

CONSULTATION REPORT ON EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND HEALTHY PASTORAL RELATIONS (MARCH 2012)

Key Findings (from the Survey Monkey and staff resourced consultations)

1. Defined Implementation Plan

While there is an overall agreement with the broad principles outlined in the report, there is a high frequency of questions regarding a defined implementation plan and an overall lack of clarity about the intended changes for pastoral charges and presbyteries.

2. Financial Considerations

There is significant feedback around funding and the reallocation of existing resources. Many respondents agreed that they would support the proposed changes if the funding arrangements did not come at the expense of increased financial hardship for pastoral charges or the elimination of regional staff supporting mission.

3. Simplification of Processes and Procedures

Many respondents identified that congregations and presbyteries are ill equipped to manage the increasing demands of pastoral relations and oversight and discipline responsibilities. There is an overall agreement that the simplification of these complex procedures and the support of a staff person would allow the freeing of volunteer resources for presbyteries and would enhance ministry and mission priorities for pastoral changes

4. Division of Responsibility amongst the Courts

There is a lack of understanding with how the Conference would be responsible for the oversight and discipline process and pastoral relations processes. It was felt that the original report did not adequately clarify the proposed role of presbytery and how the staff person would be accountable in resourcing the courts.

Because of this lack of clarity there is concern for the centralization of power in this staff position, and how this staff position would adequately relate to ministry personnel in large geographic areas or regional contexts.

5. Regional Adaptations

Ministry personnel identified that they would show increased support for the proposed changes if flexibility were given to Conferences to adapt the model to suit specific regional difference and needs. This feedback was consistent with face-to-face consultations with Conferences and presbyteries.

Some respondents acknowledged that the report did not offer sufficient latitude and recognition for presbyteries which modelled effective practices.

6. Professional Staff

There is general disagreement about the proposed ratio of one staff member to seventy-five ministry personnel and the qualifications needed by this staff position to effectively resource programs.

However, there is large and consistent support for trained accountable staff members responsible for this work and resourcing ministry personnel.

Background

In November 2011, the Executive of General Council received from the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services the report “Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships: A proposal for the initiation, support, accountability, and conclusion of paid accountable ministries in The United Church in Canada.” The Executive directed the General Secretary to initiate consultation with the wider church on the wisdom and viability for some or all of the proposed model and, based on the outcomes of the consultation, to develop options for possible implementation for report at the March 2012 meeting of the Executive of General Council.

This was the fourth round of consultation in the development of these proposals. The first was in the summer and fall of 2010. The second was a major research project which surveyed 1,700 ministry personnel and leaders of pastoral relations and oversight committees in winter 2011. The third was a focus group to test the conclusions of that research project.

Following the meeting of the Executive of General Council, the General Council Office staff developed a Survey Monkey and resource package as a vehicle for this round of consultation. An invitation for church members to respond to the Survey Monkey was repeatedly posted on The United Church of Canada website and email invitations were sent to all Conferences and presbyteries. Also, Conferences and presbyteries were presented with the opportunity to invite General Council Office staff to resource these consultations.

To substantiate the feedback and narrative responses received through the Survey Monkey, commentary from consultations and focus group sessions were used. The feedback received from this round of consultation has provided additional detail to the results of the Survey Monkey. Furthermore, this has provided an opportunity to collect feedback from Conferences where survey participation was low.

Staff resourced consultations were held with all Conferences and some presbyteries. The exception to this is Saskatchewan Conference which convene and resourced its own consultation. In this round of consultation, a slide show presentation was developed to encourage small group conversation and focus group questions. At the time of writing this report, 17 consultations were resourced by staff

- Hamilton Conference Executive
- Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference Executive
- Manitou Conference Executive
- North Bay Presbytery
- Bay of Quinte Conference
- Montreal Presbytery
- Ottawa Presbytery
- Conference Executive Secretaries
- Conference Personnel Ministers

- Maritime Conference
- Yellowhead Presbytery
- Toronto Conference
- Vancouver School of Theology
- British Columbia Conference
- All-Native Circle Conference Staff
- Newfoundland and Labrador Conference
- Huron Perth Presbytery

Over 400 lay leaders and ministry personnel participated in these consultations. Plenary presentation, small group discussion, pro and con debates, and written comments were features. In addition, many pastoral charges and presbyteries held their own consultations using the resource package developed by the General Council Office staff. And nearly 800 people participated in the Survey Monkey.

