

## ANTI-RACISM AND EQUITY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Origin: General Secretary, General Council

### Executive Summary

The United Church's focused work on anti-racism includes: anti-racism education and education for congregational leaders, anti-racism in theology, leadership opportunities for Indigenous and racialized youth, working towards creating a culture shift, advocacy for racial equity, and anti-racism in governance. The broader work on equity includes: the pastoral relations equity research project, Leadership Counts, and a full participation audit for members of national committees. These areas are only some of the national work that has been taking place in the area of anti-racism and equity in recent years, and these are outlined in the report that follows.

### Background and Context

The United Church's ongoing work on anti-racism and its work on equity are interrelated. The focused work on anti-racism is governed by the church's national [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#), which has had life from 2022-2025. The anti-racism action plan—which pre-dated the church's Strategic Plan—now has initiatives that have since been integrated into the church's overall Strategic Plan's activities.

The church's anti-racism work is also rooted in the church's anti-racism policy, [That All May Be One](#) (from the year 2000); the adoption of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as the framework for reconciliation (from the year 2016); the Indigenous Caretakers' [Calls to the Church](#) (from the year 2018); the church's [commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination](#) (from the year 2020) our theological groundings; and our call to being Deep, Bold, and Daring as we continue our journey towards becoming an anti-racist church.

The broader work on equity is governed by the church's many [commitments to equity and self-determination](#) that have been made over the years.

The annual Anti-Racism and Equity Accountability reports to General Council 44, [the report in October 2023](#) ([and that report's appendix](#)) as well as the [report in October 2024](#) all offer more details of specific activities, initiatives, programs, and strategic directions that have been taking place.

This report is taking a forward-looking approach and considering the work that will be taking place in the future—it is not an exhaustive listing of the initiatives that have taken place over the past three years.

## Anti-Racism Education

Over the past few years, the educational focus has been on engaging congregational leaders to equip them with tools for transformation and local anti-racist action. This has been engaged through programs and initiatives, such as the:

- “Wait, Is This Racist?” online community which engaged a variety of cross-country congregational teams in a cohort model of learning and engagement over 13 months,
- education and action programs such as the [40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism](#),
- opportunities for engagement with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through “Placing Ourselves in Colonialism” under the co-leadership of one of the Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animators and the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead,
- [a series of videos](#) that explore what it means to become an anti-racist church,
- an updated collective of [anti-racist educational programs](#) available through CHURCHx, and
- ready-made resources, such as the “[I Am a Changemaker: Teaching Anti-Racism with Children](#)” church school curriculum.

Many have been very well received. For example, 74% of respondents to the evaluation of the survey about the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism rated the overall program as excellent or very good. Feedback and evaluations in all anti-racism education initiatives have been showing that the focus on impact and action, as well as developing contextual responses to racism, is a direction to continue moving into the future.

In one area, for example, people named on their evaluation that after engaging in a particular anti-racism education program, they took the following actions: education and awareness efforts, community engagement, advocacy, and personal reflection and change. Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing learning and sharing their knowledge with others. The evaluation of the 2024 program for the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism showed that the program influenced participants’ actions and behaviour, the program fostered community and relationship building, and participants also shared their learnings and advocated for change within their communities. There are now more than 1110 subscribers to the 40 Days newsletter, and this number continues to grow. The recent evaluation surveys of the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism have been showing that the program is reaching new audiences for education and impact.

People have shared that there tends to be fairly broad support for the church’s work on becoming an anti-racist denomination, nationally and locally. The challenge, however, is going beyond naming a surface-level statement and continuing to make sustained structural change locally; this is too often when there is resistance to change in congregations and when the commitment may wane.

This, however, is part of our church’s work on Daring Justice, and it is grounded in Bold Discipleship; it is faith and action together. An ongoing focus moving forward will be to

continue to equip leaders for local congregational change and creating plans of action that can have local and contextual impact. A key component of this will be continuing to clearly name the theological basis for this work.

### **Anti-Racist Theologies And Faculty Engagement**

A current initiative on anti-racist theologies, which also aims to strengthen congregational leadership, includes engagement with several faculty from United Church theological schools. A group of faculty from several United Church theological schools have been meeting to continue their work on anti-racist theologies and decolonial theologies, ways to collaborate, and strengthen their work. This group usually meets together online and has also met together in-person twice; most recently in December 2024. Many of the faculty were already deeply engaged in anti-racism and anti-oppression in their own schools; the faculty network and gathering offers space for support in doing this challenging work. It engages also the sharing of resources and ideas.

