

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES
Friday, May 10 to Saturday, May 11, 2024

The 44th Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada met online from Friday, May 10 to Saturday, May 11, 2024. The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, presided.

Attendance

Voting Members: Mitchell Anderson, Michael Blair, Richard Bott, Katherine Brittain, Teresa Burnett-Cole, M Chorney, Samuel Vauvert Dansokho, Catherine Glover, Carmen Lansdowne, David Leyton-Brown, Alcris Limongi, Jane McDonald (part), Arlyce Schiebout, Thea Sheridan-Jonah (part)

Corresponding Members: Leeann Shimoda (part)

Regrets: Michael Caveney, Paul Douglas Walfall, Wilson Gonese, Kit Loewen, Kimberly Roy (corresponding)

Corresponding Staff: 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, Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, Patti Talbot, Nicole Treksler

Guests: members of the Partner Council: Kangwa Mabuluki, Annie Namala, Horacio Mesones, Samer Laham; Tim Blair, Don Hunter, Michelle Singh

Friday, May 10, 2024

Welcome

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

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

Alcris Limongi shared a territory acknowledgement from her context as a South American woman now living on Treaty 1 territory in Winnipeg. She then invited those present to indicate

in the chat the lands on which they were situated for this meeting.

Welcome and Introduction

The Moderator invited those present into a time of introductions and connection. The GCE welcomed a new member of the Executive, Rev. Katherine Brittain.

GS 82 Procedural and Consent v2

The General Secretary briefly outlined the procedural and consent motion, noting that two proposals had been pulled from consent: *GS 84 Editorial Changes to The Manual, B.7.3 Membership of the Governing Body*, and *GS 87 Editorial Changes to The Manual, Updating Language in I.2.3.1*. GS 84 will be dealt with later in this meeting, and GS 87 will come to a future meeting of the Executive. The full text of the reports and proposals is found in *Appendix II*.

Motion: Michael Blair/David Leyton-Brown

2024-05-10-110

That the General Council Executive:

1. Approve the [minutes](#) of the General Council Executive meeting held February 23-24, 2024.
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 Moderator and General Secretary.
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:
 - Moderator's Accountability Report
 - General Secretary's Accountability Report
 - Operational Plan Report – First Quarter 2024
 - KAIROS Report
 - Investment Committee Report 2023
 - Financial Assistance Fund Report (2023)
 - United Property Resource Corporation Report
 - Faithful Footprints Report
6. Adopt the Behavioural Covenant as presented.
7. Approve the following proposals:
 - GS 83 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, 3.4.2 Decisions by E-mail

- ~~GS 84 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, B.7.3 Membership of the Governing Body~~
- GS 85 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, C.3.2 Fulfillment of Responsibilities
- GS 86 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, Standardization of Terminology
- ~~GS 87 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, Updating Language in I.2.3.1~~
- GS 88 Change to Incorporated Ministries Category 2 Eligibility
- GS 90 Financial Assistance Policy Updates

Carried

Agenda Review

David Leyton-Brown provided a brief overview of the agenda and reminded participants to leave their camera on if possible. He also noted regrets that had been received and named expected guests.

Equity Reminders

M Chorney named the members of the equity team for this meeting: Arlyce Schiebout, Alcris Limongi and herself, along with Adele Halliday providing staff support. M noted that the team would be available throughout the meeting. She provided an overview of the Equity Aspirations:

Equity Aspirations

Remember to...

1. Question biases
2. Challenge assumptions
3. Notice who's missing
4. Value all voices
5. Aim for equity
6. Live out our commitments

Assurez-vous...

1. de déceler les préjugés
2. de remettre en question les idées préconçues
3. de prendre conscience des absents
4. d'accorder une valeur à toutes les voix
5. de viser l'équité
6. de mettre en pratique nos engagements

...as we strive to live out God's call

...lorsque nous incarnons l'appel de Dieu

Pour cibler l'équité

Partner Council Message

Four members of the Partner Council were able to join the General Council Executive meeting on Friday, May 10. Present were: Kangwa Mabuluki, General Secretary - All Africa Theological Education by Extension Association, Zambia; Annie Namala, Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation (India); Horacio Mesones, Director - Regional Ecumenical Centre for Advice and Service (Argentina), and Samer Laham, Director of Emergency Response Services - Middle East Council of Churches. The mission of the Partner Council is to connect the United Church of Canada with a global perspective, sharing wisdom and drawing upon the experiences of worldwide partners.

