

## **General Secretary's Accountability Report**

### **Origin: General Secretary and Acting General Secretary**

*Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your children shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your elders shall see visions. —Joel 2:28*

I am grateful for the privilege of serving as Acting General Secretary during General Secretary Michael Blair's sabbatical. It has given me the opportunity to immerse myself more fully in the work of the denomination. It has also allowed me to represent the church on a few occasions—at an online event hosted by the President of the Canadian Council of Churches, at our open house with the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and, most recently, at the funeral of former Moderator, the Very Rev. Dr. Bruce McLeod.

At the funeral, I sat with former Moderator, Mardi Tindal, and former General Secretaries Randy Naylor and Nora Sanders. We were musing about this past 16 months as a time when we lost three former Moderators: the Very Rev. Dr. Lois Wilson, the Very Rev. Dr. Robert Smith, and Bruce. Bruce was just a few days short of his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. Lois was 97 and Bob was 89. All three, as Moderator Mardi noted, were advanced in years but young in spirit. All three were also members of the first generation to be born into the United Church. There is very little of our 100-year history they did not experience first-hand. There are common characteristics among these three. There is no doubt they shaped the United Church, but is it also possible that their shared qualities reflect the church that shaped them? In them, can we see the essence of the United Church?

All three were gifted speakers, inviting us to explore new images of the sacred and of our life together as God's people. They remained curious and open to new ways of understanding God and the world. For each one of them, this life-long walk in faith led them into the world where they spoke truth and championed change. There are many things this United Church is but it strikes me that these two—being open and being in the world—are at the core.

We also mourn former National President of the United Church Women, Beulah Hayley, whose wit and warmth touched all who met her. We grieve the passing of Laverne Jacobs. Canon Jacobs was ordained by the Anglican Church and dedicated much of his life, as his obituary noted, "to pushing the Anglican and United churches to live up to Christ's inclusive, loving vision." Laverne served at the General Council Office.

### **Living within our Budget Principles**

This question of how the institution has shaped its leaders and its leaders have shaped the institution is top of mind for me as the regional and General Council Executive Minister team wrestles with the tough choices we must make to be financially stable. The Executive is also part of this deliberation as we hear from the Pilgrimages of Learning and the ideas they share. If we can't do it all, what will we do? We have committed to the objectives of our strategic plan to help the church as a whole and communities of faith in particular to live into the call and vision.

That's our priority; but are there other essentials without which we will not be ourselves? It's the question I ponder as we enter our second century.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In partnership with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, we have communicated our joint gift to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. We leave with the Centre whether or if news of our joint gift is shared.

Staff in our Indigenous Ministries and Justice Unit are busy preparing for the gatherings of the circles of the Indigenous church and for this summer's National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering where the Indigenous church will select its new governing body and will set the course for becoming autonomous. Please hold the circles, the staff, and the Spiritual Gathering in prayer that this may be a time of strength and joy for Indigenous ministries.

### **Recommendations from the Report on the Office of the Moderator and General Secretary**

The Moderator and General Secretary Accountability Committee has started meeting. Its mandate, drawn from the report adopted at General Council 45, is in the updated Governance Handbook being presented for the Executive's consideration. Also in the Handbook is a revised Public Statements Section that reflects the understanding of the report recommendation on this topic. As a reminder to the Executive, it has been asked to be attentive to this.

We are living into our understanding of what it means to have the Moderator speak "to" the church and the General Secretary "for" the church. I suspect that our understanding of "to the church" may have been limited as we conceived primarily of the United Church. Moderator Kimberly has spoken to the church as she reached out to our American full communion partners at this distressing time and to the church in Denmark and Greenland. The occasions when I, in this role, have spoken "for" the church have been more limited. One example was in protest of American threats that impact our partners in Cuba. In that role, I'm sharing the church's position; the Moderator is sharing the church's care. It's not a perfect division of roles and I anticipate will be more of a dotted than a solid line. Much like the new focus of the partnership between the Moderator and General Secretary, it is rooted in frequent and clear communication and teamwork.

The Accountability Committee is working with consultant, Janis Ryder, to develop tools to offer clarity to the incumbents and to assist with its responsibilities.

One of the other elements included in the report and adopted by the Executive last March was a shift in senior leadership roles to help resource the work of the General Secretary role. The concern was rooted in the workload of the General Secretary and I would echo that concern. There are many elements of the portfolio that I am not doing during my short tenure and the pace is demanding. If one bears in mind that I entered the Acting role with experience at every level of the church for extended periods of time and without a steep learning curve, it's clear that it would be an unfair expectation to ask any one person to take it on anew.

