitchen table and said, ‘Well, why did you come out to them? You’ve only been here a short while.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I requested that the chair of the commission speak to my board when they were learning about the parental leave benefits and planning for what would happen when I was on leave. She failed to challenge the many sexist and hostile comments made about my leave and offered limitless sympathy to those who complained the loudest, even agreeing that it was a tremendous hardship for them.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The kind of support the church offered was ridiculous. Every time I wanted to talk about this and see what could be done, they would always refer me to the person who gives pastoral care. I don’t need to be told that I’m not alone, because I am alone. And I don’t need to be told that God loves me, because I know that God loves me. I don’t need to be told, ‘You’re in the wilderness, but you will come out.’ I don’t need any heads to roll. I’m not on a mission to bash anybody. I need justice. And the person who gives pastoral care says, ‘Well, that’s not my turf.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“The regional minister did come to council meeting once or twice to help call out some of the baloney and stop the baloney from being said, by their presence. But it never went beyond any of that... I talked to the volunteer, and we decided that the volunteer should resign, and they said they’re going to resign, and then didn’t... ‘Sorry about your luck. They can harass you if they want to, and there’s nothing you can do about it. They can break the law by trying to get you to quit, or trying to fire you repeatedly while on leave and I can’t do anything about it.’” ~ Interview participant*

## **Ministry Personnel Supports Sought but Unavailable**

Overall, there is a clear recognition that regional council staff are overburdened, but this should not have to be absorbed by those who are in crisis or experiencing discrimination.

*“Regional staff are stretched too thin, with an impossible load to carry. It’s easy to feel uncared for/just a number or a problem.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I did talk with my regional minister about that statement. They mostly nodded and raised their eyebrows like you’re doing, but it’s not like they can really do anything either.” ~ Interview participant*

Other kinds of support were not available when sought out. The most frequently mentioned was **someone to go to in the region for support**/reaching someone by phone who understands United Church ethos, followed by **pastoral care** when there is a crisis such as personal grief or community trauma and **follow-up** from regional staff to see how something turned out. Many commented that they recognized that regional staff are overworked/overburdened or put in a conflict of interest, although that compassion does not solve the concern.

Other region-related supports sought but unavailable (at least in their experience/at the time) were

- pastoral support and accompaniment/intervening with M and P
- knowledgeable and respectful mediation
- a forum to solve issues of accessibility (related to disability) at the regional or General Council level
- anti-oppression being modelled and taught
- training for regional staff on how to deal with mental health issues with ministry personnel, especially because it’s so prevalent
- enough intentional interim ministers who are willing and able to move because many have “aged out” or retired

*“[The region] doesn’t take an authoritative role when the churches don’t comply with legislation. That can be quite challenging for ministers to navigate when support is not there.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I said I was being bullied, yelled at, and being sworn at at the church, and they never even responded. That’s not helpful from a regional person. So whether they need an Office of Vocation hotline for people who need answers, I think it’s probably getting to that point, because our regional staff are stretched. They don’t have the resources, the time, and the people behind them to support them. And I think out of their own need for self-care, I think they’ve stepped back from a lot of things.” ~ Interview participant*

*“One thing that was unfair was for the pastoral relations minister [PRM] to be put in a position where they had to advocate for the relationship and not for one or the other. The community of faith should have had an advocate, and I should have had one. The PRM was like a marriage counsellor, and in this situation, I think that some things were not up for debate; they were covered by labour laws.” ~ Interview participant*

Other resources and supports mentioned that were not available include

- spaces for ministers to speak about issues/find the language to describe what was happening
- a designated colleague to help think through the closure of a relationship and letting go in a spiritual way when a pastoral relationship is ending
- competent EAP support familiar with church processes
- anonymous help in a small town
- truly confidential consultation

Resources and **supports that relate to specific groups** include

- information on how to “do” medical leave and having an advocate to walk one through the paperwork/support for those on LTD
- bilingual resource people
- a consultant or contact for United Church ministry personnel working in chaplaincies or other regionally recognized ministries (as regional pastoral relations commissions don’t usually cover these relationships)
- support/accompaniment for admissions pastoral relationships
- resources and support for young ministers
- more mechanisms to connect regions and culturally specific ministries
- trauma-based supports/supports from people who understand the complexity of racial discrimination
- policies and processes that take rural/remote ministry into account (lack of technology, distance to next community of faith, presence of retired ministry personnel in the area)
- someone in the church assigned to liaise with police when responding to past hate crimes
- legal support for ministry personnel if court is necessary

*“They have me there [assisting communities of faith in a rural area], but who else? Then nobody. [Laughter] [Staff] can't be everywhere. I understand that. It was such a racist, bigoted thing that was said [at an oversight or search meeting]. I just listened, and then I gently reminded them of what we have in our papers, and I went to our policies, and I went to our handbooks. So I did it. One of the members phoned me after and said, 'I can't believe that you diffused that without yelling.' But I'm one, I'm just one person. If I weren't there and they had had somebody else who wasn't willing to meet with them all the time.... The cracks are starting to break open of this new system. Some are good, and some aren't so good.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Trying to navigate educating them on the processes because there was no one else to do it. And then having to advocate for myself at the same time for the time away for maternity leave. That was a really challenging one. And that was in my first pastoral charge, and I was still new and fresh in ministry.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The things that require litigation in the church, I hope those things still get resolved that way, because there are some contexts that are severely dysfunctional and require more than the*

*church can do about it. My experience has been that it's easier to make it about the minister than it is the congregation, because you can remove a minister, but the congregation stays. To really do the system work that's required to make culture changes in churches is big work. Our polity isn't really geared to that.” ~ Interview participant*

One theme that came up multiple times was the **isolation, lack of support, and lack of opportunities to serve for those who are on long-term disability**. Significant supports are needed for those navigating health and mental health leaves and LTD. Is there or could there be a supported network of ministry personnel on LTD for sharing strategies and spiritual support? For some this might be an opportunity to serve or receive support and an opportunity to coordinate care. Perhaps these resources would be better organized nationally than regionally.

*“They did pay money towards it. So to be fair, they made a gesture, but they wiggled out of the whole bill in a really slippery and underhanded way. So they felt magnanimous in giving me a stipend rather than being responsible for the whole bill.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I am trying to connect, and I will continue to try to connect, but the message has been loud and clear: ‘Go away. You're too difficult. We would rather use somebody who's healthy and who can be at the meeting than somebody who takes that extra step, who is not physically present.’ To include me, you'd have to be willing to use something that I could write for you in advance. That's just one example. It's been a deep hurt and frustration. I'm sick, but that doesn't mean I'm useless. I have many gifts and a lot of training and experience that I want to offer.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Community of Faith Supports Sought but Unavailable**

*“Some have been great allies and hugely helpful, others have gotten in the way, but no one has taken action and followed up with concrete action in the years of this pastoral charge fractioning.” ~ Survey participant*

On the community of faith level, the supports sought but unavailable are

- a willingness to discipline church members or apply consequences
- resources designed for communities of faith such as an ethical standards/standards of practice
- best practices for congregational leaders on how to support pastoral relationships across difference
- someone external advising M and P committees to take the racial justice training
- mechanisms to explain pregnancy and parental leaves and someone to advocate who isn't the minister themselves
- finding where to go in the United Church structure/easy-to-navigate websites

Educational programming and justice-focused policy are important forms of support even if not always engaged. Just knowing they are there and the fact that they are a regional priority is

important. However, education can also be a way to just learn how to hide racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination better.

*“The people whose job it was to protect me were out of town, and that’s when it all came down. People were stunned into silence. ‘For the good of the congregation you should probably resign.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I read those best practice, ethical guidelines for clergy, and I agree with them. But what I want to see is a similar document for communities of faith.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Those vague Methodist roots’ sentences about the independence of congregations. . . . I think it gives us an out from dealing with hard things because in reality, we have an authoritative governance structure, and there are rules, lots of them. There’re lots of rules to set our behaviour within congregations, and they’re not followed around equity. And the church seems powerless to enforce their power. And that is at the cost of ministers and those [equity-seeking persons] who come to our congregation who are of Christ and get hustled out.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Acknowledging that the behaviour was unacceptable, but then doing nothing about it. ‘Address the conflict yourself’ advice. If I felt it wouldn’t damage the strained relationship, I already would have!” ~ Survey participant*

*“I can’t come back to work where I’m being harassed if there’s nothing in place. It was just handled so poorly, by M and P and by the region, in terms of what contact was allowed and what wasn’t.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I don’t think it was the work that did me in. I think it was the lack of support from the church and the complete ugliness and bullying and toxicity from the congregation without the church having my back. . . . There was a level of vindictiveness that should have been called out and dealt with by the wider church that hurt my family and didn’t ever get resolved. It’s like we have no appetite when it’s congregational conflict or congregants behaving badly. No appetite for managing it. It was just, ‘Well, best thing for you is to move away.’ But it should never have gotten to that point.” ~ Interview participant*

*“M and P said, ‘Oh, you’re a minister, you should just put up with it. That’s your job, just let it go. It’s okay. This poor person didn’t know any better.’ And so that’s where the racism, structure, and theology just really bump into each other in very bad ways. Then no one does anything, and the minister eventually leaves because the racism is never addressed and is not allowed to say anything. If they do leave, the response is ‘Oh, you are not a very good minister. You should just do your job.’” ~ Interview participant*



## Cynicism, Trust, and Distrust

*“Most people who don't feel safe, don't then say I don't feel safe. You do other things, like you back on out. There're only certain things that you can do. 'Let me get out of here. Maybe I won't participate.’” ~ Interview participant*

There is a certain amount of cynicism or possibly realism in the answers that suggests that ministry personnel are aware that it's not necessarily easier somewhere else. One notable remark was about a yearning for regional chaplains (understanding that some regions have much more money than others). Equity-seeking ministry personnel often just need someone willing to listen, validate, and show their support. However, **knowing and trusting that regional council or colleagues are willing to step in and advocate when requested/needed is a crucial factor in their trust, even if they do not exercise it.** This trust is not automatic, must be built, and is difficult to rebuild once compromised. It is worth considering the difference between believing the institution has one's back, trusting the institution, and being confident that you will receive support/the support you wish/the support you need.

*“I will never believe that the United Church will have my back. Never. I am not confident that I will have support, so I have become very self-sufficient. I find the people that I trust. I was in a situation in the United Church not too long ago where I was bullied, and people kept saying, 'Well go to...' And I kept saying, 'No. I don't believe that I will be supported. I don't trust that.' I know that that's the institutional answer, but I just don't believe that I will have that support.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Privilege is also a matter of apathy.... My trust in the wider church has been shattered and partially repaired. There is a big question of who can we trust, and can we trust that it will be used for good and not evil? Can we shield who has access to information kept on file [about us]? How do we have a healthy future going forward?” ~ Interview participant*

Each equity-seeking ministry personnel will have a **trust threshold** that one needs to effectively reach out when need be, but this is not universally determined. Is there a trust threshold one needs to be an effective member of the wider church and if so, how can support structures meet that? We encountered discussions of distrust repeatedly. There is a general distrust of institutions, related to being a woman, that carries over into the church. Some distrust is based on a previous personal experience of someone who is now in a recognized support/authority role. The institution's answer of who to go to may not take into account networks of trust or past trauma. This general distrust causes self-sufficiency among some groups who find other people to trust or work-arounds.

*“I'm much more likely to get support from people that I know and trust than to go to somebody who just is supposed to be my person because they're part of the region. I think there's a lot of pastoral care behind-the-scenes support that happens in racialized clergy and queer clergy networks.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We don’t have confidence in our communities of faith, so the church creates policy. But the francophone communities are more elastic and don’t have the same connection with The Manual. It’s difficult to navigate systems because size is a major factor (the communities of faith are small and are a small percentage of the wider church).” ~ Interview participant*

Some equity-seeking ministry personnel still miss the frequent collegial support and interaction aspect of presbytery. It’s hard to know when new equity-seeking ministry personnel join the denomination or a region in order to proactively offer support connecting with identity-based networks. The regional structure is reportedly more effective than presbytery was, but there are still significant gaps and discrepancies among regions in chaplaincy support, training, connecting with those in ministries beyond communities of faith, and power or willingness to use power to follow through with needed changes or interventions in pastoral relationships.

*“If the region has no power and the [General Council] doesn’t respond, that sums up our UCC.”  
~ Survey participant*

**Raising concerns or seeking support is risky for ministry personnel.** Even if a community of faith is put under review, likely the minister will be also, which can look bad. Trust continues to be a huge factor in willingness to access support, especially from regions. This looks like accessibility, being seen as non-threatening to your career, and having experience or ability to connect you with someone with similar experience. A lack of support/supportive follow-through/safety means that often the only available choice is for the ministry personnel to leave or end the pastoral relationship. This does not address the problematic dynamics that may still be present, and it is perceived as risky for ministry personnel who can’t be without employment or don’t want a reputation for “being difficult” or bailing on communities of faith.

*“I have no doubt that the same thing would happen, if all that were to play out now. General Council is made up of people, clergy and lay people of the United Church, and they care and love all the people. But the system is designed to care about congregations because they are the ones that provide the money so that the systems can continue. So if we lose some clergy along the way, well, they’re pretty replaceable. So I’m sorry, it feels super jaded. I do love the church. It makes me so sad. As we’re learning deeper and deeper, the way the systems are designed, they are machines that won’t care about the people.” ~ Interview participant*

Regional council and educational institutions can help ministry personnel and candidates who are becoming ministry personnel find and create culturally appropriate and identity-specific networks in addition to location-based clusters. It may seem like equity-seeking ministry personnel require more direct time from regional ministers, but **equity-seeking ministry personnel are often doing the heavy lifting on other aspects of ministry that benefit regional councils, such as interculturalism, advocacy and education, denominational committee work, and supporting other equity-seeking colleagues.** The church needs to acknowledge the unpaid labour of informal/identity-based support networks that often provide pastoral care where official channels are not adequate or not trusted. However, this does not

mean that these networks have the authority to intervene in situations, which again creates care without action or accountability.

*"J'ai agi comme accompagnateur d'un collègue pour qui le soutien du synode m'est apparu franchement incompetent. [trans: I acted as an accompanist for a colleague for whom the support of the synod—francophone council—appeared frankly incompetent to me.]" ~ Survey participant*

## Financial Equity and Support at the Beginning

Equity-seeking ministry personnel are vulnerable to being “stuck” in unhealthy pastoral relationships because of economic pressure or lack of other viable positions. Numerous participants are still naming situations where they realize they are being paid (or offered) significantly less than the previous non-equity-seeking ministry personnel, with little disclosure or discussion.

*"[I wish there were] specific instructions from the denomination regarding equity in clergy compensation, including higher education and other factors, and showing volunteers how to take them seriously in creating a compensation package. Denominational support when clergy are negotiating compensation, so they are not doing it alone and advocating for themselves. We are taught to be humble and gracious. These are not helpful qualities when negotiating. Someone who can be an advocate for us would really help. A professional who brings experience and documentation to educate the volunteers and the clergy about what is possible and what is fair." ~ Survey participant*

*"Financial discrimination is invisible. People don't know they are doing it. They believe they cannot afford more, and this belief makes their decision seem reasonable." ~ Survey participant*

*"Within the denomination. Despite a survey conducted in the early 2010s which reported that women are paid less in every salary category than men, nothing has been done to educate volunteer M and P committees about this, or [provide] double checks to prevent it. Each clergy person negotiates salary alone, unsupported by an advocate, with the people to whom they then must minister." ~ Survey participant*

There is a **need to examine compensation equity for ministry personnel**, especially women of colour, as many have also been denied holidays, study leave, sabbatical, or continuing education funding. They may have access to less continuing education funds due to the economic situations of their communities of faith and are particularly affected by financial pressures, such as the cutting of health benefits. It should be noted that it is a strange dynamic between M and P as both a volunteer de facto human resources committee/employer and those under one's pastoral care. In comparison to other non-profit settings, one's “clients” are not usually one's HR. This makes it difficult to ask or negotiate the terms of call/appointment. Negotiation information should be discussed by search teams before they start interviewing. This should include a discussion of what might be offered and what ministry personnel might ask for or expect. Examples: a health care spending allowance beyond the basic plan, percent

above minimum, time off, flexibility about which days off in a week, and extra continuing education. Terms of call/appointment for the previous minister(s) should be made transparent both to the applicants or new ministry personnel and to the regional liaison. If less compensation is being offered, there should be justification, transparent discussion, and awareness by the regional council or commission.

*“Knowing what the previous outgoing minister was earning, even if it's not transparently communicated to the applicant, [would help]. If the liaison has those pieces of information, they could be in a place to indicate whether it is a just or unjust offering. I went in and was offered an amount. And I was told this was the amount and that as an IIM [intentional interim minister], they were required to pay a little more for that. So fine. Only after I was already in there did I find out that I was actually being paid, in base salary, \$15,000 less than their outgoing [non-equity-seeking] minister.” ~ Interview participant*

There is also interest in a workshop for equity-seeking ministry personnel on how to negotiate and how to inquire if a ministry team member is paid differently.

*“What would happen if you went in and you had some of those questions, and you could say, ‘Some of my colleagues have suggested that I ask about this.’... I get it, and I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't have, in my early career when jobs were extra tight, been so bold. If somebody had told me what I might be able to get if I asked, or reminded me that if they said, ‘Oh, no, we can't do base plus five [percent]’ to ask an innocent question: ‘How come you could do base plus five for them, but not me?’ I don't think that we have equipped people to ask.” ~ Interview participant*

## Office of Vocation Support

According to observations by equity-seeking ministry personnel, there is a discrepancy in the response-time from Office of Vocation staff based on race, gender/sexual identity, and possible other factors.

*“I have spoken to other queer and racialized people who have also said they can send an email and it'll be two to three months with no response. And they say, ‘It's really strange, because there'll be these White men who said, ‘Oh, I had no problem with XYZ at the Office of Vocation, this person is great, always responsive.’” That just seems like a very strange pattern.” ~ Interview participant*

White men get a quicker response when raising issues with the Office of Vocation. This must be addressed in both reality and perception in order to build a system of trust.

*“[As someone who isn't in a congregation] I'm [listed] on the roll as ‘in other employment.’ And so, I just always felt they forgot about me.” ~ Interview participant*

The Office of Vocation's structure and vocations ministers are a new opportunity to establish a United Church point person for ministry personnel who are in “other employment” and those on

LTD, etc. where there is not the same pastoral relationship served by a pastoral relations minister. Rather than duplicating or stretching regional resources to support these ministry personnel, perhaps the Office of Vocation would be a better avenue. Likewise, when there is a dispute and the pastoral relations minister is mediating or in a conflict of interest, the Office of Vocation/vocations minister can possibly act as an advocate or advisor to the ministry personnel to provide some distance.

## Experiences with Policy

The United Church has worked over the last few decades to ensure that there are national policies, processes, and infrastructure governing sexual misconduct and ethical standards for ministry personnel and those in leadership. Primarily these address and ideally prevent ministry personnel's misconduct towards others (colleagues, community members, etc.). More recently, the United Church's Workplace Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence Prevention and Response Policy (WDHVPR policy), first drafted in 2019 and updated in 2020 and 2022,<sup>23</sup> sets out policy, definitions, and processes to address (and ideally prevent) misconduct towards ministry personnel and lay employees in the workplace environment. Education, trust, and awareness about policies and due process are crucial in moving any policy from being an aspirational document to one that is enacted, effective, and accessible. As part of this research, we asked equity-seeking ministry personnel about their familiarity and experience with this policy and their wisdom and input about such policies in general.

*"Our policies don't protect ministers from vindictive congregations. The system seems designed to appease and placate them." ~ Survey participant*

### Workplace Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence Prevention and Response Policy: Familiarity and Experience

Over two thirds of survey participants have read the policy and are at least familiar with it or know it well. Only 6 percent do not know or understand it, and only 3 percent didn't answer.<sup>24</sup> There are no demographic trends that suggest certain equity-seeking ministry personnel are differently aware or understanding of it. When asked about the awareness of the policy among their communities of faith, they are less familiar with the policy than equity-seeking ministry personnel themselves: only 8 percent know it well or have used it, and another quarter know the basics. Almost one third of communities of faith (who have an equity-seeking ministry personnel who answered the survey) either do not know it, do not understand it, or have not discussed the policy recently enough for their ministry personnel to be aware of their familiarity.<sup>25</sup> Demographically, communities of faith who have **heard of it but do not understand it** are overrepresented in

- Prairie to Pine Region
- those in pastoral relationships with recently retired equity-seeking ministry personnel

---

<sup>23</sup> The name of this policy has been changed since this research was conducted. It is now the [Workplace Discrimination Harassment and Violence Response Policy](https://united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines). Find subsequent versions of this policy at <https://united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines>.

<sup>24</sup> Of survey participants: I know it well (28 percent), I have read it and am somewhat familiar with it (39 percent), I am aware of it, and know where to find it (23 percent), I have heard of it, but do not understand it (3 percent), Not at all (3 percent), n/a (didn't answer) (3 percent).

<sup>25</sup> Of survey participants' communities of faith: They have used the policy or know it well (8 percent), They know the basics of the policy (26 percent), They are aware of it, and some people have looked at it (26 percent), They have heard of it, but do not understand it (13 percent), Not at all (13 percent), n/a (didn't answer) (4 percent), Other (9 percent).

Communities of Faith that are **not at all aware** of the policy are overrepresented in

- Shining Waters Region
- non-congregational ministries
- those in pastoral relationships with equity-seeking ministry personnel who are Canadian citizens born outside of Canada

*“No one reads it. The chair of M and P has, but he had to. He finds that even his committee doesn’t give it much attention. Head-in-the-sand behaviour.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Little microaggressions at the congregational level and with colleagues and staff can’t be addressed [by this kind of policy]. It requires a change of church ethos, and that requires admitting discrimination against women even still exists.” ~ Survey participant*

In addition to familiarity, far fewer equity-seeking ministry personnel have experience **using** the WDHVPR policy, either formally or informally. In part, this is because it has only been available for a few years, and it is not necessary or applicable in many, if not most, pastoral relationships. One person reported having used it successfully with a positive outcome, three with a negative outcome, five have used the process informally, and four tried but didn’t follow through. Interestingly, **19 percent said they hadn’t used it but had considered it and 18 percent said that no, they would not do that.** Among these 18 percent, their communities of faith generally are not familiar with the policy at all or do not understand it, and racialized ministry personnel are overrepresented in this group, though not exclusively. There are no clear demographic trends for those who said “No, because I didn’t know it exists” or “No, but I have considered it.” There is a perception that the policy is overly heavy-handed for some situations and a hurdle for others.

