

GENERAL SECRETARY'S ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

General Council 44 Annual Meeting

October 12, 2023

*2 Corinthians 3:12: "This kind of hope gives us the courage
to speak with brave words about these things."*

(First Nations Version, New Testament)

We live in interesting times. The intersection of our rich history and certain past as The United Church of Canada with our uncertain future due to declining revenues, membership¹, and the decline in participation of Canadians in religious practices and institution, in many ways is the perfect storm for the people of God to live into their calling to deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice. It maybe that this is the time, in the words of Seamus Heaney, when "hope and history rhymes."

As part of the strategic plan, we have been using the text from 2 Corinthians as a guidepost. And, as a management team, we are committed to leading from a position of hope. Living into and with hope we imagine is one way to overcome the sense of discouragement, disappointment, anger, and frustration many are experience. Boris Novak in his poem *Decisions*, reminds us that "between hope and despair, choose hope it will be harder to bear."

Choosing hope requires the openness to be curious, the willingness and openness to multiple perspectives, and holding lightly our rules and regulations. It needs eyes to see and the capacity to imagine and the ability to laugh at oneself. As I look and visit around the church, I am grateful for all the signs of hope that are evident—thirty Indigenous young people attending and engaging in the National Indigenous Spiritual gathering, sixteen Indigenous and Racialized youth coming together to explore what reconciliation means; a community of faith who invite members of their community to come for coffee and a muffin and engage in conversation and build community, hundreds of United Church members marching all across the country to say hate has no place in our society—and that is the tip of the iceberg. God is still up to something in this church, calling us to take seriously that which we profess, "that God is still active in our world...creating, inviting us to proclaim Jesus." So, let's continue to choose to hope as we engage in partnership with God in the mending of the God's world.

The Work of the General Council:

Remit 1: The remit on the restructuring of the Indigenous Church is currently in process in the church. The remit requires a vote from **all** communities of faith that are **pastoral charges** as well as from all regional councils. Voting for the remit began in March 2023, and votes can be received until March 31, 2024. An important reminder, that if a vote is not received by the deadline date, it is considered a "no" vote. To date, while some communities of faith have voted, the majority still need to register their votes. Regional councils have been hosting educational sessions so that communities of faith can learn more about the remit process. In

¹ See Appendix on the latest statistics.

addition, background information is available on the website for the 44th General Council: <https://generalcouncil44.ca/council/remit-1-establishing-autonomous-national-indigenous-organization>.

Strategic Operational Plan: The work of the General Council continues to be guided by the strategic operational plan with its six operational objectives – *Leadership, Climate, Growth, Indigenous Pathways, Common Good and Justice*. As you will see in various parts of this report, we are deepening the work by aligning the work of the General Council Office to these objectives, and we are evaluating and reporting on the work. Not only are we aligning staff, but we are also working on aligning budgets, so that we can transparently demonstrate the expenditure and its impact. You can find more information about the Plan on the United Church website (<https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/our-call-and-our-vision>). In your documents for this meeting, there is a report outlining the progress over the first three quarters of this year.

Ministries in French: we are delighted to welcome Emmanuel Tehindrazanarivelo to the role of Responsable, Ministries in French. A pastor and a theologian, Emmanuel comes to the role from his current ministry with The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar - Malagasy Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara - FJKM Canada Montreal. He earned a doctorate from the Toronto School of Theology before serving for close to 30 years in leadership with L'Église de Jésus Christ à Madagascar - FJKM, as well as numerous organizations and agencies working for peace, justice, and reconciliation. In addition to his academic background in Ethics and Systematic and Practical Theology, Emmanuel brings vast experience in administration, project management, capacity building, church renewal, conflict resolution and peace building. He is a change-agent for social and racial justice, equity, diversity, intercultural dialogue, and collaboration.

I would like to express my deep appreciation and thanks to Darla Sloan for her excellent work as Interim Responsable in these past months.

