



The United Church of Canada General Council

GC44 General Council Executive Accountability Report for October 2023

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The 44th General Council in 2022 elected the following members to its Executive to serve until the rise of the 46th General Council, 2028:

- Michael Caveney (OM)
- M Chorney (LM)
- Catherine Glover (LM)
- Wilson Gonese (OM)
- Marlene Lightning (LM)
- Alan Lai (OM)
- Kathleen (Kit) Loewen (LM)
- Thea Sheridan-Jonah (LM)

They joined those previously elected by the 43rd General Council to serve until the rise of the 45th General Council, 2025:

- Teresa Burnett-Cole (OM)
- National Indigenous Council
- Mitchell Anderson (OM)
- Kathy Brett (OM)
- Samuel Dansokho (OM)
- Paul Douglas Walfall (OM)
- Jane McDonald (LM)
- Arlyce Schiebout (OM)

In addition to the Moderator, General Secretary and Past Moderator, Richard Bott.

Alan Lai, appointment to the Centre for Christian Studies, created a vacancy, which was filled by the election of David Layton Brown (LM). Marlene Lightening has since resigned. Teresa Burnett-Cole, Richard Bott and Catherine Glover along with the Moderator and General Secretary serve as the Sub-Executive.

Members of the Executive have been cascaded to serve on

- Foundation Board: Paul Walfall and Catherine Glover
- Finance Advisory Committee: Jane McDonald and Michael Caveney
- Pension Board: Mitchell Anderson
- Business & Agenda Planning: Kit Loewen, Arlyce Schiebout and M Chorney
- General Secretary Supervision: Mitchell Anderson (chair), Thea Sheridan-Jonah, Wilson Gonese and Michael Caveney
- Nominations Committee: Kathy Brett and Samuel Dansokho
- Joint Grants Advisory Committee: Kathy Brett and Jane McDonald

Understanding the role of the Executive

Building on the recommendations of the Workflow Working Group established by the 43rd General Council Executive, the Executive began its work together by engaging in conversation on its role. In so doing the Executive affirmed that “governance was not an end in itself but exists to enable the church to live out God’s call and vision for the church.”

While appreciating that the church has always had governance structures and systems that enabled effective decision-making allowing for action in pursuit of God’s vision for the world, seeking to understand the role of the new, smaller

Executive has become necessary. Also, understanding that some of the expectations of, and governance practices of past Executives were developed for a different era of the life of the church: where members both were elected by and therefore may have seen themselves as representatives of constituent groups within the church rather than called to govern on behalf of the whole; where the Executive was substantially larger and less able to act nimbly and strategically; and where the governance practices reflected the colonial legacies of the church. The Executive committed itself to seek to live into a more strategic and visionary role, to act in trustworthy ways with the wider church, and ultimately help the church live up to the call and vision God has given us.

It is also committed to discern how it might decolonize its work and the processes of decision making. The Executive has established an elected member and staff working group to help its discernment on how to decolonize governance.

Given that the Executive is assigned specific work by *The Manual* to act on behalf of the General Council between its meetings, and the new reality that the General Council meets annually, the Executive affirmed that as a smaller and more focused body it is best situated to perform several governance functions relating to discerning how to live out the call and vision God has given the church, monitoring progress on our goals, encouraging, and accompanying the General Secretary, and ensuring that risks are considered and addressed. The Executive has discerned that its work falls into three areas: Fiduciary, Generative and Strategic. Dan Hotchkiss serves as a governance coach to the Executive.

As an Executive, we meet four times annually – September, November, February, and May. November is the only in-person meeting and is devoted to planning and strategic conversation with limited business. This gathering provides time for engagement with General Council Executive Ministers and the Regional Council Executive Ministers for this planning time.

We are pleased to offer a bit of insight into some of the work the Executive is engaged in.

The Executive works with equity monitors which help it live into its commitments. We have established a working group supported by Indigenous Ministry and Justice and Equity staff to work of framework of how to decolonize the governance process. This work had been fruitful, but very much a work in progress. In response to

concerns raised particularly around the use of the term “mission,” the Executive has asked the Theology and Interchurch Interfaith Committee to do some work on finding alternative language.

With the election of the new National Indigenous Council (NIC) we are looking forward to continuing the dialogue and practices of strengthening the relationship between the two parts of the church. In November, 2023 the GCE and NIC will spend some time together.

The Strategic Operational plan is the north star for the work of the Executive and the framework of accountability for the management team.

Care for the whole is a critical priority of the Executive: understanding and appreciating the challenges, joys and opportunities of communities of faith, ministry personnel and staff. There are a number of ways we care for the whole: the Executive prays for the church, it seeks to be informed by data on what is happening in the church. The Executive has become aware of the challenge regarding data collection to enable more effective decision making. As part of the Strategic Operational Plan, management is committed to creating systems to collect and interpret data as a key decision-making criterion.

Task Groups

We have recruited and appointed three (3) task/working groups.

1. **Task Group on the Review of the role of the Moderator and the General Secretary.** The Manual (D4.1.6) requires that the role of the Moderator be reviewed every ten (10) years. It has been years since a review of the role has been conducted. The Executive decided to include the role of the General Secretary as well. The task group is chaired by Catherine Glover.
2. **Task group on Compensation.** In response to the direction of the General Council we have established a group to review the church’s compensation.
3. **The Apology Task Group.** In response to the Iridesce-The Living Apology final report, we have set up a Task group to draft the apology to be offered to the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

Financial

As we do our work, we are mindful of the General Council directive to live within our means. It requires a certain amount of discipline to manage the various challenges, decline in income, the realities of communities of faith -who we understand as the primary funders of the church's ministry -and the budget of the General Council offices. We are appreciative of the work of the finance team under the leadership of Erik Mathiesen, and the Philanthropy team led by Sarah Charters as they continue to raise and manage the gifts of the church.

- **Captive Insurance:** we authorized the initial \$3M investment in establishing the self-insurance initiative.
- **Budget:** one of the tasks of the Executive is approving the budget principle and budget for the work of the General Council. In 2022 we approved principles which created a \$4M deficit. Part of the rationale was to provide for a significant investment of \$1.5M in the strategic operational plan with its focus on growth.
- **Hope Bequest:** the church received a bequest of just over \$9M and the Executive returned to the 2012 practice of forwarding 50% to the Foundation with 50% staying with the Treasury, but not to be used for deficit funding.

Accountabilities

The Executive receives a quarterly accountability report from the General Secretary on the work of the General Council office, and particularly, the strategic operational plan. The Moderator provides a bi-annual written report of her ministry and quarterly oral updates. In addition, the Executive meets with the chair of the Pension Board (Anne Soh), the CEO of the United Property Resource Corporation (Tim Blair), and the chair and staff of the Board of the Office of Vocation (Norm Seli and Marlene Briton.) These conversations and reports provide the Executive with an opportunity to have a birds-eye view of the work of the church.

In support of the growth initiative of the strategic plan we have been engaging in conversation about changes and perspectives that need to be adopted to ensure the possibility of growth.

You can access the minutes and proposals from the Executive meetings on the United Church Commons - search online for "United Church Commons" and navigate to Governance / General Council Executive / GC44 Executive (2022-2025), or go to United-Church.ca and at the bottom of the page you will see a link to the United Church Commons.

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