

Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action: Background

Additional material for the information
of the Executive of the General Council
May 1–3, 2010

(This document provides more detail on significant recommendations in the triennium planning report.)

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The Consultation Process: A Snapshot

Whom did we ask?

- Everyone connected with The United Church of Canada

How did we distribute the invitation?

- In a letter from the General Secretary on January 4, 2010
 - Via e-mail to Conferences, presbyteries, and commissioners of the 40th General Council
 - Via Facebook to GC40 Youth Forum delegates
 - On www.united-church.ca
 - On the Church Leadership Network
 - On the General Council Office intranet

Who responded?

- We received more than 130 responses from individuals, congregations, presbyteries, Conference executives, Conference staff, and others. The responses came from almost every Conference.
- We also heard from General Council Office staff through an engagement process that involved two all-staff meetings, a brown bag lunch, and an invitation to submit comments by e-mail or via an online survey. This process resulted in staff contributing more than 250 ideas.

What did we hear?

- Very few people argued for the status quo.
- Only a few respondents argued for Option 1 (broad and equitable cuts).
- The general feeling was that, as one respondent argued, “it would be better to decide to eliminate some things than to see them slowly starve to death.”
- Most people who responded advocated significant change, along the lines of Option 2 (radical reimagining) or Option 3 (cut deeper than required and fund innovative work).
- Many believed this is a critical point in the church’s history and that now is the time to do something bold or different.
 - “I believe that this is the kairos for the United Church. This is the time to make the substantive changes that will prepare us for the future, when we will be greatly reduced by number and resources, but very alive in Christ and for Christ.”
 - “The time for radical transformation is upon us, and we are not fearful of what that transformation will bring.”
 - “People at all levels of the church have been putting money aside—or dare I say tying money up in buildings and investment funds that do not serve our needs or the Gospel—for a ‘rainy day.’ It’s pouring buckets! The time has come for a different kind of investing.”
- But some respondents raised cautions about the benefits that would be realized from radical reimagining.
 - “Restructuring is often seen as the answer, but careful analysis of actual financial savings at what cost to which services and programs would need to be carefully considered.”
- Respondents expressed many visions for the church and identified many different areas for change. However, some strong themes emerged:

- We need to rejuvenate congregations/ministries. Some argued for strategically supporting congregations/ministries that are doing well.
 - We need to communicate our work more effectively. “We have to start taking credit for what we do so we can attract those who appreciate our style. I watch the Salvation Army ads at Christmas and realize we do everything they do; we just never tell anyone about it.”
 - We need to take a different approach to fundraising. Some suggested appealing to those outside the church who appreciate the positions the church has taken on social justice issues. Some suggested moving away from the unified fund. Others argued for funding General Council Office administration through an assessment, and establishing a separate entity for mission/justice work that would be funded through individual donations.
 - We need to look at cost-savings, including reducing the number of committees, using technology to reduce meeting costs, looking for new partnerships, managing real estate more effectively, and reducing the frequency and size of General Council.
- But we also heard tensions between different visions of the church.
 - Governance
 - There appears to be a widespread feeling that the church is overly bureaucratic, has too many unwieldy structures, and isn’t agile. But there was little consensus on what to do about it.
 - Many respondents suggested eliminating a court, but there was little agreement on which court it should be. Some suggested collapsing Conferences into presbyteries, some suggested collapsing presbyteries into Conferences, and some proposed various ways of rebalancing the duties of and relationships between the courts.
 - At least one person suggested “disassembling” the General Council Office. In this model, the General Council Office would serve primarily an administrative function, while mission, ministry, and stewardship work would move out to the Conferences.
 - But some respondents argued for the need to maintain a strong “national” office to ensure a coherent denominational identity and voice.
 - Theology
 - Some respondents view the Twenty Articles of Faith as a relic of another era that is holding the church back.
 - Others see it as a source of strength. They look at the apparent appeal of many evangelical churches, and suggest that standing firm in or rediscovering the Twenty Articles would reinvigorate the United Church and draw people back.
 - Themes Affirmed by the 40th General Council
 - Respondents had different reactions to the themes named by the 40th General Council.
 - Some respondents told us which one of the five they thought was most important and should receive the most resources. A significant number said social justice work should remain a key priority of the church, and noted the historical roots of this work in the social gospel.
 - Others argued that “having five priorities/themes means that we have no priorities/themes. Those five themes could be used to describe almost any ministry the church is doing or could do.”

