

**RESOURCE ON THE ISOLATION IN MINISTRY PROJECT  
(2011, 2005)**

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## **REPORT ON ISOLATION IN MINISTRY**

### **Introduction**

The Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services the Executive of the General Council presents this interim report on Isolation in Ministry for information. Comments and suggestions from the Executive will inform the final report and recommendations. The final recommendations of the report will also take into consideration information acquired through collaboration with other task groups working on related issues.

There is a certain excitement and enthusiasm that drives the work of those who genuinely believe that what they are doing has the potential to change lives for the better. Such has been the case for the Working Group (of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services) on Isolation in Ministry. Effectively addressing the various issues of isolation in ministry requires more than “tinkering”. A number of intentional steps need to be taken, as The United Church of Canada continues to be called to invest in policies and programs which will enhance the health, vitality, and spirituality of this vitally important leadership resource – its ministry personnel.

It is often difficult to express excitement and enthusiasm in a written report. Yet, that is what this report attempts to do. It has been written with a passion and directness that, it is hoped, reflect those emotions of the Working Group, its predecessor, the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group, and the Permanent Committee that brings this report to the Executive of the General Council.

In accordance with its mandate, the Working Group examined the work of its predecessor, the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group. The results of the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel were studied intensely. The Group consulted with representatives of groups that bring a particular perspective to ministry within the United Church (i.e. Ministères en français/Ministries in French, Aboriginal Ministries, Affirm United). They brought to the Working Group insights concerning the well-being of ministry personnel in specific contexts. Focus group meetings with ministry personnel were undertaken and their input was carefully analyzed. Efforts were made to identify all isolation-related initiatives implemented since Isolation In Ministry first appeared on the agenda.

The Working Group recognizes the Church’s need to be vigilant about caring for its ordained and commissioned members of the Order of Ministry and for those who have been designated as its lay ministers. This need is ongoing. The Working Group also acknowledges a sense of urgency to this work, because the health and well-being of our ministry personnel will continue to be at risk if the ongoing issues of isolation are not effectively addressed. Where ministry personnel are at risk or compromised, congregations and their ministries are put at risk and compromised. This report reflects the Working Group’s commitment to the vitality of our ministry personnel and to the vitality of The United Church of Canada.

The work of addressing isolation in ministry has come from the General Council to the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services. The Working Group is pleased to present this report to the Permanent Committee; it is the Permanent Committee’s work to own. The Working Group recommends to the Permanent Committee both the acceptance of this report and the implementation of its recommendations.

### **Theological Reflection**

*“In the church, some are called to specific ministries of leadership.... To embody God’s love in the world, the work of the church requires the ministry of all....”*

– from A Song Of Faith – A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada

We are a people of covenant. When church communities invite members to respond to a call of leadership, we enter into covenant. Ministry personnel participate in a particular covenant with the whole church. We believe a covenant to be a sacred agreement before God, bonding all parties together and acknowledging mutual support.

We are a people who believe that the grace of God is close at hand. It is within this grace that we witness a broken covenant when promises made before God and with each other go unmet. It is also in grace that we acknowledge broken relationships and provide support for all parties in their work of maintaining, as well as healing, sacred relationships. Spiritual and vocational support in the form of policies, programs and practices which uphold the roles and responsibilities of ministry personnel and their families is a way the United Church of Canada can live out the grace of God.

*“Grateful for God’s loving action, we cannot keep from singing. Creating and seeking relationship, in awe and trust, we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love.”*

### **Summary of Draft Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations which the Working Group on Isolation In Ministry believes will support ministry personnel as leaders of the church and enable a system within which the importance of ministry personnel in the ongoing life of the United Church of Canada will be recognized as crucial to the well-being of the church.

#### ***Of Highest Priority – A Ministry to our Ministry Personnel and their Families***

It is recommended that The United Church of Canada provide a nationally administered program that will equip the church with paid ministers whose sole function is to deliver pastoral care and vocational support to ministry personnel and their families.

#### ***Of High Priority – An Effective Communications Strategy***

It is recommended that The United Church of Canada institute a national communications policy which would ensure the provision of appropriate communication technology to its ministry personnel to provide them with networking capabilities.

#### ***Of High Priority – Institute a Program to assist in the Creation and Sustaining of Faithful, Healthy Pastoral Relationships***

The Working Group on Isolation in Ministry recommends the establishment and implementation of a standardized program to assist presbyteries/districts, ministry personnel, and pastoral charges, missions, or outreach ministries to work co-operatively to create and sustain faithful, healthy pastoral relationships.

***Of High Priority – Establish and Nurture Collegial, Supportive Relationships within the Vocation:***

The Working Group on Isolation In Ministry recommends the establishment of programs and funding which promote collegial, supportive relationships among ministry personnel, based on their call to a common vocation.

***Of Importance***

- Institute a national policy to resource adequately the educational programs of the denomination in order to ensure that ministry personnel receive educational support from discernment to retirement, thereby continuing to affirm the principle of an educated ministry.
- Institute the policy of clearly defining the roles and relationships of paid accountable leaders within the governance and employment structure of The United Church of Canada, with clear lines of accountability and authority.

**Background and Mandate**

The following are key events in the background work on Isolation in Ministry:

- In 1998, The United Church of Canada contracted with Warren Shepell to provide an Employee Assistance Program, available to its employees, ministry personnel, and their family members
- One year later, EAP Counsellors reported that ministry personnel were experiencing unique stresses, which ministry personnel themselves termed “isolation”
- A resolution was brought before the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2000 requesting an investigation of the issue of Isolation in Ministry.
- A series of focus groups and interviews followed that resolution.
- A report on the findings was brought to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2003.
- A Steering Group was established by the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (the Permanent Committee) to study the issue and bring forward recommendations.
- In 2005, ministry personnel were surveyed on the topic of Isolation in Ministry.
- The findings and eight recommendations from those findings were brought to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2006. The report was received for information and the report’s proposed actions were referred to the Executive of the General Council (the Executive) for consideration. The eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group can be found in Appendix A to this Report.
- In September of 2006, the interim Sub-Executive of the General Council referred the issues of GCE 1 (Isolation in Ministry) to the Permanent Committee.
- In June of 2007, the Executive’s presentation “Reflecting Priorities and Principles” included a clear statement: “Support those currently in Ministry so that they can provide the leadership the Church needs (isolation in ministry work).”
- In November of 2007, the Executive’s “Review for Disposition of ‘Simplifying Policies and Procedures Related to Pastoral Relations’ Report and Resolutions (38<sup>th</sup> General Council 2003) (MEPS 10)” identified “the ambiguity and conflict that can arise when ministry personnel find themselves in multiple roles of accountability, discipline, and pastoral care” and concluded that

this concern would be addressed with the implementation of the recommendations of the Isolation in Ministry Report.

- Staffing actions began for additional human resources in the General Council Office's Ministry and Employment Unit (then the Ministry and Employment Policies and Services Unit) in the autumn of 2007.
- The staff position of Program Coordinator, Ministry Personnel Leadership was put in place within the Human Resources Unit and, in May of 2008, work began specifically on the issues raised concerning Isolation in Ministry.
- In November of 2008, the Permanent Committee established a working group to address the policy issues on Isolation In Ministry.

***The Working Group is mandated to:***

- review the eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group
- identify how the eight recommendations of the Steering Group relate to existing policies, practices, and initiatives of The United Church of Canada
- set priorities for policy development from among the eight recommendations found in the report on Isolation in Ministry
- set priorities for addressing gaps between the existing policies and polity of The United Church of Canada and those recommended in the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council's GCE 1 report on Isolation in Ministry
- develop proposals, in accordance with the priorities set, for new policies and/or changes to the polity of The United Church of Canada that will enable the church to implement the recommendations found in the report on Isolation in Ministry
- seek feedback on those proposals throughout the church
- report on its activities and proposals to the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services throughout the life of the Working Group
- present its final report and recommendations to the Permanent Committee

***Members of the Working Group***

As a Working Group of the Permanent Committee, the members were drawn from the membership of the Permanent Committee. They are:

- Donna Bowman-Woodall
- Elizabeth Brown
- Harry Brown (Chairperson)
- Tracy Murton

***General Council Office Staff Supporting the Work of the Working Group***

- Gail Franklin, Admin. Support
- Angeline Musonza, Admin. Support
- Catherine O'Brien, Staff Resource
- Joe Ramsay, Staff Resource

***Guests***

A number of guests were invited to share their insights on the topic of Isolation In Ministry with the members of the working group. These guests included both staff members employed within

the General Council Office and non-staff members. The full list of persons who were interviewed by the working group is found in Appendix B.

### ***Focus Group Meetings with Ministry Personnel***

From February 2009 to May 2010, a series of focus group meetings were held with ministry personnel in 14 locations within six different Conferences. Some results of the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel and the eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group were presented to participants. They were then encouraged to identify their priorities from the recommendations and to brainstorm ideas as to how isolation issues should be addressed.

### ***Analysis of the Eight Recommendations of the Steering Group on Isolation In Ministry***

The Working Group reviewed the eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group by asking a series of questions concerning each recommendation:

- What led to this recommendation?
- Where does the responsibility currently lie?
- How does the recommendation relate to the priorities of the Executive of the General Council?
- Is there a current policy concerning this matter? If so, how is it working? Is it faithful? Does it contribute to isolation?
- Is there currently other work going on in this area?
- What is the role of the Working Group in relation to this recommendation?
- What actions might be taken or what programs and/or resources might be provided by The United Church (at some level) that would respond in part to this recommendation?
- If a few of these programs could be implemented or resources put in place, which are the top three priorities?
- What level(s) of the courts of The United Church should be responsible for taking these actions or delivering these programs and resources?
- Which constituency/constituencies among ministry personnel would be served by this?
- What are the current policies of the church which would have to be amended/rescinded to facilitate the taking of these actions or the provision of these programs/resources?
- What new policies would have to be put in place to facilitate the taking of these actions or the provision of these programs and resources?
- If these policy changes were made, which aspects of Isolation In Ministry would the changes most likely impact or address?
- What negative response(s) to a proposal to make such policy change(s) is/are anticipated? How might they be addressed and possibly overcome?
- Which proposed policies should be included in *The Manual*?
- To implement these policies, whose buy-in is necessary before this could be achieved? How should such buy-in be acquired?
- Which policy priorities are “low-hanging fruit” -- those which can be put in place quickly?
- What should be the time frame for implementation of the other policy priorities?
- What is the anticipated financial cost to The United Church to implement each of these policy changes?

The responses to these questions and the discussions arising from the analysis guided the Working Group in its identification of priorities among the original eight recommendations.

