

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

MEETING OF THE SUB-EXECUTIVE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL MINUTES

**November 12, 2004
(Teleconference Call)**

The Sub-Executive of the General Council of The United Church of Canada met from 11:00 a.m. EST until 12:15 p.m. on Friday, November 12, 2004, by teleconference call. The Moderator, The Right Reverend Peter Short, presided.

ATTENDANCE

Voting Members

Lynn Boothroyd, Anne-Marie Carmoy, Jim Jackson, Donald Koots, Stephen Mabee, Marion Pardy, Barbara Rafuse, Peter Short, Jim Sinclair, Michelle Slater, Kent Ward.

Corresponding Members

Jim Blanchard, Carol Hancock, Ian Fraser, Bruce Gregersen, Scott Thompson (solicitor, Hicks, Morley), Kathy McDonald (in-house legal counsel), Michael Burke (Executive Minister, Ministry & Employment Policies & Services)

Regrets: George Takashima, Omega Bula

CONSTITUTING THE MEETING

The Moderator constituted the meeting with the following words:

"Au nom de Notre Seigneur, Jésus-Christ, seul chef souverain de l'Église, et par l'autorité qui m'a été conférée par le 38ième Conseil général, je déclare ouvert, par la présente, le sous-exécutif du Conseil général et ses travaux dans l'intérêt du Royaume de Dieu."

"In the Name of Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, and by the authority vested in me by the 38th General Council, I hereby declare this meeting of the Sub-Executive of the General Council to be in session for the work that may properly be brought before it to the glory of God."

PROCEDURAL MOTIONS

Corresponding Members

Motion: Jim Sinclair/Michelle Slater

2004-11-12-208

That Jim Blanchard, Ian Fraser, Bruce Gregersen, and Carol Hancock, Scott Thompson, Kathy McDonald, and Michael Burke be made corresponding members for this meeting and that Joan MacGillivray be the recording secretary for this meeting of the Sub-Executive.

Carried

Minutes of the Sub-Executive of the General Council

Motion: Jim Sinclair/Stephen Mabee

2004-11-12-209

That the minutes of the Sub-Executive of the General Council for October 12, 2004 be adopted as circulated.

Carried

UNITED CHURCH RESPONSE TO UNIONIZING CLERGY

The Moderator reviewed the purpose of this meeting, to inform the elected membership with an update and understanding of the issues related to the media coverage. It is also an opportunity to hear from members across the country. The documentation for this meeting includes the Communique (Appendix A) and pastoral letter from the Moderator (Appendix B). The documentation is offered to give support to the courts of the church with factual information. It is also given in response to the numerous media requests including one from the BBC.

The General Secretary gave the background and the General Council Minister, Resources outlined specific steps taken to date by the General Council Office. In understanding the trade union model and how this industrial model fits with the polity of the United Church many questions surfaced. These questions will be addressed in a "backgrounder" which is now being researched.

Comments included reports of congregations giving expressions of support to their clergy. Questions included the formation of unions and who the employer is. These illustrated the complexity of the employee/employer relationship as it affects clergy.

The work at the Executive of the General Council was noted. Building the capacity of the courts of the church was a priority listed in the GCE Work Book under Categories of Work by the Senior Leadership Team. Resources are needed to assist presbyteries to do the work they are required to do.

Motion: Michelle Slater/Marion Pardy

2004-11-12-210

That the Sub-Executive of the General Council affirm the Media Release related to the unionization initiative.

Carried

The Sub-Executive affirmed the discussion with trust that work will continue in a covenanted way including responses to questions related to the general principles in the release.

Thanks to the staff and volunteers was expressed by the Moderator for their hard work with appreciation for the continual flow of information and releases. Trust was expressed, trust that staff are working appropriately on the issues and that further information would be forth coming.

In closing, Gerald Dore was remembered in prayer. The people who are experiencing discomfort at this time, and their families, were also remembered.

ADJOURNMENT

The Moderator adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m. with blessings to all.

Moderator, Peter Short

General Secretary, Jim Sinclair

APPENDIX A

For Immediate Release

Friday November 12, 2004

UNITED CHURCH RESPONSE TO UNIONIZING CLERGY

TORONTO: "Trade unions can and do work for good in society, but they are not a good fit for United Church clergy," according to the Rev. Dr. Jim Sinclair, General Secretary of the General Council of The United Church of Canada.

Sinclair made his comments in a statement released today following the announcement last week that the Canadian Auto Workers Union was launching a membership drive to unionize United Church ministers. Along with this statement, the United Church also released a pastoral letter written by the church's Moderator, the Right Rev. Dr. Peter Short.

Sinclair explains that in The United Church of Canada the role of the minister is complex. It is based on a covenantal relationship between different parties, under God, rather than a contractual one between employer and employee. "Labour relations legislation was not designed or intended to regulate the relationship between a minister and the church," says Sinclair.

He adds, "Unionization of the clergy would fundamentally change the theological understanding of the covenant role of a minister within The United Church of Canada, and the character of the relationship with her or his congregation. It is also difficult to imagine how ministers could be members of a bargaining unit and at the same time continue to exercise their presbytery responsibilities of governance and management within The United Church of Canada."

Sinclair says the United Church is very aware of the challenges that ministers and congregations face in maintaining a healthy relationship. He does not believe, however, that hope for renewal lies within the adversarial approach of the union/management labour relations model.

"A continuing goal of the United Church and its ministers is to foster healthy congregations," comments Sinclair. He says the denomination has undertaken several initiatives in recent years to provide more effective support and supervision to ministers and congregations. "The church believes that when one hurts, we all hurt, and is always saddened to hear of situations where wholeness and health have not been achieved," says Sinclair.