- Or, as one person observed, “We did the typical United Church thing and threw in everything except motherhood, apple pie, and the kitchen sink—although we could probably fit those in under one of the headings if we tried.”
- Beyond these specific ideas, many respondents talked about a bigger issue: the “baggage” the church is carrying, and the need to let it go.
 - “The actual work of the church seems to have become secondary to the preservation of the institution itself.”
 - What is stopping the church from modelling different ways of doing things? asked one respondent. “Fear of change. Fear of losses. Struggling to maintain what we know and are, rather than what we could know and be. Lack of foresight. Lack of willingness to actually live out the faith we are so fierce about protecting. But really, we are protecting our places, our habits, our traditions, what we’ve always been or done, none of which is necessarily tied to a 21st-century faith.”
 - One respondent suggested that “it would make a profound mark on our culture if the church dedicated itself to the theme of essentially staging its own funeral. We could grieve the church we miss, bury notions of church that exist only in our collective memory, and seriously address the need to move on.”
- Many respondents see promising opportunities if we can let go of ideas of what the church used to be and embrace different ways of being church.
 - “We need to be ‘church’ outside of our buildings! Buildings impede and hamper the message that our United Church of Canada should be proclaiming.... The ‘church’ should meet in arenas, coffee shops, on streets, in malls, on the banks of rivers, in town squares, wherever members of our congregations can be seen, making a difference in the lives of others and of our world. That is where the church should be.”
 - One community minister wrote passionately about being a church without walls: “We have no church building. We don’t have church services. We don’t ‘look like the church,’ as people say. And our sisters and brothers in the United Church who are steeped in the experience of congregational ministry don’t even always recognize us as ‘church.’ Yet, because we don’t look like the church of Christendom that so many people are fleeing, we have an opportunity to be a faith-based ministry that ministers to people whatever their faith or lack thereof, with the compassion and social vision of Jesus as the core of all that we do.”
- We also heard from the wider church the love and passion people have for the church, a yearning for change, and hope for the future.
 - “I have heard so much about cutbacks within the church,” one respondent wrote. “When do we start celebrating the abundance of what God has already given us?”

Identity and Connection

Identity is about care for the compelling story of the church, both theological and social. It is about the ethos or “brand” name of the denomination that takes expression most directly through its faith, beliefs, affirmations, and policies. It is about having a sense of who we want to be and how we want to be known as a faithful community of followers of Christ.

In our post-modern context, denominational identity must be understood not as fixed, but as dynamic and located within changing and evolving relationships—hence, its interconnection with the other key role of connection. Together, identity and connection are grounded in a realization that all that we do must be directed toward God’s mission, which encompasses the world.

Identity has always been central to the role of the General Council. By focusing on denomination-shaping issues, the General Council would recognize that its role is primarily to represent the witness and commitment of the whole church. Its actions would not be directed solely toward setting the work of the General Council Office, but would represent decisions that affect who we are as a denomination. These initiatives would be transformational, such as the church’s recent commitment to becoming an intercultural church, or the journey with Aboriginal peoples.

Naming denomination-shaping issues (or identity) as a central focus for the General Council would focus the decision-making and work on a smaller number—perhaps only two or three—unifying areas. The overall emphasis at General Council meetings would be on intentional and in-depth discernment involving listening to each other and the Spirit. The statements and decisions about identity that would come out of General Council would be lifted up across the courts and membership of the United Church, with support, encouragement, and leadership from the General Council Office.

The identity of The United Church of Canada is not something that can be defined once and for all, but must by its nature continually be shaped, renewed, and enlivened by discussions and actions across the church.

Connection must be understood in its deepest sense as building networks of mission. This concept is akin to connexion, a term that has deep roots in the Methodist tradition. It is also found in section 3.4 of the Basis of Union of the United Church, which reads, “That in this view it is possible to provide for substantial local freedom, and at the same time secure the benefits of a strong connexional tie and co-operative efficiency.”

