

Title: BOARD AND OFFICE OF VOCATION ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Theological Grounding

Words taken from Holy Scripture remind us that

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

The tenets contained in those verses undergird the work that is reflected in this report.

The Board of Vocation is the elected body that oversees the Office of Vocation, honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry. The Office of Vocation ensures faithful, well-equipped, and effective ministry personnel, where inquirers are encouraged, candidates for vocational ministry grow in learning and competency and where ministry personnel vocation is nurtured and supported throughout their active service, and where allegations of ministry personnel misconduct are dealt with quickly and fairly and action taken for the well-being of ministry personnel and communities of faith. The Board and Office of Vocation are critical and valuable components of our strategy to call up, form, and support deep, bold, and daring ministry leadership in our denomination.

This report will begin its reflection with the place and work of the Board of Vocation in the big picture that is our denomination and wend its way through the various pieces of the vocational experience which come together under its purview.

STRATEGIC PLAN

During the year under review, the Strategic Plan was taking shape in a very methodical way, with some members of our staff team being very involved in the initial planning and drafting processes. The Office of Vocation is expected to be fully engaged with this plan primarily through the Leadership Objective, paying particular attention to recruiting, preparing and mentoring ministry personnel for leadership of the new communities of faith which will ultimately be established and those that are being revitalized for ministry in the 2020s.

As preparations were made to actualize the plan in January 2023, it was important to ensure that the regular operational aspects of the Office of Vocation remained unaffected. Specific members of the staff team were asked to be activity leads for various points of the Leadership initiative. Each activity lead identified pieces of the work which could be paused, while members of the team who were not asked to be activity leads assumed some of the responsibilities which would need to be ongoing.

STAFF

The staff team which responded in very positive ways to the various asks of the Strategic Plan was also one that had seen significant changes during the year. The team that started the year in January looked very different from the one which ended the year in December. The Revd. Dr. Jenny Stephens, who was responsible for taking a concept and bringing the Office of Vocation into being, retired from this work at the end of April 2022. On behalf of the entire United Church of Canada, she was honoured by the Board of Vocation and by the General Council Office, even as the loss of her tremendous knowledge base and skill sets were acknowledged.

In addition to a new Team Lead, there were three new vocational ministers, two new program assistants, and a new program coordinator appointed to the team. There were significant learning curves which needed to be navigated by each of these team members, who joined at different times and required particular supports in order to transition into their roles. At the same time one member was on restorative care for several months. The role was covered by team members. In September the new staff team benefitted from being together over a week-end for an in-person gathering which was a time of reflection, learning and connection.

GENERAL COUNCIL 44

The changes experienced at the staff level were replicated on the level of the elected members as the 44th General Council culminated in the summer of 2022. Those who had served at the pleasure of the 43rd General Council (the longest one in the history of The United Church of Canada) had come to the end of their first term. Some chose to end their time of service to those bodies at that time. The Board of Vocation received three new members, while the boards and committees of the Board of Vocation also received new members according to their needs, and the availability of volunteers.

Some boards and committees expressed the need for an increase in the number of people serving in the roles. With this information the Nominations Committee set to work, and many of the wish lists were able to be filled.

The 44th General Council directed that a task group of the Theology Inter-Church Interfaith Committee and the Board of Vocation be struck to

“review the Statement on Ministry (2012) in the context of the 2020s and to more fully develop the understandings of the priesthood of all believers as it relates, in particular, to the recovered roles of lay ministry in the church; and recommend to the 45th General Council any proposed revisions.”

BOARD OF VOCATION

In September the Board of Vocation hosted an in-person meeting of all its boards and committees. The meeting was held over four days in Toronto, and provided an opportunity for relationship building as well as training. New members learnt about the work in which they would become engaged, while everyone was exposed to the ways their work was integral to the whole of the Office of Vocation mandate and linked to the strategic plan. They received an introduction to the Grandmothers’ Circle, participated in a workshop on Equity, Diversity and Anti-oppression, all while being grounded in very meaningful theological reflections.