*“No, because I am not out and know that a marginalized person filing a concern would be seen as complaining and negatively impact the treatment of our marginalized communities overall.” ~ Survey participant*

*“In a previous charge, I found discrimination because I was gay... Went through the United Church process, which had a mediator between me (and also the church secretary) and the music director because she threatened us verbally and physically. The mediation was useless. In the end, I left the pastoral charge. I am extremely happy with where I am now.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Discernment about Using the Policy**

When discerning whether it is worth engaging with the WDHVPR policy and process, the two strongest factors are the **need or severity** of the situation (16 answers or 29 percent of those who responded) and **trust in the process** itself (14 answers or 25 percent). In terms of need/severity, participants said that it would need to be a situation that was persisting, where one felt threatened, that was affecting their safety or security, that had an impact or burden on ministry, and that wasn’t able to be resolved in other ways, etc.



*“If there was a burden placed on myself or someone else by the discrimination faced.” ~ Survey participant*

This is both a question of whether the effects are serious enough and also is it “something big, blatant, malicious, and easy to prove” enough that the process is likely to recognize it and address it. This ties into the concern mentioned several times **of weighing the potential cost to oneself** (reputation, emotional trauma, strain or breaking of pastoral relationship, retaliation especially against women or femme-presenting persons) **and cost to the church** (resources used, conflict focus) against the potential benefits (recognition, repair, accountability, safety, etc.).

*“If the behaviour persists, then it would be worth pursuing, but initiating any process is costly. So you weigh the cost versus the benefits.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Seeing who I would be dealing with—are there people I trust involved? How far removed are they from the halls of power or the people who are hurting me?” ~ Survey participant*

In terms of trust in the process, some mentioned the factor of their M and P (were they open to consultation or competent?), but **most focused on whether they could trust those who would be handling the complaint/situation**. Are the policy actors at arm’s length from the harasser/respondent? Are they fair, impartial, or trustworthy? Is there openness to engage without predetermined conclusions? Or have they seen positive results from others’ engagement in the process? There is a serious concern voiced by a number of participants about perception of bias and protectionism among inner circles or those who hold power in church structures.

*“If I could see that it valued the human rights of ministry personnel above the comfort of church members [then it might be worth the potential risks and drawbacks].” ~ Survey participant*

*“I’ve had a lot of ministers say things like, ‘Between you and the church, the church will always choose the church’ or ‘Between the minister and the pillars, they will always choose the pillars.’ You have to take care of yourself because a church might want to take care of you and try to take care of you, but they can’t because churches are built to take care of themselves. That makes me really sad.” ~ Interview participant*

There are still those who said nothing would help them decide, or others don’t know what would help. No demographic trends were apparent in the answers.

## **Accessibility of the Policy and Hopes**

In terms of accessibility, there are lots of concrete suggestions about what would make the WDHVPR policy easier to use. Some of these suggest that the participants are more familiar with the first or second versions (2019 or 2020) than the 2022 or later version. This, in and of itself, points to the **need for further publicity and education**, especially aimed at church boards (discussion at meetings, a video on YouTube to watch, a worship service focused on the



policy and issues). One participant mentioned “less pity.” Many highlight the need for a facilitator, consultant, union-type representative, advocate, accompanier, trained mediators, or dedicated support person.

*“Having a designated person to support ministers with this, not someone more focused on the congregation.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Le recours à des médiateurs ou médiatrices bien formés, [trans: The use of well-trained mediators].” ~ Survey participant*

Mostly, this is someone with whom to consult, discern, or gain advice, but some would like consultants to be able to just take action on complaints once made. Equity-seeking ministry personnel want to know that their complaint will mean something, be assured of follow-through or consequences, and want to know of others who have used it successfully to resolve an issue. For many, having a supportive M and P or strong, stable leadership in the community of faith is a factor, as they want to address the misconduct without sinking the community. Other concrete needs for policy accessibility: a plain language summary, clear guidelines on who it is for, a “shorter version with better examples of when to use it,” flow charts, that it specifically cover microaggressions and training on microaggressions, and being available in multiple languages.

There is some wisdom in considering whether it should be activated at the national level instead of the regional level, given the number of concerns with trust and regional resources being stretched. Similar to the sexual misconduct policy, **having consultants more readily accessible who are not within the decision-making structure** may help ministry personnel consider how to effectively engage with the policy if and when it is needed. It should be made clear that consultants remain active and accompanying throughout the process. **Further educational materials should be considered, created, and distributed, with an aim not only to explain the policy but the need for it and circumstances in which it would be used.** This could be combined with worship resources and/or the marking of a particular day/week/season.

*“If it was used to design a worship service. I find policy within worship is very restorative.” ~ Survey participant*

While the presence of the WDHVPR policy is a good first step to publicly resisting workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence, there are still multiple reasons that ministry personnel are not engaging with it. Some are the perception that it is heavy-handed, or that these kinds of issues just aren’t addressed effectively by enacting policy.

*“It would need to be more necessary. I don’t want to police the people.” ~ Survey participant*

*“As the mediator said, the church is filled with so many retired teachers and school administrators, it’s awful, but wonderful, but awful. How do you address it when somebody has*

*lived their whole life feeling like they have the power and authority to do particular things?” ~ Interview participant*

## Other Policy Work Needed

Beyond the WDHVPR policy specifically, we asked what other policies equity-seeking ministry personnel wish the United Church would create or update and for general thoughts on policy matters.

### **Policies Related to Specific Ministry Personnel, Situations, or Discrimination:**

- explicit policy on discrimination based on sexual orientation
- explicit policy on discrimination based on gender identity and trans/cis identity
- address ageism toward ministry personnel, both elders and those under 40 and/or having children
- better policies regarding leave such as maternity leave, including top-ups being paid nationally or regionally, not by the community of faith
- clarify that policies on discrimination include mental health/mental illness
- minimum standards for accessibility for ministry personnel with disabilities, then funding to enact it and regional funds for retrofits, especially in small or isolated communities of faith
- best practices on how to support and engage with disabled ministry personnel
- need to consider whether the terms and language we use actually resonate with those they describe, for example, some don't identify as “racialized” or “migrant”
- denominational policies on what is a regionally recognized ministry and addressing the disconnect for ministry personnel who serve in these ministries (such as chaplaincies) that are often housed in other organizations with their own policies, which are often more effective or transparent
- need for a clear point person for those on LTD, likely at the General Council Office, and clarity when the precipitating factor is both disability and harassment so that labour issues do not jeopardize disability benefits
- reinstating the policy of covering travel expenses for ministry personnel in remote communities to fly out once or twice per year
- proactive procedures for those who change their name and/or gender identity markers between granting of degrees/credentials and the time they might need to be presented (options to reprint? maintain confidentiality?)
- a process to reimburse expenses such as moving when a harassment situation ends a pastoral relationship. Currently the financial burden and consequences are carried by the ministry personnel.

*“Should be honest that really we have an [unwritten] policy to ‘only accept disabled ministry personnel as long as they pretend (and perform) to be able-bodied.’ ~ Interview participant*

“The maternity and parental leave policies should not require the salary top-up to be paid by the community of faith; it should come from the region or General Council. Because only the birth

parent qualifies for the longer leave period (maternity + parental leave), it means that the leave taken by most mothers has a much higher financial cost to the [community of faith] than that taken by fathers. This encourages sex-based discrimination in hiring female ministers who are perceived to be a greater financial burden if they become pregnant.” ~ Survey participant (It should be noted that this issue was under current review at the time of the research).

### **Pastoral Relations Policies:**

- to know about evaluation policies and forms (e.g., for annual reviews) before starting the position
- limitations of licensed lay worship leaders functioning as ministry personnel
- the need to actually follow the policies we’ve got, especially around retired supply appointments and perpetual supply positions
- having universal terms of reference in a place that is easy to find (such as a webpage) that clearly spells out what one is entitled to (sick days, vacation, carry over, dates for changes, etc.)
- a process for fair negotiation of terms of call/appointment with guides and guidelines
- requirements to practise compensation parity in ministry teams based on hours, qualifications/education, and ministry designation (order of ministry versus CDM), not on role in the community of faith (for example, paying the one who preaches more)
- transparency and national tracking around the demographics of who is receiving a percentage above minimum salary, by how much/terms of call or appointment, and which demographics of ministry personnel are called to full-time positions, especially in geographic centres
- that M and P members, search committee members, and community of faith leadership take (and engage in!) the racial justice training
- mandatory engagement with United Fresh Start in new pastoral relationships
- options to support, orient, and regularize linguistically specific ministry personnel working in linguistically specific ministries that don’t disrupt the relationship
- ethical guidelines for communities of faith, like that for ministry personnel
- more flexibility on things like banking holiday time to accommodate overseas travel

*“I applied for that position.... Why didn't I get it? Because they reappointed someone who doesn't qualify for it. So integrity around the recruitment process would lend itself greatly to equitable treatment of the 'others' in our midst.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Policies Regarding Uncovering or Intervening in Discriminatory Situations:**

- exit interviews or other means to know why ministry personnel leave and identify ongoing problematic issues
- need to adapt or consider where a complaint is going and whether that person is in a conflict of interest or a working relationship with the respondent
- regional or national power to intervene on terms of call/appointments and in situations of abusive treatment
- consequences for communities of faith that consistently behave badly before being allowed to enter into another pastoral relationship

- revamping the IIM program so that more are available or available to move around, so they can be assigned
- addressing the racism and other discrimination that happens in camping ministries (and outreach ministries), either as incidents or as ways the camp operates

*“Actually have equity! Which means someone—GC [General Council] or region—has to have power to intervene on calls and appointments and treatment, which it doesn't.” ~ Survey participant*

*“We need to follow the law. We need to follow the governance structure of The United Church of Canada, and we need to implement our polity as it's intended to be implemented. We don't need anything new. We need to do what the church says we need to do, and we need to do it with dignity and respect. The rules are all there. We're not following it.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Policies Specifically Affecting the Regions:**

- pastoral relations ministers appointed for a maximum term of five years, so they don't develop biases
- vocation ministers being accountable to an M and P of ministry personnel or half lay and half ministry personnel
- specific anti-racism training for regional ministers and training on how conflict resolution may need to be dealt with differently when there is an aspect of equity
- equity in meetings and equity in worship guidelines
- implement what we already have!
- reconsider the previous work done, which recommended an association of ministers (submitted to the former Ministry and Employment Policies and Services Permanent Committee but was disregarded)
- reconsider the low COL numbers in rural areas where housing may be less expensive but many other aspects of life are more expensive (travel, healthcare, etc.). Consider how this disincentivizes ministry personnel from applying or discriminates against those who do end up there (often admissions, racialized, women, etc.).

*“Continue to look at the subtleties of trauma, equity, discrimination, and violence, and create support structures and policy that have people to implement available to ministry personnel.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Educational Resources Needed:**

- learning resources about being an anti-racism community of faith
- best practices to promote ongoing education and discussion; for example, every time the church board meets, present and discuss another policy
- boundaries training courses for churches, especially board and financial volunteers
- information regarding leaves such as maternity leave, restorative care, LTD
- M and P training resources that regional staff can suggest, that cover both logistics and bring up equity conversations
- best practices in how to appreciate ministry personnel and the roles they fill

- bringing back and strengthening gender justice resources to promote education around gender equality, harassment, and microaggressions, particularly for female clergy; being proactive
- in the new M and P training modules being developed, and in the M and P handbooks, address situations where the ministry personnel are not from the same demographic groups as many in the congregation. Do not assume a generic ministry personnel.

*“We’re employees but also living out vocations, and I know it’s complicated, but surely we can find ways to do things a little differently, that allows dignity and opportunities for everybody while also dealing with the practicality of a \$2 million yearly budget loss.” ~ Interview participant*

## General Wisdom about Policy

Equity-seeking ministry personnel have significant experience navigating, writing, interpreting, and interacting with policies, often those that were not written with them in mind, which they have had to adapt or advocate to change. There is a realistic pessimism or cynicism, recognizing the limitations of policy to actually affect change and that change moves slowly because of a disconnect between community of faith implementation and regional/national policy. Our polity also more frequently and effectively oversees and disciplines ministry personnel than communities of faith or individuals therein. Despite these limitations, policy is still important as both a position statement and to outline necessary processes for intervention.

The following are some best practices and wisdom when creating policy shared by equity-seeking ministry personnel.

- Systems thinking is necessary, but policies must be based on relationship, not the other way around.

*“It’s not that the policy says there is a relationship. The policy supports the relationship.” and “I don’t need a policy. I need conversation, relationship. Relationship is harder to maintain than policy.” ~ Interview participants*

*“I see that process of actively seeking to decolonize our processes and our relationships having a positive impact opening up space for equity in general. Not just in our relationships as Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Not just in our relationships as White and BIPOC [racialized]. It opens us to a more relational way of being and differences that we might not have taken into account.” ~ Interview participant*

- Policies must take rural and remote realities into consideration, such as not having another colleague or church close by.
- Our focus should shift from policy/requirement, to opportunity to learn and live into who we say we are.
- Policy must go hand-in-hand with other strategies and not replace communication.

*“Policy can’t cover anything. Preventative measures, support teams, groups, accessible spiritual care would make a huge difference.” ~ Survey participant*

- Policies in Quebec must recognize that the labour laws and the social infrastructure surrounding communities of faith are different.
- When making changes, new or adjusted policies must consider the potential for inequitable fallout or consequences. For example, when General Council decided ministry personnel could perform same-gender marriages but communities of faith had to vote, that caused queer ministry personnel to be in a difficult position. When the extended health plan changed, this particularly affected those with disabilities, disabled family members, and financial insecurity.

*“We have a bottom-up model that is moving so much slower. There is a disconnect between the implementation and the rapid adoption of new ideas [at region or General Council]. It’s just going to be much, much slower than I might want things to be. That’s a price we pay for having a model led by the grassroots. There was already a disconnect between equity.” ~ Interview participant*

## Health, Helps, and Hopes in Pastoral Relationships

Different kinds of approaches and supports are effective and needed at different stages of a pastoral relationship to promote health. Equity-seeking ministry personnel experience many of the same dynamics and needs as those who are not equity-seeking ministry personnel, but these can be accentuated or complicated by various equity factors, and there are often more dire consequences if a healthy pastoral relationship is not cultivated or maintained. This chapter covers some of the best practices and wisdom from experience, identifying what might have helped or what equity-seeking ministry personnel wish for, both locally and nationally, to support thriving pastoral relationships. It is important to acknowledge that many of the comments received in this section highlight issues that have been emerging throughout other sections of the project.

### Help for Starting Off Well in the Pastoral Relationship

Equity-seeking ministry personnel say that they thrive when there is intentional welcoming, clarity, and openness from both the ministry personnel and the communities of faith, support throughout the structures, intentional preparation work from their previous ministry personnel, and willingness to “do the work” or engage resources and training.

**Intentional welcoming** includes

- picnics, potlucks, welcome celebrations
- social time
- community tours
- helping the equity-seeking ministry personnel meet people in the community of faith and the wider community
- support with housing, mortgage, real-estate agents, etc.

While some just felt like they were thrown into the deep end, other experiences included these described:

*“Introductions to staff before I started. A directory and some pastoral information given immediately.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Food in the fridge when we moved into the manse; not having to preach the very first Sunday so I could start to get to know folks; well-kept manse and church office; openness to try new things in worship.” ~ Survey participant*

*“They’re very considerate and flexible [such as about their manse]. They did a lot of ‘We don’t know what your plans are. Here’s some different options.’... They put in the work to think about things, but they weren’t making assumptions at the same time. They were leaving it really open and as a conversation.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Caring people right from the start—[logistical help and] a real desire to support the whole family and get to know us as individuals.” ~ Interview participant*

**Clarity and openness** start **even before** the relationship, with

- the community of faith profile being as accurate as possible
- a clear position description
- realistic expectations from all parties
- honesty and transparency in the initial interviews (for some, including being honest about being gay)
- conversations with key leaders
- being clear about what full-time or half-time means to each party
- discussing expectations and potential barriers to success before agreeing to the appointment were all mentioned

*“This pastoral relationship got off to a good start by having open, honest, and somewhat difficult conversations right at the beginning. I have been in ministry for enough years to know to lay all my cards on the table at the start and to gauge the response is the best way to know where I stand. In the case of this pastoral charge, it was a wonderful start, as they deeply appreciated the honesty and we quickly shared in a mutual respect of each other.” ~ Interview participant*

Clarity and openness in communication continue into the **first stage of the relationship**, including

- boundaries around dropping in on a manse, such as calling or texting before just showing up
- welcoming one’s partner and/or family and respecting their decision to integrate or participate or not
- continuing to clarify expectations
- humour, transparency, and vulnerability from all parties

Unfortunately, clarity and openness are not always maintained or genuine, which threatens a healthy start to a pastoral relationship.

*“Within the first few weeks everywhere I turned there were matters of concern/flags that had not been disclosed even when I clearly asked questions that should have guaranteed less surprises! From the get-go, this shows a lack of respect and trust to/for the new minister. SIGH.” ~ Survey participant*

*“What was promised or agreed to in [the] hiring process was mostly cast aside the moment [I was] hired, and some lying and deceit happened during the hiring process, all of which did not come to light until [later]. Since the relationship started in deceit and a lack of self-awareness on the part of the congregation and hiring team, the foundation was set for a rocky pastoral relationship.” ~ Interview participant*

*“No, I think as soon as they knew they had a minister, things slowly went back to their behaviour as before.” ~ Interview participant*

**Support throughout the structures** is named as crucial. This includes



- an understanding M and P representative who takes initiative with welcome
- modelling this for others
- strong support and trust from lay leaders and colleagues/other staff
- close communication with the regional pastoral relations minister

*“My efforts early on to create a relationship of mutuality. Early response by boards to indicate support over sexuality identity issues.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Had an amazing staff! And an amazing leadership team who have embraced all of me.” And “I was a part of a solid team, and my teammates valued and respected me, and modeled that behaviour to the congregation.” – Interview participants*

Some participants remember appreciating gatherings of new ministry personnel within a region [or previous Conference] for orientation, welcome, and networking funded by the General Council. This kind of gathering can be particularly crucial for equity-seeking ministry personnel coming into the United Church through admissions or mutual recognition agreements, but also for everyone who has moved into a new region.

*“No matter where you are from [in] Canada, if you go to rural Saskatchewan, you're in a strange land [unless you are from there!]... One of the really good things about it was they got to meet each other, found out about networks and things that were going on in the region, [and] they met all the staff.” ~ Interview participant*

Some equity-seeking ministry personnel also credit work done by the community's previous ministry personnel in developing a healthy culture for the pastoral relationship. This includes realistic expectations for part-time positions, accountability, communication, and boundaries.

*“I need to prepare them for a [next] minister who is only going to work the hours that they're getting paid to work and may even have stronger boundaries...or different needs than me. I was taught that in seminary, and I very quickly learned that most people were not taught that in seminary. They were taught to be the lone wolf and to show off and do all their best, which royally screws the rest of us when our best is only 40 hours a week for the job that's 40 hours a week. It's officially the M and P's role to teach this to the congregation. The Board of Vocation and regional council have some roles in doing that when M and P is not.” ~ Interview participant*

Many participants talk about their communities of faith's willingness to “do the work” or engage with resources and training, particularly before or at the beginning of the pastoral relationship and what a difference that makes. This can include actions—such as engaging local or United Church resources, self-study, and issue-specific or general diversity, equity, and anti-oppression training—that do not rely on the sole direction or effort of the equity-seeking ministry personnel. Some United Church resources mentioned include United Fresh Start and training offered to the M & P by the minister for pastoral relations.

*“At my interview...one of the members interviewing me asked what books they should read to broaden their knowledge of Indigenous matters. And I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, this is some place I want to be, and they want me to be there.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“Other trans folks in ministry have said when they go and work somewhere, they get someone else to come and do a workshop because it’s really helpful to have congregants ask questions and not worry about how it might impact that relationship with the new minister. You know, especially if it’s ‘I know, this is ignorant...or I’m still working through this, but...’ They need a space to do that, and it’s better to offload that to someone who doesn’t have that [pastoral] relationship with the congregation.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have already seen a difference in congregational receptivity to my presence as ‘other’ and a willingness to allow me to lead. And to have that supported from the beginning, and through quite a significant event in our congregation...shows me that these folks who intentionally engaged in seeking me out and doing their work through Affirm, and keeping their eyes open to the community that surrounds them, and asking the questions about why folks of other groups aren’t sitting in the pews led them into a place of feeling comfortable and confident in having me as their leader.” ~ Interview participant*

Unfortunately, when that work isn’t done, not only can it be a missed opportunity, it can also complicate and trouble the relationship.

*“If they [had] learned about being intercultural ministry before I arrived, it would be helpful for both of us to build healthy relations.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Sometimes you get leaders who say, ‘Oh this is going to be fine’ or, ‘We don’t care.’ Well, actually, then they do. So unless they have resources and preparation ahead of time, it will go badly. Almost certainly, it’ll go badly.... It’s a hard sell [to convince communities of faith to engage in training] unless you make it mandatory, because people are just so oblivious, saying ‘Oh, we’re church, we’re going to be fine. Everybody will get along,’ and then they don’t.” ~ Interview participant*

## **What Could Have Helped the Pastoral Relationship Start Off Well**

Equity-seeking ministry personnel have similar answers when asked what *could have* helped to set up a healthy, thriving, pastoral relationship. These include the areas of intentional welcoming, clarity and honesty, support during hiring and negotiation of terms, support and accountability throughout the structures, and more preparation, willingness to do the work, or engaging resources and training. Where helpful actions have already been mentioned above, they are not repeated here.

**Intentional welcoming** should include a head start on a housing search by identifying where and how rental housing is advertised (newspaper, Facebook, bulletin board, etc.), a value of care or enthusiasm for the new pastoral relationship, and an invitation to participate.