How best to reorganize for the sake of the work is still being considered. General Secretary, Michael, has discussed this both with staff and with the Executive but was not settled on a model prior to leaving for sabbatical. As General Secretary, Michael brings the gift of vision and forward thinking to the role, the commitment to the ecumenical spirit that is the DNA of our formation, and an understanding of inter-culturalism that is so important for our future. He also is with communities of faith regularly as guest preacher. I have been contrasting that with how I fill the role and am offering a metaphor—along with a caution. As with all metaphors, it can limit as much as it deepens understanding! I have been thinking of denominational structure like a wheel. The spokes are the regional councils and General Council units; they provide the structure that lets the wheel move. But the other two parts of the wheel, the rim and the hub are quite different. The rim is an outward facing part, interacting with the terrain, the place where we measure movement on the journey. The hub, on the other hand, is a central part, drawing the spokes together. General Secretary, Michael, strives to be both, connecting with the staff members regularly while also carrying that outward facing role. I am wondering if this metaphor of distinguishing the hub functions of the role from the rim ones might help. It's important not to let the metaphor be too limiting but to draw from it what can be helpful.

### **General Council Office Updates**

I am grateful to my General Council colleagues who have been an invaluable resource to me in this role at a time of significant change.

Let me begin by welcoming Angelica Benalcazar, our Executive Minister, Shared Services. Angelica moved into this role following Alan Hall's retirement December 31, 2025. The title of the role has been changed as we move all senior staff titles to align with Vocations of the Whole People of God document adopted at General Council 45. It invites each of us to understand our work as ministry. The IT Department, formerly with Finance, has moved to Shared Services. Pension and Benefits have moved to Finance with a renaming of Harry Li's title to Executive Minister, Pension and Finance.

During December we moved from 3250 Bloor St. W. to 50 Wynford Dr. Our space is limited there but it meets our needs. The Presbyterians have been most welcoming. Our staff cycle through the office in rotations as we cannot accommodate all units at once.

The move has been a major undertaking and happened smoothly thanks especially to Angelica and Mary Worrall. Our IT Team, led by Sam Hou, went over and above to relocate our servers to 40 Oak St., the Archives, and to ensure we have what we need at 50 Wynford, with as little disruption as possible.

### **300 Bloor St. W.**

Most of the work to clear 3250 is completed with the stained glass wall removed and in storage. We will also store some furniture but our needs have changed with the Anglican Church of Canada's repudiation of their sublease from the United Church. We remain in conversation with

the Presbyterians. The Anglican decision will require a redesign of the space to preserve the best options for rental and to adjust for the fact that space that was once to be shared by three may need to be rethought when serving and being financed by fewer users. We anticipate moving forward with our architect on redesigning the plans soon. These changes have impacted our anticipated move-in date.

### **Towards 2035 and Strategic Plan**

Since the approval of the **Toward 2035** Strategic Direction and Objectives at the last meeting, staff have been focused on two main areas of development. Internally, we have been working to confirm initiatives and the related lead staff in each of the objective areas (Growth, Leadership and Justice), identify strategic metrics for the overall direction and three objectives. We are also focused on aligning both budget expenditures and human resources, in preparation for an intensive in-person staff planning event from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> of April. This event will plan key results and budget for the period of July 1, 2026- to December 31, 2027, the first period of the 2026-2028 strategic plan. This is a complex endeavour because of our commitment to engage both national and regional staff in commitment, understanding and planning for **Toward 2035**.

At the same time as we are pivoting towards the whole church vision and strategy, the GCO staff are confirming 6-month transition results and budget (Jan-June 2026). Other areas of focus include the challenging judgement of what to “leave behind” and discernment on how to make our overall work more efficient in key priority areas.

The other development area is more outward-facing. This included a community of faith focused [news update](#) on **Toward 2035** and a new [website section](#) with a Moderator’s video, session 1 of a congregational discussion resource and prayer tools. Similar material is being developed and shared on eglise unie. Staff, and now some elected members, continue to make presentations for groups within the church on the vision, strategy and principles of **Toward 2035**, informing and engaging more members, adherents and communities. Regional staff are beginning to use the denominational dashboard in multiple ways, some engaging regional councils and others putting the tool in the hands of purpose-created groups or commissions. In general, the goal is to see how data can help inform the development of regional and sub-regional strategies aligned with the overall **Toward 2035** strategic direction. In another public facing example, over 180 persons gathered virtually on Epiphany to hear the Moderator’s new year’s address and witness star sightings that testified to direction of **Toward 2035**, such as youth and multigenerational programming in rural communities, the emerging migrant and diaspora communities of faith, and the changing face of ministries in French in response to newcomer communities.

