

GENERAL SECRETARY'S ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT (Part B)

Origin: General Secretary

Overview of the Strategic Operational Plan

Introduction



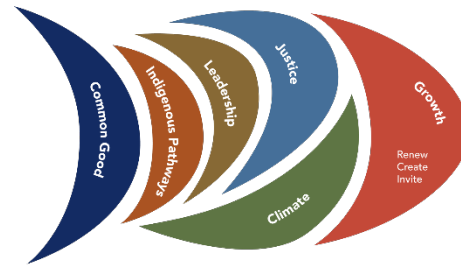
In 2021 the Commissioners of the 43rd General Council approved the Call and Vision for the church—Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice. Over the course of the past triennium, we have understood this to be the north star for the work of the church. Our animation of the Call and Vision has been both wide and deep. Achieving breadth, we have shared the Call and Vision across the denomination, in the multiple languages of the United Church, including through presentations, video, bible study, worship resources, graphic elements, and [merchandise](#). Tapping into the depth of these shared words, we have embraced and supported a significant number of conferences dedicated to the theological

themes of the Call, as well as orienting denominational publishing resources to align with, and delve more deeply into, aspects of the Call. We have found the Call to resonate with United Church identity, specifically who we are striving to become, including in our conversation with ecumenical and global partners, and our relationships with emerging communities.

This part of my report will offer some accounting of the work of the General Council Office in implementing its strategic objectives based on the Call and Vision.

For the work of the General Council Office (GCO), the 44th Executive of the General Council approved a Strategic Plan with six strategic objectives—Strengthen Invitation (Growth), Invigorate Leadership, Nurture the Common Good, Deepen Climate Integrity, Embolden Justice, and Journeying Indigenous Pathways. These objectives were understood to be interconnected, contributing to embodying the Call and approaching the Vision. Committed to increasing both transparency and accountability for results, we adopted objectives and key results (OKRs) as an organizing framework for GCO annual plans between 2023–2025.

Staff broke the six objectives into multi-year initiatives and further into activity streams, each with an accountable lead, and progress towards results tracked quarterly. That progress is shared with the General Council Executive in quarterly reporting but also accessible in a [dashboard](https://united-church.ca) on united-church.ca. In 2023, the first year of annual plan, we achieved 72 percent progress on planned key results, while in 2024 that number was 78 percent. More significant and consistent use of data has led to wrapping up ineffective projects and adjusting others. Over the course of the triennium, we have aligned programmatic and financial reporting, and seen incremental, but significant, progress in strategic thinking, focus and stronger use of metrics.



Strengthen Invitation

The General Council Executive identified the strategic objective on growth—“Strengthen Invitation: humility and confidence in sharing faith”—as the leading priority among the six objectives. The goal of the triennium focused on the development and implementation of effective and connected regional and national strategies that result in growth within existing ministries, and by seeding and sustaining new expressions of communities of faith. To support the work of the Strategic Plan, particularly related to growth, a Research and Development department (R&D) was also created, drawing in existing and new staff expertise. Early on, a tripartite framework was established for this objective, organizing multi-year initiatives in three areas: renew, create, invite.

In the area of *renewal* of existing ministries, Growth Animators are now working directly with communities of faith, drawing insight from neighbourhood profiles produced by the R&D department, helping the community discern their “why,” and developing invitation plans. By October and November of 2024, Growth Animators were working with 185 ministry personnel and 422 communities of faith. Collaborating intently with regions, other areas of focus include projects related to youth and young adult outreach, such as a highly successful francophone youth retreat, and support for pilots on cooperative and other innovative ministry arrangements, as well as specific attention being paid to rural communities of faith. Having identified growing churches within the existing ministries of the United Church, the growth department is harvesting learnings to share with communities across the whole country.

In the area of *creating* new communities of faith, the focus has been primarily on emerging migrant and diaspora constituencies. As of early 2025, 25 new emerging migrant communities were receiving support from the General Council Office, with a number of possibilities developing through the rest of the year. These include Pan-African, Hong Kong, Korean, Filipino, Malagasy, and Swahili-speaking communities, and, in some contexts, strong collaborative relationships with global denominational partners. These church plants and their leads were celebrated by the broader United Church in a deeply moving virtual [mutual blessing service](#) in January of 2025; some of the leads will also be present in Calgary at GC45 to help deepen relationships with these emerging communities within the denomination.

