

The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

Strategic Plan 2023–2025

Operational Plan Report

First Quarter

May 1, 2023



Operational Plan Report: First Quarter

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Introduction

A Call, Vision, and Plan will guide us as we strive to boldly embody the Christian story in this time, filled with certainty of resurrection and hope for new life.

Since the adoption of the Call and Vision at the General Council in October of 2021, and confirmation of the strategic objectives by the General Council in November of 2021, the General Council Office has worked on the development of an operational plan. This required not just the creation of the content, but the development of systems and processes of detailed planning, reporting, and evaluation, and the clarification of lines of accountability. The operational plan uses objectives and key results (OKRs) as the organizing framework.

In alignment with six strategic objectives, staff developed 26 initiatives, broken down into 99 activity streams. 40 of those streams were identified as priority. Some activities were identified to begin only in 2024. For 2023, each activity in the plan has an activity lead, with progress tracked monthly, and reports issued quarterly related to key results. The cumulative key results for that strategic objective are a measure of overall objective progress. This report reflects both overall and priority area progress for the first quarter of 2023. It also feeds the 2023 evaluation which will help adjust the operational plan for 2024.

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.



Overall Results

The first quarter results of this operational plan show a strong start, not only in progress on the objectives but significant shifts in ways of working towards greater transparency and accountability.

Overall, this quarter has shown solid progress towards key results. Staff are working collaboratively not only in activity teams, or larger strategic objective groups, but also across the operational plan as synergies and potential collaborations between activities become clearer. Reporting has begun to enable support and trouble-shooting by accountable leaders, including identifying areas of work that might be combined or appropriately moved into 2024.

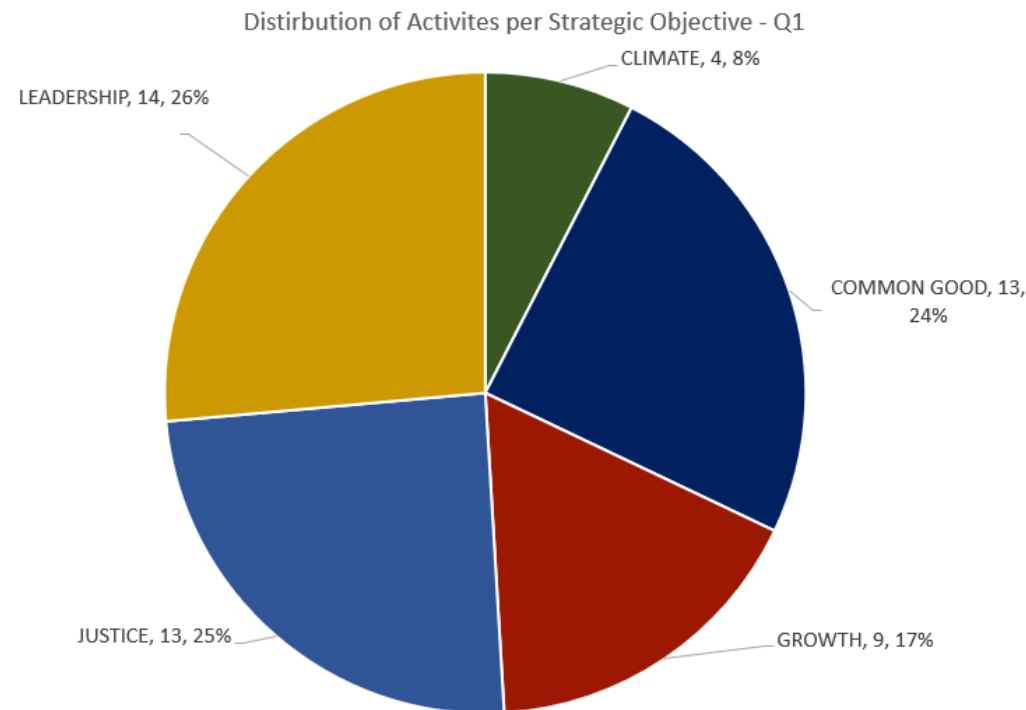
The vast majority of 2023 activities have been activated. For those that have not, the key challenge is delays in hiring for new positions. We overestimated the collective capacity to get new roles developed, posted, and hired in the first quarter. We are working diligently on this and will be able to activate some of the remaining areas of work in the second quarter as we are able to successfully fill positions.