Analysis

Distribution of Responses

When assessing the feedback of the Survey Monkey, respondents are in overall agreement with the recommendations outlined in the “Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationship” report. There is strong consensus and support for the following recommendations of the proposed model:

- the separation of oversight and discipline responsibilities for ministry personnel;
- its emphasis on collegiality;
- an increased focus on mission and ministry at the level of pastoral charges and presbytery;
- transition from volunteers to paid, accountable staff support and;
- additional professional support for pastoral relations processes.

Questions and polls included in the Survey Monkey were developed to estimate the overall support for the proposed model and the specific reasons for objections that would assist with revising the proposed model or inform possible funding and implementation strategies.

Specific questions were included to identify the challenges experienced by ministry personnel and lay volunteers with the current pastoral relations model and determine how these procedures and policies could be improved.

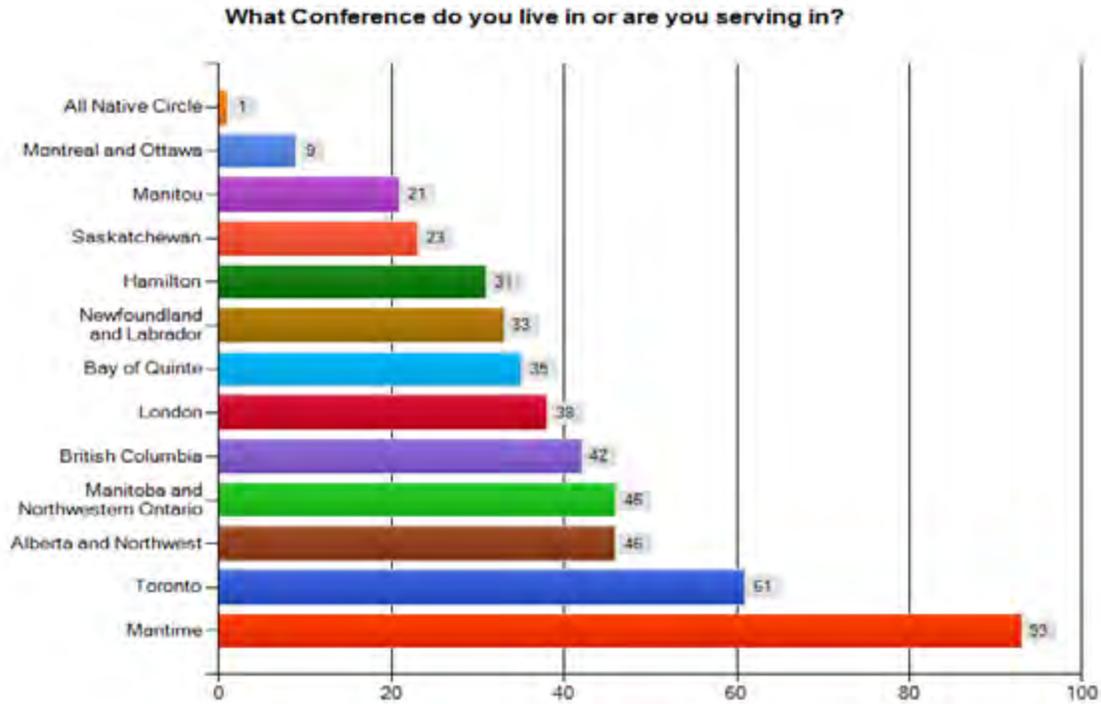
Respondents were provided with several questions to provide narrative responses. When evaluating these more than 1,300 narrative responses, it is clear that the Survey Monkey provided a useful tool for collecting substantive feedback on the proposed model, a contextual basis for implementation strategies, and insight into how the proposed model would be exercised in a local context or pastoral charge.

The distribution of responses to the proposed model can be outlined in four broad categories:

- Category A: In agreement with the proposed model and/or having minor reservation
- Category B: In some objection to the proposed model

- Category C: In objection to the proposed model
- Category D: No opinion on the proposed model.

