

D. GENERAL COUNCIL

D.1 Membership

D.1.1 Members of the General Council

The General Council consists of the following 260 members. They must all be ministry personnel or lay members of the United Church:

- a) the Moderator;
- b) the immediate past Moderator;
- c) the General Secretary of the General Council;
- d) the leading Elder or presiding officer of each regional council;
- e) 204 members elected by the regional councils on the following basis:
 - i) **Number:** each regional council elects five members *plus* an additional number allocated to it based on the proportion of communities of faith within the bounds of that regional council to the total number of communities of faith in the United Church;
 - ii) **Lay/ministry personnel balance:** a minimum of 1/3 of the members elected must be ministry personnel on the roll of the regional council, and a minimum of 1/3 of the members elected must be lay members of communities of faith within the bounds of the regional council other than ministry personnel;
 - iii) **Diversity:** attention is given to diversity of gender and age, racial and cultural identities, and sexual expressions, as provided in policies set by the General Council; and
 - iv) **Timing:** the election takes place, where possible, at least one year before the next regular in-person meeting of the General Council;
- f) 15 members chosen by the National Indigenous Organization who are in addition to any Indigenous members elected under paragraph D.1.1 e) above;
- g) the members of the Executive of the General Council who will be continuing to serve on the executive following that meeting of the General Council; and
- h) a number of members to be elected by the Executive of the General Council, on the recommendation of the regional councils, for the purpose of ensuring diversity in the General Council after the members listed in paragraph D.1.1 e) above have been determined to bring the total number of members to 260.

D.1.2 Term of Office of General Council Members

The members of the General Council elected or chosen under paragraphs D.1.1 e), f), and h) above will each serve for a term of approximately three years, starting at the beginning of the regular in-person meeting of the General Council for which they were elected or chosen and ending at the beginning of the next regular in-person meeting of the General Council.

The General Council holds annual regular meetings that take place in person every third year and electronically during the other years.



D.1.3 Vacancies

If a member of the General Council elected or chosen under paragraphs D.1.1 e), f), or h) above resigns or cannot complete their term for any other reason, the electing or choosing body may elect or choose another member to complete the term of the vacating member.

D.2 Responsibilities

D.2.1 General

The General Council is the decision-making body for the United Church as both a denomination and a legal corporation. In general terms, the General Council has the responsibility to set policy and take action for the United Church on

- a) doctrine;
- b) worship;
- c) membership;
- d) governance;
- e) property;
- f) pastoral relations; and
- g) the entrance to paid accountable ministry.

The policies set by the General Council are binding whether included in these bylaws or not.



It is also responsible for making decisions on denomination-shaping issues relating to public witness.

D.2.2 Limitations

There are four limitations on the General Council's responsibility to set policy.

D.2.2.1 Changes to the Basis of Union

The General Council may change the Basis of Union only if the change is approved through a remit.

D.2.2.2 Terms of Admission to Full Membership

The General Council may not set any requirements for admission to full membership other than those laid down in the New Testament.

D.2.2.3 Freedom of Worship

The General Council may not interfere with the freedom of worship that the negotiating churches had at the time of church union.

The term "negotiating churches" means The Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Methodist Church, the Congregational Churches of Canada, and the Local Union Church congregations.



D.2.2.4 Congregational Property

The General Council may not make policy on how certain kinds of congregational property may be held, used, or administered except with the approval of the

congregation or regional council. This limitation is set out in Sections G.2.2.2 to G.2.2.4.

D.2.3 Purpose

The General Council is responsible for the following:

- a) joining our collective hearts, voices, and resources to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world;
- b) engaging denominational-level ministry and mission, including resource development, and being a resource to regional councils and communities of faith;
- c) encouraging local and regional mission and ministry, partnerships, and ecumenical and interfaith relations;
- d) engaging in national and global partnerships and ecumenical and interfaith relations;
- e) honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry;

Honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry is described in a Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church, a resource available from the General Council Office.



- f) living in covenant with Mother Earth and All My Relations in the Earth community; and
- g) ensuring the United Church is equipped to fulfill its purpose.

D.2.4 Finance and Administration

The General Council is responsible for

- a) setting a three-year budget framework for the church; and
- b) determining the assessment formula for communities of faith and assessing them to meet the requirements of the budget.

D.2.5 Oversight of Regional Councils

D.2.5.1 General

The General Council is responsible for the oversight of the regional councils.

This responsibility includes

- a) deciding on the number of regional councils and their boundaries;
- b) supporting regional councils; and
- c) promoting parity of service across the regions.

