

## Backgrounder #5: A Three-Council Model

The following section describes the proposed three councils, clusters, and networks in more detail:

### 1. Communities of Faith

#### Description

Communities of faith would include any community of people in Jesus Christ that gathers for faith, worship, and service, and could include congregations as we currently understand them, community-based and justice ministries, faith-based communal living, house churches, shared ministries with other denominations, online communities, and others, within denominational policies.

Communities of faith would have much more freedom to nurture and live out their faith in a variety of ways, subject to the policies set by the denominational and regional councils on membership, structure, governance, and property. They would receive support from the regional and denominational councils to meet the expectations set out in their covenants and competently perform governance, human resources, and property functions. They would access United Church policies and guidelines on the denominational website, and would be able to identify when they need assistance from regional and denominational staff; fee-for-service professionals such as accountants, developers, and lawyers; and other communities of faith.

Communities of faith that determine their current ministries are no longer sustainable would receive support to transition to less formal ministry structures or wind down faithfully and seek opportunities to use any remaining resources to support other ministries or sow new ones.

#### Authority/Responsibility

Each community of faith would

- establish practices for recognizing membership and receiving and celebrating new members within the membership policies of the denomination.
- make decisions about matters including worship, pastoral care, spiritual practice, education, local administration, and local mission, justice, and evangelism, as appropriate.
- help members deepen their faith.
- select and covenant with accredited ministers and other staff to meet ministry needs, according to policy.
- where applicable, buy, sell, lease, and upgrade property according to denominational and regional policies, with support from regional staff if desired.
- enter into a covenant, to be renewed each year, with the regional council that would set out the responsibilities and authority of both. Communities of faith that do not have property or a minister would have a simpler covenant. (see Backgrounder #7: Sample Covenant).
- do an annual self-assessment of its ministry and file a report with the regional council.
- seek support and fellowship and collaborate with other communities of faith in local clusters, and work on issues of interest in networks across the church.

Members would be able to vote on all issues and represent the community in other bodies, according to policy.

In extraordinary circumstances where a community of faith acted outside denominational or regional policies or was not functioning effectively, the regional council could step in and assume control of the community of faith, similar to current section C.3.1.3 of *The Manual, 2013*.

## Staffing

Communities of faith would be able to appoint and end the terms of ministers and other staff, subject to legislation and the policies of the denomination. Only ministers who are accredited by the College of Ministers could be appointed, and they would have to be paid at least the applicable minimum salary, benefits, and pension set by the denomination. Communities of faith would take a variety of forms and could choose not to have a paid minister, depending on their ministry needs.

## 2. Regional Councils

### Description

Regional councils would connect, covenant with, and provide advice, support, and services to communities of faith. Regional councils would be decision-making bodies composed of one lay representative and one ministry representative (for communities of faith with ministers) from each community of faith in the region. Regional councils would meet at least once a year in person, electronically, or via their executives.

Most of the current Conferences would not be sustainable if they were forced to rely on their own assessments and current ways of operating. The Conference operating grant, money that currently comes from the General Council budget, represents from 30 percent to 50 percent of revenue for many Conferences. The task group has assumed Conferences would meet over the next two years to rationalize their structures and staffing into more efficient regions by amalgamating some Conferences or sharing staff resources across separate regional councils. This work needs to happen whether or not the 42nd General Council accepts the task group's recommendations, and must be completed by 2017. As the only "non-geographic" Conference, All Native Circle Conference could choose to take part in these planning meetings, but would also be part of the separate processes with the Aboriginal ministries that form the Aboriginal Ministries Council.

When considering the distribution of pooled assessments among regions, the task group recommends that factors such as the number of communities of faith, geographic distances, investment and other income, and the number of members be included in the methodology.

### Authority/Responsibility

Regional councils, through elected members or regional staff, would

- perform some, but not all, of the functions of current presbyteries and Conferences.
- administer policy established by the denominational council and determine appropriate regional policy.
- accompany students, provide mentors, and appoint supervisors for internships, each of whom would recommend to the College of Ministers whether a candidate is suitable for ministry.

- review and periodically audit the self-assessments of communities of faith to determine whether they are consistent with the covenant between the community of faith and the regional council.
- provide support, advice, and human resource services to communities of faith
- provide support, advice, and services to communities of faith with respect to selling, redeveloping, and disposing of congregational property. Through the covenant relationship, the regional council would hold communities of faith accountable for being consistent with policy on decisions about congregational property.
- investigate concerns that arise with respect to communities of faith, attempt to resolve disputes, and step in if a community of faith is not functioning effectively or is failing to meet its responsibilities.
- establish and manage an annual budget.
- share 50 percent of the money raised in the assessment for regional needs. This money would be distributed based on service needs. A regional council could choose to enact a supplemental assessment.
- have freedom to vary their structure to address regional differences.
- participate in determining priorities for mission and ministry work through the Mission and Service Fund.
- provide leadership training for ministers and laypeople, as determined regionally.
- provide oversight of camps and incorporated ministries in the region.
- celebrate ministries, including ordinations, commissionings, admissions, recognitions, and retirements.
- manage regional archives.

