

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES
Friday, September 27 to Saturday, September 28, 2024

The 44th Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada met online from Friday, September 27 to Saturday, September 28, 2024. The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, presided.

Attendance

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

Corresponding Members: Kimberly Roy

Regrets: Leeann Shimoda (corresponding)

Corresponding Staff: Sarah Charters, Treena Duncan, Cameron Fraser, Alan Hall, Adele Halliday, Peter Hartmans, Éric Hébert-Daly, Jennifer Henry, Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Mark Laid, Harry Li, Lori-Ann Livingston, Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, Shannon McCarthy, Faith March-MacCuish

Guests: Ariel Siagan, David Dawrant

Friday, September 27, 2024

Welcome

The Moderator and General Secretary 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

Jane McDonald shared a territory acknowledgement and invited those present to indicate in the chat the lands on which they were situated for this meeting.

Gathering Worship

The Moderator invited those present into a time of introductions, connections, and sharing prayers.

The Moderator took time to recognize the recent deaths of The Very Reverend the Honourable Doctor Lois Wilson, the first female Moderator of The United Church of Canada, and the Reverend Brenda Fawkes, the Office of Vocation Minister for Pacific Mountain and Chinook Winds Regional Councils. The Moderator invited the Executive into a moment of silent contemplation of these losses.

The Moderator concluding the time of worship by reading from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

GS 96 Procedural and Consent (Appendix I)

The Moderator invited the General Secretary to introduce the opening motion. The General Secretary briefly outlined the various items contained in *GS Procedural and Consent*, noting that the minutes of the May GCE meeting will be approved at the next meeting of the Executive.

Motion: Michael Blair/ Kit Loewen**2024-09-27-124**

That the General Council Executive:

~~1. Approve the [minutes](#) of the General Council Executive meeting held May 10-11, 2024.~~

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Receive for information the following reports:
 - General Secretary's Accountability Report
 - Operational Plan Report – Second Quarter 2024
 - General Council 45 Planning Committee
 - Interim Report of the Compensation Working Group

Approved motion 2024-11-22-140

5. Approve the following proposals:

- GCE 03 Change to the Basis of Union
- GS 97 General Council 46 Location

Carried

Agenda Review

The chair of the Governance Committee, Kit Loewen, provided a brief overview of the agenda and reminded participants to leave their camera on if possible. She also noted regrets that had been received and named expected guests. She expressed her gratitude to all that could be at the meeting.

Equity Reminders

M Chorney introduced the equity aspirations, and spoke on the difference between equity and equality. After providing definitions and examples of equity and equality, there was a time for discussion. Adele Halliday posed the question: As you reflect on our work today, how do you think that we as GCE might work to reduce systemic barriers (and advance equity)? M noted that the equity team would be available throughout the meeting.

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

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

Pour cibler l'équité

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

...lorsque nous incarnons l'appel de Dieu

Decolonizing Working Group

Kit Loewen named the members of the Decolonizing Working Group: Teresa Burnett-Cole, Samuel Vauvert Dansokho, Adelle Halliday, and herself. Kit provided an update from the group, which had been engaged in dialogue around three strands of a decolonizing journey. The first being personal transformation; our own experiences and examining our own biases. The second, understanding our relationship to the land, and how we might bring wholeness to the land. The third component are the systemic issues that are deeply embedded in how we live and work. Kit highlighted that this work would continue when the General Council Executive gathers in November, exploring these ideas, as we understand what it means to decolonize the General Council Executive.

Governance Education: What is the big question?

The Moderator invited David Leyton-Brown to lead the group on behalf of the Governance Committee in a conversation regarding good governance. As the Executive needs to discuss important things in the life of the United Church, there can be a tendency to either get stuck in the minutiae or talk in a lofty way that becomes disconnected from the organization.

He raised four questions to guide the Executive as they make decisions. Firstly, how can we frame a decision that establishes priorities and principles? Secondly, how can we focus our attention in choosing strategies and priorities? Thirdly how do we make decisions for the future? Finally, how can we approach the goals and priorities set, not for a future Executive to carry out, but for the staff to carry out?

There was a time for questions and comments. There was a general understanding that as the Executive continues to lean into the new structure of the church, the way we do business has shifted, and that the Executive needs to work on new decision-making skills.

GS 98 Annual Economic Adjustment for 2025

The Moderator invited Alan Hall, Executive Officer, General Council Shared Services, to present the recommendations of the Total Compensation Review Task Group for the annual economic adjustment for 2025. Alan thanked the Task Group for their diligent work over the last few months. He raised some of the reasons for the recommendations and mentioned that the decision was based on a variety of factors.