In emphasizing this connectional role, the church would affirm that a primary task of the General Council Office relates to building and strengthening connections across the church. In more current terms, it suggests that this key role would be supporting relationships or networks for mission. Because relationships are what define identity, this core role of connection would be closely linked to the other primary focus of the General Council on identity.

The proposal would involve a shift in the work of General Council staff from a more expertise-oriented “program” approach to a connectional one that would support and resource networks for mission throughout the church and around the world. This shift would be consistent with a post-modern reality that emphasizes the connectional space in which we encounter God and each other.

In the current context, information-sharing (i.e., education) would no longer be the primary tool that engenders mission. A great wealth of resources is present and continually emerging in the life and people of the United Church as a whole, including ideas and expertise as well as resources of faith, spiritual practice, and community. Members can experience effective support through connections with others with similar struggles and issues.

Among a number of initiatives, this triennium plan seeks to enable presbyteries and congregations to focus on mission. It also proposes that staff at a national level play a critical and vital role in facilitating and resourcing diverse networks of mission across the church.

This shift in role would be enabled by significant use of new technologies, such as Web video conferencing, social network sites, Webinars, wiki technology, and other mechanisms that support interactions around emerging issues and concerns. Attention will also need to be given to methods of connection that serve the needs of parts of the church that have limited Internet access.

This emphasis on networking for mission would extend to ecumenical relationships, partnerships in Canada and around the world, and expanded people-in-partnership programs. These programs would continue to lift up the United Church's commitment to "joining with other persons of good will in the search for justice, wholeness and love" (*Mending the World*, p. 1).

Grants

Because grants make up the largest component of the budget of the General Council Office, it is difficult to make major budget adjustments without affecting grants.

The General Council budget is composed of several broad areas. Approximately 45 percent of the budget goes to grants; 35 percent to staff; 12 percent to programs; and 8 percent to rent and operating expenses.

Within the grants component of the budget, the major areas for each of the 2009 and 2010 budget years are Mission Support (\$5 million), Global Partnership (\$5 million), Education (\$2 million), and Conference Operating (\$4 million).

In Option 4, General Council grants to Conferences would not be affected, but grants for Mission Support, Global Partnership, and Education would be reduced by approximately 10 percent. Other parts of the budget would experience a slightly larger reduction, other than fixed operating costs and rent, which would be excluded.

These reductions would be a measured response that would acknowledge the reality of a smaller church and increase the relative proportion of grants to the rest of the budget.

Global Partnership Grants

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit-Wide Committee has initiated a review of the number of global partnerships. This review has included assessing how funding reductions in 2007 were enacted, the current workload of staff, and the capacity of the church to maintain the current level of partnership. The recommendations, which were approved by the Permanent Committee on Programs, included reshaping the global partnership program so it can be sustained into the future, while embracing our partnership principles and expanding capacity to engage other parts of the church more deeply in global mission. The recommendations also included a process to reduce the number of partners by about one-quarter to one-third to create a sustainable, vibrant, and engaged partnership program. While this process did not anticipate reductions in the global mission grant, it does place the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit in a position to undertake reductions with clear principles and strategies that are already moving toward fewer partnerships.

Mission Support

The Mission Support Consultation meets yearly in mid-May. The Consultation has been informed of the likelihood of a 10 percent reduction in the overall grant for 2011–2013. Conference Mission Support Committees have been engaged in redefining the role and focus of mission support for many years. Further reductions in the available funds have been part of the reflection and planning.

A critical issue to be explored in this reduction is the implication for Aboriginal ministries. In 2007, the Executive of the General Council directed that reductions in funding to Aboriginal congregational ministries be limited to 5 percent. A reduction is not proposed at this time, but this question should be considered by the Mission Support Consultation when it meets.

Education

The Executive of the General Council has directed the General Secretary to explore options for reducing funding to theological schools and education centres. Theological schools and education centres have received notice of a potential reduction in funding for 2011 and beyond.

Staff have recommended to the General Secretary an approach to funding theological schools that would not distribute the cuts equally, but would reduce or eliminate funding to some theological schools while increasing funding to others. This is based on analysis that indicates that across-the-board reductions jeopardize the effectiveness of our funding to all the schools. Although these recommendations were developed after considerable consultation with the theological schools, the recommended funding model has not been shared with them to date.

