

## **THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA**

### **MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE MINUTES**

**May 12-13, 2023**

The 44th General Council Executive of The United Church of Canada met by video-conference on Friday, May 12 and Saturday, May 13, 2023. The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, presided.

#### **Attendance**

Voting Members: Mitchell Anderson, Michael Blair, Richard Bott, Teresa Burnett Cole, Michael Caveney, M Chorney, Samuel Vauvert Dansokho, Paul Douglas Walfall, Catherine Glover, Wilson Gonese, Carmen Lansdowne, David Leyton-Brown, Kit Loewen, Jane McDonald, Arlyce Schiebout, Thea Sheridan-Jonah

Corresponding: Diane Bosman, Sarah Charters, Treena Duncan, Alan Hall, Adele Halliday, Peter Hartmans, Éric Hébert-Daly, Jennifer Henry, Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Harry Li, Lori-Ann Livingston, Faith March-MacCuish, Erik Mathiesen, Shannon McCarthy, Japhet Ndhlovu, Murray Pruden

Regrets: Kathy Brett

Guests: Beth Baskin, Julian Munroe

#### **Friday, May 12, 2023**

#### **Welcome**

The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, and General Secretary, Michael Blair, welcomed those gathered for this meeting of the Executive, particularly David Leyton-Brown, who was attending as a newly-elected member of the Executive. The Moderator offered congratulations to the General Secretary, who was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity from Vancouver School of Theology; to the Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole, who received her Doctorate of Liturgical Studies from Victoria University, Toronto; and to Jennifer Henry, Executive Minister for Organizational Development and Strategy, who received her Diploma in Denominational Studies from the Vancouver School of Theology, and will be ordained on May 28, 2023.

The Moderator briefly reviewed the method of voting to be used for this meeting, and reminded members regarding the use of blue and orange cards to help determine whether the group had reached general consensus on a topic or whether more conversation was needed prior to decision-making.

#### **Constituting the Meeting**

The Moderator constituted the meeting in French and English.

"Au nom de Notre Seigneur, Jésus-Christ, seul chef souverain de l'Église, et par l'autorité qui m'a été conférée par le quarante-quatrième Conseil général, I hereby declare this meeting of the Executive of the General Council to be in session for the work that may properly be brought before it to the glory of God."

### **Territory Acknowledgement**

Thea Sheridan-Jonah led the Executive in the territory acknowledgement. As those gathered for the meeting indicated in the chat which traditional lands they were on, Thea spoke of various recent dates important in the understanding of reconciliation. She noted that May 5th had been Red Dress Day: a day to remember, acknowledge, and act for justice for missing and murdered Indigenous people in Canada. She particularly noted this day in contrast to the coronation of King Charles which took place the following day, and celebrated the monarchy and by extension the colonial institution which has caused so much harm. May 10th was Bear Witness Day, which honours the memory of Jordan River Anderson through the full and proper implementation of Jordan's Principle, which ensures all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. In closing Thea encouraged the Executive to continue reflecting and contextualizing our work as we strive to be a justice seeking and decolonizing church.

### **Agenda Overview**

The Business Planning Committee chairperson, Kit Loewen, reported the regrets for the meeting – Kathy Brett was attending a regional annual meeting, Jane McDonald would be joining the meeting later in the day, and Teresa Burnett-Cole and Wilson Gonese were not able to be present until Saturday. Kit also briefly outlined the agenda which was structured to enable the Executive to engage in deep discussions while staying focused on their fiduciary, strategic and generative responsibilities (*Appendix I*). This was the third meeting using this format. Kit reminded those present to try to keep their cameras on as much as possible to signal engagement during the meeting.

### **Equity Commitments and Lenses**

The equity support team for this meeting was introduced: M Chorney, Wilson Gonese, and Arlyce Schiebout, with staff support from Adele Halliday, Anti-Racism and Equity Lead. The Equity Aspirations were shared onscreen throughout the meeting. M indicated how to reach the team for any issues or questions. There were set times during the meeting for those gathered to consider how the group was attending to the equity commitments.