D.2.5.2 Action by General Council

The General Council is responsible for

- a) assuming control of a regional council in extraordinary circumstances where the regional council is unable to or refuses to meet its responsibilities or acts outside of denominational policies; and
- b) taking action if a regional council asks the General Council to take action on its behalf.

The General Council must take the action that it considers necessary in the situation.

D.2.6 Proposals

The General Council is responsible for dealing with proposals that it receives from regional councils and from the executive, committees, and members of the General Council.

D.2.7 Appeals

The General Council is responsible for hearing

- a) appeals of decisions of the Board of Vocation;
- b) appeals of decisions from formal hearings held by a community of faith or regional council; and

The term “formal hearing” is defined in Oversight, Conflict Resolution, and Discipline J.12.1.

- c) any other kind of appeal from a regional council.

It fulfills this responsibility through its Judicial Committee.

There are rules on the kinds of decisions that may be appealed. See Oversight, Conflict Resolution, and Discipline J.10 for more information on appeals and the Judicial Committee.

D.2.8 Theological Schools Related to the United Church

The General Council is responsible for

- a) fulfilling the responsibilities of the United Church in its relationship with the theological schools related to the United Church; and
- b) giving and revoking the power of a theological school related to the United Church to issue a testamur.

D.2.9 Incorporated Ministries

The General Council has the following responsibilities regarding applications for incorporation and incorporated ministries:

- a) deciding whether to give administrative approval for the incorporation of ministries that will carry on activities in one region;

The General Council makes the decision whether to give administrative approval through the General Secretary, General Council.

- b) deciding whether to approve applications for the incorporation of ministries that will carry on activities in more than one region; and
- c) exercising oversight of incorporated ministries that carry on activities in more than one region, or assigning that oversight to a regional council.

D.2.10 Human Resources Policies

The General Council is responsible for setting human resources policies for General Council and regional council staff.

D.2.11 Archives

The General Council is responsible for maintaining the denominational archives.

D.2.12 Executive of the General Council

The General Council is responsible for having an executive and deciding on the executive's responsibilities and powers. It must refer all unfinished business from its meetings to its executive.

D.3 Meetings

There are procedures for meetings of the General Council. They are available from the General Council Office prior to each meeting of the General Council.



D.3.1 Regular Meetings

The General Council must meet in person every third year. Members of the General Council must have the option of full participation through electronic or equivalent means for the in-person meeting.

The General Council must also meet annually through electronic or equivalent means to fulfill corporate legal requirements and for other business as determined by the Executive of the General Council.

D.3.2 Special Meetings of the General Council

If it decides the circumstances are exceptional, the Executive of the General Council may call a special meeting of the General Council between regular meetings.

D.3.3 Constituting the Meeting

The meeting of the General Council must be formally opened, or constituted, with

- a) public worship;
- b) communion; and
- c) a formal declaration by the Moderator.

D.3.4 Minimum Number of Members Present

The General Council may meet only if at least 1/5 of the commissioners are present.

D.4 Organization

D.4.1 Moderator

D.4.1.1 Election

The General Council is responsible for electing a Moderator. The Moderator must be a member of the United Church but is not required to be a commissioner of the General Council that elects them.

There is a process for nominating and electing a Moderator. It is available from the Office of the Moderator and General Secretary of the General Council Office prior to each regular in-person meeting of the General Council.



D.4.1.2 Term

The Moderator serves for a term of approximately three years. This term period begins when the Moderator is installed at an in-person regular meeting of the General Council, and ends when the next Moderator is installed at the next in-person regular meeting of the General Council.

D.4.1.3 Responsibilities

As the senior elected officer of the United Church, the Moderator has the following responsibilities:

- a. **Giving leadership:** The Moderator gives leadership to the United Church, especially in spiritual things, quickening in the hearts of the people a sense of God as revealed in Christ, and heartening and strengthening the whole United Church.
- b. **Presiding:** The Moderator presides at the meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive.
- c. **Visiting:** The Moderator visits throughout the United Church, giving sympathetic guidance and counsel, and reporting to the General Council and its executive.
- d. **Serving as spokesperson:** The Moderator serves as the primary spokesperson and representative for the United Church.

D.4.1.4 Right to Administer Communion

A Moderator who is a diaconal minister or layperson may administer communion at regular meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive.