The gathering was privileged to have one such reflection led by our newly minted (at the time) Moderator, the Rt. Revd. Carmen Landsdowne. The reminder was given to be intentional and mindful as we continued to walk with our Indigenous Siblings, as we live in to the parallel pathways, and strongly support the evolution of the Indigenous Office of Vocation.

This was an invaluable opportunity for new staff members to interact with their elected members along with colleagues from other units in the General Council Office. While candidacy boards will have some in-person meetings during this triennium, in particular to meet, assess, and support new inquirers and candidates, for the most part their work will be done remotely in consideration of the environmental impact of travel and the containment of expenses.

The Board continues to meet quarterly, over two days, virtually. Attention is given to worship and prayerful reflection in consideration of matters before it and in decision-making.

INDIGENOUS OFFICE OF VOCATION

The first Call to the Church received by the 43rd General Council calls for:

- A. The establishment of an Indigenous office or department within the Office of Vocation so that ministry personnel in our communities have services provided by people who are knowledgeable of Indigenous ways of being and working,
- B. That this office or department have an advisory group that is engaged in the development of Indigenous ministry policy.

Subsequent calls also relate to the Office of Vocation: formation to be grounded in a trauma-informed approach; ministry placements options outside of the church context; the establishment of an Indigenous Testamur; and decision making which is highly consultative of Indigenous Communities of Faith.

Relationships and supports within the Board of Vocation with the Indigenous Office of Vocation over the last four years have grown. We have learned that there is much more work around reconciliation and right relations that needs to be done in order for the Board of Vocation to be effective in supporting the Indigenous Office of Vocation.

Specifically, the understanding of the complexity of Indigenous Identity/spirituality needs more than an oral understanding. Some of the challenges involved in the development of resources needed by the Indigenous Church include:

1. Acknowledgement by non-Indigenous staff and elected members that the existing systems are built upon the non-Indigenous systems that have had almost 100 years to develop with minimal Indigenous input, and cannot be simply transferred laterally.
2. Communities of Faith have been slow to engage the cultural shift that will enable reconciliation. Currently elected members/leaders feel unprepared to support the needs of the Indigenous Church, in particular the Indigenous Office of Vocation.
3. The Board of Vocation and the National Indigenous Council have not yet had the opportunity to meet or discuss their own relationship.
4. The adoption of the National Indigenous Council proposal at GC 44 will affect the accountability and, potentially, the structure of the Indigenous Office of Vocation in the future.

Parallel Path

The Parallel path is a teaching that acknowledges the co-existence of our Christian faith and Indigenous spirituality. It has been identified and agreed that this teaching needs to be established as a cornerstone of our relationship. Once established, this teaching will provide the core foundation and framework upon which we can build:

1. Training for non-Indigenous Ministers that serve the Indigenous Church (Calls to the Church)
2. A pathway for identifying and building opportunities for shared learnings for training resources while supporting the self-determination of the Indigenous Church.
3. This work to be led by the Grandmothers' Circle, with support from the Vocational Minister.

Indigenous Candidacy Board and Grandmothers' Circle

In 2022, The Indigenous Candidacy Board went through a transition with the membership as several folks left the Board (including our new Moderator) and new folks joined. During the late summer and early Fall, the Grandmothers' Circle and the Candidacy Board worked together to develop a proposal that was centred around the needs of Indigenous Leadership within the Indigenous Church. The following were identified:

- There are significant gaps in supporting Indigenous leadership, especially around recruitment as there is an absence/disconnect of Regional Council structure and supports for many rural Indigenous Communities.
- The conversation about the Medicine Bundle, between the National Indigenous Elders Council and the National Indigenous Council, that was started in 2020 needs to be re-engaged.

The proposal was presented in November to both Councils.

In addition, there were Gatherings of the Indigenous Ministers in three provinces – Ontario, Manitoba and BC. These offered

- Support to the Candidates and Ministers as they dealt with the Impact of the Unmarked Graves at Residential Schools by having a healing Circle.
- Opportunities for mandatory Boundaries training to be offered in person, using Indigenous Traditional Knowledge.