The impact of the anti-racism faculty gathering is on shaping current and future generations of ministry personnel, who have clearer understandings of anti-racist theologies and how to continue to integrate it into their ministry practices—with anti-racism as a lens. The desired impact is on emerging ministry personnel as well as local ministries, through the leaders.

This work is already future-oriented; additional future plans include the possibilities for a collaborative course, resource development, and experiential learning. This engagement is Deep Spirituality and is grounded in anti-racism analysis.

Ecumenically, there is also engagement on anti-racist theologies. The Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff at the General Council Office also serves as the Moderator of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) global Reference Group on Overcoming Racism and Racial Discrimination. This reference group is also furthering its work on theological and biblical foundations for anti-racist work and hopes to create a publication for churches.

### **Indigenous and Racialized Youth Leadership**

Under the co-leadership of the Youth Leadership Coordinator in the Indigenous Ministries and Justice Unit and the Growth Coordinator for Diasporic and Intercultural Communities, the Indigenous and Racialized Youth leadership program has continued to flourish. This has been an important space to continue to build the capacity of youth and young adults to offer leadership, to provide an important space of belonging for Indigenous and racialized youth, to sharpen their understandings of racial dynamics, and to reflect on engaging the church. It is also a key space for the youth to connect, learn, and continue to build a stronger sense of their own cultural identities and spiritual lives individually and in community, in a safer space. Running since 2021, some of the past youth participants are already offering now leadership with national and global church programs.

A 19-year-old Indigenous youth shared this about their experience at the 2024 Indigenous and Racialized Youth Retreat: “I gained more insights about cultural diversity. Even though we experienced the same things as Indigenous and Racialized peoples, our stories are different. And that shows how rich and great our strengths are. Together, I feel we were able to connect with each other for the week and it was lovely because we were able to embrace who we were without feeling ashamed or having to experience the barriers we do in our everyday lives”.

A [series of short videos](#) from past participants describes their experiences in 2024.

The focus of this program has been on the emerging leadership from the cohorts of youth participants, since this focus began in 2021. Currently, the focus has been to create spaces for youth leadership training, and for Indigenous and racialized youth to experience being in a leadership position.

Moving forward, the next phase of work will encourage Indigenous and racialized youth to also work towards claiming space in predominantly White spaces across the church, while also maintaining a separate for identity and group formation. This includes several racialized youth who have expressed interest in pursuing theological education. This youth program is linked to both Leadership and Growth, as well as our commitments to Daring Justice.

In addition, an exciting Centennial project is proposed as a Growth initiative. It will involve a youth gathering for racialized youth who are involved in church planting activities. At least 27 church plant locations will be engaged in this leadership and growth opportunity.

### **Systems and Culture Change**

Following up on our church’s commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination, the church signed onto a framework with [Anti-Racist Cooperation](#). The Anti-Racist Cooperation framework was an initiative of Cooperation Canada, an umbrella organization of non-profit organizations of which the United Church is a member.

This framework invited annual self-assessments by organizations, and it particularly focused on the areas of communications, Human Resources and volunteer management, as well as fundraising practices. After completing the self-assessments, Cooperation Canada created a compiled report, which offered a mirror back to the people and organizations who completed the survey; through this, organizations were able to notice areas of strength as well as areas for improvement. In some areas of the General Council Office, the self-assessment showed that there are already some areas that we are doing very well, and there are some areas for improvement.

After a few years of self-assessment with staff, in 2025 some parts of the General Council Office were engaged in an intentional racial equity audit with an external consultant. In the work of racial equity, there is always room for continued change and improvement. It is important to continue to build on our strengths, and work towards systems change. A racial equity audit can

help the church to identify strengths, areas of improvement, and give staff and staffing units clear ideas for the continued anti-racist journey ahead.

The audit has focused on two areas in the General Council Office, that were already part of the earlier self-assessments: Communications and Human Resources. In addition, the United Church Foundation—which is a separate organization from the General Council Office—also collaborated and actively participated in the racial equity audit process. Two reports are being generated from the audit—one for the General Council Office and one for the United Church Foundation—which will include background and recommendations. These recommendations will help to guide the work on systemic change moving forward.

### **Advocacy On Racial Equity**

There is a recognition that some of our church's recent work on racial equity advocacy has been internal to the United Church: working on systems and structures within the church as well as empowering church members to speak and take local actions for racial justice.

