



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 Judicial Committee Report for Summer 2025

True Document Date: June 22, 2025

Origin: Judicial Committee

Composition of the Judicial Committee

For the 2022–2025 term, the Judicial Committee was composed of nine members, including the General Secretary:

- Chikwa Zahinda
- David Crawford-Smith
- Diana Ginn (*Chair*)
- George Thurlow
- James Blanchard
- Leslyn Gombakomba
- Lynn Maki
- Sandra Brooks
- Stuart Whitley
- Michael Blair (*General Secretary*)

In July 2022, Cynthia Gunn retired after 26 years as legal counsel. She was succeeded by Nicole Treksler, who now serves as staff resource to the Judicial Committee.

Membership Overview

The Judicial Committee consists of up to nine members, reflecting the diversity of the United Church with attention to equity commitments. Membership includes both laypeople and

ministry personnel from across the church's geography. At least four members must be specialists with legal or administrative tribunal experience.

The Chair is selected from within the Committee and is responsible for facilitating meetings and fostering an effective, respectful working environment.

Current Membership Terms

Appointments until the 47th General Council (2031):

- *Lynn Maki* – Ordained Minister, Northern Spirit Regional Council
- *George Thurlow* – Lay Person, Living Skies Regional Council
- *Chikwa Zahinda* – Lay Person, Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council

Appointments until the 46th General Council (2028):

- *Leslyn Gombakomba* – Lay Person, Horseshoe Falls Regional Council
- *Stuart Whitley* – Lay Person, Pacific Mountain Regional Council
- *Diana Ginn* – Lay Person, Regional Council 15

Appointments until the 45th General Council (2025):

- *Sandra Brooks* – Lay Person, National Indigenous Council (as recommended by the National Indigenous Council)
- *James Blanchard* – Lay Person, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council (three-year extension of previous appointment)
- *David Crawford-Smith* – Lay Person, Shining Waters Regional Council

As the terms for *James Blanchard*, *David Crawford-Smith*, and *Sandra Brooks* will conclude at the 45th General Council in 2025, the Nominations Committee is seeking to fill three upcoming vacancies.

Mandate of the Judicial Committee

The Judicial Committee plays an essential role in the structure of the United Church. Its primary function is to assess appeals to determine whether there are sufficient grounds for them to proceed. The Committee handles appeals related to:

- Decisions from formal hearings held by a community of faith or regional council
- Other decisions made by regional councils
- Decisions of the Executive of the General Council
- Decisions of the Board of Vocation
- Rulings made by the General Secretary of the General Council

When a decision to hear the appeal is accepted, the Judicial Committee appoints a hearing committee to manage the case and render a decision. Following the hearing, the committee issues a written decision, typically provided to the parties within 45 calendar days. The decision becomes final once it is approved by the General Council.

Increased Workload of the Committee

Historically, the Judicial Committee has handled only one or two cases every few years. However, in 2024, the Committee experienced a notable increase in activity:

- Five matters were reviewed to determine if grounds existed for a hearing
- Two matters proceeded to a hearing
- One matter was deemed outside the jurisdiction of the Judicial Committee

Judicial Committee Meetings and Hearings (2022–2024)

Image

Year	Number of Meetings/Hearings
2022	0
2023	0
2024	9

Types of Matters Before the Committee

The Committee heard a range of appeals, including by-law interpretations of *The Manual*, disputes over property disposal after disbandment, and a challenge to a Candidacy Board

decision regarding the termination of candidacy. As more congregations close, disputes between Regional Councils and communities of faith over property matters are expected to increase, leading to more appeals. Additionally, growing economic and political strife, both in Canada and globally, may contribute to more appeals as people become less collaborative in the face of uncertainty.

Final Remarks

As I conclude this report, I extend my gratitude to the members of the Judicial Committee for their dedication and thoughtful contributions during this term.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Ginn

Chair, Judicial Committee

Document Type: [Report](#)

General Council: [GC45](#)

Originating Body: [Other](#)