

Background notes for 2017 Conference AGMs

(This summary of the status of a range of General Council matters was prepared to assist those presenting at Conference Annual General Meetings.)

Remit Update

- Please urge pastoral charge boards/councils to vote on the remits. If they don't submit ballots, that counts as a no vote.
- June 30th is the deadline for four important remits. Those proposals are: Remit 1: **Three Council Model**; Remit 2: **Elimination of Transfer and Settlement**; Remit 3: **Office of Vocation**; and Remit 4: **Funding a New Model**. The deadline for Remit 6: **One Order of Ministry**, is Feb. 28, 2018.
- If the Three Council Model is passed by pastoral charge boards/councils and presbyteries on June 30, an electronic meeting of 42nd General Council commissioners will be held in September, to establish a commission to set the number and boundaries of the regional councils.
- All remits need to be enacted by the 43rd General Council in 2018. If the Three Council Model remit is approved there, it is anticipated the regional system would come into effect on January 1, 2019.
- The three remits that had a February 17, 2017 deadline all passed by a very wide margin.
- *If anyone has a remit question you can't answer, ask them to email remits@united-church.ca.*

Planning for Life after the Remits

- A Remit Scenario Planning team is planning for what will happen if the remits pass, OR if they do not pass.
- The Remit Scenario Planning team is not making decisions, but identifying decisions that will need to be made, and providing guidance in the development of proposals.
- A PC-MEPS working group is identifying key assumptions for an Office of Vocation, if Remit 3 passes.
- Another PC-MEPS working group is exploring the advisability of an Association of Ministers (although this work is not dependent on the remit outcomes)
- For information contact Alan Hall (ahall@united-church.ca) or Kate Rodd (crodd@united-church.ca).

Embracing the Spirit Update

- This program helps to develop new forms of innovative ministry while ensuring that successful initiatives now underway continue to thrive.
- In 2017, funding for the program will rise to \$750,000.
- Close to 50 projects have been approved for funding, with more now in the consultation process.
- Rob Dalgleish (rdalgleish@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

EDGE Evaluation

The effectiveness of EDGE was evaluated last year by an outside firm. Here are some highlights:

- People were enthusiastic about EDGE and think the church should continue to invest in it.
- The network is seen as innovative, entrepreneurial, inspiring, flexible, and collaborative, and 6 in 10 respondents want EDGE to remain separate from the General Council Office.

Background notes for 2017 AGMs

- The report also listed some concerns. They include: EDGE needs to communicate more effectively with the wider church so congregations know what it offers; there is a concern about inadequate staffing; there is a perception that EDGE is not sufficiently serving the needs of smaller churches, rural churches, those outside central Canada, and those with limited financial resources.
- As of September 2016, EDGE has worked with more than 300 pastoral charges, catalyzing and supporting the initiation of 50-plus new ministries.

Rob Dalglish (rdalglish@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

Pension Board Updates

The Pension Board engages companies as a responsible investor. Recent developments include:

- Goldcorp has agreed to disclose a recent independent human rights assessment update and plans for the closure and reclamation of the Marlin Mine site in Guatemala.
- Restaurant Brands International has agreed to expand the way it works with coffee farmers on issues of child labour, ensuring that any farm labour is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and improve its regional training initiatives in regard to child and forced labour.
- Cenovus has agreed to end all political contributions by the company and to fully disclose all lobbying activities in all jurisdictions in which it operates.
- TD Bank has agreed to urge the operating company Energy Transfer Partners to seek a long-term solution that respects Indigenous rights. It will also lead banks in commissioning about lessons learned about environmental and social credit risk assessment when evaluating projects.
- The Board is now a signatory to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment and filed its first report. It is also an active member of the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance. It has measured the carbon footprint of the Fund and is working with investment managers to reduce it.
- The Board is working with the General Council Executive's Responsible Investment Reference Group in response to motions to divest from companies active in the occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Alan Hall (ahall@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

General Council 43 Budget

The \$1,156,445 budget approved for the 2018 General Council is in line with previous years, with the largest new item being \$150,000 for a festival. For the first time, real-time updates to proposals and other documents will be available, with mobile devices given to those without appropriate technology.

