

## PROPOSALS

### **PROPOSAL 1 - RURAL PRAIRIE MARGINALIZATION**

**Origin:** Assiniboine Presbytery, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

#### **What is the Issue?**

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- Declare the growing feeling of marginalization the Rural Church of the Canadian Prairies is experiencing.
- Ensure the church remembers to consider the whole people of God, with particular attention to the geographical challenges when authorizing changes in governance.

#### **Why is this issue important?**

- In the Song of Faith, we read:
  - We sing of a church  
seeking to continue the story of Jesus  
by embodying Christ's presence in the world.
  - We are called together by Christ  
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,  
loving what he loved,  
living what he taught,  
striving to be faithful servants of God  
in our time and place.
- As followers of Jesus, we recognize that Jesus always cared for the marginalized. The United Church of Canada, through implementation of certain policies, has increased, rather than provided care for marginalized rural congregations. For example, the elimination of the Transfer and Settlement process has negatively impacted the rural Prairie Communities of Faith who gladly helped to form leaders in the church. This rural experience led to a broader understanding of the unique needs in rural prairie ministry and a connection to rural life. That has now been lost.
- When we consider the kind of governance change we are working on in a church that encompasses the whole of Canada, our thinking tends to move to broad strokes. But our geographical contexts are varied. One change that may be suggested as workable in an urban context may not work in a rural prairie setting.

#### **How might the Church respond?**

- The General Council could formally recognize Prairie rural congregations as marginalized communities and ensure representation on the Denominational Council.
- The General Council could ensure consultation occurs with a soon to be formed Prairie Rural Advocacy Cluster, prior to implementing policy changes that will impact Prairie Rural Communities of Faith.
- The General Council Could open the way for special circumstances arising in rural Prairie ministries to be addressed by creating "an exception" to policy to enable the continuation of a Community of Faith, e.g. appointment of a Licensed Lay Worship Leader for regular worship leadership in the absence of ministry personnel.

#### **For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?

## **PROPOSAL 2**

### **DENOMINATIONAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE REPRESENTATIVES**

**Origin:** Assiniboine Presbytery, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

#### **What is the issue?**

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- Ensure equality in decision-making processes and input into the direction of our denomination. However, we are moving towards a structure in which our Denominational Council Executive will have fewer representatives than Decision Making Regions.

#### **Why is this issue important?**

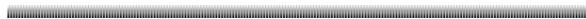
- As Christians we believe in following Jesus' teachings, which modelled the need to recognize all peoples as equal. We strive to demonstrate God's peace and love through equal power distribution and giving voice to all individuals. We have a long held tradition of making decisions through a bottom-up model rather than a more authoritative and oppressing bottom-down method. Currently, General Council Executive has consisted of at least 2 representatives from each of the 13 conferences.

#### **How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

- The General Council could increase the number of Denominational Council Executive Members from 15 to 17 (1 Representative from each of the 16 Regional Councils + 1 Representative from All Native Circle Conference)

#### **For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?



### **PROPOSAL 3 - FUNDING RURAL MINISTRY**

**Origin:** Assiniboine Presbytery, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

#### **What is the issue?**

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- acknowledge that there are a growing number of rural areas on the prairies where there are more vacancies than ministry personnel and a number of the ministry personnel are retired and/or part-time.
- respond to the challenging financial constraints in prairie rural communities of faith that make it difficult to hire ministry personnel and access resources to reimagine ministry in these contexts. We are open to new ways of enacting our faith in these rural areas, but it can be difficult to explore possibilities on our own and an assessment by our Administrative Region would only create more hardship on these small but vibrant communities of faith.
- understand that many of the new initiatives promoted in urban settings to revitalize and reimagine church (Embracing Spirit) do not translate to the rural prairie context.