*“A covenanting service. Anyone ‘vouching’ for me. A search committee willing to celebrate instead of simply being relieved and exhausted.” ~ Survey participant*

*“People including you in some of their outside activities...might make us feel we are more accepted.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Valuing and honouring the gifts of the new minister, rather than telling them week one that they should use certain words or phrases...they should preach without notes because the previous minister did...they should somehow know all the players, passwords, protocols because you breathe the same air...in other words, be like us and park your authentic self at the door! SIGH.”  
~ Survey participant*

*“I did everything I knew to do short of not being myself for that congregation. And I hung in there for a very long time. But you know, I don't think they were ready to let go of the previous person.” ~ Survey participant*

**Clarity and honesty** should include

- clarifying day(s) off before scheduling meetings on behalf of the equity-seeking ministry personnel
- honest conversations about any history of racism or other forms of discrimination in the community of faith
- honest and realistic sharing of a community's weaknesses, struggles, challenges, theology, values, and mission
- discussing realistic expectations for the position description, especially if part-time

*“I find there's often confusion about the words that are used and the theological meaning. What does it mean to want Bible-based worship, etc.? So I think that also adds another layer to it; when we can't express what our theology is, we can't get a good match no matter who it is we're employing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Not lying in the interview process.” ~ Survey participant*

*“But sometimes the search team is a group of the more involved members of the congregation. They really do believe that this is a good match, and they are welcoming and inclusive. And then they are shocked to find out that they are out of touch with their own congregation.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The first thing he did was present me with the job description, which had been the job description for the former minister who had left. He wanted me to sign that as my job description, and I said, ‘I can't do that. This was tailored to that guy. And that's not the call that I've answered.’” ~ Interview participant*

**Support during hiring and negotiation of terms** should include clearer **call/appointment** forms that

- spell out conditions, for example that “supply” over 14 hours still has benefits, or clarify moving costs
- have fail-safes for calculating salary so that communities of faith cannot underpay either deceptively or because of administrative error
- include a section that asks about accessibility

Negotiation support should also include the option of an outside advocate when needed.

*“When you are making your call forms and your agreement to be ministering to one another, you agree to a salary, you agree to administration, telephone, etc. One of the lines needs to be: What are some things you need to allow for our church to be fully accessible to you and vice versa?” ~ Interview participant*

*“Getting my contract directly instead of having my call form abducted by a secretary. This caused a radical underpayment in salary to go on for months.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I thought I had a new call lined up, and they invited me into a third interview with many pointed questions. I didn’t have the ability to negotiate terms because I felt like they were hesitant.... They were trying to pay me too little.” ~ Interview participant*

*“They were fighting me on the cost of our move. I wish we had more help in negotiating the terms of a call. I wish there was more justice. I don’t want to get into the politics of a union, but I want a negotiator available or assigned.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Being allowed to negotiate with more than one pastoral charge at a time or have some other help negotiating favourable terms. I think marginalized ministers are strongly impacted when it comes to salary negotiations, like we have to take a pay cut for being equity seeking.” ~ Survey participant*

**Support and accountability throughout the** structures includes both local and regional/national structures. Many participants wished that all M & P committee members were properly trained and ready before the appointment/call began or as soon as new members join the committee. Educational liaisons should be assigned (perhaps through the candidacy boards) for any student appointments where there isn’t an educational supervisor. **Regional pastoral relations systems must also have the ability, will, and effectiveness to impose judiciary intervention when necessary**, including a redesign of the intentional interim ministry system and equity training for search committees.

*“We also don’t [but should] come back and say to a congregation, ‘No, you are not eligible to hire this person because we don’t think you’re prepared to be welcoming.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“And the rural churches, because nobody wants to come, but now they want someone in the pulpit, and they want the minister to do services. They end up saying, ‘Let’s get whatever is available.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“Better oversight by pastoral relations before I was called, during the interview process, and in my first year. The charge misrepresented themselves in the interviews.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Re: intentional interim ministry, the problem is there’s no one available. So we’ve got places that either wanted or desperately needed [interim ministry] imposed on them, but we have nobody to offer.” ~ Interview participant*

Regional representatives accompanying the hiring process need to be well-trained and able to accompany the entire process and ensure that the people on the hiring team understand equity issues as well as the rights of ministry personnel. Expectations should be clearly laid out. For example, if they’re paying one minister above base, then all must get the same above base. The minister’s role is in collaboration and leadership, not to do what they’re told. When in the hiring process, could there be an audit? Have someone walk through the process with the community of faith, and include workshops on equity and how to be in right relationship with the equity-seeking ministry personnel.

*“Shining Waters is now training their search teams. Liaisons have to go through equity training, and the search teams have to have an equity monitor named in place, who gets training.... I think it is wonderful and will help. I don’t think it’s going to eliminate all the situations by a long shot, but it at least starts giving them some tools to look at how bias creeps into the process and what biases they might have.” ~ Interview participant*

Lastly, equity-seeking ministry personnel wished there had been **more preparation, willingness to do the work, or engaging resources and training**. When equity-seeking ministry personnel are hired, the community of faith should be given specific training about the implications of that and possible issues before the ministry personnel arrives. Some of the suggestions include

- basic labour training for boards
- United Fresh Start
- learning about how to work in harmony, especially through smaller conflicts
- learning to identify congregational norms and expectations as is done through intentional interim ministry

While this aspect affects all equity-seeking ministry personnel, it is particularly important for those through admissions, mutual recognition agreements, and those who are racialized.

*“There is now a need to build cross-cultural...I mean, preparing congregations for cross-cultural pastoral relations. And more orientation with those of us who are coming from outside...to prepare us on what we are coming to.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In the future, a whole ton of our ministers are going to be people from other cultures. That's just the reality...they're global. So if we are not doing education with our congregations,...talking about what their norms and expectations are, making those things explicit so that there can be conversations about them, if we're not looking at the covert racism that functions in Canada and in the United Church, then we're [setting] those people that we're bringing in up for failure.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We need to do a hugely better job of preparing congregations when a racialized person is going in, particularly in a small community where there may be a limited number of other racialized people or at least racialized people from the same background or culture. The norms that we have in The United Church of Canada in terms of things like what worship looks like, how we communicate with one another, the role of the minister, are all things that ‘everybody knows.’ And if you don't come with that knowing, then you are very quickly judged and marginalized.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think we needed not just resources, but maybe someone to accompany us into creating a healthy, wholesome team where we could push against things and push against each other a little bit. And where raising concerns would be the norm, as opposed to something that would be raising red flags and panicking people and all that kind of stuff.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Helps and Health: It Gets Better**

Many equity-seeking ministry personnel say that there are things that have gotten better in their pastoral relationship, and sometimes it's possible to attribute the changes to a cause. The positive themes include trust and relationship, communication, accountability and structures, learning and experience, and spiritual and community growth.

**Trust and relationship** seem to grow through

- risking vulnerability
- genuine care
- shared grief experiences
- mutual understanding and appreciation
- intentional time

*“As we learn we can trust each other, better and better.” ~ Survey participant*

*“A deepening care and respect for each other. Their previous minister had to quit...which left them feeling afraid they would never get a new minister [and] would have to close. I, too, was wounded by my previous pastoral charge and was nervous of being wounded again. As we got to know each other the trust grew, and I have noticed that my opinion is sought and considered when decisions are to be made. My respect and trust of them has deepened as I witness their desire to follow Jesus and be a caring church in his name.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The more opportunity I had to love the people, the more trust we could develop.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Pastoral care has continued to deepen. Vulnerable people have come forward based on what I have shared and the difficult topics we have broached. People have grown in understanding.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Trust grew as time went on. Living with integrity contributed. There were conversations where we agreed to disagree. Taking the parking lot conversations to the table. Not listening to anonymous comments such as ‘Some people say....’”~ Interview participant*

**Communication** is essential in any pastoral relationship. Equity-seeking ministry personnel who see improvement attribute this to

- trust
- time
- honesty
- boundaries
- theology
- creative thinking

*“Having a clear and distinct role and task [that is] time limited provides clarity.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I had a committee that had been meeting [early afternoon] for probably 50 years. And that is the worst time of day for me. It was hilarious, because I just asked them. I said, ‘You know, I’m not my best person then. Can we meet at either 10 in the morning or after three?’ And it was hilarious, because they were all, ‘Well, I’m better in the morning, too; me too.’ When we do this, we all have this conversation about ‘What are we, at our best?’ What gives me energy is when a congregation allows for my best self to shine, which means being in a place where the conversations are encouraged.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Open and continuous dialogue, clearly distinguished from good and superficial good relations.” ~ Survey participant*

**Accountability and structures** are themes we have seen in previous sections. Some positive shifts mentioned include

- moving reviews to a professional setting where there is more consistency in who is conducting them
- more focus locally rather than influence from the national office
- following through on consequences

*“We have addressed some problematic behaviours through behavioral covenants and talking about how we behave in this space.” ~ Survey participant*

*“One thing that I have asked people to do is, if I am running late or have been late on something, to tell me how it impacts them. I didn’t think about this as an actual accommodation,*

*but it really is. Because people want to be nice. But if I'm going to change, I need to actually be held accountable.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Most recent congregation: bully seemed to finally stop threatening to leave their staff position when held accountable.” ~ Survey participant*

**Learning and experience** are key reasons given for improvement in the pastoral relationship. Both take time, often resources, and opportunities for reflection and intention.

*“For many years there was an appreciation of my work as my skills increased. Thank you con ed fund!” ~ Survey participant*

*“[Acceptance of] women's leadership. They've had a supportive and encouraging role model.” ~ Survey participant*

*“So they're very supportive in this place. As far as some of the scars from other congregational settings that I've been in, I'm learning about where my triggers are. I'm getting to the point where I'm able to engage in relationships with folks and not go off in ways that are unhelpful or keep it all in and not talk about it at all. I'm able to kind of find a balance and continue the relationship.” ~ Interview participant*

*“My own confidence in my ability to minister to folks that don't necessarily hold the same opinions or perspectives that I do. I can attribute this to practice and deep discernment in my role as a spiritual leader. Really following Jesus' model of ministry is my most helpful resource.” ~ Survey participant*

**Spiritual growth and community growth** go hand in hand with learning and experience, both for equity-seeking ministry personnel and for their communities of faith. Not only are these goals in and of themselves, they can also be a precursor to other healthy aspects of thriving. Actions mentioned include

- new initiatives of inviting friends to choir
- recognizing the value of people already in the congregation as well as those who are arriving
- exploring and sharing spiritual practices
- becoming more aware of the wider church to expand the circle

*“Some church members take a time to learn and discuss about racial justice issues in their committee meeting, board meeting, or personal conversation.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The [community of faith's] increasing comfort with ‘otheredness’ within and beyond the congregation, through cycles of encounter, learning, redirection.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Individual relationships are strong where people have been willing to learn about prayer, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus. They have grown spiritually in enormous ways. Unfortunately, others try*



*to return to the previous status quo and see that empowering of others as threatening.” ~ Survey participant*

*“One group focused on walking prayer/meditation; [this] was hugely positive and would be great to offer beyond staff. More resources around physical accessibility and physical movement would be great.” ~ Survey participant*

**We are thriving! Or not.** Some equity-seeking ministry personnel took this opportunity to comment on how well their pastoral relationship is thriving, even if not attributing reasons.

*“This is a wonderful, thriving community of faith.” and “This has been a very healthy relationship.” ~ Survey participants*

And some commented on how it did not get better at all because of personalities, the strain of the pandemic amplifying a lack of vision, and irreconcilable differences.

*“This relationship was unsuccessful from the beginning.” ~ Survey participant*

*“My pastoral relationship has improved because I left and sought a community where I would be valued and respected.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Things got worse, not better. The separateness caused by the pandemic exacerbated the challenges around identity. The pandemic unveiled other systemic injustices, but I often felt like the COF [community of faith] was not interested in reflecting on this and were more concerned with how they would make church go back to what they were used to. I struggled because I felt like the pandemic was a wake-up call and an opportunity to transform as we follow what the Spirit is doing, which clashed with many in the COF who just wanted to ‘go back to normal.’ It became clear that my time with them was coming to an end. What was broken was no longer worth rebuilding and to try would have been harmful to me.” ~ Interview participant*

## **What Equity-Seeking Ministry Personnel Hope Gets Better**

Despite some pastoral relationships being unhealthy or struggling through a rough period, equity-seeking ministry personnel’s hopes for pastoral relationships, in large part, parallel the national United Church’s visions: for thriving and equitable community life for all of God’s children, including ministry personnel. These include hopes in the areas of safety and respect, equity in the community of faith, lay capacity and involvement, time and financial resources, connection with the wider church, and spiritual skills and healing.

**Safety and respect** look like

- effectively addressing bullying
- collaborative teammates
- a recognition of the humanity of equity-seeking ministry personnel
- respect and regard for their families, especially by lay leadership

This is a wish for their own pastoral relationships and those of their colleagues.

*“My wish is that my old community of faith would care as much about the care and keeping of their minister as they do about their building. My hope is that they won't be allowed to call another minister until they've made meaningful changes to their board.” ~ Survey participant*

*“An M and P committee that actually recognized I exist.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I would hope to one day serve in a charge were I would feel safe to bring my whole self.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I need the safety to feel I can actually take my sabbatical and vacation time without fear of job security or fear of being ‘stuck’ in a congregation where I am exhausted.” ~ Survey participant*

*“My hopes are that others have a pastoral relationship that is genuinely supportive of their unique gifts. (This is to a large extent what I experience within the pastoral relationship.)” ~ Survey participant*

**Equity in the community of faith** looks like the whole community embracing the diversity and equity not just of their equity-seeking ministry personnel but of the community in general, everything from “less racist” to genuine transformation.

*“I hope that some day the congregation will wake up to its privilege and own its part of the issues of the congregation not thriving and losing younger and ‘different’ people due to the toxic culture. I hope someday to find a congregation that is self-aware and self-responsible and willing to go on a journey of co-evolution with its ministry staff. I hope for a pastoral relationship where I and the congregation thrive.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I have hope that new queer/BIPOC folk will stay (as I have) and fight it out but really, why should they?” - Survey participant*

*“My hope is that modelling authenticity and vulnerability opens the hearts and minds of folks that have been previously so resistant to change (despite screaming from the top of their lungs that the church is dying!)” - Survey participant*

*“That we can grow together and open our hearts. That we can heal and move forward together. That we can celebrate diverse experiences and not look back towards White supremacy ruling as a golden age or good, ordered time.” - Survey participant*

**Lay capacity and involvement** is a hope that is not unique to equity-seeking ministry personnel, but still vital to a thriving pastoral relationship. This includes

- effective administrative teamwork
- lay people stepping up into key leadership roles
- long-term and succession planning

- commitment even when it's not easy

*“I wish that they were more able to invite, engage with, [and] understand their neighbourhoods. I wish they had stories of ministry they could easily share. But we are all improving on this.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I wish we had more human resources to fill really important positions on M and P and Leadership Team. They are volunteers; they don't seem to realize sometimes that this is my life. They don't want their volunteer work to be hard, but when I'm being bullied, that's a conflict. Someone has to do the hard work.” ~ Survey participant*

**Time and financial resources** are often stretched thin, especially for equity-seeking ministry personnel who are working extra jobs, have several commitments in the wider church, or are caregivers. Fresh ideas, balancing time, more energy, a clean office, and a manse that is close by were mentioned.

*“The relationship is great. I wish it wasn't so remote. I don't have colleagues to talk to. I commute an hour to the charge. The call would be perfect for me if it weren't for the distances I have to drive (and, incidentally, the gas money is horrendous!)” ~ Survey participant*

*“I wish I had more time to engage in work I'm passionate about.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I've moved a lot away from ministry. I used to give my heart and soul for faith and ministry. I had to move away for my own health, having a separate life. Yeah, it's tough. I don't see myself in ministry after five years from now. Probably less.” ~ Interview participant*

**Connection with the wider church** includes

- hopes for a French-speaking church [could be both a community of faith and a network] in the United Church
- encouraging more engagement with equity issues on a larger level
- more ecumenical discussion
- a relationship between the networks of the wider United Church and local ministry

Some equity-seeking ministry personnel struggle with a perceived disconnect with national staff and programs.

*“[Our] lives are so different than theirs and we need to feel not so different than them.” ~ Survey participant*

**Spiritual skills and healing** encompass a range of hopes, both practical and theological. Some of those mentioned include

- friendship
- being less shy about pastoral visiting and connecting with the community
- teaching people to pray and lift up their personal needs

*“That we could move on from their past ministry; they could complete their amalgamation and live it together.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Continue to deepen spirituality, engage in daring justice issues, seeking ways to live in bold discipleship.”~ Survey participant*

*“My only hope is that, since the Holy Spirit is moving, God will do something in our midst. I wait on the Lord until that happens, or the Spirit indicates it is time for me to leave.” ~ Survey participant*

## **How to Make It Better**

Out of their lived experience, equity-seeking ministry personnel have valuable wisdom about how to enact change. We asked equity-seeking ministry personnel, What’s one tangible change that would make a significant positive shift in your pastoral relationship? Some of these relate to church practices, policies, and the hopes expressed above. They can be summarized in the following themes: financial support, pastoral oversight and pastoral relations advocacy, intentional connection and accompaniment, effective lay structures, staff support and teamwork, and opportunities for growth.

**Financial support** includes comments about

- lowering national assessment fees
- support for francophone ministries
- a recognition that proximal housing like manses can be both a financial and an accessibility issue

*“A sense that the wider church cared about us and less assessment money driving the congregation into financial issues.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Financial support for francophone ministries threatened with disappearance due to a lack of resources and positions for pastors in training.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Housing nearby? I realize that manses had become albatrosses around the congregations’ neck but the lengthy commute to rural charges is very difficult for people with disabilities. And yet, the COL formula means that I couldn’t possibly live near by.” ~ Survey participant*

**Pastoral oversight and pastoral relations advocacy** includes everything from

- help navigating ChurchHub
- educating search committees about equity and the gifts of diverse experience
- easier ways for pastoral changes to say that this is not a good fit
- the wider church dedicating itself to ensuring there is accountability of communities of faith and consequences for horrible or abusive behaviour

Taking an intentional role in addressing toxic congregations and bullies is crucial. **Toxicity and bullying are too often approached as interpersonal, rather than the systemic issues they are.** Research tells us these issues are much worse for women, racialized people, and people with disabilities, and this study supports those findings.

*“I could never have imagined living with the symptoms of PTSD brought on by the church I loved (past tense is intentional).” ~ Survey participant*

**Intentional connection and accompaniment** were mentioned in a few different areas, including

- clarity and support for retired ministry personnel connecting to the wider church in healthy ways
- ongoing education about healthy pastoral relationships
- particular connection during a first call/appointment

*“As a retired minister and without presbytery, ‘we’ are adrift and detached from the church we’ve served.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Ministers in their first call should receive regular contact and mentorship from the regional minister, Office of Vocation, and/or equity resource group.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Resources to support and integrate equity-seeking ministry personnel once they start in their role [position].” ~ Survey participant*

**Effective lay** structures include both changes at the local level and support or direction from regional councils to help ensure communities of faith have supportive and effective lay leadership. Participants mentioned

- a new board chair with strong vision
- openness of some lay leaders to step aside and encourage younger or differently minded people to serve in leadership
- equitable policies on compensation for funerals and weddings
- a working M and P committee

Particularly with M and P committees, effectiveness includes

- annual reviews
- not accepting anonymous complaints
- more communication, affirmation, and appreciation on a regular basis

*“The Holy Spirit changing hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, or the bullies who resist change leaving so everyone else can start fresh.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The members of the church board need to understand their involvement in the ministry of the community of faith as partners with the ministry personnel.” ~ Survey participant*

In some pastoral relationships, **staff support and teamwork** would make a significant difference. This could include

- a competent secretary or administrative support
- hiring a tech person for Sunday mornings to relieve some of the minister's stress
- more staff to help achieve what ministers feel they are called to do

Lastly, **opportunities for growth** are important. Ministry personnel are passionate about their calls.

Here are some of the other things that would matter to survey participants:

- “getting rid of the building”
- “more freedom to explore on a Sunday morning!”
- “beginning to address some needs and gifts of our neighbours”
- “becoming an Affirming congregation; being more welcoming to children and youth”
- “finding ways to interact more with our surrounding community, especially those from marginalized groups”
- “an Affirming 102 refresher [after a 12-year lapse since the original process]”

## The Role of Mentors, Role Models, and Others

While a few participants answered “NA” or “none,” most equity-seeking ministry personnel have found some form of mentoring relationship not just helpful, but invaluable. The method of setting up the relationship, the nature of the support, and the equity-seeking identities of mentors have all been factors mentioned as significant.

**The method of setting up the relationship** is an important factor, as not everyone has connections or access to the same networks, particularly when you are from away. For example, equity-seeking ministry personnel new to Canada, a community, or a region are at a particular disadvantage, intensified by the dissolving of presbyteries. Some participants spoke of being on their own either entirely or in setting up mentoring relationships.

*“There were no formal role models. I knew I was on my own from the beginning.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Helpful, but I had to seek anyone else myself, the UCC did not provide any guidance in where to look.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Very important, but I have found them on my own over the years.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It's very important to have external supports, collegial support, etc. It can sometimes be difficult to establish it.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I often wished that I had had someone in my candidacy process—to help me make mistakes, with my questions, [who was] open to me being confused and messy.” ~ interview participant*

Many find informal or collegial support invaluable, both with other ministry personnel in the United Church and those in other denominations, or spiritual directors.

*“One of the best things for support are non-UCC colleagues. ‘I’ve got you. I’m going to get you through this,’ and it can’t always be top-down.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Mostly friends (often other UC clergy who had experience of the same sorts of issues), and my long-time spiritual director made a difference.” ~ Survey participant*

In other situations, mentorship is mandated and organized by the wider church, often with excellent results.

*“Having a mentor and a supervisor in the admissions process has been invaluable.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Mentor and my SME [Supervised Ministry Experience] supervisor have been excellent.” and “Prior to ordination I was a student minister and over that time I was blessed by Spirit-filled supervisors who modelled healthy ministry.” ~ Survey participants*

Sometimes the mentor is not a good fit or is absent. **People fulfilling these roles need to be well-trained, particularly when working with equity-seeking ministry personnel.**

*“Pretty negative, because they have had different understandings of racism and have projected themselves and their experiences onto me.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I didn’t have an educational supervisor; I had a pastoral charge supervisor. So that was one thing that I asked for...because that’s something I felt was really missing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“0, 0 and a big 0 [to support]. I had mentors that had [served] fewer years in ministry, who were not in favour of the new ministry I was trying to create.... Better teach people how to be a mentor and stand with you.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Only one helpful pastoral charge supervisor. The next one was unprofessional, unethical, rude, and broke confidentiality.” ~ Survey participant*

**The nature of the support sought out** varies, depending on the situation, but many equity-seeking ministry personnel mention

- being able to confide in someone, trust
- testing new ideas
- seeking history and context of the United Church
- double-checking one’s perception of a situation

*“They were really helpful for the two months that we were there together to be like, ‘Hi, yeah, that’s racist.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Regular coaching helps me step outside and get better perspectives on what is happening and what part am I contributing.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I would echo the need to have a person of trust, not someone to give [you] the answers but someone you can talk things through with, someone who is trustworthy to you, in an ongoing relationship.... I have an official mentor. Sometimes we just shoot the breeze, we have just come to know each other. Having a buddy, just a peer, who has no power over you. Sometimes the UCC is very structured and formal, which I love it, but sometimes our faith tells us the value of relationships with people, real relationships. It doesn’t have to be permanent forever and ever.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I seek out mentors outside of the church, and look to faith leaders who are bold and unapologetic (e.g., Rev. William Barber).” ~ Survey participant*

*“In many cases, mentors helped me through the gaslighting. Sharing encounters that felt uncomfortable with mentors allowed me to cultivate a certainty that grounded me. Sharing experiences with other equity-seeking-ministers made a big difference and reminded me that I am not alone.” ~ Interview participant*

That **shared equity-seeking identity of one’s mentors** is often a vitally significant factor in the effectiveness of the support.