General Council 43 Business Process

Instead of a proposal model that began with "solutions," the new business process will begin with "issues." The new business process also includes a three-phase model of listening, discussing, and deciding, and an expanded time line for learning and discussions, which should create better informed Commissioners and also allow the whole Church to participate.

Medical Assistance in Dying

A report from the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee was adopted as an official statement of the United Church on the subject of Medical Assistance in Dying. Liturgical resources and study guides are to be created to accompany the statement, encouraging communities of faith to have

conversations about death and dying. The report noted that while “life is a gift from God ... in some circumstances, Medical Assistance in Dying may be better than all other worse alternatives.

For the full report, see <http://www.united-church.ca/news/medical-assistance-dying>.

Logo Chosen for GC43



The logo for General Council 43 illustrates the theme of “Risking Faith — Daring Hope.” The artist says the dove represent spiritual faith, love and peace. The blue wave represents challenges in our lives and the world today, which sometimes make us feel helpless. The wave can also be seen as a tide of positive change. The dove passes through the wave and is warmed by the sun — a symbol of all life that gives us hope.

Financial Update

- 2016 was a positive year, by both operating budget and financial statement measures. Expense savings and investment gains offset declines in revenue.
- Eight years of positive investment results coupled with expense management efforts has slowed the rate of unrestricted reserve depletion. But we still need to make more substantive changes.
- The 2017 operating budget projects an operating deficit of about \$2.8 million before investment income and a deficit of approximately \$2 million on a net basis. This amount is being recommended, since: we have adequate reserves to fund this; we need to retain some capacity to respond to remit outcomes; there are clear savings identified for 2018 that would alone offset this deficit.
- 2018 is expected to be a transition year—irrespective of remit outcomes. If the remits are largely approved, implementation will take effect in 2019. If the remits are largely not approved, each court will need to respond to financial realities, including phasing out Conference operating grants.
- Erik (emathiesen@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information

Mission & Service Update

- The popularity of the congregational and Mission & Service giving resources known as “Called to Be the Church” continues to grow. This year, this resource was available right after Easter.
- Mission & Service giving continues to decline slowly, though less than expected. Legacy giving through wills and total emergency both went down in 2016, though gifts designated to specific M&S partners and programs increased this year. Also in 2016, one generous anonymous individual gave a total of \$1 million to the Mission & Service Endowment Fund held in the Foundation.
- David Armour (darmour@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information

Refugee Update

- United Church congregations have responded powerfully to the need to support refugees arriving from Syria and elsewhere. Sometimes this work is being done with partners in their communities.
- The United Church has been given 185 spots (i.e. individuals), more than twice the expected allotment for Refugee Sponsorship.

Background notes for 2017 AGMs

- While this allotment shows that the government has a very positive view of the United Church sponsorship program, other groups are upset that we are getting this allotment.
- There are also challenges to find communities willing to sponsor LGBTQ+ refugees, as most congregations want to sponsor families.
- Michael Blair (mblair@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

Ecumenical Partners Update

- We are living into the full communion agreement with the United Church of Christ US through leadership meetings, conversations about common areas of work, and various local and regional connections
- Talks are underway with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), on a full communion agreement that may be ready for ratification by our General Council in 2018 and their governing body in 2019.
- Conversations with the United Methodist Church may begin later this year, exploring what sort of formal relationship the two churches could have.
- There is the possibility of some three-way conversation with the Presbyterian Church (USA), The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and ourselves with a view to strengthening relationships.
- John Young (jyoung@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

People in Partnership Update

- People in Partnership programs continue to welcome global partners coming to Canada and support United Church appointments to global partners.
- People in Partnership now has a presence on the United Church website, including opportunities currently being recruited. A new initiative is an invitation to communities of faith to propose a placement for a global partner in their community.
- A process for developing the dream of what a placement would look like in a local context is available on the website as well.
- Michael Blair (mblair@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

Panel Being Assembled for Hearing

- A formal hearing into the recommendation of the Toronto Conference that the Rev. Gretta Vosper be placed on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary) has been ordered. Presently the parties to the hearing are being consulted to establish dates when each can be available and their representations will be ready. Once a date — likely later this year — is set, a panel will be appointed by the Judicial Committee Executive. Upon completion of the hearing and the deliberations of the panel, its decision will be announced by the Judicial Committee Executive.
- Contact Alan Hall (ahall@united-church.ca) for more information.