Beyond migrant communities, the Growth initiative has made investments in new ministry through the Pacific Mountain Church Planting Program, Hillhurst United Church (Calgary) satellite site, Cowan Heights United Church (St. John's) Home Harbour new ministry, Fireweed Hub/Zion United Church (New Denver), Francophone new ministry (Moncton), French language focus groups in Nakonha:ka, Symons Valley United Church (Calgary), a Campus United site at Red Deer Polytechnique in partnership with Sunnybrook United Church, and congregational revitalization in Shining Waters and Canadian Shield. The Fertile Soil mapping project, which uses data from Environics and the Census, has been completed in its test location Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council, offering accessible data on where growth could be possible with strengthening and focused invitation strategies.

In the area of *invite*, informed by a Communications audit, the General Council Office has reorganized its internal resources to focus more resolutely on communicating with the broader Canadian public. Drawing from polling of both church and general public in 2022, and from experimentation in 2023–2024 (including video promotion at *Stars on Ice*), a public outreach campaign oriented around *A Place at the Table* shifts into implementation in 2025, with the goal of extending an inclusive welcome to all to participate in the church's continued call and vision. Elements include a dynamic photo reinterpretation of the Last Supper and the *100 Tables* initiative. Beginning in the spring of 2025, 100 United Church communities of faith across the country will express the love of God and neighbour. 100 tables will be set up outside of United Church buildings, each used to express the community's unique incarnation of Jesus' invitation to the Table. Together they will form a nationwide symbol of the church's commitment to justice and the thriving of neighbourhoods we call home. Some tables might provide items for people to take as they need, others might offer an invitation of companionship and conversation, while others might offer a prophetic witness speaking to a local manifestation of economic injustice. The tables will be linked by storytelling and an interactive map. *A Place at the Table* extends beyond current outreach strategies related to the [Centennial](#) which, through using tools such as thematic newsletters and focused ads, are gaining new contacts from persons with no current association with The United Church of Canada. Focused on French Canada, a dynamic website initiative, [Mon Credo](#), taps into French speaking online influencers to invite francophone Canadians to discover the values and commitments of [L'Église Unie du Canada](#).

Invigorate Leadership

(Re)Generate: This pilot project, an initiative of the Moderator, focused on creating a cohort of ministry personnel leaders across the country, to deepen and strengthen skills and knowledge for ministry in various contexts. The project brought together 32 ministry personnel, representing diverse identities and contexts, over the course of eighteen months (January 2024–June 2025). The cohort gathered both in person and online, for five days at a time, three times per year. Participants developed “capstone projects” to integrate their learning into their ministry contexts and to respond to needs they, with lay leaders, had identified in their ministries. These capstone projects and learnings from this pilot project will be shared with the wider church after completion of the project in late June 2025. Out of the evaluations and projects, assessments will be made as to the best way(s) in which to develop this pilot into a more permanent offering for leaders in the church, with the intention to expand this to include teams of lay leaders and ministry personnel. One of the key benefits for participants has been the creation of a cohort who gather regularly, and the relationships that sustain, strengthen, and deepen each participant’s ministry within their local contexts. Participants have said:

"Without fail, I return to my congregational setting with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence in leading where I am, with all that I am, for God's people here and now. As that plays out, I believe our congregation also feels more seen and known in the national church. My learning, my bolstered identity, is theirs, too."

"This program has been amazing—it has given me a hopeful outlook, not only about the church, but about my place in it. My confidence in leadership has grown in ways that I didn't expect, and I really feel that it's so much easier to be in this position in ministry knowing that I have this group to rely on and feel a part of. The intentionality of being and growing and learning together has been core."

"The learning is amazing but what I learn from the other folks as we have space to be vulnerable and lean into the hard conversations regarding ministry are invaluable for my mind and spirit!"