Alan noted the Total Compensation Review Task Group was recommending an increase somewhere between 2.5-3% with a bias toward 3%; informed by conversations with ministry personnel, and the rising cost of living. Harry Li provided some statistics on the impact of the 2023 decision on pastoral charges.

There was a time for question and comments, with considerable discussion on the various points raised by Alan and Harry.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald**2024-09-27-125**

That the General Council Executive, on the recommendation of the Total Compensation Task group and the advice of the Finance Advisory Group and the Management Team, approve the economic increase for the pastoral relations system for 2025 at 2.5%.

After the proposal had been moved and seconded there was discussion on whether or not the increase for the pastoral relations system should remain at 2.5%. Concerns were brought forward regarding the financial struggles faced by congregations and ministry personnel, and the rising cost of living. It was noted that for a congregation the difference in the 2.5 or 3% increase was fairly negligible, while it would be more beneficial for ministry personnel. There was extensive discussion.

The following amendment was proposed:

Motion: Richard Bott/Teresa Burnett-Cole

That the initial proposal be amended to propose 3% as the Annual Economic Adjustment for the pastoral relations system for 2025.

Carried

Motion as amended

That the General Council Executive, on the recommendation of the Total Compensation Task group and the advice of the Finance Advisory Group and the Management Team, approve the economic increase for the pastoral relations system for 2025 at 3%.

Carried

GS 102 Group Benefits Plans 2025 Premiums and Plan Changes (Appendix II)

The General Secretary invited Alan Hall to speak on the changes to the group benefits plan in 2025. Alan Hall introduced David Dawrant, Director, Pension and Benefit Administration and PABAS Project Manager, who then gave a presentation on the new Group Benefits and Premium Plan changes for 2025.

There was time for questions or comments after the presentation.

Motion: Michael Blair/Kit Loewen

2024-09-27-126

That the Executive of the General Council:

- approve an increase to the annual dental maximum from \$1,500 to \$2,500
- approve an increase to the lifetime maximum fertility and surrogacy benefit from \$3,500 to \$20,000
- set 2025 active member premiums for:
 - core health, dental and life insurance at 8.33% of pensionable earnings (an increase from 7.7%) paid by the employer;
 - restorative care at 1.35% of pensionable earnings (no increase) paid by the employer;
 - employer indemnity at 0.14% of pensionable earnings (no increase) paid by the employer;
 - long term disability at 2.82% of pensionable earnings (an increase from 2.33%) paid by the employee.

Carried

Time with the Moderator

The former Moderator, Richard Bott, assumed the chair.

The Moderator acknowledged how her ministry became integrated as part of the strategic priorities. She then spoke about the Flourishing Project, and how there have been multiple events, either as standalone or integrated into the theme of the regional council meetings.

While participants have not always come with an optimistic heart for the future of the church, the Moderator noted that for the most part these have been met with positivity.

The Moderator also shared that a sense of joy in her ministry recently been her work with the Regenerate Program. This is comprised of roughly 30 ministry personnel, across multiple regions of the church, and they engage in deeper ways with the community, than what can happen at a one-day Flourishing Workshop.

There was an opportunity for questions and comments. Former Moderator Bott invited Wilson Gonese to offer prayer for the Moderator and her ministry.

The Moderator resumed the chair.

GS 100 Request from the Canadian Council of Churches

The General Secretary presented the request from the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and mentioned that The United Church of Canada was one of the founding denominations and continues to contribute to the work of the CCC. The Churches is hoping to raise \$650,000 to enable them to continue their work, and they have reached out to founding members. The General Secretary was looking for the wisdom of the General Council Executive.

There was a time of discussion. The Executive felt called to contribute funds to this.

Motion: Michael Blair/Jane McDonald

2024-09-27-127

That the General Council Executive directs the General Secretary to support or not support the campaign on behalf of the United Church by either making a designated or percentage contribution or to decline at this time.

After a friendly amendment the motion was amended to:

That the General Council Executive direct the General Secretary to support the campaign on behalf of the United Church by making a designated contribution.

Carried

General Secretary's Supervisory Committee

Mitchell Anderson shared how the Supervisory Committee supports the General Secretary while holding him accountable.

There was time for questions and comments. Paul Douglas Walfall noted that as a member of the Executive he has experienced some interactions in the wider church as bullying and can only imagine how that is for the General Secretary. Paul suggested that the Governance

Committee consider how we address this, especially in light of new members joining the Executive next year.

