

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA**MEETING OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE****MINUTES****September 22-23, 2023**

The 44th General Council Executive of The United Church of Canada met by video-conference on Friday, September 22 and Saturday, September 23, 2023. The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, presided.

Attendance

Voting Members: Mitchell Anderson, Michael Blair, Richard Bott, Kathy Brett, 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, Éric Hébert-Daly, Jennifer Henry, Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Harry Li, Lori-Ann Livingston, Erik Mathiesen, Shannon McCarthy, Japhet Ndhlovu, Murray Pruden, Heather Sandford

Friday, September 22, 2023**Welcome**

The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, and General Secretary, Michael Blair, welcomed those gathered for this meeting of the Executive.

The Moderator briefly reviewed the method of voting to be used for this meeting. She also reminded members about the use of blue and orange cards to help indicate 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

Michael Caveney led the Executive in a territory acknowledgement which had been developed in conjunction with the Indigenous urban community in Kamloops, B.C., while those gathered for the meeting indicated in the chat which traditional lands they were on.

Agenda Overview

The Business Planning Committee chairperson, Kit Loewen, provided a brief overview of 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*). Kit indicated that some members would be absent for all or part of the next day due to other commitments. She also reminded those present to try to keep their cameras on as much as possible to signal engagement during the meeting.

The Moderator welcomed Heather Sandford, the acting Executive Minister for the Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters, Bermuda-Nova Scotia, and First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Councils.

Equity Commitments and Lenses

The equity support team for this meeting was introduced: M Chorney, Wilson Gonesse, Arlyce Schiebout, and Paul Douglas Walfall, 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 invited the Executive into a time of reflection and prayer, beginning with the Holy Manners litany, and grounded on Psalm 23. Concerns were raised about the marginalization and oppression faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly children in schools. The challenges faced by ministries across the country, including financial struggles and the search for a new identity in the face of restructuring, were also acknowledged. The Moderator ended the session with prayers for different regions and communities within the Church, as well as for the people of Ukraine, Morocco, and Libya.

GS 42 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 42 Procedural and Consent*.

Motion: Michael Blair/Kit Loewen

2023-09-22-050

That the General Council Executive:

1. Approve the [minutes](#) of the General Council Executive meeting held May 12-13, 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 reports:
 - General Secretary's Accountability Report
 - Operational Plan Report – Second Quarter 2023
 - Renunciation of Former Mission Property in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)
 - Global Partnership Review Report
6. Approve the following proposals:
 - BP 03 Governance Committee Terms of Reference
 - GS 43 Editorial Changes to The Manual - Adjusting Numbering D.5.3
 - GS 44 Editorial Changes to The Manual - Minor Edit A.5.3
 - GS 45 Editorial Changes to The Manual - Add D.2.7 Authorizing Remits
 - GS 46 Changes to The Manual for Greater Clarity - I.3.4.2 and I.3.4.4
 - GS 47 Editorial Changes to The Manual - I.2.5.3 Functions of Ministry Outside Pastoral Relationship
 - GS 48 Finance Advisory Committee - Update to Terms of Reference
 - GS 49 Renunciation of Former Mission Property in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)
 - GS 50 Response to Request for Formal Apology to 2SLGBTQQIA+ from Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council
 - GS 51 Pregnancy and Parental Leave Policy Update v2
 - GS 52 Code of Conduct Policy Update
 - GS 53 United Property Resource Corporation – Board Appointments
 - GS 54 Wahta United Church Transfer of Property
 - GS 55 Active Member Group Benefits Plans 2024 Premiums and Plan Changes

Carried

General Secretary's Accountability Report

The General Secretary began this time by providing context for the work before the Executive at this meeting. He noted that the most significant item was related to the principles for the 2024 budget process and that a significant amount of agenda time would be devoted to discussion on this item, both in plenary and small groups. There would also be items that would be going forward to the General Council annual meeting in October. These were presented to the Executive for their wisdom and discernment.

The General Secretary highlighted the sense of disconnection and uncertainty felt by many in the church from the General Council Office and that it was crucial to consider this as decisions were made during the Executive meeting. He noted the long-term impact of COVID and the

structural challenges faced by the church. He concluded by noting that there are also exciting stories about what is happening in different parts of the church. He noted that in Ezra 3:12, as the foundation of the new temple was laid, there were those who were upset and raised their voices in wailing, while there were others present who cheered with excitement.