*“It was not until I had an internship with a mentor that is a lot like me, who helped me thrive.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I will always be thankful for the older clergywoman who, after conducting the triennial review by presbytery, said, ‘Girl, run!’ My long-time mentor and older female colleagues have sustained me through difficult times, reminded me of my gifts, and candidly steered me toward healthy charges and away from dysfunctional ones. Without them, I may not have persevered in paid accountable ministry.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I got connected to [someone]. And I was so lucky because we both have the same background...so we connected, and he has looked out for me, counselled me, and prayed for me when I felt like I couldn’t go on. But not everybody is gonna get introduced to those two guys, and they’re so far away from me. Honestly, if it weren’t for them, I may not have even got this far, because some of these things have been so difficult.” ~ Interview participant*

*“[Talking about an Indigenous United Church gathering:] It’s not really integrating us into the wider United Church of Canada. It’s kind of polarizing. But then again, I find an incredible sense of community with them. The first time I went to a meeting, it was like sitting down and talking to a roomful of my grandmothers.” ~ Interview participant*



*“It’s the GLBT people whom I’ve known who’ve been willing to share something of their journeys who have made the biggest difference for me; it isn’t just because somebody has a policy or a label or something.” ~ Interview participant*

Sometimes this is within United Church communities and sometimes external to it.

*“I don’t find my spiritual home as much in The United Church of Canada as I find it in our Indigenous centre, because that’s where my Elder is. My Elder is the one whom I connect to, with my Indigenous spirituality, because nobody else [in the church] knows these teachings.” ~ Interview participant*

While many equity-seeking ministry personnel are finding the mentors and supports they need through their own efforts or informal support, **regional ministers, vocational ministers, and candidacy pathways could be playing a more active role in connecting ministry personnel with potential mentors**, introducing them to others in the area, particularly to other equity-seeking ministry personnel and networks.

## **The Positive and Possible Roles of the Wider Church**

Overarching and underlying comments from ministry personnel about what the wider church could be doing to support pastoral relationships highlight **a shift to relationally based ways of being that include support and accountability** for ministry personnel and communities of faith. With shrinking budgets and the increasing complexity of both ministry and expectations, it’s a challenge, but one that aligns with conversations about shifting our paradigm from a colonial world view to more Indigenous ways of being that include interconnected and reciprocal relationships.

*“We need to start actually being a denomination instead of a collection of associated congregations that barely interact—standardized training, polity, teaming young ministers with mentors instead of leaving them in isolation, enforcement of policy, discipline procedures for members and boards that act negatively. Ministers need to actually be employees of the UCC, not congregations.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Foster a culture of grace and generosity toward ministry personnel within our communities of faith and the denomination.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Sadly, they can set policies...best practices...offer educational events, etc., but if the local communities of faith don’t embrace and embody or use/put into practice these resources, ideas, understandings, and practices...it is up to the ministry personnel to take the lead—to manage, monitor, and maintain a healthy pastoral relationship.” ~ Survey participant*

While many equity-seeking ministry personnel do find support from the wider church, many others feel isolated. They are looking for pastoral support as well as people who will step in and intervene with congregations on critical equity issues. For ministry personnel to feel supported is critical to their well-being and the well-being of the pastoral relationship. Whether it’s around

urgent issues or a simple check-in, connection with staff at regional or national levels that is intentional, supportive, and personal is critical.

In this section, equity-seeking ministry personnel comment on things they think the wider church has done *right* to actually help their pastoral relationships, and those things they feel the wider church *could be doing* to support pastoral relationships and equity-seeking ministry personnel. The wider church includes, among others, regional councils, the Office of Vocation, the General Council Office, the National Indigenous Council, and the admissions process. Participants' perspectives can be covered through eight major themes explored below:

- direct connection
- supporting connection
- practical support and intervention
- prioritizing equity
- addressing internal inequity
- valuing participation
- training and education
- benefits and policy

Some of these related themes, of course, also appear in other sections of the report.

### **Direct Connection**

Direct connection in supporting pastoral relationships with equity-seeking ministry personnel is the **most frequently mentioned area** that equity-seeking ministry personnel appreciate and also the most frequently mentioned area that they believe needs to be strengthened. Equity-seeking ministry personnel count on the wider church to actively maintain open and proactive communication with them.

Direct connection looks like

- “walking with us”
- check-ins with regional staff at least annually, and more frequently when a pastoral relationship begins or following an equity-related incident
- effective exit interviews
- hosting weekly/bi-weekly/regular open Zoom drop-ins (especially during COVID lockdowns, but even now)
- hosting town halls
- replying to phone messages or email
- getting to know equity-seeking ministry personnel more personally

Building relationship enables honesty and a foundation for future support.

*“The regional pastoral relations person was really there for us during COVID.... She has been very responsive whenever I've needed her.” and “I cannot say enough positive about [my] regional council staff and the resources they offer.” ~ Survey participants in two different regions*

While pastoral relations ministers are the most frequently mentioned, vocational ministers, other regional staff, and specific General Council staff are also included in these comments. Sometimes **ministry personnel would like more clarity about who is responsible for various forms of contact, support, and care.**

*“I would like to know who to contact. If I’m afraid things aren’t going well, who’s going to be there?... We need a minister to the ministers. Who’s my lawyer? That seems nasty, but who am I supposed to talk to?” ~ Interview participant*

*“I would love to know who, from a structural point of view, has the responsibility for representing my care and needs. It is the regional PRM for the community of faith, and the OV [Office of Vocation] minister makes sure I do my minimum, but who is representing my care? How do we really care for people? Have someone in place who is a good listener, [is] clear with what they can’t fix, ... listening and then taking the request to someone else. Being an advocate.” ~ Interview participant*

*“SUPPORT, SUPPORT, SUPPORT—just point people in the direction of someone they can trust and who has the capacity to understand where they are and where they are coming from.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Create a place of support for ministers. It seems all we have is discipline. We need someone on our side.” ~ Survey participant*

*Sometimes participants are longing for these connections to be made by a specific person’s role, for example, a person at the General Council Office who can support francophone ministries and pastoral relationships alongside other resource people, or identified support from regional staff for racialized ministry personnel.*

*“Wouldn’t it be nice if the region were able to support BIPOC ministers better?” ~ Interview participant*

*“The national [church] does not support ministry personnel generally. They are so divorced from the reality of congregational life.” and “Clergy need the wider church that supports us in the trenches of day-to-day congregational life, not some new social issue that is currently trendy.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I found our pastoral relations minister profoundly unhelpful. I would not seek support from them. People in such positions cannot only be hired for their ability to enforce policy. They have to have the ability to work with people and affirm their humanity, to build up and encourage.” ~ Survey participant*

*“My racialized colleagues and students say it is hard to be taken seriously in the UCC, although it is getting better. I think treating all of us as human beings, rather than as ChurchHub form-fillers, might go some distance!” ~ Survey participant*

In some situations, a lack of direct communication is a lost opportunity for thriving.

*“The wider church did nothing. Maybe a phone call from time to time. . . . I was working on a new model of ministry. I did a lot for the UCC. I spoke to other congregations near and far, and I never heard from the UCC to hang onto congregations that needed support. I guess they didn’t care about losing congregations.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Very few things the national church has done right. The congregation has thrived in spite of the national church. All they do is take our money with little to be seen in return.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Supporting Connection**

Supporting localized connection involves the wider church actively facilitating, resourcing, and sometimes financially supporting or sponsoring ways for equity-seeking ministry personnel to connect with colleagues and participate in or develop networks. This includes

- regions investing in leadership opportunities
- worship opportunities beyond a community of faith where one is in ministry
- matching mentors
- setting up and publicizing mutual support groups and collegial circles
- ensuring particular support for those who are retired and single

As has been said previously, equity-seeking ministry personnel often require **proactive support to make these connections, as they may not be as familiar with certain networks or may feel there is gatekeeping** by non-equity-seeking ministry personnel.

*“I really, really, really want the denomination to consider putting more time and effort into creating a conference. Maybe it’s just a one-time event, maybe it’s just a networking thing. It would be awesome if there could be some kind of gathering of marginalized women, BIPOC, indigenous, LGBTQ+ leaders who are doing the kind of work that I’m doing. Or maybe it doesn’t even have to be in a congregational setting. Maybe it’s really some cutting edge stuff that’s happening that I can’t even name. But pull us all together, and let’s learn from each other.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I just don’t know. In some ways, we’re just so isolated. We all go into these rather traditional communities and are somewhat on our own in these equity struggles.” and “To link the equity-seeking ministry personnel together, especially those who feel lonely in their solo ministry.” ~ Survey participant*

*“It’s the reminder to find circles in the world. . . . I think of people who aren’t good at [finding those], who have a harder time asking for help and acknowledging that. The wider church could really help. It would serve them well to provide these spaces.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I believe support groups are the most helpful way to provide support. They need to have stability and commitment, not just go with whoever shows up. They need to be intentional and build trust intentionally.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There needs to be a new group for clergywomen in the UCC. We are the largest equity-seeking population in ministry, yet we have no means by which to communicate, report on the discrimination, or organize.” ~ Survey participant*

Even simple acts of acknowledging and intentionally welcoming new members at a regional council meeting can facilitate new support networks. These are opportunities to say, “Hello, and we are really glad you’re here,” rather than members wondering “Who was that guy?” In addition to these simple acts, a number of equity-seeking ministry personnel emphasize that time and space set apart to gather in retreat, as ministry personnel and specifically as equity-seeking ministry personnel, would make a significant difference in their lives.

*“The video and Zoom resources have kept me feeling close to the larger church, though I long for more real together-time.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The region needs to have clergy retreats. Not just online ones.... They need to be caring for their people better.” ~ Interview participant*

*“To have a forum where we can maybe dream and discern and that isn’t oriented around the court system that we use in order to carry out our business. Because that can constrain listening and conversation.... With that kind of listening, we might hear the Spirit in our midst.”~ Interview participant*

## **Practical Support and Intervention**

Equity-seeking ministry personnel appreciate **practical support and intervention** from the wider church. Practical supports mentioned include

- aid with securing financial help
- help filling out ChurchHub forms
- answering questions
- help finding a new pastoral relationship through the settlement process (when it worked)
- liturgical resources, particularly in response to current events
- reinforcing an equity-seeking ministry personnel’s words with back-up from regional staff

*“They [settlement committee] did the best they could at the time, and the [pastoral] relationship I entered could not have been better.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Sadly, sometimes I’ve needed to call in my regional minister to repeat what I’ve already told a [pastoral] charge as their supervisor or liaison. When a man says it, suddenly they listen. I’m thankful that my regional minister sees the sexism for what it is and tells folks plainly that I had it right the first time. We need good allies in higher levels of the church who understand their privilege.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I don't have an answer here, not because I think that they haven't done anything right, but because I have never had to seek help from the wider church to support my pastoral relationship.” ~ Survey participant*

Additionally, equity-seeking ministry personnel would **like additional avenues for addressing conflict** before making a complaint and **are adamant that the wider church needs to expect and enforce more accountability from communities of faith.**

*“Conflict management tools.... Are there third parties that other denominations use?... Is there somebody else you could go to with this expertise and...sign up for three one-on-one sessions: (a) to talk about what are the issues, behaviours, and concerns (b) have another one where I get some ideas and then (c) have a reflection one. If it needs further work, I could go to the pastoral relations minister and say, ‘Okay, we've gone up a level.’ It feels like it [intervention currently] escalates so quickly. Are there options? Are there interim ministers who could do that?... Sometimes it's really nice having somebody with no chips in the game [as opposed to the pastoral relations minister].” ~ Interview participant*

*“They don't take an authoritative role when the churches don't comply with legislation. That can be quite challenging for ministers to navigate when support is not there, or the authoritarian support that would be required to make a change like this.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Prioritizing Equity**

Equity-seeking ministry personnel appreciate that the wider church is actively and overtly **prioritizing equity** as a guiding principle and in practice. Specific examples given include

- updating the United Church crest to include colours of a medicine wheel and “All my relations” in Kanien'kéha (Mohawk language)
- that the admissions process is slowly becoming more welcoming
- that regional councils and the General Council make efforts to highlight equity and justice issues at their meetings and events

*“I think it is helpful that in many ways the General Council and denominational body is an example of equity seeking; the apology for residential schools, having Affirming resources, becoming an anti-racist church. These inspire and empower me to share these ideals with the community of faith, and when I would use resources created by The United Church of Canada I felt like the church was working with me to inspire the community of faith.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I think we'll continue to see practices and documents evolve that are helpful. From equity checklists, to creating brave space.... Some of the language is starting to emerge on people's lips in a way that shows they're growing into and committed to [equity]. Even what we're seeing this past weekend in General Council 44, of people using language like ‘equity,’ that GC proposals all had an equity question. It is helping everyone in those small steps to have it become more regular and routine, to lift up all matters of equity, and to realize that our perspective of equity is growing more and more all the time.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think that the most important thing that the denominational offices have to hear from us is that there will always be churches that will resist having programming and education offered. Keep offering it. It's incredibly important to a minister like me to know that if I'm going to work at my highest level of call that God's put on my life in this denomination, I need to know that the denomination has my back. Every time I think about a program or a policy that committees have poured hours into, that people have prayed over, I feel strangely supported and affirmed. And I realize this is where I'm supposed to be doing ministry and I'm proud to serve.” ~ Interview participant*

This prioritizing not only serves as a role model, but is important to strengthen, even in the face of criticism.

*“Keep prodding and expanding as you/we have in the past.” and “Have people at all levels who take these issues seriously.” ~ Survey participants*

*“I would also ask the wider church to stop slowing down progress for the sake of the few who oppose it. There is nothing just about asking your ministry personnel to wait for their human rights to be respected because it makes a handful of older, straight, White men uncomfortable or angry.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I think as an employer, it's also around putting our money where our mouth is. We say a lot of things as a church, we proclaim a lot of things, we get behind a whole lot of causes, we're out there, and we're perceived as making a difference in the world. I think we've got some internal work to do to make a difference in our internal world of the United Church and what it means to work for the church...just as much love and attention as all the things we're waving our flag about out in the world... I couldn't take what we were claiming to be and then how we were actually treating employees. There was just a huge gap, including any processes for dealing with it when the complaint does come or when the issue is clearly defined. What can we do about it? ‘Oh, nothing.’ Good, dear, smile and nod. I just say, ‘Stop talking, church.’ Stop pretending we're going to make a difference in anything, unless we have actual processes internally to address the inequalities within our own structures, the inequities within our own way of being.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Addressing Internal Inequity**

Addressing internal inequity acknowledges that, unfortunately, not all regions and communities of faith are equal. Some are well-resourced in regard to staff and finances. Some are not. Some of these dynamics are based on geography. Likewise, some regional councils struggle with a lack of equity among their staff and practices. Part of prioritizing equity must be addressing these equity issues within our own denomination.

*“As with all equitable relationships, there is a need for rigorous self-examination that is too often lacking in the church's national and regional leadership. In my own region, a cabal of church leaders has developed who all protect each other.” ~ Survey participant*

While not all issues are specific to pastoral relationships with equity-seeking ministry personnel, they are often felt or experienced more acutely by them. This includes the dynamic of support for ministry personnel in rural areas where equity-seeking ministry personnel are often over-represented and isolated from identity-based communities. Research tells us that the more outside the context a person is from the dominant community, the more acute issues of bullying become, recognizing that in some communities anyone from “away” is automatically “other,” even without the added equity issues. General Council and the regions must put serious consideration and resources toward this situation.

*“All of my answers around equity are also coloured by the urban-centric approach that this region has adopted. It’s very dismaying for those of us in rural ministry to constantly be ‘left in the dust,’ yet this is a community of faith that is healthy, thriving, and living the gospel every day.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Valuing Participation**

Equity-seeking ministry personnel appreciate when the wider church values participation and recognizes the gifts of diversity that equity-seeking ministry personnel bring, both their own and those of their colleagues. As we have heard in other sections, this participation in the wider church can be both tiring but also life-giving for equity-seeking ministry personnel who feel isolated or unique in their pastoral relationships.

*“National Indigenous Council, General Council Office, and regional council have offered me opportunities to serve because of my intersectionality, not in spite of it. They give me an outlet to do the justice work that feeds my passion.” ~ Survey participant*

*“My participation in the equity aspects in the UCC—how to be an anti-racism church, trauma-informed, etc.—has changed my life. This could be true for others learning about queer experiences. This equity work is good, and it makes us all better human beings.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I was teary eyed when I heard about Carmen [Lansdowne’s] selection, and I watched her installation [as Moderator]. Yeah, just by being who she is and modelling her many strengths as well as her attachment to her culture should help to change some of the stereotypes that people don’t know they have.” ~ Interview participant*

There are of, course, participants who do not feel accepted or as though they belong to the wider church. Some find this upsetting, and others no longer care.

*“Not a lot when it has come to supporting my Métis heritage or my ministry path.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Training and Education**

Opportunities for training and education were frequently mentioned as things that the wider church provides, does well, and that are helpful to their pastoral relationships. These include



- M and P training sessions offered by regions
- United in Learning courses
- boundaries courses
- United Church special occasion resources, such as anniversary liturgies
- Affirming resources
- United Church–specific courses with the admissions program
- the candidacy process and formation
- resources offered by the Indigenous council, Indigenous ministers and leadership

*“I have three neighbour colleagues who are just stellar as people and ministers. Since the church has formed and shaped them, the wider church must be doing lots of stuff right.” ~ Survey participant*

Participants also highlight the United Church’s approach to education and training, which includes reflection and prayerful self-evaluation.

*“Consistently providing educational material and nudging us to think beyond where we are.” and “Because the wider church always prays for wisdom, there is an ongoing desire for education, study, and improvement in its systems.” ~ Survey participants*

In the areas of training and education, participants think that the wider church **could improve or focus in certain areas:**

- more training of M and P committees
- more education around privilege, gender, ageism, and microaggressions in general
- education about neurodiversity
- navigating the plethora of policies and printed information that ministry personnel are expected to know
- revisiting, revising, and re-releasing some previous United Church educational resources (one recommended was “Mending the World”)

Equity-seeking ministry personnel want to ensure there are avenues not only for their own education and training, but that of lay persons, those in discernment, and those in formation.

*“Peer circles. What if every seven ministers in every region [are in a peer circle, and] one of the things they have to do is make sure there’s a candidate partaking in their conversation so they can learn [strategies for navigating pastoral relationships]. The difference between ‘This is a no-win situation, run’.... [and] situations where it’s like, ‘Oh, you know what? I think I have a process that might help you stay another year.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think of candidates and lay people who are still discerning.... They also need a time to be together. I think about tools like that. If presbytery is no longer going to go out, then regional councils need to find ways to bring people in.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The wider church has failed at discipleship, Christian Education, and evangelism. If these things were properly in place congregations wouldn’t feel empowered to bully outsiders and [those] different.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Benefits and Policies**

Equity-seeking ministry personnel appreciate certain benefits and policies that the United Church has developed over the years that support thriving pastoral relationships. A few participants mentioned sabbaticals, which allow one to rest, reflect, and re-engage. As researchers, we note that sabbaticals are not universally accessible and that often equity-seeking ministry personnel never get a sabbatical because they are in more precarious ministries that are shorter term or less resourced. This has been brought to the attention of regional councils. The “disengaging policy for retiring clergy” was also mentioned as very helpful, to give retiring ministry personnel clear guidelines on how to transition to different types of ministry and take these decisions out of the pastoral relationship.

Further areas of policy that equity-seeking ministry personnel say **could be addressed**

- resolving “the DLM issue”
- reinstating emergency funds to help those who have a pastoral relationship end because of equity (was originally just because of sexual orientation)
- having the Board of Vocation look for ministers who work more than 40 hours a week and don’t take their study leave or holiday time, to remind them of the situation that they are setting up for the next minister

There is a concern that our polity and policy of relying on volunteers for significant work needs to be reconsidered.

*“Sometimes it doesn’t seem reasonable to run these organizations on volunteers. We need actual accountants to do accounting and figure out pay, etc. We need trained and skilled people to figure out HR stuff. When do we say, We aren’t doing these things well any more? Ministers are the ones who suffer. It’s just not right.” ~ Survey participant*

In terms of benefits, there were multiple comments regarding the EAP program; its importance, its limitations, and that it is often ill-equipped to address ongoing equity concerns.

*“I’ve use counselling through EAP often and I use it through my benefits. I found...I used to use the free counsellor through EAP, which was good. I have found that having a counsellor through my benefits that I can choose that’s very specialized for my needs is better.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Another part of the United Church that is always a struggle is benefits and EAP. EAP has only ever set me up with one person who was really helpful. COVID has only made it worse. EAP now is almost solely a telephone or online relationship, and it’s only short-term counselling. Like most everything in our lives, short term-counseling is really great if you have a short-term problem.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Problems accessing EAP and other benefits are a major source of stress for ministers and their families. Just finding the EAP phone number is hard. Better access to the information would help. Acknowledging that people, especially women of colour, have a harder time accessing appropriate medical care should be taken into consideration when planning for benefits.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Heath, Helps, Hopes: This Project**

Lastly, numerous participants on both the surveys and in conversations, remarked on the importance of the wider church undertaking this project and were grateful for the opportunity to share their experience, concerns, and wisdom.

*“I want to say thank you to you for holding the space, for being witness to my story.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I will say I'm so glad two diaconal ministers are doing this work. It just feels like it'd be done in a more equitable way.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The wider church does amazing things right, such as having this conversation and all the openness toward Indigenous people, LGBTQAI+ people, Asian heritage, and so on.... The church does excellent work, and I am very grateful.” ~ Survey participant*

## Specific Identity-Types of Discrimination

Most of this research and report identifies dynamics by stage and consequence in pastoral relationships. While there are some differences between various equity-seeking groups, these have not been emphasized in previous sections because our primary focus was on equity and inequity. We also didn't want to overshadow data and dynamics of pastoral relationships with what can sometimes be seen as sensationalized stories of discrimination. However, those stories were told and are vitally important to understanding the picture of (in)equity in pastoral relationships. In this section, experiences of discrimination are presented by identity category for some of the most common forms of inequity in the study. Some quotes are duplicates of those in earlier sections because of the ways they are presented here.