## **Details of the Recommendations**

### **A Ministry to our Ministry Personnel and their Families**

#### ***The Vision***

- The significant impact ministry personnel have had on those who enter the Order of Ministry within the United Church and those who serve as Designated Lay Ministers within the church is acknowledged and valued. Sometimes when one enters vocational ministry within the United Church an absence of that “ministerial” presence can develop. Having the Church address that absence and offer to those who have been called to vocational ministry the continuing presence of a minister is the goal.
- The intent is to provide United Church ministry personnel with vocational support and pastoral care by making available to them and their families the services of a pool of “chaplains”. The term “chaplains” is often used to identify members of ministry personnel who serve a group of people who are not organized as a mission or church and/or who are unable to attend religious services as congregants for various reasons. United Church ministry personnel serving in active ministries comprise such a group of people. Appendix C to this report sets out a more detailed vision of the role of these chaplains and the desired qualifications of their incumbents.
- These chaplaincy positions are distinct from the role of Conference Personnel Ministers. The former is a position of ministering (particularly in the areas of pastoral care and support), as one would serve those in a congregation, but to a geographically diverse “congregation” extending far beyond the parameters of a church building. The latter is a position of ministering to ministry personnel and pastoral charges within a specific Conference primarily on personnel matters. An inherent, internal conflict is perceived between these two differing roles. The understanding is that the Conference Personnel Ministers have a greater responsibility to the “institution” of the Church while the chaplains would have a greater responsibility to the ministry personnel cohort and would not participate in supervisory or evaluative processes involving other ministry personnel.
- Similarly, the proposed chaplaincy positions are not those of the “professional staff” who would do pastoral relations work as a result of the proposed move of some or all of the responsibility for human resources and pastoral relations work from presbyteries/districts to conferences (see “Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action”, p. 9). An inherent conflict is perceived in having one person serve as the authoritative source on pastoral relations matters on one hand and provide pastoral support and care on the other. The vision is that the professional staff carrying out pastoral relations work would have a greater responsibility to the “institution” of the Church while the chaplains would have a greater responsibility specifically to the ministry personnel cohort.

#### ***The Rationale***

- The 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel provides the following statistical findings:
  - 41.3% of those responding Disagreed with the statement, “I receive the level of support that I need within The United Church of Canada.”
  - 47% of those responding Disagreed with the statement, “I am receiving the amount of spiritual guidance that I need.”

- 56.6% of those responding Agreed with the statement, “There are few people that I can openly trust and confide in.”
- It is important to consider the impact of these statistics. There is a “ripple” effect which results in all ministry personnel being negatively affected by the malaise of some.
- Feedback received through a number of focus group meetings held in 2009-2010 supported “ministers to the ministers” as a key priority in addressing issues of isolation experienced by our ministry personnel.
- Feedback also identified the wish of ministry personnel to have an available pool of such ministers, rather than a single minister serving as their chaplain. The initial recommendation had envisioned there would be one minister to the ministry personnel at the presbytery/district level. However, the conclusion of the Working Group is that a regional pool of chaplains would address the ministry personnel’s needs and respond to their preference for a pool of available chaplains.

### ***The Urgency***

- Support to ministry personnel (both pastoral and vocational) is needed and has been needed for a number of years. Such support is consistent with the rationale behind the report, “Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action”, which states:

In order for the United Church to continue as a vital, living church, we need to address two urgent challenges: the nurturance and support of various aspects of the church during this time of transition, and the renewal of our leadership in order to identify and respond to new ministry opportunities. (p. 3)

- It is recommended that the chaplaincy program come into effect immediately across the whole church.
- The cost of not establishing such a program will be great: isolation issues will remain a major problem; stress, anxiety and depression will continue at levels above those of the general public (as was evidenced in the responses to the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel); and without adequate pastoral care and vocational support, the rates of denominational and vocational commitment may fall below those identified in the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel.
- This recommendation is founded on both the call for the renewal of the church’s leadership and the acknowledgement that support of United Church ministry personnel remains a priority for the church. Pastoral and vocational support is a program which the church must provide to its ministry personnel. The establishment and implementation of the chaplaincy program on an ongoing basis are considered absolutely essential.

### **An Effective Communications Strategy**

### ***The Vision***

- Various courts of The United Church of Canada have moved to a greater use of electronic means of communications. The Working Group on Isolation In Ministry recognizes that this has facilitated and expedited the pace of effective communications. Further the Working Group supports the broadening of this movement, best achieved by the development of a comprehensive communications policy applicable to all courts of the church, its various ministries, and its ministry personnel.
  
- It is recommended that the church provide all of its ministry personnel with their own “United Church of Canada” electronic mail address. If the format of such electronic mail addresses were uniform throughout the church, ministry personnel would be better able to communicate with their colleagues in the vocation. They would also be well equipped to maintain communications with distant family members and friends, which would be a source of strength and support for them. For security and confidentiality, it is recommended that these addresses be password secured and that each ministry personnel alone have access to her/his United Church electronic mail address.
  
- The Working Group envisions that, unless the required technology is not available in the geographic location of the ministry site, each ministry (pastoral charge, mission, or outreach ministry) be required to have its own electronic mail address, separate from that of its serving ministry personnel.
  
- The current requirement that the pastoral charge or other employing agency provide its serving ministry personnel with “a telephone” (see *The Manual, 2010*, subsection 036 (f)) is outdated and inadequate. A more appropriate communications strategy would be to establish that the pastoral charge or other employing agency must provide an annual communications technology allowance (available funds to reimburse expenses incurred, rather than to be received as income) which its ministry personnel would be able to use as best meets their individual ministry needs to acquire telephone (cellular or land line) services, internet services, computer hardware and software supplies, etc. The minimum amount of this technology allowance would be established annually by the appropriate working unit of the General Council Office.

### ***The Rationale***

- The results of the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel indicated that such a strategy is needed:
  - 43.7% of those responding Agreed with the statement, “I feel isolated or cut-off from my friends and family.”
  - 43.7% of those responding Agreed with the statement, “I often feel lonely.”
  - 44.3% of those responding Agreed with the statement, “I have difficulty building strong social networks in The United Church of Canada.”
  
- The recommendation to provide more effective communications to and among ministry personnel continues to be identified by ministry personnel as of high priority, based on the feedback from the focus groups of 2009-2010.

### ***The Urgency***

- The implementation of such a policy would reflect a wiser stewardship of earth's resources and would be consistent with the principles expressed in the report, "Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action". That report states:

A high priority would be given to using new technologies and social media to their full potential, recognizing that accommodations would be necessary because access to these technologies is not uniform in all parts of the country. A review of our print resources strategy would be conducted with a view to reducing the number of print resources produced. The number of in-person meetings would also be reduced. (from "Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action", p. 13, # 4)

- Such a strategy would also comply with the Report's statement, "There would be a renewed call to share and live our faith by using new communication and networking tools." (from "Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action", p. 13, # 9)
- The absence of such a communications strategy and a related communications policy results in the continuing reliance on print resources, which is a costly, time-consuming, and environmentally-irresponsible means of communication. It also does not foster effective communications between ministry personnel and the various courts of the church, nor between ministry personnel themselves.
- This initiative would respond to the need to have all ministry personnel receive information at the same time and in a timely fashion, which reduces the sense of isolation among ministry personnel – none would be excluded. It is also consistent with the current societal trend to fewer paper-based communications.

### **Institute a Program to assist in the Creation and Sustaining of Faithful, Healthy Pastoral Relationships**

#### ***The Vision***

- The Working Group envisions the creation and implementation of a program, similar to the Fresh Start program of the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Anglican Church of Canada, which would be tailored specifically to meet the needs of The United Church of Canada. This program would be implemented from the time a notice to end a pastoral relationship is received to a point 18-24 months after the next pastoral relationship is begun.

#### ***The Rationale***

- The results of the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel indicated that such a program is needed:
  - 53.7% of those responding Disagreed with the statement, "Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my role as a minister."
  - 31.2% of those responding Agreed with the statement, "People expect more from me than I am capable of giving."
  - In terms of "isolation" (physical/social exclusion, preventing access to opportunities, withholding of information), 27% of respondents indicated that they had experienced

such workplace bullying “Now and Then” and 15% indicated that they had experienced it “Once a Week or More” during the previous six months.

- In terms of “unrealistic workload” ( such as impossible tasks and deadlines, unnecessary interruptions), 33% of respondents indicated that they had experienced this form of workplace bullying “Now and Then” and 25% indicated that they had experienced it “Once a Week or More” during the previous six months.
- Feedback received through focus group meetings in 2009-2010 supported ministry personnel’s view that the establishment of healthy pastoral relationships remains a priority to address issues of isolation.

### ***The Urgency***

- The implementation of such a program would reflect a move to greater emphasis on identity, connection, and support, which would be consistent with the principles expressed in the report, “Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action”.
- The Church’s current means of establishing and supporting pastoral relationships is inadequate. What is needed is a proactive program through which the three parties can work to ground the pastoral relationship on mutual understanding and co-operation. The result will be the creation of a healthy pastoral relationship from its infancy. Thus, there is a more reasonable expectation of the ongoing commitment on the part of the three parties to sustain, nurture, and support that relationship. It is hoped that this initiative would be supported by, and involve the participation of, the proposed new pastoral relations staff at the Conference level.
- This is also a justice issue. The Church should commit to ensuring that all pastoral relationships are starting well together.

### **Establish and Nurture Collegial, Supportive Relationships within the Vocation**

#### ***The Vision***

- The current structures and programs of the church should be enhanced with a specific view to fostering collegial, supportive relationships between and among its ministry personnel. For example, the current oversight role (often seen as a non-supportive role) is generally considered an impediment to such relationships between and among ministry personnel; the right amendments to current oversight processes would reduce or remove that impediment. Its possible removal from the responsibilities of presbyteries/districts could result in those courts becoming a more collegial forum for ministry personnel.
- It is envisioned that through greater efforts to enhance these relationships, the church will raise up and better equip strong leadership. Some examples of this would be the expansion of current peer learning group opportunities, encouragement of informal mentoring/partners in ministry initiatives, expanding the Church Leadership Network, and expanding continuing education opportunities and funding, especially for those geographically isolated.
- The Working Group envisions the development of a more supportive and collegial “culture” among ministry personnel. The initiation of a more standardized approach to orientation

programs for ministry personnel transferring to another Conference or Presbytery/District would help achieve this vision. Such programs should exist and be offered in each Conference and Presbytery/District, so that resources are offered equitably across the church.

- Respect and recognition of those serving in the vocation of ministry is a key factor in supporting the relationships between ministry personnel and the courts of the church. The continuation of the program of recognition by the Moderator of key anniversaries (every five years) of the entry of ministry personnel into the Order of Ministry is strongly recommended. Expanding this initiative to include recognition of key anniversaries of Designated Lay Ministers, from the date of their recognition, is also recommended.
- The program of first year follow-up calls from the Ministry and Employment Unit's managers to those who have completed their first year of service since ordination, commissioning, admission, re-admission, or recognition and appointment should be continued.
- Funding must be established to support collegial gatherings for ministry personnel only, with funds managed by the Financial Assistance Committee and priority for the use of those funds given to those ministry personnel who are geographically isolated. Presbytery/district and Conference meetings involve more than just ministry personnel participating; other events held specifically to enhance collegiality and support among the church's ministry personnel are needed.
- The responsibility to offer initiatives which foster vocational collegiality and support should fall to the proposed chaplain referred to in the recommendation of highest priority.

### ***The Rationale***

- The results of the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel indicated that such initiatives are needed:
  - 24% of those responding Disagreed with the statement, "I have much in common with my colleagues."
  - 34.5% of those responding Agreed with the statement, "Few people seem to understand my issues and problems."
  - 20.1% of those responding Agreed with the statement, "I should always keep my problems to myself."
  - 16.5% of those responding Disagreed with the statement, "It is unlikely that I will look for a new vocation in the next year."
- Feedback from focus group meetings of ministry personnel held in 2009-2010 identified the need for greater collegiality and mutual respect and support among ministry personnel.