#### **Why is this issue important?**

Key underlying issues

- Though we identify as a uniting church the congregants in rural communities on the prairies often feel misunderstood, marginalized and alienated by our denomination.
- We may be dwindling in number but our connection to the Creator and the land is strong. We witness to God all around us and are striving to connect younger generations to these spiritual roots. We offer vital supports and hope in the midst of challenging times through outreach, pastoral care, strong ecumenical bonds and actively engaging the work of reconciliation.

History/background

- In the past, a number of rural communities of faith on the prairies were seen as missions and therefore eligible to receive Mission & Service Fund grants to help cover the costs of ministry. But in the last decade, the reduction of M&S funds available has meant that priority for funding is given to inner-city outreach ministries in many Regions.

Implications of taking no action on this issue

- We fear that our denomination is becoming increasingly urbanized, making it difficult for rural prairie communities of faith to continue. In many cases, we are the only church in town and when we disappear there will no longer be a spiritual sanctuary for people to learn about God, to encourage us, to challenge our thinking, to walk with Jesus, to call us to action, to show our love and to listen for the quiet Spirit.

#### **How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

Action on the issue:

- The General Council could set aside 3% of M&S dollars to help fund rural ministry on the prairies.
- The General Council could create a staff position entitled Rural Ministries Animator who would be situated within the prairie Administrative Region (Regions 2, 4 & 5)
- The General Council could allow the Rural Ministries Animator to oversee the dispensing of funds to engage and support rural ministry needs. This may include developing new models of ministry, supporting and resourcing laity, and encouraging church without walls.

#### **For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?

#### **PROPOSAL 4 - SACRAMENTAL LICENSE FOR RETIRED DIACONAL MINISTERS**

**Origin:** Assiniboine Presbytery, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

##### **What is the issue?**

- We believe God is calling us to ensure that all congregations have a vibrant worship and sacramental life. We believe that the current policy, which excludes retired Diaconal Ministers from presiding over sacraments, is both prejudicial to the ministry personnel and detrimental to those congregations who are dependent upon retired supply for their ministry support.

##### **Why is this issue important?**

- This issue is important because there are many United Church congregations, especially in rural and remote areas, who are not served by full time paid accountable ministry personnel.
- The reality of less-than-full time employment in rural and remote areas makes it more difficult to attract new ministry personnel. Many congregations rely on several different people, both active or retired ordained ministers and lay people, to fill their ministry needs, sometimes under appointment or as supply. This reality requires a higher degree of flexibility to accommodate new and innovative ways of serving the needs of the local church while still maintaining the integrity of the sacraments.
- Our current policy and practice grants sacramental authority without time limit to ordained ministers at time of ordination. Lay people who were serving as recognized designated lay ministers at time of retirement may be granted a license in retirement. However, there is no provision for retired Diaconal Ministers to be licensed for sacramental authority. The current policy discriminates against Diaconal Ministers and disadvantages congregations who may be dependent upon the ministry support offered by retired Diaconal Ministers.

##### **What is the history/background of this issue?**

- The church has been in conversation about sacramental rights for diaconal ministers for many years. One aspect of the One Order of Ministry Remit was intended to address this issue; however, the Remit itself, which covered far more than just sacramental authority, failed. We need to find an intermediate solution to the problem of inconsistency in licensing practises while we wrestle with trying to achieve consensus on the broader theological understandings of both ministry and sacramental authority in the United Church.

##### **What would be the implications of taking no action on this issue?**

- As the One Order of Ministry Remit failed, the current policy remains in place. From a congregational standpoint, they could well be without the opportunity for a sacramental life. If a retired Diaconal Minister was appointed to the congregation, that minister is currently not eligible for sacramental licensing. But because the congregation has a retired Order of Ministry person hired under appointment, even if only for one Sunday per month, they would be ineligible to have Sacrament Elder(s) licensed. As such, there would be no opportunity to celebrate baptism or engage in the breaking of bread together as a sacramental act.
- For those retired Diaconal Ministers who may provide support to several rural and/or remote pastoral charges, on either a regular or occasional basis, they would not be able to fully engage the needs of the pastoral charges as both retired ordained and retired designated lay ministers may.