This has been and will continue to be an important facet of our church's anti-racism work; it is consistent with one of the four calls in the anti-racism policy statement *That All May Be One*: "Acting justly by endeavouring to act justly within its own structures, courts, policies and practice. We realize we need to address systemic racism and work for just relationships within our body". There is still considerable work to continue in working within the church to challenge systemic racism and racial exclusion.

In addition to engaging within our church, however, our future orientation for advocacy will also become more outward facing. This too is consistent another one of the calls in our anti-racism policy statement, and which names: "Speaking to the world by supporting anti-racism work within broader society. As Christians, we are called to uphold justice for all God's people and live out the gospel in the world of legislation, regulations, policy and practice and media." One example that was already noted, and growing area for advocacy is related to immigration policies and racialized ministry personnel, who are being admitted to The United Church of Canada from other countries.

### **Anti-Racism And Governance**

Nationally, the church's work on anti-racism has been guided by a committee of national volunteers called the Anti-Racism Common Table. This diverse committee—composed of Indigenous, non-Indigenous racialized, and White peoples—who all hold multiple intersecting identities have offered feedback on resources and the overall church's [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#).

Moving forward, there will be a new national committee structure after General Council 45 to continue to guide the church's national anti-racism work. Separately, and in addition to the anti-racism committee, there is also the possibility for creating an additional national group of volunteers who would focus on the broader work of equity and anti-oppression.

**Pastoral Relations Equity Research Project**

The [pastoral relations equity research project](#) is one example of focused work on equity and anti-oppression with the experiences of ministry personnel.

This national research project launched January 2022 and ran until April 2023. It is interrelated with two other research and statistical projects exploring equity for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada: Leadership Counts and the Total Compensation Review Task Group report.

One part of the executive summary of the research report noted that: "...many people experience our church's ethos of justice and equality as aspiration rather than lived reality. Racism, ableism, heterosexism, sexism, cissexism, and other forms of oppression continue to exist in The United Church of Canada. And the people best able to articulate how this impacts their ministries and pastoral relationships are those who live the experiences. So those are the people whose stories this research project sought."

The detailed report from that research project is available as a [full report](#) and as an [executive summary](#). The report focused on ministry personnel, and so currently, follow up from the report findings are taking place within the Office of Vocation in consultation with the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead.

**Leadership Counts**

This project, which began in November 2021, is the voluntary identity survey of ministry personnel, staff, and national committee members. It is rooted in commitments that the church has made to equity, diversity, and anti-oppression. This [short video](#) describes the project.

A [mid-term report](#) described the progress up to November 2023, and an updated report will soon be available.

These past few years were important in order to gather baseline data on the equity identities who are among the church's ministry personnel and who are serving on national committees. Moving forward, the focus will be helping the church to reflect on and work on barriers that are affecting the full participation of peoples, and to develop strategies that work to address those barriers. This will be an important piece of work moving forward.

**Full Participation Audit On National Committees**

In addition to the data collected about the identity of some of the church's leadership, the people who were serving on national committees were also invited to engage in an anonymous full participation audit. This audit is work that was a collaborative effort between Member Engagement and the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead.

This audit was designed to measure seven markers of participation: wholeness; individuality and collective/communal voice; valuing; interculturally engaging; accessible and barrier-free; choice; and leadership. People's individual responses were also cross-referenced with their identities.

For each of these markers, committee members rated their experiences of participation highly. In addition, the audit reflects that many committees are intentionally working to integrate commitments to equity, diversity and anti-oppression in their ongoing work.

Exploring deeper into the findings of the full participant audit: most respondents feel a strong sense of belonging (87%) and that their opinions are valued (93%), but there are concerns about discomfort discussing personal identities (11%) and being asked to represent their identity groups (12%).

Additionally, respondents generally feel their identities are valued within the group, with the highest levels of perceived value for primary language (91%) and position as ministry personnel or layperson (88%). However, there are areas where some respondents feel less valued, particularly regarding their racial and/or Indigenous identity (6%) and sexual orientation (8%).

The barriers that people are most struggling with in committee work include language barriers, technological barriers, and scheduling challenges.

Continuing to enhance full participation will be an important facet of committee orientation and support in this coming triennium.

### **Concluding Words**

The church's commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination, and the ongoing commitments to equity, are long-term commitments. There has been some positive progress in these areas, however, there is still considerable work to continue to move forward as a church. As our anti-racism policy notes, the journey towards anti-racism is a continuous effort. Collectively and individually, we continue our faithful journeys towards equity and bold belonging.