



**The United
Church of Canada**
**L'Église Unie
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Dear friends in Jesus' beloved community of The United Church of Canada,

As we mark our Centennial, we are offered a profound moment: a time to honour and reflect on the faithfulness of those who came before us, and at the same time, to lift our eyes to the horizon and imagine the future to which God is calling us. Indeed, we “sing of a church seeking to continue the story of Jesus” (*A Song of Faith*).

Over the past years, our work on the General Council Strategic Plan has deepened this forward-looking perspective, and now we are broadening the lens to consider the future of the whole church.

You may have already heard the phrase **Toward 2035**—a conversation that began with regional and denominational staff leaders and members of the General Council Executive in November 2024. This conversation, grounded in both discipleship and data, is expanding to include the whole church, as we seek a Spirit-led vision for what it means to be the United Church in the years ahead.

It is our hope that, flowing into regional council annual meetings and General Council 45, every level of the church, including communities of faith and other expressions of local ministry, as well as networks and clusters, will be involved in this bold discernment of who we aspire to be.

At the core of this conversation is a conviction, held with humility and confidence, that the United Church continues to be called to faithfully witness to the God of abundant love, the Christ risen among us, and the lively Spirit who works in us and others. We are convinced that we are invited to embody this witness first and foremost in the lives of faithful disciples gathered in communities across Canada, in small rural localities, towns, suburbs, and the breadth of Canada's cities.

We know that there are fewer people worshipping in, volunteering in, giving to, and participating in United Church ministries at every level: congregation, camp, campus, council, or community. We have learned that unforeseen circumstances can be disruptive and have long-term impact. At many board and council tables, and in many online meetings, we feel exhaustion, anxiety, and even fear, about the ongoing survival of ministry. Data projections offered into this conversation confirm this lived experience. Without a common vision and strategy—a whole-church commitment to discernment and collective action—our witness as a denomination will be severely constrained.

Toward 2035 imagines a different future—one in which bold, inspired communities of disciples share their faith and build community with their neighbours; The United Church of Canada reflects the diversity of our neighbourhoods and rejoices in the presence of all generations.

Toward 2035 commits to continue to be a faithful presence across Canada, in rural, urban, Francophone and Indigenous settings, but perhaps in different ways, more reflective of a connexional church.

Toward 2035 envisions a future where cooperation and collaboration will be at the centre, reflecting a shift from isolated congregations and ministries struggling on their own to ones that discern ways to thrive together.

Toward 2035 foresees resilient communities, accompanied by adaptive and effective ministry leaders, less burdened by property and governance requirements.

Toward 2035 seeks to be a ministry-focused, data-informed vision and strategy for the whole church. It will help us discern the most faithful approach to ministry in various locations and guide our stewardship of current and potential resources, such as grants, staffing, and training. Instead of many different uncoordinated, and perhaps even overlapping strategies for renewal, growth, and invitation, we will strive to discern and act more effectively together, inspired by a common commitment to resilient witness.

What can you do? Watch for opportunities to join in the conversation. As we move towards General Council 45, we will soon publish a discussion guide for conversation within communities of faith and church networks. Some regional gatherings will dedicate space to this conversation this spring, and GC45 Commissioners will receive briefing material to prepare for a session at General Council in August. In the fall of 2025, other regional gatherings will pick up the conversation. It is our hope that discussion about **Toward 2035** will ignite a spark across the country, animated by the lively Spirit of God who challenges and comforts, convicts and creates.

This conversation is not only about what “will be.” It is also about what “is.” Where do you sense God at work in your corner of the church? Where do you perceive “a new thing?” What possibilities do you already see emerging out of a connexional, cooperative approach? What if this became the norm for United Church ministry? Where can you fuse good data with discipleship commitment, to make effective and faithful decisions?

While this conversation takes place, staff will make information—both quantitative data and qualitative insight—accessible to more of us. We will work hard to paint an informed picture of the challenges and opportunities of the church across the country, and also the possibilities offered by the changing face of our nation. The fuller the picture, the stronger our capacity for prayerful and wise discernment.

Keep an eye out for resources to aid in conversation, and as you do so, please pray.

Please pray that in a moment where hope and joy, justice and peace, are so desperately needed, that we, whom God has called together as disciples in this United Church, might boldly sing to, in and with a hurting world. May our daring hymn ever more be of a God who is abundant love and wholly justice.

One hundred years ago, this church was formed with great celebration and sacrament. It began with faithful people seeing the possibility God guided them into, right there in the place they called home. We are convinced that God still calls, and that we can respond even more strongly to that call if we truly understand—that even within this church—we are not alone.

Together in our call to Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael".

Rev. Michael Blair
General Secretary