



The United Church of Canada General Council

GC44 General Council Executive Accountability Report for October 19, 2024

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Membership

The 44th General Council in 2022 elected the following members to its Executive to serve until the rise of the 46th General Council, 2028: Michael Caveney (OM), M Chorney (LM), Catherine Glover (LM), Wilson Gonese (OM), Marlene Lightning (LM), Alan Lai (OM), Kathleen (Kit) Loewen (LM), Thea Sheridan-Jonah (LM); they joined those previously elected by the 43rd General Council to serve until the rise of the 45th General Council, 2025: Teresa Burnett-Cole (OM), National Indigenous Council, Mitchell Anderson (OM), Kathy Brett (OM), Samuel Dansokho (OM), Paul Douglas Walfall (OM), Jane McDonald (LM), and Arlyce Schiebout (OM); in addition to the Moderator, General Secretary and Past Moderator, Richard Bott.

With the resignation of *Kathy Brett*, *Katherine Brittain* (OM, Pacific Mountain) has been appointed for a term of one year. You will be asked to ratify her appointment

at this meeting. With the resignations of Marlene Lightning and Alan Lai, David Leyton-Brown (LM) and Alcris Limongi (OM), have been appointed until the rise of the 46th General Council, 2028. In consultation with the National Indigenous Council, two members of the Council (*Leeann Shimoda* and *Kimberly Roy*) have been appointed as Corresponding members of the Executive.

Teresa Burnett-Cole, Richard Bott and M Chorney along with the Moderator and General Secretary serve as the Sub-Executive. Members of the Executive have been cascaded to serve on: *Foundation Board*– Paul Douglas Walfall and Catherine Glover; *Finance Advisory Committee*– Jane McDonald and Michael Caveney; *Pension Board*– Mitchell Anderson and Thea Sheridan-Jonah *Business & Agenda Planning* has been restructured to become the *Governance Committee*: Kit Loewen, Arlyce Schiebout, David Leyton-Brown and Paul Douglas Walfall; *General Secretary Supervision*– Mitchell Anderson (chair), Thea Sheridan-Jonah, Wilson Gonese and Michael Caveney; *Nominations Committee*– Richard Bott and Samuel Dansokho; *Joint Grants Advisory Committee*– Jane McDonald.

Priorities

The General Council Executive has been focused both on the work assigned to it and on the way, it completes that work using four different lenses.

1. Equity

The Equity Team works with Anti-Racism and Equity Lead, Adele Halliday. Members of the team open the meetings of the Executive by highlighting the equity aspirations and close each day with a reflection on the Executive's efforts to live into these aspirations, noting what has worked well and where there is room to grow.

2. Decolonizing

Each meeting sets aside time for the members of the Executive who serve on the Decolonizing Working Group to encourage the Executive in its commitment to decolonizing our work and how we work.

3. Behavioural Covenant

The Executive agreed upon the wording for a Behavioural Covenant and committed itself to that covenant with its closing worship in May, 2024. The Covenant will be presented to other General Council Committees/Task Groups and to General Council Commissioners in preparation for General Council 45.

4. Governance Committee

The Executive transformed the *Business and Agenda Committee* into a the *Governance Committee* to help the Executive focus on its role of being “governors.” In this role, the Executive must keep the vision and goals of the church as articulated by the strategic plan before them and focus on the future health and well-being of the church. The Governance Committee is working with governance coach, Dan Hotchkiss, and brings the insights from these sessions to the Executive. The Executive has been reflecting on the conciliar nature of the church and how best to facilitate connection between the councils that enables discernment and informs decision-making. One of the discussions the Executive hopes to spark at GC45 involves outlining the General Council's work in a way that recognizes the new pattern of an annual meeting and that clarifies what matters require the General Council's input and what ones might be handled by the Executive itself.

The Work of the Executive

Remit 1

Over 80% of pastoral charges voted on Remit 1: Establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Church Organization. The Executive thanks regional council staff and volunteers who highlighted the resources available about the remit, led workshops on it, and encouraged participation in the remit process. The results were:

- Regional Councils and National Indigenous Council: Yes: 17; No: 0
- Pastoral Charges: Yes: 1482; No: 93

A proposal to enact the remit is before you at this meeting of the General Council.