Over 30% of the activities have met their key results, with the overall average of 74%. As we begin to see clearly our capacity for quarterly progress, we will be able to improve our planning, staying aspirational but with a healthy dose of realism. One of the most significant factors in failing to meet key result is difficulties for activity leads and team members in letting go of previous work. Workload tools have been developed and Executive Ministers and Managers are continuing to support staff in focusing on the plan, engaging in the difficult process of letting go or increasing operational efficiencies to allow for more space to achieve the planned work. Staff are being added to teams to increase capacity in some areas.

With operational plan implementation, there is huge transition in ways of working, through regularizing reporting, and different processes for collaboration. The cross-unit nature of this plan requires changed accountability flows. Overall, we are seeing improvements in breaking down silos and growing alignment to the plan. This has required the development of learning resources, and opportunities for training at different levels. As we continue to make this transition, including learning and adjusting, we should see more and more capacity to both develop and implement stronger and stronger results.

Activities Distribution and Start

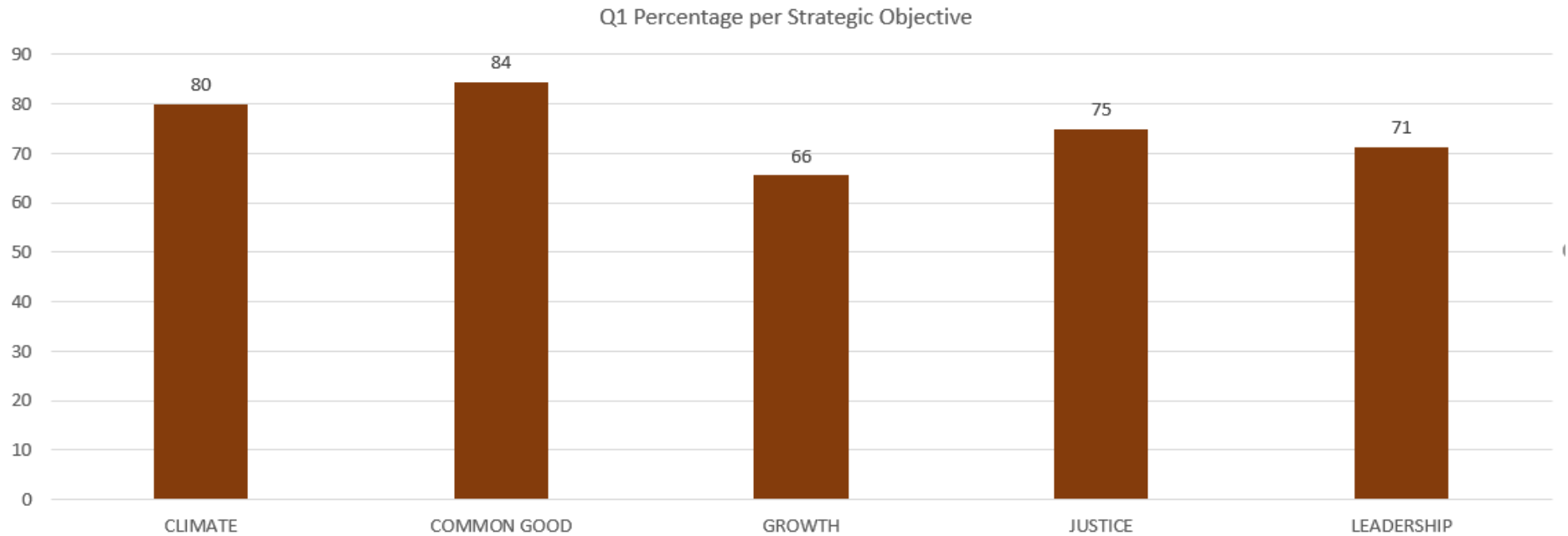
88% of the planned 2023 activities have started



- 2023 Status: 69 of 78 activities have started. 29 of the 36 prioritized have started.
- A couple of the planned activities for 2023 have been moved to 2024.
- All planned 2023 activities in Climate and Common Good are underway
- The 9 "not yet activated" activities planned for 2023, are pending due to unfulfilled staffing or hiring.
- Indigenous Pathways is reporting in a narrative manner.