**How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

- The General Council could authorize an amendment to current policy to allow retired Diaconal Ministers to be licensed for sacramental authority, the boundaries of which are not confined to a specific pastoral charge, as long as they remain in good standing with the United Church of Canada.

**For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?



## **PROPOSAL 5 - ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

**Origin:** Settlement Commission, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

### **What is the issue?**

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to support Pastoral Charges (Local Ministry Units) to increase their capacity to use technology to:

- Connect with other bodies of the church for meetings, webinars, on-line worship, etc;
- Communicate more efficiently in the new Regional Model of being the United Church;
- Save time, money and energy through connecting by phone or internet rather than driving the increased distances;
- Support each other's congregations and build healthy, thriving, viable faith communities.
- Currently many congregations do not have the money to finance the hardware or training for people to use it.

### **Why is this issue important?**

What are the key underlying theological, ecclesiological, missional, or justice issues?

- As the United Church evolves into larger Regions for decision making, communication by means other than face-to-face meetings will become essential.
- In many Pastoral Charges, the capacity for distance communication (phone, internet etc) is limited by lack of equipment, or that the equipment belongs to the minister, not the pastoral charge.
- The capacity to use technology for distance communication is lacking or limited to the minister
- Increasing numbers of pastoral charges are without called or appointed ministry personnel for long periods of time or permanently
- Some pastoral charges share ministry personnel making communication between locations essential
- Though there are some volunteers in congregations who are skilled in the use of technology, many (especially older) members are fearful of technology and need support to overcome barriers to learning
- Some pastoral charges could benefit from live-streaming of worship services or education events, webinars.
- Most congregations are able to participate in a Telephone Conference Call. While this is adequate for conducting a short business meeting, the ability to see each other and share documents, participate in webinars, share worship, etc is required for building healthy pastoral charges and communities of faith.

Developing the capacity for communication and having the equipment to do so:

Extends the capacity for study, and for conducting meetings of the church;

Increases the ability to extend the mission of the church to places where it might be failing;

Provides support to one another in 'how-to' be church in areas such as outreach, faith formation, training (sacrament elder, worship leadership), stewardship, administration, all areas that will fall to the Community of Faith (JNAC/Ministry Profile);

Provides the ability to fill on on-line forms thus ensuring information is transmitted speedily and accurately.

- Currently, smaller churches that cannot afford to buy the equipment are increasingly feeling left out of or abandoned by the Church. These same churches are often those without ministry personnel.
- Many Pastoral Charges are no longer able to afford full time ministry. Some have been without paid ministry personnel. Some have little or no music leadership. Congregations could share on-line worship with others, both neighbouring and at a greater distance. Volunteer leadership could benefit from worship and music resources which are available, but they need the technology and the capacity to use these. Provision of funding for equipment and training of leaders, especially those congregations without paid ministry, would allow them to participate more fully in the ongoing life of the wider church.

What is the history/background of this issue?

A recent survey conducted by Cambrian Presbytery (14 respondents out of 24) showed

Availability of a computer	75% have a computer in the office 16% have a computer in the sanctuary 25% have a computer for their ministry personnel 25% have no computer	
Is there a notebook or laptop computer?	Most churches have at least one available to the church and/or the minister with 7% reporting none.	
Operating System:	Predominantly Windows 10 or lower 20% MAC Linux	
Highspeed Internet in Church	NO 21%	YES 79%
Download and upload Speed	Highly variable	
Hardware	NO	YES
Printers:		100% at least 1 or more, mix of Laser and Ink jet
Scanner	31%	69%
Digital Projector/Screen	21%	79%
Flat Screen TV 50" or greater	54%	46%
Speaker Phone	29%	71%
Sound System		100%
Microphone	14%	86% (1-4)
Headphones for Assisted Hearing	64%	36%

Software: 4 churches skipped this question

Of the 10 churches which responded some have some familiarity with:

