PCPMM 17   Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation

Origin: Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry, Task Group on Intercultural Ministries

The Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry proposes that the Executive of General Council:
1. **Receive the report "Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation"**
2. **Forward it and the following proposal to the 41st General Council for decision.**

Proposals:

That the 41st General Council of The United Church of Canada:

1. **Receive the report of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries, entitled "Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation."**

2. **Adopt this "Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church", and recommend this vision to all courts of the church—including General Council and its Executive, Conferences, presbyteries/districts, and pastoral charges—for study and reflection, and encourage all courts to integrate aspects of this vision into their mission and ministry:**

    Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church
    An intercultural church is one that is:

    welcoming. **It:**
    - **is open, accepting, joyful, and life-giving;**

- **trusts that God's Spirit opens all to new and different experiences, however challenging, painful, and uncomfortable at times;**
- **seeks to use inclusive and expansive language in worship and community life, and honours diverse language in policy statements and official declarations;**
- **maintains a commitment to mutuality, inclusion, and radical welcoming as part of the church's mission and ministry.**

relational. **It:**
- **affirms, honours, and treasures the God-given differences present in the context of its communities—recognizing that there are a variety of cultural expressions of faith;**
- **offers a positive vision of community as a whole, with critical engagement within and between cultural perspectives;**
- **recognizes reciprocal relationships among and between one another, and our responsibilities to live in right relationship with all of creation;**
- **strives to become a culturally diverse and multilingual community.**

adaptive. **It:**
- **lives with God's grace enabling it to accept mistakes, and learns and grows from the past;**
- **opens itself to be vulnerable;**
- **continually affirms diverse cultural identities to avoid assimilation into dominant cultures;**
- **is not afraid to engage in transformation of heart, mind, structure, and policy—including continually adapting to change when change is called for.**

justice-seeking. It:
- **steadfastly and authentically seeks to share resources, redress power imbalances, and challenge systemic injustices, while seeking full and equitable participation of all—both inside and outside of the church;**
- **faithfully addresses racism and White privilege;**
- **recognizes the church's complicity in historic injustices and tries to do things differently;**
- **commits itself to becoming a globally minded, inclusive, and justice-seeking community.**

intentional. It:
- **seeks to be enriched by different cultural perspectives, and knows that what we hold in common does not deny difference;**
- **creates spaces for courageous conversations;**
- **proactively cultivates diverse leadership, particularly within cultural communities that have been historically minoritized and underrepresented;**
- **engages in self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through ongoing prayer, education, training, consultation, monitoring, and evaluation of its intercultural engagement.**

missional. It :
- **seeks to discern, acknowledge, and embody biblical and theological bases for becoming an intercultural church;**
- **affirms that the God of mission has a church in the world, and that we—in all our differences—are active participants in God's mission.**

3. **Direct the Executive of General Council to establish forward-thinking processes of accountability at an Elected Member level that would intentionally monitor and build on the intercultural vision, and report to the 42nd General Council 2015 about progress made on this intercultural commitment.**

Background

Introduction and overview
In 2006, at the 39th General Council, The United Church of Canada made a commitment to becoming an intercultural church. This dynamic intercultural commitment was offered as a vision of transformation, where there is "mutually respectful diversity and full and equitable participation of all."[1] Cultural and linguistic minority communities—specifically representatives from Aboriginal, Francophone, Deaf and racialized constituencies—were invited to lead the way in shaping the intercultural vision, with the understanding that insightful leadership can come from minority communities.

Representatives from those diverse communities were invited to be part of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries, to continue to offer shape for the intercultural vision.

About the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries
The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries was established to assist the United Church in its efforts to become an intercultural and racially just church. We are a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse group of people—with representatives from Aboriginal, Francophone, Deaf, racialized, and ethno-cultural majority communities—that

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[1] A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada. 2006.

began meeting in January 2008. We have operated with simultaneous translation and interpretation between English, French, and American Sign Language (ASL).

The purpose of our task group has been to continue to shape programs, processes, and policies about intercultural ministries, from representatives' community perspectives, for the church as a whole. We report directly to the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry.

We have met over the course of several years, and this report offers insights and recommendations that emerge out of our faithful struggles and discernments. We have worked hard to be able to say with common affirmation what we have discovered and explored. As such, this report is offered in our own voices, with excerpts of stories interspersed.

The elected members of our task group have been Susan Beaver, Helen Bickle, Thierry Delay, Gisèle Gilfillan, Sarah Harrington, Ettie Gordon, Su Won Hong, Elaine Jacobs, Danielle Ayana James, Victor Kitagawa, Marie-Claude Manga, Emmanuel Kwadwo Ofori, and Martin Rumscheidt. Staff support to the task group was offered by Michael Blair, Adele Halliday (staff resource), Maggie McLeod, and Darla Sloan. Past staff support persons have included Pierre Goldberger and Laverne Jacobs.

Our circle of conversation has also, on occasion, included people whom we have invited to lead cultural immersion experiences. These resource persons have described and offered a diversity of lived experiences and resources for our continued work. We have spent time immersed in First Nations, Francophone, Deaf and racialized communities; we have also spent time exploring social class and rural contexts.

Our report, therefore, emerges from what we have been through in terms of our educational experiences, interactions within the group, life experiences, observations, research, group processes, and prayerful discernments.

Background
A transformative vision
The first report on intercultural ministries that was approved by the 39th General Council in 2006, entitled "A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada," said:

> "God is calling us to transformation as individuals, as communities, as church, with all the traditions and cultures we have been gifted with. Not one thing will be left untouched in God's transformative power, including our culture that is the intersection of our beliefs, our values, our worldviews, our language(s), our customs, our traditions, our ethnic heritages, our memories."

Recognizing that some cultural minorities in the church were experiencing inequities in the church, our intercultural commitment is therefore offered as a vision of transformation for the whole church—where the intercultural dimensions of ministries become a denominational priority in living out the church's commitment to racial justice, and where racial and cultural power imbalances are redressed.

In 2006, "intercultural" was initially defined as "mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures." This was an interim description until the intercultural vision could be more developed and contextualized to experiences of people

within the United Church. Also, in 2006, the intercultural vision focused primarily on racial, linguistic, and cultural minority communities; since then, the intercultural vision—and the description of what "intercultural" means—has expanded considerably:

> To become an intercultural church is to respond to the call to live together in intentional ways that engage in mutual recognition, respect, and understanding of difference; and, through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable to access to power, we as the church seek to be fully committed and faithful in our response.