The General Secretary invited those present to share their thoughts regarding what to keep in mind as decisions are made. The groups noted various items including the rate of change in the church, how to do things differently, how to become more nimble, how to encourage younger people to become involved with the church, and whether communication from the church to the communities of faith adequately conveys the necessary functions and responsibilities.

In closing, the General Secretary reminded the Executive to keep all these contexts in mind as conversations and decisions were made over the course of the meeting.

TICIF 01 Principles-Based Justice Work (*Appendix III*)

The General Secretary noted that this work followed decisions made by General Council 44, 2022. He invited Jennifer Janzen-Ball to introduce the proposal. Jennifer noted the interdependence of the principles and that none was to be seen as more important than the others. The principles document had been deliberately kept to two pages, with the first page setting some context and the second page outlining seven possible principles for justice work. There was an opportunity for questions or comments. Concern was raised regarding the word “reparations.” This was followed by discussion about ways to understand the word, beyond financial compensation, but all of the ways in which ‘repair’ may be addressed. It was noted that there might be a need for education within the church to ensure understanding regarding the concept of reparations.

There was also clarification that the intention was for the tool to be used immediately and improved through practice before being brought back to GC45 with any revisions.

Motion: Paul Walfall/Samuel Vauvert Dansokho

2023-09-22-051

That the General Council Executive:

- a. directs that this proposal be sent to General Council for discussion and decision-making at the annual meeting on October 21, 2023;
- b. suggests that the principles be adopted in principle with any necessary revisions to be brought to the 45th General Council 2025. Such revisions will be based on the experience and evaluation of using these principles to respond to situations of injustice and to requests from partners; and
- c. encourages further conversation with the Indigenous church about ways to include Indigenous spiritual teachings into the principles document and to bring suggestions and revisions to the 45th General Council 2025.

Carried

GS 57 Ministry Leadership to Meet the Needs of the Church in the 2020s, Part B Designated Lay Ministry (Appendix IV)

The General Secretary reminded the Executive of a commitment to resolve issues relating to Designated Lay Ministers which had originally been brought to the 44th General Council, 2022. He invited Alan Hall and Jennifer Janzen-Ball to provide some background to these proposals. The pre-GCE learning session had included time, including a video, on this proposal. Alan Hall outlined five specific actions in the proposal, emphasizing the importance of the background document for understanding the context of the proposals. After the short introduction there was time for questions or comments. The proposal strongly urges regional councils to review their practices around eligibility and licensing for those who retired as DLMs, since these are executed differently across the country.

Motion: Catherine Glover/Kathy Brett**2023-09-22-052****For Current Designated Lay Ministers and Current DLM Candidates*****GS 57a Proposal 1: Acknowledgement of the Faith and Leadership of DLMS***

The GCE recommends that the General Council recognizes the lifelong vocational call of many current designated lay ministers and honours and values their many years of faithful service to the church and directs the General Secretary to develop an appropriate acknowledgement for the 45th General Council (2025).

Carried**Motion: Jane McDonald/Arlyce Schiebout****2023-09-22-053*****GS 57b Proposal 2: Possible Pathway to Testamur for Current DLMS and Current DLM Candidates***

The GCE recommends that in light of the faithful and valued service of many designated lay ministers, the General Council directs the General Secretary, in cooperation with the Credentialing Committee of the Board of Vocation, to develop and implement a process that would allow current designated lay ministers who have discerned and practiced a lifelong vocational call to ministry to demonstrate that they meet the requirements for Testamur and readiness for commissioning or ordination and grants authority to the Board of Vocation, on the recommendation of its Credentialing Committee, to grant Testamur to those DLMS. This process would also be open to current DLM candidates who have discerned a lifelong vocational call to ministry.

Carried**Motion: Michael Caveney/Teresa Burnett-Cole****2023-09-22-054*****GS 57c Proposal 3: For Lay Ministry Going Forward***

The GCE recommends that the General Council

- a) requests that regional councils permit currently recognized DLMS and those who are current students who do not choose to request ordering, to move to different communities of faith (legacied);

- b) acknowledges that the need identified in 2000 for localized lay leadership still exists (in the “Ministry Together” Report on Ministry for the 21st Century received by the 37th General Council, 2000); and
- c) refers the original intent of designated lay ministry (in the “Ministry Together” Report on Ministry for the 21st Century received by the 37th General Council, 2000) to the on-going conversations about trained lay leadership in collaborative ministry settings.