## Staffing<sup>1</sup>

The equivalent of 60 ministry and other professional staff would work in the regions and provide operational advice and support. These positions would be funded through the pooled assessments directed to the regions. This funding would result, on average, in one staff person located in the regions for every 44 communities of faith. If a region has additional resources over and above the pooled assessments, that region could choose to hire additional staff.

It would be up to the regional councils to decide how to deploy staff. One model would include community advisers to provide support, advice, and services to clusters or groups of communities of faith and create connections to networks and experts. A key role would be to provide advice and services to support healthy covenantal relationships among communities of faith, ministers, and staff.

In addition to operational staff, ministry and mission staff, whose salaries would be funded from the Mission and Service Fund, would

- establish and maintain social justice and outreach activities on a regional level
- educate, train, and nurture ministers
- train and support lay leaders
- develop programs for youth and young adults
- develop and support communities of faith

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<sup>1</sup> All staffing numbers in this report are based on financial modelling completed by General Council Office finance staff in consultation with the Permanent Committee on Finance. They are based on the best estimates available of the financial resources that will be available. More detail is provided in Background #10: Finances.

Regional secretaries would hire and manage regional staff. Regional secretaries would report to the General Secretary of the denominational council, as Conference Executive Secretaries do now.

## Clusters

One of the key components of the recommended model would be collegial gatherings called clusters. Clusters would be regular gatherings of communities of faith and their leaders within a geographic area. Clusters would be the driving force in gathering as the people of God to support mission. Clusters would be responsible for

- promoting and encouraging communities of faith to work together for worship, mission, justice, collegiality, stewardship development, and strategic planning as well as connecting with networks in the wider church
- electing a planning team to manage the regular meetings of clusters
- supporting communities of faith in articulating their mission strategy and assessing their success in carrying it out

Within three years, current presbyteries would create appropriate clusters of communities of faith. The presbyteries would then cease to exist as decision-making courts of the church.

Clusters could contribute to the Mission and Service Fund. Some clusters might be financially supported by the communities of faith they represent. Some clusters might apply for money from the Mission and Service Fund. Others might fundraise to hire staff or support their projects.

## 3. Denominational Council

### Description

The denominational council would nurture the identity of the United Church, discern and express a denominational voice, and connect the United Church with God's wider church by deciding on denomination-shaping issues related to public witness, theology, and governance structure. It would establish a three-year budget for the church and the assessment rate for communities of faith to fund the church, and elect a Moderator. Along with a business meeting of two to three days, the gathering of the denominational council would include major learning events, worship, national gatherings of networks, and faith celebrations.

The denominational council would meet every three years, as it currently does, but would be much larger than the current General Council because each community of faith would send one lay representative and, for communities of faith with ministers, one ministry representative. Travel, accommodation, and registration costs would be paid by communities of faith, with bursaries available where needed. The average cost for all commissioners would be calculated and charged as a standard registration fee to ensure costs for all communities of faith are equitable. Inviting representatives from all communities of faith to participate in the denominational council would help connect them directly with the work of the denomination and increase understanding and buy-in around the decisions of the denominational council.

Commissioners would be able to take part electronically in the triennial denominational council meeting, and mid-term meetings would also be possible.

The denominational council would ordinarily be held in a “permanent” location to save staff costs and resources that go into working out new arrangements each time a new location is used.

Between meetings of the denominational council, an executive would make decisions about all matters except those specifically reserved for the denominational council. The executive would be much smaller than the current body—between 12 and 18 members—and would reflect the principle that all the voices of our diverse church must be heard but not necessarily always be present. Members would be chosen based on needed competencies, but with a stated goal of diversity in the executive's makeup.

The denominational executive would establish standing or other committees, which would be much smaller in number than currently. All members of the executive would serve on a standing or other committee. Some members of the standing committees would be chosen from outside the executive based on their expertise in relevant areas. The chair of each committee, other than the audit committee, would be a member of the executive to ensure there is a link of accountability to the executive.

### **Authority/Responsibility**

The denominational council would

- elect a Moderator from those nominated.
- elect an executive from the slate presented by the nominations committee, drawn from regional council nominations, and taking into account the need for named competencies and the expectation that Aboriginal, francophone, racialized, and other diverse voices would be included. A representative of the Aboriginal Ministries Council would be a member of the denominational executive.
- establish a three-year budget envelope for the church and the assessment rate for communities of faith to fund the church.
- vote on denomination-shaping issues related to public witness, theology, and governance structure.
- refer all unfinished matters to the executive, which would have wider powers to act and to set directions for staff between denominational council meetings.

### **Staffing**

A smaller denominational staff would provide common services such as

- administration of denominational policies
- technical services such as information technology, payroll, accounting, human resources, administration, benefits, and pension plan
- communications
- supporting the Moderator
- leading global partnerships and national-level ministry and mission work
- managing denominational archives

Other denominational staff located at the denominational office and in the regions would support and enable mission and ministry.

### **Networks**

One of the goals of reducing the number of governance decision-making bodies in the church structure is to leave more room for communities of faith to support one another and

carry out ministry, both individually and together. Clusters would provide that support to communities of faith in the same geographic areas. Another way people could connect across the church would be through networks, which would link people with similar passions.

**See Backgrounder #8: Networks for further detail and examples of networks.**