The General Secretary needs to discuss the specific recommendations with the theological schools. If the recommendations are to be implemented to take effect in June 2011, notice of the decisions (not just consultation) should be given this spring. Therefore, the General Secretary will seek at this meeting the Executive's authorization to enter into discussions with the theological schools and bring to the Sub-Executive a final proposal on the allocation of Education Funds. This process would allow as much notice as possible to be given of the change in Education Grants for 2011–2013.

Notice would be given to education centres that funding would be uniformly reduced by 10 percent for the 2011–2013 triennium.

Conference Grants

The General Secretary is recommending that Conference grants not be reduced for the 2011–2013 budget plan. The current formula for Conference Grants was agreed upon for three years after a major consultation with Conference presidents and leading elders in 2009. If Option 4 is approved, Conferences would be asked to undertake additional work related to pastoral relations. No additional funding for that work has been identified yet.

Implications

Grants represent 45 percent of the budget of the General Council Office. Because grants and salaries are the two largest components of the budget, any shift from the proposed 10 percent reduction would have immediate impacts on the salary category. The current proposal is for approximately \$1.2 million to be reduced from grants and \$1.8 million from the remainder of the budget (excluding rent and operating costs). This proposal would involve a reduction of between 15 and 20 positions from the General Council Office and a reduction in program resources and meeting costs.

Fixing the grants at the 2008–2011 level would mean that a further \$1.2 million would have to be cut from elsewhere in the budget. Such a reduction could mean the loss of approximately 15 to 20 additional positions and even further reductions in program and meeting costs.

New Ministries Fund

A New Ministries Fund would be established to encourage the development of innovative and experimental ministries within The United Church of Canada. The fund would provide financial assistance in the form of grants, for staff salaries and related costs, during the initial or formative years of a new ministry.

It is proposed that this fund be “seeded” with \$1 million from the reserves of the church. Additional sources of funds would be explored, including the invitation to contribute to the fund proceeds from the sale of church properties and other means of significantly increasing the resources available for this purpose.

Concept

The church is a living organism with natural life cycles. Like any living organism, old cells give way to new ones, and without new growth the organism dies. Denominations that are growing are doing so because they start new ministries. Research suggests that new ministries are more likely to attract visitors or drop-ins than long-established ones. New ministries are also more likely than established congregations to call or receive leaders whose cultural background is different from the majority. It is easier to explore new expressions of ministry or new ideas in new ministry settings, and the ideas and energy created through new ministries is contagious. In short, new ministries reach new people and new communities and can help revitalize existing congregations.

The primary challenge the United Church faces in the next decade is how it will support and encourage new ministries. This is also a question of faith—believing that God is active in the world to bring new communities of faith and mission into being.

What Do We Mean by New Ministries?

New ministries will emerge where God’s Spirit is at work. They will vary in how they are created, whom they serve, and how they function. The Church of England calls them “fresh expressions.” The current moment suggests that new ministries need freedom to be as diverse as our imagination allows. New ministries can be born out of the passion of an individual or the insight and energy of a community. They are usually grounded in their context, seeking to serve their community and its people. Almost always, they “go out” rather than invite people to “come in.” They can be led by professional ministry personnel or lay people. They may be one age group or multi-generational, one ethnic language or several, rural or urban.

The challenge for the United Church is to allow, enable, and provide the space in which new ministries can emerge. This process can involve changing our understanding of congregations or communities of faith, and changing our policies to allow greater flexibility for new forms of ministry. It can involve shifts in understanding of how ministry personnel function, giving greater freedom and support for ministers to experiment in developing new expressions of ministry and mission. It must also involve the allocation of resources.

What Support Would Be Offered?

Financial support would be offered for salaries and program costs related to the development of new and innovative expressions of ministry. It is not intended that the fund would provide capital for buildings or property.

The New Ministries Fund would be linked to the Centre for Ministry Development. The centre would be a resource to applicants to the New Ministries Fund by assisting with consultation around best practices, mission and business plans, and ongoing advice throughout the development of the ministry.

While some of the initiatives in new ministry development would come from established communities, the expectation is that initiatives from individuals (lay and ordered) as well as teams of clergy and lay people who seek to follow a passion for new expressions of Christ's ministry would also be supported.

