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GC45 HF02 Policy That Meets a Variety of Changes in Communities of Faith for Summer 2025

True Document Date: August 9, 2025

Origin: St. Paul's United Church, Oakville, ON

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

In the life cycle of a community of faith, change is natural, and it might happen in a variety of ways, such as "relocating," "realignments," "reforming" (all of these are in the Manual as descriptors of congregational lifetime changes - G.1.3), "migrations," "mergers," and more. A more fulsome policy around changes in communities of faith is needed. For those leading communities of faith through change, the current policy is limiting. Going through these changes and trying to pigeonhole the work into the amalgamation policy is not helpful. Policy needs to recognize practical ministry. Rather than limiting communities of faith to policy written for disbandment and amalgamations, communities of faith need to be able to envision property use beyond this.

2. What is happening now?

G.1.3 in the manual mentions four possible changes in the life of a congregation, including 1) amalgamation, 2) becoming a single-point charge, joining a multi-point charge, or becoming part of a different multi-point charge, 3) relocating, and 4) concluding its ministry. = Currently, the manual only holds a policy for amalgamation of congregations (G.1.4) and for "ending" a congregation (G.1.5). There is no description or policy for realignment or relocating. Communities of faith need to be able to envision property use beyond amalgamation and ending.

3. What is the recommendation?

Policy needs to recognize practical ministry (1). It would be helpful to the life of communities of faith to explore the operative/practical theology that currently exists within the church on change and movement in communities of faith. One recommendation might be to add items to G.1.3, for example, e) migrations, f) mergers, g) other changes in consultation with the Regional Council, but this might create a need to continually add items. Another recommendation which might be more effective, would be to remove G.1.4 and G.1.5. and create a handbook that includes processes on all the different changes that might occur in the life of a congregation. This would expand instead of limiting the different ways a congregation might imagine a way forward.

4. Background information:

Many communities of faith are in discernment and exploring the ministry they offer in their local contexts. They are exploring ways of being more effective in their communities and finding new ways to be sustainable. They are making bold decisions and taking risks. They are imagining church differently. The current policy is potentially limiting and could restrict communities of faith from doing what is most needed in their community and context. The policy needs to reflect the current work that is occurring within the church. Communities of faith are thinking outside of the box but the current policy does not support the different ways a community of faith might change.

5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

This proposal does not apply to the church's commitments on equity.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:
Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

 Agree

- ⬚ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- ⬚ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GCinfo@united-church.ca

References

1. **Practical theology** is an academic discipline that examines and reflects on religious practices in order to understand the theology enacted in those practices and in order to consider how theological theory and theological practices can be more fully aligned, changed, or improved. Practical theology has often sought to address a perceived disconnection between dogmatics or theology as an academic discipline on the one hand, and the life and practice of the church on the other. *Definition from Wikipedia

Document Type: Proposal

General Council: GC45

Originating Body: Horseshoe Falls Regional Council