White Privilege

- The General Council Executive agreed to “name work on identifying and understanding white privilege important to the church,” and it directed the General Secretary to appoint a task group to create an education program around the issue, which would produce or identify online and educational resources. The task group is also to be encouraged to liaise with other ecumenical partners and civil society.

Communications Update

- There is a palpable hunger for any spiritual content online, as United-church.ca now receives over 100,000 visits per month, videos on YouTube receive over 6,000 views per month, and the reach of our social media posts is in the tens of thousands each month.
- Webinars continue to be popular, and it is hoped that United-in-Learning will be a revenue source for the church.
- The decision has been made to not publish any new books for 2017, but this decision has been made on a one-year basis in the midst of many changes in the office.
- The new website continues to be problematic for some users; we are working to resolve those issues. (If someone raises particular issues please get the details or encourage them to contact Kate directly)
- Kate Rodd (crodd@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

Aboriginal Ministries Council Update

- As mandated by the 42nd General Council, the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle have been meeting since June 2016 to prepare proposals to on the future, and work, of the Indigenous church.
- The Caretakers are preparing to make recommendations to the 2017 National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering in July and then incorporate the wisdom of that gathering into the proposal will go to the General Council Executive in November, 2017, in preparation for General Council 43 in 2018.
- The Caretakers have made a number of Calls to address their concerns. They include: the formation of an Indigenous Council and a national Indigenous “organization” connected to that Council; the development of Indigenous theological resources; Indigenous church communities should be able to choose their relationships within a three court structure, which would include an understanding of “dual belonging.”
- For more information, contact Maggie McLeod at mmcleod@united-church.ca.

Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools Update

- The church continues to work on its commitment to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. [A new video](#) and workshop to help communities of faith and other regional structures discern how they can live into the UN Declaration has been released.
- We are supportive of an ecumenical campaign to pass Bill C-262, a private member's bill providing a legislative framework for the federal government's implementation of the Declaration: <http://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/undrip-campaign>
- The church continues to advocate for justice in the National Inquiry Into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/justice-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls) and has developed new worship materials on the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery (<http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/doctrine-discovery>). We also continue to work with the other parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement on issues such as the resolution of claims outside the agreement (for example, day scholars) and drafting a Covenant of Reconciliation.
- For more information, contact Sara Stratton (sstratton@united-church.ca) or sign up for the Living Into Right Relations newsletter: <http://www.united-church.ca/newsletters>.

Review of Property and Investments

- Nearly one in three congregations will be looking at sale or some form of redevelopment of their property in the short term, and many of these congregations are not resourced for this complex work. B.C. Conference is investing resources into looking at our property as a portfolio and how it can be used to create greater resources for future sustainable ministry.
- The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation believes in the value and impact of United Churches and is providing \$300,000 in funding (half grant, half interest free loan) so we can create an inventory of properties across the church and how to use them to 'Love their Neighbourhoods'.
- Rob Dalgleish (rdalgleish@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information.

General Council Office Consolidation Update

- This ongoing consolidation will result in rental costs dropping by approximately \$1 million annually starting on September 15, 2017, with the new lease locked in until July 2023. The consolidation cost—amortized over the life of our rental agreement—will be approximately \$1.5 million. That figure includes buying new furniture that can be used for 20 years.
- Resource- and space-sharing discussions continue with other denominations, and we have entered into some modest staff-sharing arrangements. Discussions around potentially sharing space continue, as we await news about the redevelopment of the Bloor Street United site.
- Erik Mathiesen (emathiesen@united-church.ca) can be contacted for more information

Tracking our History Through Artifacts

- With the consolidation of the General Council Office, an artifact inventory is guiding decisions on what historic artifacts to keep and what to dispose of.
- All churches, pastoral charges, and Conferences have their own artifacts, which face an uncertain future if a congregation closes or amalgamates. For that reason, a sub-committee of the General Council Archives and History Committee is now putting together guidelines to help church members and trustees deal with the artifacts they have.