For further discussion of the terms "culture" and "intercultural," see [Appendix B](#).

A process of church-wide transformation

In 2009, at the 40th General Council, a report was written by the newly formed Task Group on Intercultural Ministries; the report was entitled "Intercultural Ministries: A Process of Church-Wide Transformation." In this report, the importance of transforming church structures and systems was re-emphasized, and cultural empire was identified as a challenge to becoming a truly transformed intercultural church. In describing the scope of intercultural ministries, the report reflected that "the church affirmed that this commitment will be a process—a prayerful journey of transformation—affecting all areas of the church's life."[2]

This report also reflected on the following:

> The anticipated transformation is such that it will change some of our ways of being church together. The church's

processes, policies, and procedures will all be examined through an intercultural lens; this will, in turn, affect how we articulate theologies, how we make decisions, and how we proactively create spaces for diverse cultural groups to participate fully in decision-making processes within the church.

Becoming an intercultural church is a call to transformation. To truly be a transformed church, based on justice, equity and the redress of power, several areas of the church will be affected. Becoming an intercultural church is both a vision of what we hope to become, and the process of our faithful response to this call.

In reaffirming its intercultural commitment, the United Church has expressed that some things will change:

> As the church risks letting go of some structures, traditions, and manifestations of cultural empire, there will inevitably be grief, as there is with any kind of change. Yet, the promise of transformation and our theological understanding of new life means that, as some old things pass on, new things will also come to life.[3]

Living into a renewed commitment

This report, therefore, seeks to offer in-depth policies and processes that can lead toward church-wide transformation. It seeks to breathe new life. Becoming an intercultural church requires some policy shifts, and it also requires attitudinal shifts. The report is offered in humble faith with the understanding that transformation is of the Spirit, and that as

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[2] Intercultural Ministries: A Process of Church-Wide Transformation (Interim Report). 2009. *Record of Proceedings*, p. 639.

[3] Intercultural Ministries: A Process of Church-Wide Transformation (Interim Report). 2009. Record of Proceedings, p. 640.

faithful followers, we too can be transformed—and can also be agents of transformation.

> It is through interrelationships of mutual support that all of the components and constituencies of our Church *together* will be empowered to transform the Church and renew its witness to the Gospel for the 21st century….

> Ours is a broad vision of The United Church of Canada as a Church called to live out a renewed understanding of the Gospel in our contemporary context. We share a vision of a United Church that serves all populations and cultures that make up the country through relationships that are just, inclusive, and mutually life-giving.[4]

> *A story from a candidate for ministry...*
> People sometimes say to me: "What? You go to church? You, the marginalized one, with your handicap and your homosexuality?" I chose the United Church because it recognizes the beauty of my whole person—including those more marginal parts of me—that I am also entirely made to receive and give love in that which makes me unique, but also because I am proud of the way the United Church applies itself imitating Jesus, living Jesus' teachings instead of imposing its version of the truth. The United Church is not perfect, but it admits it. It's humble, capable of asking forgiveness, of inviting people to come and change it, make it better, make real what the Spirit is inspiring us to live now.

1. Biblical context

The call to become an intercultural church is not one solely in response to changing racial and cultural demographics. Rather,

becoming an intercultural church is a faithful response to being the church that moves us back to the very beginning of our faith.

The Bible was written in the context of racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. In the beginning, God created the Earth. And God said the creation was very good; it was also diverse and interdependent. Each part of God's creation reveals unique aspects of Creator.

We read in the Bible hopes that there are no longer strangers and aliens (Leviticus 19:33–34). Isaiah prays for a house of prayer all of God's peoples (Isaiah 56:6–8) and offers a vision where the wolf and lamb lie down together in the peaceable kingdom (Isaiah 11:1–9).

Through the story of Pentecost (Acts 2), we read that the early church was born into a culturally and linguistically diverse context. At Pentecost, each person heard the gospel spoken in their own language. Thus God's Spirit—working with people from many nations—set in motion the early Christian church. Cultural and linguistic identities were left in place, but unified in a new, and larger, expression of common humanity.

Jesus himself worked in the context of diversity—a culturally Jewish man who started a church, and who lived and worked with society's most marginalized peoples. Jesus himself broke barriers of race, class, gender, and social norms to create a community of believers where all were welcome. Through the interaction with the Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman (Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30), Jesus' own assumptions were challenged. Jesus enabled encounters with marginalized and diverse peoples to shape and change him.

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[4] A Vision for French Ministries in The United Church of Canada. 2009. *Record of Proceedings*, p. 730–31.

Diversity is central to our faith, and central to what it means to being called to be the church.

2.   Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church

God exists in community, and we are invited to be in community together.

Individually and in community, we do everything through the lenses of our cultures: there is no such thing as a culture-free perspective. Our experiences and understandings are shaped by our cultures. Since we cannot capture the complexity of God through our limited cultural understandings, our understanding of God is limited when we see this God through only one dominant cultural perspective. Instead, our understandings of God and our scriptures can be deepened when we come together, as disciples of Jesus Christ, in all of our differences and diversities to acknowledge intercultural reality and richness.

We strive to become an intercultural church to deepen our understandings and experiences of God and of one another. Within The United Church of Canada, a variety of cultural expressions of faith are affirmed and welcomed. Part of the vision of the intercultural church is to create a space where we can sustain our own cultural identities while also affirming those of one another.

An intercultural church is one that is:

welcoming. It:
- is open, accepting, joyful, and life-giving;
- trusts that God's Spirit opens all to new and different experiences, however challenging, painful, and uncomfortable at times;
- seeks to use inclusive and expansive language in worship and community life, and honours diverse language in policy statements and official declarations;
- maintains a commitment to mutuality, inclusion, and radical welcoming as part of the church's mission and ministry.

relational. It:
- affirms, honours, and treasures the God-given differences present in the context of its communities—recognizing that there are a variety of cultural expressions of faith;
- offers a positive vision of community as a whole, with critical engagement within and between cultural perspectives;
- recognizes reciprocal relationships among and between one another, and our responsibilities to live in right relationship with all of creation;
- strives to become a culturally diverse and multilingual community.

adaptive. It:
- lives with God's grace enabling it to accept mistakes, and learns and grows from the past;
- opens itself to be vulnerable;
- continually affirms diverse cultural identities to avoid assimilation into dominant cultures;
- is not afraid to engage in transformation of heart, mind, structure, and policy—including continually adapting to change when change is called for.

justice-seeking. It:

- steadfastly and authentically seeks to share resources, redress power imbalances, and challenge systemic injustices, while seeking full and equitable participation of all—both inside and outside of the church;
- faithfully addresses racism and White privilege;
- recognizes the churches' complicity in historic injustices and tries to do things differently;
- commits itself to becoming a globally minded, inclusive, and justice-seeking community.

intentional. It:

- seeks to be enriched by different cultural perspectives, and knows that what we hold in common does not deny difference;
- creates spaces for courageous conversations;
- proactively cultivates diverse leadership, particularly within cultural communities that have been historically minoritized and underrepresented;
- engages in self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through ongoing prayer, education, training, consultation, monitoring, and evaluation of its intercultural engagement.

missional. It**:**

- seeks to discern, acknowledge, and embody biblical and theological bases for becoming an intercultural church;
- affirms that the God of mission has a church in the world, and that we—in all our differences—are active participants in God's mission.