Bridging between the internal development and external facing work is the commitment to get baseline information to support measurement and evaluation in **Toward 2035**. We are currently developing a baseline survey on awareness of **Toward 2035** and its strategic direction across the

church and another significant survey to identify a diversity baseline from which to measure progress towards a multiracial, multigenerational and intercultural church.

GC45's commitment to dedicate 10% of Mission and Service funding (over 3 years) to Growth and the **Toward 2035** initiative is being dedicated in year one to supporting migrant, diaspora and francophone community leadership, expanding integrated growth and stewardship animators across the country to the ultimate goal of one per region, and investing in youth and young adult and Indigenous priorities. This complements Growth funding from the existing program budget going to support some innovative collaborative regional experiments where communities are pushing into new configurations to strengthen inspiration, resilience and diversity.

While the development of **Toward 2035** has been proceeding, staff completed the work of Q4, the final quarter of the 2023-2025 strategic plan (report provided).

### **Mission and Service**

2025 was a successful one in terms of direct giving and legacy giving. We now have \$18.3M in received and committed gifts through the Centennial Legacy Campaign. We are working on gathering information to help us increase our understanding of how much is designated for congregations and communities of faith, Mission and Service, the Foundation, and other ministries. Several years ago we shifted the deadline for congregations to send in their year-end Mission and Service gifts to January 15<sup>th</sup>. It remains clear that a significant number of congregations have not adjusted their processes and continue to send in their prior year Mission and Service gifts on or after January 31<sup>st</sup>. That means that finalizing the year-end total takes longer than we would like for reporting and celebration purposes. We will keep promoting the change and keep working to shift more congregations to the January 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. As we move into 2026, we have already finalized the Easter Campaign and will share a preview of the campaign with you in the near future. We are also beginning to disseminate a solid, cohesive narrative for the year. There will be an overhaul of the Mission and Service web presence, donation pages and a refresh of a number of promotional materials. We look forward to sharing those updates with you in the future.

### **Finance**

2025 Financial Update: Operating revenues for 2025 are tracking above budget, driven by generous donor support and solid investment performance. Year-end Mission and Service (M&S) contributions are still being finalized. Total M&S revenue is projected at \$21.7M, compared to a budget of \$20.2M. This favorable variance is primarily attributable to strong bequests (\$4.5M), direct major gifts (\$1.2M), and special donations from property sale proceeds (\$1.7M). However, congregational M&S giving is currently \$600K below budget (\$15.0M actual vs. \$15.6M budget). This trend raises concerns about congregational financial capacity and future revenue assumptions, and may also reflect timing issues related to remittances from communities of faith.

Other General Council Office revenue streams also performed exceptionally well. UCRD delivered a 45% increase in sales year-over-year and generated \$700k gross sales, a notable achievement. In addition, the Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) program, IT and Accounting and Pastoral Charge Payroll Services continue to generate sufficient revenue not only to fully cover operating costs, but also to produce additional revenue that supports the mission and ministry of the church.

The investment portfolio achieved a gross return of 10.69% in 2025. While this represents solid absolute performance, it underperformed the benchmark return of 16.54%. The primary drivers of underperformance were due to lack of exposure to several sectors that dominated market gains in 2025, including gold, energy, Shopify (Canada), and the U.S. “Magnificent Seven” equities, which were major contributors to index performance.

While total revenues are expected to exceed budget, operating expenditures are also projected to run over budget. Significant variances, totaling approximately \$1.0M, are primarily concentrated in legal fees, IT licensing, and consulting costs. The increases in legal and consulting expenses are largely attributable to one-time tasks, while higher IT licensing costs reflect both an under-estimated budget and unanticipated market-driven price increases.

**Interim Office Move:** The new interim office at 50 Wynford Drive became operational in early January. While modest in size, it is fully functional and supports regular in-office days for the Finance and Church in Mission units, as well as bi-weekly management meetings. Decommissioning of the former office at 3250 Bloor St. W is in progress, with full vacancy required by the end of February. Extensive discussion has occurred regarding the disposition of cubicle furniture. Given the Anglican Church of Canada’s lease repudiation, retaining the furniture is no longer prudent due to prohibitive storage costs. In addition, the cubicles - designed for a traditional office environment - are poorly suited to the current hybrid work model. Attempts to resell the furniture have been unsuccessful. Staff are exploring charitable donation options, with disposal as a last resort.