Cooperative Ministries: In 2023, work began in earnest on a national level on cooperative ministries, because of the proposal passed by GC44 related to Ministry Leadership in the 2020s. The first year included gathering information on existing cooperative ministry models in the United Church and doing some research on the ways other denominations have supported cooperative ministries (often called collaborative ministry in the literature). The second year of work included supporting learning communities of those engaged in various forms of cooperative ministries and offering funding for six Supervised Ministry Education (SME) learning sites that are cooperative ministries. These SME sites are each unique and offer exciting opportunities for current candidates to experiment and learn on the ground. This funding allows cooperative ministry sites and candidates to practice and deepen skills for cooperative

ministries and offers the denomination the chance to learn from these six very different sites. Funding for some new SME cooperative ministry sites will be provided in 2025 and 2026. In addition, some sites for potential cooperative ministry models have been identified in at least two regional councils; work is ongoing to determine supports and next steps needed to launch at least one of these cooperative ministry pilots in 2025/2026.

Theological Schools: The Theology and Ministry Leadership unit, with the eight affiliated United Church theological schools, have been working together to “reimagine theological education.” This work includes: identifying ministry formation and theological education that is needed for the church now and into the future (including skills related to cooperative ministries and discipleship formation); developing and supporting an anti-racism faculty network; supporting the schools in developing field-based theological education programs for candidates (for ordination or commissioning) without an undergraduate degree and with a lifelong vocational call to ministry; ascertaining ways in which the schools can collaborate together, and as a result of that work, applying for a significant funding opportunity through the Lilly Endowment that would enable the schools to further collaborate on reimagining the ecosystem of theological education in Canada.

Nurture the Common Good

Insurance: The captive insurance entity has been operating for two years and has delivered tangible savings to United Church communities of faith. In the first year of the captive’s operation, it was able to decrease the premium for congregations and pay the interest of \$258,423. In the 2022/2023 renewal cycle, the captive insurance model delivered immediate savings of \$2 million, translating to less financial burden for the 960 congregations participating in the program. In the first year of operation, the loss ratio was within the expected range of 20 percent. As a result, the captive insurance was able to contain premium increases at a minimal level. However, two significant adverse fire claims occurred in the summer of 2024, each costing the captive approximately \$2 million. Despite the adverse claim experience in 2024, and the need to recapitalize the captive insurance, the insurance initiative has proven to be an effective risk management tool for the Church. It has helped mitigate skyrocketing premium increases, reduce financial burdens on congregations, and enhance overall financial sustainability.

Mission and Service: We are grateful for the individuals, families, congregations, and communities of faith that generously support Mission and Service year after year. As our shared tangible expression of God’s love in our world, together we have accomplished so many good things. Your Mission and Service gifts funded the [\(Re\)Generate program](#) and the [2024 Rendez Vous: Audacious Hope](#) youth event. Both initiatives supported and increased the capacity and skill of younger leaders within the Church. Similarly, the [Youth Climate Motivators](#) program (see below) was very successful in engaging youth across Canada to work with local congregations on climate justice and environmental initiatives. This helps us all further our work of living with respect in Creation while also encouraging new leaders. Further afield, our global partnerships

thrived. Highlights in 2024 supported by your generous Mission and Service gifts include the convening of the first [Human Sexuality and Gender Consultation in Africa](#), support for [communities undertaking sustainable agriculture](#), and assistance for [people affected by war](#). Your generosity creates and supports the many ways we together show and share God's love in our world. Thank you for your dedication and your gifts. Additional information on Mission and Service can be found at the [United Church website](#), including more stories, accountability reports, and worship resources.

Assessment: With the enactment of Remit 4, *Funding a New Model*, it was intended that all pastoral charges would share in funding both regional and denominational governance work in a proportional and transparent way. The original implementation plan for the transition to the new funding model (as approved with the ratification of Remit 4) contemplated a three-year transition plan with full implementation by 2022. It was further contemplated that General Council 44 in July 2022 might ratify certain principles and assessment rates going forward. COVID impacted the schedule, with the transition plan extended into 2023 and there being considerable uncertainty regarding the longer-term financial impact on congregations. General Council 44 first affirmed the existing assessment rate in 2022 and was again asked in 2023 and 2024 to affirm the current rates and principles. At each annual recall meeting of General Council, there will be an opportunity to affirm or change these rates. In 2024, the total denominational assessment was \$11.8 million, which played a vital role in funding both regional and denominational governance work.

