



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 PM01 Emerging Communities of Faith for Summer 2025

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Origin: Ingrid Brown

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

We believe that the Triune God is calling us to (re)widen the structures of the church to make room for Emerging Communities of Faith within The Manual of The United Church of Canada.

The key missional issue is that The United Church of Canada's Emerging Communities of Faith are sprouting up all around us!

As this happens, The Manual (2024) has no category for the Emerging Communities to fit within or grow within the structures of the church.

The Strategic Plan of The United Church of Canada is calling for growth, a part of which is through the creation of new Communities of Faith like these - and some Regional Councils are engaging in this work within their own contexts.

There is an opportunity to start diverse new and resonant Emerging Communities which practice deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice, even as we, the Church, commit to renewing existing Communities of Faith.

2. What is happening now?

The Manual (2010) had a category of 'mission' (page 38, Bylaws) which could hold such Emerging Communities, though this category was removed in later editions of The Manual.

This removal means that there is no longer a place to hold communities that are not yet ready to become full Communities of Faith.

As The United Church of Canada seeks to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and develop diverse decolonizing, post-Christendom expressions of Christ's church, these Emerging Communities are a way to explore what God's Spirit is doing in the church in both new and renewing ways.

However, these communities are struggling to find their place in the church.

Currently, Emerging Communities in The United Church of Canada are often left without a container to hold them in the church as they grow. This minimizes or complicates their capacity for representation and participation in the wider church, developing local decision-making and accountability structures, and even to explore membership paradigms or to baptise or marry folks.

This may stunt or marginalize initiatives to create new Communities of Faith, and even leave these new communities and the courts of the Church vulnerable to liabilities as Regional and Denominational Councils support and hold these communities in sometimes laissez-faire ways.

3. What is the recommendation?

The Pacific Mountain Regional Council proposes that the General Council draw upon and revise the category of 'mission' found in the 2010 Manual (page 39, Bylaws) into future editions of The Manual, amending the potentially problematic term 'Mission' to 'Emerging Community' and updating the language of the courts of the church. The amended definition would read:

"Emerging Communities of Faith" mean one (1) or more groups of people that are a part of The United Church and that meet for public worship, but not fully constituted as a Community of Faith that is a Pastoral Charge or a Congregation by the Regional Council."

The Pacific Mountain Regional Council proposes that the General Council add a section to the manual (B.9) for Emerging Communities of Faith with these or similar terms:

- An Emerging Community will exist as a ministry or expression of the Regional Council through a covenant with the ministry personnel and/or a wider group of leadership in

the Emerging Community.

- The Regional Council will be responsible for the care, administration, and oversight of the Emerging Community.
- As an Emerging Community gains capacity, the Regional Council will have the authority to gradually transfer roles and responsibilities to the Emerging Community as it evolves toward becoming a fully recognized Community of Faith that is a Congregation or Pastoral Charge, provided the Emerging Community reports all relevant information to the Regional Council.
- The Regional Council will have the authority to accept voting delegates from Emerging Communities to the same ratios as established Communities of Faith at such a point as the Regional Council deems the Emerging Community is ready to do so.

4. Background information:

Though the language changes, the church is always called to new expressions of our ancient faith.

As it was in the old 'missions' within The United Church of Canada (and precedent denominations) the structures of the church should encourage both Emerging Communities as well as support existing / established ones. This reflects our Strategic Priorities (especially the Leading Priority: "Growth" see https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2022-12/strategic-plan-final_nov-2022.pdf)

This proposed change to The Manual allows for Emerging Communities of many expressions to find a place in the structures of the church, as well as to give them a flexible process to grow organically into full Communities of Faith.

This Proposal is coming from the on-the-ground experience of several 'maturing' Emerging Communities in the Pacific Mountain Regional Council, as well in consultation with regional staff who are working alongside ministry personnel, ministry teams and volunteers to establish these communities.

This proposal is being presented by Rev. Ingrid Brown from Weird Church and endorsed by The Emmaus Community / The AbbeyChurch, two of our earliest Emerging Communities in the Pacific Mountain Region.

The experience of many of these communities and their ministry personnel is that they are operating on the margins of the church and are finding the gaps in denominational polity that are discordant with the support and enthusiasm that their work is generating.

On one hand leaders are being encouraged to create new expressions of Church and, on the other, there is no place or category in church polity in which to incubate these.

Though these communities are classified as “missions” on Church Hub, there is no comparable category in The Manual (2024).

This proposal would seek to empower these Emerging Communities, though not at the expense of existing ones. There are no immediate budgetary implications that are not already part of the Strategic Plan.

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

Emerging Communities of Faith often have strong distinctions of identity; be they intentionally diasporic, affirming, first-third (younger), linguistic, etc. Many have BIPOC, differently abled and / or queer folks in leadership.

They often present new opportunities to be intercultural, intergenerational and/or entrepreneurial.

These Emerging Communities offer a gateway into the church both for leadership and congregational adherents from diverse demographics who are not always represented or engaged as easily in established congregational cultures.

Empowering Emerging Communities can be an action to enhance and deepen our commitments to becoming a diverse, intercultural, intergenerational, creative, entrepreneurial, anti-racist and / or decolonizing church.

As such, they are an important part of the ecology of the church.

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

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