These categories were repeatedly used to assess overall support and objection with the proposed model and its specific recommendations.



Survey Resources

At the beginning of the Survey Monkey, respondents were given an opportunity to review the “Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationship” report and a slide show presentation on the proposed changes. Over 67.1% of the total respondents reviewed these documents before completing the survey.

Survey Participation

At the time of writing this report, the Survey Monkey had received 772 respondents, 367 full completed surveys, and an excess of 1,300 narrative responses on the proposed model and its changes. Respondents to the Survey Monkey were primarily ministry personnel and lay volunteers currently active with congregational councils, boards, sessions and presbytery.

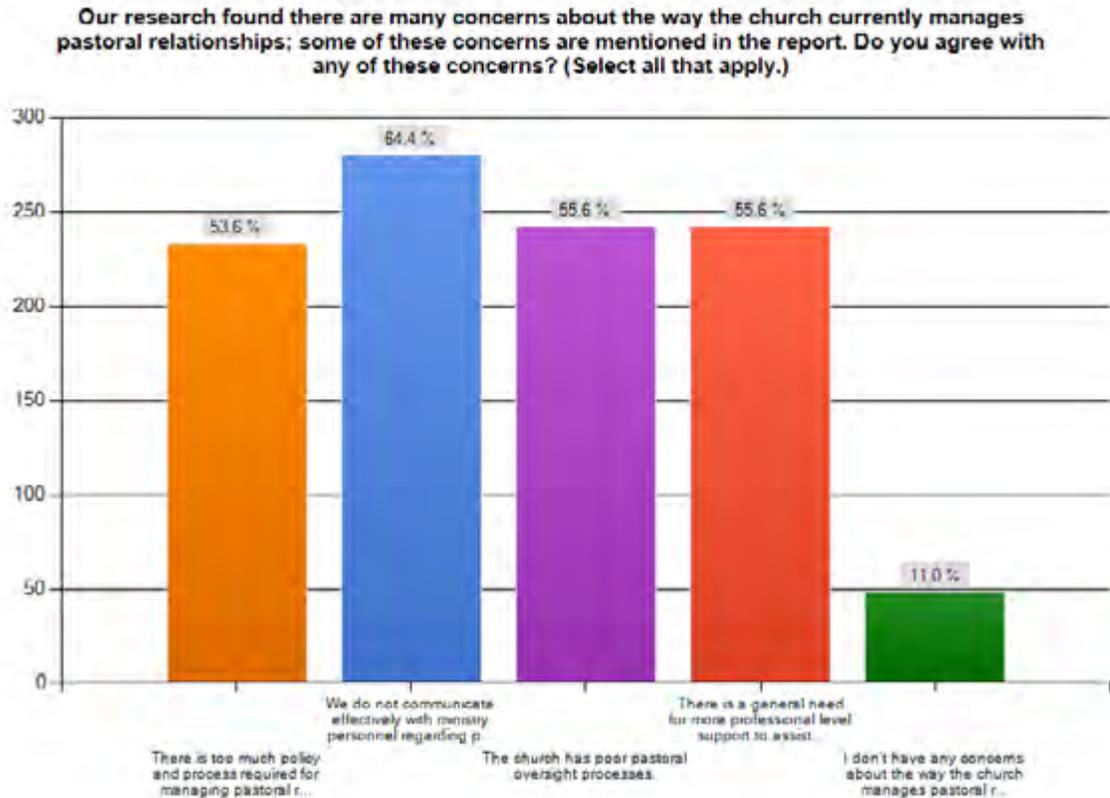
The distribution of responses by Conference is:

Current Pastoral Relations Model

Respondents were asked to indicate agreement with and provide commentary on current concerns with how the Church manages pastoral relationships and pastoral relations processes. From the following concerns, respondents were allowed to select all that applied:

- Ministry personnel do not communicate effectively with ministry personnel (64.4%)

- Poor oversight processes (55.6%)
- More professional level support to assist pastoral charges (55.6%)
- Too much policy and process required for managing pastoral relations (53.6%)
- I don't have any concern about current pastoral relations processes (11%)