Deepen Climate Integrity

There is such a thing as a delightful problem to have! We have committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2030—a bold and ambitious target. The Faithful Footprints program was established to address our biggest emissions contributor: our buildings. The program is managed by Faith and the Common Good, who conduct audits, assess applications for financial assistance, and track the impact of the changes made. In the past two years, interest in the program has grown exponentially, a sign that communities of faith understand the importance of improving energy efficiency and reducing emissions. However, the church cannot sustain the grants as they have been operating. We are in the process of providing additional screening, so that support can assist congregations with less ability to undertake these changes without a grant. The details are being finalized in consultation with regional councils. In the meantime, it is worth celebrating that over 500 communities of faith have reached out to Faith and the Common Good with an interest in Faithful Footprints!

Greening our buildings is only one pillar of the climate objective. The others include raising our spirited voices, connecting with the earth, and responding to climate impacts. A new travel policy has been developed that limits a General Council committee or task group's in person meetings and that rewards use of public transit and carpooling.

Climate motivators, youth employed by the church through a Canada Summer Jobs grant, have been engaging with elected leaders to advocate for change. The [2023–2024 Sustainability Report](#) highlights how their efforts have had an impact.

The need for change has become more and more apparent through the devastation caused by severe weather events and wildfires. Through the [Canadian Foodgrains Bank](#), we are supporting our partners around the globe as they develop new agricultural practices to enhance food security. Meeting our climate objective will require more than just new techniques, new travel policies, political action, and building upgrades; it will require a change of heart and a way of living that prioritize the words of our creed: “To live with respect in creation.”

Embolden Justice

Building relationships and partnerships for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights: In the past triennium, we have been strengthening our relationships and partnerships with ecumenical organizations, civil society networks, and key 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations. This transformative strategy has fostered increased collaboration, networking, and advocacy for enhanced 2SLGBTQIA+ rights. One of the most successful collaborations has been to enter into a funding agreement between Equitas and The United Church of Canada. A framework was established for Equitas to provide funding to The United Church of Canada to the tune of \$372,533. The funding is intended to support the Human Sexuality and Gender Diversity project, which aims to advance the human rights of LGBTQ2IA+ people in countries eligible for overseas development assistance (ODA). We have partnered with the All-Africa Theological Education by Extension Association (AATEEA) to implement the project.

With this global-facing work, we are working with our partners and diverse stakeholders to create spaces for dialogue and changing exclusionary narratives within faith communities. This intersectional approach connects 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy with broader justice initiatives, nurturing solidarity and ensuring holistic justice work rooted in the shared vision of dignity for all. We have established ourselves as bold advocates in global conversations on equity and dignity. Through advocacy efforts with governments and international agencies, we are promoting the visibility of the United Church’s voice on global 2SLGBTQIA+ issues. Evaluation data shows growing partnerships with key stakeholders, and increased visibility of our advocacy efforts.

In collaboration with government relations strategic initiatives, the church is represented in priority national and global 2SLGBTQIA+ networks. South-south and south-north dialogue is fostering meaningful exchanges between global partners, our global ecumenical network, and LGBTQIA+ communities. This strengthens global solidarity and builds collective capacity to address 2SLGBTQIA+ rights within intersecting justice frameworks.

Success Story—African Church Leaders Consultation: The African Church Leaders Consultation on Human Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Africa, held in Mozambique in 2024, was a significant success in advancing the agenda of inclusion. The consultation fostered dialogue

among faith leaders, ecumenical figures, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, promoting acceptance of sexual diversity and identifying gaps in current practices. We share the [story](#) of one of the participants in the consultation.

Principle based approach: In October 2023, the 44th General Council adopted a set of principles to guide its justice work, marking a significant shift from its previous policy-based approach. This new principles-based framework aims to enable more timely and contextual responses to emerging social justice issues. The seven key principles were [adopted in principle in 2023](#) with revisions being brought to the [adopted in principle in 2023](#), with revisions being brought to this 45th General Council.

This shift was motivated by the church's recognition that its previous policy-based approach often left it out of sync with rapidly changing global realities and the calls of its partners. The new principles are designed to provide a flexible framework for making ethical, justice-seeking decisions without prescribing specific actions for every circumstance. The adoption of these principles represents the church's ongoing efforts to decolonize its processes, actions, advocacy, and ministries. It reflects a commitment to respond more effectively to situations of injustice in Canada and around the world, while also being more responsive to requests from partners. We are encouraging all communities of faith and regional councils to engage with the principles, taking ownership of them and applying them in their local contexts as they exercise their prophetic ministries. These principles are designed to guide our collective work towards justice, equity, and compassion.