Staffing & Office Structure: To align the General Council office with the Strategic Plan there are some minor adjustments and then two substantive changes which have been approved by the General Council Executive. Previously six (6) working units carried out the work of the Office – Philanthropy, Church in Mission, Ministry and Employment, Office of the Moderator and General Secretary, Finance, and Indigenous Ministries and Justice. In November 2022 we established a seventh unit – the Organizational Development and Strategy (ODS) Unit, with Jennifer Henry as the Executive Minister. The Unit has now been structured to support the growth objective of the operational plan. Jennifer manages a team which includes: (a) *The Director of Communications* (Ronda Parks) and the communication staff – the old Communications Unit is integrated to respond to the findings of the Communications audit, to strengthen an outward facing communication strategy; (b) *The Director of Growth* (Cameron Fraser) and the reimaged EDGE staff team and includes the regionally deployed growth animators. We have now appointed six regionally deployed animators (Scott Reynolds, Tori Mullin, Sharon Ballantyne, Calin Lau, Greg Smith Young and Jordan Cantwell), plus a staff lead

(Emo Yango) for diaspora ministries; (c) a Research and Development Group headed by a Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Research. The Research and Development Group will bring expertise in analyzing and interpreting data to support the work, ministries, and projects of the General Council Office; and (d) effective July 1, 2023, Ministries in French moved from the Office of the Moderator and General Secretary (OMGS) to this new unit.

In June 2023 the Ministry and Employment Unit was restructured to create two new units: (a) *Ministry Leadership* – which will include the work of Theology Interchurch Interfaith (TICIF), relationships with the theological schools, the Office of Vocation, pastoral relations, and member engagement, and is led by Jennifer *Janzen-Ball* as Executive Minister; and (b) *Shared Services*, under the leadership of Alan Hall and will include Pension, HR/Payroll, GCO Administration, Archives, and Legal and Incorporated Ministries.

Further, as part of the realignment, we are working to standardize role and titles in the system. Marlene Britton's role title has changed from Team Lead Policy and Programs for Ministry Personnel to Director Policies and Programs for Ministry Personnel. Angelica Benalcazar's role title will be changed from *Human Resources and Payroll Manager* to Director of Human Resources & Payroll Services.

As we seek to deepen our advocacy and justice work, we have created two new positions, one for Global LGBTQI+ advocacy and solidarity, to support one of the three justice priorities. We are pleased that Jane Thirikwa has accepted this position; the second position is a Government Relations role, and we are currently recruiting for this position.

Changes to regional staff leadership: Eric Hebert-Daly was appointed the regional executive minister for East Central Ontario, Eastern Ontario Outaouais and Nakonha:ka regional councils. Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa has been seconded to the General Council office and is leaving her role as executive minister for Western Ontario Waterways, Horseshoe Falls and Antler River regional councils. A search is now underway for a new executive minister for these regions.

Finances: The church's financial management continues to involve managing greater variability and uncertainty in the current results as well as projecting potential future scenarios in support of the emerging strategic plan. This would likely have been true without the pandemic but has been exacerbated by it. The financial health of the church continues to be a challenge for the long-term sustainability of the church.

We need to 'right-size' our operations in a way that allows us to be effective. We will need to ensure that the strategic operational plan has enough room to be successful. Major investments in imagining a new future will be necessary, and we will need to resolve what it means to live within our means. These contextual realities are important to our choices over the next couple of years.

The General Council Office operating budget includes a structural deficit that will worsen over time if no action is taken. The approved 2023 Operating Budget contemplates a \$4.0 million

deficit which includes a \$1.5 million investment in spending directly linked to the strategic plan. The deficit is 10% of annual revenues. This deficit target was recommended by management and approved by the Executive based on the need for extraordinary action in response to overall church trends and needs. A related commitment was to return to “living within our means” and tackling the deficit in 2024 and onwards.

This means we need to remove something close to approximately \$6 million in potential costs by 2025. We are to date recommending accomplishing budget reduction over two (2) years, acknowledging that any cost cutting must align with strategic plan priorities. There are several circumstances impacting the long-term sustainability of the church. Many of these factors are outside of the control of the leadership: the changing landscape of the Canadian culture, the impact of COVID-19, the increased financial stress on communities of faith, and some expedited closures, as well as the well-being of ministry personnel, and the economic challenges of inflation. We are seeking to mitigate what we can as we move forward.