Carried

Motion: Jane McDonald/Arlyce Schiebout

2023-09-22-055

GS 57d Proposal 4: For Future Candidates without Undergraduate Degrees

The GCE recommends that the General Council recognize that most of our theological schools do not require an undergraduate degree for entry into degree and diploma programs leading to ordination or commissioning, and affirms the theological schools’ development of a variety of programs of study for theological education and formation leading to commissioning or ordination. The General Council Executive encourages the Board of Vocation and candidacy boards to direct people without an undergraduate degree, who are discerning a call to life-long church-wide ministry, towards ordered ministry preparation and formation.

Carried

Motion: Jane McDonald/Kit Loewen

2023-09-22-056

GS 57e Proposal 5: For People who Retired as Designated Lay Ministers

The GCE recommends that The General Council strongly encourages regional councils to review their practices under C.2.1 b) and I.2.4.1 b) of *The Manual* to consider, in light of the leadership roles and acquired experience of many lay members who retired as designated lay ministers, granting both licence to administer the sacraments and membership in the regional council to lay members who retired as designated lay ministers and are resident within the regional council. Further, that regional councils be encouraged to review their policies on voluntary associate ministry and eligibility to practice other functions of ministry as may apply to lay members who have retired as designated lay ministers.

Carried

At his request, it is noted that Paul Douglas Walfall voted against the motion *GS 57e Proposal 5: For People who Retired as Designated Lay Ministers*.

Motion: Arlyce Schiebout/Kathy Brett

2023-09-22-057

That the General Council Executive forward the preceding five proposals regarding Designated Lay Ministry to General Council for discussion and decision-making at the annual meeting on October 21, 2023.

Carried

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

There was time for the whole group to reflect on the adherence to the equity aspirations to this point in the meeting. The use of the discussion forum in preparation for the meeting was

affirmed. There were concerns raised about inequity in the treatment of Designated Lay Ministers across the country, and the way French was used in the Holy Manners Litany at the beginning of the meeting. The Moderator will adjust the litany, and if there is time in the agenda, space for further conversation regarding Designated Lay Ministry will be found.

In-Camera Session – Budget Conversation

After a break, the Executive moved to an in-camera session to discuss various implications relating to the principles and assumptions to be used in setting the 2024 budget.

Motion: Teresa Burnett-Cole/Jane McDonald

2023-09-22-058

That the General Council Executive move into an in-camera session with the following membership: members of the Executive, all Executive Ministers present, Harry Li, and Adele Halliday.

Carried

Regathering – Out of In-Camera Session

Motion: Kathy Brett/Kit Loewen

2023-09-22-059

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

Carried

The Moderator invited those present to share a thought or issue that came up during the small group discussions. There was hope expressed for growth in the church; the challenge of balancing being a responsible employer while maintaining financial responsibilities to the wider church; and whether these decisions would preclude the work of the Compensation Review Task Group.

Reflections on the Day

M invited the group to consider in silence the work done by the Executive throughout the day in working toward the equity aspirations.

The Moderator invited former Moderator Richard to close the day in prayer.

Saturday, September 23, 2023

Regathering Worship

After an update on attendance, the Moderator led worship to begin the second day of the meeting. She began with the fully bilingual version of the Holy Manners Litany, thanking Samuel Dansokho for his suggestion the previous day. The worship time continued the reflection on Psalm 23.

Table Group Time

There was time in small groups to check-in and share any reflections on the finance discussions from the previous day. There was time for feedback to the larger group which included: a

suggestion to create a fund to help partners who would be facing cuts to grants; concern was expressed that the Executive had not been given enough data about the current state of the church (viability of communities of faith in particular) to make the decision regarding the 2024 budget; the fragility of communities of faith and ministry personnel across the church was raised; and that perhaps educating both sets of staff - those who work in communities of faith, and staff working for the General Council Office and in the regions - that compensation is not just salary, but also includes study leave, benefits, pension, etc.

2024 Operating Budget Principles and Assumptions

Several proposals were presented to the Executive to set the groundwork for the 2024 budget principles decision. There was opportunity for discussion or questions for each proposal.