CANDIDACY PATHWAY

The formation of ministry personnel is guided by six candidacy boards encompassing all of the regions across the Church (one of which also serves all Francophones pursuing ministry formation) and one national Indigenous Candidacy Board.

Each board is comprised of at least 12 elected members, and one staff person. As time has passed, the staff who resource these boards have found that they are not simply representing a denominational office, but are in fact integrally engaged in the vocational journey of ministers.

At the end of December 2022, there were 213 candidates for ministry in the Candidacy Pathway, being guided by the seven Candidacy Boards and the associated Vocational Ministers.

Table 1: Candidacy Boards Across the Country

CANDIDACY BOARD	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES
Indigenous CB	14	14
Atlantic CB	16	33
Quebec and Eastern Ontario CB	37	35
Mountain CB	28	41
North and Central Ontario CB	57	28
Prairie CB	40	30
Southwestern Ontario CB	30	32
TOTAL NUMBER	222	213

The emerging trends that have been noticed across the Boards are:

- Strong preference for in-person interviews as opposed to virtual events.
- More retired people with pensions becoming candidates.
- Majority of candidates in the ordained ministry stream.
- Twenty percent of the work of the Quebec & East Ontario Candidacy Board being done in French.
- Increased diversity among candidates, particularly in North & Central Ontario Candidacy Board.

ADMISSION

The Board of Vocation acted on concerns raised by the Admission Board in July 2021, as they reviewed the statistics around the number of ministers who were approved for search. At the time, 49 ministers were approved and in search, 41 of whom were racialized. By September, when the Board of Vocation met with the Admission Board, 3 of the 41 racialized ministers had been offered appointments, while ALL of the 8 white ministers had found appointments.

After the meeting with the Admission Board, and receiving a recommendation about a way forward, the Board of Vocation appointed the Admission Matching Committee. That committee has been working feverishly, and has garnered interest and tangible support from the Pastoral Relations Ministers in the regional councils, who are critical partners in this work. Further details about this part of the work can be found in the Appendix to this report.

ONGOING VOCATIONAL SUPPORT, FORMATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

An integral part of the vision of an Office of Vocation, coming out of the extensive studies done over the last 18 years, beginning with the Isolation in Ministry Study, was the need for ongoing support, formation, and development of vocation and call. With this in mind, after the thrust to establish the Office and its necessary protocols, a change in nomenclature from “Office of Vocation Ministers” to “Vocational Ministers” has been introduced. The Office of Vocation is not just about formation and discipline, but, equally important, continued formation and maturation as faithful, well-equipped, and effective ministry personnel through the full arc of ministry service. The vocational ministers engage ministry personnel on matters of continuing education and sabbatical plans, discernment regarding changes in pastoral relationships, support in re-animating call, and many other aspects of the evolution of a dynamic, life-long call to vocational ministry. This, coupled with the role of regional councils in supporting the health, joy and excellence in ministry practice, will keep our ministry personnel leadership vital and engaged. In addition the Standards for Accreditation Committee and Board of Vocation are actively developing standards for continuing education and for mandatory training which will further enhance support for vocational development.

ENHANCING EFFECTIVENESS, OVERSIGHT AND DISCIPLINE OF MINISTRY PERSONNEL

The culture shift caused by the ‘split episcopacy’, which required the Office of Vocation to focus on responding to formal concerns and the regional councils to focus on collegiality has been occurring, although the journey is sometimes challenging. Over the past year, there has been a focus on intentionally consulting with regional councils through an increased number of case conferences during the informal phases of oversight and discipline proceedings.

As the response committee continues its work there is recognition of the need for more trained investigators, reviewers and consultants, as some people have stepped away from the work, for a variety of reasons.

The remedial committee noted that of the 15 cases processed over the course of the year, nine were ministers who had already served for 20 years or more.

Table 2: Remedial Committee 2022

ITEM	NUMBER
New Cases 2022	7
Carried Over from 2021	8
Total case load	15
Effectiveness Support Committees	7

Some of the themes which arose out of the remedial work were:

- isolation in ministry practice,
- emotional intelligence (lack of self-awareness and relationship management skills),
- recognizing boundaries and
- power dynamics.