Captive Insurance: As we approach the first anniversary of the launch of our Captive Insurer initiative, the key results are positive. The implementation was very intentionally rushed to deliver immediate savings to participating congregations, and the target savings in excess of \$1 million have been achieved. This is a recurring saving from what otherwise would have been paid. Furthermore, loss results have been better than estimated and reinsurers have expressed comfort with the *UCC Protect United program*. Preliminary negotiations support a high single-digit or low double-digit premium increase which compares favourably to the market generally and would be less than participants were paying two years ago.

Service levels in year one has been poor and frankly unacceptable. In rushing the launch, the administration was overwhelmed, and we underestimated the extent of support congregations would need in transitioning from a local broker. Major changes have been made and the program is now on schedule to confirm December 1st renewal terms in October (well in advance - unlike last year). Underwriting of new applications is also now offered on a timely basis. Negotiations with reinsurers should also yield greater flexibility in coverage choices, which could be offered to churches mid-term. We note that this initiative still requires the underwriting of applications, standard claims adjudication, good local risk management and hopefully resultant claims experience within expectations.

Mission & Service: We continue to be grateful for the generosity of folks in the church. Beyond supporting your own communities of faith and local charities, you continue to be incredibly generous in our shared Mission and Service. Thanks to your gifts to Mission and Service, partners in the state of West Bengal in India were able to rescue a mother and toddler who were the victims of human trafficking. The mother was lured from her community with the promise of work and was then forced to work with little to no pay and had no way to return to her community. Thanks to our partners, the mother and her child were reunited with their family. Due in part to your gifts to Mission and Service, this summer’s Climate Motivator program was able to engage 15 youth across the country to work with the Moderator and

communities of faith on climate justice and environmental programs. The benefits of this program have been huge – including the support of the leadership of the youth and the launch of a variety of initiatives that help congregations take concrete actions on climate issues. Your gifts make a difference here and abroad and it is why I am pleased to share that givings have remained steady year over year. Please encourage your community faith, family and friends to contribute to the amazing work we do together either through your congregation or online at <https://united-church.ca/donate>.

Reconciliation and Equity

The churches commitment to reconciliation and racial equity continues to be a significant part of the work of the General Council Office. We are committed to walk the talk and to continue to contribute to the mending and healing of God’s world. I offer you a few updates here in this report. In addition, there is an additional report to this meeting on the work of reconciliation and justice as we deepen our work around the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the legacy of mission.

Bringing the Children Home: This program continues to respond to the ongoing work of locating and identifying unmarked burial sites on the grounds of former residential institutions in a way that affected communities deem appropriate. The Archives continue its work of providing communities with copies of all records related to the institutions their children were taken to and expanding access to all documents (located in the national and regional archives) related to any “colonizing institution” of the United Church.

Anti-Racism and Equity: This work continues under the leadership of Adele Halliday. This overall work is guided by the United Church’s Anti-Racism Action Plan—now integrated into the church’s overall Strategic Plan—and names five (5) key areas of work: education and awareness; theology; advocacy; governance; and healing and accountability. The work on the action plan is supported by the Anti-Racism Common Table, which coordinates and develops strategic directions and policy proposals for The United Church of Canada’s anti-racism work. This group is not a program development group for detailed or local anti-racism activities; rather, its focus is big-picture thinking and setting priorities for the denomination’s anti-racism commitment. The church’s [equity commitments](#) also undergird the work. This overall area continues to deepen our engagement by developing systems and structures that seek to work towards the transformation of the church, including identity-based data collection, so that decisions can be made which are well informed. Practical and accessible resources are also being developed. You are invited to take part in the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism (<https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/anti-racism/40-days-engagement-anti-racism>). You have as part of this workbook a report on the church’s anti-racism and equity work.