3. Theological basis

With all of these degrees of difference, what might an intercultural theology for The United Church of Canada encompass? Of note, one of the early assignments of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries was "developing a theology of inclusion, and a theology of intercultural ministries in a Canadian context." This section of the report seeks to respond to that early assignment.

The problem of inclusion

It is our observation that there are times when the United Church describes itself as an inclusive church. Over time, however, we as a task group have realized that there are problems with the word "inclusion."

When one is "included," it means that someone else has the power to include—and exclude. There are power imbalances implied in the word and process of "inclusion." To say that someone can be included names a particular place of privilege. It might involve a person saying that another is welcome into their space—it implies a host and a guest.

But "inclusion" is not necessarily mutual, and it is not always transformative. Someone can offer to include another, without making any other changes in their way of being. Inclusion does not necessarily mean mutuality, or that a hospitable or equitable space has been created. Often, instead, a minority person (or community) is invited into a culturally dominant space, without any other changes to help them feel at home.

To then develop a theology of inclusion was problematic, because it wouldn't address these power differentials and issues of privilege. Rather than developing a theology of inclusion, we thought it would be helpful to instead focus on a theology of intercultural ministries in the Canadian context.

Theological touchstones

When the task group began our work on a theology of intercultural ministries in the Canadian context, we grappled with questions of theological difference. We represented very diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic communities, and each of us came with differing understandings and experiences of colonialism, oppression, and systemic issues. We also had a wide degree of theological diversity within our membership.

With all of this difference in community, how would we then have a conversation about theology of intercultural ministries in the Canadian context, and still come to consensus for moving forward? We soon realized that a theological exercise around *identity* would be helpful; it would also help us to have conversations about *difference* with some common understandings.

So we began a process to develop several theological "touchstones"—some basic theological tenants that we came to consensus on. Seven touchstones were developed by the group in total. This process took considerable time, but by wrestling with what the theology of the group was, we were able to develop some basic understandings that helped us to live into our intercultural and theologically diverse space.

Some of the touchstones were seemingly simple, such as this one: "In God all things are possible. God makes all things new and cannot be captured in any human construct." Each such touchstone, however, had a lengthy explanation behind it, to offer further context and meaning. The conversation about the context and meaning was particularly valuable for us to come to some common understandings.

What we later realized would be most helpful to share in this report would not be the individual touchstones themselves, but rather, the process of developing the touchstones. To develop the touchstones, with the question of cultural diversity always in the back of our minds, we then asked each other questions such as: What is our understanding of God and of how God works in the world? Who is Jesus for us? What do we understand and how do we reflect on the scriptures, the Trinity, issues of diversity, church, and community?

Through this process of creating the touchstones, we also came to a clear understanding that theology is about God, and the way in which we present our language. And, because our understandings of God were shaped by our diverse cultural experiences, the way in which we were doing theology was also going to be different.

We realized that, since theology is contextual, there will be many different theologies—not one intercultural theology. In fact, the group developed a new term—intercultural *theologizing*—with the understanding that "theologizing" was a verb and not a noun. It meant that the process of our understanding of God would continue to change, and so our theology would also continue to change.

After considerable contemplation, we affirmed that offering neither one intercultural theology nor many intercultural theologies would suffice, because as soon as they were written and understood, they could continue to change as our context and understandings changed.

With the process of developing the touchstones, and moving away from describing intercultural theologies, we recognized

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that we did not need to recreate new theologies. Instead, much of the theological basis for becoming an intercultural church was already written and affirmed by the church in earlier statements of faith.

Intercultural theologies
In thinking forward, the task group thought that it would be most helpful to reference the past—and two important statements of faith. One is *A New Creed*; the other is *A Song of Faith*.

From *A New Creed*, the following had particular resonance for the theological basis for becoming an intercultural church:

> We believe in God:
>   who has created and is creating,
>   who has come in Jesus,
>   the Word made flesh,
>   to reconcile and make new,
>   who works in us and others
>   by the Spirit.
>
> We trust in God.

Through these statements from *A New Creed*, it is affirmed that there is dynamism, and that it is God who works in us to create something new. The "newness" of becoming an intercultural church is not based on our own limited cultural understandings, but rather, because God's Spirit has already been working within all of us to reconcile, recreate, and renew ourselves, our communities, and our churches.

It is through our belief and trust in God that we are active participants in God's mission.

Becoming an intercultural church is not an end-goal in itself. Rather, becoming an intercultural church is one process through which God works in us to bring about transformation for us all.

Another statement from *A Song of Faith* also lent itself to further theological reflection on becoming an intercultural church:

> Our ancestors in faith
>   bequeath to us experiences of their faithful living;
>   upon their lives our lives are built.
> Our living of the gospel makes us a part of this communion of saints,
>   experiencing the fulfillment of God's reign.
>   even as we actively anticipate a new heaven
>   and a new earth

> The church has not always lived up to its vision.
> It requires the Spirit to reorient it,
>   helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition,
>   challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,
> for we are called to be a blessing to the earth.

> We sing of God's good news lived out,
> A church with purpose:
>   faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
>   gifts shared for the good of all,
>   resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,
>   fierce love in the face of violence,

human dignity defended,
members of a community held and inspired by
God,
corrected and comforted,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.
We sing of God's mission.

These lines from *A Song of Faith* encompass so much of what it means to become an intercultural church. For example, the vision for becoming an intercultural church is grounded in commitments that the church has already made, and in the work of our ancestors in faith. We too are part of the communion of saints, and the newness that we anticipate comes because of our faithful gospel living and the movement of God's Spirit among us.

