

## **ANTI-RACISM AND EQUITY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

### **44th General Council, October 2023**

The church's anti-racism and equity work is a coordinated and collaborative effort that engages several staff across many different unit areas. This work is intentional about journeying towards longer-term structural, systemic, and transformational changes to make the church more equitable for people of all identities; it also simultaneously aims to provide more practical and accessible anti-racism resources for a range of local contexts. Aspects of the church's anti-racism and equity ministry do overlap with the church's work on Indigenous justice and anti-Indigenous racism, and therefore seeks to engage this in integrated ways.

This report serves as an accountability measure and offers an overview of the church's overall work on anti-racism and equity from the perspective of the General Council Office. When the United Church's General Council made a commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination in 2020, the people of the United Church also asked for regular updates on the church's progress. This report, therefore, serves as one facet of this ongoing communication and accountability. It is important to note, however, the church's commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination was a commitment for the church as a whole—across all regions and all ministries—and so the sustained efforts in local and regional communities also continue to be essential for the whole church to continue to live into its denominational commitment.

There are clear theological foundations for this work that stretches over decades. Although the church's commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination was made in the year 2020, the United Church's anti-racism policy, *That All May Be One*, dates back to the year 2000. The *Calls to the Church* by the Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle was approved in 2017-2018. There are also theological foundations to the inter-related work on intercultural engagement, opposing discrimination, and seeking justice. All of these theological understandings are elaborated upon in past reports and communications.

In addition to the theological underpinnings, the anti-racism and equity efforts of the General Council Office are guided by the church's [National Anti-Racism Action Plan](#). This three-year plan was developed by the United Church's Anti-Racism Common Table—which is one of the church's national committees, and it is an intentionally diverse group of Indigenous, non-Indigenous racialized, and White peoples from across the country. In addition to their racial identities, this team of people also name and hold multiple additional identities.

The Anti-Racism Action Plan has since been incorporated into the church's overall Strategic Plan. The current Anti-Racism Common Table members are now playing a role in continuing to evaluate and monitor progress on the plan, to name gaps, additional contextual realities, and offer course correction as needed.

The National Anti-Racism Action Plan names five key areas for sustained effort, and the balance of this report focuses on those five themes:

- Education and awareness

- Theology
- Advocacy
- Governance
- Healing and accountability

### ***Education and awareness***

The goals for education and awareness are as follows:

- Understand the diverse impacts of colonialism, White supremacy, and racism in our church. This includes, but is not limited to, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-immigrant, and internalized racism.
- Move from simply acquiring knowledge to learning how to transform individual behaviours.
- Resist and reject the power and privilege that come from Whiteness, and work instead to restore right relationship. Start to give back resources, real estate, and artifacts taken from Indigenous and racialized communities. Where returning what was taken is no longer possible, compensate Indigenous and racialized communities.

For this theme area, there were several initiatives.

*40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism:* One program, currently underway, is the [40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism](#). This is the third year for this popular program, which is multi-faceted in its approach. It features daily written reflections, crafted by diverse authors from across the United Church, which move people through a time of learning about an aspect of anti-racism, a faith reflection, and a way of living out the concept in their local context. There are weekly events on Tuesday evenings throughout October and November, a range of study groups available to participate in, discounted anti-racism books from the United Church Bookstore, and a weekly newsletter that pulls it all together. Robust evaluations of past years have noted that this program is contributing to local learnings as well as inspiring transformation and change in a range of contexts.

*Anti-racism for leaders of children:* a brand-new United Church resource is almost ready for use! This resource, for leaders of children, has been in development for several years. This six-session resource is grounded in scripture and it is ideal for Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, or adults who work with children aged 6-12. The resource is currently being piloted, and it will be available for people across the church in the New Year.

*Anti-racism for Youth App:* a new anti-racism education app was launched early this year, and it is available on Google Play as well as the Apple Store. This education was developed by racialized young people in the United Church as a creative way to learn and challenge racism. The young people noted that youth would be more engaged through an app, and so people of the church developed one for them!

*Racial justice education:* the church's racial justice education program continues to be mandatory for ministry personnel. This year, however, the program expanded based on demand. A new online course is now offered for lay leaders. Expanded components of the program also have additional practical ways to engage the content in local contexts. The courses are available on the church's e-learning platform, [ChurchX](#).

*Placing Ourselves in Colonialism:* this online course was created to help people across the church understand the diverse impacts of colonialism. Over the course of 5 months, people were invited to read a book and engage with the authors of [Healing Haunted Histories](#), to research and write about their family's history and migration stories, and to reflect on their experiences theologically. More than 100 people from across the country engaged, shared about the personal impacts and transformation, and asked for continued opportunities to deepen this exploration in future years.

*Becoming an anti-racist church video series:* the video series "[Becoming an Anti-Racist Church](#)" was launched earlier featuring United Church leaders, and is a playlist on the United Church's YouTube channel. New for this year are videos focused actions of people living out the church's anti-racist commitment in their local communities of faith and networks. A video will be featured at this meeting, and more will be added to the playlist!

