

## **Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith (TICIF) Accountability Report**

### **Origin: Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith**

#### **Overview:**

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee met twice in person throughout the triennium and periodically online, with smaller working groups meeting more frequently. For the first two years of this triennium (2022-2025), TICIF focused primarily on theological work assigned by General Council, developing principles for the United Church's justice work.

The committee also connects with United Church members who have been named to Canadian and global ecumenical bodies, as well as to Canadian interfaith bodies. The committee continues to wrestle with how best to engage the inter-church and inter-faith work that is part of its mandate, since the elimination of the ecumenical and interfaith program coordinator position in July 2020. The committee is starting a practice of inviting these representatives to one of the meetings each year so that there is greater understanding of the work that each is involved in.

The committee had two unexpected resignations in the last few months of this triennium, as well as the sudden and tragic death of chair, Alison Etter, in February 2024. The remaining eleven elected members represent a diversity of regions, leadership, and theological perspectives within the church. The committee has staff support from the Program Assistant, Theology and Ministry Leadership, and the Executive Minister, Theology and Ministry Leadership.

#### **Work Carried Over From the Previous Triennium (2018-2022)**

TICIF continued work on some items from the previous triennium, including a report on the United Church's understanding of the episcopate, and developing a [theology of giving study resource](#). The General Secretary requested TICIF in 2020 to engage the question of how the United Church of Canada understands the role and location of the episcopal function within the new governance model of the United Church. This question arose from the 2020 report of the Anglican Church-United Church Dialogue. The theology of giving resource was requested by the Executive of General Council as well as TICIF; the development of this resource was supported by stewardship staff in the General Council Office.

#### **Principles for Justice Work**

The principles-based justice working group was comprised of seven members of TICIF and met monthly from October 2022 until early September 2023. During this time, the group reviewed core United Church documents, including *Mending the World*, *Principles of Reconciliation* (2003), *Towards 2025: A Justice-Seeking Justice-Living Church*, *Principles of Partnership*, *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*, *Intercultural Ministries: Living Into Transformation*, *TRC Calls to Action*, *UCC Response to the TRC Calls to Action*, *A Church with Purpose*, *Caretakers Calls to the Church*, and the *Just Peace Task Group Report*. The group also consulted with members of

the Just Peace task group, with staff who had experience in using principles to guide justice work, and with staff from Indigenous Ministries and Justice and the Church in Mission units, who have expertise and experience in receiving and responding to requests from members, partners, and civil society groups. Each of these consultations was rich and aided the working group in developing and revising the principles. The group also had fruitful conversations with, and feedback from, the rest of the members of TICIF. Throughout this time, the group worked diligently to discern and distill the core commitments of the United Church into these principles.

The committee was pleased that the annual meeting of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Council approved the principles in principle, at its October 2023 meeting. TICIF was directed to consult with staff applying the principles to aid it in making any necessary revisions to the principles, and to bring the revised principles to the 45<sup>th</sup> General Council for deliberation.

A subsequent smaller working group met with General Council Office (GCO) staff in September 2024 to gather feedback about the principles for our justice work. GCO staff have been applying the principles to various justice issues that have been raised within the church and by ecumenical and interfaith partners in Canada and globally. TICIF approved the proposed revisions to the principles and so a proposal with the proposed revisions is before the 45<sup>th</sup> General Council.

### **Discipleship**

The work on engaging the church in a study of discipleship, as mandated by the 44<sup>th</sup> General Council, started in 2024. This timeline was necessary due to other pressing work the 44<sup>th</sup> General Council had asked TICIF to do (primarily the development of the principles for justice). A small working group from TICIF met monthly from May to November 2024 and launched a social media campaign in early February 2025, with the support and creativity of Communications staff in the General Council Office. The group developed discussion questions that can be used in a variety of ways in communities of faith and has a [webpage](#) inviting people and communities of faith to share stories, artwork, music, written and video reflections of how they are living out their discipleship. Currently, this campaign is in English only, on the advice of Ministères en français. Based on learnings from the initial campaign, materials may be subsequently translated into French. We anticipate sharing some of these stories and offering reflection questions in some of the Centennial monthly newsletters. TICIF is also delighted to see that engagement in discipleship has taken root in the United Church outside TICIF; notably in “Bold Discipleship” named in the [Call and Vision](#) of the current strategic plan, and in the establishment of the Growth Animators team.