Adobeacrobat reader – 90%

Microsoft Office for Windows - 90%,

SKYPE 70%

ZOOM us basic 40%

Dropbox basic 50%

- Software skill levels vary from Office Administrator to Ministry Personnel.
- Some pastoral charges do have excellent technical capacity. Some however do not have:
  - new or up-to-date equipment ( much is old or borrowed or a hodgepodge)
  - adequate internet connection
  - sufficient bandwidth within the community, either upload or download speed
  - the ability to share documents by email
  - the ability to access webinars
  - the ability to fill in in-line forms
  - In some cases the equipment (e.g. computer, lap-top, printer, etc) is owned by the minister and when he or she leaves, the pastoral charge is left without.
- The fact that only 14 out of 24 pastoral charges responded to this survey conducted by Survey Monkey may be a further indication of the lack of or equipment or capacity to use technology.
- We acknowledge the existence of Technology Grants that are already part of the current Financial Resources handbook: [http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/handbook\\_financial-resources-abbreviated.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/handbook_financial-resources-abbreviated.pdf) but challenge whether the terms of reference are adequate to meet the needs .

What are the principles informing this issue?

- Every pastoral charge, congregation, local ministry unit should be able to communicate effectively by telephone and internet, with other bodies of the church,
- As a church that values inclusion, it is important that the many national audio-visual resources that are now dependent on technology or internet access or both, are accessible by all pastoral charges.

**How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

Action on the issue

- The General Council could ensure there is on-going funding for enhanced Technology Grants for pastoral charges which need to upgrade their equipment and software to a specified standard.
- The General Council could ensure that Funded Training Courses and Support are available to enhance the capacity for members of the pastoral charges (lay members and ministry personnel) in the use of technology for communication and worship (especially that unique to the United Church of Canada)
- The General Council could establish a requirement in the Pastoral Relations Covenant (PR 450) to include the hardware and internet access where possible.

**For the courts transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?

## **PROPOSAL 6 - MOVING EXPENSES FOR MINISTRY PERSONNEL**

**Origin:** Settlement Commission, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

### **What is the issue?**

- The ability of some pastoral charges to pay Moving Expenses has resulted in limited distribution/mobility of trained Ministry Personnel to fill vacancies across the United Church.

### **Why is the issue important?**

- As a church we train Ministry Personnel for the denomination as a whole and the UCC has policies that ensure portability of Ministry Personnel across the church so that the ministry needs across the church are able to be met in a fair manner.
- The UCC congregations/pastoral charges in some areas of the country (and Bermuda) are reliant upon the movement of Ministry Personnel significant distances. This reliance is increasing with increasing numbers of Ministry Personnel retiring in some areas and a decreased number of persons discerning and training for Diaconal Ministry/Ordained Ministry or Designated Lay Ministry.
- Some pastoral charges who are able to afford salary and other costs on an ongoing basis are not able to afford the one time costs related to a significant move in the same year they are also paying costs related to search processes.
- Access to financial assistance for moving ministry personnel is crucial.

### **What are the key underlying theological, ecclesiological, missional, or justice issues?**

- I Corinthians 12 ....The interconnectedness of the body of Christ, the church, and our understanding of the stewardship of the resources across the church, would support the development of policies and processes that would encourage the just sharing of resources , both human and financial across the United Church of Canada where and when possible.

### **What is the history/background of this issue?**

- There exists as part of the Mission Support Grant System, a fund entitled “ Moving Expenses: Pastoral Charges and Community Ministries “ the objective of which is “ to share the costs of moves within Canada with pastoral charges or community ministries with modest income and small membership, including those designated by Conference as isolated ministries.” Monies are shared according to a formula( first \$ 1,500 from the charge or mission unit; next \$ 8000.00 40 % is the responsibility of the Pastoral Charge or mission unit and up to 60% will be considered by the Financial Support Group (FSG) from the Mission Support Grant Common Fund; over \$ 9000.00 is the responsibility of the pastoral charge or mission unit. The monies for this fund come from the Common Fund which may have a bit of money in it after June 1 but more likely has funds only after November 15 after Conferences have returned to General Council any Mission Support Grant monies assigned to them that have not been used. The guidelines for the fund are in the Financial Resources Handbook:
- The absence of moving assistance in the form of a grant or a loan at points throughout the year when moves may get approved or happen more frequently i.e. for July 1, September 01 or January 1; means those pastoral charges or community ministries may not be able to access ministry personnel that are the best match for their pastoral relationship. It is not a good stewardship practise for presbyteries/conferences/regions to permit a pastoral relationship to begin based on the “hope” that there will be funding available for Moving