These members delivered a joint message focussed on the shared process of decolonization. The full message can be found at *Appendix III*. There was time for comments and questions after their message to the Executive.

Gathering Worship

The Moderator led worship, which was centred on Ephesians 6: 18-20, a reading she will use during the Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage to be held in Ottawa in a couple of weeks. Worship included prayers for the world, and local concerns shared with the Moderator by staff in the various regions of the church.

Decolonizing: Highlighting Consensus

The Moderator reminded the Executive of the use of the orange and blue cards as a tool in working towards consensus in the process of decolonization. The use of the cards is to see if there's resonance, or divergence across opinions and feelings on particular proposals or discussion items. It is important to remember that the cards are not being used for voting, but as a means of testing and discerning together.

Strategic Plan Update

A short presentation was led by Jennifer Henry, Executive Minister, Organizational Development and Strategy, and Sarah Charters, Executive Minister, Philanthropy and Director of the United Church Foundation. This presentation particularly centered on the Common Good objective. The strategic objective of this pillar is “to significantly increase denominational capacity and will to make decisions on properties and resources that are focused on the ministry of the whole church, with a view to enhancing equity, sustainability, right relations, and administrative efficiency and effectiveness.” They outlined some of the key initiatives related to financial sustainability, collective decision making, shared services, and increased accountability. There was then time for small group discussion. Questions focused on whether the initiatives and activities were appropriate to the national role, and what future priorities might be. In particular, the sessions sought to continue to find ways to assist Communities of Faith and regions by leveraging national support to reduce administrative burden or costs.

There was some time for general feedback from the groups. Notes from each group were shared back to Jennifer.

GS 89 2025 Operating Budget Assumptions and Principles

As this was Erik Mathiesen’s final Executive meeting prior to his retirement, the General Secretary took time to thank Erik for his contributions to the life of The United Church of Canada over the last 15 years, and particularly in his time as the Executive Officer, Finance. Erik noted ways that the church has been “living within our means,” a commitment made through the new funding model which began with the restructuring in 2019, while striving to support Communities of Faith. The examples he shared included the Faithful Footprints grants to congregations to help them reduce their carbon footprint, and the Protect United initiative,

where a \$3 million loan has funded a captive insurance program to help participating United Church ministries reduce insurance costs.

Harry Li, Controller, presented the 2025 budget principles and assumptions, noting that the high-level budget would be offered for approval in September. Harry spoke of how the framework used for the approved 2024 budget, and the 2025 principles and assumptions, aligns financial resources with strategic planning, while also laying the foundation for achieving long-term financial sustainability. There was time for comments or questions.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2024-05-10-111

That the General Council Executive approve the following principles, assumptions and target for the 2025 budget:

Budget Target:

- a) Total Operating Budget Deficit before transfer from operating reserves must not exceed \$2 million.

Budget Principles

- b) All financial and investment decisions must be evaluated through the lens of affordability and sustainability.
- c) All financial resource allocation decisions must be evaluated through the lens of alignment with and linkage to strategic plan objectives.
- d) Budget and programming decisions must be linked to proactive communication planning and delivery.
- e) We will strive 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.
- f) We are seeking to evolve to a triennial approach to budgeting. Most immediately, we are focusing on 2025 with consideration of the financial forecast for 2026-2027, but will extend that process as we gain more information about the state of the church post-COVID.
- g) Non-recurring expenditures, such as the structure review and triennial General Council meetings, are excluded from the operating budget and funded from the operating reserve directly, with close monitoring of the reserve's long-term financial health to ensure the minimum reserve policy is being followed.
- h) Annual budgeted withdrawals from operating reserve not to exceed \$2 million. The \$2 million limit excludes non-recurring expenses, such as those for General Council meetings and Centennial Celebrations, as these costs are directly funded by the operating reserve.
- i) Annual spending on strategic plan growth initiatives, funded by the Hope Bequest fund, should not exceed \$1 million.