Remit 2

The General Council Executive, at its meeting of September 27-28, 2024, approved the question for a remit concerning the membership of regional councils. The need for this remit became apparent as The Manual Committee offered advice following the decisions of the October 21, 2023, General Council Meeting concerning regional council membership for retired Designated Lay Ministers. The General Council will be

asked to authorize this remit at its meeting on October 19.

Strategic Plan

The Executive continues to hold the staff accountable to the operation of the General Council's Operational plan, The Executive has the opportunity to explore various aspects of the strategic objectives. The Executive is committed in investing in the strategic plan to ensure the transformation of the work of the church.

Task Groups

The Executive has established three Task groups to facilitate work mandated by the General Council and the Manual

- a. *The Role of Moderator and General Secretary* - the Manual encourages a 10-year review of the role of the Moderator. The Executive, decided as part of the review, it would also request a review of the role of the General Secretary. The review working group is chaired by Catherine Glover and staff by Alan Hall. The group includes: Evelyn Day, Mary Royal-Duczek, Bruce Gregersen, Clarence Jones, Kelsi James, Ray Jones, Colin Phillips, Kimberly Roy, Leeann Shimoda, Stefanie Uyesugi-Cooper. The Task Group has been active through the spring and summer meeting with the incumbents, previous office holders, support staff to the offices, Indigenous leadership, Advisory and Supervision committees, regional executive ministers, General Council executive ministers, and with members of the Executive of the General Council. Surveys will go out later in September to the general membership of the United Church and to Commissioners of the 44th General Council. Consultations with Canadian and global partners are being scheduled for October. The task group fully expects to bring a fulsome interim report and emerging recommendations to the November meeting of the Executive.
- b. *Task Group on Total Compensation*: The Task Group is chaired by Jane MacDonald and staffed by Alan Hall. Members of the group include Elizabeth Brown, Oliver Dingwell, William Joseph Harasymow, Ashley Keeping, Beth Martin, Bri-Anne Swan, Janice Sidney, Stefanie Uyesugi-Cooper. The task group has, to date, in addition to research and data- collection, held consultations with church treasurers and ministry personnel (a total of approximately 246 participants in the online consultations) and surveyed both groups (a total of 776 respondents) with questions of sustainability, adequacy, and annual

adjustment. It has researched 2025 wage trends across employment sectors in all regions of the country as well as with Canadian Anglican, Presbyterian, and Evangelical Lutheran churches. e. The task group is currently developing “straw models” and preparing questions for focus groups this fall. An interim report will come to the November meeting of the Executive and final report to its winter 2025 meeting.

- c. *Structural Change Evaluation Steering Group* The membership of the Structural Change Evaluation Steering Group is Shirley Cleave (L) and Ryan McNally (OM), who are serving as co-chairs, and Joshua Bell (L), Treena Duncan (Regional Council Executive Minister), Rey Anderson (Community Capacity Development Coordinator), who is currently serving as the representative of the Indigenous church, and Wilson Gonese (General Council Executive). Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa is the staff resource.

On January 1, 2019, when structural change came into effect so also did other changes such as Candidacy Pathways and ChurchHub. The Steering Group is focused on the evaluation of the changes set out in the Comprehensive Renewal motions of GC42 (2015) according to the directions given by the Executive of General Council (March 2018). Data is being collected and there will be an opportunity for both focus groups and broad input as information is gathered to assess the impact of structural change and make plans for the future.

Budgeting & Finance

Since the General Council last met, Erik Mathieson, Executive Officer, Finance, retired. The Executive is grateful to Erik for his service to the church and the way he resourced financial matters before the Executive. The Executive was pleased to appoint Harry Li, former Controller, as the new Executive Officer, Finance. Harry is interested in developing a multi-year budget and in advancing the timeline when the Executive makes budget decisions.