Grant Reduction to Regions

In response to a question, it was noted that funding for the Indigenous church will be maintained at the current level for 2024. The 25% reduction in grants to the regions is divided equally between all regions, but will affect regions differently. For many regions this will affect staffing.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2023-09-22-060

That the General Council Executive approve the Mission & Service Grant reduction to regions as proposed from \$240K to \$180K.
Carried

Uncoupling Cost of Living Adjustment from Consumer Price Index

There were questions about whether this needed to be permanently uncoupled or if it was possible for just 2024. Concern was raised about whether the communities of faith would need time to adjust to any suggested changes.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2023-09-22-061

That the General Council Executive approve the uncoupling of the annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) from the current practice of using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and request the Compensation Task Group in collaboration with Finance Advisory Committee to propose a new process including affordability as a factor.

Amendment: Paul Walfall/Mitchell Anderson

That the words "for the 2025 budget year" be added after Consumer Price Index (CPI).
Defeated

Motion as originally moved

Carried

Uncoupling Staffing Cost of Living Adjustment from that in the Pastoral Relations System**Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald****2023-09-22-062**

That the General Council Executive approve the uncoupling of the Staffing COLA from the Pastoral Relations system.

Carried**Cost of Living Adjustment**

There was a request that this proposal be dealt with *seriatim*. The original proposal read:

That the General Council Executive approve COLA for the Staff system at 2% and for the Pastoral Relations system at 4% for 2024.

2024 Cost of Living Adjustment – Staff

There was a question about what the financial implications would be if the COLA for staff increased by 4% rather than by 2%. The response was that an additional \$270,000 would need to be found to offset that additional cost. In response to a question about how the percentages were arrived at, Jane McDonald, Chair of the Finance Advisory Committee, noted that these numbers were an attempt to balance benefitting employees, while not being so onerous that further staff or funding cuts would be required in the face of financial decline faced by the church.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald**2023-09-22-063**

That the General Council Executive approve COLA for the Staff system at 2% for 2024.

Carried**2024 Cost of Living Adjustment – Pastoral Relations System**

There was considerable discussion regarding this proposal and the amendment: there will be congregations for whom an increase will be a financial difficulty, and there will be ministers for whom the increase may still not be enough.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald**2023-09-22-064**

That the General Council Executive approve COLA for the Pastoral Relations system at 4% for 2024.

Amendment: Richard Bott/Mitchell Anderson

That the percentage increase be changed from 4% to 6.3%.

Carried**Motion as amended**

That the General Council Executive approve COLA for the Pastoral Relations system at 6.3% for 2024.

Carried

GS 56 2024 Operating Budget Principles and Assumptions (Appendix V)

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2023-09-22-065

That the General Council Executive approve the following principles, assumptions and targets for the 2024 budget:

- a) Inflation will continue to moderate but not return to pre-COVID levels soon;
- b) Travel and meeting expenses to target 40% of pre-COVID expenditure (which, with increased travel cost, implies 25% of pre-COVID travel). This implies a significant cultural shift in what we choose to participate in and how. Will require careful monitoring;
- c) All financial and investment decisions must be evaluated through the lens of affordability and sustainability;
- d) All financial and investment decisions must be evaluated through the lens of alignment with and linkage to strategic plan objectives;
- e) Budget and programming decisions must be linked to proactive communication planning and delivery;
- f) We will try to be as transparent as possible regarding the likely future direction of our spending and the likelihood of future reductions. When known, we will provide two or more years notice of a phased, complete cut;
- g) We are seeking to evolve to a triennium approach to budgeting. Most immediately, we are looking at 2024 and 2025, but will extend that process as we gain more information about the state of the church post-COVID;
- h) For 2025 we will need to update the assessment revenue sharing with regions as assessment revenue is projected to decline in proportion to membership from its 2023 high water mark. The financial viability of sustaining 16 regions will need to be part of the discussion;
- i) Increasing the assessment rate is not recommended for 2024 or 2025, but could be put on the table for GC45. The whole basis for the new financial model was for the financial capacity of the broader church to align with congregational health and ability to fund;
- j) For grant funding reductions, we contemplate using an impact lens to the extent possible and will contemplate funding fewer programs, but also invest more deeply when feasible;
- k) Total Operating Budget Deficit not to exceed \$3.2 million with proposed target of \$2.6 million;
- l) Annual incremental investment in strategic plan not to exceed \$1.5 million;
- m) Continued decline in annual congregation M&S (\$1,000,000 per year) consistent with membership related metrics;
- n) Mission and Service grant reductions to be finalized by September 20, 2023 as part of overall target savings of \$2.6-3.3 million;
- o) Indigenous church budgets to be maintained level for 2024 subject to ongoing discernment around longer term funding and participation in cost reduction in 2025;
- p) 2024 Assessment distributions to regional councils to be held level, with notice given of likely reductions for 2025;
- q) The COLA factor and related guidelines for 2024 to be finalized by September 20, 2023 for immediate implementation;

- r) With exception of extraordinary Lloyd Hope gift, bequest income will be used to support the operating budget for the coming triennium as has been the case for 2019-2022 (this maintains on hold our 2014 policy of transferring 50% of bequests to the Foundation).

