

BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY: CALL AND VISION 2022-2025

Origin: General Council Executive

Report

Introduction

In light of the earlier restructuring of the church, and in response to *BC03-Leading on Purpose* and *BC05-A Vision to Ground Us*, General Council 43 recommended to its Executive and the General Secretary the development of a common mission and vision for The United Church of Canada. The Executive of the General Council undertook the task of developing a statement. This work, also overlapped with the Executive's desire to establish some clear priorities for the national work of the denomination and the General Council Office (GCO). Following on some early progress completed under the tenure of Nora Sanders, and through the appointment of the new General Secretary Michael Blair, these pieces of work were brought together into a consultation process leading to the development of a mission and vision for the whole church and a full strategic plan for the General Council office for 2022-2025.

The proposed mission and vision statement points towards a bold, hopeful, sustainable future for The United Church of Canada. This statement of purpose and hope is not for the sake of the institution or only the needs of the communities of faith that make up our legacy and our present. But rather because we believe that **The United Church of Canada is called to witness in love and justice to the liberating healing Christ risen in this place and time**. Articulating common hope "at such a time as this," (Esther 4:14) is our best effort to disrupt the narratives of decline and despair. By discerning a strong purpose and offering a clear vision for the church, in consort with a strategic plan for the General Council Office, we strive to create the conditions for missional growth, slowing if not stopping the slide in participation, impact, and finances.

Building on the assumptions of the Comprehensive Review Task Group, this mission and vision statement imagines communities of faith as more expansive than local congregations, inclusive of camps, education centres, chaplaincies, community and other ministries. It anticipates communities of the future, the shape of which we do not yet know. The intention is to offer this statement to the whole church for their engagement. How might communities of faith and regional councils engage this *call* and vision? What complementary local and regional plans might flow and connect with the 2022-2025 strategic plan for the denomination, a plan which focuses on the GCO role as coordinator, connector and identity shaper? How might we unite around who we could be as Beloved Community—deep, bold, daring, diverse, connected, hope-filled, inspiring—living the Good News that continues to be born in our midst, even in these most perilous times?

Development Process

The development process began following General Council 43 in Oshawa July 21-27, 2018, but intensified in January of 2021, following the creation of an advisory Project Team from across the church. Relevant denominational reports, reflections, and statements were reviewed, and organizational values were confirmed through a process, beginning with joint reflection by the National Indigenous Council (NIC) and the General Council Executive (GCE). In addition, a series of "right relations" commitments were confirmed, understood to be foundational for the

development of any plan, such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Calls to the Church* and *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*.

In February and March 2021, work continued to discern context, again engaging the NIC and GCE. Six key areas were identified where the current conjuncture was seen to offer challenge but also opportunity. Relevant to this context, three possible directions for the General Council Office were developed, each with a proposed mission and vision statement. A series of consultations on mission, vision, as well as possible objectives and initiatives for the GCO followed: Moderator's Town Halls (5); Indigenous Church Circles (4); and virtual focus groups with specific communities across the church and partnerships (23). These virtual gatherings were in addition to a set of focused surveys.

By the end of June, a proposed mission and vision statement had been developed and was being tested with leadership in the church including regional council presidents/chairs, principals of theological schools, and staff leadership. In August, the refined statement was tested with General Council Commissioners through a survey, to strong support. The final proposed statement was brought to the General Council Executive on September 25, 2021, who reviewed and revised the statement and recommended it to this 43 General Council annual meeting. Also, on September 25, the GCE approved in principle five strategic objectives for the General Council Office, from which the General Secretary will develop an accountable operational plan.

The Big Picture

Mission and Vision for The United Church of Canada Linked to GCO Strategic Plan 2022-2025: Overview



A diagram that depicts how the mission, vision, commitments, values, and affirmations of The United Church of Canada are linked to strategic objectives for the General Council Office for the years 2022 to 2025.

Foundational to the Plan

The following affirmations, values, and commitments are understood to be foundational to the mission and vision statements, and to the GCO strategic plan 2022-2025. The approach offers an important lens through which to view the statements and plan.

Affirmations drawn from our tradition

- Basis of Union
- 1940 Statement of Faith
- New Creed
- Song of Faith

Values developed with the National Indigenous Council and the General Council Executive

- Christian Faith
- Sacred Story
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Respect
- Community
- Equity
- Reconciliation
- Service
- Humility
- Innovation

Commitments drawn from our Statements

- To Right Relations with Indigenous Peoples: Reflected in the United Church Apologies and commitments to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the Caretakers' Calls.
- To Become a Church that is: Anti-Racist, Inter-Cultural, Affirming, Functionally Bilingual
- To Live Principles of Partnership in Global and Canadian Solidarity¹

Approach

A vital vibrant future for the United Church relies on the health of each part—national, regional and communities of faith, including in and with the Indigenous church. In a healthy church, the national supports the regions who support communities of faith as the primary locus of

¹Such as from *Reviewing Partnership in the Context of Empire* (2008), *Canadian Partnership* (2012)

ministry. In approaching implementation of this plan, attention will be given to the roles of each and the positive, supportive interconnections.

Becoming Beloved Community: Mission and Vision

The proposed mission statement was developed through a widely consultative process striving to reflect the core of what The United Church of Canada seeks to be in this time. While the six words and three phrases stand alone, they also reflect a process through which a deep and grounded faith compels a life of bold discipleship, lived in worship, service, and community, and expressed in the church and world in daring acts of justice.