D.4.1.5 Deputy Moderator

If the Moderator dies, resigns, or cannot serve for an extended period for any other reason, the Executive of the General Council is responsible for appointing a deputy Moderator to assume the Moderator's responsibilities for the period required.

D.4.1.6 Review of Role

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for reviewing the following at least once every 10 years:

- a) the United Church's needs in a Moderator;
- b) the Moderator's responsibilities; and
- c) the opportunity a Moderator has to pursue themes and initiatives.

The executive must make recommendations to the General Council based on these reviews.

D.4.2 General Secretary

D.4.2.1 Appointment

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for appointing a General Secretary of the General Council.

The General Secretary must be a member of the United Church.

D.4.2.2 Term

The General Secretary of the General Council continues in office until the Executive of the General Council appoints a successor.

D.4.2.3 Responsibilities

The General Secretary is the senior staff and administrative officer of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive.

The General Secretary is responsible for

- a) assisting the Executive of the General Council in discharging its responsibilities;
- b) preparing for the meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;
- c) preparing and circulating a report of the meetings of the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;
- d) arranging for implementation of the decisions by the General Council, its executive, and its sub-executive;
- e) facilitating the work of the committees and commissions of the General Council;
- f) ruling on questions about the polity, procedures, and practice of the United Church;
- g) preparing draft changes to *The Manual* for the General Council or its executive to consider;
- h) overseeing publication of *The Manual*;
- i) preparing the annual budget of the General Council for the Executive of the General Council to consider;
- j) having possession of the corporate seal of the United Church and the documents and records of the General Council;
- k) serving as an automatic member of any committee established to direct planning or research;
- l) serving as a general liaison officer for the councils of the United Church; and
- m) performing other duties as assigned by the General Council.

D.4.2.4 Acting General Secretary

If the General Secretary dies, resigns, is removed, or cannot serve for any other reason for an extended period of time, the Executive of the General Council is responsible for appointing an acting General Secretary for the period required.

D.4.3 Officers

The General Council or its executive is responsible for appointing General Council officers. It is also responsible for setting the number of General Council officers from time to time.

The General Council officers are responsible for

- a) acting for the General Secretary when required by the General Secretary on a short-term basis; and
- b) performing other duties as assigned by the General Council or the General Secretary.

D.4.4 Documents Signed by The United Church of Canada

The General Council is responsible for ensuring there is a corporate seal for The United Church of Canada. The following requirements apply to documents signed by The United Church of Canada under corporate seal:

- a) the document must be signed by two people;
- b) one of those people must be the Moderator, the General Secretary of the General Council, a General Council officer, or the executive officer, finance;
- c) that person must arrange for the corporate seal to be imprinted; and
- d) the other person must be the Moderator, the General Secretary of the General Council, a General Council officer, the executive officer, finance, or one of up to six people that the Executive of the General Council has appointed to sign documents.

D.4.5 Commissions of the General Council

D.4.5.1 Acting by Commission

The General Council may appoint one or more United Church members as a commission

- a) to take on a specific responsibility for the General Council; and
- b) to make decisions on behalf of the General Council.

D.4.5.2 Decision Is Non-debatable

A commission's decision is as effective as a decision of the General Council that appointed it. It is not debatable and there is no right of appeal from it.

D.4.5.3 Reporting

A commission is responsible for reporting its decisions to the General Council. The decisions must be included in the minutes of the General Council.

D.4.6 Committees and Other Bodies of the General Council

D.4.6.1 General

The General Council may fulfill its responsibilities with the help of committees, task groups, steering groups, teams, and other bodies as determined by the General Council.

There is a policy for recruiting and appointing the membership of committees. See the Governance Handbook available from the General Council Office.



D.4.6.2 Mandatory Committee Responsibilities

The General Council must have committees to fulfill the responsibilities set out in this section (D.4.6.2) or provide for this work to be done in some other way.

There is a policy for the membership, detailed responsibilities, and procedures for each of these committees or other bodies. See the Governance Handbook available from the General Council Office.



- a. **Archives and History Committee:** The Archives and History Committee is responsible for coordinating and promoting archival and historical activity for the United Church.
- b. **Audit Committee:** The Audit Committee is responsible for
 - i) overseeing the United Church’s financial reporting, control, and audit functions; and
 - ii) overseeing the United Church’s pension plan on behalf of the pension board.
- c. **Judicial Committee:** The Judicial Committee is responsible for dealing with all appeals to the General Council of
 - i) decisions of formal hearings held by a community of faith or regional council;

The term “formal hearing” is defined in Oversight, Conflict Resolution, and Discipline J.12.1.