At its May meeting, the Executive considered the principles that would guide the 2025 budget. The Executive reviewed the state of the church’s financial reserves and how anticipated operating costs connected to the objectives of the Strategic Plan. As we progress on our journey to achieve long-term financial sustainability, these broader topics will continue to be on our collective minds:

1. What does a financially sustainable “broader church” look like? Can we simply downsize expenditures to align with revenues? Can we afford our current structures with the responsibilities currently assigned?
2. What does a financially sustainable Indigenous church look like and how might it be funded? How would the broader Indigenous church structures participate in cost containment?
3. How can we advance equity, diversity and anti-oppression ambitions and commitments?
4. From a risk management perspective, what is the appropriate balance between “living within our means” and investing in the strategic plan?

The financial planning and management strategies adopted by the General Council Office are designed to ensure that the Church not only overcomes current financial challenges, but also thrives in the future. By adhering to the principle of 'living within our means' and strategically aligning our resources, we aim to establish a financially robust future that enables the Church to live out its Call and Vision.

Staffing

The Executive was pleased to appoint Rev. Mark Laird as Executive Minister for Antler River Watershed, Western Ontario Waterways and Horseshoe Falls Regional Council.

The Executive wishes Shirley Welch, who has long supported its work and that of the General Council, the best on her retirement in late June and welcomes Tyler Lodge who has now assumed those duties.

Shared Services

- a. United Property Resource Corporation is owned by the United Church of Canada. As part of its care for the whole, the Executive keeps strong connection to the work of the corporation
- b. The United Church of Canada (UCC) Protect initiative is by far the largest financial commitment of the strategic plan, with a \$3 million loan funding a captive insurance program aimed at helping participating United Church ministries first reduce and then contain insurance costs. In addition to providing the start-up capital, the church is also exposed to needing to provide more

capital in the event of particularly adverse claims results - especially during the early years. The program was rushed into place for December 2022 to provide immediate premium relief with a rollback of premium increases from 2020 and 2021. This meant premium reductions of 11-27% during a year when insurance premiums in the industry were going up by 15-30%. Even with a premium rate increase in December 2023, on an apples-to-apples basis, participants were paying less for insurance than two years prior. So far - repeat - so far, the program has been a success financially. Annualized premiums paid for 2021/2022 were \$10.1 million versus \$8.1 million for the first year of captive insurance - a saving of almost \$2 million when adjusted for new business and closures/amalgamations. The interest on the start up loan is being paid annually. Claims experience has been well within target levels, and with each additional year of reasonable claims experience the captive insurance arrangement becomes more self-sufficient and the start-up loan potentially repayable. Despite the very encouraging initial financial results, the customer service and administration has been very poor and caused much frustration for participants. Much of this was attributable to rushing the launch of the program to deliver the financial benefit, but our partner's existing systems and staff proved inadequate for the volume of queries that arose. Church side decisions to deliver more savings also proved challenging administratively. There has been much remedial activity underway and we expect to achieve proper service capacity by Q2 2024. This will also be when we launch greater coverage flexibility and improved communications. Everyone is reminded that this initiative will need to run just like a traditional insurance company and claims administered accordingly. The difference is that we are all in it together to try to reduce risk and claims - and therefore premiums. This captive insurance arrangement exists solely to benefit participants.

Caring for Ministry Personnel

In February, the Executive received the report of the Pastoral Relations Equity Research Project concerning the pastoral relations system and directed the development and implementation of a plan of action consistent with the Invigorate Leadership Objective of the Strategic Plan to be reported upon by February 2025.

In the fall of 2023, the Executive recommended a thorough review of two policies from the perspective of all users: Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and

Violence and Sexual Misconduct. At its September 27-28, 2024 meeting, the Executive received the report of that review which recommended combining the existing two policies into one entitled “Creating Safe and Respectful Environments” and directed the General Secretary to operationalize the new policy. As noted in the proposal, Creating Safe and Respectful Environments is an expansion on the current policies and is intended to deepen the operationalization of conduct expectations across Church environments. It offers a clear picture around how responsible bodies will lead the implementation of these expectations, what support mechanisms can be accessed and the commitment to consistent application of complaint response procedures across diverse environments.

