

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL
MINUTES
Friday, February 23 to Saturday, February 24, 2024

The 44th Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada met online from Friday, February 23 to Saturday, February 24, 2024. The Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, presided.

Attendance

Voting Members: Mitchell Anderson, Michael Blair, Richard Bott, Teresa Burnett-Cole, 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

Corresponding Members: Kimberly Roy, Leeann Shimoda

Regrets: Michael Caveney, Thea Sheridan-Jonah, Faith March-MacCuish

Elder: Evelyn Day

Corresponding Staff: Diane Bosman, Marlene Britton, Sarah Charters, Treena Duncan, Alan Hall, Adele Halliday, Éric Hébert-Daly, Jennifer Henry, Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Harry Li, Shannon McCarthy, Japhet Ndhlovu, Murray Pruden

Guests: Craig Bater, Taylor Croissant, Norm Seli, Jim Simpson

Friday, February 23, 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

Immediate Past Moderator, Richard Bott, invited those present to not only remember that all the lands of Turtle Island are the ancestral homes of Indigenous people, but to consider reconciliation in all aspects of their lives.

GS 76 Procedural and Consent

The General Secretary briefly outlined the procedural and consent motion. The full text of the reports and proposals is found in *Appendix II*.

Motion: Michael Blair/Kit Loewen**2024-02-23-097**

That the General Council Executive:

1. Approve the minutes of the General Council Executive meeting held November 17-18, 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; the Chair of the Board of Vocation; Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the United Church Foundation; Chair of the General Council 45 Planning Committee; and 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 – Fourth Quarter 2023
 - Board of Vocation Report
 - Foundation Board Report
 - Pastoral Relations Equity Project – Executive Summary
6. Approve the following proposals:
 - GS 77 Amendment to the Joint Grants Committee Terms of Reference
 - GS 78 Funding for The United Church of Canada Centennial

Carried

Welcome and Introduction

The Moderator invited everyone into a time of introductions in a sharing circle. The GCE welcomed a new member of the Executive, Rev. Alcris Limongi; two corresponding members, Leeann Shimoda and Rev. Kimberly Roy, from the National Indigenous Council, and Elder Evelyn Day.

Agenda Review

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.

Equity Reminders

M Chorney named the members of the equity team for this meeting: Arlyce Schiebout, Wilson Gonese and herself, and noted that they 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

...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

Gathering Worship

The Moderator led worship, which included prayers from *Act Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis*, and a video, *By Any Means Necessary*, featuring Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

Decolonizing Conversation

Samuel Dansokho led the Executive in a discussion regarding decolonization centred on the concept of Sankofa, the idea that it isn't taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot; that we should look back and learn from the past. Samuel shared images of a Sankofa bird with its head turned backwards while its feet face forward carrying a precious egg in its mouth. He then asked the Executive to share their observations and reflections. He asked the question, when are memories a danger for the colonizers? He closed the time with a video of Sweet Honey in the Rock, an all-woman, African-American a cappella ensemble, singing *Breaths* (1988).

Governance Education & Update

Mitchell Anderson shared a story from author and Dene Elder George Blondin. Mitchell likened the story of the hunter and the raven to the roles of governors and those who are actually able to get the work done. The role of the GCE is to be like the raven flying high in the sky, seeing the larger picture and giving direction, so the work can be done by those closer to the ground, creating an effective partnership.

GS 79 Pastoral Relations Thriving with Equity Research Project

As a follow-up to a prior learning session in January, Adele Halliday, Anti-Racism and Equity Lead, and Marlene Britton, Director of Policies and Programs for Ministry Personnel, Theology and Ministry Leadership, invited the GCE to work in small groups to discuss the proposal, and to answer the question, what principles would you name to guide the plan for this work moving

Approved motion 2024-05-10-110

forward? The notes from the small groups will be shared with Adele and Marlene to facilitate implementation. There was a request to not water down the work, but to remain centred on the issues of equity seeking ministry personnel, or candidates in the United Church, who do not look or speak like those in a congregation. In response to an expressed wish to move beyond reports to action, there was an agreement that an interim report will be prepared for the November, 2024 GCE meeting.