Revenue Assumptions:

- j) Continued decline, albeit to a lesser magnitude, of \$600,000 in 2025 Mission & Service contributions using the 2023 actual Mission & Service as the baseline.
- k) The budgeted Bequest income for 2025 is set at \$1.8 million, which will be directed in its entirety towards the 2025 operating budget, continuing the practice established from 2019 to 2024. Any Bequest income exceeding \$1.8 million will be added to the operating reserve to support the church's future endeavors.
- l) Increasing the assessment rate is not recommended for 2025/2026 but could be put on the table for GC45 in 2025. 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.
- m) Other revenues generated by the General Council Office, such as fees, bank account interest, and bookstore sales, etc. are to be shared between governance and Mission and Ministry.

Expense Assumptions/Cost Containment Measures:

- n) Inflation is expected to continue moderating but is not anticipated to return to pre-COVID levels soon; the current inflation rate as of February 2024 stands at 3.1%.
- o) The 2025 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for General Council Staff system to be maintained at 2%.
- p) In 2025, a strategic effort to enhance operational efficiencies and reduce costs will lead to the elimination of 6.5 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs). To contain severance costs and mitigate any adverse effects on staff morale and program impact, these reductions will primarily target vacant positions resulting from terminations or retirements.
- q) The funding for Mission and Service revenue-funded grants will remain consistent with the 2024 levels. Starting from 2026, these grants will be linked to Mission and Service contributions.
- r) In 2025, assessment allotments to regional council offices will be reduced by a net total of \$150,000. This reduction will be achieved by discontinuing the contingent grant of \$150,000, which was initially created to assist with contingencies that may arise during the 2019 New Funding Model implementation process.
- s) The Indigenous church will continue to be funded for 2025, pending further discernment regarding sustainable funding and the use of the Indigenous reserves. A portion of the total budget, specifically \$500,000, will be sourced from the reserves of the Indigenous church.
- t) The Program budgets to be held constant at the 2024 level. While management continues to deliberate on the future role of the General Council Office, staff believe that safeguarding a certain level of program funding is essential. Program funding not only represents an investment in the future, but it is also a key metric followed by donors and church members.
- u) Continue to tighten control over travel and meeting expenditures and use the strategic plan to assist in prioritizing travel and meeting planning. In the 2024 budget, a target saving of 40% of pre-COVID expenditure was mandated as a cost reduction measure, implying a significant cultural shift in what we choose to participate in and how.

After the proposal had been moved and seconded there was a request that point o) regarding the 2025 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for General Council Staff system be removed from the motion, as this is being considered as part of the Total Compensation Working Group, which has not yet made recommendations.

Amendment moved and seconded: Teresa Burnett-Cole/Katherine Brittain

That item o) be removed from the proposal.

Carried

Motion as amended

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Carried**United Property Resource Corporation Report**

Tim Blair, CEO of Kindred Works and United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC) board member, provided an update on the work of UPRC and Kindred Works. UPRC is the primary point of contact for United churches across the country needing support and advice regarding property matters. Kindred Works is the United Church's property development corporation, committed to building purpose driven rental housing. Kindred Works has just been certified as a Beneficial Corporation (B Corp). Tim outlined the current Kindred Work's goal to deliver 5,000 new units by 2027; seven projects will be construction-ready in 2024.

UPRC is working to increase knowledge and awareness within congregations and regions about its services. One important piece of work is the development of regional land trusts to hold and manage surplus property within the United Church where the local community of faith has disbanded or amalgamated. The trusts aim to achieve long-term financial stability and stewardship for the common good, including possible future ministry needs such as might be emerging with the Growth initiative of the General Council Office strategic plan. Four regional trusts have been created: Eastern Ontario Outaouais, Eastern Central Ontario, Shining Waters, Horseshoe Falls and the United Church General Council. Other regions are establishing trusts, pending approval of their respective governing bodies.

