



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 Structural Change Evaluation Steering Group Accountability Report for Summer 2025

True Document Date: June 22, 2025

Origin: Executive of the General Council

Background

In 2012, The United Church of Canada created the Comprehensive Review Task Group, later renamed the Comprehensive Renewal (CR) Task Group, which set a course for structural change. In 2015, the Task Group report, including recommendations, was presented to the 42nd General Council. After a number of revisions, incorporating feedback from across the church, the General Council approved the Comprehensive Renewal process and authorized a series of remits to seek the approval of the wider church of the revised recommendations. All remits were approved by wide margins. The recommendations included an evaluation process. The nature of the evaluation was further shaped by the Executive of General Council in March 2018. At that point, the decisions taken in 2015 had been endorsed by the church and were awaiting final enactment.

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Evaluation Process

On January 1, 2019, the United Church of Canada (UCC) undertook the most significant change to its organizational structure since 1925, shifting the denomination from a four court to a three council model. The UCC committed to evaluating the structural change after five years.

The General Council Executive appointed a Structural Change Evaluation Steering Group (SCESG) in April 2024 to guide the evaluation process.

The membership of the Steering Group consists of

- Shirley Cleave (lay person, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters) (co-chair)
- Ryan McNally (ordained minister, East Central Ontario) (co-chair)
- Joshua Bell (lay person, Living Skies)
- Wilson Gonese (ordained minister, Canadian Armed Forces and General Council Executive)

They are supported by the following staff:

- Rey Anderson Community Capacity Development Coordinator for Indigenous communities in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario
- Treena Duncan, Executive Minister, Pacific Mountain and Chinook Winds Regional Councils
- Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, Senior Governance Support Lead.

The SCESG was given the mandate to assess the effect of the organizational change on the UCC based on the expectations for the evaluation outlined by the General Council Executive) in 2018. THE SCESG was specifically tasked to:

- oversee the design and evaluation process of the structural change
- measure the changes against the objectives that guided them
- seek broad input
- prepare a report including recommendations

The goal of the SCESG was to design an evaluation process that is both wide, allowing for all who are interested to participate, and deep, delving into details with those most engaged in the new structure.

The SCESG began its work in June 2024. Over three days, we spent time discovering and valuing the diversity of experience and knowledge that the members bring to this work,

reviewing the goals of the restructuring, identifying assumptions and clarifying objectives of the evaluation. The evaluation process began with research into the background, objectives, and details of the changes implemented. We conducted an extensive review of relevant documents, including past reports, General Council Records of Proceedings, and minutes of task groups and other bodies. Through this preparatory work, we identified the overarching question of the evaluation, the aspects of the change to be evaluated, concurrent changes that are out of the scope of the evaluation and factors influencing sources of information

To focus the evaluation, we developed an overarching question.

To what extent has structural change helped the church to:

- Become sustainable with regard to financial and volunteer resources
- Simplify governance and structure and processes
- Establish standards for formation and accreditation and separate oversight and discipline of ministry personnel from collegial support through dual episcopacy of the Office of Vocation and the Regional Council,
- Focus resources on communities of faith
- Support ministry personnel “towards health, joy and excellence in ministry practice” and lay leaders to the same (UCC Manual 2024 p.79)
- Encourage connection, collaboration, sharing, and innovation
- Foster a deeper sense of shared United Church identity
- Enliven communities of faith to witness to the gospel

To ensure that the evaluation addressed the structural changes, we identified the aspects of change to be evaluated

- Three Council Model
- Office of Vocation
- Association of Ministers
- Financial Model – Assessments/Property/Investments
- Regions and Membership & Boundaries
- Relationship of Staff

To limit the evaluation to the structural changes, we identified many changes that happened concurrently that are beyond the scope of the evaluation including

- Candidacy Pathway Process
- Changes in the pastoral relations process

- Implementation of Church Hub
- UPRC/Kindred Works
- UCC Protect United
- Call, Vision and Strategic Plan
- Impacts of COVID-19

NOTE:

While the Indigenous Church was significantly impacted by the structural change, it will not be included directly in this evaluation. The Indigenous Church is still discerning its direction and relationship to the United Church. However, in consultation with the Indigenous Church, appropriate approaches will be used to collect feedback on experiences to date related to the structural change.

To ensure that the sources of information and data collection for the evaluation are relevant and comprehensive, we identified a number of factors to be considered.

- There needs to be wide consultation across the whole church.
- Those impacted directly by the change have both experience and information.
- Those involved in shaping the implementation have particular insights.
- Dominant and equity seeking persons/groups often have different experiences.
- The Francophone Church needs to be able to participate in the language of their choice.
- The United Church has data available within its electronic storehouse that could be useful.
- Classifying variables (e.g., regions, age) should be consistent with United Church criteria.

We recognized that we needed to hire a consultant with appropriate expertise and experience

to ensure the best data collection practices were used in conducting the evaluation. Following a competitive process, the Steering Group engaged Credence & Co., a well-known and respected consulting firm in Waterloo, ON. An introductory letter from Credence & Co. was sent to all ministry personnel and communities of faith early in March.

The research project has been designed in consultation with Credence & Co. They are responsible for collecting data from all participants, analyzing the information collected, and offering feedback to the SCESG based on the responses received, including recommending strategies to strengthen the organizational structure of the United Church.

Multiple data collection processes (i.e., surveys, focus groups and interviews) are being used to gain a broad perspective.

Using an iterative process and beta testing, surveys have been developed to gather information from across the church. The Communications Unit has been critical in the translation and distribution of the surveys. In early May, surveys were sent out to all communities of faith and all ministry personnel and staff impacted by the structural changes. All survey responses are anonymous, and the data are stored in Canada and only for the duration of the project. Survey responses are due by Tuesday, June 15. Credence & Co will analyze the data received and provide a preliminary report to the SCESG. The United Church is a diverse organization. Responses from all participants are important to ensure we capture the experiences of the structural change from all parts of the church.

The SCESG will share initial insights from our work with General Council 45 this August.

Over the summer and the fall, Credence & Co will conduct approximately 30 focus groups with various constituencies from across the country to delve more deeply into relevant issues. They will also conduct interviews with senior United Church leaders and/or persons responsible for the implementation of the structural change. Credence & Co will then analyze the information gathered through the focus groups and interviews.

In fall 2025, Credence & Co will present a draft report to the SCESG based on the analysis of all the data collected. The SCESG will meet with the consultants to review the draft to ensure clarity and understanding. Credence & Co will provide a final report including recommendations to the SCESG in late fall.

In early 2026, the SCESG will present a final report to the General Council Executive. It will be based on the report prepared by Credence & Co and related research undertaken by the SCESG. It will include recommendations that can be considered to modify or strengthen aspects of the structural changes.

The investment in change has been significant and far-reaching. This evaluation is intended to identify unintended consequences and gaps, as well as the unsung blessings that may have occurred. Wide participation by the church is essential for the success of the evaluation.

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