Motion: Arlyce Schiebout/Teresa Burnett-Cole

2024-02-23-098

That the General Council Executive:

- A. Receive the full report of the Pastoral Relations Equity Research Report, and its executive summary; and
- B. Direct the development and implementation of a plan of action consistent with the Invigorate Leadership objective of the Strategic Operational Plan:
 - for addressing the issues raised by the report, and
 - working collaboratively with the Board of Vocation, the Office of Vocation, and regional councils to identify any policies that need to be revised, or developed, to create a more equitable and just processes, and
 - provide a final action plan to the General Council Executive no later than the February, 2025 meeting.

Carried

Board of Vocation Report

Marlene Britton and Norm Seli, Chair of the Board of Vocation, were available to respond to any questions or comments on the Board of Vocation accountability report. Marlene shared a video about the United Church admission matching process. Most of the discussion centred on the admission process, including issues of systemic blocks, and questions regarding complaints. In closing, the importance of volunteers for the various roles related to the Board of Vocation was highlighted.

The Moderator thanked Norm for being present with the Executive, and for the work done by the Board of vocation.

Reflections on the Day

Wilson Gonese reflected on equity and fairness at the close of the first day of this meeting.

At the request of the Moderator, Mitchell Anderson offered a prayer to close the day.

Saturday, February 24, 2024

Worship

The second day of the meeting began with worship led by the Moderator. Rev. Alison Etter, chair of the Theology, Inter-Church and Inter-Faith (TICIF) committee, and Rev. Karen Hilfman Millson, both of whom had passed away recently, were remembered in prayer. The reading of the Holy Manners liturgy in French and English was shared among members of the GCE and prayers were offered for the church across the country, drawing from concerns raised by regional councils. A moving video, *Plowshare Prayer Song* by Spencer LaJoye, was shared in closing.

Time with the Moderator

The former Moderator, Richard Bott, assumed the chair.

The Moderator provided a brief update on her recent work, highlighting the beginning of the (Re)Generate program, a part of the Moderator's Flourishing Initiative, which endeavors to support ministers in leadership development to assist with the changing needs of communities of faith and the church in the world. She named as a particular concern the financial stress that many communities of faith are under. After her report there was an opportunity for questions and comments.

Richard prayed for the Moderator and her work. The Moderator resumed the chair.

Foundation Board

Jim Simpson and Craig Bater, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of the United Church Foundation, and Sarah Charters, President of the Foundation, joined the Executive in the first intentional conversation between the GCE and the Foundation.

Jim Simpson began his report by giving thanks for the life and gifts of Rev. Tim Reaburn, a former member of the Executive, who was serving as chair of the Foundation Board when he died in December of last year. Jim explained that in 2006 the Foundation's total grants were a total of \$654,000 for all gifts, and that the amount has multiplied 21 times since then. He noted that impact investing is making a difference and has become an important focus of investment for the Foundation, along with the assurance of financial return. The Board has been discussing how the relationship between the Foundation and the church has grown over the last 20 years and are wondering if the current memorandum of understanding, and ways of working continue to serve both entities. During the time for questions there were many positive comments and affirmations for the work being done by the Foundation.

The Moderator thanked Jim and Craig for joining the Executive for this time of reporting. The General Secretary invited any feedback to ensure continued effectiveness for the ongoing work of the United Church and Foundation.

GS 80 Centennial Fundraising Campaign

Sarah Charters, in her role as Executive Officer, Philanthropy, outlined the findings of a preliminary feasibility study for a proposed fundraising campaign to be built around the Centennial, and a possible timeline for the campaign.

Motion: Michael Blair/Richard Bott**2024-02-23-099**

That the General Council Executive:

- Request that a national planned (legacy) giving campaign led by The United Church of Canada Foundation in which the General Council Office and the General Council Executive will participate;
- Commit to providing leadership in promoting and supporting the campaign; and
- Ensure appropriate resources – as per the strategic plan and budget – are allocated to the campaign.

Carried

General Secretary Accountability Report

The General Secretary highlighted several items from his written report, including the approaching remit deadline; that the Centennial celebrations would launch with worship on Sunday, June 9 at Metropolitan United Church in Toronto; the structural review, which will examine whether the structural changes have accomplished the intended results; and the move to 300 Bloor Street West. He also noted the need to have ongoing conversations about leadership in the United Church: ordained and lay, elected and staff – for a sustainable future; the ambiguity between the Office of Vocation and Board of Vocation; and the lack of nimbleness caused by the polity of the United Church. He wondered about revisiting the possibility of changing from the United Church of Canada Act to the Canadian Not-for-Profit Corporations Act.