- ii) other decisions of regional councils;
- iii) decisions of the Executive of the General Council
- iv) decisions of the Board of Vocation; and
- v) rulings of the General Secretary of the General Council.

There are rules on the kinds of decisions that may be appealed. See Oversight, Conflict Resolution and Discipline J.10 for more information on appeals and the Judicial Committee.



- d. **Manual Committee:** The Manual Committee is responsible for assisting the General Secretary with
 - i) preparing *The Manual*; and
 - ii) conducting remits.
- e. **Nominations Committee:** The Nominations Committee is responsible for recommending people for appointment to the Executive of the General Council, Office of Vocation, committees, boards, or task groups, or United Church representatives to other bodies, as requested by the General Council, its executive, or the General Secretary of the General Council.
- f. **Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee:** The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee is responsible for helping the church in expressing
 - i) its longing for God;
 - ii) its theological identity; and
 - iii) its commitment to whole world ecumenism.

D.5 Executive of the General Council

D.5.1 General

The Executive of the General Council is the decision-making body for the United Church between meetings of the General Council, living into covenantal

relationship and mutually accountable with the General Council, regional councils, and communities of faith.

D.5.2 Membership of the Executive of the General Council

D.5.2.1 Membership

The Executive of the General Council consists of the following 18 members:

- a) the Moderator;
- b) the immediate past Moderator;
- c) the General Secretary of the General Council; and
- d) 15 members of the United Church elected by the General Council.

At least 50 per cent of the members of the Executive of the General Council must be members of the United Church Pension Plan.

This is a legal requirement for the United Church Pension Plan.



D.5.2.2 Term

The 15 elected members of the Executive of the General Council will each serve for a term of approximately six years, as follows:

- a) beginning when they are elected at a regular in-person meeting of the General Council;
- b) ending when new members are elected to replace them at the second regular in-person meeting of the General Council after the one at which they were elected; and
- c) with the terms staggered so that every three years, approximately half of the elected members will have completed their terms.

D.5.2.3 Vacancies

The Executive of the General Council may fill any vacancies in its membership pending the next regular meeting of the General Council. A member elected to fill a vacancy on the Executive of the General Council will serve for the balance of the term of the vacating member.

D.5.3 Responsibilities of the Executive of the General Council

D.5.3.1 General

The Executive of the General Council has the following general responsibilities and powers.

- a. **Unfinished business:** dealing with all unfinished business and other matters referred to it by the General Council;
- b. **Routine and emergency:** dealing with all routine and emergency work of the General Council between meetings of the General Council;
- c. **Committees:** establishing standing and other committees; and
- d. **Additional authority:** exercising additional authority of the General Council as set out in sections D.5.3.2 to D.5.3.9 below, subject to any limitations set by the General Council.

D.5.3.2 General Council

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for the following:

- a) initiating or passing on any proposals to the General Council for action by the General Council that the executive considers necessary or advisable;

There is a policy for the form and content of proposals to the General Council. It is available from the General Council Office prior to each regular meeting of the General Council.



- b) making recommendations to the General Council;
- c) consulting with the church and then referring to the General Council any denomination-shaping or faith-shaping issue that arises for the executive;
- d) reporting its actions to the General Council;
- e) ensuring that the decisions and recommendations of the General Council are carried out, or explaining why they were not carried out;
- f) communicating its decisions to all members of the General Council and all councils;
- g) calling special meetings of the General Council;
- h) overseeing remits; and

The Executive of the General Council oversees remits authorized by the General Council. The executive may not authorize a remit itself. See Initiating Action and Change F.2 for more information.



- i) approving changes to *The Manual* to
 - i) implement General Council decisions; or
 - ii) improve the wording or organization of *The Manual* where it is redundant, ambiguous, or unclear.

D.5.3.3 Committees

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for

- a) appointing an Advisory Committee for the Moderator;
- b) appointing a General Secretary's Supervision Committee; and
- c) receiving and reviewing reports at least annually from the committees established by the General Council or its executive.

D.5.3.4 General Council Office

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for

- a) ensuring there is a General Council Office to carry out the ongoing work of the General Council;
- b) deciding on the organization of the General Council Office;
- c) setting human resource policies for General Council and regional council staff;
- d) appointing General Council officers, executive ministers or officers, and regional council executive ministers or speaker; and

There are processes for recruiting and appointing regional council executive ministers or speaker, General Council officers, and executive ministers or officers. See the Human Resources Policy Manual available from the General Council Office.