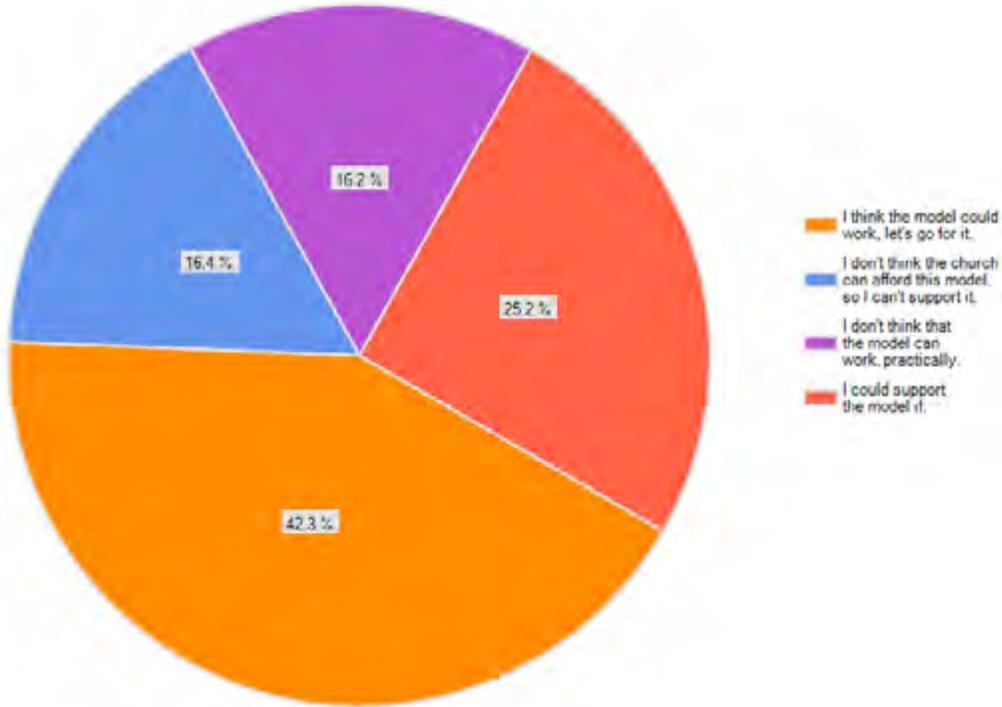
Respondents were provided with the opportunity to offer narrative feedback on their specific concerns not included in the survey options. From these responses, several concerns highlighted the need for staff support with knowledge of employment standards, how the current model drained excessive amounts of volunteer time and energy, current processes are cumbersome and redundant, and how policies are too time consuming and prohibitive for small presbyteries.

Support for Proposed Model

At various stages of the Survey Monkey, respondents were asked to rate their support or disagreement with the proposed model. The distribution of responses to this question are:

- 73.2% strongly agree or somewhat agree with the proposed changes (Category A)
- 15.6% somewhat object with the proposed model (Category B)
- 14.5% strongly object with the proposed changes (Category C)
- 1.7% do not have an opinion on the proposed changes (Category D)