Also, at its meeting in September, the Executive authorized the economic adjustment for the pastoral relations system at 3%. It is anticipated that General Council 45 will receive the report from the Total Compensation Task Group and that, out of that report, guidelines and a process for considering the annual adjustment will be set.

Accountabilities

The Executive of General Council functions as the administrators of the Pension Board and fulfills this role with gratitude for the dedication and advice of the Pension Board. The chair of the Pension Board Anne Soh reports annually to the Executive.

The Executive also meets with the Board of The United Church of Canada Foundation annually. The Foundation’s support for the ministry of the church is deeply appreciated.

The Executive also receives annual updates from the Board and Office of Vocation.

In addition, as representatives of the shareholders, the Executive meets annually with the Board of United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC), in addition to an annual update from the CEO of the corporation, Tim Blair. UPRC is a wholly owned subsidiary of the United Church which is helping identify and preserve valuable properties for future ministry along with resourcing congregations on maximizing the use of their property in support of their ministry.

Centennial Celebrations

On June 9th, the centennial year was launched with a worship service at Metropolitan United Church, Toronto, in close proximity to the opening gathering at what was then the Mutual Street arena. A centennial newsletter is published monthly each with a different theme that reflects on one element of the United Church's history. The church is focused on commemoration, not just celebration, as we acknowledge our failings as well as our strengths. The theme adopted for the Centennial is Deep, Bold, Daring.

General Council members are encouraged to add the events they are planning to the map on the United Church website. (It is rather sparsely populated at the moment even though news of many events has been shared verbally with members of the Executive and with staff!)

The centennial has three streams: commemoration, public witness, and fundraising. The second stream started this past spring with a video introducing people to the United Church that was shown at Stars on Ice. More plans are underway and will soon be launched.

This fall the fundraising materials will be tested with a few communities of faith and then refined for broader use. The focus of the campaign is on legacy gifts to equip the church, including and especially people's home congregations, for the future.

The centennial worship service will be on June 8, 2025, and is being hosted by Gower St. U.C. in recognition of Newfoundland's decision to join the United Church before it joined Canada! The service is at 7:00 p.m. Newfoundland time allowing people from across the country to attend via the livestream.

General Council 45

The Executive is grateful to Chinook Winds Regional Council who, for the second General Council in a row, have provided leaders and volunteers. When the plans to be present in Chinook Winds in 2021 were postponed and moved to a virtual meeting in 2022, Chinook Winds was asked if they might want to host in 2025. Their gracious welcome is appreciated.

For the first time, the General Council will be held in a Convention Centre, a decision made due to the complications of meeting our technological needs in other settings. Technology is relied upon to provide up-to-date resources for Commissioners and to

enable an equitable process for both the online and hybrid sessions of General Council. An orientation event has been planned for Commissioners on April 27, 2025 with General Council opening online on June 22, 2025 and holding its first learning and discussion sessions on June 28, 2025. Commissioners can elect whether to join in-person in Calgary from the evening of August 7th to August 11th or to join the meeting electronically.

The theme for General Council is “Dreams and Visions” drawing on the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2.

Image



Credit: The United Church of Canada

The theme speaker will be Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of The United Church of Canada’s full communion partner, The United Church of Christ in the U.S.

The Planning Committee has had significant discussions about the nature of General Council meetings now that the General Council meets annually. The hope is that these annual meetings will be an opportunity to respond in a timely way to changes in existing policies and practices so that the in-person sessions can be oriented to that which is best accomplished in person such as major discussions and decisions which set the direction for the church. The agenda is being planned with this goal.

The Governance Committee anticipates discussing not only what work comes to the in-person and online meetings of General Council but also whether some work might be handled by the Executive itself and, if it is able to outline some options, will bring these to GC45 for consideration.

The Executive invites General Council Commissioners to encourage those with the gifts to serve as Moderator to consider whether they are called to this role. More details along with contact information for General Council Office folks with whom a potential nominee might discuss the role can be found at www.generalcouncil44.ca under the tab "Preparing for GC45".

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