### Disability

"God creates us full of potential but with different abilities."

~ United Church of Canada website, [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)

One-third of survey participants noted living with a disability (No - 67 percent Yes - 33 percent),<sup>26</sup> including many with other equity-seeking identities as well. Some disabilities are invisible, and they may or may not choose to disclose it. Some are very visible.

*"There's the whole disability thing. I don't think that as a country, inside or outside the church, that we know how to manage well with people who have physical disabilities, whether they're visible or not. Because we just expect people to work hard and work often. And we expect our ministers to be on call all the time. So maybe one of the outcomes could be a boundary." ~ Interview participant*

*"The minority which tends not to be talked much about in equity conversations is disabled people. That's really the last bastion of congregational hard-headedness, because we are not willing to modify our building. We cannot modify our physical space, which has been helped by the designation a lot of our buildings have as heritage buildings (provincially defined). But the government actually encourages you to make those accessible. It's usually congregations that won't budge on these things in terms of physical accessibility, as we pointed out several years ago in the [Theologies of Disabilities Report](#). Accessibility is not just physical accessibility, it's also accessibility of attitude towards including people with all kinds of disabilities in the life of the congregation, which includes ministry personnel. Given what is going to hit the province and the country in general with long COVID and a new wave of newly disabled people, which is going to include ministers, this is going to be a real challenge in the next few years for our restorative*

---

<sup>26</sup> This was the question to which they were responding: "Do you identify as a person with a disability and/or as disabled"? For the purposes of this question, "persons with disabilities" refers to people who experience long-term (lasting, or expected to last for six months or more), persistent, or recurring physical, mental, sensory, or learning disabilities, including those with chronic health conditions, which may result in a person experiencing disadvantage or encountering barriers to full participation.

*care program and communities of faith with the way they think about disability.” ~ Interview participant*

**Implications:** A large number of clergy live with an added challenge to an already challenging career. There are implications for restorative care, physical plants, and congregational capacity/willingness to consider alternate ways of doing things. Congregations often hold prejudice about people with disabilities who in turn work twice as hard to counter the prejudice.

*“Because we’re visibly disabled, the assumption is, we’re hardly ever going to be working. This causes us to work twice as hard and become even sicker because we don’t want to give in to this prejudice that’s held about us.” ~Interview participant*

## **Ableism**

*“But how many communities of faith pass[ed] by my profile, didn’t offer an interview? Because I made it clear in my information that I was a person who [had a particular physical condition]. If that’s going to deter you from talking to me, then we probably shouldn’t be talking. On the other hand, if you had a chance to talk to me, would that take some of your fear away? It’s kind of like a bit of a chicken and an egg story around that. And I have made my choices. Others may make different choices. But I think there is something to be said, around all the equity-seeking identities, that we never know how we might have been possibly judged in our transparency.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Ableism is just not high on the agenda for the church as a whole. Not really. I think it’s still at the stage where we say, Oh, look, we have a speaker who has a disability—aren’t we good? Right? That’s sort of what it feels like.... The real effort is to see how our decisions exclude others, to see how our ways of thinking exclude others. It just feels like we’ve got a long, long ways to go.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I got tired with the church, who is always sending me to do stuff and asked me to speak publicly but never takes care of my physical needs. And I’m not the only disabled person who says that. That people will say, ‘Come and offer your different gifts.’ But what about my limitations? They’re part of me, too. They’re always ignored. So I always had problems, you know—locked doors, stairs, locked bathrooms, not being able to use a shower or bathroom. And so, I’ve never really, fully been fully seen for these things, right?” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think that’s a trap to any minister who falls sick for whatever reason, disabled or not. Any minister [who] for some medical reason is no longer able to perform the way they do. And for me, it really said also, we accept you as long as you pretend to be able-bodied.... So I think, what if that policy was public? What if we knew what it was? What if it’s just a matter of paying a little more, and then the church doesn’t put people in unjust situations anymore?” ~ Interview participant*

*“They questioned whether my medical diagnoses were valid. They pressed for details about every diagnosis. They said, ‘You look fine.’... It was just such a toxic, hurtful situation.”*  
~Interview participant

*“Every time I've asked the board to negotiate with me, to brainstorm with me, they would refuse to discuss accommodations if I was in the room. And then M and P would accuse me of being in conflict of interest because I'm trying to get an advantage. And then I would say I'm not in conflict of interest. I'm not asking to gain anything. I want us to work well together.”* ~ Interview participant

*“So Morneau Shepell [former employee assistance program provider] was awful, awful. Questioning all the time whether or not I should be off, how much I should be off, ...pressured so hard to go back that I went back sooner than I should have.... And then they were constantly on me about how I needed proof from all kinds of sources that I needed to remain on half time. My doctor...went to bat for me...because he was just disgusted with how much I was pressured.”* ~ Interview participant

*“We know what to do with clergy who are dying. If you have terminal cancer your colleagues at least know what to do, whether the formal church does or not. But for me I'm young-ish. And I'm chronically ill. And it's an invisible illness. And really, there's very little understanding from the clergy I've come across anyway, about what chronic illness or chronic pain is like. And so it's like one more area in my life, where...it's up to me to explain. Constantly being the spokesperson is frustrating.... Why is it my job as the person who has the disability or multiple disabilities to try to explain to the church why they ought to have some sort of care for me or for my family?”* ~ Interview participant

*“I heard from a few counsellors, ‘Oh, yeah, the United Church. They're known for eating their young.’ Wow. Not a good reputation to have. Right? Oh, yeah, that church that eats their young?”* ~ Interview participant

## **Body**

*“People didn't realize I was fat. They didn't know. Two men made comments about counting calories. A woman was trying to be in solidarity for me. That's something.”* ~ Interview participant

## **Racism**

*“So I did push back and say, ‘Have you considered the fact that if what you're saying is true, and I don't think it is, Black men and Black women feel stress and anxiety because we have to live with racist behaviours, and we have to live with the constant fear of the dominant culture attacking us or harming us or doing things to us that could be harmful. We have to live with that. So relaxing is a little difficult.’ And he didn't say anything to that.”* ~ Interview participant

“The United Church of Canada has a long history of condemning racism: For decades, the United Church has condemned all forms of racism, named racism as sin, and worked to eliminate systemic racial discrimination. People in the United Church have developed [anti-racism policies](#) and education programs, worked toward reconciliation and [Indigenous justice](#), adopted the [Calls to the Church](#), and created [intercultural policies](#) and [initiatives](#). In spite of this steadfast and faithful work by committed people over generations, the reality of racism in the church is ever-present.”

—*The United Church of Canada, “Working Towards Becoming an Anti-Racist Denomination”*

*“Sometimes it feels like gaslighting. You feel like, am I the only one or am I crazy? Or am I imagining these things are happening; am I over sensitive? All of these kinds of questions. And so I think, for me anyways, what I've witnessed in these groups is that it is helpful... I mean, in one way it's good to know that you're not the only one that sees what you see. And then on the other hand, it's also sad to know that from coast to coast to coast, this is the experience of clergy who want to share their gifts with this church, you know, and are hurt by the sin of racism. This is really sad.” ~ Interview participant*

As noted in The United Church of Canada’s document “Working Towards Becoming an Anti-Racist Denomination,” despite our commitment to being anti-racist, racism exists. Ministry personnel who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour must deal with

- being considered “not a real minister” (aka White = real)
- overt and covert racism
- having their experiences of microaggressions and macroaggressions dismissed
- the inability to find work or precarious work situations

and other experiences stemming from racism. This occurs in communities of faith as well as at regional and national levels.

*“For me the whole element of trust. Because you have to choose to trust, always, in places that are not safe. Even though we say we've created a safe place, because we'd like to say that, it's still not a safe place to be. And I don't know that the White world is aware of that in terms of how unsafe other people might be feeling. Right? So I think we've got a lot of work to do. And a whole lot of ways that are, some of them are subtle and some of them are not so subtle, that are more overt. But I also know that every person of colour has learned to live with that. So that a whole lot just rolls off you unless it's really directed and they're trying to be mean and vicious and get you out of a job or something else joins that action. But I think you just get used to taking endless microaggressions.... So I'm not really sure where that places me.... Is this my responsibility to educate the world about what they're doing? I don't know.” ~ Interview participant*

This section highlights the voices of ministry personnel, predominantly from interviews. It is divided into sections based on

- personal experience
- communities of faith
- regional and national levels of the church

- institutional and systemic issues and experiences
- thoughts and observations from regional staff

*“I get invited to speak about equity, diversity, inclusion, that sort of EDI realm, from time to time. And what I like to put an emphasis on is, liberation is collective. White people need to be liberated from White supremacy.... Sure there is this, it's directed towards racialized people in its particular ways. And that needs to stop and end. But the liberation is needed for all people.... Injustice, it hurts both. And I think that has been really important in spaces where there's predominantly White, cis, straight people, to be able to frame it that way, to say, This is your conversation. And not because of what you do for others, but what you are doing for your own self.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Personal Experience**

*“And I have found it frustrating that I can be in a room and offer what I think is something worth considering. And it gets no consideration. And a White person will say it, and it's like the best idea ever. And that has happened enough that I'm like, okay, what's going on here? Right.” ~ Interview participant*

*“My experience is I would like to declare I'm passing through kind of the valley of death whenever I experienced those kinds of...and then there were more than I shared with you in this interview.” ~ Interview participant*

*“But I fought, I resisted. This racism is killing people. And not only racism. Also colonialism. Because when I experience all these painful and unexpected shocking incidents, done by our European settlers.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Being told by my White friends, and I love this line, We just think of you as White. And I'm like, well, thank you for discrediting half of my reality. Thank you so much for that.... So there's this negation happening that could happen in both worlds, right, which is quite interesting in terms of where do I belong?”*

*“They want to make me like them. It's exactly assimilation policy and this assimilation philosophy. I clearly understood that and my own consciousness clearly rejected [that]. I really don't want to be like you because I'm comfortable with mine. And I want to be myself.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I journeyed with them last year on a book about White supremacy. And we had a couple of good discussions. But then I had a person of colour—whom I consider a friend, and she would call me a friend, too—tell me that I'm not dark enough to talk about racism.... Dear God, to say I'm not dark enough to talk about racism just felt racist to me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I took a lot of abuse from that person, racist, sexist abuse.... I tried to handle it in a pastoral way and hear him out and engage with him and have a conversation, and when it didn't go the way he wanted it to, he really just became abusive.” ~ Interview participant*



*“What was the most painful was just the almost daily microaggressions that I felt from my team. My team was not aware of their own racism. No. And M and P was not aware of their own racism. So when I went to M and P to talk about these things and say, ‘Hey, can we do something? I want to have a good relationship with these folks, and this is really hard for me to deal with on a regular basis.’ You know, M and P pulled out all of those things like, They probably didn’t mean it. They had this Black person before like them a lot. So clearly, they’re cool with Black people. You know, all of these tropes that if they weren’t so painful, they’re almost funny, because they’re just such cliches that we hear over and over and over again.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I did a whole series in February for Black History Month. And there was a lot of good feedback. But there was also me getting an anonymous phone call on my answering machine at work that said I don’t have any right to talk about that in the sanctuary.” ~ Interview participant*

*“[My colleague] showed up to help a family plan the funeral of their loved one. And they straight up told him, We won’t have a [BIPOC] minister do that. It just made me so sad for him and for us. And for me. How much of that can you take before you have to lose your passion for your call, the thing that you feel that God is really asking you to do? How much of a cross are we called to bear in this community?” ~ Interview participant*

*“It’s really hard because it feels like either I’m invisible or fetishized in some way.... Oh, well, we’ve done this good thing. We have her here.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It’s that reaction to our no’s that feels sometimes so violent. Like we don’t have a right to say, Well, no, I’m not going to be that thing that you want me to be. Because I’m a whole person.... And you could ask me to do something where I got to help you, you know, or it was collaborative, or, it wasn’t just, Can you show up and make me look legitimate?” ~ Interview participant*

*“One day the conversation turned to grandchildren or something and they were talking about so and so who had a child, but she had a really dark baby, right? And people were wondering about that. And the line that came out of the lady’s mouth was ‘must have been the n\*\*ger in the woodpile.’ And I’d never heard that expression before. But that just floated out of her mouth pretty effortlessly. Right? And we’re all just sitting around having tea and I’m thinking, okay, right.... And I took that to someone who was in authority, or just like, okay, so how do I...what do I do with that? Because I know I’m not changing that 80-year-old lady’s racism. I know that. You know, that just rolled on out of her mouth, but there I am, I am still receiving that. Right? And what do we do with that?” ~ Interview participant*

*“All along the road leading to the church and on our church sign itself somebody went through and put racist stickers all over the sign and on the posts leading to the church. It’s like George Floyd. Listen, Black Lives Matter. I’m like, do they? Do they really matter? Because I’m not feeling it. Prove it. We say all kinds of things. And then we do other things. When that went down, someone phoned me and said, ‘I’m just checking in.’ That was important. It changed the*

*nature of our relationship, because I was able to say thank you for that. Because a whole lot of people, nothing. Radio silence. So when I say about having the hard conversations like that, some of it's being able to break into that stuff that normally polite Canadians, we just shut up about. We've been taught that ooh, if it's going to be uncomfortable, or if it's challenging, maybe we shouldn't go there. When really, you need to know that somebody cares when stuff like that is happening.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Some few people were not very receptive. There was an old fellow, he could not shake my hand for a long time...he could not greet me, he could not shake my hand. And I could tell, he will always speak to me with kind of disdain, a bit derogatory.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I saw it through my candidacy, too. Racial justice was a huge factor in my candidacy process. And the folks who think that they're not racist, they're the most challenging ones. That have this identity of being not racist, not discriminatory. 'I'm a nice person. I'm nice to people of all races, so therefore, I'm not part of racism.' They're the hardest ones to deal with because they've got such a strong cognitive dissonance between their identity and the reality. It's so great that it's hard to break through.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Communities of Faith**

*“I don't know how to address these levels of racism.... They would much rather be open for three quarters of the year than have a minister who is Black or maybe has an accent other than [regional]. Like, what the hell?... I was not proud of them. Nor was I proud of me if I left them in that state.... I had hoped that I had left them better than that.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Cultures have compulsory Whiteness. And it's not talking about Whiteness in terms of a skin tone, because that is what it is. But it's Whiteness in terms of what it means to belong to that power group. And when you walk in, everything tells you that this is a place for other people like us. The way we worship, the way we sing, the way we stay still, the way the preaching is done, where oftentimes, it's more like a lecture than the Word of God coming through.... If somebody walks in off the street that looks like me, or looks like my father, looks like my auntie, what do they do? What's there for them to feel like they really belong, other than everybody's word that hey, you could come in and we'd love you. How are we supposed to trust that? Especially when, as ministry personnel, we know that that's not what's happening, that we're hurting, you know.” ~ Interview participant*

*“And it makes me wonder what the search committee...has told those ministers.... Why aren't they interviewing you? Because they're not allowed to discriminate based on race, so.... And it also makes me wonder what the regional rep is doing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Churches just flat out would be like, You're not experienced enough for us. You know, like the big [urban] churches. Which is funny, because my friends who are White men that graduated the same time as me got jobs in [urban] churches. And they somehow were experienced enough.... There's something about who stayed in [the city] because they could find positions. And who's had to move further out. ” ~ Interview participant*

*“Indigenous and black and LGBTQ ministers become teachers. I shouldn’t have to teach.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It’s hard to really get people to understand that this is about a whole other realm of invisible power that is sunk into our systems of doing things. It’s walking into a United Church and seeing all these White guys, all the pictures. And I’ve done it so many times.... It’s like an unspoken, This is not for you. This is not yours.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I am supporting somebody...a relatively recent immigrant in a pastoral relationship where the congregation is going to the former White male clergy in the community to preside at significant life events, so baptisms, weddings, funerals. And..their gut feeling is if I bring this up with M and P, it’s not going to go well.... It would be helpful if M and P were encouraged, at least strongly encouraged, to take the racial justice training. But that’s not something that a racialized minister can suggest.” ~ Interview participant*

*“My concern is this pattern, where you set up certain ministers for a career that’s unstable.... I literally was asked during an interview: We normally hire older, White, straight men for this position. Can you answer as to what you would say to people when we hired you that were expecting that? How do we reassure people that you would be a good minister? And basically, we’re just like, how would we offload the pastoral care that would be needed by the fact that you’re racialized and queer? And, you know, they basically said, ‘We know these are our biases.’ How are you-self aware enough to ask this, but then also still be asking it?” ~ Interview participant*

*“The experience of getting leaflets in the church mailbox...getting hate literature in the mailbox and being told, ‘Oh, that’s just so and so; don’t worry about it.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“We had a group of three folks in the congregation who were racist. The racism was manifest in language use for Brown people—and I’m being polite when I say that—and their regard for folks who were of Muslim faith. And there was hate literature that was circulated.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I remember another lady saying to the board the other day, ‘People in town are asking, When are we going to get a real, real minister?’ She was referring to the Canadian White minister, someone who looks like us. So it was very clear that there were racial issues with some members of the congregation who were not accepting.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Obviously, bringing a whole bunch of Black people to church was not what they were looking for.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The Affirming process can be a shield, because they think they then can’t be racist, but they really are racist.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Regional and National Church**

*“[This region] is really, really White. Like, really White. And...it was after George Floyd died. I remember calling my regional minister and asking [them], ‘Have you checked in pastorally with any of the racialized clergy in our region? I imagine that it’s been a really difficult time for them.... It hadn’t actually even occurred to our regional minister—whom I love, like, I really appreciate [their] ministry—but it hadn’t occurred to [them] to check in with any of the people of colour who are serving in ministry in [this region].” ~ Interview participant*

*“[Talking to a regional minister] You should also know that I am Métis. And you wouldn’t know that by looking at me, but I just want to note that.... And so the regional minister did not check in with me after Kamloops happened.... I don’t really think that [the regional ministers] really know how to support racialized or Indigenous people in ministry. But yeah, it’s lonely.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Somebody used lynch language at one of the [regional] town hall meetings. And because we’re inviting someone from the national office in to talk about the changing benefits program, and we were advised not to lynch the man. You know, fine. We can use that language. But that has its own baggage with it. And I don’t think there was any understanding on the part of the person who used the language that maybe you shouldn’t do that.... We say and do so many things that...just rolls off, like lots of people think, well, I can talk about lynching.... I’m allowed to use that word. Absolutely. But there’s some meaning that goes with it. But not a clue. And that’s our leadership, that’s coming out of the leadership. So once again, we say one thing, and then we do another.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Institutional and Systemic**

*“A lot of times, Asians are not seen. There’s an invisibility factor to Asians.... Every once in a while the same person [will] say, Oh, we’re all White here. I’m going, No, we’re not. Do I have to remind you every single time I am not White? Hello? So it’s just like, we’re not seen, we’re not heard. And so that culture becomes part of us as well, is that we’re not a voice, right? We don’t have a voice. And so that’s an important part of the racism piece that also needs to be looked at. I think East Asians particularly need to gather together and Koreans, there are so many Korean ministers across the church who just need to be together and particularly the women, particularly women clergy, Asian women clergy; it is a hard place to be.” ~ Interview participant*

*“One of the things that I find is different, I think, for those of us who are raised Canadian, we’re raised in this society that says, ‘There’s no difference.’ We’re raised in a society of entitlement. But when it comes down to it, we don’t really get the privilege. But we’re raised as part of the culture that expects the privilege. So I notice when I have conversations with my colleagues of colour who are born and raised in Canadian mainstream society, I find that we—I know I do, but I find that some of my colleagues do, too—we get more upset about the inequities. Where somebody who has come from another country, it’s kind of like what they feel like, [they’ve] come as an outsider and so, you know, kind of expect to be, ‘She’s like an outsider.’ Well, I was an insider. And I’ve been fed a lie my whole life and then I came to a point of realizing that’s not really how it is.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I have another friend who is queer, [racialized] and had the similar thing that I've gone through, where a church hires you, and then they can't afford you.... And then it feels really icky. Every time you're in a meeting, and then money always comes up, and then you're just sitting there. And you know that they're sort of looking at you, like you cost too much. And then having to leave the church and restart. And it's exhausting, right? The more marginalized you are, the more likely you are to end up in those precarious church roles and the more you have to uproot your life to find a new job or take on the stress. And it's not really a church's fault. They're not trying to burn out a minister or hire them for a job that isn't sustainable. But I think that's the larger trend. I just worry, the longer I'm in ministry, the more expensive I am. And so what's going to happen 10 years from now when a church looks at me and they think, Oh, we just can't afford them?” ~ Interview participant*

*“It's challenging, right? Because it feels like it's a risk. And we already feel at risk. Right? Like when you walk into a room, and you're the only person of colour, you're already at risk.... You have the moment where you're like, Yeah, I'm here. So you already feel at risk. And then anything else you do is just amplifying that risk. Right? And so if then you're speaking out in an assertive way about topics that are sensitive, oh, God, that's a bigger risk. Right? So it just feels like it's already risky to be here in the equity-seeking reality of not being a White man. Right? English. So because I'm not the norm, I'm already at risk. And so then it's all the other layers of what else might be intersecting with that risk.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In [an urban] area, one minister has been five years looking for a job. What else could it be other than racism?” ~ Interview participant*

*“It seems to be more people complain more if the person is not White, regardless of the accent.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It was ugly..... And that experience had a lot in it. It was textured, but sexism and racism, [were] definitely a piece of it.... And the resources that were brought in...to a certain extent, it depends on how you're defining the “problem” [signs air quotes with fingers]. I put that in quotes because how you define it determines how you address it. The resources that were called in were appropriate for how that situation was defined and for resolving it. But that situation required me to get legal counsel. So it was the beginning of the ‘get legal counsel because if you think anyone in the church is coming to take care of you, good luck with that.’ So that was my own first personal experience with why so many people lawyer up in the church in terms of being in pastoral relationships that are dysfunctional, abusive, toxic, call them what you will. And the capacity to be able to address that in a way that doesn't just crucify the minister.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Black History Month and I was talking about issues of racism. You know, these are the kinds of folks who would say, ‘Well, you know, the world would be better if, if they had Jesus, if they just knew Jesus, there wouldn't be this hate.’ The sentiment in that particular community comes from an entrenched White privilege that was established in the fifties and sixties.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The second round of interviews, and their response was all, ‘Yeah, you’re very good. But we would want to take you if you’d like to be our pulpit supply minister whilst we’re still looking.’ If I’m good to be the pulpit supply minister, that means I can be good to be a minister. But I’m the wrong colour. That’s what I’m getting. So I kind of gave up searching anything around [that area]. Because I know they’re not gonna buy it.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Thoughts and Observations from Regional Staff**