### **Countering Antisemitism**

The Countering Antisemitism Working Group was established soon after General Council 44, composed of members from the Anti-Racism Common Table and TICIF. The group created educational resources: a course on ChurchX, Round the Table blogs, a [website presence](#) on

[www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca), and a Good Friday worship service— as ways of living into its mandate of challenging antisemitism in Christian theology and worship. In April 2024, after these parts of the work were completed, the working group decided to come to an end. The work of countering antisemitism, however, is still very much needed!

The staff assigned to the work (the Executive Minister for Theology and Ministry Leadership and the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead) developed a further education plan for 2024 and the first half of 2025. The education plan continues the work of engaging the church in examining the ways that anti-Judaism and antisemitism show up in how we read and interpret scriptures, in our theologies, and in our hymnody. This work is linked to the overall [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#), and one of the live events for the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism featured Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, who explored “The Texts of Advent: Finding Good News and Avoiding Antisemitism” on November 12, 2024 (with English-French interpretation). The plan for later 2025 and into 2026 is to develop ecumenical learning opportunities to help the members of the church engage in advocacy to counter antisemitism.

### **Engaging the Church’s Histories, Practices, and Theologies of Mission**

The Mission Working Group was established in early 2023 and was comprised of members from the Indigenous Church, the Anti-Racism Common Table, and TICIF. The group met throughout 2023 to determine recommendations to bring to General Council Executive, which had assigned the work. GCE passed a proposal in November 2023 which, in part, directed the development of theological, liturgical, and educational resources to engage the church in further learning about our history, theologies, and practices of mission with particular attention to the ways in which these differed with global partners and domestically.

In 2024, a small advisory group, comprised of some of the former members of the Mission Working Group along with some other United Church members with particular knowledge in this area, met with staff to develop an action plan. Resources for bible studies and worship services are being developed. Additional resources and ways to animate the resources will be developed throughout 2025 and into 2026.

### **Vocations of the Whole People of God: Ministries for Our Time Statement**

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Council Executive asked the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee and the Board of Vocation to review and revise the 2012 Statement on Ministry (work arising from the “Ministry Leadership to Meet the Needs of the Church in the 2020s” report and proposal to the 44<sup>th</sup> General Council). A key aspect of the request was to strengthen and affirm the importance of the ministry of the whole people of God and particularly to uphold the ministries and discipleship of laity. A small working group comprised of members from TICIF and the Board of Vocation met regularly throughout 2024 to determine scope, review past statements, reports, and proposals on ministry, and to solicit feedback from laity engaged in living out their faith as ministry in paid and volunteer work within and outside the church. The draft statement is before the 45<sup>th</sup> General Council.

**Interfaith**

The committee continues to explore ways in which it can support interfaith work on a denominational/national level. In the past, this work has primarily happened through national staff being involved in various interfaith organizations and through study documents that the committee (and its predecessor) produced. However, in this triennium, the committee decided that producing additional study resources was not an avenue it wanted to pursue at this time. Rather than staff participating in two national interfaith organizations, TICIF agreed to test out two models. One was to work through the Nominations process to appoint an elected member to the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee; the other was to ask a member of TICIF to be part of Canadian Interfaith Conversations. The committee has also noted that it would be helpful to have further conversation about what its interfaith commitments might look like and so has emphasized the interfaith aspect of its work in the Nominations process for this upcoming triennium.

In February 2025, TICIF hosted a national interfaith gathering, to connect with people in the United Church who are engaged in local and grassroots interfaith work. The gathering, while small, offered an opportunity to hear from three different people in different parts of the country about the ways in which interfaith work is happening. Participants had an opportunity in small groups to share more with each other. TICIF hopes to host additional gatherings going forward, to support this work and to discern what might be helpful for interfaith work on a denominational level.