*Equity Arc for Staff:* currently in development is the Equity Arc training program, for staff of the General Council and Regional Council Offices. This comprehensive educational program contains both online asynchronous modules, as well as facilitator-led workshops. It is intended for all staff of the General Council and Regional Council Offices and offers a background and application of the [church's equity commitments](#). The program, to be delivered over a 3-year span, will focus on: the Indigenous Church; anti-racism; disabilities; mental health; workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence response; and sexual orientation and gender identity. The training is anticipated to be launched in 2024, and will be integrated into staff annual reviews and the updated Employment Equity policy.

### **Theology**

The three-year goals for theology are to:

- Increase understanding across the church that the dominant theology of the church is based in White, male, European theology and practices, and name the need to change this.
- Recognize and encourage existing and new theologies and practices that promote multiple marginalized identities and intercultural practices and values.

For this theme area, there were two primary initiatives, that are engaged in close collaboration between the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead and the Executive Minister for Theology and Ministry Leadership.

*Gathering of theological faculty on anti-racism:* in June 2023, the faculty from several United Church theological schools gathered in-person to focus on anti-racist theologies, plans for

continuing to integrate anti-racism work into their teachings and practice, and to create a network for continuing to support one another in this ongoing work. This group of faculty has been meeting online since June 2022 and will continue to meet regularly going forward.

*Mission Working Group:* members of the Anti-Racism Common Table and the Theology, Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) have co-created a working group about “mission”. The group was formed in order to wrestle with the legacy of the church’s theology around mission, particularly with respect to the ways in which a colonial theology of mission guided the church’s participation in colonization in Canada, in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities, as well as in its participation in global missionary and colonizing endeavours. The use of the word “mission” is common within the United Church and in ecumenical circles and it can be a trigger for those who have borne the brunt of missionizing efforts that were really about cultural and physical genocide. The working group will be bringing an initial recommendation to the November 2023 meeting of the Executive of General Council (GCE).

### **Advocacy**

The advocacy goals are as follows:

- In advocacy efforts, follow the lead of Indigenous and racialized people—who are most affected and have the best understanding—while providing support, labour, and resources. Create safer, more accessible spaces for networking for Indigenous and racialized peoples within the church that encourages anti-oppressive advocacy to develop naturally.
- Develop relationships of mutuality and trust with Indigenous and racialized communities and related movements inside and outside the church. Take into account overlapping oppressions, and do not assume everyone sharing one social group all thinks and feels the same way.
- Focus on collaborative political advocacy supporting social movements here and overseas that prioritize issues affecting Indigenous and racialized leadership.

Some of the goals listed for this theme area will have more emphasis in future years of the plan. For example, advocacy for racial equity in housing has been named as an area of work in the Strategic Plan which has a clear link to this theme area. That facet of advocacy work, however, has not yet started. Similarly, the work of political advocacy is scheduled for a future year for engagement.

At present, one primary focus has been on deepening relationships, and another on education and advocacy.

*Pastoral Relationships Equity Research Project:* this qualitative research project about broad aspects of equity ran throughout 2022 and for the earlier part of 2023, and focused on ministry personnel. The project was led by co-researchers and ministry personnel Marcie Gibson and Kimiko Karpoff, who were accompanied by a research team. The research project focused on identifying current intervention, pastoral support, and systemic change. Ministry personnel from across the church participated in online surveys, focus groups, and interviews. They

shared about patterns of inequity experienced by ministry personnel across all regions of The United Church of Canada. A report from the research project, along with accompanying recommendations, will be shared with the Executive of General Council in November 2023.

*Antisemitism Working Group:* this working group—which includes members from the Anti-Racism Common Table and from the Theology, Inter-Church, and Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) was created in response to proposal GS14, entitled “Challenging Antisemitism in The United Church of Canada”. The proposal asked for the development of an education program about antisemitism for the United Church, and to ensure that such a program include ideas for advocacy within the United Church. [A website is in development](#) which will house resources as they are created.

### ***Healing and accountability***

- Support community-determined and self-defined healing for and by Indigenous and diverse racialized people from intergenerational trauma and internalized White supremacy.
- Challenge White defensiveness, and increase White emotional strength to undertake anti-oppression work at the individual level.
- Confront denial of ongoing colonialism by non-Indigenous people. Repair damages to relationships caused by colonial and spiritual violence perpetuated by the church.

*Challenging White Privilege:* in June 2023, a group of White people gathered online to consider concrete ways of challenging White defensiveness and White denial throughout the church. The goals of the consultation were to share stories of what the church looks like if White church people who offer leadership at all levels including communities of faith have rejected the power and privilege that comes from Whiteness, and to determine what a further consultation might accomplish and who best to engage in that consultation. The follow up work from this gathering continues.

*Support Circles:* there continue to be support circles available to racialized people within the church. They were created to help work towards healing from racial trauma. Plans are underway to further expand and animate these circles in the coming year.