This emphasis on innovative mission and ministry would involve close collaboration with presbyteries, which would be the formal bodies of oversight. This emphasis would link with another objective of the triennium plan: to encourage and free presbyteries for mission engagement.

United Cares

The Opportunity

Members and adherents of the United Church are among the most generous people in Canada. Many supplement their charitable giving to the church with gifts to community organizations, hospitals, colleges and universities, performing arts groups, and other organizations. United Church members and adherents also offer support through the United Church's designated appeals, including the recent Haiti appeal. When given an opportunity to support significant and meaningful programs, our members and adherents respond.

At the same time, giving to the Mission and Service Fund has not kept pace with inflation for many years. This development is largely due to demographic changes in the church. The Mission and Service Fund is supported primarily by long-time members. Life transitions for many of these members mean their support will continue to decline. Shifting generational patterns, including the desire of younger members and adherents for hands-on experiential connections with mission and short-term or one-off funding, further accentuate this trend. Diminished support for denominationally shaped programs is also reflected in declining givings to the Mission and Service Fund.

The challenge is that the overall decline of the Mission and Service Fund feeds a perception of decline in the church as a whole and contributes to the sense of a weakening denomination. This perception persists even though significant additional and new funds for mission come into the church through appeals, supragifts, extra measure projects, and other sources. The United Church needs to seek alternative sources of revenue. It also needs to interpret to its own members and those outside the church that the United Church is a vibrant, living organization that is worthy of their personal gifts and resources.

While the United Church has long-standing and effective mechanisms and partnerships in place for emergency appeals and global relationship initiatives, they are not well known within or outside the church. During major emergencies, such as the Haiti earthquake and the Pacific tsunami, the church has faced repeated criticism from its own members about its lack of visibility compared with other "agencies." Neither the Mission and Service Fund nor designated gift mechanisms provide an avenue for advertising the United Church's ability to respond or a mechanism for non-members to contribute to the church's social justice work but not its denominational life.

The New Vision

A new, long-term fundraising process and marketing initiative called "United Cares" would enhance and expand the work of the Mission and Service Fund, which will continue.

The United Cares Fund would encompass three giving streams:

- Justice, Community, and Environment
- Global Connections (World Development and Relief)
- Emergency Appeals

The Justice, Community, and Environment stream would provide opportunities for Canadians who appreciate the United Church's stance on justice issues to provide specific support for that work. For example, many Canadians deeply appreciate the ways in which the United Church has supported the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. This stream would also

be a place to support the work of the church's numerous community (outreach) ministries and ongoing work on environmental issues and concerns. While there would be opportunities for designation within the category, it would also be a place where donations from the wider community could be directed to strengthen the commitment of the United Church to being a justice-seeking community.

Global Connections would transition the existing World Development and Relief program to a fully dedicated fund that would be used to supplement core budget provisions for this work.

Emergency Appeals would continue the existing policies and mechanisms for emergency relief, including the 15 percent allocation from special appeals toward lesser-known humanitarian crises, and would not require any change in policy.

The Audience

A major audience for this fund would be beyond our current donors and would extend to inactive or non-United Church members in the wider community who are in sympathy with the social justice work we do. United Church members and current donors to the Mission and Service Fund could also support the United Cares Fund, likely through exceptional and one-off gifts, and hopefully in addition to their ongoing support for the Mission and Service Fund. The marketing of the fund, while emphasizing the humanitarian programs contained within the proposal, would clarify that it would be an expansion of current work, not a replacement for Mission and Service-funded work. An immediate benefit would be addressing the long-standing problem of identifying the United Church as a legitimate place for humanitarian giving in times of crisis.

Donations to the fund would be fully designated gifts, resulting in funding over and above the Mission and Service Fund to the programs identified within them. The intention would be to maintain funding within the core budget for all of these areas of work.

The Mission and Service Fund would be positioned as the fund that makes the United Cares work possible. For example, through their gifts to the Mission and Service Fund, United Church members and adherents would be contributing to the long-term stability of global and Canadian partner relationships that make emergency relief and development work possible. Contributions to the United Cares Fund would supplement and strengthen this work.