The vision statement strives to reflect what the church aspires to be within a five to ten-year span.

Living purposefully into this vision anticipates becoming what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others called the “Beloved Community,” the ever inbreaking, ever transforming, ever reconciling realm of God, realized in our time.

Mission

Deep Spirituality

Bold Discipleship

Daring Justice

Vision

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

Strategic Objectives for the General Council Office

To guide the General Council in moving towards the stated vision, five strategic directions with objectives were proposed. Given that these objectives are focused on the General Council Office, they are not being presented to the General Council for approval. Rather, they have been reviewed and supported in principle by the General Council Executive, pending approval of the interlinked mission and vision statement by General Council.

While each objective is expressed as a specific theme, there are strong intersections between each area. Each of the objectives will be tracked with relevant measurement. And, as the operational plan is developed by the General Secretary, these objectives will flow into initiatives and projects that will also be accountably tracked and evaluated.

Embolden Justice: Collaborating to Mend Church and World

Make meaningful collective progress on Indigenous justice, racial equity, and 2SLGBTQplus rights both in the church and world, while demonstrably deepening bold effective solidarity on other justice issues, through ecumenical collaboration and denominational networking.

Invigorate Leadership: Adapting and Innovating for Bold Discipleship

Renew a vision of leadership based on the emerging mission of the denomination—deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice--and align discernment, recruitment, training, and support of ordered and lay leadership, to this vision.

Nurture Common Good: Equity and Sustainability in Resources

Significantly increase denominational capacity and will to make decisions on properties and resources focused on the ministry of the whole church, enhancing equity, sustainability, right relations, and administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

Deepen Integrity: Living Climate Commitments

Amplify and integrate current initiatives in a bold, hopeful denominational climate strategy that accelerates reductions towards the goal of an 80% decrease in emissions by 2030.

Strengthen Invitation: Humility and Confidence in Sharing Faith

Develop and implement effective and connected regional and national strategies, that result in growth within existing ministries, and by seeding and sustaining new ministries and communities of faith.

Conversations Continue

Through this process, the General Secretary, Moderator and members of the Project Team, engaged in virtual conversation with close to 1000 persons in the church and partnerships. The value of conversation was affirmed, not only for the end result of developing a strategic plan, but because of the understanding developed through the process. There was a sense of the Spirit moving in and through these gatherings as concerns and insights were offered and received. The proposed mission and vision statement comes out of the heart of the consultations.

However, with respect to the GCO strategic plan, it became clear that the totality of what was discussed could and should not be contained within a time-limited and strategic process. In some areas there was a need for further conversation, either ongoing or to resolve key issues. On that basis, the following discussions are recommended as a priority for continued conversation:

- with the Indigenous Church, particularly but not exclusively the Manitoba and Keewatin Circle, to resolve outstanding questions regarding the restructuring of the denomination and the implications on self-determination. In particular the question of whether the NIC functions as a “super region” needs to be resolved, alongside particular calls for the reestablishment of Indigenous presbyteries, such as Keewatin.
- with the Francophone community and the broader church on linguistic equity within and outside the church, historically and culturally, as well as how we live into being functionally bilingual.
- with Canadian ecumenical and full communion siblings related to opportunities for deepened collaboration such as in global partnerships, coordinated advocacy, and sustained justice, in addition to the continued discussion about administrative, service, archival, and space sharing.
- related to the role of the General Council Office with respect to the roles of regional councils and communities of faith.

Much of the input from the consultations—with the Indigenous church, Francophone communities and ecumenical partners—s included in the GCO strategic plan, however the plan does not full account for the substance of unfinished conversations as recommended above.

What’s Next?

Should General Council 43 affirm the mission and vision statement, these next steps are anticipated:

- Working with members of the original project team and others, and building on some initial progress, an animation process across the church will be initiated. This process will share the results of the consultation process and offer the mission and vision statement for reflection and engagement as to its meaning for regional councils and communities of faith, including for further discernment in the Indigenous church.

Resources will be produced to invite and support theological reflection, study and relevant ministry planning.

- In November, the General Council Executive will ratify the strategic objectives that were approved in principle on September 25 and direct the General Secretary to create a 2022 budget and long-term financial strategy linked to the emerging plan.
- The General Council Office will develop targets and indicators for the strategic objectives related to the period of 2022-2025 and begin to identify baselines.
- The GCO will engage in a transition process to assess existing work against the objectives and equip staff with planning and reporting tools.
- Working with a series of possible initiatives, the GCO develop a first “super year” operational plan of GCO projects and activities for September 2022 to December 2023, directly linked to the strategic objectives. In subsequent years (2024, 2025), on the basis of evaluation of the year previous, calendar year operational plans will be developed.

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The above report, with some small adjustments primarily to improve accessibility, was provided to support the proposal that General Council 43 “adopt the mission and vision statement...as the mission and vision for the whole church; and commend it to regional councils and communities of faith and United Church incorporated ministries for engagement and discernment for their ministry.” This proposal was passed on October 21, 2021.

Subsequent to this proposal, during ratification at the General Council Executive in November 2021, members of the Indigenous Church requested the use of alternate wording for “mission,” given the violent legacy of colonization. The “mission” is subsequently referred to as the “Call.” In addition, the words “open, accessible and barrier free” were added to the Commitments by the General Council Executive.