We will continue to monitor their implementation, gather feedback, and adjust as necessary.

Journeying Indigenous Pathways

National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering (NISG): This triennium will be remembered as an important juncture in the journey towards a self-governing Indigenous church. It will be remembered as a significant time of learning as the Indigenous church tested new governance processes. It will be remembered for General Council's adoption of Remit 1, *Establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Organization*, confirming the Indigenous church's ability to chart its own path forward. Two National Indigenous Spiritual Gatherings were held in the triennium. At the first, in 2023, a new model for the appointment of the National Indigenous Council (NIC) was introduced. For the first time, five circles of the Indigenous church played a direct role in selecting NIC members. As the new NIC began to meet, some challenges with the new model became apparent. These structural issues combined with some interpersonal conflict led to a breakdown in the NIC's ability to carry out its duties in April 2024. Considerable effort was made over four months to implement a process for healing. These efforts failed when the second of two NIC co-chairs stepped down from leadership in August. This led me, as General Secretary, in consultation with Indigenous Ministries and Justice leaders, to make the difficult decision formally to dissolve the NIC and call for another NISG which would have the authority to appoint a new NIC. Questions and concerns were raised about that decision and particularly the process for making it. The church learned that new protocols and

methodologies need to be developed to address such challenges in the future, rooted in the wisdom and traditions of Indigenous peoples.

An NISG was held from November 29–December 2, 2024, in Winnipeg. The NISG decided that it was not ready to appoint a new NIC. They agreed that further work needs to be done to develop an effective model for governance of the Indigenous church. They asked the National Indigenous Elders Council (NIEC) to provide leadership in developing that model. They agreed. The NIEC's first step will be to look at its own composition with a view to expanding the NIEC to ensure better representation from across the country. It is important for the entire church to recognize that the NIEC has been asked to assume significant roles and responsibilities that they quite literally did not sign up for. The NIEC was not set up to govern the Indigenous church but to offer spiritual leadership and guidance. Nevertheless, the NIEC has accepted the NISG's decisions and have begun their work, agreeing to meet more frequently, in order both to carry out the mandate given to them by the NISG and to act as the National Indigenous Council (NIC) when decisions need to be made which normally would go to the NIC. This is a heavy task for the Elders. They will require support, encouragement, and, above all, patience from the rest of the church as they assume a very heavy workload, until such time as a process is developed and implemented to appoint a new NIC.

Racialized and Indigenous youth: The Indigenous and Racialized Youth Retreat is a program that has been designed and delivered by Indigenous and Racialized young people for other youth who look like them. The annual program has been offered since 2022 and is held at the Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre.

The retreat makes space for 20 young people, and every year we invite four youth to come back and serve as junior leaders. The youth leaders are integral as they help shape the program, support the adult leadership in determining who the participants will be, and support new participants in their journey at the retreat.

The Indigenous and Racialized Youth Retreat is invaluable to the participants as we have often heard that "this space is what was missing from our lives." It offers a safe space for the youth to come together and not worry about Reconciliation or trying to educate other people about their lived realities. Instead, the space provides the youth a chance to create lasting friendships, foster true allyship, learn from one other, and a rare opportunity to speak truths without feeling the need to censor oneself. The youth leaders ensure that the programming includes a social justice element, a sweat lodge ceremony, sharing their respective traditional foods, traditional songs, and other camp-like activities.

The Youth Planning Team were together March 20–23 in Winnipeg to plan this summer's program. The 2025 Indigenous and Racialized Youth Retreat will happen at the Sandy Saulteaux Spiritual Centre from August 18–22.

Looking Ahead

In the next triennium we will continue to animate the Call and Vision as we refine the strategic objectives. We plan to refine the strategic objectives, and invite a denomination-wide plan that has strengthening communities of faith at the heart of it. Data will continue to play a critical role in evaluating our work, especially in discerning whether the Strategic Plan, as was the overall intent, is effectively “slowing—if not interrupting—a decrease in participation, giving and impact.”