Assistance later in the calendar year as the risk is that if the charge does not receive moving assistance they will not be able to pay salary and other expenses and have to give notice to end the pastoral relationship. This has actually happened in the Conference of MNWO.

- The Transfer and Settlement System which had its final round in Spring, 2018 use to present an option for those congregations/ pastoral charges with limited resources to access ministry personnel by having an established contribution by the pastoral charges to the costs regardless of the cost of the move or the resources of the pastoral charge.
- An additional concern is with changing structures there may be no such centralized fund and each Conference/Region will be left to set aside funds for moving assistance from within the designated amount of their own Mission Support grant allocation, not necessarily sharing the responsibility/burden of this matter across the church. The definition of “modest income and small membership” may mean that some who have the issue of finding the lump sum for moving costs are not eligible for assistance.

**How might General council respond to the issue?**

- The General Council could ensure the Moving Expense: Pastoral Charges and Community Ministries continues to exist as a denominational fund and ensure funding assistance is available throughout the year by having a balance from January 1 of at least the amount that was previously available for moves within the Transfer & Settlement processes. Monies could come from the Mission and Service Fund.
- The General Council could ensure that when Mission Support Grant monies are divided up between the Conferences /Regions those divisions include some monies based on the number of “modest income and small membership” pastoral charges or Mission Units likely to be engaged in a change in pastoral relations during that calendar year or some other formula or criteria that seems reasonable and just (like that used for the former travel equalization grant)

**For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?



**PROPOSAL 7 – APPOINTMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL DESIGNATED MINISTER****Origin:** Settlement Commission, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario**What is the issue?**

- The Manual states:
 

*“A Pastoral charge may appoint a person as a “congregational designated minister” if the Presbytery has designated the ministry position as one that is accountable to the governing body of the pastoral charge. The following requirements apply:*

  - a) The person must be a baptized Christian*
  - b) The person must agree to comply with the polity of the United Church*
  - c) The appointment must be for a specified term, which may be renewed and*
  - d) There must also be a member of the order of ministry or a designated lay minister settled in or appointed to the pastoral charge.*

*A congregational designated minister is accountable to the governing body except in matters of discipline. They are accountable to the presbytery in matters of discipline.”*
- The Manual 2016 I:1.8.4 (d) (there must also be a member of the order of ministry or a designated lay minister settled in or appointed to the pastoral charge) presents a hardship for many Pastoral Charges in that it prevents the hiring of trained leadership (Congregational Designated Minister) in situations where Pastoral Charges have declared vacancies and are waiting for Order of Ministry or Designated Lay Ministers to be called or appointed, or where Pastoral Charges are not able to call or appoint Order of Ministry or Designated Lay Ministers due to their financial situation and/or location.
- Congregations small or large, rich or with financial hardship, in city or rural locations deserve to be served by those who have training in specific areas.
- We believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to respond to this challenge in a way that
  - a) supports pastoral charges,
  - b) offers recognition to those gifted by God for supporting Pastoral charges in an area of ministry that the congregation feels less than capable to do on a voluntary basis,
  - c) recognizes that accountability is vital.

**Why is this issue important?**

What are the key underlying theological, ecclesiological, missional, or justice issues?

