



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GCE44 GS33 Iridesce: The Living Apology for May 2023

True Document Date: May 12, 2023

Origin: General Secretary, General Council

1. What is the issue?

In 2018, the General Council Executive approved a motion (GCE 13 - PMM 15) to extend The Living Apology Project, to report to the spring 2020 meeting of the Executive of the General Council. Due to COVID-19 this was extended to the fall of 2020.

The motion requested that the Executive / General Secretary appoint a group to work with the outcomes of The Living Apology Project, to offer an apology to the LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit community at the Denominational Council in 2021 (rescheduled to 2022). The approved motion also reaffirmed the church's endorsement of the Affirming Ministries Program and invited all communities of faith to participate; and directed the General Secretary, General Council to develop resources for ministers, church leadership, and the wider church in their ministry with LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit communities that: offer pastoral care, create opportunities for healing and reconciliation, and demonstrate respectful engagement in conflict/disagreement.

One of the questions the working group was asked to address was the 'how of an apology.' The working group submitted its final report to the General Secretary with a number of recommendations. The final report suggested a framework for the apology.

2. Why is this issue important?

The United Church of Canada was the first denomination to mandate full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, and yet we are aware of many painful stories from both before and after the significant decisions of 1988. The Iridesce Project gathered extensive research and has reported to the General Secretary with a range of possible next steps.

3. How might the General Council Executive respond?

The General Secretary recommends that the General Council Executive

- a. **Receive the Report, *Living Apology into Action* and the accompanying *workplan* for information; share the Report with regional councils and communities of faith for their consideration;**
- b. **Commit to offering an apology to the 2SLGBTQIA community at an appropriate time to be determined;**
- c. **Appoint a small working group of up to four (4) persons to draft the words of an apology, and request the Nominations Committee to recruit the members to serve on the working group; and**
- d. **Direct the General Secretary to develop a *Memorandum of Understanding* with Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble to outline the relationship and responsibilities of the shared ministry.**

4. What will be the impact?

Responding to this work will contribute to the strategic objective of growth. It will require some staff capacity and an articulation of the relationship between Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble and The United Church of Canada.

5. How does this proposal help us live into the commitments on equity?

This proposal is consistent with the church's intercultural and equity commitment and furthers the church's affirmation as reflected in the words of Song of Faith:

*We sing of God's good news lived out, a church with purpose:
faith nurtured and hearts comforted, gifts shared for the good of all,
resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize, fierce love in the face of violence,
human dignity defended, members of a community held and inspired by God,
corrected and comforted, instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.*

6. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council Executive

In 2009, the 40th General Council, in response to a perceived lack of movement on the 1999 consultation with LGBTQ+ ministry personnel and the continued emergence of challenges related to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit members, mandated a National Consultation on Homophobia and Heterosexism in the Church. The final report from this consultation was presented to the General Council Executive in January of 2012. This final report speaks to the work undertaken in the following way, "The participants in this consultation believed that the goal of creating an inclusive church is a broad agenda that is critical to the future development and soul of the United Church. Ultimately, the participants reminded us that inclusion is not about providing some members of the Church with special treatment, but rather recognizing all people, including people in the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums, as vital members of the family of God."^[1] Iridesce: The Living Apology Project (Iridesce) grew out of the 2012 consultation as a way for the church to examine, through the sharing of stories, lament, education, and prayer, what next steps were needed and how the Church might best move forward.

^[1] Brian Mitchell-Walker, GLBTT National Consultation (United Church of Canada, 2012) 12.

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