*“I’ve been hearing things through the grapevine around the housing crisis that we’re facing and what impact that is going to have on calls to ministry. And I think particularly around issues of ministers of colour. And you know, the bias in terms of being able to access housing. Is that going to be an issue for us? I know of a couple of situations where colleagues in ministry have had to move in with other colleagues because they’ve lost their housing. We currently have a situation here in one of our regions of a minister of colour, their community of faith is trying to find them housing and there’s just such a limited or lack of housing that it’s difficult. So, you know, does the fact that they are a minister of colour also add another dimension to finding housing in what is predominantly a White rural area? As far as what our colleagues are facing, sort of, in the wake of whatever wave we’re in, and then now the housing stuff on top of it, too.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“What I would say is that we need to do a hugely better job of preparing congregations when a racialized person is going in, particularly in a small community, where there may be a limited number of other racialized people. Or at least racialized people from the same background or culture. And so the norms that we have in our church of Canada in terms of things like what worship looks like, how we communicate with one another, the role of the minister are all things that everybody knows. And if you don’t come with that knowing, then you are very quickly judged and marginalized and so on. So there were a whole bunch of hidden norms in that congregation I served. It was misogyny that congregation, it was racism, there were a whole bunch of norms around what the minister was and wasn’t to do, how you communicated with each other, who went for lunch with him. Those kinds of dynamics that really left the minister who was there quite excluded.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“There’ve been a couple of situations where I’ve supported ministers of colour. And, you know, again, some of the same thing of not being respected in their position or role as a spiritual leader within a community of faith. So in those couple of cases I can think of, you know, the minister has then moved on to another community of faith shortly thereafter.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“I did work with one congregation...preparing to receive a [BIPOC] minister. And knowing that other [areas] had experiences of racism spray painted on their church walls when a [BIPOC] minister came. This congregation was forward thinking and saying, How do we get ready to do that?... [We] went through some exercises to help them understand that, yes, it’s about culture, and it will be about race. And when it becomes obvious that it is about race, you need to be ready. And here are some ways you can be ready and not ignore it. Because if you just cover up the spray painting right away, you don’t allow, first of all, the police to get in to find out who*

*did this. But that person is still out there. And the sentiments are still out there as well.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“What I heard you say, people don't want to have that conversation, because...there is a concern that they will be perceived as racist? Yes, I think so.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“I know of a situation, actually more than one, where an Asian minister experienced racism in the church and took it to M and P. And M and P said, ‘Oh, you're a minister, you should just put up with it. That's your job, just let it go. It's okay, this poor person didn't know any better.’ And so that's where the racism and structure and theology just really bump into each other in very bad ways. And then no one does anything, right? And the minister eventually leaves because the racism is never addressed and is not allowed to say anything. And if he does, or she does, it's like, Oh, you are not a very good minister, you should just do your job.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“It's actually easier to see when it's the LGBTQ stuff, because they will use it as a theology. It's harder to find a theology to explain why you're racist. But it's there. And I am often gobsmacked with some of the conversations I have. And I don't want to make it a rural/urban thing, but it is more often found in some of the rural churches where the entire community is White.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

## **Sexism**

Yes, sexism still exists in The United Church of Canada. Women in ministry

- get paid less
- receive more scrutiny and criticism
- have their dress and bodies policed
- are recipients of male sexual harassment
- are not “seen” as the minister
- are often made to feel unworthy or second best
- also contend with the experiences and trauma of being a woman in our society
- often bear a greater load of family caretaking

This has been sorted into four categories—personal experience, institutional sexism, the collective experience of being female or femme presenting, and family responsibility.

### **Personal Experience**

*“And I was challenged also on the level of dedication I had to my ministry work while also being a parent of young children about what I was prioritizing. [My male colleague] was applauded for some of the things that he did. Whereas I was challenged for some of the choices that I made, even though some of them were the same choices.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Since entering ministry, the sexual harassment has been so frequent that it's changed how I dress. I moved away from clothing that I found attractive. Also I'd repeatedly been asked if I was the minister's wife, church secretary, or the musician.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I knew more things about structure and governance of the church than this board member who felt undermined by the knowledge that I was presenting and the method in which I delivered it, which was authoritatively, I'll say. And he took exception to the fact that I challenged his leadership.... This never happened with my [male] colleague.... But the fact that I was female did factor into a lot of things.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I've been in some churches and I have faced some comments about my body shape, my clothing choice, my attractiveness, my like, all of these things.... I have experienced unwanted physical contact in a way that I don't see [my male colleague] experience, but I don't know.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I interviewed, got to the second interview. I knew that I bombed that interview, but that when they called to tell me why they weren't hiring me it was because I was too young. In the end, they actually ended up hiring somebody who was also young, but he is male.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I really do hate to think of what it would be like if I ever got pregnant. I don't think that would be an easy road. Yeah. Other younger—40 and under—ministers, friends of mine in this region, have had some difficulties with their congregations negotiating maternity leaves and congregations saying things like, ‘Well, if we had known, we wouldn't have hired a young woman.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“And she told me quite bluntly that before they let him go, they made him promise he would come back and do their funerals, because they weren't having some woman do their funerals. I went on and did both their funerals, and they, you know, became quite friendly to me. But yeah, what do you say when somebody says, ‘Oh, well, [the former minister] is going to come back and do our funerals? Just so you know, we aren't having you.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I had one guy tell me to grow my hair; I look like too much of a butch.” ~ Interview participant*

*“As a woman in ministry, I faced the sexism that all women have. The overt, the, you know, the micro ones, as well as super overt.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Told me we don't believe in women as ministers and...we don't want you to do the funeral, and we're going to have so and so do it, a man, a White man. And then they had the UCW of my church do the luncheon, and the UCW not batting an eye. Like, happy to do it and yeah, it just feels so dismissive.” ~ Interview participant*



*“He had all the language of justice seeking and a feminist language and would use that in worship. But then he would turn around and use his power to cement his place in the congregation. In a way that was not helpful to me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’m in conversation regularly with a couple of women ministers, who it’s very clear that some of their congregations would rather have a male minister. And how the particular parishioners in charge are running the place. I guess they don’t like having a woman in charge. And that’s obvious. They’d never say that. But it’s quite obvious that it’s a gender thing.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“Everybody asks when I’m going to have more children, constantly. I just feel like in general, you should never ask that [unless] maybe if you’re really good friends.... I’ll be on my lawn, somebody stops by, ‘So when are you having the next one?’ I’m like, ‘I’m literally gardening; go away.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“Sometimes when I talk to someone who is not churchy, and I get a lot of ‘Sorry, is that you or your husband that’s the minister?’ So people still get confused, or they think that we’re both and I’m like, literally, I’m wandering around in a f\*cking collar. You know?” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think like we are so trained, as folks who are raised as girls, I think, in Canadian society in general and also as church people, so trained not to do that. It’s really hard to defend yourself. Even when it’s so reasonable. But that feels overt, you know what I mean? I feel so small all the time, or I feel like there’s a mould for a minister they’re trying to squash me into and when I don’t fit, they’re just pushing and pushing and pushing. And it can be anything from the way I talk to the length of the service to I didn’t pause enough to—the list of my failings can just go on and on.*

*“Some of the big concerns I had [about using the workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence policy] were: one, because the individuals in question are fairly well known in the church, I get really concerned about them talking shit about me. And then I get labelled as a troublemaker, or difficult or anything, especially as a femme person.” ~ Interview participant*

*“If you’re assertive, you will be called aggressive. You will, right? Like, I do believe that assertiveness isn’t always appreciated. That’s how I’ll name that. Whereas in the males, it’s expected and it’s okay for them. But it’s not so okay for the women.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Female. Yeah. You know, and people don’t often see that as something that is, in the church, a disadvantage. But it surely is in my place, because every female minister they’ve ever had has not worked out well for them. And I’ve been there for nine years now. And so we’ve gotten over a lot of trouble patches, which is great. But it’s now becoming very apparent that they want a male in the pulpit. And I think that has come because we have more men that are coming to church now. It’s great. But now they want more of a male role model in that pulpit and have said as much. So yeah, women, put that in there.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The other piece I want to definitely mention is that I worked in a United Church congregation where I was in a team, where the male colleague consistently took credit for work I had done.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’ve got colleagues of mine who say, ‘How’re you doing today, kiddo?’ That’s Reverend kiddo to you. And so there, we are fighting a society that does not always value women with the way we think women should be valued.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’m always taken aback by how free people feel to tell me their opinions about what I wear. It still happens and I think, I don’t understand (laughter). Anyway, it just surprises me. It’s not that it happens all the time, but it’s happening in the congregation that I’m in. Yeah. Really? I hope I wore the right outfit for today.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The gender stuff. The sitting at the board and saying something, and there’s a pause. And then they continue talking as if nothing was said. And the thing about being, is it because I’m a woman? Is it because I’m queer? Is it because I’m a person of color? It’s probably a little bit of everything. Gender is probably a really huge part of that, but it’s not the only thing. That’s the other piece. Yeah, I think gender has a much bigger impact than we like to think.” ~ Interview participant*

*“There was a meeting after I had resigned. The word got out to the congregation and something that was said: ‘When will we get a real minister?’” ~ Interview participant*

*“For another position in the team, a woman was being offered the position. [Someone said,] ‘Didn’t any men apply for the job?’ People hear it and they don’t know how to respond. That level of misogyny is just so difficult.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I experience extra criticism because I am queer, young, assigned female at birth; would you ask this of someone who wasn’t those things? Where I was coming out in the queer community, I was treated like a person. In the church, I was treated ‘like a woman.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“The church as I see it is becoming more and more non-straight-White-male led, yet our congregations do not see beyond the 1950s male minister with a nice little wife to bake for the church sale and kids to be the role models in the youth group. As a female I’m expected to fill both roles (baking the cookies and leading church) but only until a real minister can be found. I’m tired of my education, my time, and my skills not being respected.” ~ Survey participant*

*“As a straight, White woman, I recognize my experience is one of privilege and relative comfort. I wanted to complete this survey because both times I have answered a call, there have been people who said, ‘We want to hire a man this time.’ That plays out in various ways that are difficult to name, sometimes difficult to identify except for an underlying feeling that something is not right or wondering...What if? For the most part within my own United Church, I have felt respect and support. In the surrounding conservative community, not so much.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Institutional Sexism**

*“The toxicity of the process and the church’s unwillingness to recognize that women who are married, who are students, who are mothers, who have partners with professional obligations sometimes have to move and sometimes have to move across the country. And it really wasn’t up to me. And the sexism I faced over that in the first candidacy round was just unbelievable from this church that says they value women in ministry.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I remember reading studies, maybe even 10 years ago, primarily from the States, but Lewis Center and Pew Foundation, around women in ministry, in particular. So equity seeking in that regard. And for example, first time—that’s when we had settlements still—but first time pastorates were primarily lower paying, rural, isolated, and that’s where women were finding themselves in ministry, instead of congregations that could be above scale.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The role of minister, the traditional role of minister is built on the foundation of an assumption that you have a wife. I mean, I just, I feel that all the time. Preparing your healthy meal and ensuring your self care. As if your spouse or partner exists, and if they’re not doing that, and you have to do it, and that time has to come from somewhere like that becomes a part of the picture. Right?” ~ Interview participant*

*“Look at the list of the top 15 churches in this country. How many are led by women? Never mind queer people! My God, the top 10 or 15 pulpits in this country in The United Church of Canada are led by men, period. Period. I don’t know a woman who makes more than 100 grand. I know lots of men that make more than 100 grand.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Their other major equity issue is pay. Because [of] not having a national salary grid, women automatically get paid [in the] less range. We do not have that issue when everybody’s paid the minimum. But I think we do as soon as people get paid over the minimum.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Collective Experience**

*“It would be helpful if I felt like there was room for this—[I’m] really talking about the cumulative trauma of being a woman and then engaging in ministry. Because I think that that actually is part of the issue with trying to do ministry. So for instance, it doesn’t matter what congregation I’m in, I’m always in that hyper alert state, if I’m alone in the sanctuary, in the church, in the building, always that hyper alert state. Is this okay, is this okay?... There was a time when I was in the church and somebody was smacking at the door, and I could just tell by the way that they were hitting the door that I didn’t want them to see me. And I didn’t feel safe.... And I think that safety is just, that’s not just an issue in the congregation, it’s everywhere, right? Am I safe? Am I safe? Am I safe? If somebody wants to speak to me alone, am I safe? Am I safe? The work that it takes to constantly be aware if you’re safe or not. And that goes beyond the fact that I’m working at this congregation at this time; that is just a given in my life, right? And I think that the other thing, that is cumulative.” ~ Interview participant*

*“If you're a strong female, I think you're going to encounter difficulty, just because you're a strong female. So I think that's just a given.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I don't trust my well-being to the institution. I just don't. And that I feel like that's very much related to what my life has been as a woman.” ~ Interview participant*

*“There're really things around inappropriate touching.... I just think every femme person has stories of being low-key fondled at church, which is so pathetically sad.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think that there are an awful lot of people that think we've solved it. There isn't sexism anymore, because ‘Look, you've got this, you've got this.’ And having been in a church setting, fresh out of college, and having been in a situation where I was the only woman in a ministry personnel gathering and when I would walk in the room, there would be jokes and comments, you know, so where it's so blatant to where we're at now. It's still there, but it's underground, and it's disguised. And it's also I think, out of awareness for a lot of people.... I find it interesting when there's a situation where a male colleague comes in, and an energy shifts just so subtly, to, oh.... No, that's not portraying it right. But almost a, a deferring; it's a very subtle deference to the male colleague, that where you see the energetic shift in the room. It's even hard to name it, like, ‘Hey, did you know you all kind of deferred to this individual?’ They're in the Zoom room or whatever. Right? But it's so pervasive, I've seen it again and again, right?” ~ Interview participant*

### **Family Responsibility**

*“Saskatchewan in a lot of ways was great, because they did recognize that they weren't going to get a whole bunch of ministry personnel. And so they had quite a lot of admissions folk in Saskatchewan. But there was still that kind of racism. I had a woman who went out on maternity leave, God forbid. Here's a congregation that, you know, wanted young people in their congregation and wanted to grow their church, and their minister was actually providing them with that experience, except she wanted to go on maternity leave—how dare she? That whole relationship soured because she took her maternity leave and when she came back, they were awful to her. And so she moved.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Child care—four-day meeting but no child care. We want young people to be here but hold things on a Friday. We say inclusive, welcoming all, loving, but policies and procedures exclude. If in a certain life experience, [you] can't participate.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I asked my male ministerial colleagues, what happened when your kids were born? And I observed the amount of gender bias; I, as a non-birthing parent, was treated differently than someone perceived male. I was told by those in the congregation, ‘You better not be spending time with your children when you should be working.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think sometimes the challenge for me around parenting comes in serving the wider church and having access to...like, just being able to serve [on the] Executive or doing other national*

*projects or work. It feels limited by access to awareness around school schedules and the reality of child care and that kind of thing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“People...not having a point of connection. They're talking about holidays and whatever and ministers are just trying to survive. Or the other common one is oh, they want children here. Somehow they don't want my children or they don't want me to have children. They want me to have children, but they don't want me to parent them.” ~ Interview participant*

*“As a mom, I feel protective of [my disabled child]. It's a really difficult dance to try to do. And the whole assumption at this point [in COVID restrictions], that we should all just get back to doing everything in person, is frankly really ableist. It's just ableist in every way, and is saying, ‘You know, if you're kind of vulnerable, well, too bad.’ So, I'm in a strange position of serving a congregation and trying to do this at the same time, and it's exhausting.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We certainly have some issues in walking the talk at the congregational level that I've seen. And again, there were women with young children or who dared get pregnant in ministry.... There was another one who had small children and was not willing to just drop everything at a moment's notice for congregations. And so she left, too. And it's so counterintuitive because we [say], Okay, on the one hand, you want young families and children; on the other hand, God forbid your minister should be one of those young families with children.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In the moment, I didn't have the capacity to take them all on. But in hindsight, I'm just appalled. I have colleagues who have a cold and their M and P says just stay home, we'll read your sermon Sunday morning. Feel better; see you next week. That would have been really helpful for me in that situation. And we never asked for time off for a cold. That's one of the things about being a special needs family, you learn how to coordinate and juggle stuff really well. So you know, again, it's like, I don't even know what to call that. Sexism, like not being willing to accommodate around a minister who has school-aged children?” ~ Interview participant*

*“The pandemic has been really hard on ministry personnel, and it has brought challenges that they didn't anticipate and challenges that the people who support them who aren't in congregational ministry at the moment don't understand. It's been a really new journey for everybody. And it's just been hard balancing, you know, particularly for ministry personnel with a young family and single [parents]. And having gone through being in ministry and the switching over to virtual ministry and all the things that have had to happen around that while parenting and being the teacher, trying to support children [who] were supposed to be doing their schoolwork and may not have taken well to online learning. And so it's just it's been a lot and there's a weariness. It's not entirely over. But it's still continuing. It's a continuing drain. Continuing to learn how to be virtual church and now be a hybrid church. And that was different in different congregations in different situations, but I think that's a trend that I've heard quite consistently. It's kind of like you've run this great sprint, and now you'd like to rest but you can't because you have to keep going. You might not need to be running as fast as you were. But boy, it would be nice to be able to stop.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We have some very strong, very dominant lay leaders who are retired, who have all the energy in the world, because they’re not parenting a toddler, who, you know, have significant privilege. They’re kind of when you think of the United Church, that’s who you think of, and they have a lot of social capital, especially in the United Church. And so I am held, at least for them, I am held to their standard of work. But I have a kid, I have a partner, I keep saying over and over again, this is my employment. This is my primal like, you know, however, we feel about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.... My employment is directly connected to my sense of security in person.”*  
~ Interview participant

## **Heterosexism and Cissexism, Homophobia and Transphobia**

“The United Church of Canada affirms that gender and sexuality are gifts of God, and that all persons are made in the image of God. We welcome into full membership and ministry people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.” ~ The United Church of Canada website, [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)

In 1988, The United Church of Canada declared that sexual orientation should not be a barrier to ordered ministry. Thirty-five years later, many from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community continue to experience heterosexism and cissexism in the church. While some regions are more open and there are communities of faith that are Affirming or making an effort to learn, ministry personnel who are 2SLGBTQIA+ still experience

- the feeling that there are things they are not able to do because of their identity
- others policing their appearance
- a need to hide aspects of who they are
- a lack of safety
- difficulty getting hired by communities of faith

This section highlights the voices of ministry personnel, predominantly from interviews. It is divided into sections based on

- personal experience
- communities of faith
- institutional and systemic issues and experiences and
- thoughts and observations from regional staff

### **Personal Experience**

*“I really am careful when I’m in like interdenominational settings about my language that I use about my spouse. So if I talk about her at all, I try to use really gender-neutral language.”*  
~Interview participant

*“I only came out as non-binary [recently] to the church. I told some people ahead of time, but I had to establish a relationship with them before. It’s a lot cooler to be queer than it is to be non-binary.”* ~ Interview participant

*“It drains your energy/spirit when there are unclear expectations and unclear criticisms that relate to that—when people criticize that I ‘attract all the queer people,’ when they are vague, for example, ‘the sound of your voice.’ ~ Interview participant*

*“There’s a price you pay for being AFAB [assigned female at birth], or queer in ministry. I feel I want to do more about race and reconciliation. I find it more difficult to deal with how to support other equity-seeking groups because I’ve asked too much of them already to accept me.” ~ Interview participant*

*“That’s an example of subsumed homophobia where we say we can’t cope with this idea of this body in the pulpit and therefore we are going to spend 300 hours on Facebook until we find something [in my posts] that offends us. Right? And I think this is rampant in the church. Around racism, too.” ~ Interview participant*

*“When I talk to other queer people who are racialized people in the church, they often end up finding ministry in positions that were seeking for a while. And I kind of wonder about that. I did interviews in [an urban centre] and just by experiencing blatant sexism, racism, homophobia in the interview process, [in] Affirming, progressive churches.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It would literally just be easier if somebody punched me. To be able to just go and say this [experience of inequity] is somehow worthy. And it’s even like this equity thing. [This research study] I wasn’t going to do it for a long time, because I felt like I don’t count. And then I was filling out the demographic questions thing. It was like, ‘Oh, look at me, little ball of queer, non-binary mental health stuff.’ Yeah, this [study] is great. But the whole bar for things is so high. And I think the standard or the burden of proof feels so significant, it’s a real challenge.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I guess it has to do with that idea of strategic vulnerability, of really wanting to be able to choose the measures in which you share yourself.... So I definitely get anxious about stuff. Our town is not super progressive.... I was out to the church, but I’m not super out in town. After a year, I told my colleague at the [neighbouring] church that I’m queer, but we had built a relationship.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Before ministry, I originally moved from a small town because there was homophobia in the small town. But it’s about not having family, poverty. What’s really been hard as a queer person is being broke, not being able to find a community, having a prolonged adolescence because I didn’t have a family to help make those changes. I don’t want to over-victimize it. Now I’m doing really well, but I wasn’t all the time. In some ways, I’m super privileged, but other times I haven’t been. That’s why I’m so resentful. The LGBT ‘community’ never lived up to its name. I’m sick and tired of the White, affluent, gay culture.” ~ Interview participant*

## Communities of Faith

*“This one dude keeps calling me a woman all the time. In just random conversations where I'm like, I don't feel like this is important. You know, I'm not a woman. Say person; just say person, like in general, just say person for everyone.” ~ Interview participant*

*“One of the deepest crises I faced as a mother, as a minister. I called and I had this long chat with [a General Council staff person] explaining the situation...saying, I think it'll be the end of the pastoral relationship. If I do this, I think there's a good chance they'll refuse, and then I'll have to resign because I'm not going to tell my [child] I won't marry [them].” ~ Interview participant*

*“In terms of my sexual orientation.... Discrimination that I've experienced within my congregations when I've been serving them has been sort of microaggressions, like not really anything big. People continuing to call [my spouse] my friend...but it's hard to tell if it's just because they're older and don't know what the correct terminology is, or whether they're actually being passive-aggressive about it.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I've experienced some really profound, overt homophobia. And I continue to struggle with it to this day in the congregation I'm in now. The hiring committee, the search committee decided to disclose my sexuality. Plus, people were googling me, and it's fairly obvious.... And people left the congregation because of my queerness. And the ones that were left articulated to me that it's okay as long as we don't talk about it.” ~ Interview participant*