It also acknowledges that the church has not always lived up to its vision, and that God's Spirit can reorient the church. The transformation comes by honouring what has happened before, by living with grace, and by challenging privilege.

The church has a purpose—God's mission lived out. And the good news is that a community of people who call themselves "church" also resist and challenge the systemic issues of exploitation, marginalization, and violence. The community is instead one of faith and love, where gifts are offered.

The church community is also adaptive: it lives with God's grace enabling it to accept mistakes, and learns and grows from the past.

The task group realized that with these two statements from the church's past, there was no need to create something new. Instead, intercultural theologies are grounded in something old from our own church traditions.

4. Reclaiming the church's intercultural identity

The early Christian church—as referenced in the book of Acts—struggled with how to embody community when there were so many degrees of difference (i.e., racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious). Some might argue that part of the reason why our church today still struggles with these very same issues in community is because of a resistance to change in our ethos.

We believe that what we are being called to do today, is to reclaim what church is. The church is a gift left by Jesus' descendants. Being church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a gift from God. Church is not a human invention. But we as humans are still struggling to find what church is and what it means in our culture, context, and time.

We note that reclaiming interculturality from the past and working toward transformation can be both difficult and scary. And yet, since we are reclaiming the church's intercultural identity, the phrase "intercultural church" is somewhat redundant. To be the church is to be intercultural. If there is no diversity, if there no degrees of difference that are embraced, then perhaps we are not faithfully living into what it means to be the church.

Within one church family, there are many cultural communities. Culture is complex and layered (even if all people might look the same).

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For example, Edward T. Hall was one of the first to say that culture can be likened to an iceberg—he reflected that ten percent of culture is found above the surface; ninety percent is found below. The ten percent above the surface is what is seen and understood first—the external cultures, which are often observed with the senses: things that one can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. These aspects of culture are explicitly learned, conscious, easily changed, and represent objective knowledge. A celebration such as a cultural dinner would be an example of a surface culture.

When one first enters into another culture, one is usually first interacting only with the top ten percent—literally, the tip of the iceberg! Sometimes, people make assumptions or develop ideas about another cultural community without really understanding the internal or deep culture that makes up the majority of that culture's values and beliefs.

However, 90 percent of culture is found below the surface. This includes the beliefs, patterns, values, and myths. These are internal cultures, and they are implicitly learned, unconscious, difficult to change, and express subjective knowledge.

Becoming an intercultural church is trying to make change at this deeper level—and affecting this area that is potentially difficult to change.

A recent national survey in 2010, called "Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada"[5]—which included more than 300 interdenominational church leaders across Canada—noted the challenge for churches is negotiating which cultural norms from the past they should hold on to and which to let go of. It reconfirmed that the process of adapting to change can be easy or difficult.

This is the kind of transformation that is called for—and yet, it is difficult.

The United Church of Canada has also acknowledged this difficulty in its own history. For example, at the 35th General Council in 1994, it was noted:

> Simply to tinker with structures without addressing the deeper convictions, attitudes, and values which inform those is not an adequate response to the concerns being raised by those in ethnic ministries.[6]

More recently, research within the United Church, the Emerging Spirit project found "deeply rooted congregational cultures highly resistant to change" and worked to help congregations "break out of established cultural patterns that no longer connect to those outside the existing membership of the church."[7]

As a result, to focus *only* on policy solutions will never effect the kind of deep and transformative change for which we are striving. In addition, we are all being called to deeply examine our attitudes, values, and personal around difference—and risk doing things differently to create a better space of belonging for all.

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[5] World Vision Canada, 2010. "Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada."

[6] "The proposed model for the Ethnic Ministries Council of The United Church of Canada", p. 246. 35th General Council of The United Church of Canada, 1994. *Acts and Proceedings*, p. 246.
[7] Gregersen, Bruce, 2011. "Identity and Mission" discussion paper, p. 5.

Story from a task group member…
I kept a particular paper from our last task group meeting. The paper had on it the words "inspire" and "culture." This particular day—when we were at the Deaf Cultural Centre—I learned that the signs used in American Sign Language have shape, depth, and texture. Since then, what has gone through me is an awareness of my own difficult spaces, as we talk about changes transformation and taking steps forward. For some time, I have wanted to learn more about Deaf culture but found it challenging—I later recognized that the difficulty is about me acknowledging the challenge of stepping forward.

5. Identity and connection

Becoming an intercultural church is central to issues of identity and connection. Identity has particular resonance for minoritized communities.

To value strong understandings of identity means engaging with marginalized (and/or new) communities challenging false assumptions of equality and entrenched cultural patterns. It means creating space for much greater diversity to emerge than most congregations have been prepared to accept.[8]

For example, a recent paper on "Identity and Mission" states that identity "is also expressed in the struggle by marginalized communities within larger dominate cultures to assert distinctiveness both to challenge oppressive characterizations of the community and to seek greater self-determination."[9] Terence Anderson, in his paper "Our Defining Center," reflections on the question of who we are, as The United

Church of Canada, and writes that this is a key question of identity. For example, according to Anderson,

"the much discussed pluralism of our society heightens the identity problem. When we are safely ensconced in a relatively homogeneous society, it is possible to function just find without addressing identity questions."

He goes on to say:

"For those belonging to minority cultures, or minority denominations, identity issues have always been unavoidable. They have to keep asking themselves, will we assimilate to the majority culture and no longer be a distinctive people? Or will identify with our ancestors and carry forward in new ways our unique heritage?...

The identity questions before us can legitimately focus on boundaries—who and what belongs?"

The question of boundaries and belonging also speaks to the concept of "identity politics."

6. Called to be the Church

Becoming an intercultural church is a key aspect of identity and connectionality for The United Church of Canada. The words of *A New Creed* name what being called to be the church involves:

We are called to be the Church:
  to celebrate God's presence,
  to live with respect in Creation,
  to love and serve others,
  to seek justice and resist evil,
  to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
    our judge and our hope.

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[8] Gregersen, Bruce, 2011. "Identity and Mission" discussion paper, p. 4.
[9] Gregersen, Bruce, 2011. "Identity and Mission" discussion paper, p. 3.

Using the framework of the creed, our group spent considerable time discerning what practical steps correspond with each section of the creed. In fact, we found that the same broad topic might fit in multiple places. Because there is no such thing as a cultural-free perspective, we found that there are many different ways of looking at the same thing, since we can look at it through multiple perspectives[10].