Progress against Key Results

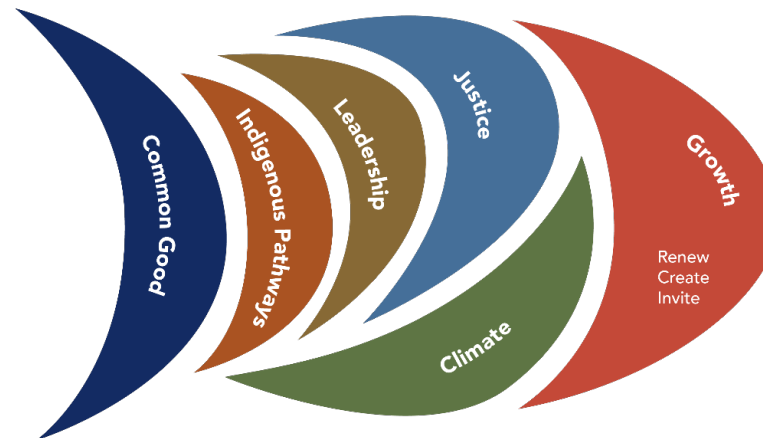
76% is average result for Q1



- Progress against key results in Q1 varies from 84% in Common Good to 66% in Growth
- Average is calculated from key results on all activated activity streams.
- Indigenous Pathways is reporting in a narrative manner.

Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives--Justice, Leadership, Common Good, Climate, and Indigenous Pathways—show strong intersections among them, and collectively contribute to the overarching strategic priority on Growth. The following section identifies the objective, and offers a summary of the overall progress for this area (including all activated activities), as well as giving more detailed information as to how each priority activity in this objective has fared in the first quarter of 2023.



Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith

66%

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.

In Growth, all of the proposed activities are identified as priority, with 2023 starts. Work has begun in each of the three streams:

- Renew existing communities of faith
- Create 100 new communities of faith
- Invite through galvanizing common identity and reaching out beyond existing members

While there is some solid initial progress, a longer than expected hiring process for key positions in this area has been the result of delay some of our efforts. With the Communications Director firmly in her position, and the Director of Growth newly hired, we should be able better advance planned initiatives. Position descriptions for planned Growth Animators have been developed in discussion with regional colleagues and posting will happen shortly.

In the Renew stream, the team have focused on an inventory of key resources and tools available to support renewal, and have created updated stewardship tools. Work to take an inventory of “people” resources, such as coaches and consultants, is underway. Key work has been done to begin to align EDGE resources and capacities to the renew objectives.

In the Create stream, the team has confirmed a definition for communities of faith, created an intake tool, and developed a process stream. Impressive work has been done to recruit leadership for migrant community of faith development, including holding a first planning gathering.

While the public outreach campaign area has not yet begun in earnest, the team focused on Call and Vision animation across the church is hard at work on aligning key resources, including new publishing house books, to the Call, and developing promotion and animation related to the Call and Vision including banners, videos, posters, worship, inspiration, and education materials. The Call and Vision, or the strategic plan overall, has been the focus of a number of regional gatherings, growing a sense of common identity and purpose across the church. *Mon Credo*, a key web tool in francophone outreach, is set to launch, and work continues on developing a platform for Centennial action.

<p>RENEW: We will strengthen the capacities of existing communities of faith to welcome, attract, retain, transform, and send people into the world. The plan is for a creative, robust, clear, and coordinated set of resources to help communities of faith strengthen invitation and innovation, reducing current duplication and filling in key gaps.</p>		
<p>General Council 43 Proposal</p>	<p>Priority Activities</p>	<p>% Progress against Key Results</p>
	<p>Conduct an assessment towards providing concrete tools and grants or loans to communities of faith so that they might clarify their identity, strengthen their invitation, and ensure the future of their ministry.</p>	<p>100</p>
	<p>Develop coaching and consulting resources to assist in community of faith transformation, including towards collaborative ministry models or ecumenical shared ministry.</p>	<p>50</p>
	<p>Build a coordinated strategy to provide financial sustainability and stewardship support to communities of faith to create a stable operating base, including engagement in social finance.</p>	<p>95</p>
<p>CREATE: Mapping demographic information and assessing community needs, we will propose, develop, and create 100 new communities of faith with a view to their long-term sustainability.</p>		
<p>General Council 43 Proposal</p>	<p>Priority Activities</p>	<p>% Progress against Key Results</p>
	<p>Create eight new online communities.</p>	<p>Not yet activated</p>
	<p>Create 45 new communities in regional priority areas or identity communities.</p>	<p>Not yet activated</p>