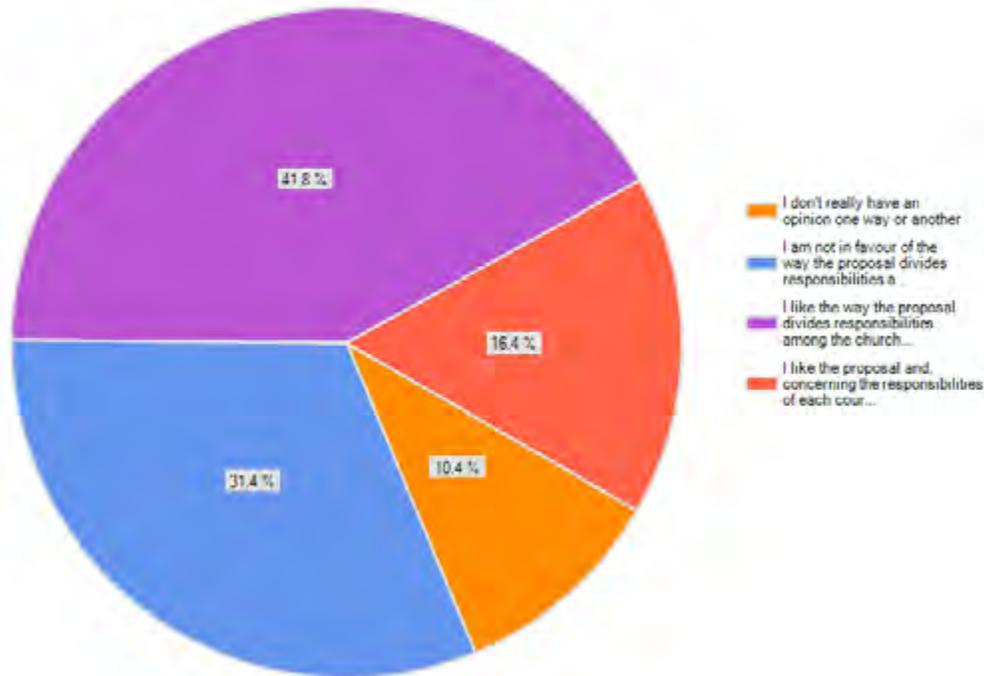
Based on its description, do you think the proposed model would be practical?



After registering narrative responses on the practical aspects of the proposed model and concerns with specific recommendations, there was an increase in support when respondents were asked if the proposed pastoral relations model would be practical or effective in addressing issues with current model.

- 67.4% agreed that the proposed model could work or could support the proposed model if minor changes were made.
- 16.4% agreed that the Church could not afford this model
- 16.2% agreed that the proposed model could not work practically

At the broadest level, what is your reaction to the division of responsibilities described in the summary above?



Of the respondents that submitted narrative responses to this question, many celebrated how this model would create more effective pastoral relations processes, provide additional staff resources deployed to presbytery, and free volunteer time for mission and ministry focussed work.

Concerns with Proposed Model

The primary issue that respondents had with the proposed model was the funding proposal for new staff positions and the possible funding implications that this would have for pastoral charges and presbyteries. While respondents did acknowledge that new staff positions would be a valuable support to pastoral relations processes and free volunteer time and energy, there was clear concern that the report had inadequately considered the financial cost of these positions, the ratio of one staff resource to seventy-five pastoral charges, as well as the time and demand of pastoral relations work.

Additionally, there were concerns with the implementation plans of the proposed model, accountability for new staff position, the perceived loss of episcopal power of presbytery and the centralization of pastoral relations and oversight and discipline responsibilities at the court of Conference.

Conclusions

While a few participants in the in-person consultations felt strongly that the current pastoral relations practices are sound and sustainable, most felt that they are not, that significant change is necessary, and that greater staff resourcing is required. That said, and said clearly, there is also reluctance to engage more change and to incur new financial costs.

It was interesting to hear students at the Vancouver School of Theology reflect on the proposed model. They spent little time critiquing the current model or the detail of the proposed model. Instead their focus was on the opportunities that could be gained for presbyteries to become forums of collegiality and support and to be places of vital conversation about mission and ministry. They were excited at how presbytery's vital engagement with pastoral charges would invigorate and animate pastoral charges in their mission and ministry.

Leaders of intercultural and racialized ministries spoke about the valuable support trained staff would be in assisting their congregations to establish themselves in the United Church and to support their ministry personnel leadership.

Cautions raised were that in the interests of securing efficiencies in our pastoral relations practices we not compromise the relational quality of pastoral relations. Clearly if adopted, care will have to be taken to design processes and procedures that continue to draw upon the wisdom of the local ministries and of the presbyteries and staff would need to be well ensconced in the ethos and spirit of the United Church. Cautions were also frequently raised that funding for this model not come at the expense of resources for public witness and mission animation.

Others spoke about the need for there to be considerable latitude for adaptation of relational and discernment processes and prescriptive policy for formal and disciplinary processes.

There is a desire that if substantial change is approved by the General Council, that it be implemented in stages, with extensive consultation with the Conferences, and in ways that allow for continuous review and revision.

Detailed accounts of the consultations and of the Survey Monkey results and comments are available. Feedback that is received between the preparation of this report and the meeting of the Executive of the General Council will be accounted for at the time of the meeting.