- e) deciding on the office accommodation of the General Council Office.

D.5.3.6 Theological Schools Related to the United Church

The Executive of the General Council has the following responsibilities for theological schools related to the United Church:

- a) making decisions on proposed incorporations, charter amendments, or dissolutions of schools;
- b) making decisions on setting up or discontinuing academic chairs in the schools, and making or terminating academic chair appointments;
- c) consulting with governing boards of schools about the appointment of principals;
- d) appointing principals and faculty members;
- e) making appointments to the governing boards of schools; and
- f) appointing an advisory committee on educational matters to help it meet these responsibilities for the schools.

It must follow the school's charter and any agreement between the United Church and the school in fulfilling these responsibilities.

D.5.3.7 Pension Plan and Group Insurance

The Executive of the General Council is the legal administrator of the pension plan. It is responsible for

- a) appointing the pension board for the pension plan;
- b) amending the constitution of the pension plan based on the recommendation of the pension board; and
- c) amending the group insurance plan contract based on the recommendation of the appropriate permanent committee.

D.5.3.8 Financial and Property Matters

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for

- a) making a decision on the annual budget of the United Church;
- b) supervising the unified plan of finance, the Mission & Service fund, and all other funds for the mission of the United Church;

There is a policy for the unified plan of finance and a procedure for funding the work of the United Church through the Mission & Service fund. See the Unified Plan of Finance: Mission & Service Fund resource available from the General Council Office.



- c) approving loans and overdrafts on the United Church's bank accounts;
- d) making a decision on any proposal to seek funds from the communities of faith of more than one regional council for any purpose other than the Mission & Service fund; and

- e) approving sales and mortgages of United Church property that is administered by the General Council Office. The Executive of the General Council may set policy for the General Secretary to give these approvals.

D.5.3.9 Associate Member Agreements

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for setting policies for

- a) associate member agreements between the United Church and a congregation or other ministry in Canada that is part of another denomination outside of Canada; and
- b) recognition of people serving in formal ministry leadership in congregations or other ministries of other denominations under associate membership agreements with the United Church.

D.5.4 Meetings of the Executive of the General Council

The Executive of the General Council may meet only if at least 1/3 of its members or more are present.

Corresponding members are not counted for this purpose.

D.5.5 Organization of the Executive of the General Council

D.5.5.1 Committees and Other Bodies of the Executive of the General Council

The Executive of the General Council may fulfill its responsibilities with the help of committees, task groups, steering groups, teams, and other bodies as determined by the executive.

There is a policy for recruiting and appointing the membership of committees of the Executive of the General Council. See the Governance Handbook available from the General Council Office.



D.5.5.2 Commissions

The Executive of the General Council may appoint one or more United Church members as a commission

- a) to take on a specific responsibility for the Executive of the General Council; and
- b) to make decisions on behalf of the Executive of the General Council.

A commission's decision is as effective as the decision of the Executive of the General Council that appointed it. It is not debatable.

The same right of appeal is available for a commission's decision as for a decision made by the Executive of the General Council itself. See Oversight, Conflict Resolution, and Discipline J.10.



A commission is responsible for reporting its decisions to the Executive of the General Council. The decisions must be included in the minutes of the executive.

D.6 Sub-Executive of the General Council

D.6.1 Requirement

The Executive of the General Council is responsible for having a sub-executive to do the continuing work of the executive between regular meetings.

D.6.2 Membership

The Sub-Executive of the General Council consists of

- a) the Moderator;
- b) the General Secretary of the General Council; and
- c) three members of the Executive of the General Council, as elected by the executive.

D.6.3 Responsibilities

The sub-executive has the following responsibilities:

- a) making decisions on financial or administrative matter on behalf of the Executive of the General Council where the matter involves assets or expense of less than two million dollars, subject to the authority of the Executive of the General Council to decide the matter itself; and
- b) such other responsibilities as may be assigned to it by the General Council or its executive.

D.6.4 Meetings

D.6.4.1 Meeting and Alternative Decision-Making

The sub-executive may make decisions under paragraph D.6.3 a) above at meetings or by signing written resolutions as an alternative to holding meetings, as long as the resolutions are signed by all members of the sub-executive.

D.6.4.2 Reporting

The sub-executive is responsible for reporting its actions to the Executive of the General Council for information and for inclusion in the minutes of the executive.

D.6.4.3 Quorum

The sub-executive may meet only if at least 1/3 of its members are present. Corresponding members are not counted for this purpose.