To become an intercultural church is to respond to the call to live together in intentional ways that engage in mutual recognition, respect, and understanding of difference; and, through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable to access to power, we as the church seek to be fully committed and faithful in our response.

May the lived experience of respectful relationship in this task group, may the findings and questions we have raised, the stories we have shared and proposals recommended all reflect Holy Grace and a faithful response to the Call of God. Amen.

The elected members of our task group have been:
Susan Beaver
Helen Bickle
Thierry Delay

Gisèle Gilfillan
Sarah Harrington
Ettie Gordon
Su Won Hong
Elaine Jacobs
Danielle Ayana James
Victor Kitagawa
Marie-Claude Manga
Emmanuel Kwadwo Ofori
Martin Rumscheidt

Staff support to the task group was offered by:
Michael Blair
Adele Halliday (staff resource)
Maggie McLeod
Darla Sloan

Past staff support persons have included:
Pierre Goldberger
Laverne Jacobs

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[10] To help illustrate this, our task group developed an "intercultural wheel," so that if one item is first view through the lens of a particular part of A New Creed that we acknowledged that we could easily look at that same item through a different part of the creed and have different perspectives emerge.

Appendices

Appendix A:
   Action Items for Living into Transformation

Governance Structures and Processes

1. Direct the Executive of General Council, through its Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda, to:
   - explore models of consensus decision-making used by other Christian communities (such as the Canadian Council of Churches; the World Council of Churches; the World Communion of Reformed Churches; and the Uniting Church of Australia) for their major meetings and gatherings,
   - make a recommendation by January 2013 to the Executive of General Council on a model of consensus for use by its committees and task groups, and by all courts of the church—including General Council and its Executive, Conferences, presbyteries/districts, and pastoral charges,
   - decide on, and implement, appropriate methods for training elected members serving on committees and task groups on the model of consensus decision-making, including writing relevant supporting documents.

2. Commit to adopting consensus as the official decision-making process of The United Church of Canada, and that consensus will replace the current Rules of Debate and Order (prescribed in Appendix III of *The Manual*) for the 42nd General Council—and all subsequent General Councils—as well as for future meetings of the Executive

of General Council and of all of the Permanent Committees.

3. Direct the Executive of General Council, through its Permanent Committee on Governance & Agenda, to ensure that:
   - in each triennium in which they are serving, all elected members nominated to national committees and task groups of the General Council undergo at least one full day of anti-oppression training that focuses on issues related to intercultural engagement, gender justice, racial justice, socio-economic class, intergenerational diversity, disabilities, and alternatives to empire,
   - any anti-oppression training makes use of the integrated lens already developed for committee use, and other related United Church tools around anti-oppression,
   - an additional day of training is offered for all chairs of national committees and task groups on anti-oppression processes for meetings,
   - the anti-oppression training is developed in consultation with the program staff at the General Council Office related to the work of intercultural engagement, gender justice, racial justice, intergenerational diversity, and empire,
   - tools are developed to evaluate how the training is being implemented, integrated and utilized, and that offer critical self-analysis,
   - after the training takes place in each triennium, a report is given to the Executive of General Council that references the evaluation tool and makes recommendations about the next steps for training.

4. Encourage all Conferences and presbyteries/districts to deliver anti-oppression training for elected members

serving on Conference and presbytery/district committees, so that in each triennium in which they are serving, all elected members nominated to Conference and presbytery/district committees and task groups undergo at least one full day of anti-oppression training that focuses on issues related to intercultural engagement, gender justice, racial justice, socio-economic class, intergenerational diversity, disabilities, and alternatives to empire.

5. Direct the Executive of General Council, through its Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda, to research a diversity of ways to make meetings of General Council committees and task groups more accessible and equitable to a broader range of people by:
   - consulting with people who are currently underrepresented in the governance structure—such as youth and young adults, shift workers, racialized peoples, people who speak English as an additional language, people who are Deaf, and people with disabilities—to gather their insights about accessibility and making attendance at meetings more accessible,
   - offering clear directions on alternative meeting days and times that will increase the participation of underrepresented groups and of people who may not be available for multi-day in-person meetings,
   - presenting options that offer translation and interpretation for meeting participants who may not speak English fluently.

6. Direct the Executive of General Council, through its Nominations Committee and Member Engagement Services, to:
   - ensure, through questionnaires/tools, that all elected members are willing to engage self-analysis and critical

reflection as part of their nominations process, and encourage all people to self-identify their cultural identities when being nominated to committee and/or task group work,
   - develop a process for succession planning that will enable building and investing in a pool of diverse leaders of elected members—with an emphasis on underrepresented and minoritized peoples—and working with them to continue to build effective leadership skills for future opportunities including offering new and dynamic opportunities for leadership development, orientation, experiences and further training,
   - have an initial goal that by the 43rd General Council, at least one-third of the elected members serving on national committees and task groups will be from racialized as well as other minoritized communities,
   - report to the 42nd General Council on plans and progress.

7. Direct that the General Secretary, General Council:
   - offers affirmation and thanks for the work that has already been done around writing in plain language, including the work done related to the simplification of *The Manual*,
   - develops a plain language policy for communications of The United Church of Canada.

8. Direct the Executive of General Council to set aside a special protected yearly fund to provide simultaneous translation and interpretation at national events and national meetings of committees and task groups to enable the fuller participation of peoples who do not speak English fluently.

Ministry and Employment

9. Name that the Executive of General Council affirms the current Employment Equity policy section of The United Church of Canada's Human Resources Policy Manual for the General Council Office and Conference office staff, and direct the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS) to create a task group (with intentional inclusion of people of diverse cultural identities, people of varying socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, racialized peoples, peoples of diverse gender identities including women and transgendered people, and people who are Deaf) to focus on the development of specific and tangible strategies in these United Church workplaces to:

   - increase the participation of people of diverse cultural identities, people of varying socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, racialized peoples, peoples of diverse gender identities including women and transgendered peoples, and people who are Deaf in the calling, appointment, development, and advancement of staff,
   - offer specific benchmarks to measure progress,
   - examine and eliminate systemic and deliberate barriers for recruitment, employment, development, and promotion of underrepresented groups,
   - create ways to increase the outreach efforts and composition of applicant pools,
   - develop guidelines for conducting interviews with intercultural awareness—including having racially and culturally diverse hiring committees,
   - continue to operationalize the anti-racism policy and the guidelines from The United Church of Canada on

"Ending Racial Harassment: Creating a Healthy Workplace",

   - create proactive plans to connect with and increase the hiring of "at-risk" racialized youth from low-income and impoverished backgrounds for staff positions—including summer positions—at the General Council Office, and minimize the hiring of General Council Office staff relatives for these positions,
   - offer updated language that reflects the wording currently in use by the United Church when referring to people in the Employment Equity policy,
   - report on the plans developed for implementation of the above at the 42nd General Council,
   - implement monitoring mechanisms, which would include reporting to each subsequent General Council about plans and progress in relation to Employment Equity.

