

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
Strategic Plan 2023–2025

Executive Summary
2024 Annual Plan Report
Quarters 1 and 2 (January to June)



Introduction

Today and always may we follow in the Way of Jesus, sowing seeds of grace in deep, bold, and daring ways, so that all Creation might be nourished by your love. All of this we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen!

--Prayer from June Worship Service Commemorating the Church's 99th Year

Reflecting the Call and Vision adopted by the General Council (GC) in October 2021 and implementing the strategic objectives confirmed by the Executive (GCE) in November 2021, the General Council Office (GCO) developed its first annual plan for 2023. This required not just the creation of content, but the development of systems and processes of detailed planning, reporting, and evaluation, and clarification of lines of accountability.

We chose to use objectives and key results (OKRs) as the organizing framework for our annual plans. Staff broke down the six strategic objectives into 26 initiatives, further reflected in activity streams. Each activity stream has a lead, and often also a team, with progress tracked quarterly. The cumulative key results for that strategic objective are a measure of overall objective progress towards the 3-year goal.

During 2023, we shared those detailed quarterly reports with the GCE (available through the [United Church Commons](#)) and with the church through summary reports on the [website](#). Summarizing the year's progress, we released a full [2023 report](#) integrated with a financial statement.

For 2024, we continue to refine planning processes. Staff now work with a dashboard that connects activity reporting to real time financial reporting. We continue to work at being more and more strategic, integrating better metrics. This report reflects the first two quarters of 2024, highlighting progress against key results in the strategic objective areas.

Call

Deep Spirituality

Bold Discipleship

Daring Justice

Vision

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

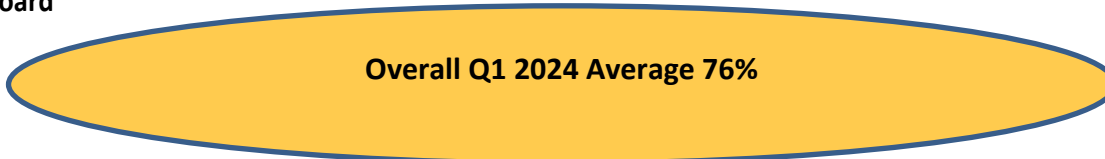


Q1 and Q2: Progress towards Planned Key Results

*There are three ways of looking at the big picture for a quarter: dashboard, graph and narrative. Averages for each strategic objective area and the overall average is calculated from all activated activity streams, as well as through “good news stories.” **Note that Indigenous Pathways is using another process other than key results methodology for their reporting.*

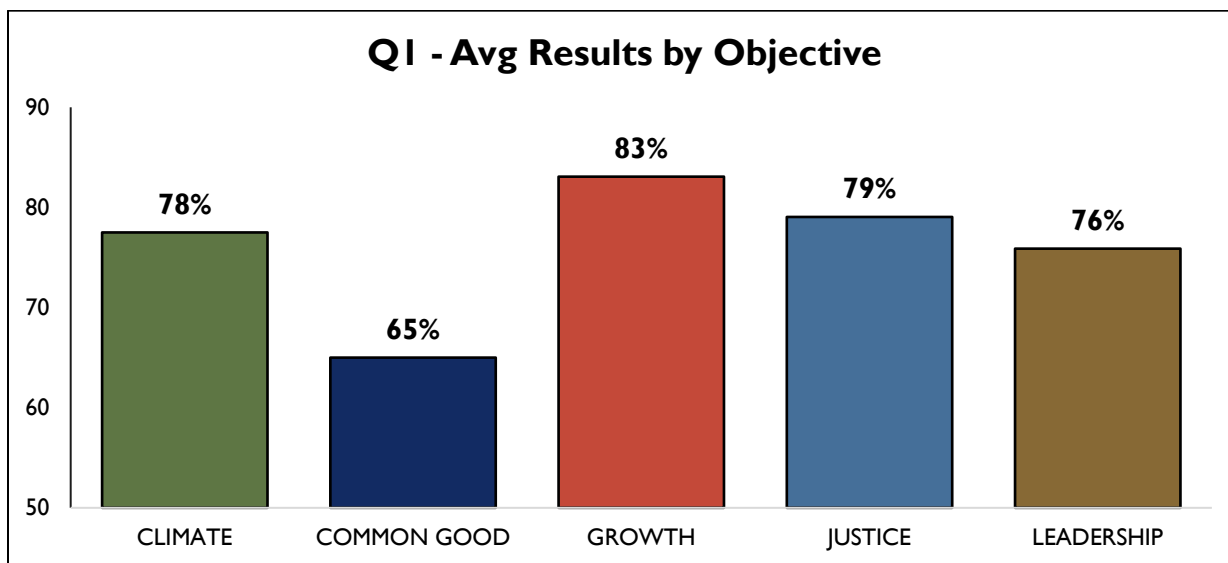
Overall Results: Quarter 1 2024 (January to March)

