The United Church of Canada General Council

GC45 COM03 Autonomy of Communities of Faith and their Assets for Summer 2025

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

Since restructuring, many Communities of Faith have felt increasingly distanced from and unsupported by the National Church. "We are called to be the church" and our communities of faith want to live into their faith missions to the best of their abilities given their local contexts.

2. What is happening now?

The General Secretary has recently mused about pulling the denomination out of The United Church of Canada Act and into Charitable Organizations legislation leading us to wonder whether the primary identity of The United Church of Canada is still "Church" or has it become "Charity" or "Corporation?" Would transitioning from The United Church of Canada Act to the Charitable Organizations legislation undermine the current Remit process that insists on the collective voice of communities of faith?

When churches disband the distribution of assets is as follows:
First:

- Reimbursement of holding/maintenance/disposal costs
- Covering unpaid past assessments and current year assessment
- Repaying any congregational indebtedness

Then:

- 33% for the congregation to direct to United Church of Canada ministries such as neighbouring congregations, United Church outreach ministries, United Church camps, United Church extension councils, The United Church of Canada Foundation or any of the following:
- 15% designated for Indigenous ministries
- 12.5% designated for Mission and Service (current year)
- 12.5% designated for Mission and Service Endowment Fund
- 2% designated for Archives
- 25% designated for regional council (HF Congregational Property Toolkit)

However, there is no for existing communities of faith to manage their building and staff expenses through operating budgets without special projects or matching funds.

There is currently no option for communities of faith who no longer discern a benefit from belonging to The United Church of Canada to secede from union with the assets that they have worked so hard to create and maintain to keep those assets.

3. What is the recommendation?

General Council should initiate a Remit allowing any communities of faith that wish to secede from union to do so with ALL of their real-estate and financial assets in place.

4. Background information:

The congregation holds the building “in trust” while the congregation is active. However, this “trust” relationship entails that the congregation bears all maintenance and repair expenses including any upgrades to the existing property, but when a church closes all significant financial assets of the building revert to the denomination in the aforementioned ways. It hardly seems equitable that a congregation invests its finances into a property that it has purchased or built and maintained for generations, with no return and no real decision-making power in what happens with its assets other than to make a “recommendation” with respect to 33% of the dispersement.

In a typical property held in trust, the trustee is compensated for all expenses they have incurred during the time of the trusteeship including maintenance costs, taxes and any other real costs. This is not the case with denominational property of The United Church of Canada.

There are no guidelines for the distribution of assets of congregations that wish to remain congregations but no longer wish to be part of the denomination.

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

By allowing individual communities of faith to secede from union with their assets in tact, the grass-roots of the Church will have their concerns, needs and dreams heard and met. Individual communities of faith can determine what is best for them and their contexts.

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