

REVISED PRINCIPLES FOR JUSTICE WORK IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA, MARCH 2025

Preamble:

The United Church has used a policy-based approach to its justice and advocacy ministry for decades. Policies are reflective of a particular time in history. Changes to policies are often slow because of our governance processes. Policy statements made in specific moments in time find us out of sync with the calls of partners and with rapidly changing global realities. The 44th General Council asked that a principle-based approach to its justice work be developed. A set of principles would govern the church's responses to historic, current, and emerging social and ecological justice issues and enable timely and contextual responses.

Principles are guides for prayerful discernment when responding to situations of injustice. Principles do not spell out in detail what specific actions should be in specific circumstances but rather provide a framework for making ethical, justice-seeking decisions. The context of each justice issue will need to be considered in such decision-making, guided by the principles.

We believe God calls The United Church of Canada to seek justice, dignity, and fullness of life for human beings and for all our relations within God's beloved creation. The United Church is called to speak and act with humility and with courage, recognizing the ways in which the church has perpetuated harm and has benefited from its complicity in oppression and colonization. Colonialism remains in our midst. It shapes our imagination and informs the many ways we relate with one another and with creation, both individually and institutionally. Colonialism reproduces and expands white supremacy, modern-day slavery, racism, exploitation of labour of one class over another, among many other manifestations.

The [Call](#) to bold discipleship, deep spirituality, and daring justice means that we cannot remain silent in situations of injustice, demonstrating our love for our neighbours (Deuteronomy 6; Mark 12; Matthew 22; Luke 10). Jesus models costly solidarity; the Holy Spirit invites us to faithful transformation; and God calls us "to work with God for the healing of the world, that all might have abundant life." ([A Song of Faith](#)). We continue to seek to act ecumenically and with interfaith groups in responding to situations of injustice.

Addressing injustice includes (though is not limited to) building:

- a) *awareness* and understanding of injustices experienced
- b) *analysis* of the systems and forces that perpetuate injustice
- c) *advocacy* with those who are made vulnerable
- d) *action* with those neighbours who invite/welcome our participation in their work

The principles outlined below are intended to be used together as they are interdependent. The principles speak to, and enrich, one another when they are used to discern action in situations of injustice. These are not intended as a checklist but as an invitation to prayerfully reflect on what

the church's response could be. The principles are informed by the United Church's policies, affirmations, and commitments.¹ The principles give direction and guidance to national staff and national committees in the church's work to seek justice and fullness of life. Other councils, staff, lay people, and ministry personnel of the United Church may choose to draw on these principles to guide their own speaking and acting. The principles are identified in bold, with clarifying sentences to illustrate each principle.

¹ Over the course of several years, General Council has made the following commitments on equity. There are places where the church is already living into a principle-based approach to its justice and advocacy work such as:

- adopting [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as the framework for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;
- adopting the [Calls to the Church](#) from the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle as the basis for a new relationship;
- welcoming [people of all sexual orientations and gender identities](#) into full membership and ministry in the church;
- committing to becoming [an intercultural church](#);
- committing to becoming an open, accessible, and barrier-free church, where there is [full participation of people with disabilities](#);
- working towards functional bilingualism and [ensuring that Francophone ministries are an integral part of the church's identity, mission, and vision](#);
- [opposing discrimination](#) of any kind on the basis of identity; and
- developing an anti-racism policy and committing to becoming an [anti-racist denomination](#).

Anti-Oppression

Lament and actively oppose the sins of oppression and colonization, including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and discrimination of any kind, in our churches, our communities, our nation, the world, and God's good creation. Encourage the ministries and work of anti-oppression in our churches so that we may more fully express the dignity of humanity and creation as bearing the image of God.

Truth-telling and Repenting

Recognize, acknowledge, and repent the ways in which The United Church of Canada has contributed to, or enabled, whether intentionally or unintentionally, suffering and unjust practices, including its participation in colonization. Amplify the truth-telling voices of those who suffer and are made vulnerable as opposed to those who hold power. Encourage critical analysis of power and thoughtful exploration and questioning of biases.

Intersectionality

Recognize and name complexities and multiple oppressions in situations of injustice. Strive to avoid false binaries in analysis and in statements. While conflicts may arise, seek to understand differing perspectives while being aware of systemic power differences.

Respect for Human Dignity

Act with others in ways that uphold human dignity. Listen to and offer solidarity with those among us experiencing injustice, oppression, the denial of dignity, and violation of human rights. Affirm the right to resist, repudiate, and challenge any expression of injustice. Listen attentively to, and support, social movements and groups of people who are historically marginalized and who are most affected by injustice.

Full Participation and Decolonization

Recognize the church's complicity in causing harm and name ways in which we seek to redress, continue to learn, and dismantle colonization. Challenge expressions of domination that are replicated in our institutions, our relationships with partners, and with creation. Support community-based self-determination, including the self-determination of Indigenous peoples. Discern with humility and with partners and oppressed peoples in the church when to speak and act for justice. Encourage ways to imagine life in all its fullness in concrete terms, subverting structures of domination.

Equity, Mutuality, Respect, and Reparations

Pursue equity, mutuality, respect, and reparations as the path towards justice, reconciliation, and right relations. Continue to be prayerful companions in mutual discernment and justice-seeking with United Church partners, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and with other justice-seeking groups.

Costly and Prophetic Solidarity

Speak and act prophetically against injustice in all forms, knowing that solidarity may be costly.