### **Gathering Worship**

The Moderator led the Executive in opening worship, beginning with the Holy Manners litany, and reflecting on Job 37:1–13. The Moderator also offered prayers for various members of the Executive, as well as regional concerns and joys which had been brought to her attention.

## **GS 26 Procedural and Consent (Appendix II)**

The Moderator invited the General Secretary to introduce the opening motion. The General Secretary briefly outlined the various items contained in *GS 26 Procedural and Consent*.

### **Motion: Michael Blair/Kit Loewen**

**2023-05-12-031**

That the General Council Executive:

1. Approve the [minutes](#) of the General Council Executive meeting held February 10-11, 2023.
2. Receive for information any [correspondence](#) to the General Council Executive received since the last meeting of the Executive (sent to the Executive by email and found online).
3. Adopt the agenda for this meeting as circulated, with any changes which may be necessary as the meeting evolves, to be made on the recommendation of the Business Planning Committee.
4. Name as corresponding members to this meeting any General Council Officers, Executive Ministers, Executive Officers, and Regional Council Executive Ministers who are present; anyone else who may be named by the General Secretary to serve as resource persons to the General Council Executive.
5. Receive for information the following:
  - Moderator's Accountability Report
  - General Secretary's Accountability Report
  - Financial Assistance Fund Accountability Report
  - Operational Plan Quarterly Report
  - Iridesce: The Living Apology Final Report and Recommendations
  - Decolonizing the Work of the GCE, May 2023 Update
  - Investment Committee Annual Report 2022
  - Joint Grants Committee Report
6. Approve the following proposals:
  - GS 27 Stewardship of Extraordinary Bequest – Lloyd Hope
  - GS 28 Employment Equity Policy Update
  - GS 29 Changes to *The Manual* – La Table des ministères en français
  - GS 30 Trust Structure for Holding Real Property
  - GS 31 Terms of Reference for Compensation Task Group
  - NIC 01 Recommendation from the National Indigenous Council re: Task Group to Review the Roles of the Moderator and General Secretary
  - GS 32 Change to terms of Reference for Task Group to Review the Roles of the Moderator and General Secretary
  - GS 35 Finance Advisory Committee - Update to Terms of Reference
  - NOM 05 Recommendations for Appointment

**Carried**

**General Secretary's Accountability Report**

The General Secretary invited those present to work in small groups to engage with several scenarios related to budget planning to help the Executive identify principles for the 2024 budget. The small groups reflected on the following:

1. What questions are emerging for you?
2. What are we missing?
3. Can you live with a budget that is reflective of the scenario?
4. What would be a bold, faithful approach?

Each of the three groups gave a brief report on the return to the plenary space. Some of the main points included that:

- decisions must take into account challenges facing communities of faith and regions, including recent experiences of restructuring;
- decisions cannot jeopardize our capacity to be church together;
- time needs to be given for the strategic and operational plans to take root;
- we need to support efforts to develop evangelism across the church in a manner consistent with our denominational commitments;
- any reductions should be aligned with the current plan and be strategic in nature rather than “across the board” cuts;
- creative discussions are needed on cost-sharing between denominations and across the church; and
- decisions should be linked to the long-term vision of the church and not simply a tweaking of the status quo.

The complete notes from each small group will be shared with the management team in their considerations for the budget for 2024 and onward. The General Secretary thanked everyone for their contributions to the conversations.

The Moderator noted that Catherine Glover would be leaving the meeting at this point until the afternoon session.

**General Secretary's Supervision Committee**

Mitchell Anderson, chairperson of the General Secretary's Supervision Committee, gave a brief overview of the performance review process that will be conducted with the General Secretary. Mitchell reminded the group that the review process was not strictly evaluative, but to be supportive in Michael's ongoing development as a leader. The Executive was encouraged to be in touch with Mitchell directly with any questions or comments.

**In-Camera Session – Human Resources Conversation**

The Executive moved to an in-camera session.

**Motion: Michael Blair/Arlyce Schiebout**

**2023-05-12-032**

That the General Council Executive move into an in-camera session with the following membership: members of the Executive, Alan Hall, Erik Mathiesen, and Harry Li.