10. Through its Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee and the Executive of General Council (through its Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services and its Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry), create a framework to explore the mutual recognition of ministry with other Reformed traditions that make up the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and global partners of The United Church of Canada.

11. Explore methods to ensure that there is intentionality and partnership between the General Council Office, the Executive of General Council (through its Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services) and other courts of the church to:

- assess the admissions processes, and identify potential barriers faced by ministry personnel who come to Canada from global partner communities and are seeking admission to The United Church of Canada,
- effectively engage and create intentional spaces of invitation for immigrant ministry personnel—who are already in Canada—in the life of the church,
- identify ways to increase recruitment of ministry personnel from marginalized communities.

12. Having recognized that some racialized ministry personnel experience isolation in ministry in a unique ways, direct the Executive of General Council, through its Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services—in partnership with Conferences—to examine and implement additional support systems for racialized ministry personnel by:
    - working with General Council Office staff to implement mandatory intercultural competencies and anti-oppression training for racial majority congregations hiring racialized ministry personnel by doing intentional work with the hiring congregation and presbytery/district on intercultural, identity, racial justice, and other equity issues,
    - encouraging congregational members, staff, and ministry personnel to undergo training in intercultural awareness and intercultural conflict resolution,
    - on a regular basis, bringing together all self-identified racialized ministry personnel in the Conference to support one another, talk about their experiences, and develop additional processes around isolation in ministry,

- exploring additional systems of support for the congregation and racialized ministry personnel.

Congregational Development

13. Encourage presbyteries and districts to provide opportunities for congregations to explore ways in which they might embrace the focus on intercultural ministries and understand their own cultures in their local contexts through training and workshops commending the Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church for study and reflection, and embracing the focuses of the Commitment to Inclusion and Covenanting for Life.

14. Encourage Presbytery Oversight Committees to use resources related to the Commitment to Inclusion and Covenanting for Life as part of their presbytery oversight visits as tools to ask and engage congregations in questions around diversity.

15. Given the changing cultural and racial demographics in Canadian society, the increase in immigration from different parts of the world, and the reality that few United Church congregations are geared specifically toward some of these new immigrant communities, direct the development of a new mission strategy for effectively engaging with diverse cultural and racial immigrant Christian communities in Canada.

16. Direct that the Executive of General Council create a task group on property sharing—based on an acknowledgement that the oversight of property is both a congregational and presbytery responsibility—including representation from Conferences and presbyteries, and including culturally diverse additional resource people as needed, and

membership from the Permanent Committee on Finance, the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry to focus on:

- amending the regulations on property sharing where two or more United Church worshipping communities are sharing property that moves beyond a landlord/tenant relationship while taking into consideration the ministry and mission needs of both communities,
- developing models for culturally sensitive and appropriate forms of memorandums of understandings or covenants that will apply to the different parties in the relationship,
- offering options for congregations that will be continually sharing space beyond three years so that a different type of agreement is developed, which is not based on a rental or tenancy or like agreement.

17. Declare that The United Church of Canada will move toward intercultural conflict resolution throughout the life and mission of the whole church in all of its courts by:

- directing the Executive of General Council to develop processes for intercultural conflict resolution and restorative justice for use in all courts of the church,
- making appropriate changes to the *Dispute Resolution Policy Handbook* to reflect these intercultural processes,
- clearly naming that for a person to be eligible to serve as a Conflict Resolution Facilitator in The United Church of Canada, they must meet the current requirements for becoming a Conflict Resolution Facilitator, as well as undergo specific training on intercultural conflict resolution,

- ensuring that any conflict or dispute involving congregations currently designated as diverse cultural identities, Aboriginal, Ethnic Ministries, Deaf, or Ministries in French, be resolved with the presence of at least one person who has been specifically trained in intercultural conflict resolution.

18. Call the United Church to an emphasis on the priority of intercultural worship, and direct the General Secretary, General Council, to ensure that there are adequate resources to meet this call through:

- broadly sharing the principles of intercultural worship,
- encouraging the development of intercultural worship resources for congregations for wide dissemination,
- making such resources available in many languages of the church by inviting the sharing of resources by diverse cultural communities,
- making available a consultant—who has specialized training in intercultural worship—who can work directly with congregations across the country that want to make their worship services more intercultural.

Faith Formation and Education

19. Direct that the Executive of General Council explore the establishment of a yearly, ongoing monetary fund for scholarships through The United Church of Canada Foundation for historically underrepresented peoples—including peoples who are racialized, Aboriginal, Francophone, Deaf, or have disabilities—who are members of The United Church of Canada and are interested in pursuing a degree at a doctoral level in order to build up resources and create a diverse community of knowledge.

20. Direct the Executive of General Council, through its Permanent Committee on Ministry Employment and Policy Services, to:

    - create intentional and ongoing opportunities for the mentorship of people from underrepresented groups who are interested in paid accountable ministry within The United Church of Canada, in consultation with members of those underrepresented groups,
    - incorporate an intentional intercultural component as part of the candidacy process,
    - develop policies that require all United Church candidates to spend intentional time in a culture other than their own and considering the global reality in Canada, through intentional field placements, and intercultural internships throughout places in Canada—including but not limited to community ministries or the All Native Circle Conference—and that the General Council Office be considered as one prospective internship site.

21. Direct the General Secretary, General Council, to discern the most effective approach for offering a United Church of Canada certificate program on intercultural ministries, by working cooperatively and in partnership between the General Council Office and United Church–affiliated education centres.

22. Direct the General Secretary, General Council, to facilitate a gathering of United Church faculty once in each triennium to focus on addressing intercultural issues in the curriculum.

Appendix B:

Understanding "culture" and "intercultural"

Understanding culture
Culture is often described as the shared, and often unspoken, understandings in a group. Some people say that it is what you know—that everyone else also knows. Culture is a series of lenses that shape what how we see the world around us, and how we perceive, interpret, and where we draw our boundaries. For all of us, it may be possible that there are times when our "cultures" may appear invisible to us—sometimes it is when someone is removed from a culturally familiar environment that they realize some of their cultural boundaries. Still, for all of us, culture shapes our ideas of what is important, influences our attitudes and values, and animates our behaviours.