NEW03	Create 30 new migrant communities.	100
	Create 7 new intentional, intercultural engagement communities.	60
	Create 5 new francophone communities.	Not yet activated.
	Create 5 new communities aimed at connecting with persons with disabilities.	25
	Advance communion and partnership conversations that enhance the creation and development of communities of faith.	30
<p>INVITE: Drawing deep on the new Call and Vision, we will galvanize common identity and purpose across the church, strengthening the understanding of our discipleship in this time. We will develop ways to communicate effectively with different groups of the public about the spiritual home or pathways to home in the church, including using the 100th anniversary to renew relationships.</p>		
General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities	% Progress against Key Results
TICIF01	Encourage all members, adherents, affiliates, and communities, councils and ministries of the church to engage with the Call and Vision in diverse ways.	85

	Develop and implement a multi-pronged communication strategy focused at Canadians with no current relationship with The United Church of Canada that invites them to discover deep spirituality, belonging and community.	Not yet activated
	Develop MonCredo.org to enhance development and welcome of francophone community in the United Church	60
	Celebrate, commemorate, lament and learn by developing a coordinated approach to Centennial 2025.	50

Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World

75%*

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.

The measurable goal under the Justice pillar is to “collaborate in spaces where just relationships can flourish for abundant life in the church, Canada, and in global communities.” Under the quarter in review, the team has collaborated in the following spaces with significant progress:

- Living commitments to the TRC Calls to Action, MMIWG Calls to Justice, and UNDRIP
- A successful Indigenous and racialized youth retreat held.
- Coordination and convening the second global regional consultation "Asian Consultation on Gender and LGBTQ+ Inclusion", which took place in Manila, Philippines, in mid-February.
- Review of 40 days for Anti-racism project

Some key results were fully advanced, while some aspects of the key results were postponed. The hiring of a 2S and LGBTQIA+ Advocacy Coordinator was delayed, but this will now be achieved in the 2nd quarter.

The overall purpose has been to create a daring justice momentum to contribute to the reduction and prevention of inequalities and injustices and to ensure that social justice is prioritized in national and global spaces where we, as the United church, are participants in promoting abundant life. We have continued to advocate for social justice in ecumenical and other spaces, doing so to pave the way towards the emergence of a revitalized Church that addresses religious-induced homophobia or Indigenous and racist tendencies which enhance societal polarization.

Beyond the individual human tragedies and their impact on the world of work, the converging global crises have shown the crucial need for concerted, ecumenically coordinated action and this is being addressed within various key results of the current operational plan. If we are to build just, sustainable, and resilient societies to achieve lasting peace, we must have social justice. It is both necessary and urgent.

Addressing systematic injustice issues around Indigenous and racial justice is not a once-off activity and we are proud to report that significant steps are being made to be in those collaborative spaces promoting just relations: holding ‘Have Heart Day’ which relates

to the child welfare and education in the TRC Calls to Action; consultations leading to work that advances self-healing; and development work by the Indigenous and racialized scholar program.

In order to deepen and broaden the knowledge of senior staff on issues facing Palestine and Israel, and contribute to protecting rights defenders at risk, two Executive Ministers participated in a joint ecumenical church leaders delegation solidarity visit with partners in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, with a report to be shared at the end of the 2nd quarter.

The major challenge faced in the first quarter was making critical decisions on what to stop doing

Accountable: Japhet Ndhlovu

**Note that averages in Justice, Leadership, Common Good and Climate are calculated from all activated activity streams not only the priorities which are highlighted below in these sections*

General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities	% Progress against Key Results
	Deepen understanding and action on the ongoing colonial injustices identified in the TRC Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls to Justice, contributing to advocacy on TRC 1-6, as well as on Calls to Action directed to the Churches and Parties to the Settlement Agreement.	50
	Drawing from experience, develop theology, policy, educational resources, and strategies to return resources, real estate and artifacts taken from Indigenous and racialized communities or provide appropriate compensation.	100
	Support the relational, funding, and archival work related to <i>Bringing the Children Home</i> and develop further specific responses to denomination's colonial legacy as discerned to be appropriate.	100
	Following the lead of affected communities and developing trust/mutuality, contribute to increased access and equity in housing for racialized communities.	Not yet activated