There was time for questions and comments after the verbal report.

A meeting of the shareholders of the property corporation was held at the close of this portion of the meeting of the Executive.

Mission and Service Moment

Sarah Charters shared a video highlighting the work of Mission and Service, and thanked the Executive for their continued support of the work.

Reflections on the Day

Arlyce Schiebout reflected on equity and fairness at the close of the first day of this meeting. She particularly highlighted the Round Table methodology that the Partner Council had raised early in the day, as a way of listening to and including different voices.

At the request of the Moderator, Katherine Brittain offered a prayer to close the day.

Saturday, February 24, 2024**Worship**

At the beginning of the second day of the meeting the Moderator welcomed Leeann Shimoda, and noted that Thea Sheridan-Jonah could not be present due to other commitments. A

regathering time began with a time of worship centering on Amanda Gorman's poem, *Fury and Faith*.

Faithful Footprints

Erik Mathiesen introduced Michelle Singh, Executive Director for Faith in the Common Good which runs Faithful Footprints for the United Church. The Faithful Footprints program is a key initiative under the strategic plan's Climate pillar, and offers congregations up to \$30,000 in grants towards energy conservation and renewable energy projects. Michelle provided a brief update to her written report, after which there was time for questions and comments.

The Moderator thanked Michelle for joining the Executive for this time of reporting.

Time with the Moderator

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

The Moderator reflected back to the Executive some of the discussions, concerns and themes that she is hearing across the church. She noted particularly that there is a shift in the church and in public opinion regarding justice for Palestine, more than there has been historically in the church.

After her report there was an opportunity for questions and comments. Two GCE members expressed appreciation for the Moderator's capacity to engage the church, noting examples from recent Regional Council annual meetings.

At the request of the Immediate Past Moderator, Teresa Burnett-Cole prayed for the Moderator and her work. The Moderator resumed the chair.

General Secretary Accountability Report

The General Secretary highlighted several items from his written report, including the possibility of shifting from The United Church of Canada Act to the not-for-profit act. The General Secretary noted again the slowness of processes embedded within the Basis of Union.

The General Secretary noted the ongoing challenges of communicating with the church, sharing his reflections that there is both a need to share information and interest in finding information about the wider church. He highlighted recent public outreach, such as a video spot created for the Stars on Ice tour, and emphasized the importance of communicating to a specific audience, drawing on research and best practices. The General Secretary also spoke of the commitment to be data-driven and focused on Growth as the leading priority.

In conclusion, the General Secretary acknowledged upcoming retirements, thanking Erik Mathiesen, Patti Talbot and Shirley Welch for their decades of commitment to the church and inviting deep gratitude. He noted that there will be significant institutional knowledge leaving with them.

Samuel Dansokho noted the importance of remembering the difference between information and communication. The United Church shares much information, but the wider church still seems to feel disconnected from what is happening in the church, or doesn't see the full scope of work being done at the national level.

In-Camera Session – General Secretary's Supervisory Committee

The voting members of the Executive moved to an in-camera session for a report from the General Secretary's Supervisory Committee.

Motion: Samuel Vauvert Dansokho/Teresa Burnett-Cole

2024-05-10-112

That the General Council Executive move into an in-camera session with the following membership: voting members of the Executive, not including the General Secretary.

Carried

Regathering – Out of In-Camera Session

After the *in-camera* session and following a short break, the following motion was passed.

Motion: Jane McDonald/Teresa Burnett-Cole

2024-05-10-113

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

Carried

Governance Education: the Conciliar Nature of the Church

Senior Governance Lead, Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, led a session that highlighted the United Church's conciliar model. In small groups the Executive focused on the appropriate way proposals come to the General Council and the General Council Executive, and the risks of bypassing opportunities for the fuller wisdom and discernment of all courts of the church.

The group also wrestled with the definition of "denomination-shaping" decisions, as well as definitions of "routine" and "urgent." The Governance Committee will do further work on these questions and bring them back to the GCE.