Dashboard



| Strategic Objective | Progress on Key Results |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Strengthen Invitation | 83% |
| Embolden Justice | 79% |
| Nurture the Common Good | 65% |
| Invigorate Leadership | 76% |
| Deepen Climate Integrity | 78% |
| Journeying Indigenous Pathways | Good |

Graph



Narrative

“Our overarching goal is to create the conditions for renewal, dedicating focus, energy, and resources to slowing—if not interrupting—a decrease in participation, giving and impact.”

–The United Church of Canada Strategic Plan 2023-2025

The overarching goal for the strategic planning process led to the development of a strategic objective on Growth (“Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith”) and the decision to make that objective the priority, with other strategic objectives contributing to its accomplishment in intersecting ways. Because Growth was a significantly new terrain, the first GCO annual plan (2023) involved preparatory elements, taking aspirations and developing or retooling human and other resources to shape and support anticipated outcomes. This quarter, the first of the second annual plan (2024), the **Growth strategy shifts from developmental to implementation**, having an impact also on intersecting strategic objectives.

Key shifts to implementation this quarter are reflected in the following:

- The Growth department is fully staffed with either retooled positions or new positions, most notably the six regionally deployed Growth Animators;
- All other enabling strategic plan positions, including the Government Relations Officer and the Lead for the Research and Development (Data) Team, are in place;
- Growth work in the areas of RENEW and CREATE, which in the first year focused almost exclusively on engagement with migrant and diaspora communities, is now expanded to include other work on key regional priorities, including with existing congregations;
- Growth work in INVITE, also in a preparatory phase over the last year, is now becoming visible in brand/identity strategy, public relations campaigning, and Centennial initiatives;
- Intersecting objectives, particularly Leadership and Common Good, are working closely with Growth to enable their initiatives to amplify Growth in the areas of RENEW, CREATE and INVITE.

With the shift into implementation, the focus will need to be on whether efforts are effectively “slowing—if not interrupting—a decrease in participation, giving and impact,” grounded in clear baselines and drawing from relevant data.

While the Growth strategy is performing well, meeting 83% of its key results in Q1, and other objectives are also solidly progressing (between 69-79% progress against key results), there are still challenges:

- continuing to strengthen the intersections of the objective areas towards the plan's overall Growth strategy;
- a requirement for increased focus, and impact at the appropriate scale for national initiatives;
- a stronger strategic mindset and capacity in management and staff;
- integrating stronger evidence through our renewed Research and Development (Data) team.

New streamlined reporting system and full budget integration has advanced the infrastructure support for planning, as have advancements in aligning newly developed human resources systems.

Good News Stories

There is a group of United churches in Regina who are collaborating to offer Sunday morning worship leadership in a way that frees up ministry personnel time for other aspects of ministry. They invited me to help them discern the next steps...Through our time together they began to get a clearer sense of the deeper purpose to which God is calling them within their communities. They started to name what was essential for them in responding to God's call and what assets they have that could be used, repurposed or potentially released in order to free up time, energy and resources to serve the purpose to God has for them. By the end of the evening, folks were feeling renewed in their sense of purpose and excited about the possibilities for growing their ministry with their neighbours.