Tracking Gifts

Gifts to United Cares would be reported in an overall report, along with Mission and Service Fund donations, as gifts to The United Church of Canada. As is currently the case, all designated gifts would be used as directed by the donor. Unlike current policies for designated givings, these gifts would be included in the final reporting of donations coming from a congregation.

Concerns

Establishing United Cares could leave the perception that the United Church is abandoning the unified fund. It would be important to affirm continuously that this is not the intent. Rather, the existence of the unified fund would make the work of this new fund possible. United Cares would provide new and clearer opportunities for those who wish to give to a specific area of interest. It is intended that this fund broaden our reach beyond current donors to those beyond the church in the general public.

There may be concern that we are removing the most marketable aspects of the Mission and Service Fund by creating United Cares. This is not the intent. The Mission and Service Fund would remain the primary support for partnerships and programs of the United Church. The existence of this new fund would be possible because of the partnerships and programs supported by the Mission and Service Fund. Implementing United Cares would allow the United Church to do more work that reflects the interests of its members and supporters.

People in Partnership

A focus on *connection* at the heart of the work of the General Council would take expression in many ways, including an increased emphasis on people-in-partnership programs. These programs would seek to link United Church communities with global and Canadian partners for shared engagement in mission.

The United Church of Canada's "Statement and Affirmations on Global Partnership" (approved by the Executive of the General Council in November 2008) recommended increased participation of the whole church in global partnership, particularly at the congregational level. The overall direction proposed in *Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action* is that these increased initiatives in partnership include Canadian ministries as well.

In the global context, significant programs have already been initiated and would be expanded. These include such programs as Face to Face, Mission Exposure Trips, Twinning, and Extra Measures. New initiatives for congregations (or other groupings) interested in connecting with global partners would be developed. These relationships would be informed by the common principles of global partnership affirmed in the Statement on Global Partnership. Work is underway on a similar report and statement for partnership in the Canadian context. All relationships would develop in ways that are unique to the contexts, interests, and capacities of participants.

The program would invite congregations and other United Church groupings into relationships through a flexible process that would accommodate a number of entry and exit points. It would encourage and support the application of best practices, principles, and thoughtful analysis to both existing and new mission relationships. It would be an opportunity for Canadian and global partners to share their stories with one another and the broader church.

The program would not replace current global mission programs of the General Council Office. A strong global partnership program at the national level would complement local mission relationships, adding richness and depth to the church's work.

The potential impact of this program would be significant. It would offer opportunities to increase participation of United Church people in a faith journey that is global in perspective, while rooted in a local context. It would increase the number and diversity of opportunities to live out United Church principles of global and Canadian partnerships. It would hold out new possibilities for lived expressions of the United Church's commitment to be an intercultural, anti-racist church. It would facilitate direct congregational resource-sharing with partners based on principles of mutuality and accountability. Finally, it would aim to increase connection and commitment to work supported by the Mission and Service Fund.

Critical questions would need to be addressed as the program develops. These questions include the capacity concerns for Canadian and global partner participants. Complex questions about language and accessibility would also have to be considered.

A conceptual framework for the program has been developed and is available on request.

Pastoral Relations and Human Resource Functions

A New Approach

If the General Council Executive accepts the recommendations in “Planning for a Future Grounded in Faith and Action,” professional human resource/pastoral relations staff at the Conferences would assume the bulk of responsibility for pastoral relations and human resource functions. This would free presbyteries to become a forum for shared mission and collective support of congregational and other ministries, and a place of collegiality and cooperation among ministry personnel and lay leaders.

The shift of pastoral relations functions from presbyteries to Conferences would not take effect fully until after the next General Council, but if this direction is approved, consultation and planning should begin right away. It may be possible to begin to pilot this model on a voluntary basis during this triennium.

The existing Oversight and Discipline and the Pastoral Relations steering groups of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services would be immediately retooled to develop proposals for the Executive’s consideration and input. These steering groups were appointed by the Executive of the General Council on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee and have mandates rooted in numerous proposals to General Councils calling for reform. This work would need to be done in a consultative way that would include input and participation from presbyteries and Conferences.