Teresa Burnett-Cole expressed particular concern for the upcoming National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering as a time when the General Secretary may come under attack for his actions concerning the National Indigenous Council. She asked that the Executive hold the Moderator and General Secretary in prayer during the gathering.

The Moderator thanked Mitchell and the General Secretary's Supervisory Committee.

Time With the General Secretary

The Moderator invited the General Secretary to discuss his accountability report. The General Secretary gave thanks to the Executive, the Moderator, and his Supervisory Committee.

The General Secretary asked the GCE to have a conversation about the church's response to the war in Gaza and our justice commitments, including applying the justice principles in a way that allows the Church to be responsive to partners, ecumenical relationships and civil society partners.

There was a time for responses and concerns to this topic. There was positive feedback to the General Secretary, and the United Church's approach to the way we are engaging in advocacy related to the war in Gaza, and overall, with what God is doing at this time with the General Secretary and Moderator.

In conclusion, the General Secretary thanked the Executive for their feedback and work, and the Moderator prayed for the General Secretary.

Additional Items

Following the conversation from both *GS 98 Annual Economic Adjustment for 2025* and *GS 102 Group Benefits Plans 2025 Premiums and Plan Changes*, the Moderator gave time to concerns raised by Paul Douglas Walfall.

Paul noted that the health of Communities of Faith must be the concern and responsibility of the Executive, citing the Deed of Church Union 7.1. He proposed that the General Council Executive form a working group to assess the current state of Communities of Faith, especially in regard to their financial sustainability.

In response, the General Secretary recommended that information based on the data already available to the GCE on the viability of Communities of Faith be prepared and shared at the November Executive meeting. At that point in time the Executive may want to reconsider how they move forward.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

Arlyce Schiebout reflected on the Executive's adherence to the Equity Aspirations throughout the first day of the meeting. She asked the Executive to take a few moments and reflect on the question: as you reflect on our work today, how do you think that we as GCE might work to reduce systemic barriers (and advance equity)?

Closing Prayer

The Moderator closed the meeting with a prayer by Thomas Merton.

Saturday, September 28, 2024**Worship and Covenanting**

The Moderator began the second day of the meeting with worship incorporating the hymn *Called by Your Name*.

The Executive covenanted with Mark Laird, Regional Executive Minister, Horseshoe Falls, Western Ontario Waterways, and Antler River Watershed Regional Councils, and Harry Li, Executive Officer, Finance.

Equity Reminder

Wilson Gonese spoke of the history of the United Church and reminded the group of the commitment to equity and provided an overview of the equity aspirations, in light of our history as The United Church of Canada.

GS 99 Approval of 2025 Operating Budget (Appendix III)

The Moderator invited the General Secretary to introduce the proposal regarding the 2025 operating budget. The General Secretary reminded the Executive of decisions made at previous meetings as those relate to the proposal before them. He then invited Harry Li to present the 2025 operating budget.

Harry Li offered highlights on the 2025 operating budget for The United Church of Canada General Council Office and gave a brief budget trajectory for the next three years. He extended his thanks to the finance department and all staff who were part of the process.

There was a time for comments and questions. There was considerable discussion regarding the budget, particularly with regard to the cost-of-living adjustment and the various impacts of changing the percentage of the increase.

Motion: Michael Blair/ Jane McDonald**2024-09-27-128**

That the General Council Executive approve the 2025 Operating Budget, as detailed at the end of this proposal, which has been developed in accordance with the budget principles and assumptions approved at the May 2024 GCE meeting. The budget includes a 2.5% cost-of-living

Approved motion 2024-11-22-140

adjustment (COLA). Any incremental salary costs will need to be covered within the existing 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) **[New]** *The 2025 Annual Salary adjustment (COLA) for the General Council Staff system is set at 2.5%, which aligns with the recommendation from the Total Compensation task group and the financial sustainability mandate previously approved by the GCE.*
- 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.

Carried

By his request, it is noted for the minutes that Paul Douglas Walfall opposed the motion.

Strategic Plan Update

The General Secretary introduced the strategic plan and the various objectives. He then introduced Jennifer Henry, Executive Minister for Organizational Development and Strategy, and Cameron Fraser, Director of Growth and Ministry Development, to lead the Executive in a conversation on *Growth*, noting the three foci of the *Growth* approach – Create, Renew, Invite.

Approved motion 2024-11-22-140

Jennifer Henry reminded the Executive that the second quarter report could be reviewed online. Jennifer invited Cameron Fraser to lead a presentation on the *Growth* strategic objective.

After the presentation there was time for discussion, in small groups and in plenary.