**Carried**

**Regathering – Out of In-Camera Session**

Before returning to plenary, the following motion was passed, as reported by the General Secretary.

**Motion: Arlyce Schiebout/Paul Douglas Walfall**

**2023-05-12-033**

That the Executive of the General Council move out of the in-camera session.

**Carried**

**Reflections – Equity Aspirations**

Before the break and while still in-camera, the team reflected on the adherence to the equity aspirations.

**Governance Review**

After the break, the Moderator invited Kit and Mitchell to lead the Executive through this item. There was an opportunity for members to check in with each other regarding the position taken regarding having external participants attend GCE meetings. By mutual invitation, members confirmed the decision to not include external participants as being the correct decision for the current Executive. The group also acknowledged the difficulties caused by this decision and the ongoing challenges and opportunities around communicating GCE decisions. The Executive was reminded to not become tone-deaf to the concerns of the wider church.

The Moderator drew the conversation to an end commenting that there seemed to be consensus among the deciding body around the decision that had been made.

**BP 02 Governance Committee (*Appendix III*)**

Kit and Mitchell briefly introduced this proposal. After the proposal was moved and seconded there was time for questions and discussion. During this time concerns were raised regarding the broad nature of the motion. After considerable discussion the Executive agreed in principle to alter the focus of the current Business Planning Committee to instead become a Governance Committee with a focus on governance goals and supports, and continuing the work of the Work Flow Task Group. Terms of reference for the Governance Committee will be brought to the September GCE meeting.

**Motion: Kit Loewen/Mitchell Anderson**

**2023-05-12-034**

That the General Council Executive approve in principle *BP 02 Governance Committee*, and that the terms of reference for the proposed Governance Committee be brought to the September, 2023 meeting of the Executive.

**Carried**

**Time with the Moderator**

The Immediate Past Moderator, Richard Bott, took the chair.

Moderator Carmen shared her concern regarding relationships within the church. She noted the discomfort people in the church are feeling in the new structure. Some ambiguity was allowed in *The Manual* and in the structures of the church in order to allow for the blooming of new ways of being in the new structure, which was disrupted by COVID.

Because of agenda changes the time with the Moderator had been shortened. It was agreed to add extra time with the Moderator to the agenda for the next day.

Richard thanked the Moderator for her update, and Moderator Carmen resumed the chair.

**Reflections on the Day**

Arlyce and M reported on the work done by the Executive throughout the day in working toward the equity aspirations. They noted that the group had worked well and carefully during the sessions for this day. Regret was expressed by Samuel Vauvert Dansokho that the staff had not been included in some of the discussions during the day.

The Moderator invited Samuel to close the day in prayer. His prayers were bookended by songs he had chosen for this time.

**Saturday, May 13, 2023****Regathering Worship**

The Moderator led worship to begin the second day of the meeting. This worship time was focused on issues related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

**Agenda Update**

Kit Loewen provided an overview of the changes to the agenda to accommodate the work still outstanding.

**Equity, Diversity and Anti-Oppression Conversation**

The Moderator led the Executive in a conversation about equity, diversity and anti-oppression (EDA) and its application to the work of the Executive. This included a review of the EDA principles which the GCE had had learned about prior to the meeting by participating in the learning modules. The Moderator briefly outlined Holy Manners and the Seven Sacred Teachings (or Grandfather Teachings), as well as going over various definitions related to this work.

The Executive had an opportunity to share their thoughts regarding equity, diversity and anti-oppression principles prior to breaking into small groups for conversation regarding particular EDA scenarios. These conversations are to help the Executive focus on ways to keep these principles in mind during committee meetings.

After the small group discussions there was time for individual feedback in plenary.

The Moderator thanked the staff group which had developed the EDA training session: Diane Bosman, Adele Halliday, Tim Hackborn, and Jeremy Shimmerman.

### **GS 33 Iridesce: The Living Apology (Appendix IV)**

The Executive had been joined by Julian Munroe, co-chair of Affirm United/S'Affirmer Ensemble and of the Iridesce: The Living Apology Project Working Group, and Beth Baskin, staff in the Church in Mission unit. After the General Secretary provided some background there was time for questions or comments. There was great affirmation for this work expressed by those present.