There was an opportunity for questions or comments. There were affirmations, but also a concern that the United Church is trying to do too much work, perhaps a narrowing of the focus to leadership would help the church remain relevant and be sustainable. In response to a question about why to shift to the not-for-profit act, the General Secretary noted again the slowness of processes embedded within the Basis of Union.

Richard Bott noted that his concern about the lack of clarity between the Office of Vocation and the Board of Vocation. With the consent of the Moderator he put forward the following proposal.

Motion: Richard Bott/Samuel Vauvert Dansokho**2024-02-23-100**

That the General Council Executive request the General Secretary to take the necessary steps to clarify the oversight relationship between the General Council and the Board of Vocation.

Carried

Correspondence

An item of correspondence had been sent directly to most of the members of the GCE expressing concerns about the decision of the General Council regarding Designated Lay Ministers made at the October, 2023 annual meeting. Jennifer Jansen-Ball reviewed a letter of response with the Executive, and with some small adjustments the GCE approved the response.

In response to a request for some clarity about how individual GCE members should deal with direct correspondence, the Moderator noted that this would be added as a discussion item for the next meeting of the Governance Committee.

Reflections – Equity Aspirations

Arlyce reflected on the progress that we have made, the progress that still needs to be made, and the hope that surrounds us, noting particularly the Admissions video shared with the group on the previous day.

General Council 45 Planning Committee Report

The General Secretary introduced Taylor Croissant, chair of the General Council 45 Planning Committee, who joined the Executive and presented an outline for the 45th General Council which will be held in Calgary, in August of 2025. The theme for GC45 will be Visions and Dreams, based on Acts 2:17: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young shall see visions, and your elders shall dream dreams.” Prior to August in-person gathering, there will be two June listening and discussion sessions held online, and more challenging proposals will be dealt with in person during GC45. A new proposal template and guide is being developed. Taylor noted the hope that the new template would enable the General Council a greater breadth of possibilities in addressing issues.

In response to a question it was noted that the mandate of the Way Forward Committee is to determine where there are areas of consensus, and to propose a way forward if there is no consensus. For this reason, the notes taken in the discussion groups are very important, as they must reflect all viewpoints and the full breadth of what is covered in the discussion groups.

The General Secretary and Moderator extended their thanks for the ongoing work of the GC45 Planning Committee.

Strategic Plan Update (2024-02-23 GCE Appendix Operational Plan Quarterly Report)

A short presentation by Jennifer Henry, Executive Minister for Organizational Development and Strategy, outlined where the church is at this time with regard to the strategic plan timeline and objectives. She noted that this was time of transition between the first year and second year of the operational plan. Jennifer reminded the Executive that the strategic plan and its objectives are in that raven’s place, with a high viewpoint, and the operational plan is the work of the General Secretary and the staff.

Some of the changes that were highlighted include the fact that there are now 20 priority areas, down from 40 in 2023, with the hope to become even more focused in the future.

The Executive worked in small groups considering the presentation and the report, exploring three questions: What resonates? What's missing? Where should we invest more? Notes from the groups were shared back to Jennifer.

The Moderator thanked Jennifer and her team for their work.

Mission and Service Moment

Sarah Charters gave a quick overview of 2023 Mission and Service giving, which, while declining by 1.5% year-over-year, is a strong result in comparison to other charitable organizations. The 2024 focus for donations to Mission and Service will be on PAR, the monthly pre-authorized remittance program. She also showed a video about a micro-loan program for women in Kenya.

Reflecting – Decolonizing

Teresa Burnett-Cole, a member of the Decolonizing Working Group, offered closing reflections on the work of the GCE in their decolonizing processes. She noted many elements of the meeting, including the opening Sankofa reflection, that reflected well the Executive's decolonizing commitments. Reports are a problem area, but executive summaries are useful. Having the reports written more accessibly could help them be more widely shared in the church. Teresa also spoke of the tension between the corporate church and communities of faith, with a hope that a way can be found to bridge that gap.

The Moderator thanked Teresa, the Decolonizing Working Group, and the Equity Team for their work at this meeting and ongoing.

Reminder of Next Steps

The General Secretary reminded the Executive of the next meeting, which is scheduled for May 10-11, 2024. He noted that the meeting summary would be available early in the following week, and would be shared by email and available on the GC44 website (generalcouncil44.ca).

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/Kit Loewen

2024-02-23-101

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 to end the meeting.

Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne

General Secretary, Michael Blair