--The Very Rev. Jordan Cantwell, Growth Animator, Prairies

Communities of Faith (CoFs) are considering participating in the "Wait, is this Racist?" book study and engaging in conversation with themselves and us about the implications of addressing racism within their own Community of Faith...One Community of Faith is using this as an opportunity to connect with people who may have left because of racism and to invite them into conversation about how the community of faith could change.

--Beth Baskin, Lead on White Privilege activity, Justice Objective, and Identity and Mission Network Coordinator

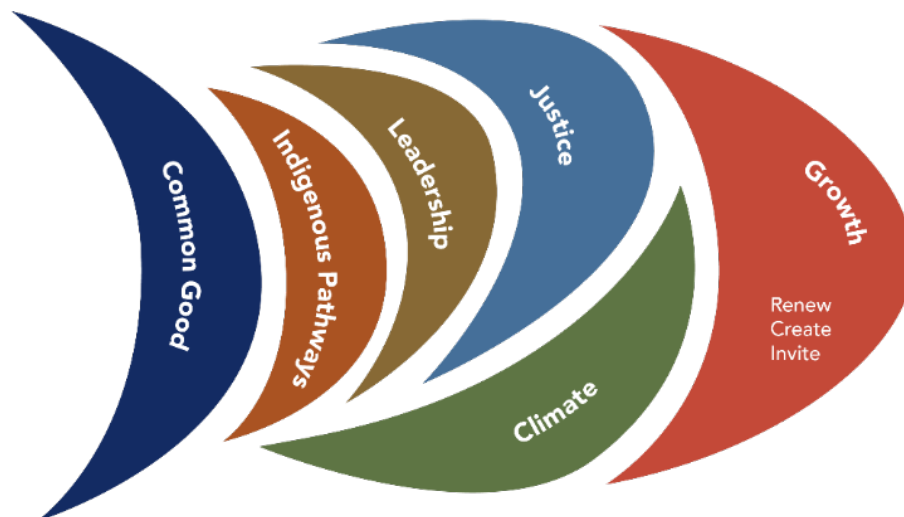
"You helped me." These words bring joy and gratitude, a sense of hope and renewed possibilities. Following a conversation with a rural pastoral charge's ministry personnel, where I shared a resource that we had discussed and together discerned it felt like it might be a good next step, these powerful words were shared...: "You helped me to focus on how to start to engage the congregation more on visioning for our outreach." ... There was a sense that ministry personnel had increased their own

capacity to equip their beloved community, offering support, encouragement and fresh energy for their next steps.

--Rev. Dr. Sharon Ballantyne, Growth Animator, Atlantic

I have had wonderful conversations with two candidates at different seminaries who are already interested in exploring cooperative ministry. They were both bright, articulate, energetic and optimistic about cooperative ministry as a way of doing church. They will also contribute to a growing pool of thinking on the topic as they work through collaborative ministry in their academic work.

--Rev. Dr. Andrew Richardson, Lead on Cooperative Ministry Pilots, Leadership Objective, and Office of Vocation Minister