With this knowledge, efforts are being made to have these skills developed earlier in the vocational life of ministry personnel.

CHURCHHUB

Concurrent with the need for the Office of Vocation to gather both data and documents about all ministry personnel and candidates into one place, was the broader decision by the General Council Office Information Technology (IT) Steering Group to consolidate and update the more than 30 databases used in the General Council system. Ministry personnel documentation was scattered across ninety-some presbyteries, twelve Conferences, one Circle, and the General Council Office. Consolidation of documentation has been a monumental but critical

undertaking. It allows for consistency of record keeping, timely and accurate responses to queries and investigations.

In addition, the General Council directed action around environmental sustainability, including moving away from paper files. Development of electronic means for storage of documents and a database began in 2017 prompted in part by the move from two and a half floors to one at the General Council Office. Paper personnel files no longer exist. Files are stored in SharePoint and the database is in Dynamics, both part of the MS Office 365 Cloud suite.

The database is accessed through the portal, which is used by various groups including now all the boards and committees, called ChurchHub. State of the art security protects the information and controls who has access to what information.

Table 3: ChurchHub Use 2022

Record of Call/Appointment Completed	1337
Annual Declarations completed	2000
Ministers requested to be approved for search	889
Communities of Faith profiles posted	361
Total number of ministers in calls/appointments	1471

The online Record of Call/Appointment form replaces the paper PR450 forms (4 pages) that were used until 2020. Each of these online forms is saved electronically in the Private Documents folders in ChurchHub for each of the minister and the Community of Faith, as well as in the ministry personnel files in the Office of Vocation Pastoral Relations (OVPR) Sharepoint library.

The use of online forms has significantly decreased errors in minimum salary numbers at time of appointment or call as all information on the minister (years of service, salary category) and on the Community of Faith (regional Cost Of Living group) is gathered directly from Dynamics and Sharepoint and not entered manually by any participant. The Regional pastoral relations staff play an important role in reviewing the details on each form and approving them via ChurchHub.

While ChurchHub is associated with the Office of Vocation, it is far broader in its application. The complicated development, roll out and slow uptake in the constituency flags how large a culture shift this is. For the Office of Vocation, ChurchHub allows ministry personnel to file their annual declaration regarding criminal charges and take responsibility for updating their mandatory training. Behind the scenes the data and documents are accessible, as required by role, to Office of Vocation staff and appropriate regional council staff.

In 2022, approximately 2000 ministers completed their annual declarations via ChurchHub.

When ministers made the request via ChurchHub to be approved as eligible to seek calls or (re)appointments, Vocational Ministers confirmed that ministers were “On the Registry” of accredited ministers (up to date Annual Declaration and mandatory trainings and no outstanding OV orders). Once approved, the ministers’ names were included on the Available Ministers list.

When Communities of Faith positions were submitted via ChurchHub, the Regional pastoral relations staff was notified by email. They then reviewed and approved the Community of Faith profile and position descriptions. Once approved the position/profile is added to the list of Available Positions on ChurchHub and can be viewed by approved/available ministers.

ChurchHub functionality continues to be developed and improved for purposes of the Office of Vocation. It is also expanding to include statistics and assessments, annual reports, and a PAR module. In the future Regional Council staff will have access to statistical and assessment information for their communities of faith. ChurchHub is in continuous improvement as users, ministry personnel and community of faith leaders, identify glitches and request enhancements.

CONCLUSION

The work summarized in this document, and detailed in the appendix, was realized through the herculean efforts of very capable elected members, an indomitable staff team, engaged consultants, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Even as we continue the cultural transition from 90-some presbyteries, 12 Conferences, and one Circle with 1,500 volunteers holding and exercising responsibilities for this work, we are excited as 150 volunteer appointed members and 14 staff to move forward with the whole Church as the strategic plan is operationalized.

Words from one of our Creeds remind us that

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.

For the sake of the world,

God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.

*In the church, some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
both lay and ordered;*

some witness to the good news;

some uphold the art of worship;

some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;

some build up the community of wisdom;

some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.

To embody God’s love in the world,

*the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
of all believers.*

A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada (2006)

May it be so.