	Develop and implement educational strategy that deepens understanding of the diverse impacts of colonialism, White supremacy, and racism in our church.	80
	Develop a change strategy to move from awareness to ownership and action, that leads to rejecting the power and privilege that comes from Whiteness, and restoring right relationship.	40
	Increase the shift from white Euro-centric male dominant theology, encourage existing and new theologies that promote multiple marginalized identities and intercultural practices, and develop relevant accessible theological resources.	100
	Develop an engaging campaign that increases the support of the Canadian government to 2S-LGBTQIA+ refugees in Canada and globally.	Not yet activated
GCE03	Develop a principles-based approach to social justice in the United Church.	100
	With the theme human flourishing, support the Moderator in hosting cross sectoral change making conversations on “things that matter” that result in deep dialogue and bold commitments, while broadening engagement of the Moderator’s office within and beyond the church.	87

Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and Innovating for Bold Discipleship

71%

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.

The leadership objective has four main areas:

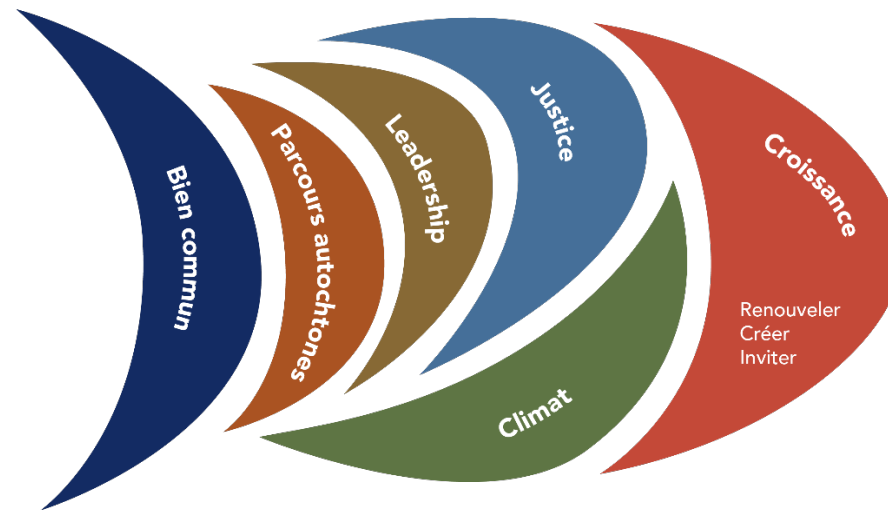
- Ministry of the whole people of God and leadership development
- Ministry personnel leadership (including candidacy pathway, admissions, theological education)
- Elected members and ministry personnel support for equity, diversity, anti-oppression commitments
- Internal staff support around equity commitments and systems to streamline processes (e.g., A new HRIS system, connected to payroll).

Overall, work is going well in each of these areas, with excitement in the activity teams and leads around their projects. Several of the activity streams are cross-cutting and staff are connecting with one another to check in. The equity, diversity, and anti-oppression training has been well received by committee chairs, who have also appreciated the opportunity to connect with one another that this training has allowed. A few challenges have arisen around the Admission matching program. For example, it is harder to find five communities of faith to participate than was imagined; to date, three communities of faith have been identified. The group is working hard to reduce some of the barriers for other communities of faith to participate. And a new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is a bit delayed in rolling out, due to external factors. However, that is minor and staff have been working hard to push the external vendor to speed up their timeline and that has worked.

Accountable: Jennifer Janzen-Ball

General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities Only	% Progress against Key Results
	With a view to strengthening lifelong vocation and connection to the church for lay people and ministry personnel, review continuing education and leadership development programs currently offered and develop a coordinated, extensive set of training programs.	100
	Intentionally identify young leaders in the church and support their continued development.	65
GCE06; N:ka 01 notes	Reimagine theological education through a process that enables schools to collaborate around the ministry needs of the future.	50
	Enhance collaborative, innovative, and diverse ministry through experiments in different models and through renewed recruitment and admission processes.	80
	Collaborate with regional council colleagues and theological schools around collaborative ministry models, including Ecumenical Shared Ministry.	80
	Increase the number of youth and young adults moving towards paid, accountable ministry, bridging the gap between First Third ministry and recruitment, including racialized, Indigenous, and queer people, including addressing the compensation model.	Not yet activated
	Enhance ongoing leadership development for/with ministry personnel, with focus on developing mentorship/accompaniment skills, with a special focus on mentoring for those who want to learn and share church planting skills, including Admission ministers.	50
NEW03	Create a working group within the Board of Vocation that would review the admissions process for ministry personnel, as well as gather data, with particular consideration of anti-racism	80