The General Secretary and Moderator thanked Jennifer, Cameron, the growth animators, and the team for their hard work.

At the invitation of the Moderator, Mitchell Anderson prayed for the team.

GS 92 Creating Safe and Respectful Environments (*Appendix IV*)

The General Secretary invited Alan Hall to present this proposal which is meant to bring together the sexual abuse response harassment and workplace harassment and violence policies. Alan noted that while this was discussed at a previous Executive meeting in the Spring, the proposal was moved to this meeting to give time for questions and subsequent additional revisions for clarity.

There was time for questions and comments. In the course of the conversation the Executive agreed that as this is a policy that is renewed annually, management can take the concerns raised here into account for future revisions. By his request, it is noted for the minutes that Paul Douglass Walfall opposed the motion, as it is his belief that this policy fails vulnerable peoples.

Motion: Michael Blair/ Richard Bott

2024-09-27-129

That the General Council Executive adopt the proposed policy and direct the General Secretary to operationalize.

Carried

Mission and Service

The General Secretary invited Sarah Charters, Executive Officer, Philanthropy and President of The United Church of Canada Foundation, to give a presentation on Mission and Service. Sarah highlighted that revenue to this point in the year has been as expected, and that the Thanksgiving campaign had been launched. She noted that the Centennial Legacy campaign, although not yet widely promoted, has already received much support throughout the United Church.

In closing, Sarah applauded the overwhelming support for the retreat for Indigenous ministers; in which the \$45,000 goal was surpassed.

The General Secretary and Moderator expressed thanks to Sarah and her team, as they facilitate and enable the generosity of the United Church.

GS 103 Authorizing Action for a Principle-Based Approach to Justice Work in the United Church of Canada (*Appendix V*)

The General Secretary provided a brief introduction to the proposal, and introduced Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Executive Minister, Theology and Ministry Leadership, and Ariel Siagan, a member of the Theology and Inter-Church, Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF), to present on the principle-based approach.

Jennifer gave a brief overview of using an ethical framework for decision making . Ariel offered a presentation on the implications of three of the principles: decolonization, truth, and prophetic solidarity.

Following the presentation there was considerable discussion. After extensive discussion, it was agreed that the proposal would be brought to the next meeting of the Sub-Executive after editing and clarification.

Motion: Samuel Vauvert Dansokho/ Mitchell Anderson

2024-09-27-130

That, having the benefit of this discussion, the GCE refers proposal *GS 103 Authorizing Action for a Principle-Based Approach to Justice Work in the United Church of Canada* to the General Secretary for further refinement to be brought to the Sub-Executive for decision.

Carried

GS 101 General Council 45 Budget Proposal (*Appendix VI*)

Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, Senior Governance Support Lead, presented the budget for General Council 45. The General Secretary noted that in preparation for General Council 44, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic deposits were made in Calgary. If the General Council Office had cancelled rather than postponed, those deposits would have been lost. When Chinook Winds offered to host General Council 45, it made economic sense for Calgary to be the host site again.

Motion: Michael Blair/ Wilson Gonese

2024-09-27-131

That the Executive of the General Council authorize the budget for the 45th General Council for up to \$2million.

Carried

The Moderator noted that Michael Caveney had left the court, due to another obligation.

Centennial Update

Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa provided an update on the Centennial celebrations. She noted Sarah Charter's previous presentation on the legacy campaign, and Cheryl-Ann spent some time

focussing on the public-facing campaign of the Centennial, as there is a hope to raise the profile of the United Church with Canadians.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

Alcris reflected on the Executive's adherence to the Equity Aspirations throughout the meeting. She reminded the Executive of the definitions and examples of the differences between equity and equality.

Reminder of Next Steps

The General Secretary reminded the Executive of the General Council annual meeting on Saturday, October 19, 2024. Michael noted that the summary of this meeting would be available early in the following week. A Sub-Executive meeting will be arranged as soon as possible. He thanked the Executive for the current and future discretion regarding the Cost of Living Adjustment announcement, as the General Council Office will be communicating that information in an appropriate time and fashion.

On October 22, the United Church will be hosting a town hall gathering as an opportunity for United Church members to ask any particular questions coming out of this meeting or the General Council meeting. The Executive is encouraged to participate in that town hall meeting.

Motion: Katherine Brittain / Kit Loewen

2024-09-27-132

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

In closing, the Moderator recognized and thanked the Executive for their hard work, and the respectful ways they engaged with material and one another. The Moderator then closed the meeting in prayer.

Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne

General Secretary, Michael Blair