#### **Motion: Michael Blair/Samuel Vauvert Dansokho**

**2023-05-12-035**

That the General Council Executive

- a. Receive the Report, *Living Apology into Action* and the accompanying *workplan* for information; share the Report with regional councils and communities of faith for their consideration;
- b. Commit to offering an apology to the 2SLGBTQIA community at an appropriate time to be determined;
- c. Appoint a small working group of up to four (4) persons to draft the words of an apology, and request the Nominations Committee to recruit the members to serve on the working group; and
- d. Direct the General Secretary to develop a *Memorandum of Understanding* with Affirm United/S'Affirmer Ensemble to outline the relationship and responsibilities of the shared ministry.

#### **Carried**

The Moderator noted that the motion passed unanimously. She thanked Julian and Beth for being present to witness the completion of this phase of the work.

### **Offering and Thanks**

The Moderator invited Sarah Charters, Executive Minister, Philanthropy and President of the United Church Foundation, to share the work of the Mission and Service Fund. Sarah highlighted Grace United Church in Gananoque, Ontario, which has increased its contributions to the Mission & Service Fund every year for the past five years. When asked, they noted that they shared the *Your Generosity Matters* stories on a weekly basis and that the minister regularly speaks about Mission and Service. Sarah shared a short video from the *Your*

*Approved motion 2023-09-22-050*

*Generosity Matters* series which featured Adele Halliday, Anti-Racism and Equity Lead in the Office of the Moderator and General Secretary. In the video, Adele spoke about *40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism*, a 40-day program designed to move people through a journey of reflections and actions on anti-racism.

The Moderator thanked Sarah and her team for the work done to encourage gifts to Mission and Service.

### **Time with the Moderator**

There was an opportunity for some additional time with the Moderator, which had been requested the previous day. The Immediate Past Moderator, Richard Bott, took the chair.

The Moderator spoke about nurturing younger leaders in the church. As part of broadening engagement and hosting change-making conversations under key Strategic Plan priorities, the Moderator will be hosting a series of events across the country for the next two-and-a-half years, taking place fall 2023 through spring 2025. These events will include public lectures and workshops, theological symposia, church workshops, a national book club, and a leadership academy.

Richard thanked the Moderator and offered a prayer for her continuing work. Moderator Carmen resumed the chair.

### **Reflections – Equity Aspirations**

The Equity Team invited the Executive to silently reflect on the morning session.

Teresa Burnett-Cole offered a prayer to close this portion of the meeting.

### **Operational Plan: First Quarter Review**

After a break, the General Secretary invited Jennifer Henry, Executive Minister of Organizational Development and Strategy, to share an update with regard to the 2023 first quarter of the Operational Plan for the General Council Office.

Jennifer's verbal update covered three areas: where we are going, what we are doing, and how we are doing it. Clarity around *where we are going* is being supported with the production of various resources outlining and framing the Call and Vision of the Strategic Plan. The work being done (*what we are doing*) can be tracked on the United Church of Canada webpage. Jennifer shared a slide showing the progress in the various objectives. She spoke of the transparency on *how the work was being done* with the reporting on the website.

Jennifer noted that this year of reporting will create a baseline in some key areas that will be used for comparison in subsequent years. She also reported on uptake at the regional level in



engaging with the Call and Vision, and in planning efforts, particularly where an existing strategic plan does not currently exist.

There was a request for feedback from the Regional Council Executive Ministers. Treena Duncan, Pacific Mountain Regional Council and Chinook Winds Regional Council Executive Minister, noted that the strategic plan is helping people to look forward with some hope after the discouragement and isolation of COVID.

The Moderator thanked Jennifer and all the staff involved in developing the Operational Plan and its reporting.

**GS 34 Authorization to Proceed with General Council Office Relocation** (*Appendix V*)

The General Secretary invited Erik Mathiesen to provide some background regarding this proposal. The plan to relocate the General Council Office has been in the works since 2012. This proposal is to affirm previous decisions given the changed financial situation. The proposal comes with unanimous support from the Finance Advisory Committee.