	<p>commitments, isolation in ministry, financial stressors, structural barriers within the church, and external advocacy around immigration processes. This might lead to an Admission Matching Commission.</p>	
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Nurture the Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources

84%

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.

Priority activities in this strategic objective are proceeding well. Most of the objectives are in an information gathering or review process to inform a path forward. The exception would be the self- insurance program which is in full operational mode and the fundraising initiative which has launched a couple of campaigns during the fourth quarter. Pinch points have been staff capacity, some due to leaves, others due to the transition to the operational plan and living into a new way of assessing, organizing and prioritizing work. This transition piece is true for the activity leads and teams, and for the individuals they are trying to collaborate with and collect information from, in order to get the work done.

What has become quite apparent through the work done to date is that there is great opportunity for relevant, shared services, coordinated by or located in the General Council Office. Much of the information gathering and review processes indicate that there are needs across the church that could be coordinated to achieve economies of scale or more confident supplier decisions.

Accountable: Sarah Charters

General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities Only	% Progress against Key Results
GCE07	Implement a self-insurance program for all church entities. Reduce a significant cost and stressor by 15-30%.	75
	Integrate granting and donation portals to improve efficiency, transparency, accountability and our ability to tell our story.	10
	Steward church buildings or money released from sales for future ministry, strengthening and seeking to align existing regional council property policies including reconciliation and reparations considerations.	40
	Promote, encourage and increase giving in support of denominational work and target a national capital fundraising program for the church's 100th anniversary.	75
	Develop a cross United Church or potentially cross-denomination strategy for information management.	100

Deepen Integrity: Living Climate Commitments

80%

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.

On the climate initiative, the first quarter was extremely busy with staff planning for and animating various church Earth Week activities and promoting [For the Love of Creation](#) activities to regions, congregations and local networks. [Faithful Footprints](#) continues to build momentum and the second biennial church sustainability report was released in time for Earth Week. On the investment front, the church voted in favour of multiple shareholder proposals related to reducing fossil fuel funding and speeding a just transition from fossil fuels. There is small but devoted core of climate activists in our networks, and the challenge is to try to grow this into more of a church-wide movement.

Accountable: Erik Mathiesen

General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities Only	% Progress against Key Results
GS01	Expand <i>Faithful Footprints</i> denomination-wide to improve the energy efficiency and reduce the carbon pollution of church buildings, dramatically increasing the number of participating communities.	80
GS01	Deepen engagement in ecumenical, interfaith, and civil society education and advocacy towards climate justice by identifying and amplifying the capacity of communities of faith and individual champions.	100

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.

As we walk together, the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous United church, we have much to relate and recognize as we step further on the concentrated work and planning on our Indigenous Pathway within the Strategic Plan, with a priority on the structure of the Indigenous United Church. The National Indigenous Council (NIC) and the National Indigenous Elders Council (NIEC) have met in their planned monthly meetings this first quarter of 2023 focusing on the National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering (NISG) 2023. Part of our Indigenous Pathway is to focus on our Indigenous Spirituality. In order for our leadership from NIC and NIEC to start this dialogue, we look to our Sacred Bundle held by our bundle keeper till the next NISG in July 2023 in Edmonton, Alberta. The NIC has been working on the structure recommendations and best appointment processes for a newly appointed National Indigenous Council that will be named at the National Indigenous Spiritual gathering. These are first steps to the process of the Indigenous Pathways and the continuous work that the Indigenous church look forward to creating and living in.

Accountable: Murray Pruden

General Council 43 Proposal	Priority Activities Only
NIC01; GS10	Build consensus towards a governance structure for the Indigenous Church.
	Initiate new local Indigenous ministries, with a focus on urban communities.

***Note that Indigenous pathways is using another process other than key results methodology for their reporting.*