**Captive Insurance Update:** The 2025/2026 captive insurance renewal is complete, featuring an optimized risk-transfer structure and a new fronting company, Ecclesiastical.

Key outcomes include:

- Increased GCO cost recovery to \$100,000 (from \$75,000)
- Flat premium renewal, with only inflationary adjustments
- Coverage limits of \$2M per occurrence and \$10M annual aggregate
- Reduction of the LOC requirement from \$11.5M to \$7.0M (provided by UCC)
- Transfer of a \$1.25M LOC obligation from the former fronting company to Kindred Insurance Inc., an important step toward removing LOC exposure from the church’s balance sheet

## Ministry Leadership

In late November, we received word that our grant application for a five-year Lilly Large-Scale Collaborative grant had been approved, for almost \$10 million USD. Approximately \$7.5 million will be for a 5-year project with the Theology and Ministry Leadership Unit of the GCO, and all eight of the United Church's theological schools, to reimagine theological education. This is an incredible opportunity and a significant resource in working towards theological education and formation for leadership for communities of faith. This grant will allow the church and schools to:

- deepen collaboration;
- offer new courses and other learning opportunities for candidates, ministry personnel, and lay leaders in communities of faith
- strengthen and sustain the ecosystem of theological education within Canada
- explore new conversations and ways of engaging in theological education and formation for the church we are becoming

The other \$2.5 million is directed towards an endowment fund, with the intention of sustaining theological education after this grant project is completed. Lilly's generous terms mean that they will contribute on a 3:1 basis.

Additional updates around theological education:

- St. Andrew's College and the Anglican and Lutheran colleges in Saskatoon continue to explore ways to deepen their collaboration
- Various memoranda of agreement between the GCO and its schools have been made over the last 5-7 years; some of these agreements will be reviewed after 5 years, as per the terms of the agreements

## Anti-Racism and Equity Updates

*Leadership Counts:*

[Leadership Counts](#) is the ongoing project that invites ministry personnel and members of denominational committees to confidentially and voluntarily share information about the ways in which they identify. The survey offers respondents the opportunity to share more information on how they see themselves—how they name their cultures, their languages, their racial identities, their genders, their orientations, and their disabilities. The Leadership Counts project is a collaborative effort of General Council staff in Member Engagement, the Office of Vocation, and Anti-Racism and Equity.

In late 2025, the end-of-term report for Leadership Counts was completed; it is [available as a PDF](#) on the United Church's website. The data generated from this latest report will help to inform the United Church's Strategic Plan and work on **Toward 2035**. A record-number of 2,055 ministry personnel and elected members have participated in Leadership Counts to date.

A copy of the end-of-term report is included in your meeting docket; there will also be a conversation about Leadership Counts at our meeting in February so that we can delve more deeply into the data, and collectively reflect on its implications for **Toward 2035** and other areas of ministry.

*Equity, Diversity, and Anti-Oppression (EDA) for Committees:*

Member Engagement and the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff have been working closely together on integrating equity into the ongoing work of national committees. They have created an Equity, Diversity, and Anti-Oppression (EDA) Pathway that outlines all of the equity-related initiatives that committees are expected to engage in during this triennium. They have also offered training for all national committee chairpersons and related staff to orient to the pathway as a whole. The Governance Committee will be profiling this with the Executive at the February meeting.

The five components of the EDA Pathway are: the Equity Aspirations & Commitments; the Behavioural Covenant; EDA education for committees; Committee Self-Assessment; and All Member Participation Audit. Currently, committees are using the Equity Aspirations in their meetings and exploring and signing the [Behavioural Covenant](#). Many are engaging in thoughtful theological reflection about the covenant as a whole, and what this might mean for their committee life. Most committees are anticipated to have signed the covenant by the end of 2026.

*Racial Equity Audit:*

Throughout 2025, the General Council Office conducted a racial equity audit, that focused on three key areas:

- The United Church of Canada's overall commitment to becoming an anti-racist church,
- The human resources policies and practices of the General Council Office, and
- the United Church's external communications.

The racial equity audit was conducted by Bromby Consultants under the leadership of the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff.

The final report of the audit report has now been completed. Follow up work on the recommendations from the audit is now underway with leadership from Human Resources, Communications, and the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead. [The Executive Summary of the report is available](#) as part of your meeting docket, for information.

