



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 NS01 Apology from The United Church of Canada to the African Diaspora for Slavery and the Legacies of Slavery in Canada for Summer 2025

True Document Date: August 8, 2025

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

We believe that the triune God is calling The United Church of Canada to apologize to the people of African Descent for

1. the involvement of the antecedent denominations, that formed The United Church, in enslavement of Africans in Canada, and
2. the involvement and participation of The United Church of Canada in the legacies of slavery in Canada

2. What is happening now?

The United Church has taken the lead to apologize for its complicity with various wrongs done in the past to various ethnic and racial groups no such apology has been offered to the people of African descent. The United Church of Canada has made many great strides in speaking out against racism in Canada and across the world since the 1960s. The 43rd General Council made a clear statement committing The United Church of Canada to becoming an antiracist denomination. However, it is regrettable that to date church has offered no apology.

The Bible teaches that repentance is a necessary act for the mending of broken relationships. Repentance, according to the teachings of the Church, is not primarily an act of emotion; it is not the same as feeling sorry for an issue. Repentance is an act of recognizing a wrong that has been done and to make the deliberate move to do otherwise. The New Testament teaches about "works meet for repentance" which are the actions and words which should accompany repentance and signify that it is occurring. Repentance in the Christian faith is not destination that is arrived at but is instead the beginning of a process that will continue until there is reconciliation. An apology is a necessary sign and symbol of repentance. An apology in this case is a public repudiation of any claim that slavery was not a part of Canadian history or that systemic racism does not exist in Canada.

Slavery in Canada

The enslavement of African people is part of the history of Canada. This occurred in the period of preconfederation when this land was known as British North America. It is unreasonable to argue this was not part of Canadian history and many events that occur during this period have been incorporated into the narrative of Canadian history, e.g. the war of 1812. For over 2000 Africans were enslaved as chattel which meant that they were not considered as human and as such were brutalized, raped, dehumanized and with no rights whatsoever.

Involvement of Antecedent Denominations

History recalls that the antecedent denominations which united to form The United Church of Canada (Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists) in 1925 has benefitted from the enslavement of Africans as they were part of the society of that time. In some cases, evidence shows that some ministers from these denominations owned slaves. The example of Rev David Cook, a Presbyterian Minister, in Nova Scotia is well documented as being a n owner of two enslaved Africans.(Winks, 2012, p. 102).

After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, there was no unanimity of opposition to the enslavement Africans in the United States of America. Winks (2002) shows that while an official statement was made by Presbyterian and Congregationalist general bodies many local bodies did not support these statements (Winks, 2012, p. 222). Winks also noted that in general the Methodists in practice "ignored slavery as best they could."(Winks,

Legacies of Slavery

Following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, the legacy of slavery continues and exist up to the present time, these legacies of slavery include system racism which manifested itself in systemic racism which exists in Canada. Examples of this can be seen in segregated education which existed up to the 1970's, unequal employment opportunities, differential housing opportunities, and an intentional block by immigration authorities to exclude Black people from Canada. Along with these there have been the continued use of derogatory statements against Black people and various forms of racial micro-aggressions (1).

The July 2017 issue of The Journal of the Historical Society of the Alberta and Northwest Conference of The United Church of Canada noted that the Ku Klux Klan came to Alberta in the 1920s through the work of a Methodist, and then United Church, minister. The same periodical noted that clergymen of the United Church were Klansmen and that at the time the United Church had the unsavoury reputation, according to the writer of the book "The Ku Klux Klan in Central Alberta," of being a church that "refused to condemn the Klan's activities." (Lovatt, 2017)

It should be noted that in 1927 a resolution came to the Saskatchewan Conference "not to support the Ku Klux Klan in any way." However, the Conference ultimately accepted the recommendation "that Conference refrain from making any deliverance on the question." (Lovatt, 2017) The conference did not make an outright move to separate itself from an organization that was public in its espousing of anti-Black racism.

Within The United Church of Canada

Various studies have shown that within the United Church the legacies of slavery are present. These reports have revealed cases of Black ministers being subjected to harassment and bullying in congregations, Black ministers having a more difficult time to find appointments/calls when compared to their White colleagues, and Black ministers often being ridiculed because of their accents or cultural heritage. In addition to this many Black ministers have reported the sense of being made to feel like second-class members of the church.

At the point of union, no autonomous Black Methodist church was invited to be involved in the talks leading to union. At the time of union, the only Black congregation that became part of The United Church of Canada was the Union Church in Montreal. Sixteen years after union it is recorded that the first Black candidate for the ordained ministry would not find a settlement placement although the church noted that there was a shortage of ministerial candidates. At the time of union in 1925 there was no Black person involved in the leadership of the denomination and this continued for almost the first 50 years of the existence of The United Church of Canada.

With the formation of The United Church of Canada in 1925 the Methodist Church of Canada and the Congregational Church of Canada has ceased to be independent denominations and the United Church is the rightful inheritors and expressions of these denominations in Canada. An apology from the United Church today is an apology on behalf of the antecedent denominations that came into union.

The year 2024 marks the end of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descents. Now, as the church seeks to mark 100 years of existence that an apology is made 1) on behalf of the antecedent denominations, and 2) for the church's own complicity in the legacies of the enslavement of Africans.

3. What are the recommendations?

The General Council could

- a. empower the General secretary to have prepared a public apology from The United Church of Canada a) on behalf of the antecedent denominations for their complicity and involvement in the enslavement of Africans in Canada, and b) for the United Church's complicity in the legacies of the enslavement of Africans. And this apology be made ready for the recalled sitting of the General Council in October 2026.
- b. Empower the General Secretary to meet with the Moderation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to suggest that the presbyterian church also issues an apology.

4. Background information:

Lovatt, L. (2017). The KKK and the Church. The Journal of The Historical Society of the Alberta and Northwest Conference of The United Church of Canada.

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Winks, R. W. (2012). *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. McGill-Queens's University Press.

Anti-Racism and Racial Justice Work in The United Church of Canada: A Snapshot in 2020

The United Church of Canada: Working to Become an Anti-Racist Denomination

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

This proposal

- i. continues the declaration of the United Church to be come an anti-racist denomination.
- ii. Continues the commitment of the church to decolonization.
- iii. Affirms the Intercultural commitment of the church.
- iv. Lays the foundation for the Biblical understanding of repairing relationships that have been broken because of unrighteousness.
- v. Allows a path for moving forward with seeking to enable honesty and truth in pastoral relationship processes.

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. Racial microaggression can be described as "brief, everyday exchanges, that send denigrating messages to individuals" because of the colour of their skin or perceived racial group .Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. John Wiley & Sons,

Inc.

Document Type: [Proposal](#)

General Council: [GC45](#)

Originating Body: [Northern Spirit Regional Council](#)