Cultural identities can include groups which share commonalities of age and generation, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, geographic ties, political affiliation, faith community, language, rural and urban, and much more.

Culture is about much more than food, clothing, and festivals. Instead, all of us belong to multiple cultural communities. And, our collective cultures are shaped by our diverse experiences, interactions, relationships, communities, and identities. As such, culture is fluid, and can change depending on time and context.

Each of us belongs to more than cultural communities—for example, a person is not just their racial identity alone—and so everyone has some experience in transitioning between different cultural boundaries and communities.

As we become more aware of cultural lenses—our own and others' lenses—we recognize that there is no such thing as a culture-free perspective[11].

Understanding intercultural
Because our understanding of culture is broad—our understanding of intercultural must also be broad.

Initially described as "mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures," our description of what intercultural means is now much broader.

We would now define intercultural as the following:
> To become an intercultural church is to respond to the call to live together in intentional ways that engage in mutual recognition, respect, and understanding of difference; and, through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable to access to power, we as the church seek to be fully committed and faithful in our response.

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[11] Adapted from: Michelle LeBaron & Venashri Pillay, "Conflict, Culture, and Images of Change", pgs 14-15. In *Conflict Across Cultures*, Intercultural Press, Boston, 2006.

Appendix C:

Demographic & Statistical Context

When The United Church of Canada first made a commitment to becoming an intercultural church in 2006, the leadership for the intercultural vision was initially given to cultural and linguistic minority communities. As such, to offer context for what intercultural means today, it seems fitting to first initially on Aboriginal, Francophone, racialized, and linguistic minority communities in the United Church.

It is important to note that understanding of "intercultural" is indeed now much broader than racial and linguistic groups only; however, focusing on these communities of difference can help deepen our understanding of the cultural context in which we find ourselves today. It is for illustrative purposes that this report will offer background information on race and language as a lens through which we can better understand the churches attitude towards difference.

Several recent national surveys and statistics have helped to paint a picture of the current Canadian context, and the realities facing Canadian churches.

According to Statistics Canada, the numbers of First Peoples in Canada is growing. The most recent census, from 2006, stated that 1,172,790 people reported Aboriginal identities—which includes First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples. This is an increase from 976,305 Aboriginal peoples in 2001, and 799,010 in 1996[12].

Further, the Aboriginal population is growing much faster than the non-Aboriginal population: "between 1996 and 2006, it increased 45%, nearly six times faster than the 8% rate of growth for the non-Aboriginal population over the same period[13]."

There were also large numbers of Aboriginal peoples present in the church in 1925, at church union:

> By the time of Church Union there were Methodist and Presbyterian Indigenous congregations from Quebec to Vancouver Island, all under the denominational Boards of Home Missions ... approximately sixty-one Indigenous congregations, predominantly Methodist, entered the United Church of Canada in 1925[14].

In addition to growing numbers of First Peoples on the land, the church has been, and continues to be shaped by migration. A World Council of Churches report[15] states the following:

> Migration is a global phenomenon. Today, globally around 250 million people are labelled migrants. A recent BBC report stated that at the start of the 21st century one in every 35 people is an international migrant.

Locally, according to Statistics Canada, new immigrant peoples will account for 22% of the total Canadian population

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[12] Statistics Canada. "The Daily". http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080115/dq080115a-eng.htm, accessed on 8 November, 2011.

[13] Statistics Canada. "The Daily". http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080115/dq080115a-eng.htm, accessed on 8 November, 2011.
[14] Task Group on the Basis of Union and the Crest. 2011.
[15] World Council of Churches. 2010. Report of the Consultation on Mission and Ecclesiology of Migrant Churches. Utrecht, the Netherlands. 16-21 November, 2010, p.1.

in 2017[16]. This means that nearly 1 in 5 persons in Canada is born outside of Canada. The last time immigrant communities comprised such a high percentage of the Canadian population was in the early decades of the 20th century, between 1911 and 1931[17]—the very time in which The United Church of Canada was born.

Another report by Statistics Canada, names that more than 200 ethnic (sic) origins were reported by the total population of Canada in 2006, including Aboriginal peoples[18]. This is contrasted by the reality that in 1901, the Census recorded only 25 different ethnic groups in Canada[19]. These current racialized communities are ethnoculturally diverse, and not just limited to Canada's largest urban centres[20].

All of this takes place in a country which is officially bilingual—French and English—and where Francophone peoples live all over the land. Currently, French is the first official language spoken for nearly 5% of the Canadian-born population—outside of Québec[21].

The United Church of Canada is also ethno-culturally diverse. According to a national recent Identity Survey (which was conducted in 2011), the picture of the United Church's cultural reality is one where there are many languages spoken and used in worshipping communities, many new immigrants, and the majority of respondents trace their history in Canada to only one or two generations past.

Canada has been changing, and continues to change. What is important about this statistical overview are it's implications for church.

For example, the World Council of Churches report[22] offers the following reflection on the growing number of "migrant/multicultural" churches in the global north, including Canada:

> These ecclesial communities invite the established local churches to enrich their understanding of Christian self-identity, ecclesiology and mission, challenging the assumptions of migration of the colonial and post colonial era, and its impact on church and global relationships. The gifts and challenges these migrant/multicultural churches provide demand a re-imagining of mission, evangelism and being church.

What does it mean to be church, in the midst of growing difference among Canadian society and church attendants?

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[16] Statistics Canada. Ethnocultural diversity in Canada: Prospects for 2017 (Accessed June 29, 2011).

[17] Statistics Canada. Ethnocultural diversity in Canada: Prospects for 2017 (Accessed June 29, 2011).

[18] Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census (Accessed June 29, 2011).

[19] Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census (Accessed June 29, 2011).

[20] Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census (Accessed June 29, 2011); Statistics Canada. Ethnocultural diversity in Canada: Prospects for 2017 (Accessed June 29, 2011).

[21] Statistics Canada. Statistical Portrait of the French-Speaking Immigrant Population Outside Quebec (1991 to 2006). Written by René

Houle and Jean-Pierre Corbeil. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-641-x/89-641-x2010001-eng.htm (Accessed November 10, 2011).

[22] World Council of Churches. 2010. Report of the Consultation on Mission and Eccesiology of Migrant Churches. Utretch, the Netherlands. 16-21 November, 2010, p.3.