Carried

Compensation Task Group Reporting

The General Secretary noted that it would be important for budgeting for 2025 that an interim report be received from the Compensation Task Group. The terms of reference were shared with the Executive. There was a request regarding sharing more data with the Executive. In response, the General Secretary noted that an additional position had been created at the General Council Offices related to gathering and analyzing data.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2023-09-22-066

That the General Council Executive change the terms of reporting of the Compensation Task Group to provide an interim report no later than the fall of 2024.

Carried

The Moderator invited Mitchell Anderson to close this section of the agenda in prayer.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

After the lunch break, Paul Walfall reflected on lenses in relation to the work done throughout the day, as well as how lenses affect our interactions in the world.

Communications Plan for Decisions

The General Secretary invited Jennifer Henry to outline the communications plan to be implemented after the meeting concludes. Jennifer noted that there would be proactive focused messaging to the wider church through the meeting summary (posted online and emailed to those who subscribe to updates), on E-ssentials, through social media, and shared during a meeting with the regional Presidents. There will also be a pastoral letter to all ministers, and a briefing meeting with Pastoral Relations staff. There will be a letter sent to all treasurers, as well as the monthly treasurers online meeting. General Council and regional staff will be notified through a Narthex posting, and there will an opportunity for questions at an all staff meeting.

There was a suggestion that regional council staff meet with ministers to explain the reasons for decisions made. The General Secretary noted that this often does happen, and that the Regional Council Executive Ministers are present at the GCE meetings and are part of the communications plan.

Offering and Thanks

The General Secretary invited Sarah Charters, Executive Minister, Philanthropy and President of the United Church Foundation, to share the work of the Mission and Service Fund. Sarah reported the good news that Mission and Service givings were level with the same time last

year. She noted that the Thanksgiving campaign would be centred on anti-racism, coinciding with the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism program. Philanthropy will begin a feasibility study for a capital campaign to build resources for the future of the church. Sarah then shared the Thanksgiving appeals video in French.

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

Time with the Moderator

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

The Moderator spoke about the work she has been engaged in over the last few months. She spoke particularly about time she spent with the youth climate motivators working for the church for the summer, and a week spent with the Gibimishkaadimin program, a five-year pilot project to encourage reconciliation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth within The United Church of Canada. The Moderator was also the keynote speaker at the National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering, and she and the General Secretary attended the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, in Indianapolis. These were all in addition to getting the Flourishing workshops prepared, and hosting the Moderator's book club – the Mod's Book Squad.

Richard thanked the Moderator on behalf of the Executive. Wilson Gonese offered a prayer for her continuing work. Moderator Carmen resumed the chair.

General Secretary's Accountability Report (part 2)

The General Secretary began by asking if any members had questions about his written report. He shared an update regarding the centennial celebrations in process for 2025. Celebrations will begin as of June the first 2024, and continue until the end of June, 2025. There will be a website dedicated to the centennial for communities of faith to share stories and what they are doing in celebration.

The General Secretary will bring a more concrete proposal to the November 2023 GCE meeting.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

Wilson Gonese encouraged the Executive to continue their equity work, recognizing that differences and diverse opinions are a strength.

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 in person from the evening of Thursday, November 16 to Saturday, November 18, 2023. More information regarding the location of the November meeting will be shared closer to the meeting date.

The annual meeting of the 44th General Council will be held on Saturday, October 21, 2023.

Closing Motion

The General Secretary named the members of the Sub-Executive, Richard Bott, Teresa Burnett-Cole and Catherine Glover, before he introduced the closing motion.

Authorizing the General Council Sub-Executive**Motion: Michael Blair/Arlyce Schiebout****2023-09-22-067**

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.

Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne

General Secretary, Michael Blair