**Ecumenical**

TICIF supports national and global ecumenical work in a variety of ways, primarily through being the accountable body for United Church elected members. In particular, TICIF connects with the United Church representatives on the Canadian Council of Church's (CCC) Governing Board as well as the [Commission on Faith & Witness](#) and the [World Council of Church's Faith & Order Commission](#).

The mandate of the CCC's Commission on Faith & Witness is:

- To foster a greater understanding of faith we hold in common and to provide an ecumenical witness to Christ's mission in the world.
- To support the creation of resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- To hold forums on dialogue around ecumenical topics
- To engage in ecumenical education
- To focus on one theological topic and the production of a resource each triennium

From 2021-2024, the Commission focused on the Church in a digital age, particularly with respect to the implications and consequences the increased use of technology in church life has on the theological understanding of church (ecclesiology). The topic for the resource for the 2024-2027 triennium is Theology of Christian citizenship (Church and State).

An important highlight of the World Council of Churches' work this year is the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the adoption of the [Nicene Creed and the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order](#) that will take place in Egypt at the end of October 2025. The United Church is privileged to have the Rev. Dr. Sandra Beardsall on the Faith and Order Commission; she is chairing the working group planning the celebration. The Conference will be hybrid with options for small group engagement online.

In August 2024, two United Church members attended the World Methodist Council gathering on our behalf. As the "expression of Methodism in Canada," the United Church is a member of the WMC.

The United Church continues to be well respected in national and global ecumenical circles. In fact, the United Church is often asked by the World Council of Churches to nominate United Church members for various committees and commissions of the WCC. Although the United Church is a small denomination, globally speaking, we are held in very positive regard in these ecumenical circles.

### **2025-2028 Proposed Work**

In order of priority, although not all these areas may be addressed in this next triennium:

1. Continuing the work on discipleship, with a focus on evangelism, interculturality, and multiple religious belonging (connected to previous work on membership, from 2015-2022)
2. Ecclesiological implications of shifting from policy-based approach to principles-based approach
3. Sacrament of baptism in a virtual world
4. Interfaith Relationships: building relationships nationally; supporting and learning from local/grassroots work
5. The 2<sup>nd</sup> century of the United Church: reinspiring our uniting identity, including celebrating 20 years of "A Song of Faith" in 2026
6. Current Theological Issues:
  - a. Eco-theology in a time of climate emergency
  - b. Solidarity in times of suffering and violence, "Christ in the rubble"
  - c. Sexuality
  - d. Theology, ethics, and artificial intelligence
7. Liturgical practices: clerical garb; online community (connected to questions of sacraments online/virtually)

### **In Memory of TICIF Chair, Rev. Alison Etter, 1982 – 2024**

Rev. Alison Etter, the chair of TICIF from summer 2020-February 2024 and a member of TICIF since 2015, died unexpectedly in February 2024. She is deeply mourned by members of TICIF, her communities of faith, her husband, and her young son. She touched many people with her passion for justice, her deep compassion for all, her wonderful laugh, and her quick and insightful mind. Alison was an excellent chair of TICIF, bringing thoughtful reflection, good

processes for ensuring all voices could be heard and could participate fully, and navigated many discussions with wide-ranging perspectives with grace. *Alison, presente!*

*Respectfully submitted by Deborah Elliott and Michelle Owens, co-chairs, on behalf of:  
Hyuk Cho, Isaac Kamta, Frances Kitson, Andrew Mills (resigned January 2025), Lloyd Nyarota,  
Andy O'Neill (resigned January 2025); Lillian Patey, Ariel Siagan, Miriam Spies, Noel  
Suministrado, Michelle Voss  
With staff support from Jamie Wilder and Jennifer Janzen-Ball*

Proposals:

[Revised Principles for Justice Work](#)

[Vocations of the Whole People of God: Ministries for Our Time](#)