*Leadership Counts:* this is the United Church’s voluntary and confidential survey of identities. Leadership Counts was first launched in November 2021 for ministry personnel and for members of national committees, and is a collaborative effort between Member Engagement, the Office of Vocation, and also Anti-Racism and Equity. Beginning in September 2023, the initiative is also being rolled out to staff in the General Council and Regional Council Offices. [A short video](#) describes the project, and the survey informs the development and evaluation of the United Church’s strategic plan and anti-oppression work. There are results already collected for ministry personnel and members of national committees: please visit the Leadership Counts section of the [United Church website](#), where there is background information, and where you can also read about some patterns and trends that we’re already

noticing. A more detailed mid-term report about Leadership Counts is also available as an appendix, and is one of the background documents for this meeting.

*Human Resources and Equity:* this Employment Equity policy for the General Council and regional council offices was updated in 2023. The updated version is an expansion on the 2019 policy and intends to deepen the operationalization of the church's equity, diversity and anti-racism commitments. It also clarifies Human Resources' role in implementing this commitment across employing units. It provides updated procedures around staff recruitment, hiring, and retention to create a more equitable workplace. Human Resources also plans to collect identities of applicants in ways that are consistent with Human Rights legislation.

*Indigenous and racialized youth gathering:* this is the second year of the gathering for Indigenous and Racialized Youth in the church. Initially started as an outgrowth of the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism, this now-annual gathering is now firmly lodged as emerging youth-oriented community of faith. It focuses building capacity through mutual learning on experiences of racism and creative responses to anti-racism in the United Church. The youth have expressed they want mutual culture-learning from each other. Certainly, though, the experiences of racism have continued to be a focus of the gathering.

*Ongoing accountability:* in addition to the anti-racism work being guided by the United Church's Anti-Racism Action Plan, the staff are also guided by the [Anti-Racism Framework](#) from Cooperation Canada, of which the United Church is a member, as one way of continuing to hold ourselves to broad anti-racism commitments and to making systemic change. We complete yearly assessments and reports about our progress, and note how else we can continue to work towards becoming an anti-racist denomination by continuing to transform our systems and structures.

### **Governance**

The goals for the governance area are as follows:

- Change composition and procedures so that governance committees are places where members are encouraged to speak from their own experiences and offer critical analysis on anti-racism issues. Ensure committee members are not all White.
- Be intentional about making time to focus on relationships and processes that promote equity in church governance.
- Ensure that our church governance policies and structures will reflect our anti-racism commitment.

*Committee composition:* Member Engagement and the Nominations Committee continue to use intentional strategies to promote and encourage the diversity of the church's leadership to be a part of national committees and other roles. This diversity includes racial identity, and is also expansive in engaging people from a range of identities and intersections of those identities. The Leadership Counts survey reveals the comparatively high-level of diversity present on committees—as well as places where more engagement is needed. Having racially diverse committees is not a sufficient end goal in itself. In addition, this work extends beyond a

committee's composition, to support groups and individuals ensure that people of diverse identities are able to participate fully and be present with their full selves. Plans are underway to engage in a full participation audit for national committee members in 2024.

*Equity, Diversity, and Anti-Oppression Education for committees:* staff of the General Council Office created an engaging e-module education series for national committee members that focused on equity, diversity, and anti-oppression. It is offered through the e-learning platform, ChurchX. The first two modules are asynchronous, and are designed to give people background knowledge about various aspects of equity, diversity, and anti-oppression in relation to committee work. The last module is an in-person conversation, within each committee, about how this applies to their committee's specific work. Staff first met with and trained the chairs of committees so that the chairs could then facilitate the conversation with their committees. To date, the majority of committees have completed or will soon be completing their education sessions. Feedback on the sessions has been overwhelming positive and has yielded in-depth conversations, learnings, and applications as well as requests to make similar programs available more broadly to other leadership groups in the church.

*Equity Support Team:* there continue to be Equity Support Team members who participate in the meetings of the Executive of General Council (GCE) as well as General Council. While all participants of the meeting have some accountability for creating an equitable space, it is the Equity Support Team that plays a particular leadership role in helping the whole gathering to continue to live into the Equity Aspirations. They continue to offer concrete suggestions for making meetings more equitable spaces for people of all identities.

*Decolonizing governance processes:* a small team is also continuing to work towards decolonizing the governance processes of the Executive of General Council (GCE). They have created opportunities for learning as well as some concrete suggestions for change. The Decolonizing Working Group and Equity Support Team intentionally work in cooperation with one another.

### **Concluding Words**

The work of anti-racism and equity is ongoing long-term and sustained work that continues to work towards the transformation of the church as a whole. It is not easy work, and yet it is necessary work to continue to live into our commitments. In addition to the work around systemic and structure changes, there continue to be resources and processes available for people across the church to continue to engage in anti-racism work in their own local contexts.

Even when an organization has committed to becoming more equitable, the amount of time that it takes to make structural and systemic changes cannot be underestimated! It is important to note that the work of anti-racism and equity is a sometimes slow process of transformation—and the whole church is invited to continue to engage.