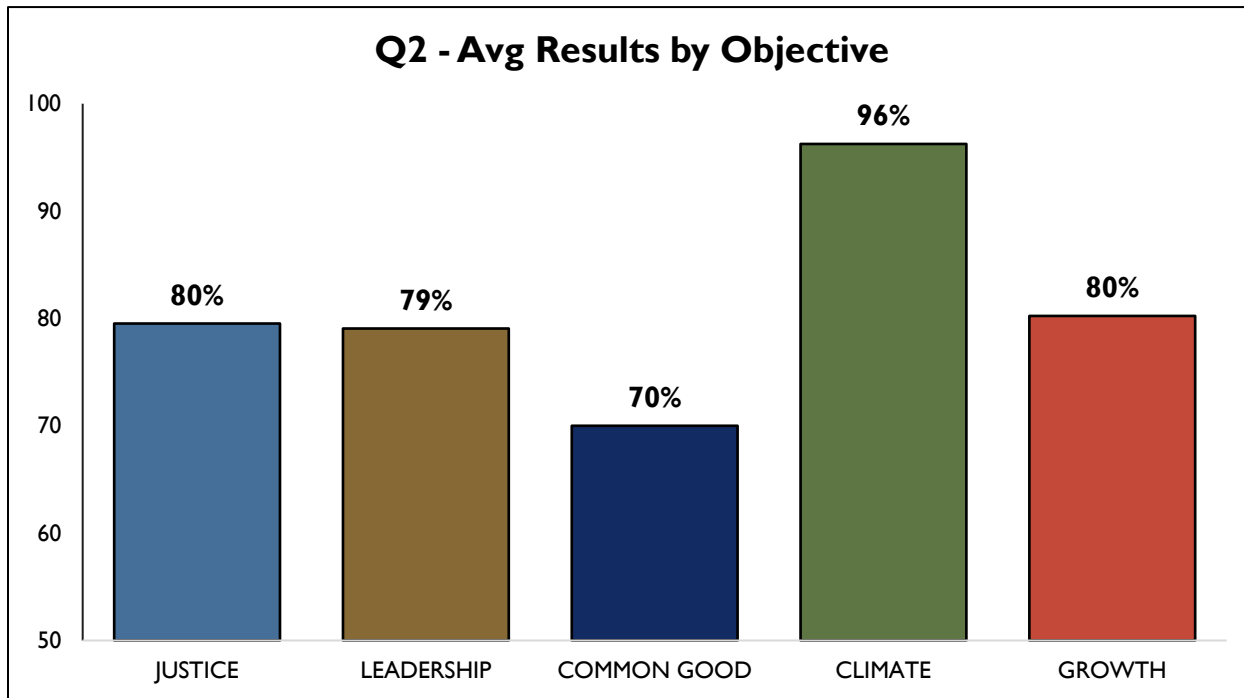
Overall Results: Quarter 2 2024 (April to June)

Dashboard

Overall Q2 2024 Average 80.4%

| Strategic Objective | Progress on Key Results |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Strengthen Invitation | 80% |
| Embolden Justice | 80% |
| Nurture the Common Good | 70% |
| Invigorate Leadership | 79% |
| Deepen Climate Integrity | 96% |
| Journeying Indigenous Pathways | Fair |

Graph



Narrative

Our emerging church plant fellowships are living into deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.

-- Dr. Emo Yango, Growth Coordinator, Diaspora and Intercultural Communities

Overall progress on key results in Q2 was strong with an 80.4% completion rate for activities planned for this period. Ten of 73 activities (where key results are being tracked) completed 100% of what was planned. There are very few areas of significant challenge and these are being actively managed, with key decisions about whether they get back on track or be concluded. With a range of 70-96% for progress in Growth, Justice, Leadership, Common Good and Climate Integrity, it is clear that all tracked strategic objective areas are solidly moving forward.

Q2 is the second quarter to have full strategic plan staffing, particularly in the Growth Department where the largest “staffing-up” took place. This is beginning to enable steps towards the original plan—that “Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith (Growth)” be the leading priority. As well as impressive numbers of engagement with existing congregations and regions by the Growth Animators, there are at least 20 new emerging communities, with an additional 15 or so possibilities among Francophone communities. In these communities, people are gathering for worship, engaging in fellowship activities together, and learning about the broader context of The United Church of Canada, supported by Emerging Church Leads.

Hoped-for plans for communications outreach to the Canadian public have begun with key pilots. The opportunity presented by the Centennial is already showing results in increased sense of common identity by existing denominational members, and interest by those not currently part of the denomination. Other strategic objective areas are considering how their priority integrates and reinforces this leading priority on Growth.

On a broader level, there is evidence that the Call—deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice—is increasingly resonating, not only at the regional level, but through expressions within communities of faith. For example, three theology conferences this fall are picking up the Call up as the key theme.

With the completion in Q2 of two major advances in the operational planning cycle, the component parts of an operational planning process at the GCO, linked to the strategic plan, are now fully in place. One of these elements was the preparation of a full-year [annual report](#). The second element was the inclusion in our reporting system of real-time financial information, pulling from our accounting systems. These two elements, and a fully functioning Research and Development (Data) Team, largely brings to completion the integration of an annual planning cycle at the GCO. There is still work needed on processes and culture but major components are in place.