Referring to recent media attention to these matters, Sinclair comments, "I know there are those who are anxious about the present discussion of unionization. Frankly, I encourage it. It provides a welcome opportunity for members of The United Church of Canada to examine their ministry of caring for all who are associated with the church, ministers and congregations alike, to address where it is deficient, and certainly to affirm where it is effective and faithful."

For further information, please contact:

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APPENDIX B

November 2004

To sisters and brothers in The United Church of Canada
Greetings in Christ from Peter Short, Moderator

It is not every day that something as close to my heart as the health, sustenance, and vitality of United Church ministers becomes a national news story. In recent days the Canadian Auto Workers Union has shown an interest in United Church ministers who are experiencing difficulty. That interest has become news. I want to communicate with the whole church about this because the issues at hand are substantial, timely, and important to us all. Pray that as we work together at these things, God's Spirit will guide us into wisdom, compassion, and courage.

I know that many of our ministers are struggling. I know this because I have been a minister in congregations for 25 years – 13 of those years in two of the most isolated pastoral charges in The United Church of Canada. Knowing that ministers are struggling is what moved me as Moderator to spend time leading retreats for as many of our ministry personnel as possible. To date I have led retreats for over 500 ministers of the United Church. I have prayed with them and sung with them and encouraged them and talked with them about their vocation, and listened to their stories of what the experience of ministry has been for them. Ministry is hard work, calling for exceptional gifts of compassion, insight, faith, and courage. Ministers often find themselves carrying the work of ministry in an isolation that can have geographic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Few people understand. So when the news came that several of our 3,000 active ministers have felt moved by their struggles to investigate the idea of joining a union, I understood much of the frustration and the hope that brought them to that place. Actually, I am grateful to God for the attention ministry is receiving and for the opportunity to go more deeply into what I have begun so that our ministers might be strengthened, equipped, encouraged, and defended in the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have a great respect for the ministers of The United Church of Canada. Our ministers are well educated, profoundly dedicated to their work, and committed to a faith that issues in justice. I urge you to support them. Support them as they think, discuss, and pray in order to discern the way forward that is best for them, for the church, and for the gospel to which we belong. I trust that congregations will respect their ministers' right and freedom to speak openly and freely about this initiative to unionize clergy. Such rights and freedoms are valued in the tradition of The United Church of Canada and enshrined in Canadian law.

Some of the stories I hear from ministers break my heart. Some of the stories remind me of my own bewildered and broken-hearted times in ministry. But at the same time, some of the stories I hear bring much joy. For example, last month I was contacted by a congregation in Nova Scotia. This congregation was seeking advice about what to do in their relationship with their minister. They were planning an appreciation event for him in recognition of his valued work amongst them and in their community. The event was to be a surprise. They told me what they had planned and asked me for advice. Did I have suggestions about how they might express appreciation for their minister? After thanking them for their thoughtfulness and care, I suggested that many ministers lack adequate resources for continuing education. I pointed out that lifelong learning is a vital ingredient in a minister's struggle to stay alive in the work of the gospel. I suggested that they revisit their continuing education policy to ensure that it afforded adequate opportunities for their minister. It did my heart much good to have the chance to participate in a small way in their important gift of recognition and thanksgiving. I was happy to send along a message expressing the appreciation of The United Church of Canada to this congregation and its minister on this special occasion.

I want to thank and encourage the many hundreds of congregations whose care and nurture of their ministers makes for happy and fruitful relationships – relationships that foster much that is good in church and community. I am aware that people in many congregations feel they are being portrayed unfairly as abusive and neglectful in the media stories, portrayals which fail to tell the whole story of ministry in The United Church of Canada. I am grateful for the good people of every congregation who are finding ways to sustain life-giving relationships with their ministers.

Approved – December 17, 2004

I want to set before you what I believe to be a critical dimension of the challenge we face. Right now we must recognize how much work we have to do to build up the strength and capacity of our presbyteries and districts. Right now we must turn to that work, beginning where we can, even though we may not have all the answers yet. The presbytery/district is the body in the church that has prime responsibility for attending to the health, supervision, and support of congregations and ministers. Presbyteries/districts carry an increasingly heavy regulatory load. Yet at the same time, they find themselves with decreasing human and financial resources. In fact, I consider the capacity of the presbytery/district to fulfill its mandate to be so important that at the recent meeting of the Executive of General Council, I put this issue on the agenda for major attention. It is on the table of our national leadership now and it will not come off until it has been addressed in a way that sets us on a path to restoration of health, hope, and harmony.

Sisters and brothers, we must not turn from addressing the hard challenges that face our leadership. We must be brave in the face of difficult issues. We must be faithful to Jesus Christ in finding a way forward. We must move with insight and compassion beyond the familiar territory into a new land where our ministry will be equipped and sustained for the good work that lies before us – the good work of the gospel.

Long before the Canadian Auto Workers Union showed an interest in us, we were aware of these things and at work on them. Long after the news stories have moved on, we will continue to give ourselves to the quest for a healthy ministry in a vital church. We'll be at work to encourage and support the gifts God has given us. As it is written in Ephesians, "The gifts God gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

In the end, I am grateful that the ministry we all care so deeply about has received the attention of the Canadian people through the media. I promise you my prayers, my vision, and my labour for the coming of the day when the news will tell of a church that, by the power of the Spirit and the effort of its people, has built itself up in love.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Short". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Right Rev. Dr. Peter Short
Moderator
The United Church of Canada