How are churches responding? The World Council of Churches report reflected on "the sobering necessity to raise awareness and educate both church and society on issues of migration, religious and cultural diversity."

> For the United Church, reflecting the changing Canadian reality is also what is required to be faithful to its "of Canada" identity and certainly faithful to the world's diversity that is God's gift. It is why intercultural work is increasingly important in the life of the United Church and will play such a significant role at this coming meeting of the General Council.[23]

A recent national survey in 2010, called "Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada"[24]—which included more than 300 interdenominational church leaders across Canada—confirmed the need for better engagement of the immigrant reality. This report noted that churches only offer a superficial welcome to immigrant communities. In this same report, it shared that "59% of respondents said their leaders occasionally or never spoke of the benefits that cultural diversity brought to their church congregation"[25].

These statistics help form a basis for our desire to become an intercultural community.

For example, in a paper written on Identity and Mission[26] in 2011, it states that "the United Church will need to find ways of beginning new intercultural congregations to be able to fully engage the changing nature of Canadian society."

And, some in the church are open to this kind of change—in the United Church's Identity Survey: only about half of respondents want to worship in a church where others are mostly like them.

Even with these statistics in mind, it is important to note that intercultural is not the same as ethnicity. Further, becoming an intercultural church is broader than a sole focus on racial identity, ethno-cultural communities, and immigration; however, this remains an important grounding and aspect of what it means to create intercultural communities.

It is also interesting to note, however, that for The United Church of Canada, some of these realities are not new. For example, in 1972, the Executive of the Division of Mission in Canada in its September meeting established a Task Force on Immigration and Minority Ministries. (Notably, this is one year after Canada officially became a multicultural country.) In 1976, British Columbia Conference established a Task Force on Ethnic Minority Ministries. From 1989-1990, The United Church's mission theme was "Multicultural Canada", and the *Mandate* special edition in 1989 had as its theme "Canada's Cultural Mosaic".

In terms of other degrees of difference within the church, some insights could be offered around diverse communities—such as

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[23] Gregersen, Bruce, 2011. "Identity and Mission", p. 4.
[24] World Vision Canada, 2010. "Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada".
[25] World Vision Canada, 2010. "Beyond the Welcome: Churches Responding to the Immigrant Reality in Canada", p. 27.

[26] Gregersen, Bruce, 2011. "Identity and Mission", p. 3.

communities including people who are Deaf, or who represent diverse social classes, or people with disabilities.

For example, in 2011, The United Church of Canada conducted a national survey of United Church members. Of those who responded to the church's Identity Survey, 5.3% stated that they are a person living with a disability. The survey went onto to state that people with a disability in the United Church are less comfortable participating in events outside of regular worship services and that their involvement has tended to decrease recently more than others. Persons with a disability also express discomfort with expressing opinions to others in United Church; people living with disabilities are often on the margins of church life.

From the period of the early 1970s to present, there have been many meetings and reports on immigration, cultural difference, and diversity. Yet, these important moments in the church have not yet resulted in church-wide transformation. The church has been aware, but has not yet taken enough action in this area of ministry.

Hence, the purpose of this report is to offer specific policy direction around what it means for The United Church of Canada to become an intercultural community. Many of the directions are focused at a national, Conference and presbytery level.

Appendix D:

The Circle Process
As a task group the way we did the 'circle process' evolved during the course of our meetings together. The circle was chosen as the meeting format because it not only lends itself readily to working amid diversity it is also a beautiful tool that enables those who participate in it to foster deeper relationships with others and self. By its nature, in the circle, all persons are equal, each has a voice (even in making the choice to pass or not be heard at a particular time gives the 'speaker' a sense of empowerment and belonging), and each is valued as an individual with a contribution to make to the whole.

As a tool, the circle creates a safe space (sacred space) where persons can share (open up) without fear of being interrupted or put down. In such an atmosphere participants learn to respect others, respect what they have to say, (in turn) each learns what they have to say is valued thus creating a sense of trust and security.

The circle is especially good for dealing with contentious issues because it creates a very respectful atmosphere in which the likely hood of getting back and forth argument and speakers vying to make points heard is minimized – ideally not engaged in.

Visually the circle invokes a sense of communion, equality, value, and common purpose amongst those gathered.

The essential/basic elements that undergirded our work circle were:
- The 'circle process'

- Our covenant
- Intercultural Conflict Resolution Process

The basic format for the 'circle process' for members of the task group went thus:
- Gathering
- Welcome/Worship
- Renewal of Covenant
- Check in
- Overview of Meeting Agenda
- Agenda items – task group work
- (from time to time we broke from the circle to work in smaller groups – which then reported back to the whole)
- Worship

The 'circle process' used by the task group saw members gather around a worship centre (prepared to celebrate the liturgical season or predominant meeting theme). The meeting was in the context of worship with worship at the beginning and end of each day.

Following words of welcome task group members engaged in Worship – prepared by group members around the season or theme incorporating visuals, language, practices from the varying cultural backgrounds

Before the invitation to 'check in' (a way for members to enter into 'circle space' by sharing something of what they brought to the meeting with them) the covenant (our agreement of how we would work together) was renewed – sometimes by individuals reading separate pieces – sometimes in unison. During 'check in' as well as during work times varying ways to speak in the circle were utilized – sometimes moving

clockwise – other times counter clockwise; sometimes using the technique of mutual-invitation,[i] at other times using a 'pop-corn' technique.[ii] Whichever technique was used to talk in the circle care was taken that only one person speaks while all others listen (there was no dialogue as in ordinary conversation). Silence was respected "…leaving room for Spirit, who has a different sense of time…"[iii]

After all had had an opportunity to 'check in' the Agenda for the meeting was reviewed with adjustments made where needed. Here persons in the circle had opportunity for input using the same respectful ways of communicating as described above.

Work in the circle was carried out in like manner. If a decision was required members moved around the circle as many times as necessary for consensus.

When conflict arose in the circle techniques of intercultural conflict resolution were invoked – a time of learning as well as a time of restoration of relationship.

As the model for meeting used by The Intercultural Task Group the circle became a place of gathering, a place of sharing joy and sorrow, a place of work, a place of healing, a place of forming deep bonds of friendship in an intercultural context.

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[i] A technique in which one speaker then invites another to speak
[ii] A technique where persons speak one after another in no particular order in the circle – only when no other person is speaking
[iii] From Covenant for the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries