

SIMPLIFICATION OF CHURCH PROCESSES SUMMARY OF CONSTITUENCY FEEDBACK

The Simplification of Church Processes Working Group was a staff working group comprised of Wendy Cranston, Joel Den Haan, Bill Doyle, Cynthia Gunn, and Alan Hall. The mandate of the working group was based on the following motion, made by the Executive of the General Council in May of 2011:

Direct the General Secretary, General Council to initiate a project to simplify our processes in order to reduce significantly the complexity and size of The Manual and make it more user-friendly, with an interim report for submission through the General Secretary to the November 2010 meeting of the Executive of the General Council, and a full report for the May 2011 meeting of the Executive.

The first step of the staff group process was to ask for input from the church constituency. We received a total of 242 separate responses from two surveys. The narrative response questions resulted in 135 responses from 84 individuals, 24 pastoral charges, 20 presbyteries, 3 Conference groups, and 4 other groups (Liaison Cluster Diaconate of the United Church of Canada, Maritime Conference; Faculty at Le Seminaire Uni/ United Church Theological College and two WonderCafe discussions). A separate survey was done to reach the youth population of the church, resulting in 107 individual responses.

The interest of the membership of the United Church in this project resulted in a significant response to both the youth survey and narrative questions. The results of both were shared with steering groups and task groups whose work had also been mandated by the Executive of the General Council through the Future Grounded in Faith and Action report and subsequent motion.

The youth survey results indicated that an isolated, but committed population of youth feel welcomed in the United Church, but challenged when trying to initiate change, and have not, on the whole, had positive experiences when inquiring about ministry.

The narrative response questions resulted in a laundry list of feedback about church processes, primarily critical or negative, although twenty-four responses included a “thank you” for embarking on this project of simplification. Much repetition throughout the responses, allowed for the classification of the responses into seven categories: Education and Students; General Comments; Governance; Identity and Connection; Manual; Oversight and Discipline; and Pastoral Relations. A further breakdown into sub-categories follows below.

Categorizing all of the feedback allowed for the emergence of larger themes:

- The reason that congregants are so frustrated with church processes (such as JNAC, JSC, interim ministry, amalgamation etc.) is because the length and complexity of our processes stalls regular congregational ministry and mission for such long periods; periods that are often without leadership and/or without regular pastoral care of the congregation. It is extremely challenging to the life of a congregation to have to stop and start congregational life. These times of transition often see a loss of membership.

- The policies and procedures of the United Church are too complex and require far too much time to rely wholly on the gifted time and capacity of volunteers.
- Our policies and procedures need to be mission-based. Members and adherents of the United Church do not want to come to church to save the United Church as an organization – they want to come to church to learn about God’s mission in the world and how to be a part of actively living out God’s mission.
- The relationship between our courts, and between ministry personnel and the courts of the church, is lacking in trust – this needs to be repaired.

Simplification of Church Processes - Constituency Feedback Categories and Sub-categories

1. Education and Students

- discernment
 - i. simplify
 - ii. consistency between court
- candidacy process
 - i. simplify

2. General Comments

- no room for creativity in processes
- process matters more than common sense
- have values as rationale for policy
- mission-based policy
- currently no rationale for pastoral relations policies
- resource and support needed for lay employees
- volunteers are under-trained
- volunteers shouldn’t be expected to hold the level of knowledge necessary for oversight and HR concerns
- we don’t have enough volunteers
- need paid staff support
- more resources and support through amalgamations

3. Governance

- congregational governance
 - i. simplify
- courts
 - i. presbytery
 - 1. separate collegial function from oversight function
 - ii. we don’t need four courts
 - iii. redundancy of responsibility and decision-making
 - iv. decision-making too slow
 - v. move towards self-governance of congregations
 - vi. better communication between the courts

- vii. better education about responsibilities
- viii. remits are voted down because of lack of understanding
- notice
 - i. want meeting on the second Sunday

4. Identity and Connexion

- identity
 - i. we need to understand the UCC as the United Church not just as a church united from three founding denominations
 - ii. communication our theology
 - iii. How are we living out God’s mission? Are we able to answer this question?
- inclusion
 - i. local churches want to be included in decision-making
 - ii. we don’t all have the same base-knowledge about the UCC
 - iii. Don’t hide behind “ethos” – how are we living out God’s mission?
 - iv. communicate!
 - v. resources are geared toward large urban churches when most are small/rural
- sacraments
 - i. more flexibility for lay members to administer the sacraments
- membership
 - i. DLM membership in presbytery or congregation?
 - ii. retain full membership
 - iii. Is full membership necessary?
 - iv. membership is a barrier in fulfilling the volunteer needs of the church
- streams of ministry
 - i. inequality created by common function held by different streams of ministry
 - ii. one stream of ministry

5. Manual

- manual and identity
 - i. What will this process of simplification do to our identity?
 - ii. policies that recognize the differences in our collective contexts
 - iii. policies and structures that “facilitate and encourage” ministry
- simplify
 - i. distinguish between policy and procedure
 - ii. even the power between members
 - iii. flexibility and values
 - iv. be clear about additional resources
 - v. lower language level
 - vi. remove ambiguous language
 - vii. eliminate repetition
 - viii. organize topically

6. Oversight and Discipline

- pastoral care for ministers
 - i. EAP faith-based
- accountability standards
 - i. ES&SP need to have weight
- reviews
 - i. get rid of 333 and 363 processes
 - ii. ministry personnel need support through reviews
 - iii. inconsistency between courts
 - iv. remove from presbytery
 - v. ineffectual and cumbersome

7. Pastoral Relations

- interim ministry
 - i. accessibility for rural charges
 - ii. undermined by lack of pastoral care
- handbooks
 - i. update
 - ii. ensure accuracy
 - iii. changing process too often results in anxiety
- admission
 - i. simplify
- sabbaticals
 - i. accessibility in rural charges
 - ii. more resources
- CDM
 - i. complex
- responsibility for pastoral relations
 - i. consolidate pastoral relations work into one court
 - ii. move pastoral relations work to Conference
 - iii. eliminate redundancy of work between courts
 - iv. congregations need more resources from the presbytery
- pastoral relationships
 - i. allow for appointments of longer than 1 year
 - ii. remove distinction between calls and appointments
 - iii. change of pastoral relationship without cause by pastoral charge is a damaging process
 - iv. change of pastoral relationship with cause is a damaging process
- forms
 - i. too many
 - ii. too complex
 - iii. need electronic forms
- DLM
 - i. complex
 - ii. distrust in process
 - iii. policy creates disincentive to pursue OM

- JNAC/JSC
 - i. simplify
 - ii. redundant in rural congregations
 - iii. having to elect JNAC/JSC reps is “a nightmare”