God’s Future:

Leaning into God’s Future is one of the themes from the 39th General Council 2006, in Thunder Bay. In the prayer from *A Call to Purpose*, the church prayed, “God propel us into your future, rooted in the richness of our past.” So, as we seek to live into the prayer, we continue to move

forward with boldness and daring, knowing that “the future does not fit the containers of the past.”² We are seeking to be open to and responsive to the winds of God’s Spirit. Whispering, and nudging, and inspiring us to catch the edge of the fresh new winds by finding ways to imagine the new future that is unfolding, by investing in engaging diaspora communities open to be taught and led by their wisdom, planning, and investing for growth, contributing to the shaping of imagination through the Flourishing project and the re-generate initiative to invest in leadership. We do this even as we look to 2025 with the centennial and General Council, and dream of the opportunities created by our cohabiting with the Anglicans and Presbyterians in 2026.

Centennial Planning: We are working on plans for the national recognition and commemoration of the centennial of the church. This is a significant event in the life of the United Church. The Centennial Planning committee has been working to curate and gather information on how communities of faith and regions will acknowledge the centennial. The Centennial Committee continues to fulfill its mandate of curating events for the celebration of the centennial in 2025. They have developed some guiding principles for the various activities ([Appendix II](#)). United Church of Canada institutions who are planning events can submit the following ([Form](#)). We would appreciate any feedback you might have with regards to the guiding principles. We are anticipating that most of the events will take place between June 2024 and June 2025. Details of the National General Council plan will be forthcoming in the next few months.

GC45: The 45th General Council is scheduled to be held in Calgary, Alberta from August 7 to 12, 2025, hosted by the Chinook Winds Regional Council. The planning committee is chaired by Taylor Croissant, and Kenji Marui as the chair of Business. The General Council will be an in-person meeting with an online option consistent with the Manual D.3.1. Regional councils will be asked to elect their Commissioners no later than August 2024.

300 Bloor Street: Plans are well underway regarding the move to 300 Bloor Street West (Bloor Street United). The expectation is that the move will take place in the first quarter of 2026. We are in the process of finalizing the lease agreement with the national offices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada. We are also in the design phase with KPMB as the architect. With the change in work, and moving to a remote/hybrid work environment, it has created the opportunity that all three Church archives will be able to be accommodated on site, in addition to all three denominational offices.