**Motion: Michael Blair/Michael Caveney**

**2023-05-12-036**

That the General Council Executive authorize the General Secretary to sign a 15-year lease committing The United Church of Canada to moving its offices to 300 Bloor Street West, effective Q1 2026; and to sign sub-leases with the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the national arm of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Incremental Capital Cost is estimated to be \$3.6-4.0 million (\$90 - \$100/sq foot on top of the tenant allowances of \$60.00 originally agreed in 2012) with the denominations agreed in principle to cost sharing in proportion to agreed "share" of space. The United Church share would be \$2.0-2.2 million.

**Carried**

**GCE Vacancy**

The General Secretary reported that there is a vacancy on the Executive, due to the resignation of Marlene Lightning. Marlene had joined the GCE through the nominations process and her replacement will be sought in the same way. The Business Planning Committee will review the framework which had been developed prior to the nomination of David Leyton-Brown, for use in the next search. They will share their assessment for the new vacancy with the Executive prior to beginning the call for nominations. This way forward was agreed to by consensus using the orange and blue cards.

**Letter of Invitation from the National Indigenous Council**

The General Secretary noted that correspondence had been shared from the National Indigenous Council (NIC) regarding having a member of the GCE serve on the NIC beginning at the National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering scheduled for this summer in Edmonton. He suggested that the Nomination Committee could engage with the Executive to identify an

individual to serve on the NIC bringing the name to the General Council in October for appointment. In response to a question, Murray Pruden indicated that the choice of individual would be up to the Executive. Meetings of the NIC are held approximately monthly.

### **Indigenous Church Remit**

Teresa Burnett-Cole raised a concern about the awareness across the church regarding the remit about the Indigenous church which was launched in February of this year. There were assurances that there were plans for education at regional annual meetings, as well as follow-up with communities of faith during the process.

### **Commitment to Decolonization**

The Moderator invited Kit Loewen to introduce this section of the agenda. Kit noted that a report had been shared with the Executive prior to the meeting.

There was time for small group discussion on the guiding questions included at the end of the report *Decolonizing the Work of the GCE (May 2023)*:

- What would you affirm in this report?
- What might you want to adopt as practices or recommendations for the GCE?
- What do you feel is missing from this report?
- What additional concrete suggestions would you offer for continuing the work of decolonizing the GCE?

Mitchell and Teresa wrapped up this agenda item by noting that the GCE doesn't need to be perfect in its decolonizing attempts, but needs to be willing to learn, and risk, and dare together along the way. Teresa noted that in her group there was a question about whether Bourinout's Rules were, in fact, the way that the Executive should be working. The decolonizing group will review the notes taken in the small groups to offer direction on some ways of working that can be implemented right away.

The Moderator thanked Mitchell, Teresa, Kit, Murray and Adele for leading the Executive through this work.

### **Reflections – Equity Aspirations**

Wilson Gonese, M Chorney and Arlyce Schiebout encouraged the Executive to continue their equity work. Arlyce posed a question to the Executive for their consideration and thought: How else would you suggest that we continue to practice equity in a virtual space?

The Moderator expressed gratitude to the team for their work at this meeting.

### **Final Reminders**

The General Secretary reminded the group that the next meeting of the Executive will be held online September 22 and 23, 2023, and the annual meeting of the 44th General Council will be

held on Saturday, October 21, 2023. There will be quite a bit of work at the September GCE meeting that will be going forward to the GC44 annual meeting, as well as the budget assumptions for the 2024 budget. Some of the work coming out of this meeting, as noted by the General Secretary, included terms of reference for the Governance Committee; the framework for the selection of a new member of the Executive; clarified expectations around a representative from the GCE to the National Indigenous Council.

### **Closing Motion**

The General Secretary introduced the closing motion.

### **Authorizing the General Council Sub-Executive**

**Motion: Michael Blair/Kit Loewen**

**2023-05-12-037**

That the General Council Executive authorize its Sub-Executive to deal with the business placed before it by this meeting of the Executive and any emergent business that may arise prior to the next meeting of the General Council Executive.

**Carried**

The Moderator offered a closing prayer of thanks and blessing.

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Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne

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General Secretary, Michael Blair