

Title: GS 4 Task Group on Adoptions from United Church Maternity Homes

Origin: General Secretary

The General Secretary, General Council proposes:

That the Executive of the General Council establish a task group to advise on next steps of The United Church of Canada in regards to adoptions from United Church maternity homes.

Background:

In the spring of 2010, Mary Anne Alton, documentary producer/director and council member at Beach United Church in Toronto, contacted the General Council Office about her film, *40 Year Secret*. The film documented the story of an unwed mother who describes being coerced into giving up her child for adoption while a resident in a church-run home for unwed mothers. During her research, Ms. Alton discovered that many women who had resided in church-sponsored maternity homes had similar stories. Of the approximately 80 to 90 homes operating in Canada between the turn of the century and the 1970s, eight were run by the United Church.

In the fall of 2010, Ms. Alton was invited to show the film at a “Brown Bag Lunch” held at the General Council Office, hosted by the Gender Justice Committee. Representatives from the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers (CCNM), a Canadian lobby group for the rights of women who have placed children for adoption, also attended the meeting and led a discussion. The CCNM members and Ms. Alton requested that beyond the discussion and promotion of the film to groups in the church, the United Church publicly acknowledge the experiences of women in United Church maternity homes and apologize for any involvement the church may have had in forced adoptions.

After the screening and discussion, the Gender Justice Committee decided that it didn’t have the necessary information to call for an acknowledgement and apology by the church, and took no formal action. Alcris Limongi, Program Coordinator: Gender Justice, Racial Justice, promoted the film, *40 Year Secret*, and provided some discussion questions for group use.

The issue of the church’s role in adoptions was raised again in the spring of 2012 when a National Post reporter contacted the church about a series of articles she was writing on the topic. The articles followed the release of a major report by the Senate of Australia that documented the history of similar homes operating across Australia. The Australian Senate report led to acknowledgement that the history of the homes included unethical and, at times, illegal practices involving in many cases coerced and at times forced adoptions.

Following the National Post articles, Bruce Gregersen, General Council Officer, Programs, was interviewed and featured on a Global News 16x9 program on forced adoptions. As a result of these articles, the church opened contact with a second group representing mothers whose infants had been adopted from church-run homes, Origins Canada. At that time the United Church

offered assurances that it would undertake archival research to explore adoption practices at United Church maternity homes in light of concerns about unethical practices similar to those identified in Australia. Amy Crawford, Program Coordinator: Children, Youth, and Young Adults, has been coordinating ongoing contact with the two groups, and overseeing the work of an archival researcher who was contracted to research the history of United Church-run homes. The researcher has reviewed materials available in the General Council archives, the archives of Conferences that operated maternity homes, and the archives of the Massey Centre, originally the Fred Victor Mission. Preliminary research has also begun into the experiences of people who were impacted by adoptions from United Church maternity homes.

In addition to meeting with representatives of the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers and Origins Canada, a meeting of ecumenical leaders and a panel of mothers was hosted at the General Council Office.

Terms of Reference for Task Group:

The Task Group on Adoptions from United Church Maternity Homes will identify, evaluate and make recommendations concerning subsequent actions regarding the history of United Church-run maternity homes and related issues that it identifies through the course of its work. The task group will be accountable to the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry.

Membership: The task group shall be made up of four members plus a staff liaison. Members shall include the following skills:

- capacity to reflect theologically
- experience in denominational processes;
- familiarity or experience with current adoption practices and legal issues in adoption;

The membership of the task group will be chosen through the General Council nominations process, and will include at least one member of the Executive of the General Council.

Terms of Service: The task group shall be established as soon as is feasible and the Permanent Committee on Programs for Mission and Ministry will bring its report to the Executive of the General Council by the fall of 2013.