While progress is being consistently made on key activities under each strategic objective and operational planning is now largely integrated, there are still challenges in the area of strategic thinking. The pull of previously existing work is still a factor in preventing full alignment with the strategic objectives. The priority needs to be on robust, national-scale projects and programs that tangibly move forward the strategic objectives. However, there is an organizational culture of pursuing more numerous, smaller activities, and a momentum related to existing work. In planning for 2025, strategic objective teams are being encouraged to look carefully at their objective and the key initiatives and consider whether the activities being proposed, truly move forward the objective. Are there pieces of work that need to be left behind or areas that could be combined for greater impact? This includes sourcing data for the objective and initiatives that can help evaluate whether there is true progress.

Sunnybrook United Church is incredibly excited about their new First Third Ministry and the support that they can offer to the new Campus United ministry at Red Deer Polytechnic. This opportunity came together quickly. It felt that the Holy Spirit was guiding the process, as many people said, 'Yes' to a new thing they discerned God was doing in their midst.

-- Rev. Scott Reynolds, Growth Animator, Mountain

Near the end of Q2, we took some time to reflect on our overall goal for this multi-year initiative focused on the church: "to advance racial equity by moving towards a shift in transformed structures and systems and intentional leadership of racialized peoples." We considered if our activities were helping us move towards this goal or if there was anything that needed to be shifted or changed. After some careful discernment, we named that we are definitely on the right track, and moving in the direction. Sometimes, the shift in racial equity and the overall engagement on systemic change can be slow – but it is moving! That's good news!"

-- Adele Halliday, Anti-Racism and Equity Lead

Appendix: Strategic Objectives approved by General Council Executive

Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith

Objective: Develop and implement 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.

Accountable: Rev. Cameron Fraser.

Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World

Objective: Make meaningful collective progress on Indigenous justice, racial equity, and Two Spirit or LGBTQIA+ rights both in the church and world, while demonstrably deepening bold effective solidarity on other justice issues, through ecumenical collaboration and denominational networking.

Accountable: Rev. Dr. Japhet Ndhlovu

Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and Innovating for Bold Discipleship

Objective: Renew a vision of leadership based on the call of the denomination—deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice—and align discernment, recruitment, training, and support of ordered and lay leadership, to this vision.

Accountable: Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball

Nurture the Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources

Objective: Significantly increase denominational capacity and will to make decisions on properties and resources focused on the ministry of the whole church, enhancing equity, sustainability, right relations, and administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

Accountable: Sarah Charters

Deepen Integrity: Living Climate Commitments

Objective: Amplify and integrate current initiatives in a bold, hopeful denominational climate strategy that accelerates reductions towards the goal of an 80% decrease in emissions by 2030.

Accountable: Rev. Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa

Journeying Indigenous Pathways: Forging Right Relations**

Objective: Deepen Indigenization and healing in The United Church of Canada towards self-determination and the possibility of reconciliation.

Accountable: Rev. Murray Pruden (currently on leave)

Overall Strat Plan Accountable: Rev. Jennifer Henry

Legend:

This legend refers to how we are ranking overall progress on strategic objectives, as well as on specific activity streams. For more detail on the activities in each objective area and their specific progress, see either the quarterly reports to GCE (available through the [United Church Commons](#) and referring to the General Council Executive and meeting dates for the specific years) or through summary reports on the [website](#). On the website, the most recent quarter's progress is highlighted.

| Excellent | Good | Fair | Delayed | Not Activated |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Progress on the overall objective or activity is moving along well. Key results per quarter are being accomplished. | Progress on the overall objective or activity continues but not exactly at the rate or in the sequence anticipated. | More significant issues have surfaced related to the overall objective or activity and they are being actively managed towards continued progress. | Something significant has delayed this activity and we are paying attention to discerning the way forward or getting it back on track. | This activity was not planned to begin until a later quarter. |
| 80-100% | 60-79% | 50-59% | Under 50% | |
| Bold is for priority activities | | | | |

For questions or further information about the planning process—strategic or annual—please contact: planning@united-church.ca