*“In my past pastoral relationships, when I wore a scarf they would say, ‘We are so glad that you're choosing to dress more feminine.’ There was talk of putting in a dress code, but it was a matter of financial equity. They were expecting nicer clothing than what I could afford with what they were paying me, but also it was a way of policing my dress when I was dressing more masculine. People like it when it's easy. Sometimes asking someone to ‘look professional’ or ‘more formal’ is code for asking them to blend in, similar to some folks who are policed for a racial look.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I'm their first out minister. And so the search team agreed that they would continue to be an informal support to me, specifically in relation to that, and that they wanted to do work before I arrived. And they wanted to pay attention and create a culture of if somebody says something inappropriate that they can step in. I was like, look at all y'all doin' healthy things. You know, we're talking, and they were teaching each other stuff. And one of them's like, I've never thought about that before. That's really interesting. I'm like, look at y'all learnin' from each other. Just felt so different.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Last Sunday was Pride. We talked about some of the milestones, you know, we have that really great timeline of 2SLGBTQ2IA+ moments. So we were talking about some of them. And I said, think about it. 1988. I'm allowed to be here as a non-binary minister because of 1988. And they were like ‘Ahh,’ like, ‘Hey.’ So some of it's continuing need for education.” ~ Interview participant*



*“My concern is this pattern, where you set up certain ministers for a career that's unstable.... I literally was asked during an interview: We normally hire older White straight men for this position. Can you answer as to what you would say to people when we hired you that were expecting that? How do we reassure people that you would be a good minister? And basically, we're just like, how would we offload the pastoral care that would be needed by the fact that you're racialized and queer? And, you know, they basically said, ‘We know these are our biases.’ How are you self-aware enough to ask this, but then also still be asking it?” ~ Interview participant*

### **Institutional and Systemic**

*“We are in service to people with full pensions, which most of us will never have, and paying them salaries, and our resumes get taken out of the pile, and no one wants to talk about it. It's ludicrous. If this was any other kind of corporation, there would be lawsuits piling up. We fall back on the difference between employment and covenanting [which] leaves this weird loophole, and ministers suffer greatly. Greatly. I am commissioned by The United Church of Canada [and] I am an expert in what I do. And I can't get a decent job.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I was looking for a place. I had been asked to submit an application to a church and then they called me a half hour later and told me, ‘We no longer want you to apply.’ And then I heard through the grapevine, the reason why was that in the half hour, they found out that I was in a same-sex relationship. And so when I told the Conference personnel minister about this, [they] didn't really do anything about it at all. But at least [they] could affirm that that shouldn't have happened. But...I sometimes think that maybe congregations just find other reasons to say that they don't want to hire me.” ~ Interview participant*

### **Thoughts and Observations from Regional Staff**

*“I think specifically of some of the female or transgender clergy whom I have supported, who have not received the respect due as a spiritual leader, you know; obviously, that's limited to their community of faith.” Interview participant (staff)*

*“In the United Church, and [in] my community is a proudly covenanting congregation. They even used to put this on their billboards in town, which meant that they were protesting the 1988 decision to ordain LGBTQ people. So that is still their identity, and they are proud of it.... I've been to meetings with them where they will say, ‘Here's the theological, scriptural reasons why we will not hire.’ And they aren't the only congregation that would put it forward that way...in the two regions I work with.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“I found myself several times in that situation tearing my hair out and going, this would not have happened if they had been heteronormative and cis.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“[In] a process, which was the first that I knew of that, a congregation actually reached out asking for support in communicating with LGBTQ ministry personnel and staff. And M and P was wondering, How do we address concerns that come from the congregation? How do we respond to them? So they were looking for support. It does reflect some movement, that this*

*question didn't come from the ministry personnel, but from the congregation leaders looking for guidance in this support.... And we couldn't find anything.... There's all kinds of information, literature, on issues facing clergy, but there was nothing for congregation leaders in how to support pastoral relationships across difference. So that's something that's needed and it probably would have been helpful.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

## **Mental Health and Neurodiversity**

*“I think that mental illness is even less understood. You can still be a good minister, even if you have episodes of depression or anxiety.” ~ Interview participant*

*“Because mental health and neurodiversity are so often invisible, we often choose not to share it, because we don't have to. And yet, it makes us vulnerable.... It's like pronouns. We need someone to intentionally say—someone who is safe— to say, ‘This is a place where mental health diagnosis and identities can be shared without judgment.’” ~ Interview participant*

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness every year. Some people estimate that 15 percent of people in the world are neurodivergent. It makes sense, then, that this would include ministry personnel, as well as others in a community of faith. And yet mental health issues and neurodiversity still are largely misunderstood and can cause added conflict.

Ministry personnel reported hiding their mental health issues or neurodiversity from the community of faith. Some shared that even when the congregation knew they were living with mental health issues, they didn't know how to access appropriate support or how to respond appropriately to their minister's mental health.

### Ministry personnel experience

- a lack of understanding that mental health issues can exist and be managed
- pushback against boundary-setting
- a lack of flexibility or understanding to accommodate neurodiversity
- stigma

*“We talked a bit about how it's ironic that when you talk about struggles, that's a really healthy sign of how you're doing. But because of the stigma around mental health, it can sometimes be interpreted as the opposite. So it's this thing of me being really open about the fact that I have chronic depression. Some people are like, ‘Whoa!’ But really, that's part of what helps me be okay. So I get that there's an education component around that. But the problem with being open and really speaking from your own location is people sometimes like to use it against you, whether they intend to or not. They're very passive aggressive.” ~ Interview participant*

This section highlights the voices of ministry personnel, predominantly from interviews. It is divided into sections based on

- personal experience

- communities of faith
- institutional and systemic issues

## **Personal Experience**

*“It runs in the family. It's just a thing. And so that feels very comfortable. It's always kind of interesting to me, surprising, maybe. I understand now. But the first few times people would be very hush hush about their own mental health stuff. I was like, oh, this is something that some people are really ashamed about.” ~ Interview participant*

*“There's definitely this capitalist part of me that feels like I'm cheating the church by taking care of myself. Yeah.” ~ Interview participant*

*“This sent me through deep depression. And then I got diagnosed with PTSD, which I thought was only something that would happen to you if you went to war, or if you had a history of abuse, or, you know, assault and things like that.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I encounter relatively little pushback on restorative care for what people consider to be physical illnesses. People occasionally push back when the minister is burning out and needs a break. And not everybody understands that this is a mental issue. Still. Cancer, you're fine.” ~ Interview participant (regional staff)*

*“I went to the emergency room...for what the doctor called an acute stress reaction, and now I'm realizing I was having panic attacks, because I recently have been diagnosed with generalized anxiety.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It's this funny thing of, yes, we want a minister to preach about mental health and preach about Pride, but we don't want them to be queer or to have mental illness. Like (laughter), you know, it's just weird. Yeah. Very weird.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Communities of Faith**

*“I do live with PTSD and depression. I also have ADHD, and these were things that I was very transparent about, and really putting in boundaries about my workload and what was realistic. And that wasn't received well.... ‘I can't believe she's saying “no” to us.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“There's only really been one time when I've had a really acute bout in ministry that I had to navigate. And I used language around a chronic health issue as opposed to a chronic mental health issue. And so I refer to it in terms kind of like in a way that you would refer to pancreatitis or something. I have a medical issue and it's having a flare up. And so I just need to work from home for the next couple of weeks while my body heals. And that felt like an accurate description of what was happening. But I didn't feel comfortable naming the medical condition that needed addressing also because I didn't think it was any of their business anyway. But I had been wondering about that afterwards. I thought, if it were osteoarthritis and I was having a flare up, would I have just named that?” ~ Interview participant*

*“It was really tough that people thought I looked fine and would even...say hi to me when I was in town and say, ‘Oh, well, you look a lot better.’... I find that when you’ve lived since you were 13 with neurodiversity, or mental health challenges, you get pretty [darn] good at putting [on a brave face].” ~ Interview participant*

*“Some of the people on M and P had been open about their own mental health struggles, but then seemed to have no tolerance or patience for mine.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I explained to them that I’ve worked really hard to be better at administration. But that those things that might seem small were a lot. And I asked them to find a volunteer to do that if they weren’t gonna hire an admin person. And their response was, ‘Well, we can do that for as long as you’re a student, but then.... As much as I can be good with boundaries, I also just took that to mean I should be handling this.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I’m near tears just trying to say, ‘I’m trying to tell you what I need. You keep saying, What do you need? And I’m trying to tell you, and it’s f\*cking exhausting.’ I don’t just make random stuff up off the top of my head of ‘Oh, I’d like a pony.’ (laughter) No, it’s so much work.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The days that I was a wreck and not able to get off the couch and feeling ruined, I either went for a long drive to have privacy or I didn’t leave my house. Because if people saw me in that state, they would say, ‘Oh, my gosh, she needs a full year off.’ So it was very, very tough.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Institutional and Systemic Issues**

*“I was on medical leave in my previous congregation, and it was so horrific. I will never in my life go on a medical leave for mental health again, no matter what. Just never. It was so awful.” ~ Interview participant*

*“A lot of congregations would not call an autistic minister. Diverse, yeah. Even though some of us have called for years for a variety of learning styles in seminaries to accommodate people.” ~ Interview participant*

*“The neurodivergent piece is different.... I didn’t know I had ADHD. Although learning about it has really informed my life, made things make sense, made me feel like I make sense for once. But people who have physical illnesses, like cancer, for example, or a heart attack, or stroke, which is not to say, by any means, that life for them is easy. But I feel like [there’s] grace given...especially when you can point to bloodwork that says this is what needs to happen, or how much time is needed, versus, you know, ‘Just exercise more’ or ‘Just focus more.’” ~ Interview participant*

## Issues for Further Research or Follow-up

The following issues arose organically and frequently in our research, despite not asking or focusing on them. We have included them here, as well as some further resources or perspectives, as they may be issues that The United Church of Canada wishes to consider for future research.

### Bullying

#### Clergy Bullying

We did not ask about experiences of bullying. Bullying came up in the responses with enough frequency to take note. It drew our attention and also drew us to searching out other research specific to clergy experience of being bullied. The experience of bullying is not exclusive to The United Church of Canada. It is also not an experience that only happens to equity-seeking clergy. However, it is clear that both equity-seeking status and the ways in which equity-seeking ministry personnel are hired put them more at risk for bullying.

Research shows that every identifier not considered the norm in a particular context further increases the risk of being bullied. Ministry is challenging in the best of circumstances. Ministry personnel are juggling a variety of tasks, varying expectations, and diminishing resources with increasing demands—a context that holds tension between the secular world and our desire for kin-dom community. Add to that the further challenges faced by ministers who are equity-seeking—racism, subtle or overt, faced by people who are BIPOC; the societal expectations and sexism experienced by women; the misunderstandings of people who live with neurodivergence, physical disability, homophobia, and transphobia—and challenges increase exponentially.

**Implications:** If clergy bullying is pervasive, which it seems to be, then it needs to be acknowledged denominationally and addressed as part of clergy education. Clergy are unprepared for this experience, although there is growing research on this topic. (This experience is not new. John Wesley wrote about his experience of being bullied.) This is not to put the onus on the clergy, simply to prepare them. At the same time, communities of faith and regions must be supported to address bullying.

Here is some existing research:

- “Merging Personal and Collective Responsibility Towards Redeeming Bullying Congregations,” a doctoral thesis by Lydia P Istomina. Istomina’s hypothesis is that pastors experience burnout and churches are polarized because Christians treat their pastors and each other in dismissive ways and the denomination does not provide enough protection. Pastor bullying is a result of misdirected purpose of the church. Pastors are vulnerable because they represent the official line of the denomination to fulfill a mission that does not always coincide with the vision of the local community. Church authorities tend to view bullying as a problem that exists only between

individuals, refusing to admit that long-term patterns cannot exist without the support of a toxic system, organization, or the wider community within which it occurs.

- “Immunity in Community: Clergy Experience of Bystander Decision Making in Clergy Workplace Harassment” by Bradley Morrison (United Church clergy).<sup>27</sup>

This study used directed content analysis to extend Darley and Latané’s bystander decision-making theory to the analysis of clergy workplace harassment. Bystander decision-making theory, which was developed from analyzing bystander subjective experience in emergency incidents, was applied to non-emergency incidents. Interviews with United Church of Canada ministry personnel (N = 10) were coded using bystander decision steps as pre-determined categories. Findings were analyzed to construct a model of clergy workplace harassment and a bystander task list. Additional findings were discussed regarding normative abandonment and theological reflection on the ecclesial and missiological consequences of bystander immunity from communal responsibility.

- *Broadview* magazine in its April/May 2024 issue published an article on bullying of clergy written by Christopher White (United Church clergy), [“More United Church clergy are feeling targeted by congregational bullies.”](#) He wrote this because of the increase in stories he’s been hearing from colleagues.
- **Impacts** are clergy burnout, mental health issues, PTSD, clergy turnover, congregational unrest, and instability. See “Silent Clergy Killers,” in Huffington Post, by David Briggs; [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/silent-clergy-killers-tox\\_b\\_1437857](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/silent-clergy-killers-tox_b_1437857)

## **Participant Responses to Questions That Relate to Bullying**

### **What has discrimination looked like for you? Do you want to describe any particular incidents?**

*“Overt bullying and usurping power and authority, belittling, behind-the-scenes sabotaging and coercing others to take the bully’s side.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Is there anything else about personal experiences of discrimination in your pastoral relationship that you would like to mention?**

*“Just this: there is a real ignorance among many about intentional meanness. They think bad behaviour is just a parishioner having a bad day, even if it goes on for months and really affects me. Christians still don’t know how to recognize, or what to do with, bullies.” ~ Survey participant*

*“A retired male colleague attended my church, my immediate predecessor. He was a bully and undermined my ministry by his presence, his rage, and his social connections. He even retained his hospital visitor tags, and I found him wearing them in a patient’s room. When I took steps to address the problem he undermined me more. Presbytery tried to contain him but had no power. A male colleague also tried, but with no ramifications to his actions. He simply refused to change or to see how he was also harming his so-called beloved community. Typical bullying behaviour buttressed by a toxic masculinity.” ~ Survey participant*

---

<sup>27</sup> Morrison, B. (2017). Immunity in Community: Clergy Experience of Bystander Decision Making in Clergy Workplace Harassment. *Practical Theology*, 10(4), 367–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1336394>

### **What are the things (if any) that severely impact your pastoral relationship?**

*“Candidacy Board and their harassment, bullying, gaslighting, and meanness.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The male bullies of the board were able to make my housing unsafe, deprive me of my rightful wages, and treat me with disrespect at board meetings and in worship without suffering any consequences. I finally left without a new call to go to.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The coercion that began to divide the CoF [community of faith]...the way my bully covertly attacked me in meetings and how many apologized and expressed empathy/sympathy after the attack, yet would never stand up against the bully or call them on their behaviour. It came down to the bully or me...and the CoF chose the bully...who is still employed by my former pastoral charge and still revered/loved by many...while I was dispensable.” ~ Survey participant*

*“The bullying during COVID was unreal.... Notes to the M and P about me, slander, gossip, doing services behind my back, doing pastoral care behind my back, etc., threatening to cut offerings.... Insults about my appearance or performance on Zoom calls and worship, etc. And then it began with a second person.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Personal Experiences of Bullying from Interviews**

*“I was ready to go on leave because I was being bullied, and I was being yelled at. I was being sworn at at the church.” ~ Interview participant*

*“There were many intertwining issues that affected my time there.... I actually ended up with a diagnosis of complex PTSD. They started to be really ugly to my family.... So there really was no escape. And the bullying just went on.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I just want someone to go and tell them to knock it off, you know, because Christians are annoying. And they quote the Epistles, ‘Have you gone to your brother, and have you shared your concern before approaching the communion table?’ blah, blah, blah.... Where’s the teacher who comes in and says, ‘Stop being a bully?’ Because I feel like I’m being bullied. And I’m so sick of it. I don’t deserve to be treated that way. And where are the people who agree and are there to say, ‘Yeah, you can’t treat somebody this way. It’s not okay’?... Where’s the bystander intervention?” ~ Interview participant*

*“Congregations have a lot invested in keeping the peace. So that is also why it often becomes easier to not support the new person as opposed to risking the relationship with the person who lives next door to you and you’re gonna have to put up with.... That bully isn’t going to leave. But your minister could leave. So it’s a sacrificial thing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We have bullies in our churches, and congregations are very reluctant to address their bullies. And so usually they will sacrifice the minister rather than confront the bully. And so that, those family systems that are in those congregations, play a huge part. And sometimes, you know,*

*race, gender, etc. is behind it. And sometimes it could be absolutely anybody who happens to disagree with this person is going to feel the brunt of it.” ~ Interview participant*

*“People just do not know how to deal with the bully in the congregation or bullies.... Sometimes they’re the big givers. So it ties in with economy as well. You don’t want to upset the big giver of your church. And so you’ll let them do whatever they want because they’ll withdraw their money, which I’ve seen happen as well. Someone who’s a big giver doesn’t like the minister, they withhold their givings, which sacrifices the congregation. So that’s what I mean about the multiple layers of pieces that are all connected.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Fair Compensation and Negotiating**

*“I believe that I have suffered financially because of my gender. No one congregation has done this. Rather, it is systemic.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I thought I had a new call lined up, and they invited me into a third interview with many pointed questions. I didn’t have the ability to negotiate terms because I felt like they were hesitant and had received a letter warning them about me. They were trying to pay me too little.” ~ Interview participant*

From the issues raised by many in both interviews and the questionnaire, it is clear that equity-seeking ministry personnel receive lower pay and often fewer benefits. While The United Church of Canada has a minimum salary scale based on status and years of service, equity-seeking ministry personnel are already in the position where they are more likely to begin ministry in part-time and/or precarious positions in communities of faith. Communities of faith often move to part-time ministry because of lack of funds.

The notion of negotiating compensation is, in itself, elitist. People whose experience comes from industries in which pay is set by a scale, such as service work or collective bargaining, do not come with the culture or experience of negotiating. People coming from other countries also do not have this experience. There is no level playing field for people who are equity-seeking who are often made to feel and told outright that they should be grateful to get a job at all. Many have no knowledge or experience of added benefits that some clergy negotiate such as extra holidays or days in lieu. Women are often told they don’t need full compensation or benefits because they have a spouse. Men are not told this. In Canada, we know both that there is a gender pay gap and that it is worse for those within the intersections of other marginalizing identities.<sup>28</sup>

*“I think it’s so frustrating to see the church talk about equity and people in all the positions, talk about working on equity, and then see the way they say things like, ‘Well, you can always negotiate for more money or more benefits or more study leave.’ Which to this day, they say and yet we know, super concretely, that people—racialized, women, trans people, LGBT—everybody who is othered does not have the same power to negotiate. And I know that some*

---

<sup>28</sup> “The Facts about the Gender Pay Gap,” <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/the-gender-pay-gap/>



*people have skills in negotiation and help train others, but not everybody can access somebody to help train them.” ~ Interview participant*

Lower compensation not only affects current finances but has long-term and lasting impacts because pensions are based on salary.

*“I have loved my career despite the inequity which I experienced financially. Now that I am close to retirement, you will not see the impact of your frugality on my life. God willing, I will live another 30 years. All those years I will bear the financial impact of your unconscious downward pressure on my compensation. I wish that I were retiring feeling that my gifts and commitment had been fairly compensated.” ~ Survey participant*

Can The United Church of Canada model a paradigm that is different than capitalism?

## **Recommendations**

Note: There may be more recommendations embedded in the report that are not mentioned here.

### **To General Council**

- Make all ministry personnel salaries publicly available.
- Create a national standardized salary scale based on costs, not negotiation.
- Consider a central compensation system.

*“The other major equity issue is pay. Because [of] not having a national salary grid, women automatically get paid less [in the] range. We do not have that issue when everybody's paid the minimum, but I think we do as soon as people get paid over the minimum.” ~ Interview participant*

### **To Regions and the Office of Vocation**

- Provide trained negotiators who know what fair compensation is to support equity-seeking ministry personnel.
- Ensure it is the practice that everyone or no one in a pastoral charge receives compensation above the base.

*“I've also been in ministry situations where my colleague was making the grid plus 15 percent. And I found out and I went to the church, and I said, ‘I would also just like pay equity here, would just also like plus 15 percent.’ And they were just like, ‘Absolutely not.’ Right. And I live in the same city, and I have to eat the same. So even within churches, there're issues there.” ~ Interview participant*

### **To Ministry Personnel**

- Support and advocate for fair and equivalent salary for all of your colleagues, even if it means a reduction in your own compensation.

*“Despite a survey conducted in the early 2010s which reported that women are paid less in*

*every salary category than men, nothing has been done to educate volunteer M and P committees about this, or [add] double checks to prevent it. Each clergyperson negotiates salary alone, unsupported by an advocate, with the people to whom they then must minister.” ~ Interview participant*

## **Justice and Equity Disconnect**

In the United Church Commons (commons.united-church.ca), economic justice is highlighted in the section What We Believe and Why. We talk about child poverty and children’s well-being, yet underpay women ministers who are parenting, sometimes on their own. As a national church we have passed policies that call us to “equip local Congregations and Pastoral Charges to actively engage in working toward creating changes that will help address the increasing needs of the most impoverished citizens in all parts of our country”<sup>29</sup> while not addressing the poverty and inequality within our own institution.

## **Voices**

*“My entire ministry and income have been impacted because I am a woman.... From being settled to part time...to not having my appointment renewed for getting pregnant.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Well, fortunately, one of my education placements was [in a congregation with a woman in leadership]. And she took seriously her role as a woman to a woman, ‘You need to learn how to do this in the church.’ And so she taught me how to do that. And that I should do that. When I’ve tried to do that at [the congregation where] I was ordained, it didn’t feel like I was ready to ask for more at the beginning. But after I said, ‘Oh, you should consider giving me above minimum.’ And they just said, ‘no.’” ~ Interview participant*

*“I received the least amount of money they could pay me for several years, and finally received a raise above the minimum. At that time I was angrily warned that they did not want to see the minister driving a BMW. The male minister who came after me with less experience, less education, less additional ministry leadership began his ministry at the same stipend as I had when I left and received more housing allowance.” ~ Survey participant*

*“At least we have a minimum salary scale. But too often the minimum is presented as the maximum, because before I walk in the door they have framed their annual budget with a minimum salary, so they have no room to negotiate.” ~ Survey participant*

What are the things that severely impact your pastoral relationship?

