

Theme: SMALL & RURAL MINISTRIES

GENERAL COMMENTS

What We Heard:

- Rural ministry is a very important part of the church; it's not just on the prairies. Each rural area has its own characteristics and challenges.
- Rural ministries keep people together.
- Need to make a distinction between rural & isolated. There is a difference between the two.
- There are significant challenges facing these ministries right now – they are at a crisis point – and they have been the heart of the United Church.
- Economic struggles in communities & financial pressures on communities of faith; rural communities are also facing

depopulation. We are losing touch – ministers often don't live in the community(/ies) they serve.

- Small churches are not only rural – there is need for an alternative model of ministry in smaller churches. Often the current model of ministry doesn't fit innovative ways of being the church.

BC 6 – MINISTRY SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

What We Heard:

- Strong agreement with the proposal.
- Some said we need to capitalize on the models where things are working successfully already; we need not always reinvent the wheel. Effective models exist in All Native Circle Conference.
- Several groups said that a handbook would be helpful. One group wondered whether, if the policy and handbook are created, there needs to be a network.
- One group said there doesn't need to be a staff role; another group suggested there should be a regional paid accountable staff.
- There were questions about how some of the resources might be adapted for small urban ministry.

- One group wondered when there is no longer a presbytery what touchstone for communication will exist?
- The proposal presupposes the supervising minister is ordered but it is sometimes the case that a supervising minister is a lay person.
- It is hard to find people to supervise; becoming a growing demand on ministry leadership.
- There can be tension when the supervising minister needs to spend significant time with a pastoral charge that is not your own.
- A minority felt that this is forcing small and rural communities of faith to pay for a service that is required by The Manual; on the other side there is a community of faith paying someone who is not always there. Is remuneration a solution? Would the regions provide resources?

Suggested Way Forward:

That the 43rd General Council affirm proposal BC 06 Ministry Support and Supervision and direct the General Secretary to implement.

Moved: I. Brown

Seconded: B. Mee

CARRIED.

BQ 6 – ALTERNATE RELATIONSHIPS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

GENERAL COMMENTS

What We Heard:

- There is strong support for the proposal.
- It would be good to have options and alternatives.
- Policy/practice needs to catch up with reality. Many communities of faith are having “meetings” that are not meetings (as defined by The Manual).
- Need more guidelines and more flexibility; need structures for locally appropriate governance. Guidelines are better than models – one size doesn’t fit all.
- We should be sharing best practices when bodies are successfully changing governance practices. For example,

one group shared about a multiple pastoral charges sharing one Ministry & Personnel Committee.

- One group suggests to refer to the Manual Committee for consideration with respect to the ongoing revision and location of the bylaws; Manual Committee is already considering guiding principles without defining how they must be met.

Suggested Way Forward:

That the 43rd General Council affirm proposal BQ 06 – Alternate Relationships and Governance Structures, and direct the General Secretary to implement.

Moved: W. Stride

Seconded: M. Bell

CARRIED.

MNWO 1 – RURAL PRAIRIE MARGINALIZATION

What We Heard:

- There was mixed support for this proposal.
- Small and rural congregations are highly important to the United Church.
- There was support for consultation with rural advocacy clusters; clusters are free to be created without input from the national church.
- It is up to the region to ensure that there is a balance of representation at the Denominational Council.
- The request for exceptions is uncomfortable – it feels like a band-aid again instead of a solution; groups hear this as a cry for help and there is a lot of anxiety moving to the three-court structure.

- Groups noted that this was a rural issue, not just a Prairie rural issue; we need to avoid further isolating rural communities. Rural communities are often not represented in national church programs and committees.
- Concerns over the recommendation about creating a back door for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to become full time worship leaders; on the other hand, it is frustrating for rural communities who have access to designated lay ministers, ministers from other denominations, or licenced lay worship leaders who are limited by The Manual in how/how often/how long they can serve rural communities.
- Our current period of transition and ambiguity creates an opportunity for us to respond creatively to needs in the church.

- Almost all groups noted that we must respond thoughtfully to the circumstance of isolated and rural ministries; rural life is a culture.

Suggested Way Forward:

That the 43rd General Council direct the General Secretary to implement GC42 2015 - 48; and take no further action on proposal MNWO 1 – Rural Prairie Marginalization.

Moved: B. Paterson

Seconded: M. Martin

CARRIED.

Amendment:

Moved: K. Black

Seconded: G. Goin

CARRIED.

MNWO 2 – FUNDING RURAL MINISTRY

What We Heard:

- There was a strong consensus that we need to find long term solutions to significant problems facing rural ministries, without a will to affirm the proposal.
- Consider asking the General Secretary to write a policy to support rural ministry.
- There was some support for the creation of the Rural Ministries Animator to respond to the sense of isolation and urgent needs facing rural congregations.
- There were many questions about funding, appropriate structure to respond, and whether this is a prairie or national issue similar to other proposals on small and rural ministry.

- There is urgent help needed, but groups raised concerns about how the proposed funding allocation would impact the grants to regions.
- Revitalization of ministry is the issue, not the money – the proposal needs to go to the Regions.

Suggested Way Forward:

That the 43rd General Council direct the General Secretary to encourage the regions to consider proposal MNWO 02 and that the General Council take no further action.

Moved: S. White

Seconded: J. Frostad

CARRIED.

MNWO 4 – ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

What We Heard:

- Existing church grants for technology should continue with prioritizing rural congregations with high needs.
- There was support for the Church's role in advocating to government and telecom companies for adequate internet access in all rural communities; all the technology in the world can't overcome connectivity and networking issues. This is a justice issue.
- This is important because of increased use of technology for mandatory training; this is an issue of equity.
- Suggestion for a church-wide IT strategic plan on use of technologies in the church; could be a focused study in each region.

- Technology is also a concern for urban congregations due to structure and connectivity concerns.

Suggested Way Forward:

That the 43rd General Council affirm proposal MNWO 04 Access to Technology for Effective Communication, and directs the General Secretary to establish a plan for advocacy for rural connectivity and to implement the proposal.

Moved: G. Bott

Seconded: T. Orlando

CARRIED.