### ***The Urgency***

- The church continues to identify the need for strong ministry leadership. "Recruitment, development, and support of ministry personnel, with a particular focus on a diverse new generation of leadership, would be named as an important focus for the next decade." ("Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action", p. 11)

- Statistics indicate that one in every six ministry personnel is considering leaving the vocation of ministry; support and collegiality among those in the vocation is essential.

### **The Investment**

The members of the Working Group have been acutely aware throughout their work that there will be costs involved in making the recommended investments in policy and program changes to address isolation issues. While costs have been “in the picture”, calculating the financial costs to implement the recommendations is beyond both the mandate and the expertise of the Working Group. The Working Group has identified some cost considerations, which are set out in Appendix D. The Working Group proposes that those working within the General Council Office with expertise in the areas of cost projections and financing be asked to provide accurate cost estimates for implementing the recommendations of this Working Group.

### **Related Work of Other Groups**

Two of the original recommendations were considered to be of importance, but primarily within the mandate of other groups, and thus considered beyond the scope of the Working Group:

- Institute a national compensation system that recognizes education, years of service and special circumstances. (see the mandate of the Task Group on Ministry Compensation)
- Revise *The Manual* as necessary to accommodate the changes recommended by the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group. (see the mandate of the Simplification of Processes Project)

Some other recommendations fell within the Working Group’s mandate as well as the mandates of other groups. Specifically, the first, third and seventh original recommendations are very much related to the mandates of The Steering Group on Oversight and Discipline and of The Steering Group on Pastoral Relations Policy Review.

Harry Brown and Catherine O’Brien met with the Task Group on Ministry Compensation and the Steering Group on Oversight and Discipline to share background information with those groups and to invite them to consider the “lens” of Isolation In Ministry when carrying out their mandates.

### **What Has Been Done Since 2006**

While the Church has not made a direct investment in ministry personnel as a result of the Steering Group’s Report on Isolation In Ministry, that report has contributed to the work of the Church in two ways:

- by providing an empirical perspective on the morale of ministry personnel, which has helped to inform and to guide some initiatives that had already started: review of the discipline policy, continuing education funding, programs through the Centre for Clergy Care and Congregational Health (Starting Well, Take Care, Making the Most of Retirement), increased program staff available to ministers and church courts; and
- by giving impetus to, or helping to shape, new work that has emerged: the new admissions policy and procedures, the new transfer and settlement policy, the Church Leadership Network,

the "Circle of Support" program, financial support and minimum allowance for continuing education, and the Candidacy Pathways initiative.

The Focus Group meetings, invitations to which were sent to ministry personnel only, provided a new opportunity for ministry personnel in selected centres across the country to meet together to discuss issues of Isolation In Ministry. It also provided them with an opportunity to provide input to this Working Group of the Permanent Committee and, thus, to influence its work.

Over the past year, inserts in CONNEX have focused on the topic of Isolation In Ministry from a variety of approaches. Under the by-line, "From Isolation to Building Community in Ministry", these articles have invited feedback, which has been then transferred to the Working Group, further to direct its work.

In 2009, a new initiative was introduced to recognize the anniversaries of membership in the Order of Ministry. Letters of congratulations were sent out from the Moderator to those Ordained Ministers and Diaconal Ministers who were celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, ... or 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination, commissioning, or admission into the United Church's Order of Ministry. In 2010, the program was extended to recognize those celebrating their 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. This initiative grew out of issues concerning adequate "respect and recognition" being offered to the Church's ministry personnel.

In 2010 another initiative was introduced to connect with new ministry personnel. The Executive Officer, Human Resources and the Manager, Ministry Personnel Policies & Programs have communicated with all those who were ordained or commissioned into the Order of Ministry or recognized as a Designated Lay Minister in the previous year. The intent was to "touch base" and to provide a continuing awareness of the church's interest in them and their ministries.

The time has come for the introduction of major policy changes and program initiatives arising out of the original eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group and in response to the ongoing needs of our ministry personnel. The recommendations of this report reflect the major policy changes and program initiatives needed now.

### **Moving Forward**

The work must go on to address the issues of Isolation In Ministry currently facing those serving in vocational ministry within The United Church of Canada. There should be no end date to the church's efforts to address the various forms of isolation, alienation, burnout, anxiety, depression, and stress experienced from time to time by the church's ministry personnel. The well-being of our ministry personnel is key to their own personal health and strength and therefore to their ongoing capability to contribute to the health and strength of the church.

For this reason, the Working Group on Isolation In Ministry makes the recommendations set out earlier in this report and urges their acceptance and implementation. This will continue the church's work of providing vocational support, in the form of policies, programs and practices, which support the roles and responsibilities of its ministry personnel and will indeed reflect the way the United Church lives out the grace of God.

**Appendix A: The eight recommendations of the Isolation In Ministry Steering Group, presented to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2006:**

1. Initiate and fund programs that assist presbyteries, ministry personnel, and pastoral charges in the creation and sustaining of faithful, healthy pastoral relationships.
2. Provide a nationally administered program that will equip presbyteries with paid ministers whose sole function is to deliver pastoral care and vocational support to ministry personnel and their families.
3. Institute a national policy to provide programs and funding that promote collegial, supportive relationships among ministry personnel based on their call to a common vocation.
4. Institute a national policy to adequately resource the educational programs of the denomination in order to ensure that ministry personnel receive educational support from discernment to retirement thereby continuing to affirm the principle of an educated ministry.
5. Institute a national policy to provide appropriate communication technology in order to provide networking capabilities among all ministry personnel.
6. Institute a national compensation system that recognises education, years of service and special circumstances.
7. Institute the policy of clearly defining the roles and relationships of paid accountable leaders within the governance and employment structure of The United Church of Canada, with clear lines of accountability and authority.
8. Revise *The Manual* as necessary to accommodate these changes.

**Note**

Excerpt from the Record of Proceedings of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council, p. 779

**Motion: Jim Blanchard/David Boyd**

**GC 39 2006 - 179**

That the 39th General Council 2006:

1. Receive for information the “Isolation in Ministry” report.
2. Direct that the report inform the purpose statement(s) to be developed by this General Council.
3. Refer the “Proposed Actions for Isolation in Ministry” to the Executive of the General Council for consideration following the 39th General Council 2006.

**Carried**

**Appendix B: Guests of the Working Group on Isolation in Ministry**

The following persons met with the Working Group on Isolation in Ministry to assist the group in carrying out its mandate. The Working Group extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to these individuals for their valued contribution to this work.

Dan Benson, Executive Officer, Communications Unit  
Michael Blair, Executive Officer, Communities in Ministry  
Richard Cocksedge, Manager, Information Technology Services  
Ken DeLisle, on behalf of Affirm United  
Jason Ding, Programmer Analyst, Information Technology Services  
Sue Everton, (then) Conference Personnel Minister, All Native Circle Conference  
Steve Fetter, Coordinator, Continuing Education, Communities in Ministry  
David Giuliano, (then) Moderator, General Council  
Pierre Goldberger, (then) Executive Minister, Unité des ministères en français  
Alan Hall, Executive Officer, Ministry and Employment Unit  
Lesley Harrison, (then) Coordinator of Welcoming Ministries, Emerging Spirit  
Keith Howard, (then) Executive Director, Emerging Spirit  
Don Hunter, Chairperson, Permanent Committee on Finance  
Laverne Jacobs, (then) Coordinator, Aboriginal Ministries  
Susan Jones, Staff Resource, Financial Assistance Committee  
Bill Kennedy, Executive Officer, Finance Unit  
Alcris Limongi, Program Coordinator, Gender Justice, Racial Justice, & Sexual Minorities  
Mardi Tindal, Moderator, General Council  
Martha Watt, Communications Coordinator, Ministry and Employment Unit

## **Appendix C: Chaplain to Ministry Personnel**

### ***Nature of the Position –***

- this is a ministry position – ministering to a “congregation” comprised of those actively serving as ministry personnel in pastoral charges and to their families within a particularly defined geographic area

### ***Pastoral Care***

- the incumbent would, as a member of the chaplaincy team, be responsible for ongoing pastoral care for the ministry personnel and their family members within the geographic area being served
- the incumbent would be called on from time to time to visit the ministry personnel under her/his care and/or their family members
- the incumbent would encourage the ministry personnel and family members of the “congregation” to engage in intentional programs of self-care
- the incumbent would serve as a confidant to ministry personnel and their family members
- the incumbent would be knowledgeable of and encourage, as necessary, the use by ministry personnel of support mechanisms such as mentoring and spiritual direction

### ***Community Building***

- the incumbent would facilitate collegial gatherings (in person or electronically) for ministry personnel and family members of the “congregation”
- the incumbent would encourage the sense of vocational community among the ministry personnel he/she serves and would serve as an advisor to those ministry personnel on practice standards and ethical issues

### ***Worship Leadership***

- the incumbent would occasionally be expected to provide “worship leadership”, including preaching to this geographically diverse congregation by various means, including the use of technology such as through devotional video recordings and worship via video conferencing
- the incumbent could also be called upon occasionally by members of the “congregation” to officiate at special worship services: i.e. funerals, memorial services, weddings, sacraments -- specifically for the ministry personnel being served by the chaplain or their family members

### ***Christian Development***

- the incumbent would be expected to facilitate and occasionally present Christian development programs for the “congregation”, especially to help these ministry personnel continue in their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith throughout their active ministry
- the incumbent would also be involved in identifying and recommending to their congregational members courses/conferences/retreats/events which would assist the ministry personnel and family members being served in their own spiritual growth and development, as well as increase the ministry personnel’s knowledge and expertise as congregational leaders

***Outreach/Social Justice***

- the incumbent would work with the “congregation” to offer ministry personnel and their family members opportunities to live out their faith beyond the pastoral charges they serve through outreach and/or social justice initiatives

***Commitment to the Wider Church***

- the incumbent would be knowledgeable of the roles and responsibilities of the various courts of the United Church of Canada and would willingly share that knowledge with the “congregation”
- the incumbent would be knowledgeable of the policies and initiatives of The United Church of Canada and would willingly share that knowledge with the “congregation”
- the incumbent would remain an active member of the Presbytery/District in which she/he resides and of the Conference in which geographic area he/she resides

***Desired Qualifications (not in order of priority) –***

- member of the Order of Ministry of the United Church of Canada or a recognized Designated Lay Minister within the United Church of Canada
- a minimum of ten years’ experience in ministry, which has been acquired within a pastoral charge setting or as a chaplain or a combination of the two
- a deep faith and a commitment to live out that faith in service within the church
- excellent communication skills, including effective listening skills
- compassionate and empathetic
- effective leadership skills, especially in worship and Christian development leadership
- good judgement and confidence in decision making
- able to work effectively in team ministry
- strong organizational skills, including effective time management skills
- high level of ability to utilize up-to-date computer technology for distance communication
- community building and development capabilities
- sensitive to diversity within the “congregation”
- openness and welcoming of various theological expressions of the Christian faith
- tactful and discrete, with respect for others’ need for confidentiality
- excellent facilitation skills
- effective research skills
- supportive and willing to build strong relations with other ministry personnel
- ability to work effectively with persons of various ages and years of experience within the United Church of Canada
- enthusiastic
- ability and commitment to balance work responsibilities with the need for his/her own self-care

***Number of Positions in Each Ministerial Team –***

It is believed that a team of chaplains in each of six regions will provide a greater possibility of the chaplains being available to respond to the needs of the “congregation” and, if need be, will provide the members of the “congregation” with the opportunity to select a chaplain with whom they feel comfortable.