*“Resentment, lower standard of income, lower pension therefore long-term financial pressures that the congregation will never see.” ~ Survey participant*

---

<sup>29</sup> Policy to Action GC41 2012 - 033: 3 To Ask All to Act Through Their Elected Representatives and Appropriate Agencies to Address the Need of Our Most Vulnerable

*“We promote a White-centric point of view about compensation. We don’t listen to communities and don’t listen to leaders.” ~ Indigenous participant*

*“And then [the Pastoral Relations Handbook] says a helpful tool for approaching your negotiations is the negotiating tools for ministry personnel found on the pastoral relations page. When you go to that page, what you find is a household budget tool. It has nothing to do with negotiating salary. It has to do with what your expenses are, what savings you have. It factors in your spouse's salary as well, to determine what you absolutely need. This is not a negotiating tool. And [it] really, really disadvantages people who don’t understand how White, able-bodied males negotiate in the world. You know, the business model of negotiation. And so none of that stuff encourages women who always undersell themselves or still [do] fairly regularly. And folks especially coming from other countries where ministry personnel don’t do that kind of thing.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I come to church work from other non-profit settings, some of which were union and many of which weren't or were government funded. So, there's this cap. But my clients were never a volunteer HR committee. My clients were never my search team who interviewed me. So, when I was negotiating with [this community of faith] and the people who did the search, all these uppity ups that I don't really even know yet are negotiating terms with me. You bet your ass that changes what I think I can ask for. Because two months from now I could be supporting you through the death of your father. I don't know what's going to be going on and what Velcro rip tension I might [have] create[d] by saying I want base [salary] plus five percent.” ~ Interview participant*

*“It's all well and good for colleagues to say, ‘You can and should expect more than the minimum of the pay scale.’ It doesn't matter if the people receiving me haven't had that normalized. And just think like, ‘Oh, these millennials are so greedy. Hasn't she seen our finances?’ If it could be normalized for the team who puts together the search process to be like, ‘Here're some things that you really can and should be prepared to offer your minister.’ Like a health care spending allowance now that our benefits have been slashed back or a percentage above whatever. Yeah, if that's normalized, that would probably make a big difference.” ~ Interview participant*

*“What if, as people are finishing off their ministry training as an example—or at any time they choose—there are workshops or things to help people know what can you negotiate? What could you ask for?... And what do I think I want that I've never thought of because I've never heard? The first time I heard somebody say that they asked for six weeks holidays, including a seventh Sunday, I thought, ‘I mean, you've been doing this and asking for this in every interview. And I'm just now thinking that it's okay.’” ~ Interview participant*

## **Rural Context**

*“Again, I can't bring up my equity needs without also explaining that this is a rural and remote pastoral charge. I have no colleagues nearby. I have no coffee shop to use the Internet at. I have no transportation other than my car so can't get on a bus if my fatigue is unworkable. The local hospital has whole sections closed and is still a 45-minute drive. The pastoral charge*

*closest to me is 30 minutes away and doesn't even have indoor plumbing. I'm horrified that all communication only comes through email and by Zoom from the larger church. Most Zoom meetings I sit and watch the buffering circle!!!” ~ Survey participant*

This study did not specifically address rural ministry, and issues of rural ministry expand beyond those of equity. Yet it is also true that many equity-seeking ministers serve in rural pastoral charges, often because that is where they are able to find work. This section is here to flag that rural ministry is an area for the church to continue to consider, including how ministers are placed and supported in rural communities of faith.

Several people talked about the challenge of being queer in small towns or having mental health issues. Other factors include having medical professionals or people you see in clinics who attend the congregation and maintaining privacy for family members.

Rural ministry also continues to have issues around access, such as high-speed Internet, as more of our work is online only, such as forms and ChurchHub, and meetings are held over video conferencing.

## **Technology**

*“I'm not really sure if it is a financial problem or access.... The...concern is that a lot of the rural churches are just not keeping up because they don't have the technology. Some places don't have good, reliable Wi-Fi access. So that's a real problem. Whether they can afford it or not, they just don't have it. They just can't. So when we have regional meetings, when we had our regional meetings online, that was a problem that a lot of people just didn't bother showing up. It was just too difficult.... So maybe that's an equity issue as well as access to technology?” ~ Interview participant*

## **Being Overlooked**

*“All of my answers around equity are also coloured by the urban-centric approach that this region has adopted. It's very dismaying for those of us in rural ministry to constantly be 'left in the dust,' yet this is a community of faith that is healthy, thriving, and living the gospel every day.” ~ Survey participant*

## **Isolation**

*“Rural setting [with] no connections to my minority community” ~ Survey participant*

*“Isolated from colleagues merely because of the location” ~ Survey participant*

*“Isolated from colleagues—yes, for sure. This is rural.” ~ Survey participant*

*“Small rural churches are off the radar of most regional councils.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I'd read this book about how you need to have really good boundaries with congregations and all that stuff. So I arrived with the firm notion that these people can't be my friends. I will be*

*friendly to them, but...the author said things like, If you're looking for friendship, talk to the clerk in the grocery store, say, 'Do you want to be my friend?' But the irony...is, every time I thought I'd found a friend outside the congregation, either they moved away...or they died in a car accident, or they started attending my church. At least half of them started attending my church. So after about a year of this nonsense of feeling really lonely—my dog was wonderful, but she was a dog—I admitted to myself that, okay, maybe in a big city where there's lots of other options, maybe these rules of you can't be friends with anybody in the congregation really work. But in this context, I don't think it's gonna work.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I'm always the first Black person these people are having as a minister. My first pastoral charge, I was the only Black person in town.... So everywhere I went, everywhere, everyone would greet me, 'Are you the new minister? Are you the new minister?' I didn't have to introduce myself. The awkward guy is the United Church minister.” ~ Interview participant*

*“I think for this conversation, the context of ministry is really important...how folks that are 'others' are treated can be a highly geographical kind of thing.... We may struggle more rurally to enact equitable ministry practice, then we would, say, in urban centres where they get it. It's against the law.” ~ Interview participant*

*“We are often alone, especially in small towns and rural areas. It's a long slog, and there aren't many people to share the work.” ~ Survey participant*

### **The Need for Further Research and Attention**

*“Rural versus urban divide.” ~ Survey participant*

*“More about the experience of rural and remote clergy.” ~ Survey participant*

*“I wish you would've asked about the needs for people who are rural as opposed to urban.” ~ Survey participant*

*“There is ongoing lack of awareness of accommodation by both regional and General Council staff that has been particularly obvious during the pandemic. Communication by both of these courts has been solely virtual, making participation impossible for many, including everyone without broadband. (Many, many rural pastoral charges.) This is both economic and rural discrimination as well as discrimination for those with visual and hearing impairments. Yet when I have repeatedly raised this issue, I'm met with blank looks and shrugged shoulders.” ~ Survey participant*

### **Privacy**

*“I think it's probably pretty common for ministers in small towns. You know, going and getting my medication is stressful. Like, half of the doctors go to my church. I was [having a medical procedure] and I was looking at someone, and she said,.... 'Oh, I'm, you know, so and so; we've met before.'... Yeah, that's really awkward.” ~ Interview participant*

# Theological Reflections

This final section includes theological reflections. As we concluded the sacred conversations of focus groups and interviews, and as participants finished the sacred truth-telling and sharing of filling out surveys, we wanted all participants to have a chance to reflect theologically and engage spiritually. In the French and English surveys, participants were asked, What could we be “as church” if there was equity in pastoral relationships? How could “getting this right” break open the kin-dom of God? In the interviews and focus groups, participants were invited into prayer and asked how they would complete the phrases “Gracious God, we ask you” and “Creator, we celebrate.” Answers have been compiled and presented here.

## Kin-dom of God

The text all comes from quotes from survey participants.

### **Breaking open the kin-dom of God:**

Would make the community more open to new people who have need for community and acceptance but don't find it.

Would mean I finally would be welcome at the table.

Perhaps more people would find the community they're craving in a church, not at the gym or a yoga class or at a bar.

Is a necessity for the kin-dom of God; we would be doing our job. Anything less is an underperformance.

We become more who God wants us to be by being an equitable church. Racism is a sin. And we need to figure out how we can, [speaking] personally as a White person, step back so that my Indigenous and racialized colleagues can do their thing and speak their truth. Because I've had lots of airtime as a White person. So that equity is, it's the only way. There's no other way.

The church cannot keep continuing to get this wrong.

Invites everyone to the table. You are worthy. You belong. You, too, are a child of God. There is the great educational factor of, Who are the children of God? Just the great diversity there....

Something about the abundance of the kingdom. The kin-dom.

Is more of a prying open than a breaking open. I don't think we can really imagine it, because it's so far outside our experience that we don't fully have a model in our minds.

Well, if we don't work at getting it right, we will be hypocrites. I think "getting this right" will lead us as we seek a post-Christendom church; maybe this is the heart of a post-Christendom church.

If there was equity, if everyone could be fully who God created them to be, then the Holy Spirit would be able to dance freely in our churches rather than being constrained by expectations!

Is why I was ordained! To do my part in bringing about the kin-dom.... It would mean healing and peace for all. I have always dreamt of a world where everyone gets second place...no more competition and instead, we reach out to ensure all have the same status, where together we celebrate each other's gifts.

Is built as we let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be the mind that leads us into service and servanthood.

Seeing each other as truly equal and not better than some other group. We are all gifts from God. Love it.

We would get off our high horse and develop humility in our interactions with each other. We would focus on the ways our structures function to distance us from one another when we pretend there are no people with enormous power in the church.

I was struck by the changes to the Indigenous ministries in the United Church and how we seem to be on the path towards partnership rather than inclusion/assimilation. It feels like this is a step towards the kin-dom and away from a colonial mindset. I feel like God is up to something that will break us out of a long history of circular violence brought on by thousands of years of invasion and slavery. I love that the church is taking leadership in breaking our old mindset and reaching for something new, different, and more loving.

I would feel like this church really cares about my health and happiness as a woman.

I think there are a whole lot of churches that could be revitalized if they opened their hearts and minds to ministry personnel who look and see the world differently than they do.

We would tap into the isolation and quiet frustration that lives in the hearts of the communities around us and be places of refuge and renewal—not seen as desperate for more people, more money, and wanting to return to a stereotype of what church is.

These differences can bring us to better understand our own experiences, identity, and gifts. Learning about other possibilities opens us up to even more ways to love, flourish, and be in relationship. Diverse experiences point to the beauty of the diversity of God's creation.

It breaks open the kingdom of God by showing the world that God's voice is more than one voice speaking more than one language and more than one colour of skin or gender identity. God's bigger than the three little letters English speakers put in that name. And until we can break open equity and have people of colour and all marginalized communities represented, we're missing out on voices, we're missing out on perspectives. Which means we're missing out on opportunities to do God's work. And it also means we're missing out on hearing what God

wants us or needs us to do. By not being accessible we're closing ourselves off from God.

I think there would be more diversity in congregations.

Is complicated, as I don't feel any less part of God's kin-dom. But once people become more aware of this challenge (as well as other invisible challenges) I believe we would portray a more unified Body of Christ.

You can't have the kingdom of God without equity. So that vision of what the kingdom of God is, is about equity and inclusion, justice. And this is justice. And grace and reconciliation. I don't think you can be Christian without those, let alone have the kingdom of God come near without those. So it's absolutely essential that that's what we're striving for. Even though we don't get it right all the time, and we never will. Because we have these interesting human tendencies. If we're not striving for it, then what the hell are we doing? Why do we exist?

The only people that Jesus truly condemns are the religious hypocrites. If we cannot be a denomination that walks the talk, has values and support, and strives with all our might for equity and inclusion and diversity and anti-racism and all of that, then we are religious hypocrites, plain and simple. We are the ones that Jesus condemned.

**We could be:**

Creative, inclusive and respectful.

A place where all are welcome.

Free.

Free from the imperialism that poisons our lives. The racism in my current community sickens me, and I wish I could use stronger language to call upon my congregation to challenge it.

Deep community. Vital. Open. Impactful in enacting the kin-dom of God.

Lived equality. Modelling equity.

The vision of God in reality; just like the colours of the world Crayola crayon box.

We'd be living out our faith and calling.

A more sustainable ministry across the country.

Better. And we can and will, I trust. Eventually.



A community that looks a lot more like the mix of people we see outside our doors, and the gospel would be heard in ways that better reflect our present reality rather than the "golden age" of 1965.

Open to having honest, deep, transformative conversations...to create spaces where we can be authentic without feeling defensive, can be accepted and valued,...celebrated, loved, and cared for, just as God created us to be without fear of repercussion...where folks in the pastoral relationship were truly able and excited to experience God in new ways...through new expressions...through new ideas and understandings and to receive these as blessings.... *If* the United Church could let go of colonial practices...old traditions...the settler notion of "come be like us," we might just be open to meet God in the here and now...and be surprised, delighted, upheld, and sustained by the kin-dom in our midst that is calling us all to dive in!

We could be an example of fairness in compensation for other denominations. Once justice is done in one place, it becomes a beacon of light for others. As our volunteers worked within a fair system for clergy compensation, their experience from within the church would inform their lives outside the church as well.

We would have more healthy ministries and fewer stressed ministry personnel.... Getting this right with more diversity in the pulpit would likely bring more diversity in the pews.

A light to the nations instead of sidelined as irrelevant.

What we pretend we are...

Oh. My. A remarkable entity.

## Prayers

The text all comes from quotes from survey participants. As part of the interviews and focus groups, participants were asked how they would complete the phrases "Gracious God, we ask you" and "Creator, we celebrate."

### **Gracious God, we ask you**

Gracious God, we ask of you deep comfort and resonant joy for all of those who serve you, who feel weary, who feel lost, who feel stuck. Gracious God, we ask that your renewing wind blow through and liberate and free and inspire those who need it most.

God we ask:

### **Creator, we celebrate**

We celebrate the life and history of The United Church of Canada and the many, many ways in which lay people, clergy, congregations, mission units, and so many others have sought to be faithful over the years and have been able to revise and

That you would help this committee, the wider church, General Council, to hear the findings of this report. And to offer support to clergy. We need your help, we need strengthening, God. Acknowledging that there is a problem is the first step toward dealing with a problem.

For more vision, more honesty, and a willingness to humble ourselves before you to listen more than we speak. To learn from the experiences of people who've been wounded by the church, people who are racialized, people who are disabled, people who have children, people who have struggled in terms of sexual identity. And people who just have not felt well accepted by the church that claims to include everyone.

Allow the people who can make change in the church to hear the silent whispers of those who are oppressed, those who feel alone, those who are sad, those who are angry, and those who need your support.

Gracious God, we ask you to help us to listen. That something good comes out of this that might bring the kingdom of God closer. To make us community that cares for one another like it's never cared before.

We lament the wrongs. We lament the pain and the hurt that have been caused because of humanity. We ask God to make God's self known more often in the hearts of the people who only see gender or only see sexuality. We would ask for ministers who can illuminate the gospel so that churches can...get on the same page as Jesus, please.

[We] give thanks that the United Church is

adapt to changing times.  
Creator, we celebrate who we are and being created by you.

Your Holy Spirit moving through all things and moving through us.

Your triune presence in the Body of Christ in the world that seeks to share the good news of your kingdom.

The underlying faith and trust that your Spirit walks with us through all the ups and downs, all the pandemics and baptisms and births and dying of many generations.

We celebrate:  
Your presence in our midst, in the air and the waters and the trees and the spark of energy that gives us life. In our relationships with one another, with creation, with you not being three different spheres of relationship but three different planes of the same relationship. We celebrate the love that has been imprinted on us as we were created in your image and as we strive to live in the way of the Christ.

We celebrate:  
The beauty of your presence. Your love that is woven in and through all that we know, all that we have, all that we are. The love that is never, ever gone or lost.

still here...and we look forward to our centennial. We give thanks for this institution. But God, it must change to match the challenges of a new millennium, a new time. God, help us to be willing to do the work that's needed.

Help us to hear your call for your kingdom here on earth. Help us to be brave and courageous and willing to tear down what needs tearing down. Help us to find energy, to find Sabbath, to find hope, real hope. Help us to see, and hear, and remember, those who are always, and so easily, pushed aside for later.

God, we ask  
That people will tread gently upon the earth, be kind to one another, look out for each other, and not feel that they have to be superior to one another. That we are all God's beloved children, no matter what nation we belong to, no matter the colour of our skin. And that there are many paths to the one truth. And by saying that, we mean when we go to heaven, we expect to sit and have tea with Muslim friends.

Help congregations to know better how to behave as the mature Body of Christ, not as infants who are tossed around by every wave in every teaching. The disciples teach us, shape us, and form us until we look like Jesus.

To soften hearts and open minds so that all your children will learn to love without judgment and with great grace. And we ask that everyone we invite into ministry feel supported throughout their life in ministry.

We ask you to

Your grace that you're giving each day.

The struggle of the church.  
This amazing project. And the hope, prayer, that it's not just a project, but actually leads to action.

We celebrate, God, we celebrate Jesus, and we celebrate the community's attempt to be community, that which is the work of Jesus Christ.

We celebrate:  
The hard work that many people, many good people are doing to try to bring justice into our faith. Because it's hard work.

We celebrate:  
Opportunity and even the scary parts where we feel a change and we don't know what's next.

The strong leaders who have both modelled and shared their passion for faith and for justice.

Diversity in all its faces and forms and all the gifts it has brought to our ministry and continues to bring into our lives.

We celebrate:  
Hard and holy conversations

Help us stay mindful of that accompanying spirit as we embrace and celebrate many of the joys of these days, while also walking the path of a faith in many different circumstances and changing situations.

There are people for whom there needs to be a deeper search to figure out how to really be equitable to others. We hope that we find a path forward. We're grateful for the grace, the ability to make mistakes and muddle through because we are churches about grace and forgiveness.

That in all of your presence, to grow in us as individuals. That we create space where the knowledge of your presence becomes increasingly shared knowledge in our lives and in our church, in our world. That the focus may be on what you are doing. For your continued guidance through the power of your Holy Spirit to call us to faithfulness, justice, and peace in this time.

Give us patience to be hopeful. Even when things are hopeless we ask you for your healing love. Because sometimes we fall short of showing that healing love to others we ask that you will direct this church to the ways that you intend for us to be life-givers, to make a difference in the world, to touch the life of every person whom we meet and the whole of creation. We ask that you make us become aware of and pay more attention to things that are easily ignored. We ask that you give us that sense of beauty and acceptance and a listening heart.

Would you strengthen us so that we are unafraid, and that we would stop just sweeping all these issues under the rug,

that break us through to the kingdom of God, where we are prepared to make the changes individually, collectively, structurally, so that we move towards a more equitable world for everybody, whether you're [in] paid accountable [ministry] or sitting in a pew. The deep passion, and the love that thousands of people have for one another, for your world, for your creation, for all your children. And [we] celebrate that people want the world to be better for everybody.

That this work is finally being done in the church, and that I don't feel like I'm a voice crying in the wilderness as much as I used to.

We celebrate:

This United Church of ours, [the research team] and the national church for meeting the need and taking the time and energy and space and resources to begin this work. And to know that it's ongoing work, but to be taking such a valuable and clear kind of first step. God, [we] celebrate that and all those who have participated and been vulnerable and open.

That there is willingness to even begin to look at these issues. There's so much hidden racism, and sexism,

and that we would take an honest look at it and humble ourselves and repent? For God, you've said over and over in your word that your mercies are new every morning, that you are patient and compassionate, and that you love to forgive us when we will admit that we've done wrong. So God, would you turn us around? Would you turn us in a different direction? Would you help us to look honestly at who we have been and who we would like to be as an institution? And God, would you teach us and help us care for one another, that we would be Christ for each other, that there will be support in this challenging, beautiful call to be your ministers? God we pour out and pour out and pour out, and we need to be poured into.

As we journey together, Creator, we ask of you that we would be more honest about where we're truly at, not just in terms of finances, or congregational closures, or amalgamations, or the challenges of the pandemic, which are real and many, but that we would be more honest about how we are treating clergy and their families, what our expectations are of clergy and their families. That these are [some] of the models from the 1980s or 1960s that are not sustainable.

We ask you to help the church today, not just the leaders, but also the people of congregations, to find the motivation and the courage and that perspective and the perseverance to wrestle with the changes that are upon us so that we are not stuck in past models that have served well in the past but maybe are not serving so well today.

and ageism, and ableism. And, like a surgeon has to excise a wound to get the infected tissue out before the body can begin to heal, so, too, does The United Church of Canada need to look at this infection and excise the diseased tissue.

A willingness to hear the truth and back it up with money and stuff...a willingness to do things differently even as we hang on to ancient traditions. [And] the new things that are already underway. Almost 350 new ways being fuelled, both [by] minister and ministered-to, in many ways.

For our United Church. In some ways, it is such a gracious example of what church can be. Thank you that we've mostly managed to escape dogma, that we, at least in theory, create space for different expressions of faith, different expressions of liturgy, different expressions of worship. God, that's beautiful, and right, and good.

The life of congregations.... the journey that [we are] treading with the members of congregations. The gifts of time, talents, and resources that [we each are] blessed with.... The diversity, the inclusiveness, the myriad of experiences, and the many

We pray for all those clergy out there and their families who are currently being hurt and feel vulnerable and alone and afraid to say even, What's going on? Would you encourage them today? Would you send your Holy Spirit? Would you send a human representative, somebody with skin on, to comfort and offer compassionate care? Whether that's a coffee with a colleague or someone out of the blue, but prompt pastoral care for your servants. We know that we're dust, we know that our frame is vulnerable, and God, we need your help. We need a clarity of vision.

We ask for you to bless, really bless, our communit(ies) of faith, The United Church of Canada, and people who suffer in this world who have lost their loved ones and who are doubting your being with us in faith. And God, we ask of you to lead us to love, truly love, one another.

For grace to notice your love. We ask for the knowledge of your loving presence, to go into the places where you alone know it is most needed. And we offer ourselves to this work, to this task.

Bless this project, as we try to follow your way to make our church more welcoming, more equitable, and more liberative for all. For those who serve and those who worship to find you there and look for you there. We ask that you bless all whose hands, hearts, and minds are involved in this project, all who have shared their sacred stories, their painful stories. May they be used in ways that are careful and kind. We ask this, knowing that all that we ask for we shall receive through the one whom you sent to demonstrate love incarnate, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

learnings. The gift of time, the opportunity to serve, the opportunity to be present, the opportunity to be authentic. The opportunity to be me.

Tremendous hope. Hope in the gospel. Hope in the living God. Hope even in humanity. Even though our history [is] not so good. [We] do believe that we can change and that as a church, we're seeking. We're still aspiring to be something.

The existence of The United Church of Canada, and the people who are still here, still serving, still trying to find a way through the wilderness.

This church that we have created, that has been created by our ancestors in the faith. In all its humanity, and ridiculousness, and pettiness, and beauty, and justice. [We] celebrate what we get right and lament what we get wrong. And still believe that we are called to be the church, still believe that we are called to do the work together.