- Currently the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario has 72 pastoral charges that do not have an Ordered or Designated Lay Minister settled or appointed to the pastoral charge. These are viable pastoral charges worshipping and doing God’s work in their communities. Many of these pastoral charges have been actively searching for at least a year for ministry personnel. Many are searching for someone on a less than full time basis and/or in beginning salary categories. While there are ordered ministers and designated lay ministers, recognized, actively looking for call or appointment in some Conferences, they are not able to relocate where the need is. Other pastoral charges are not able to attract applicants because of their financial situation. Many are at least 90 km in distance from each other, making a multiple point charge unfavourable for both the pastoral charge and a minister.
- There are other Conferences who face similar problems.
- We are all gifted and skilled, some of us in the more challenging areas such as Pastoral Care, Worship Leadership, ...regardless of the ability to attract Ordered or Designated Lay Ministers or financial status of a pastoral charge (some where vacancies have been declared), the wider

church views the viability of these pastoral charges as positive and must find ways to support these pastoral charges.

- If a congregation must have a called or appointed minister on their charge to appoint a Congregational Designated Minister, congregations without are treated unfairly.
- Pastoral Charges need leadership to move into God's mission with energy and guidance.
- The wider body (Presbytery and Conference) to whom these congregations are responsible is huge, and travel is often unsafe especially in the winter. Congregations in these more remote areas (remote means from the wider body offices and staff, and distance from other pastoral charges with whom they might share) need Congregational Designated Ministers as sole staff focussing on one specific area of ministry (working within the guidelines specified by the church).
- There appears to be a scarcity of ministers willing to accept the opportunity to move into these pastoral charges. A Congregational Designated Minister(s) in this situation provides trained support to the charge.
- 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of the spiritual gifts shared by all of us with the reminder that the body is responsible for all parts. It is our understanding that 'where two or three' gather to worship, praise and enter into God's mission, there is viable ministry. The United Church must find a way to provide staff holding gifts and skills in all of these places. Currently, the only way for these pastoral charges to appoint someone with gifts and skills for the work is to have an ordered minister or a designated lay minister called or appointed already. Without someone in a ministry stream at the pastoral charge, this means that the work can only be done voluntarily by perhaps less than skilled and gifted people who are not accountable for their work, or tired volunteers who readily admit they are not doing the best.

What is the history/background of this issue?

- Many of these congregations were Missions or Settlement Charges when Settlement was an option. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, churches were attended and supported by a greater number of people allowing for the call or appointment of ministers. Earlier in the history of the United Church, ministers entered the ministry earlier in life and were not restricted to larger centres by special circumstances and the expectation was that they would be settled to their first call or appointment.
- Proposals that were sent through the Conference of MNWO by Cambrian Presbytery in 2012 resulted in the General Council directing the General Secretary to develop policy defining the purpose and role of congregational designated Ministers and Licensed Lay Worship Leaders for inclusion in the by-laws and submit to GC 42". The results did NOT eliminate the requirement for a Settled or Appointed Minister to be present in order that a CDM be hired and the restriction still remained.

What are the principles informing this issue?

- Questions informing this issue are:
  - a) What makes viable ministry?
  - b) Can viable ministry grow and continue without leadership/followership?
  - c) How can we encourage accountable, gifted and skilled leadership where people do not feel called into all aspects of streams of ministry?

**How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

Action on the issue:

- The General Council could change the polity so that a Pastoral charge may appoint a person as a “congregational designated minister” if the Pastoral Charge Supervisor appointed by presbytery, an Ordered Minister or a Designated Lay Minister Recognized, is assigned the responsibility of overseeing the work of the Congregational Designated Minister and reporting to Presbytery as well as the pastoral charge.
- The General Council could change the polity so that a Pastoral charge may appoint a person as a “congregational designated minister” if the congregational designated minister is accountable through an agreement made with another pastoral charge that has an Ordered or Designated Lay Pastoral Minister Recognized for supervision and accountability purposes.
- The General Council could change the polity so that a Pastoral charge may appoint a person as a “congregational designated minister” if the congregational designated minister is accountable to the governing body of the Pastoral charge.

**For the courts transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?