- NL and MAR Conferences (about 355) – minimum 2 positions, maximum 3 positions
- M&O and BOQ Conferences (about 355) – minimum 2 positions, maximum 3 positions
- TOR & MTU Conferences (about 315) – minimum 2 positions, maximum 3 positions
- HAM & LON Conferences (about 475) – minimum 3 positions, maximum 4 positions
- MNWO, SK, & ANCC Conferences (about 325) – minimum 2 positions, maximum 4 positions
- ANW & BC Conferences (about 430) – minimum 3 positions, maximum 4 positions

Total: Minimum 14 positions, maximum 20 positions

Each chaplain would be required to live within the geographic region in which she/he serves.

## **Appendix D: The Cost of the Investment**

### ***A Ministry to our Ministry Personnel and their Families***

- It is envisioned that the cost to implement this recommendation would include:
  - the salary and benefits costs of 14-20 full-time ministry personnel to serve as regionally-based chaplains
  - the cost of administrative support services for those chaplains
  - the cost of technical equipment and resources to support them in their ministries (i.e. computers, cellular phones, internet access, etc.)
  
- Initially establishing a pool of regional chaplains may appear to be very expensive. However, it is felt that, when viewed in relation to the amount of monetary resources spent on training and paying ministry personnel within the United Church, the cost of implementing this recommendation would be relatively inexpensive.
  
- The cost of not establishing such a program would be great: isolation issues will remain a major problem facing ministry personnel; stress, anxiety and depression will continue at levels above those experienced by the general public (as was evidenced in the responses to the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel); and without adequate pastoral care and vocational support, the rates of denominational and vocational commitment may fall even below those identified in the 2005 Survey of Ministry Personnel.

### ***An Effective Communications Strategy***

- The church would have to invest in additional technological resources, both human and infrastructure, to establish and support a wider-use electronic mail system with a larger number of available electronic mail addresses.
  
- The church would however save on its current communication costs through the reduction of reliance on the distribution of print resources to ministry personnel, pastoral charges, and other employing agencies.
  
- Pastoral Charges and other employing agencies would have the additional expense of establishing an annual technology allowance, to reimburse ministry personnel for the cost of their communications technology purchases. In addition, pastoral charges would have to assume the cost of printing downloaded information, if they wish to have a hard copy.

### ***Institute a Program to assist in the Creation and Sustaining of Faithful, Healthy Pastoral Relationships***

- Funding would be required to train facilitators to work with presbyteries/districts, ministry personnel, and pastoral charges, missions, or outreach ministries to implement the program. The additional cost of human resource time and training must also be factored in to this recommendation.
  
- In addition, there would be the added cost of General Council Office staff time to develop the program to suit the needs of The United Church.

- There would also be the added costs facing ministry personnel required to take part – in terms of both their time and travel expenses, particularly for those geographically isolated.

***Establish and Nurture Collegial, Supportive Relationships within the Vocation***

- Ongoing funding will be required to continue peer group learning events and other continuing education opportunities at which ministry personnel can participate together.
- Funding for collegial social gatherings is required. The extent of this funding would vary from presbytery/district to presbytery/district, depending on their geographic boundaries.
- Ongoing funding of the anniversary letters initiative is required.

## **Appendix E: Recommendations of the Task Group on Isolation In Ministry**

The eight recommendations of the Task Group on Isolation In Ministry

1. Initiate and fund programs that assist presbyteries, ministry personnel, and pastoral charges in the creation and sustaining of faithful, healthy pastoral relationships.
2. Provide a nationally administered program that will equip presbyteries with paid ministers whose sole function is to deliver pastoral care and vocational support to ministry personnel and their families.
3. Institute a national policy to provide programs and funding that promote collegial, supportive relationships among ministry personnel based on their call to a common vocation.
4. Institute a national policy to adequately resource the educational programs of the denomination in order to ensure that ministry personnel receive educational support from discernment to retirement thereby continuing to affirm the principle of an educated ministry.
5. Institute a national policy to provide appropriate communication technology in order to provide networking capabilities among all ministry personnel.
6. Institute a national compensation system that recognises education, years of service and special circumstances.
7. Institute the policy of clearly defining the roles and relationships of paid accountable leaders within the governance and employment structure of The United Church of Canada, with clear lines of accountability and authority.
8. Revise *The Manual* as necessary to accommodate these changes.

## ISOLATION IN MINISTRY STEERING GROUP RESEARCH FINDINGS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The Task:** The United Church of Canada became aware in 1998, through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that, when surveyed, counsellors reported significant feelings of isolation among Ministry Personnel. A resolution was presented to the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2000, resulting in a motion directing the Humans Resources Committee to identify ways to reduce the impact of isolation on individuals serving the church. The General Council contracted our EAP provider WarrenShepell to assist the United Church by conducting focus groups and interviews. The result was the establishment of a Steering Group following the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2003 to study the issue and bring forward recommendations. In the first phase of its work, the Steering Group observed that the term “isolation” seemed to refer to a variety of related but distinct experiences: institutional alienation, geographical distances, role-based alienation, theological differences, spiritual needs, social alienation, cultural differences and economic hardship. The continuing task would be to understand these various forms of isolation and recommend to the church an appropriate response.

**The Scope:** All United Church members are equal as participants in the ministry of Jesus Christ. However, the roles and responsibilities of members within and to the church are not the same. Some members are “set apart” to offices of responsibility and accountability. We designate positions that carry roles and functions that require particular gifts, skills and commitment. This report is concerned with that group of members that the church sets apart as its paid, accountable leaders and our covenantal obligation to equip Ministry Personnel for the roles and functions they are called to fulfill.

**The Process:** The Steering Group brought together a variety of experiences of both lay and ordered members of the church, studied previous reports, and conducted the most extensive survey of Ministry Personnel in the church’s history. The survey was administered for 4 broad reasons:

1. To assess **levels of isolation** among Ministry Personnel;
2. To assess **levels of psychological adjustment problems** among Ministry Personnel;
3. To assess a variety of **personal attributes** (social support, and coping styles) that may exacerbate or ‘buffer’ the negative impacts of isolation;
4. To assess the **criticality** of certain types of Ministry Personnel isolation by correlating them with adjustment problems.

**The Findings:** The most significant findings for the Isolation Steering group resulted from the survey of Ministry Personnel, which indicated some good news for the United Church. First of all, isolation levels are *generally* low. For example, almost 85% generally feel supported by others and more than 80% do not experience negative interactions with others. Second, Ministry Personnel commitment levels are generally high. For example, almost 75% ‘talk up’ their pastoral charges as great charges to serve, and over 90% are satisfied with their vocation as a minister. Third, the commitment to ministry as a vocation is relatively *impervious* to isolation factors. That is, although Ministry Personnel report feeling isolated, the sense of isolation does not seem to make much of an impact on their commitment to the vocation of ministry. And the

last piece of good news is that the *organizational* sources of isolation are *not* powerful drivers of stress, depression, anxiety, or aspects of burnout.

However, not all the news is good. For the segments of Ministry Personnel that *do* report higher isolation, the impact of that isolation on adjustment and commitment can be tragic for the individual minister and family members, and crippling and costly to the whole church. While the actual percentage of Ministry Personnel who report isolation and its negative effects may not seem particularly alarming, the impact of the experience of isolation is so devastating that the whole church is significantly affected. One of the reasons why this may be true is suggested by one of the survey findings: The experience of Ministry Personnel in *pastoral charges* has the greatest impact on isolation and adjustment. In other words, the pastoral relationship between Ministry Personnel and their pastoral charge (or ministry) has a very direct relationship with their levels of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. In addition, the survey provides evidence that *social alienation*, as a form of Ministry Personnel isolation, is one of the strongest and most consistent drivers of Ministry Personnel adjustment problems. Over 44% have difficulty building strong social networks in the United Church. Almost 44% often feel lonely. Nearly 60% feel that there are few people they can openly trust and confide in.

**The Recommendations:** The United Church of Canada must recommit at all levels to the covenant with Ministry Personnel serving Pastoral Charges and other ministries. Moreover, we must recognize the significance of the pastoral relationship to the health and well-being of Ministry Personnel, members of our congregations, and the effectiveness of our mission and ministry. The work of the Steering Group has shown that our greatest capacity to positively address stress, depression, and burnout among Ministry Personnel is by investing in healthy relationships between Ministry Personnel and the people with whom they minister. Steps must be taken to nurture and sustain the health of the pastoral relationship through changes in both attitude and program commitments. The study has also shown that social alienation is highly correlated to stress, depression, anxiety and burnout, and therefore any efforts by the church to decrease social alienation for ministers will make a positive difference. Fortunately, the skills and competencies needed to strengthen pastoral relationships and build social networks are cognitive, or teachable, and are already possessed by many people in ministry. As well, pastoral relationships can be strengthened through policy changes, and through programs at the congregation, or ministry, and Presbytery/District levels.

The Steering Committee recommends adaptive and programmatic changes through the following initiatives:

- Strengthen Pastoral Relationships
- Nurture Relationships Among Ministry Personnel
- Invest in Continuing Education
- Invest in Communication Technology
- Invest in Human Resources for Ministry Personnel
- Continue to Address Compensation Issues
- Continue to Support the Work Related to Learning Outcomes
- Address Institutional and Structural Sources of Isolation

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**The members of the Isolation in Ministry Steering Group:**

**David Boyd**, (Chair) Ordained, BC Conference

**Elizabeth Brown**, Ordained, ANW Conference

**Norm Graham**, Lay, HAM Conference

**Bob Gibson**, Ordained, LON Conference

**John McGonigle**, Diaconal, N&L Conference

**Nancy Wilson**, Ordained, MAR Conference

**Gordon Sonmor**, Lay, SK Conference

**John Thompson**, Ordained, ANC Conference

**Linda Thompson**, Lay, TOR Conference

**Staff Resource:** Joe Ramsay, Ministry Personnel Policies and Programs

Michael Burke, Executive Minister, Ministry & Employment Policies and Services

**Consultants:** Gerry Smith, Vice-president, Organizational Health, WarrenShepell

Paul Fairlie, WarrenShepell

Scott Fagan, WarrenShepell

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## **BACKGROUND**

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*Jesus Christ came into the world to be the servant of God and all people. As servant Lord, Jesus calls his Church to a ministry of worship, witness, and reconciliation. In baptism we were received as members of his Church and at confirmation we committed ourselves to its ministry. In order that this ministry of the whole Church may be fulfilled, God has given the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, and the diaconal ministry of Education, Service and Pastoral Care. It is the responsibility of the Church to seek, train and set apart those whom God calls so to serve. (The Basis of Union, 11.3)*

The practice of the United Church of Canada since its inception has been to train and vocationally “set apart” men and women chosen as paid, accountable leaders for the church. When any community or organization distinguishes within itself certain members with unique roles, responsibilities, training and functions, the circumstance for isolation is created. It was not surprising when the United Church’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider found in 1998 that, when surveyed, counsellors reported feelings of isolation among Ministry Personnel. At the same time, our EAP Provider, WarrenShepell, reported that usage of the EAP program by ministry personnel was twice the average for comparable professions.

The EAP Committee of the General Council, with the Human Resources Committee, recognized the need to understand further the extent of isolation experienced by Ministry Personnel, especially the relationship, if any, to the high use of EAP. A resolution was presented to the 37<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2000, resulting in a motion directing the Human Resources Committee to identify ways to reduce the impact of isolation on individuals serving the church and report back to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council. The EAP Committee contracted WarrenShepell to assist the United Church with the task, and from 2000 to 2003, counselling data was analyzed, telephone interviews were conducted, and focus groups were offered in Moncton, NB, Winnipeg, MB, and Naramata, BC. A report was presented to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Council, prepared by Gerry Smith, vice-president of organizational health for WarrenShepell. The General Council responded by passing a resolution to form a steering group to follow up on the issues identified in the report.

*The United Church of Canada collectively invests more than 90 million dollars every year supporting salaries and housing for ministry personnel serving pastoral charges and outreach ministries.*

Following the restructuring of the General Council and General Council offices, the resolution became the responsibility of the Permanent Committee on Ministry Employment Policies and Services. The PC-MEPS established a task group to set out the mandate and terms of reference for a steering group to shepherd a study of isolation among Ministry Personnel. Over the next 18 months, Isolation Steering Group has attempted to further understand the breadth of experiences described by ministry personnel as isolation. Our methodology included three levels of investigation:

- 1) Deep conversation within the steering group, whose members were selected because of a demonstrated familiarity with some form of isolation, or the issues of isolation in ministry.
- 2) Consultation with professional opinions, in person or through research, including previous United Church studies, other General Council staff, United Church theologians and ecumenical reports and surveys.
- 3) The most extensive survey of ministry personnel ever conducted in the United Church, with response from nearly 1600 individuals, providing feedback on more than 400 questions. The survey included several measures commonly used in workplace evaluations, as well as the Clergy Isolation Inventory, developed by WarrenShepell for the United Church. The survey also posed some open-ended questions; the responses were recorded verbatim, and sorted thematically.

## **PROCESS**

### **September 2003**

- The PC-MEPS established a task group to define the mandate and scope of the project and to establish the terms of reference for a steering group.

### **December 2003**

- The task group reviewed the study and resolution received by the 37th General Council and the Isolation in Ministry report that was received by the 38th General Council, with the resulting resolution.
- Criteria for populating the steering group were established, including a balance of Ministry Personnel categories, experiences of isolation, urban/rural and ethnic diversity, and gender balance.
- A mandate for the steering group was formulated.

### **January 2004**

- **MANDATE:** The Permanent Committee on Ministry Employment Policies and Services approved the report of the task group, and established a steering group to “identify issues that contribute to the experiences of isolation in ministry and re-examine practices and supports for order of ministry to determine priorities and to develop programs to address these issues.”

- The PC-MEPS nominating committee was directed to recruit steering group members based on the established criteria.

### **March 2004**

- The two Permanent Committee members and resource staff met with the consultants from WarrenShepell, the Moderator and the General Secretary to clarify the strategy for the work of the steering group.

### **June 2004**

- The full steering group met for an orientation meeting and to set out the work for the next two years.

### **October 2004**

- The steering group reviewed the previous work related to isolation: the 1998 survey of EAP counsellors, reports to the 37th and 38th General Councils.
- Key program strategies for mitigating the effects of isolation as an aspect of vocational ministry were adopted.
- Links to other General Council initiatives were identified.

- Theological and policy driven causes of isolation were also considered.
- The group established protocols for using an Internet based resource for continuing work between meetings.
- A survey of all 2600 active ministry personnel was selected as the best method for gathering data to identify key drivers of isolation, enabling the steering group to recommend the programs and policy changes that would have the greatest impact.

**January 2005**

- Consultation with Paul Fairlie (WarrenShepell), statistician and lead staff for survey
- Development of programmatic strategies to mitigate experiences of isolation

**March 2005**

- Conference call meeting to further develop survey questions

**April 2005**

- Consultation with GCO Staff regarding capacity for communication and information technologies
- Consultation with the Moderator concerning his meetings with ministry personnel throughout the church
- Further refinement of survey questions

**June 2005**

- Consultation with theologian John Young (Queen`s Theological College) concerning the theology of ministry in the United Church, ministry role and identity, and possible correlation to perceptions of isolation within the church

**September 2005**

- Survey results received. 2600 surveys were distributed, 1600 returned for a return rate of 62%. Initial analysis of the survey was received.
- Determining format and style of reporting to PC-MEPS

**November 2005**

- Further results of survey, analysis, drafting of report to PC-MEPS, formulation of strategic initiatives for recommendation

**December 2005**

- Focus groups held in 6 conferences to review the report and draft recommendations

**January 2006**

- Conference calls to receive further survey analysis from WarrenShepell and reports from focus groups held in December
- First draft of report and recommendations to PC-MEPS
- Conference call to receive comments and suggestions from PC-MEPS and finalize report and recommendations

**February 2006**

- Final report and presentation to PC-MEPS

## ISOLATION AMONG MINISTRY PERSONNEL

Why focus on isolation? When counsellors from WarrenShepell, the church's EAP provider, worked with ministry personnel and their families in the late 1990's, they tracked a number of presenting issues associated with the vocation of ministry. The word used by counsellors consistently throughout the church to describe dissatisfaction with vocational ministry was *isolation*. The focus groups held in 2002 attempted to more clearly understand what ministers meant by isolation. The report to the General Council in 2003 reflected on the three recurrent themes that emerged:

*“Ministers feel generally unsupported in their work, theologically, spiritually, structurally, financially and geographically. There is a general sense that, although the church talks openly about inclusivity, the practice is not apparent to ministry personnel who feel “excluded” by their theologically labelling, their “acquired” reputation, their gender, sexual orientation...financial status and community status. Most ministers expressed discontent with current church structures indicating that one of the biggest causes of isolation for them as ministers is the fact that Church House and the General Council live in a world completely separated from the real church found in the pastoral charge and local congregations.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Sometimes in the vast organizational machine of The United Church of Canada, I don't know whom I am accountable to, how I can have any influence on decisions in the church, or even who my boss is. When I faced some pastoral relations issues, I tried to find the appropriate information only to realize that I didn't know who to call or where to find answers. And when I turned to my colleagues for support, two of them informed me that they were coming to conduct a Presbytery oversight visit. My presbytery Pastoral Relations Convener isn't much help because he's just new to the position, doesn't know all of the policies, and doesn't have much time. I do not feel as though there is anywhere I can turn for pastoral care – my conference Personnel Minister is sympathetic but is stretched so thin that she doesn't have the time. And when I try to make some suggestions to my conference executive about some possible changes, I'm told that the governance model that we are utilizing doesn't allow for the kind of input that I'm offering. And now I find myself facing a 363 review and have discovered that the resources of the national church are available to the presbytery but I am on my own. I feel powerlessness, distrustful and lonely, and I wonder if I should just get out.*

Ministry personnel themselves were able to name the impact that feelings of isolation had on their ministry and their personal lives, ranging from mild to intense. They identified high levels of stress, apathy, frustration, resentment, and bitterness. They also associated the sense of isolation with behaviours of withdrawal and interpersonal conflicts. Finally, many ministry personnel from the focus groups reported that they were losing heart and questioning their future in the church.

The Steering Group, at its initial meetings in 2004, speculated that the use of the term “isolation” may refer to a variety of related but distinct experiences: institutional alienation, geographical distances, role-based alienation, theological differences, spiritual needs, social alienation, cultural differences and economic hardship.

### Institutional Alienation

Anecdotal reports of members of the Steering Group suggested that Ministry Personnel are reporting in significant numbers they feel isolated from the United Church of Canada as a denomination.

Ministry Personnel express a mistrust of leaders that they believe are affecting the direction of the church as an institution. Over the last decade, section 363 of the Manual, which gives Presbyteries the power to review the effectiveness of Ministry Personnel, has become a familiar noun among Ministry Personnel: “the Presbytery is going to do a 363 on her.” Ministry Personnel report feeling conflicted in their role as Presbytery/District officers and colleagues. Trust is difficult when neighbouring ministry personnel are asked to be both friend and judge.

- 82% agree with the values of the United Church of Canada while 35% said that the United Church does not act on what it says it believes
- 1 in 3 say they are troubled by the church’s belief systems
- 1 in 3 have difficulty working with different beliefs in church courts
- 1 in 3 feel excluded by others

### Geographical Isolation

Members of the Steering Group reported many stories of geographical isolation experienced by ministry personnel serving the church: the size of community in which they live, the time required to visit family and friends, the distance to the closest learning centre, time it takes to visit a trusted colleague, the nearest urban centre, access to an Internet connection, the time spent traveling to Presbytery/District or Conference. One member of our steering group can only travel from his community by airplane during the spring and fall of the year! This is not common, but it does

The mean travel time, including air travel, for ministry personnel to visit family is almost 4 hours. 40% of Ministry Personnel report that they are lonely.

*God’s call meant new career, new city and new relationships. The rich intensity of life and spirit in the church carried me through to ordination. But settlement on a prairie charge is lonely... and the travel! Presbytery meetings three hours each way. Conference committee six hours. Airport four hours. Nearest trusted colleague four hours. Always each way.*

*Three funerals cancelled my study leave/retreat. I got to mom’s side four days after dad’s stroke. I learned about local issues like money and building problems but our series on same sex marriage was shunned. I dare not have my life partner visit me here. Where is my church?*

illustrate the scope of the geographical breadth of the United Church.

#### **Role-based Alienation**

By role isolation, the Steering Group is referring to the experiences identified as Ministry Personnel where their vocational identity, and professional distancing, hinders genuine and personal relationships with others. The group also suspected that one of the drivers for isolation is the ambiguity about their role as minister, and feelings of being overloaded by the demands of their role within their church and community.

### Theological (belief-based) Isolation

Conversation by the Steering Group indicated that in many areas there are spiritual and theological issues that separate ministry personnel from one another, from their congregations, and from the General Council. Other anecdotes suggested that, although ministers are proud of the United Church of Canada for its stance on social issues, they have a hard time reconciling the denominational stance with the local congregation.

### Spiritual Isolation

Isolation is understood by many as a spiritual issue. Throughout the church, ministry personnel report not receiving the spiritual guidance they need. Although they are regarded by their congregations as spiritual leaders, many report that they do not have the time to pray, reflect, and worship in ways that maintain their spiritual health. They feel that they must be “busy” for time to be counted as “work.” Associated with this is an “impostor syndrome,” when ministers feel that church members assume that they practice a healthy spiritual discipline.

### Social Isolation

Social isolation is related to role, but is experienced as a separate form of isolation. The steering group has identified that many of those in vocational ministry report that they are separated from former social networks, and they feel alienated from the social networks nearby. Many Ministry Personnel live at a distance from family and close friends. While not unique to the vocation of ministry, it seems to be a significant form of isolation for many ministry personnel.

### Cultural Isolation

As a national denomination, the United Church expects a high degree of mobility for Ministry Personnel who are members of the Order of Ministry. Settlement on a first pastoral charge may mean relocating to another part of the country where cultural alienation is experienced. The increased number of ministry personnel admitted from other denominations has also become a factor, and may involve language and ethnic differences.

*I just received an invitation to a party. As much as I would love the chance to meet some new people, I know it won't take long before the question is posed, 'So, what do you do?' With my response usually comes an awkward silence, a strained conversation; a change in the person's behaviour.*

*Soon, all the people at the party know me as 'the minister' and not as a social being. People's perceptions of ministers and our families can certainly alter our social relationships. I've tried to establish social networks and develop friendships beyond my local community but I get tired driving an hour to the nearest centre, which provides me more anonymity and social opportunities. Because of my social struggles, I feel even more separated from my family and friends who truly know me for who I am and not just what I do. Maybe I'll just send my regrets to the party and get caught up on some of my many church responsibilities on Friday night... after all why should this weekend be any different from the others?*

*Called into ministry, I had no expectations of getting financially rich but some of my economic challenges don't always seem just. In my isolated location, I face high costs of living but my pastoral charge is financially unable to pay beyond minimum. I live in a manse making it most difficult to build up equity for a home in retirement. Going to another part of Canada is not easy as many churches cannot afford moving costs. Salary, the housing situation and study payments vary so greatly among our ministers that the church seems far from "united."*

### Economic Isolation

Financial stress is perceived as a type of isolation. More than 67% of Ministry Personnel earn less than \$50,000. Requests for equity and justice in the payroll system, and in how it is administered, resulted in a major compensation study undertaken by the General Council in 2003.

One-third of ministry personnel report that they worry often about their financial situation.
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## ***DEFINING MINISTRY IN THE UNITED CHURCH***

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For the first 40 years of the United Church's history, the roles of leadership in the church were fairly clearly defined: laity, ordained ministers, and overseas personnel (for example, medical deaconesses). In the mid to late 1960's, there were discussions with the Anglican and Presbyterian denominations as to how we might blend our one order of ministry with their three orders. In 1964 a commission was established, and it produced the document *Report on Ministry in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. The role of Conference Personnel Minister was introduced as an oversight role for ministry personnel. A task force resulting from the 1974 General Council considered the offices of ordained and diaconal ministries. Some voices called for the elimination of ordered ministry altogether. In the end, the task force recommended three non-hierarchical orders of ministry: service (diaconal); pastoral (presbyterial) and oversight (episcopal). The report was not adopted, and the General Council in 1977 established another committee to continue the study.

In 1980, *Project Ministry* was presented to the General Council. Even though this report was not adopted in whole, it may be the most constitutive of how we currently think about ministry. This report articulated an understanding of "the ministry of the whole people of God." The report affirmed that ministry does not belong to us, but that all "participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ." For the living out of this ministry as an organized church, *Project Ministry* recognized four offices: pastoral, teaching, service and oversight. The report also affirmed the role of lay leadership within the church's life and work.

The 2000 General Council received the report *Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century*, resulting from a study commissioned by the 35<sup>th</sup> General Council in 1994. The report recommended that the church recognize two categories of ministry personnel: designated lay ministry in congregations, outreach ministries and chaplaincies; and ordered ministries of word, sacrament, pastoral care, outreach and service. Again, sections of the report were affirmed, but the report was not adopted in its entirety.

Running through all of the debates and reports of the last 40 years is the recognition that ministry happens in two distinct spheres. First, and most importantly, ministry is the faithful engagement of everyday life by followers of Jesus Christ. The living out of the Christian faith has through the years been called by many names: discipleship, ministry of the laity, and more recently, the ministry of the whole people of God.

Within this broad understanding of ministry is a second sphere: the mission that is corporately ordered and institutionalized as the ministry of the United Church of Canada. To accomplish this ministry, we have organized a common life, established norms, created programs, developed systems, and shared our resources. As the United Church of Canada, we are accountable for our

corporate ministry: to each other, to society, and to the will and wisdom of our membership as determined by the decisions of church councils.

All United Church members are equal as participants in the ministry of Jesus Christ. However, the roles and responsibilities of members within and to the church are not equal. Some members are “set apart” to offices of responsibility and accountability. We designate positions that carry roles and functions that require particular gifts, skills and commitment.

This report is concerned with that group of members that the church sets apart as its paid, accountable leaders. It is concerned with the capacity of our paid ministers to manage the challenges inherent in the work to which they are called. It is concerned also with the United Church’s capacity to equip ministry personnel for the roles and functions they are called to fulfill.

As a church, we promise to equip and support ministry personnel, who in turn promise to accept responsibility for the well being of a congregation, ministry, or the United Church as a whole. We call this mutual promise a covenant.

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### ***A THEOLOGY OF COVENANT***

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Covenant theology is deeply rooted in our historical and biblical faith, beginning with Adam and Eve, Sarah and Abraham, Jacob, Moses and God’s gift of Torah. Psalm writers and prophets remind their hearers of the blessings and obligations of covenant. Jesus offered his followers a new covenant symbolized by his life, death and resurrection.

We are a people of covenant. At our baptisms, through our parents, families and friends, or as adults, we enter into a covenant with God and with a community of faith. Our baptism celebrates our participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. The covenant of baptism is renewed when we participate in the liturgy of every baptism. For many, the covenant of baptism is renewed at confirmation.

Whenever church communities ask individual members to respond to a call to leadership, we enter into covenant. Ministry personnel, whether ordained, diaconal or lay, participate in a covenant with the whole church. This covenant is between ministry personnel, the Presbytery/District and the congregation or mission. The covenant that is created each time ministry personnel take up new positions is vital to the health and well-being of those in ministry, congregations and outreach units, as well as the Presbytery/District as a whole. Promises are made that set the parameters for support, accountability, responsibility and mutual ministry to take place. In terms of the vocational health of ministry personnel, this covenant is imperative and, when honoured, it is life giving. The embrace of the covenant enables communities of faith to “set apart” members to distinct roles of leadership, with unique roles, authority and responsibilities, without creating the experience of isolation.

We witness a broken covenant when presbyteries forget that they have promised to support ministry personnel in their leadership roles. We experience a broken covenant when congregations place unreasonable demands on ministry personnel while not offering support. We recognize a broken covenant when ministry personnel selfishly or inappropriately put their own needs and desires ahead of the well-being of a congregation or the mission of the wider church.

We acknowledge a broken covenant when ministry personnel choose to withdraw from Presbytery/District and colleagues.

Yet we believe that the grace of God is close at hand. Renewing the covenant specific to ministry personnel means that each participant takes the covenant seriously, repents of wrongdoing and in humility opens up to new possibilities in relationship. Sometimes this process takes a long time, especially when there is significant distress, pain, and trust has been broken.

One way the United Church can help to renew the covenant and rebuild trust is to provide vocational support for the ministry personnel with whom we have covenanted. By vocational support, we mean the policies, programs and practices that support the roles and responsibilities we have placed on ministry personnel. We hope that his report will address ways in which the church can significantly improve its capacity to provide vocational support to ministry personnel.

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### ***THE SURVEY OF MINISTRY PERSONNEL***

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#### **Purpose**

In an effort to further understand the isolation experienced by Ministry Personnel, the Steering Group initiated a survey of the nearly 2600 active Ministry Personnel in the United Church. The survey was administered for 4 broad reasons:

1. To assess **levels of isolation** among Ministry Personnel; that is, to use particular experiential and cognitive measures to determine the percentage of ministry personnel that self-report isolation, and the degree to which those factors make a difference.
2. To assess **levels of psychological adjustment** problems in the Ministry Personnel population; that is, the mental and emotional difficulties reported by Ministry Personnel
3. To assess a variety of **personal attributes** that may exacerbate or 'buffer' the negative impacts of isolation; for example, personality, social support, and coping styles
4. To assess the **criticality** of certain types of Ministry Personnel isolation by correlating them with adjustment problems; that is, what forms of isolation are connected to indicators of emotional or psychological difficulties.

The original intention was to survey only levels of isolation in terms of the *stressors* for members of the Order of Ministry (i.e., what external situations or circumstances may be contributing to isolation). However, in order to obtain a more complete perspective, it was deemed necessary to conduct a full audit of all active Ministry Personnel (ordered and lay), and include measures of *strain* (i.e., psychological adjustment), and *moderating* variables (i.e. personal attributes). In doing so, the United Church could **validate** its model of isolation among all Ministry Personnel by a) linking *types* of isolation to *adjustment* (i.e., "Is this type of isolation as harmful as we think it is?"), b) establish priorities for organizational change to support ministers, and c) identify personal attributes that are either (i) risk factors to monitor, or (ii) indicators of a need for resources through training and development.

Our Employee Assistance Program provider, WarrenShepell, developed and conducted a Survey of Ministry Personnel, which included measurements to address each of the four reasons named above:

### 1. Isolation

- Organizational Alienation
- Perceived Persecution (Victimization)
- Respect & Recognition
- Social Alienation
- Belief-Based Alienation
- Role Ambiguity and Overload
- Role Conflict

These dimensions of Ministry Personnel isolation are *empirically informed*. That is, despite the theoretical groupings of isolation issues that were derived by the Steering Group from anecdotal reporting and focus group content, data analyses suggest that the above groupings and themes represent a more reliable and valid way of describing and measuring Ministry Personnel isolation. It is these dimensions of Ministry Personnel isolation that were examined in the study.

### 2. Adjustment

- Depression symptoms
- Anxiety Symptoms
- Stress Symptoms
- Burnout-Emotional Exhaustion
- Burnout-Depersonalization
- Burnout-Lack of Personal Accomplishment

These dimensions of adjustment were measured because they represent the most critical elements of emotional well-being. In addition, burnout is a work-specific form of adjustment that has been studied in other clergy populations. There is a vast research literature base on the impact of these adjustment problems on work performance and employee withdrawal behaviours. These dimensions of adjustment were measured through well-known, standardized measures that are associated with norms. This allowed us to compare United Church Ministry Personnel to benchmarks.

### 3. Commitment & Turnover Cognitions

- Pastoral Charge Commitment
- United Church Commitment
- United Church Turnover Cognitions

It was also important to understand levels of Ministry Personnel satisfaction, commitment, and thoughts of leaving the pastoral charge and the Church as an employer. While knowledge of Ministry Personnel isolation and adjustment levels are important, it is also important to understand how these problems ‘feed through’ to key employee outcomes. This is yet another way of validating aspects of isolation as critical problems. Commitment and turnover cognitions,

in particular, are known from other research as substantive drivers of actual turnover. Thus, they are ‘acid tests’ of just how malignant certain types of isolation may be in thinning the Ministry Personnel ranks.

#### 4. Personal Attributes

- Trait Perfectionism
- Sources of Social Support
- Coping Styles
- Dispositional Optimism

The well-being of individuals is always an interaction of *person plus situation*. It is one thing to understand what *organizational/systemic* and *role-related* stressors are impacting the well-being of Ministry Personnel. It is quite another to understand what Ministry Personnel bring to the Ministry Personnel role that may, alternatively, *exacerbate or buffer* the distress that comes with isolation. By measuring these personal attributes, the United Church can take action to prevent Ministry Personnel adjustment and commitment problems by managing risk factors, as well as equip Ministry Personnel with personal resources to help them manage the unique difficulties associated with the ministerial role. Trait perfectionism was particularly measured because this personal attribute has been associated with Ministry Personnel adjustment in past research. It was measured using a well-known and valid instrument. The social support measures were designed especially for Ministry Personnel response, and were based on a well-known theoretical and empirical model of social support. The measures of coping styles and dispositional optimism (generalized expectation that good things, rather than bad things, will happen) represent ‘teachable’ personal attributes that many past studies have indicated are associated with high well-being both in work and non-work domains. There was a strong interest to ‘discover’ what well-known personal attributes were especially effective at helping Ministry Personnel to stave off the damaging effects of isolation and maladjustment, and keep them satisfied and committed to their vocational role.

As an aside, the survey also included a well-known, valid measure of workplace bullying. While this is not considered to be a dimension of clergy isolation, it is a role stressor that has been linked to clergy adjustment in past research. There was some interest to audit levels of workplace bullying in the Ministry Personnel population and to examine its impact on adjustment and commitment.

For the sake continuity, the top line results from the survey will be discussed in order of *strengths to opportunities for development*.

## Analysis

### **Ministry Personnel isolation levels are *generally* low.**

For *most* areas of Ministry Personnel isolation, the majority of Ministry Personnel report low isolation. The following are a few results that exemplify this:

#### *In general...*

- Almost 85% generally feel supported by others.
- More than 80% do not experience negative interactions with others.
- Almost 90% believe they have a say in decision making that affects their work
- More than 9 in 10 feel accepted by others as a capable and credible minister.

#### *Organizational Alienation*

- Only 1 in 3 feel troubled by current belief movements within the Church.
- Two thirds have a high degree of respect for Church leaders.
- Less than 1 in 5 feel that the Church no longer cares or believes in its cause.

#### *Belief-Based Alienation*

- Almost 70% do not feel that they are forced to work within a belief system that is different from their own.
- Less than one-third feel excluded by others because of their beliefs.

#### *Respect & Recognition*

- Almost two-thirds feel that their skills and efforts are sufficiently recognized and rewarded.

#### *Social Alienation*

- Almost 65% do not feel isolated or cut-off from their friends and family
- Only 1 in 4 feel that they have little in common with their colleagues.

#### *Perceived Persecution*

- Only 1 in 5 feels that they do not have enough privacy.
- Almost 75% feel that they have adequate privacy in their personal lives.
- Over 70% are not often treated unfairly because of who they are.

### *Workplace Bullying*

In addition, the reported frequency of workplace bullying was low. When the six questions that measure this role stressor are rolled up into a composite scale, the average minister reports a score that is only 38% of the maximum possible score.

### **Ministry Personnel commitment levels are generally high.**

The majority of Ministry Personnel also report high commitment to their vocation, their pastoral charges, and the Church as an employer. The following are a few results that exemplify this:

- Almost 75% ‘talk up’ their pastoral charges as great charges to serve.
- Over 80% are satisfied with their current pastoral charge.
- Almost 90% feel that being a minister is an important part of who they are as a person.
- Over 90% are satisfied with their vocation as a minister.
- More than 75% feel they belong to the United Church as an organization.
- Over 75% do not often think about leaving the United Church to work somewhere else.

### **Commitment to ministry as a vocation is relatively impervious to isolation factors.**

Not only is commitment to **ministry** high among Ministry Personnel, levels of such commitment are relatively unaffected by issues of isolation. *No single isolation question or dimension correlated substantively with vocational commitment.*

The only factor that appeared to diminish commitment to the ministry was feelings of diminished personal accomplishment on the part of Ministry Personnel (i.e., a component of burnout). When Ministry Personnel feel that they are no longer able to serve as effective ministers, it is time to move on. As vocational commitment diminishes, so too does commitment and retention with the Church as an employer. Time to leave ministry equates with time to leave the United Church. However, levels of personal accomplishment in the Ministry Personnel population hover around average, so this not an immediate concern.

### **Organizational sources of isolation are not powerful drivers of adjustment.**

While some sources of Ministry Personnel isolation stem from difficulties related to the Ministry Personnel role and pastoral charge, others stem from relationships with the United Church as a whole (e.g., leadership, culture, climate).

A few aspects of *Organizational Alienation* and *Belief-Based Alienation* could be judged as problematic in terms of levels reported by Ministry Personnel:

- Almost 4 in 10 have a high degree of distrust in Church leaders.
- 4 out of 10 Ministry Personnel feel powerless to effect change in the Church.
- Less than half of Ministry Personnel feel that leaders are interested in what goes on at other courts of the United Church.
- 1 in 3 Ministry Personnel often feel alone in their beliefs

However, neither source of isolation was a substantive **driver** of **adjustment**. These ‘systemic’ dimensions of isolation were the **lowest-ranked** drivers of depression, anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion symptoms. In other words, whether Ministry Personnel feel connected or disconnected to the United Church has little bearing on how well or unwell they are. Relatively-speaking, there are few ‘oppressive’ issues affecting the wellness of the Ministry Personnel population.

There are **caveats** associated with these relatively positive findings. While Ministry Personnel adjustment may not be *directly* affected by systemic factors, Ministry Personnel adjustment is likely affected *indirectly* by a lack of sufficient organizational support to enable Ministry Personnel to deal with stressors associated with the Ministry Personnel role and experiences in the pastoral charge. The following finding backs this up:

- Less than half of Ministry Personnel feel they receive the level support they need within the United Church.

This single issue is the **second-highest driver** of commitment to the Church as an employer and thoughts of leaving. *For every 1-point decrease in the level of perceived organizational support among Ministry Personnel, the United Church can expect over a half point decrease in commitment to the United Church as an employer.*

In general, Organizational Alienation and Belief-Based Alienation, as dimensions of isolation, are the **strongest** drivers of commitment and turnover cognitions.

Feelings of commitment and thoughts of turnover should not be taken lightly. Two published meta-analyses of hundreds of studies indicate that these withdrawal variables correlate -.33 and .45 with *actual* turnover.<sup>2 3</sup> What likely *protects* the United Church against Ministry Personnel acting on these attitudes is a *stronger* commitment to ministry as a vocation.

\* \* \* \* \*

<p>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor 12:29)</p>
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So far, the picture of Ministry Personnel isolation at the United Church may appear rather benign. The average minister appears to be **integrated** rather than **isolated**. The average minister also appears to be highly committed to the ministry and the United Church as an employer.

However, percentages and averages can hide enclaves of Ministry Personnel for whom isolation is a problem and for whom associated distress and feelings of withdrawal are high. For some segments of Ministry Personnel that *do* report higher isolation, the impact of that isolation on adjustment and commitment can be crippling and costly to the United Church. Here, we are making the important distinction between **level** and **leverage**. Levels associated with isolation may be low, on average, but the total cost of isolation to the United Church, attributable to a smaller group of Ministry Personnel, may be similar to the total cost

<p><b>Leverage is the issue:</b> Levels (or numbers) may be low but the total cost may be similar to a moderate level of isolation in the entire Ministry Personnel population</p>
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attributable to the entire Ministry Personnel population at a moderate level of isolation (e.g., drug costs, diminished Ministry Personnel performance, closure of pastoral charges, turnover).

**The experience of Ministry Personnel in pastoral charges has the greatest impact on isolation and adjustment.**

The average minister is not isolated, has moderate to high well-being, and is committed in various ways. When results are tabulated to identify *when* isolation and maladjustment are high, all (or most) roads lead to the pastoral charge. Consider the following:

- All forms of Ministry Personnel adjustment are correlated more **highly** with **pastoral charge commitment** than with vocational commitment, United Church commitment or United Church Turnover Cognitions (correlations from -.19 to -.38).

A “correlation” measures the degree to which two separate items increase or decrease in relation to each other. For example, a person’s height and weight are *positively correlated*. If a person’s height increases, so will her/his weight. A “negative correlation” means that the items move opposite to each other; that is, as one increases, the other decreases. For example, in the table on this page, as workplace bullying *increases*, the level of pastoral charge commitment *decreases* by a factor of -0.45.

These findings contextualize the “hurt.” They tell the United Church *where* a good deal of the isolation factors originates.

Additionally, correlations among types of Ministry Personnel isolation and pastoral charge commitment helps the United Church to *rank* the types of isolation that are of greatest concern.

Ministry Personnel Isolation Items & Dimensions	Pastoral Charge Commitment
<i>I am appreciated by and supported by the community that I serve</i>	0.53
Workplace Bullying	-0.45
Lack of Respect & Recognition	-0.44
<i>I generally feel supported by others</i>	0.36
Perceived Persecution	-0.35
Social Alienation	-0.35
Role Conflict	-0.33
Role Ambiguity & Overload	-0.29

The above dimensions of Ministry Personnel isolation are correlated with pastoral charge commitment at **higher** levels than with United Church Commitment. This, again, helps the United Church to pinpoint the pastoral charge as the context for addressing isolation when it is high. For example, Lack of Respect and Recognition and Perceived Persecution, when they are high, are *not* occurring between colleagues, nor between ministers and the United Church, but largely between ministers, their pastoral charges, and their communities.

Additionally:

- The six dimensions of isolation, tabled above, are **more highly** correlated with emotional exhaustion and depression than Organizational Alienation or Belief-Based Alienation.

This is further evidence that the most potent isolation factors are those that originate in the pastoral charge setting.

Role ambiguity/overload and role conflict may not, at first, appear to be substantive drivers of pastoral charge commitment. However, these dimensions of isolation were among the *highest* reported by Ministry Personnel:

- Almost 75% feel that they have too much work for one minister to do.
- Over 60% feel that they do not have adequate time to think and contemplate in their role as a minister
- Less than 40% feel that there are clear, planned goals and objectives for their roles as ministers.

Higher levels of role difficulties combined with moderate leverage in affecting adjustment and commitment suggest that these are areas of concern.

One of the learnings here is that organizational/systemic isolation factors can have an indirect impact on Ministry Personnel adjustment and commitment. The United Church as an employer can create and deliver supports that address these different forms of isolation, point for point.

**Social alienation, as a form of Ministry Personnel isolation, is one of the strongest and most consistent drivers of Ministry Personnel adjustment problems.**

The levels associated with social alienation were higher than for other forms of isolation. Consider:

- Over 44% have difficulty building strong social networks in the United Church.
- Almost 44% often feel lonely.
- Nearly 60% feel that there are few people they can openly trust and confide in.
- 35% believe that few people understand their issues and problems.
- Almost 50% are not receiving the amount of spiritual guidance they need.
- When questions that measure social alienation are rolled up into a composite scale, the average minister reports a score that is **54%** of the **maximum** possible score.

While some of these figures may not seem very high, bear in mind that many adjustment problems, including both depression and emotional exhaustion, are considered by many psychologists to be socially-mediated. Most theories and models of depression are interpersonal in nature. Our social relationships are our greatest source of well-being.

The impacts of social alienation:

- Social alienation was one of the top drivers of all Ministry Personnel adjustment and commitment outcomes.
- Social alienation was the top driver of all Ministry Personnel adjustment outcomes.
- ‘Having warm relations with others’ while not low in the Ministry Personnel population, was one of the top drivers of every measure of stress, depression, anxiety, and burnout for Ministry Personnel, as well as commitment to the church.

In summary, social alienation has the most impact of all the Ministry Personnel isolation dimensions. It is also the most consistent in its impact on a broad range of Ministry Personnel adjustment and commitment outcomes. Thus, its effects are assumed to be both invasive as well as pervasive.

**Ministry Personnel require specific competencies to help them manage depression and emotional exhaustion.**

The adjustment levels of Ministry Personnel are, for the most part, average for the general population (e.g., anxiety symptoms, emotional exhaustion). However, they are higher for depression (78<sup>th</sup>. percentile) and stress symptoms (88<sup>th</sup>. percentile). It is recommended that the United Church focus on addressing the Ministry Personnel isolation issues that *most* impact **emotional exhaustion** and **depression symptoms**.

Both of these adjustment states are considered ‘end states’ that are difficult for individuals to recover from without outside counselling. Both adjustment states are also associated with cognitive changes that are difficult to reverse. Ministry Personnel who are depressed may have negative, unrealistic views of themselves, the world, and the future. Ministry Personnel who are emotionally-exhausted may become cynical about their role as a minister and depersonalize their charges. Both are associated with lower performance and turnover in a variety of occupations.

Due to the criticality of these adjustment outcomes, the United Church should monitor and address their specific isolation drivers:

Ministry Personnel Isolation Dimensions	Depression Symptoms
Social Alienation	0.46
Workplace Bullying	0.36
Perceived Persecution	0.36
Respect & Recognition	0.32
Role Ambiguity & Overload	0.31
Role Conflict	0.29

Ministry Personnel Isolation Dimensions	Burnout - Emotional Exhaustion
Role Ambiguity & Overload	0.57
Perceived Persecution	0.49
Workplace Bullying	0.48
Role Conflict	0.46
Social Alienation	0.45
Respect & Recognition	0.39

Both depression and emotional exhaustion are also implicated with *lower* pastoral charge commitment.

In addition to addressing the isolation drivers of these adjustment problems through organizational change and development initiatives, it would behoove the United Church to provide training and development to Ministry Personnel to equip them with cognitive and behavioural competencies that are known to ‘stave off’ such emotional problems. Psychologists have identified a number of ‘trainable’ personal attributes that help individuals to manage problems in their lives and regulate the negative emotions that accompany them. Some of these are behavioural, such as practices taught through *problem-solving therapy*.<sup>4</sup> Others are cognitive styles such as *locus of control* and *hardiness*.<sup>5</sup> Another cognitively-based personal attribute was measure in this study – dispositional optimism.<sup>6</sup>

Following are the results related to dispositional optimism:

- Dispositional optimism was the only personal attribute that was negatively correlated with **most** forms of Ministry Personnel maladjustment (correlations ranged from -0.36 to -0.52).
- Among the personal attributes, dispositional optimism correlated highest with Vocational Commitment.
- Dispositional optimism was related to fewer EAP accesses (-0.25).

By equipping ministers with effective coping styles such as dispositional optimism, the Church is addressing those aspects of the Ministry Personnel role that cannot be changed. The United Church can help ministers to help themselves to approach the problems that they face a little differently. Since there are many significant drivers of emotional exhaustion and depression, building effective coping styles would address many of them simultaneously. It is important to bear in mind that coping styles such as dispositional optimism and hardiness (the ability to withstand adverse conditions) are not just thought-based. They are associated with a host of adaptive habits and other behaviours that are also effective in improving life and work functioning (e.g., planning, setting goals).

It is important to bear in mind that no social support or coping style appeared *entirely* effective at buffering the effects of *high* Ministry Personnel isolation in the study. At best, social support and coping styles can help alleviate isolation factors when they were minimally or moderately present. This further strengthens the recommendation that the United Church, as an employer, must fill the gap left by personal attributes by lending more tangible or constructive supports to Ministry Personnel who are isolated in their pastoral charges.

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## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVES**

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The United Church of Canada is failing to adequately provide the financial resources and the nationally administered support programs for ministry personnel to faithfully exercise the vocation of ministry. The conclusions of this Steering Group compel the United Church of Canada to recommit at all levels to the covenant with Ministry Personnel serving Pastoral Charges and other ministries. There are three categories of response that this Steering Group encourages the church to make.

### **Support for coping with the isolating nature of ministry**

The practice of paid, accountable ministry in the United Church of Canada is by its very nature isolating. In accordance with our denominational theology and polity, we invite some of our members to accept positions of leadership that symbolically and relationally, by degree and by function, set them apart from other members of the community. We are therefore responsible, at a denominational level, to *provide the programs and resources that mitigate the hardships and challenges of the isolating nature of the vocation.*

### **Provide resources for personal development and competency**

Some folk in ministry experience isolation stemming from personal, individual or family systems factors. Isolation of this kind is not directly related to the vocation of ministry in a generic sense, and therefore must be addressed by the *provision of programs and resources appropriate to individual needs.* In the same way, the church *must improve the screening and discernment processes* to ensure that it does not place individuals into ministry positions for which they are not suited spiritually, theologically, intellectually or psychologically.

### **Address the systemic and institutionalized causes of isolation**

As the steering group analyzed the drivers of isolation, the systemic causes of isolation became abundantly clear. *Isolation and its debilitating outcomes are unnecessarily created by a number of institutional factors including:*

- A lack of denominational clarity concerning the various categories of paid accountable ministry
- A mistrust of leadership and apprehension toward clerical authority
- Inadequate policy and procedures for the supervision and support of ministry personnel
- An ambiguous employment relationship between ministry personnel and the wider church that becomes problematic when disciplinary procedures are required

We offer, as the General Council's response to isolation in ministry, the following eight strategic initiatives. Each of these initiatives can, in part, equip individuals to manage the challenges of ministry, support emotionally and psychologically the person in ministry, and bring about changes to the systemic issues that may contribute to isolation in ministry. This Steering Group recommends establishing clear national directions, policies, and programs in the following areas: Pastoral Relations, Human Resources, Peer Relationships, Continuing Education, Communication Technology, Compensation, Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes, and Institutional Structures.

### **1. Strengthen Pastoral Relationships**

**We recommend that the General Council initiate and fund programs that assist presbyteries, ministry personnel and pastoral charges in the creation and sustaining of faithful, healthy pastoral relationships.**

#### **Potential Program Initiatives**

- Presbytery/District based program for (at least) those in the first 5 years of commissioning, ordination, or recognition (an expansion of the Starting Well program). The program should include mentoring, support to pastoral relationships, the development of role and identity (formation), challenges, expectations and rewards. The “Fresh Start” program in use by the Anglican dioceses of Toronto and Niagara is a good model.
- Provide a nationally supported, consistent orientation program for ministry personnel moving from one conference to another
- Develop and fund a national program for the training and support of M&P Committees, especially enabling them to better inform pastoral charges regarding the challenges of congregational ministry.

### **2. Invest in Human Resources for Ministry Personnel**

**We recommend that the General Council provide a nationally administered program that will place human resources in presbyteries to provide ministers whose sole function is to deliver pastoral care and vocational support to ministers and their families.**

### **3. Nurture Relationships Among Ministry Personnel**

**We recommend that the United Church of Canada institute a national policy to provide programs and funding that promote collegial, supportive relationships among ministry personnel based on their call to a common vocation.**

#### **Potential Program Initiatives**

- Develop and fund a national programming for facilitated peer groups of ministry personnel, appropriate to the context (face to face, teleconferencing, web based).
- Develop a process and provide funding so that ministry personnel can from time to time reflect on vocation, call and role in ministry within the United Church, (retreats, vocational assessments, etc.)
- Provide funding or personnel resources for spiritual guidance/direction

#### **4. Invest in Continuing Education**

**We recommend that the United Church of Canada institute a national policy to adequately resource the educational programs of the national church in order to ensure that ministry personnel receive educational support from discernment to retirement thereby continuing to affirm the principle of an educated ministry.**

##### **Potential Program Initiatives**

- Provide a national fund specifically for continuing education, training and skill development for professional ministry based on at least 1.5% of the church's gross compensation budget, (representing the minimum industry standard).
- Offer throughout the church regional continuing education seminars for ministry personnel that have a proven affect on adjustment issues in ministry, for example, wellness, conflict resolution, goal setting, problem solving, stress management, time management.
- When determining funding grants for educational programs, take into account the geographic implications of ministry personnel attending

#### **5. Invest in Communication Technology**

**We recommend that the United Church of Canada institute a national policy to provide appropriate communication technology in order to provide networking capabilities among all ministry personnel.**

##### **Potential Program Initiatives**

- Increase the effective use of teleconferencing / videoconferencing
- Ensure that all ministry personnel are provided with a computer and the best available internet connectivity.

As we make better use of communication technologies we suggest:

- Develop a web based resource and online community specifically aimed at supporting ministry as a professional vocation in the United Church
- Support and sponsor Ministry Personnel exchange programs
- Continue funding and supporting the development and provision of worship materials and other resources supporting the practice of ministry
- Enhance Connex or publish a journal specifically devoted to vocational ministry in the United Church (similar to the former *Practice of Ministry in Canada* journal).

#### **6. Continue to Address Compensation Issues**

**We affirm the directions of the Compensation Steering Group in instituting a national compensation system that recognises education, years of service and special circumstances.**

- We have continued to consult with the Compensation Steering Group, which has undertaken a complete and separate study related to compensation, and we find that the directions of this group are consistent with our group's study and research. We particularly support special programs for geographically remote settlements to

compensate for the challenges of being removed from previous support networks (travel allowances, etc.).

**7. Continue to Support the Work Related to Leadership Outcomes**

**We affirm the work of the Education for Church Leadership Committee in the development of leadership outcomes that focus on competencies related to goal setting and planning, self-care, time management and conflict resolution, personal coping skills, stress management, and developing and maintaining a spiritual discipline.**

**8. Address Institutional and Structural Causes of Isolation**

**We recommend that the General Council adopt the policy of clearly defining the roles and relationships of paid accountable leaders within the governance and employment structure of the United Church of Canada, with clear lines of accountability and authority.**

**Potential Program Initiatives**

- Separate the oversight and support functions of Presbytery/District within the polity of the United Church
- Establish a position ombudsperson for ministry personnel at the General Council Office
- Establish a program at the General Council to recognise key anniversary dates, milestones, and retirements of Ministry Personnel
- Provide adequate funding for educational and information resources to support consistency with respect to Pastoral Relations work
- Develop a General Council based strategy to promote a healthy organization
- Develop a communication strategy and program, either in conjunction with Presbytery/District meetings or via some other mechanism, to educate and inform Ministry Personnel about United Church programs and changes in policy as they occur.
- Research and produce a report to clarify the lines of accountability and authority in the United Church in terms of ministry personnel employment and governance relationships; essentially, answer the question *who is the employer for Ministry Personnel?*
- Review the disciplinary authority of Presbyteries under section 363 of the Manual, and make recommendations for changes that would provide a fairer and more competent process, which would include adequate support and advocacy for any Ministry Personnel whose ministry is under review or scrutiny.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

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The Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services recommends that the United Church direct increased and sufficient resources to fund the strategic initiatives contained in this report. We believe their implementation will lead to reduced ministry isolation, a more positive morale among ministry personnel, and a healthier work climate; by investing in a healthier leadership, the church will benefit through increased revenues, including to Mission & Service, and enhance our mission in Canada and the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Record of Proceedings 2003, p. 673.

<sup>2</sup> Eby, L.T., Freeman, D.M., Rush, M.C., & Lance, C.E. (1999). Motivational bases of affective organizational commitment: A partial test of an integrative theoretical model. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 72, 463-483.

<sup>3</sup> Tett, R.P., & Meyer, J.P. (1993). Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and turnover: path analyses based on meta-analytic findings. *Personnel Psychology*, 46, 259-293.

<sup>4</sup> D’Zurilla, T.J., & Nezu, A.M. (1999). *Problem-solving therapy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Springer.

<sup>5</sup> DeNeve, K.M., & Cooper, H. (1998). The happy personality: A meta-analysis of 137 personality traits and subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124, 197-229.

<sup>6</sup> Seligman, M.E.P. (1998). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Pocket Books.