As a model emerges in consultation with the Executive, the staff of the Human Resources Unit would establish a team to develop a range of policies and procedures for the Executive that would replace the current *Manual* sections pertaining to pastoral relations. The bulk of these policies and procedures would not return to *The Manual*, but reside as stand-alone documents that may be amended and changed by the Executive, allowing for a more responsive and agile pastoral relations practice. If the 41st General Council in 2012 approves the proposed changes, an implementation process could begin upon the rise of the Council.

What Might This Look Like?

Not to predetermine a form but to spark imagination, consider a consultative process involving the pastoral charge and the presbytery in developing a position description and undertaking a selection process with the leadership of the human resource/pastoral relations staff person. The team would bring a recommendation to both the pastoral charge and the presbytery that would describe the ways in which it has been discerned that the candidate is called to this particular ministry. The human resource/pastoral relations staff person would then conclude the appointment/call/settlement terms in accordance with the policies determined from time to time by the church.

Within the congregation, a support team would be established to encourage the ministry, while the human resource/pastoral relations staff person would meet at least annually with the ministry personnel to review the year completed, establish goals and objectives for the year ahead, and discuss plans for continued study and skill development. They would also identify areas of challenge or difficulty and determine means to address them. This would form the basis of the ongoing oversight and support for the minister. When concerns about the ministry personnel’s or the pastoral charge’s conduct of ministry arise, the human resource/pastoral relations staff person would be the first tier of intervention.

The human resource staff person would be part of a national circle of church human resource/pastoral relations professionals who would, with the General Council Human Resources Unit, develop and recommend to the Executive of the General Council evolving best practices and variations that reflect the regional realities and geographies of the church.

The above is just a quick pencil sketch of one possible model. Remember, the objective is to relieve the pastoral charge and the presbytery of delivering the human resource function of employing and supervising ministry personnel. This is not to reduce the pastoral relationship to an “employment” relationship only, but to recognize that this “employment” relationship is part of the “pastoral” relationship and requires professional attention.

It's Part of How We Support Strong Paid Accountable Ministry

The exercise of the human resource practice of pastoral relations—the call, appointment, settlement, support, oversight, and discipline of ministry personnel—currently rests with committees of the congregation and presbytery. This work consumes enormous amounts of lay and ministry personnel time while dominating presbytery agendas. Furthermore, it requires ministry personnel to supervise, oversee, and discipline colleagues, compromising the capacity of the presbytery to be a forum of collegial support, encouragement, and cooperation. Sensitive personnel information that in other places is considered confidential becomes part of the public record or exposed to a volunteer and peer committee. Frequently, Ministry and Personnel and Pastoral Relations committee members express frustration at having limited, if any, expertise, experience, or competence for undertaking responsibilities for which any errors could have considerable consequences.

Ministry is a vocation. But there is also a practical employment component to paid accountable ministry. In this latter sense, skills are brought in exchange for financial compensation. Obligations, defined in provincial and federal law, church policy, and individual and/or collective employment contracts, are assumed by the church as “employer.” In the former sense, informed by our understanding and experience of the mutuality with which God engages and partners with humanity, we assume the employer obligations as a privilege and enhance them with respect, honour, and care that reach beyond the limitations of a strictly contractual agreement. We strive to embrace one another with fair, just, and consistently applied policies and practices and to provide healthy, safe, and respectful workplaces (from the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services’ statement of guiding theological principles).

Centre for Ministry Development

Congregations are at the centre of the life of The United Church of Canada. Our future as a church will depend on our ability to support strong congregations, walk with congregations going through important transitions, and celebrate and encourage a wider variety of faith communities.

The creation of the Centre for Ministry Development would provide services to strengthen congregations and local ministries using an innovative service delivery model that would allow flexibility to respond to local needs.

In general but important ways, the emphasis on connection lifts up the importance of mission at the heart of congregational vitality. The significant commitment to people-in-partnership programs, it is hoped, will strengthen the mission focus of congregations across the church. The encouragement of presbyteries to focus on mission is also related to this emphasis on connection.

Strengthening and encouraging congregations to be able to make a shift in ministry focus is a necessity that many consulting firms seek to address. It has also been the primary focus of the Emerging Spirit campaign. What is clear is that the future role of the General Council Office in this area needs to be different than in the past, and hopefully designed in such a way that there is capacity for growth in the services offered.