**Property**

Through this period, coordinating with regional colleagues, we have formed a property cluster at the General Council within the Organizational Development and Strategy unit. Under the oversight of Harry Li and Jennifer Henry, lending expert leadership to this cluster is Miriam Bowlby (east), seconded from Kindred Works, working with a new church engagement lead, Clare Dennis (central) and connecting to the growth department, particularly in



Alexandra Belaskie (west). Here we are trying to coordinate priorities for needed property support for regions, address risk, integrate the GCO loan and grant program, and build a cross-country property inventory that can interact with strategic considerations. While we maintain the legal framework of UPRC Board and UPRC Trustee Inc, as a separate organization, we are keeping the work close to the GCO, and particularly the Growth Initiative, to enhance integrated strategy and reduce complexity. Property support is now articulated as one of the six key initiatives under the Growth objective in the emerging strategic plan, given its relationship to the renewal of congregations.

There is some significant development work to do to develop this cluster, integrate it closely with regions and build coordination, particular with Kindred Works (KW), as a key resource, a strategic development partner and the property management arm for regional trusts. As some of the KW construction projects gear up and as we address some challenging situations such as the financial gap we navigated last meeting, lots of focus is going into treating each challenge as a case example, creating templates, systems and flows for further work in a similar vein and developing better communication patterns. The different cultures of congregational decision making and a property redevelopment company, combined with high stakes, and a lack of capacity can make for communication challenges. However, we are working hard to stay focused on our shared long-term goal of stewarding church buildings for long term ministry in ways that also address crises like housing affordability and climate impact.

### **Faithful Footprints**

January marked the reopening of the Faithful Footprints program. Last year, the program had to be paused because the number of applications received in the first quarter totaled the annual budget. In essence, the only criteria beyond the project itself was how quickly the application was submitted. Additional criteria were added to the new application form bringing the program in line with other General Council loan/grant programs and requiring regional council input. There will be an open period for application submission. When it closes on April 30<sup>th</sup>, regional councils will join Faith and the Common Good staff, who manage the program on our behalf, along with General Council staff to award grants. The balance of the year will be devoted to supporting projects approved, resourcing potential applicants, and evaluating the pros and cons of the new criteria.

While climate remains one of our key justice objectives, Faithful Footprints is envisioned moving into the property cluster as one of the ways we identify and resource strategic sites in the portfolio.

### **2025 Accountability**

Two key documents are provided for the Executive's information.

The first is the [Q4 report for the Strategic Plan](#). A more fulsome report, reflecting 2025 and the experience of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan is being prepared. In contrasting our initial experience and our plans going forward, it is helpful to note that:

- a) Many items in the Common Good objective have been implemented and moved into ongoing operation. Thank you to Accountable, Sarah Charters, and the activity leads.
- b) In the first plan, the objective often served as an umbrella for work underway. In the new plan, the objective is shaping what work will be undertaken. It's a subtle shift but a significant one demonstrating a growing understanding of planning strategically.

Also attached is the [Media Summary Report for 2025](#). This is external monitoring reviewed for us by our Press and Public Relations Lead, Lori-Ann Livingston. Internal monitoring of web visits, opening of newsletters, etc. is tracked by our Communications team. In reviewing the information in the report, I noted:

- 1) The importance of the Centennial as an opportunity for local communities of faith to engage with the media and as a good news story. How can we draw on those insights to help local congregation make the life and work of the United Church a good news story where they live?
- 2) The role of our leaders—both Moderator Carmen and Moderator Kimberly had noteworthy public profiles. I encourage the Accountability to note this as they do their work and to consider how to incorporate this in the expectations of the Moderator.

### **GC 45 Decisions**

Fall meetings, moving, and dealing with changes at 300 Bloor St. W. have delayed action on some matters either General Council 45 or the Executive directed to the General Secretary for action. By way of update:

#### *National Youth Council*

Staff from different General Council units have met to consider next steps. Plans are underway to recruit a Vision Team to draft the mandate and membership of a National Youth Council. The Vision Team will involve youth with support from staff so that we can ensure that the proposed design is crafted by youth and young adults for youth and young adults.

#### *Animation of the 2S and LBGTQIA Apology*

Plans are underway to provide some initial resources for use. A small group is being formed involving staff from both the General Council and regional councils along with a representative of Affirm and from the Apology Task Group to develop further plans to animate the apology throughout the church.

#### *AI Task Group*

The rapid rise of AI technology is of interest to several staff. They are gathering in the near future to help draft terms for the task group mandated by General Council 45 in hopes of recruiting in the spring cycle of the Nominations Committee.

*Assessment Task Group*

General Council 45 directed the General Secretary to form this task group. General Secretary, Michael, has proposed members for it but the pace of work in the fall along with the move and handling the 300 Bloor St. file means that our Executive Minister, Pension and Finance, and I have not had time to draft Terms of Reference and to proceed with this.