Way Forward regarding *NEW 01 Join the Apartheid Free Communities Movement* (Appendix IV)

The Executive considered a proposal submitted by a GC 44 Commissioner focused on human rights and international law violations by the state of Israel leading to systemic racial discrimination.

There was much discussion regarding this proposal. The GCE recognized the urgency of the unfolding catastrophe in Gaza, and supported ongoing United Church efforts, including participation in the Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage, advocating for various actions including pushing for humanitarian aid, a permanent ceasefire and just peace.

NEW 01 *Join the Apartheid Free Communities Movement* suggested that the General Council Executive consider:

- A. Promoting study/discussion of the issue throughout the denomination by supplying links to existing studies already developed by communion partners and others, including the Presbyterian Church USA, the Society of Friends, the United Church of Christ USA, and by Kairos Palestine. Provide links to resources made available by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Ecumenical Accompaniers, The United Nations, B'tselem, Breaking the Silence, Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, the United Network For Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, and/or other human rights based, fact sharing organizations in Israel, Palestine and the World.
- B. Acting on the issue, including:
 - GCE becoming a signatory body to the Apartheid Free Community Campaign at <https://apartheid-free.org>;
 - GCE commissioning a group including former Ecumenical Accompaniers to Israel and Palestine to recommend effective next steps as an Apartheid Free Church; and
 - GCE encouraging/suggesting action by congregations and others, asking them to become informed on the issue and to take appropriate action (signing on to the Apartheid Free Community Campaign, etc.)

In response, the following proposal was brought before the Executive.

Motion: Arlyce Schiebout/Teresa Burnett-Cole

2024-05-10-114

That in response to *NEW 01 Join the Apartheid Free Communities Movement*, the General Council Executive directs the General Secretary to take action based on what is actionable on a principles-based approach (*TICIF02 Principles-Based Justice Work*, approved October 2023), that we table the sign-on to the movement until the October, 2024 General Council annual meeting, that we direct the General Secretary to get legal clarity regarding education of the courts of the church, and that we request the Governance Committee clarify the distinction between *The Manual* terms "routine and emergency" and "denomination shaping and faith shaping."

Carried

At his request, it is noted that Samuel Vauvert Dansokho voted against the preceding motion.

The Moderator invited the Immediate Past Moderator to offer a prayer after this difficult discussion and decision.

GS 84 Editorial Changes to *The Manual*, B.7.3 Membership of the Governing Body

After discussion regarding this proposal it was agreed that this was more than just an editorial change to *The Manual*. The General Secretary noted that this might also fit in with the work

being done by the Theology, Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee regarding membership. He suggested that this item be returned to the Manual Committee for further work, and could come to a future GCE meeting. The Executive agreed to this approach.

Joint Grants Committee Appointment

Though Kathy Brett had resigned from the General Council Executive, she had expressed an interest in continuing on the Joint Grants Committee until the end of this triennium.

Motion: Michael Blair/Arlyce Schiebout

2024-05-10-115

That the General Council Executive appoint Kathy Brett (Ordained, First Dawn Eastern Edge) to serve on the Joint Grants Committee until General Council 45, 2025.

Carried

Behavioural Covenant

The General Secretary reported that the updated Behavioural Covenant for all denominational committees, including the GCE, which had been approved in the consent agenda, will take effect at the rise of General Council 45.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

Alcris reflected on the Executive's adherence to the Equity Aspirations throughout the meeting.

Reminder of Next Steps

The General Secretary reminded the Executive of the next meeting, which is scheduled for September 10-11, 2024. He noted that the summary of this meeting would be available early in the following week, and would be shared by email and available on the GC44 website (generalcouncil44.ca). General Council 44 will hold its annual meeting on Saturday, October 19, 2024.

Authorizing the Sub-Executive of the General Council

The General Secretary noted those on the Sub-Executive: Richard Bott, Teresa Burnett-Cole, M Chorney, the Moderator and himself.

Motion: Michael Blair/David Leyton-Brown

2024-05-10-116

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

A short time of worship based on the Behavioural Covenant closed the meeting. Shirley Welch was presented with flowers from the Executive to mark her retirement.

Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne

General Secretary, Michael Blair