The Design of the Centre for Ministry Development

The Centre for Ministry Development would not be a physical location but a core staff team (likely four to five full-time positions) that would function both in team initiatives and as individual consultants. The staff team would develop and work with a network of congregationally based presenters/consultants who would be sensitive to local contexts and needs. This would build on the strength of the model used successfully for delivering the Emerging Spirit workshops.

The objective would be to draw together a group of skilled individuals who, through their experience and ability, can provide significant assistance to United Church congregations desiring to transition their ministries into a new future.

The Centre for Ministry Development would offer a range of programs, some of which would be available to the congregation free of charge and some available on a fee-for-service basis. It would be able to tailor services to the needs of those being served.

Staff of the Centre for Ministry Development, through their consulting work and shared experience in congregational transformation, would gain significant expertise and awareness of best practices in congregational transformation. It is expected that these learnings would be shared in workshops held regularly throughout the country.

Congregational consulting programs would also be available on a fee-for-service basis. These consulting programs would vary depending on the skills of the staff and the needs of congregations.

The critical expectation is that core funding offered through the General Council Office would diminish as consulting revenue increases. It is likely that the General Council Office commitment to the salary component of the Centre for Ministry Development would be necessary for several years, and through that time direct accountability to the General Secretary would be maintained.

There is also the potential that if there is sufficient demand for the programs and services, fees paid would enable overall services to be expanded.

The Centre for Ministry Development would also be linked to the functioning of the New Ministries Fund by providing consultation on proposals to the fund. While the staff of the Centre for Ministry Development would not have a decision-making role on applications, they would provide significant support in design and planning for the applications. It is proposed that the cost of this service be drawn from the New Ministries Fund on a per-application basis.

Implementation

With the approval of the Executive, the General Secretary would begin a process of detailed design of the Centre for Ministry Development, including developing a business plan, analyzing the budget needs, developing job descriptions, and consulting with key contributors and stakeholders across the church.

Existing staff of the General Council Office would have an opportunity to apply for positions with the Centre for Ministry Development, and applications from outside would also be invited.

The Centre for Ministry Development would have an executive director, who would be hired as soon as possible to share in building the full staff team.

Proposed Workplan for Rewriting *The Manual* (By-laws)

Goal

The last major revision of *The Manual* was completed 25 years ago. The goal now is to produce an edition of *The Manual* that

- is shorter.
- is written in contemporary and accessible language.
- contains the church law and policy necessary to support church community life and meet basic legal requirements.
- provides flexibility wherever possible in church structures and processes.
- enables creative ministry by eliminating excessive prescribed detail.

There are no plans to make changes to the Basis of Union, which would require a remit, but should any changes in this category be identified, they would be noted with recommendations as to process.

Proposed Workplan

The General Secretary would designate as lead staff for this project the Executive Officer, Human Resources, and the Staff Legal Counsel. The Staff Legal Counsel would be seconded to this project to write the new draft version of *The Manual*.

Lead staff would draw on the expertise of a small staff team; seek the advice of church experts in United Church polity, history, pastoral relations, ministry vocations, and church court procedures and governance; and consult broadly. During the summer of 2010, commissioners of the 40th General Council (2009), and others in the church, would be asked to contribute their ideas about how to improve *The Manual*; for example, "How would you redesign *The Manual* to make it more useful?"

The Manual Project would address questions such as: What absolutely must go in *The Manual*? What could be removed? If removed, how would that subject matter be addressed? Where would it reside? Who would need to give permission for that? What are the implications of not having everything in a single document? How would that be communicated to the wider church? What elements of *The Manual* currently present barriers to calling ministers? What elements are so complicated that they risk excluding people from full participation? How can we use technology to best advantage with a new version of *The Manual*?

The General Secretary would provide a progress report to the Executive of the General Council in November 2010. It is anticipated that a completed draft of *The Manual* would be available for the May 2011 meeting of the Executive of the General Council. This would allow for a year of study and further work before the 41st General Council (2012). The Executive may wish to appoint a task group for that purpose.

As part of the study process, The Manual Committee would also be asked to review and report to the General Secretary on the draft of *The Manual*.