² The title of a Blog by Rishad Tobaccowala

Appendix I

The United Church of Canada, 2022
A Comparative Statistical Statement

	2022	2021-2022 % Change	2021	2020-2021 % Change	
Preaching Places	2,516	-2.71%	2,586	-2.38%	
Church (Sunday) Schools	1,012	-6.81%	1,086	-18.53%	
Candidates in Training	178	1.14%	176	1.15%	
Households under Pastoral Care	252,209	-6.92%	270,962	-5.69%	
Baptisms (12 Years of Age & Over)	260	4.42%	249	61.69%	
Baptisms (Under 12 Years of Age)	2,010	56.66%	1,283	44.16%	
Marriages	1,912	30.87%	1,461	29.41%	
Funerals and Memorial Services	9,869	18.80%	8,307	2.49%	
Total Membership, Beginning of Year	351,920	-3.56%	364,929	-3.48%	
Members Received on Profession, Under 18	403	40.91%	286	32.41%	
Members Received by Profession, Over 18	682	31.66%	518	56.97%	
Members Received by Certificate, Otherwise	3,592	4.09%	3,451	-19.20%	
Members Removed by Death	6,849	6.22%	6,448	-4.09%	
Members Removed by Certificate	4,342	161.09%	1,663	8.20%	
Members Removed by Otherwise	6,903	-16.44%	8,261	-7.61%	
Total Membership, End of Year	338,503	-4.06%	352,812	-3.56%	
Total Non-Resident Membership	77,634	-3.40%	80,363	-4.12%	
Total Resident Membership	260,869	-4.25%	272,449	-3.39%	
Identifiable Givers to Local Expense	153,908	-2.87%	158,450	-7.82%	
Number Financially Supporting Households	142,691	-2.95%	147,035	-8.28%	
Identifiable Givers to M&S Fund	57,631	-4.77%	60,515	-9.44%	
Average Weekly Attendance	111,489	-5.50%	117,983	12.25%	
Membership of Church Schools	18,730	-9.87%	20,780	-25.11%	
Membership of Christian Education Groups	73,602	8.62%	67,762	-21.98%	
Membership of Men's Groups	5,261	-12.58%	6,018	-20.65%	
Membership of Women's Groups	25,069	-7.97%	27,241	-11.66%	
Value of Churches, Contents	\$5,530,706,338	2.41%	\$5,400,496,060	2.00%	
Market Value of Vacant Church Land Sites	\$82,763,050	0.51%	\$82,344,234	4.01%	
Value of Manse(s), Site(s)	\$126,920,813	0.21%	\$126,651,560	2.25%	
Housing Allowance Paid	\$1,055,918	-22.52%	\$1,362,868	-13.08%	
Estimated Market Value of Church Land	\$2,435,589,758	2.25%	\$2,381,951,122	37.61%	
Value of Endowments, Investments	\$702,337,267	-3.45%	\$727,404,211	6.10%	
Property Insurance	\$5,663,718,868	1.70%	\$5,569,039,949	0.70%	
Total Liabilities	\$48,299,703	-2.15%	\$49,362,731	-0.60%	
Raised	A) By Congregational Givings	\$200,633,963	-1.92%	\$204,561,720	-1.35%
For	B) By Women's Groups	\$4,332,045	42.52%	\$3,039,611	-18.03%
All	C) By Other Sources	\$117,547,513	-1.82%	\$119,725,143	-24.68%
Purposes	D) Grand Total	\$322,513,521	-1.47%	\$327,326,474	-11.54%
Expended for Local Capital Improvements	\$30,933,459	10.99%	\$27,869,251	-41.30%	
Expended for Debt Repayment	\$5,176,413	-12.61%	\$5,923,381	24.80%	
M&S Fund Gifts Received from Congregation	\$18,831,516	5.52%	\$17,846,611	-5.77%	
M&S Fund Gifts Received from U.C.W.	\$475,061	-3.42%	\$491,901	-27.77%	
Given for Other U.C. Appeals	\$930,034	-42.04%	\$1,604,731	210.88%	
Given for Other Non-U.C. Purposes	\$25,159,495	38.74%	\$18,133,834	17.25%	
Expended for Operation of Charge	\$280,487,955	6.41%	\$263,597,418	-1.83%	
Salary Paid to Minister or Supply	\$78,362,245	0.93%	\$77,642,875	-2.48%	
Salary Paid to Other Ministerial Staff	\$8,803,311	-2.74%	\$9,051,692	-4.60%	
Travel Expenses Paid to All Staff	\$1,758,393	15.64%	\$1,520,549	-15.15%	

Appendix II

Guiding Principles for Centennial Commemorations

As communities develop plans for various activities to commemorate 100 years of The United Church of Canada, these principles are meant to ground us in the commitments and values of the Church.

The guidelines are organized into *equity requirements* and *invitational guidelines*, and are structured around the [Church's Call and 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.

Equity Requirements for planning Events and Activities:

All activities must support the commitments of the United Church of Canada and bring us closer to the shared vision of the Church in 2025.

Right Relations with Indigenous Peoples

- Planning teams must consider the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and the [Caretakers' Calls to the Church](#), and ensure appropriate consultation with Indigenous communities in planning and delivering commemorations.

Becoming a Church that is anti-racist, affirming, accessible, intercultural and functionally bilingual

- The commemoration must support [equity and inclusivity](#) in planning, communicating and delivering content.

Partnership Principles

- The planning team must practice mutuality, dialogue and accountability when engaging with Canadian or [Global partners](#) on a commemoration project.



Invitational Guidelines:

Planners are invited to consider and share how they are responding to Calls in their centennial activities.

Bold Discipleship

How does the centennial activity develop, support, reinvigorate or share resources between communities of faith?

Daring Justice

How does the centennial activity deepen bold, effective solidarity on justice and climate issues?

Deep Spirituality

How does the centennial activity strengthen courage and humility in sharing and growing faith?